In the driving seat

Nepal’s festival season starts this weekend with Tij, the day devoted to women that they themselves are ambivalent about. Most Nepali women will fast, visit Pushapati, take a holy dip, and don red and green to wash away sins and for the longevity of husbands. Others regard Tij as a practice that perpetuates female subservience and fatalism.

But Tij is also a festival of solidarity and sisterhood, and has emerged lately as a day of defiance. If the lyrics of this year’s traditional Tij duets are any indication, women are saying enough is enough, and want an end to existing inequalities within the home, at work, and in state structures.

Despite constitutional provisions for one-third female representation in all sectors of government, the number of women ministers in the current cabinet is only three out of 31.

“The cabinet seems like an old boys’ club, and proves that the constitution alone can’t guarantee equal participation of women at decision-making levels,” says Bandana Rana, member of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee).

Nor is it enough for Nepal to boast of having its first female President, Speaker of Parliament, and Chief Justice. Apart from proportionate representation of women in all state organs, at the very least women need to have rights to grant citizenship as men do, as well as benefit from equality in inheritance laws, and stringent penalties must be strictly enforced for any violence against women.

Yet Rana: “The cultural values that define women as second-class citizens need to be changed. Nepali women must enjoy equal opportunities and equal participation in decision-making.”

Patriarchy in the Hierarchy

Editorial

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Patriarchy in the hierarchy

The Tij fast by Nepali women could also be considered a one-day hunger strike against male dominance in our politics and society.

However, Tij has traditionally also been a celebration of sisterhood and solidarity, a one-day rebellion characterised by deliberate defiance against male dominance. Could it be that some Nepali women today consider the Tij fast as a hunger strike against patriarchy? Going by the lyrics of the new duets that have been released in the run-up to this year’s festival, there is open ridicule of menfolk as lazy, good-for-nothing spilt bulls (see page 7).

Add ‘corrupt’, and why not, that sums up the attributes of most men who have the audacity to rule over us. Let’s just leave aside for the moment the fact that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has already squandered one-and-a-half months of his nine-month rotational tenure just to form a council of ministers from a coalition of four parties. The Nepali Congress could not even agree on a list of ministerial appointees until after the Nepali Students’ Union elections as well as the return from New Delhi of Deputy Prime Minister Bimalendra Nidhi. Why the selection of ministers by Nepal’s largest party should be held hostage by the election of 43-year-old ‘students’, and a visit to India by the prime minister’s special envoy, has never been satisfactorily explained to the public.

In terms of inclusivity, the ratios are not much better for Dalits, Janajatis, or Madhesis either. For example, there are only two Dalit ministers, and three from Janajati groups. As Bineeta Gurung argues in her column in this issue (see page 6), not only is there no ‘substantive representation’ in support of gender-based governance, but even ‘descriptive representation’ — corresponding to the constitutionally-stipulated ratio of 33 per cent of female representation in government, is sorely lacking.

The sad irony is that this is happening under the prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who used to be the ‘Supreme Commander’ of a guerrilla army of which one-fourth was made up of women warriors, many of whom laid down their lives for equality.

The members of the ruling coalition are the same political parties that took to the streets to protest King Gyanendra’s ‘regression’ in 2005. What a change, that of the 31 ministers appointed under the prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who used to be the ‘Supreme Commander’ of a guerrilla army of which one-fourth was made up of women warriors, many of whom laid down their lives for equality.

In contrast to the politico-military hierarchy, the members of the ruling coalition are the same political parties that took to the streets to protest King Gyanendra’s ‘regression’ in 2005. What a change, that of the 31 ministers appointed under the prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who used to be the ‘Supreme Commander’ of a guerrilla army of which one-fourth was made up of women warriors, many of whom laid down their lives for equality.

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Western mountain districts improve while east-central Tarai stagnates, as Nepal’s development remains uneven

SAHINA SHRESTHA

The traditional narrative in Nepal’s development and political circles is that the eight districts of the east-central Tarai are the least developed parts of the country. They are often bunched together at the bottom of the pile with the under-developed districts of the western and far-western mountainous zones.

Past UN Human Development Reports over the years show that compared to the national average, both the western mountain districts and east-central Tarai have lagged behind in the Human Development Index (HDI)—a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income per capita indicators.

More careful examination of the 2014 Human Development Report figures shows that the eight districts of the east-central Tarai (Sindhupalchowk, Dhading, Makwanpur, Sankhuwasabha, Rautahat, Bara and Parsa) performed better in terms of HDI than the hill and mountain districts of western Nepal (Achham, Dailekh, Bajura, Bajhang, Doti, Mug, Bamlam). Life expectancy and per capita incomes are actually higher in the east-central Tarai districts whereas the literacy rate and average years of schooling are better for the mountainous districts of the west.

The far-western hill districts of the trans-Karnali have often been the first to suffer from food insecurity due to the remote topography and out-migration of able-bodied men. This has affected agricultural productivity, leading to poor nutrition especially among women and children.

East-central Tarai districts are less vulnerable—despite an entrenched caste system and gender disparities, these districts are more accessible, and benefit from proximity to the open border with India.

However, while the western hills and mountains are now slowly climbing up in the development parameters, the index for east-central Tarai has remained stagnant over the years. Because of the higher population in the plains, government development outlay per capita is also much lower in the Tarai than in the hills.

“It is not fair to compare the two regions,” says Tula Neupane Sab of the Madhes Foundation.

“They are different historically, geographically and population-wise. Although the districts in Far and Mid-West have lower HDI scores, they are making progress compared to the past whereas in the Madhes, the progress has been stagnant.”

Indeed, Nepal’s Human Development Report published in 1998 shows that the districts in the mid- and far-west were the poorest in the country. The districts in Central Tarai were comparatively better. For example, Rautahat’s HDI score was 0.308 whereas Bajura’s was... to inhuman under-development

NEPAL is performing well in terms of its Human Development Index (HDI) world ranking in UNDP’s annual Human Development Reports because of overall improvements in national-level parameters such as the literacy rate, maternal and child mortality rates, per capita income and average lifespan.

The HDI is a composite statistic that is used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. A country scores higher when indicators such as lifespan, education level and GDP per capita are higher, and fertility rate and inflation rate are lower.

The Index is based on a formula devised by UN economist Mahbub ul Haq in 1990 with the explicit purpose to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people-centered policies. He worked with Nobel laureate Amartya Sen on capabilities and functions that provided the underlying conceptual framework for development.

Nepal has recorded one of the most dramatic improvements in HDI among least developed countries, but it still lags far behind other countries in South Asia and the global South. Nepal has set a challenging goal for itself, of graduating from a ‘least developed’ to a ‘developing category’ by the year 2020.

That is just four years away, and given how development has suffered due to political instability and poor governance, the goal is not likely to be met. Currently, Nepal ranks 145th among countries with a score of 0.548 in the HDI, among 188 countries in the Human Development Report 2015. Nepal’s score falls in the low human development category, and there has to be much more improvement in the indicators in order to progress to the ‘developing country’ category, such as in per capita Gross National Income, education, health, and the economic vulnerability of the people.

In education, Nepal needs to raise the average years of education of people aged 25 and above. The figure for this indicator increased by 0.1 years from that in 2013, and reached 3.9 years in 2014. However, if we compare it with fellow SAARC members, we lag behind Sri Lanka and Maldives (which are the top HDI performers in South Asia). Education of those aged 25 years and above stood at 10.8 and 8.8 years in Sri Lanka and Maldives respectively, in 2014. To catch up, Nepal has to make an enormous investment in education.

The aspect of HDI where effort is needed is in per capita income. Although Nepal’s poverty rate has fallen dramatically, mainly due to the infusion of remittances cash into the economy, there are still hurdles ahead. In 2014, the per capita Gross National Income of Nepal rose to $2,311 from $2,164 the previous year. But to take a big leap forward, Nepal has to generate more jobs within the country by investing in high-value agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure development.

The other component of Nepal’s HDI that needs work is in lessening the gender disparity in all aspects of development. The recent Human Development Report put Nepal’s HDI score for women lower than for men.

Nepal’s average national achievement in HDI improvement also masks serious regional disparities between hills, plains and mountains as well as between eastern and western Nepal. The report also points out that the six districts of the eastern Tarai together with the districts of the western and far-western mountains lag behind the rest of the country in just about every parameter of development.

The Nepal Human Development Report 2014 states: “The pace of economic growth needs to be accelerated and be accompanied by large-scale employment generation and enhanced productivity.” There is also a need to improve education and raise the standard of Nepal’s human resources, and decrease the gender and geographical disparity in development within Nepal.

We know what needs to be done, we just need to do it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>HDI Score 2004</th>
<th>HDI Score 2014</th>
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<tr>
<td>Humla</td>
<td>+0.009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mugu</td>
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<td>Bajura</td>
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<td>Jajarkot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parsa</td>
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<td>Bara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rautahat</td>
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<td>Mahottari</td>
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<td>Dhanusa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siraha</td>
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However, by 2004 the Human Development Report showed Bajura increasing to 0.310 and Rautahat to 0.469. And ten years later, Bajura was 0.594 and Rautahat had come down to 0.386. Other districts in the west-central region showed a similar trajectory.

In the Human Development Report of 2014, the districts in the east-central Terai lag behind the districts in mid- and far western mountains in terms of education.

In his book, *Some Aspects of Nepal’s Social Demography*, Prathob Sharma breaks down literacy data in the 1991, 2001 and 2011 censuses, by region, caste and district. In 1991, Rautahat was the only district from Madeshs that had a low literacy rate. In 2001 Mahottari joined the ranks, and by 2011 six Madeshs districts had the lowest literacy rates in Nepal. The decline in education is not because of a lack of schools but due to educational policies, says Sah. He added: “Many Madhesi faced difficulties when the one-language policy was introduced in the education sector, moreover there are fewer teachers for more students.”

Government expenditure is higher in hilly areas as compared to other ecological belts and there is a wide variation in public expenditure in Nepal. “The per capita expenditure is more in the west and far west than in the Terai, even though the population in Terai is greater than in the hills,” says Sah.

Uma Shankar Prasad in his study *Government Expenditure in Madhes* shows that in 2001/2, the Terai got 19.4 per cent of the budget whereas the hills received 75 per cent, and the mountains 5.6 per cent. By 2009/10 the Terai’s share had gone up slightly to 22.1 per cent, and the hills got 71.7 per cent. Because of the larger population involved, per capita government expenditure in the Terai is even more disproportionate, and this is reflected in the lack of improvement in the HDI.
Power to women

Male politicians still do not believe women to be as capable and deserving as themselves

Those who argue that a woman’s elevation to power does not necessarily advance the interest of women cite examples of Benazir Bhutto, Khin Kyi, and Sheikh Hasina. There were also Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher who wielded power, but chose to rule their countries with a pro-militaristic attitude that served the male-dominated establishment. It is only fair to assume that Hillary Clinton’s past hawkish approach to US foreign policy will not advance the cause of feminism. Statescraft requires leaders to act tough to prove their mettle, more so if they are women.

The same argument crops up every time there is a demand in Nepal for fair representation of women in leadership. It is said that female representation in parliament does not guarantee better lives for women. When a woman is elected to a significant post, her merit and competence are doubted, and her elevation often attributed to ‘positive discrimination’.

The old boys’ club is also cited. It is not mere coincidence that most women in politics are either born or married into political families. But that is not the whole truth — Nepal’s political establishment is sexist to the core.

Despite her proven record, a woman’s leadership capacity is questioned across the board. She is held against unrealistic standards that do not exist for men. Women leaders are expected to be motherly, divine and untouched by sin.

Corruption has to do with power, it requires a favourable ecosystem to protect those on the take. Ministers like Sarita Giri and Radha Gyawali are fired without a second thought while men like Vijay Kumar Gachhadar and Mahesh Basnet stay in government despite shady backgrounds.

The presence of women in the legislature, known as ‘descriptive representation’, reflects the degree to which the representatives look like the public. Women’s proportionate representation in parliament is essential if they are to equally access and fully participate in power structures and decision-making. Studies show that without gender quotas, some countries will take another 500 years to have fair female representation. High levels of women’s representation in parliament, such as in Rwanda (63.8%) and Sweden (43.6%), are possible because of quotas.

An increased proportion ensures ‘subtractive representation’ in support of feminist issues. A recent study in Argentina found that such a boost was associated with more women’s rights bills being introduced. In India, women are more likely than men to raise issues of domestic violence. In Botswana and Rwanda, female MPs passed women-friendly bills despite stiff opposition from men.

Nepal’s new constitution sets women’s representation in parliament at 33%. Women lawmakers constituted only 29.8% in the second CA, but it is higher than the 22.2% world average of women parliamentarians.

The election of Bidyabhandari Basnet as President and Om Prakash Gharti Magar as the Speaker of Parliament marked a tangible shift in Nepali politics. The appointment of Sunil Karki as Nepal’s first woman Chief Justice added another gender milestone.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal repeated this week that the increase in female participation in Nepali politics was a direct result of his armed struggle. While this has some merit, it overlooks the confluence of strategies of both internal and external women’s movements, which helped women advance their status during and after the conflict.

Conflict have levelling effects as societies seek to re-create themselves by framing new constitutions. During the war, gender roles were disrupted, pushing women into new activities in the absence of men. Women were also exposed to political opportunities, both as members of the Maoist movement and as peace mobilizers.

However, if women’s organisations had not seized the opportunity during the constituting-making process, the deep institutionalised gender bias in society would have persisted. Throughout the tenure of the first and second CAs, various organisations and feminist groups lobbied vigorously to secure reservations for women. In addition, emerging international norms and mounting pressure from bilateral donors and international agencies gave women a new impetus to demand a political presence.

Nepal’s brusquely biased citizenship laws prove that Nepali politicians still do not believe women to be as capable and deserving as men. Further proof of male dominance is the composition of the coalition cabinet. Of the 13 allotted seats, the Nepali Congress could come up with only one woman minister. The Maoists included only two women in government, but they are only state ministers.

Why do we need more women ministers if we already have so many women parliamentarians? The answer is simple: because female representation in the executive has a symbolic effect. They serve as role models and inspire other women to engage in politics.

More importantly, they help to raise awareness of what women can achieve if they can wield political power.

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Songs of rebellion

Lyrics of Tij songs reflect newfound independence and empowerment of Nepali women

SMRITI BASNET

S

Singer Komal Oli (pictured above, centre) is not new to controversy, in fact the outspoken performer seems to thrive on it. This Tij, she has created another furor with her new duet ‘Janaa Choti’ (for the Last Time) with Pashupati Sharma, which contains rebellious lyrics about how she has decided to end her pursuit of a worthy husband. They say: ‘Naat hoi bhepo hina, aadat garna janne, Tyesto keto pae dilma naam lokhaai dinthe’ – ‘I want a man who doesn’t scorn women, but respects them. If I find a man like that I would write his name on my heart.’

Having not found anyone who has ‘Goli ma gath, aadat ma aata’ (cash in his pocket and strength in his heart), Oli concludes her ‘Po’ (husband) song series – which is loved and hated in equal measure – hinting that she might enter politics to help Nepali women fight for equality.

Adorned in red sari and heavy green tilak, women singing and dancing has been a hallmark of the Tij festival, which this year falls on Sunday. Over the years, the songs have been laced with fatalism: male dominance, neglect, and loneliness. But Tij lyrics are becoming increasingly defiant. “Previously, ‘Tij was the festival when women went to their parents’ homes, but it has more and more been used as an opportunity to gather and share their feelings,” said Sabitri Malmali of the Culture Department at Tribhuvana University.

Singers like Oli are no longer taking their secondary role in society as a given. They are voicing their independence and using Tij songs to do it. Their songs ridicule good-for-nothing husbands and taunt wayward ones.

“Janaa Choti” (Maga’s Dusmi Kade Junga) (Porcupine Like Mouastache) is a monologue against her husband’s behaviour and the work she is treated by his family. Having to live with an unemotional, alcoholic and jealous husband, Magar’s songs express the pain of wasted youth: ‘Kopilakme line bhaat ma ko isha ra auto bhaat ma hand that was supposed to hold books and pens today holds a hoe.’

Singing ‘Janna baba Janna’ (I don’t want to go, father) Magar refuses to return home to a worthless husband who treats her shabbily.

Released last year, another hit duet by Pashupati Sharma and Janaki Tamang Magar is a dialogue between a wife and her husband who have been driven to poverty because of his profligacy. The wife sings: ‘Maita chhada dukha ki kai na katoke keti, herda bherai bhaga le ni lhaso sadak’ (I never knew hardship when I was at home. Now I have to live on the streets). Calling husbands worthless and incompotent seems to be a recurring theme in Tij songs of late. Sharma and Magar’s duet this year is ‘Mamag ko Deuti Pani’, a sequel to last year’s hit. The wife is now running her own business, much like the husband’s pasti pani shop, which has also prospered. Although by the end the wife regains confidence in her husband, her willpower and independence are celebrated throughout the song.

Komal Oli is regarded as a pioneer in turning Tij songs into acts of defiance, starting with her super hit ‘Potta Janna Pani’ (I want to slope) ten years ago. She faced severe criticism for her ‘salacious’ and ‘improper’ lyrics, but took it all in her stride and rode the wave of popularity, releasing a new and more rebellious song every Tij.

In her private life, too, Oli has steadfastly refused to get married. At every media interview, she has had to field the question: ‘When will you marry?’ Her reply is in another of her songs: ‘Mile sikh ma gaari banchha bhai na bhai, patrakar le sodh le sodhik duka pana thale, Greet sangit ma rama chemchhu, aulat ka kanyag, ghumchhu gus sahak, pura garbhu raha’ (My father told me I don’t have to marry, but journalists bound me with that question, I enjoy singing, earning a living for myself, travelling and finding my own fulfillment).
BEAUTIFUL MESS: Street artist Dipeshwor Gurung working on a wall opposite the Russian Embassy, the art deals with issues of unplanned urbanisation and migration.

PREVIOUSLY festooned with billboards for big brands, the wall opposite the Russian Embassy in Balkwatar now showcases a black-and-white artwork of crumpled transmission lines over a cramped city depicting unplanned urban growth.

Probably inspired by Kathmandu’s own chaotic growth, street artist Dipeshwor Gurung thought this wall would be an apt medium to put out his message: “If everyone leaves, there won’t be anyone left behind to untangle the mess.”

Like Gurung’s wall, there are many other examples of outdoor art in Kathmandu, and the city’s walls are getting a makeover with ArtLab’s PRASAD Street Art Festival this month. Political slogans and advertisements are being painted.

PUBLIC AWARENESS: A 70-meter long temporary art installation by Cambodian artist Leon Sodan on the lake inside the Central Zoo, opened during WAC 2012. Made out of plastic collected from the Skirmi Bhisak River, the work of art speaks to environmental issues.

The shift in setting of Kathmandu’s arts from private to public spaces could be a catalyst for change.

SMRITI BASNET
KATHMANDU TRIENNALLE

After two successful editions in 2009 and 2011, the Kathmandu International Art Festival 2017 is scheduled for 7 March to 9 April next year, with the theme ‘My City’. Belgian artist Philippe Van Cauteren will be the festival curator.

"The artists will create new works in the city, about the city, collaborating with the city," said festival manager Nischal Shrestha. The month-long event will feature works by 45 local and international artists. It will also have gala events, a three-day symposium, public performances, passive and guided tours, film screenings, master classes, and workshops (including for children).

Ashima Ranjit has been engaging in performance art, carrying a human skeleton on her back to represent the state of neglect of public health. ArtFest (ArtFest) has accompanied protests supporting crusading physician Govinda KC. The impact of such performances goes far beyond that of an indoor gallery exhibition.

When art goes public, it wields the power to challenge the status quo. Ranjit says this power can also be used to highlight the spaces themselves.

Historically Kathmandu was a city that emphasized open spaces for its festivals, gatherings, and performances, but Ranjit says today those very spaces have shrunk. She says it is the duty of Nepali artists to help reclaim such open public places from being smothered by concrete structures.

Although the city houses magnificent sculptures by artist Thakuri Prasad Malati, like the one in the BCCI garden dedicated to Mother Nature, it is increasingly becoming an eyesore.

"Art affects architecture. If you have art in the public sphere, it starts changing the face of the city and makes it unique," said researcher and artist Premina Shrestha.

Many works of art by international artists in the Kathmandu International Art Festival 2012 were temporary outdoor installations, art initiatives, to draw attention to environmental degradation and social issues.

Said Nischal Shrestha of Siddhartha Arts Foundation’s Education Initiative (SAFE): "Usually artworks are commissioned by governments to create cultural cities. In Kathmandu’s case, the city needs to get involved and artists need to be encouraged."

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**EVENTS**

**Monochrome mandalas.**
Master woodworkers by learning the art of making monochrome mandalas with Satya Media Arts Collective. 16 September, 11 am to 3 pm, Satya Media Arts Collective, Jawalathali. Apply: https://goo.gl/iutqQv, Fee: Rs 500

**Ride to Khokana.**
Contribute to restoring Nepal’s cultural heritage by participating in a ride under the guidance of the Kathmandu Cultural Heritage Committee. 26 September, 7 am onwards, Price: Rs 600

**Day hike.**
Destails on this one-day hike, offering exhilarating glimpses of Khaptad National Park, on 8 September, 8 am onwards, Price: Rs 300

**French Film Festival.**
Experience the diversity of Africa with the fifth edition of Nepali Africa Film Festival. 7 to 13 September, 7 am onwards, Al Aroon, Cultural Centre, Kantipath, (Ph) 01466220

**Arjuna’s Dilemma.**
Mark your calendars for the staging of the opera Arjuna’s Dilemma, based on the Bhagavad Gita, by One World Theatre. 3 to 11 September, 7 pm onwards, Patan Museum, Patan Durbar Square, Thamel. Rs 750, 500 (students). Rs 250 (students)

**Fragments exhibition.**
Save the date for Kabi Raj Lama’s ‘Fragments’ lithography prints exhibition. 29 August (Inauguration at 5.30 pm) to 9 September, Shilpanchak Art Gallery, Boby Matal

**MEZZE BY ROADHOUSE.**
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**Kathmandu Live.**
Top along with the seal of star-stirring music, as Kathmandu performs live. 16 September, 8 pm onwards, Patan museum

**Rock’n Roll**
Groove along with famed Nepali bands Adhikari Bros and The Stormy Winds this weekend. 3 September, 7 to 11 pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9803779797

**Clubwala Live**
Enjoy Sunday night with veteran rock band Clubwala as they belt out their hits, 3 September, 8 pm onwards, Spazio Italian Bar & Lounge, Thamel.

**Mango Tree Lodge.**
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From the town red with crowds of women as they came out to celebrate the day with folk songs and dances. 4 September

**The Art Exhibition.**
Attend the exhibition of German contemporary visual artist Lena Kaercher, organised by Artido. All sale proceeds go to Subasthe Nepal orphanage.

**License Plate.**
On 9 to 13 September, Artido, Sangyo Mohalla, Chhatru Hospital Road, 9871808888, artido@hotmail.com

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From the town red with crowds of women as they came out to celebrate the day with folk songs and dances. 4 September

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Mark your calendars for the second edition of the international classical music festival organised by the Gharna Music Foundation. 14 to 18 September at Hotel Pakn Pe, 17 September, 4 pm, at Tundepa, Thamel, 9889780000 / 35510064, www.gharnamusicfoundation.org. Tickets: Rs 700 (general admission), Rs 250 (students), Rs 2,000 (four-concert package)

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In perfect harmony

Done right, Kathmandu’s traditional architecture would add to the city’s aesthetics and make it more seismic-resistant

SAHINA SHRESTHA

When the Malla dynasty ruled the Valley’s kingdom, rivalry between rulers translated into magnificent monuments, bahads and city squares in the three towns. Today, over time, this extraordinary architectural heritage has been confined to the historic corners of the towns. These centuries-old mud-brick structures were hardest-hit by the earthquake last year, sending the incorrect message that traditional architecture is weak and prone to seismic damage.

One-and-a-half years after the earthquake, it is clear that most ruined homes are being rebuilt using concrete beams, with few choosing traditional facades and even fewer opting for traditional materials.

In Harsiddhi, Bagmati and Sankhu, while the temples are yet to be reconstructed, new homes are being built with concrete and have started dominating skylines that used to feature tile roofs. Conservation architects are appalled, not just because this spoils the traditional look of the towns, but also if the right materials and techniques used, older designs would be more seismic-resistant.

“Elements of traditional architecture can be added to modern building codes for two-to-three storey buildings in the valley if asked,” says conservation architect Sudashan Raj Tiwari. “As for the houses that are being built, the construction materials and technology and the materials make traditional buildings fairly earthquake-resistant.”

Rathnaitpur’s historic core suffered some of the worst damage. A few blocks off from Dattatreya Temple, in an alleyway in Inachok, old houses destroyed by the earthquake have been ravaged by two monsoon and are neglected. Just opposite, Namuna Ghar, which abovestall and unscathed. The 150-year-old house was renovated in the early 2000s using mud, brick and timber, but did not suffer even a hairline crack during the earthquake, and just lost some dhukuri tiles from its roof.

Now we have figured out a way to install the dhukuri so that they won’t fall the next time there is an earthquake,” says heritage conservationist Babinda Pur, who restored the house. “The best architecture for any given place is the one that has evolved there.”

Pur’s other projects include the Tia Mani House in Gachchall and the ambitious Namuna Ghas in Sanga where three houses form each of stone, brick, and mud mortar line a ridge—all survived the earthquake.

In Patan, Devendra Shrestha says restoring his family home in the traditional style was the best decision his family ever made. The Malla-era Newa Cihan, also known as Shrestha House, was renovated and opened as a tourist accommodation in 2006. While the nearby residential buildings are supported by wooden frames after the earthquake, the 350-year-old house sustained only minor damage.

“No new materials were added when it was restored,” says Shrestha, “and by the looks of it, it was the right decision.”

What makes traditional architecture relatively earthquake-resistant is that from the floor to the attic, each element is bound together. The use of timber, mud and traditional chakku joints and wooden beams makes the house flexible during quake shaking. The maximum wall thickness on the ground floor, double framework of windows, wall plate weightage, roof system, as well as large floor areas—these make traditional buildings resistant to earthquakes.

Achiel cross functions as an individual piece, so even when one part collapses the whole house will not go down like concrete structures do,” says urban planner PS Joshi of UN-Habitat. “The lifespan of concrete is around 60 years, but houses built using traditional materials have a lifespan of 100 to 150 years, old architecture should be promoted, and this is the perfect opportunity to research more about it.”

Adding traditional architectural and techniques of the Valley’s new architecture into designs while rebuilding would not only add to the aesthetics of the city but also help conserve Kathmandu’s unique architectural heritage. The neighbourhoods would be elegant, affordable, and suited to the climate because of the use of mud mortar and brick. With salvageable materials, building a house the old way would cost Rs 3 to 4 million in the Valley.

Rabindra Pur’s resort in Fulpat of Kavre, top left, using only mud, brick and timber withstand the earthquake.

“Even a government architect said the buildings during the earthquake, the human casualties will be much fewer,” says Pur.

Old architecture does not mean an outdated lifestyle, as interiors can be modern. Examples of this are Newa Cihan in Patan and Namuna Ghas in Bhaktapur, which blend old and new in perfect harmony.

Says Pur: “The trick is to adapt newer materials to reflect and blend with the traditional methods. It is still not too late to rebuild using traditional architecture, and this is the perfect opportunity to preserve history, share endangered traditional knowledge, and promote tourism.”

Which Rani Pokhari?

How old does a building have to be to be considered an architectural landmark? Which is the original? These questions are at the centre of the debate about post-earthquake reconstruction of monuments and temples that were restored in the Majli Style after the 1934 earthquake and government funding.

For example, should the famous Bhagawanwar Temple in the middle of Rani Pokhari be rebuilt in the stula style, or, as a Hindu temple that the earthquake destroyed is a major religious establishment, the monument’s location (KMC) destined to reconstruct it was before April 2015, but using restored concrete columns to increase the structure strength. There was an uproar on social media, protests were held, and the KMC has now been forced to seek public input: the Department of Archaeology demanded the KMC to demolish the concrete pillars, and the project has been halted for the moment.

Says urban planner PS Joshi: “Heritage is not only about art and architecture, it is about the knowledge of our ancestors that is in the verge of being forgotten, and the link between tangible and intangible heritage.” Joshi is an advocate of traditional materials as well as traditional techniques being used elsewhere or whenever new materials have to be employed.

After the 1934 earthquake, many of the temples lost their original form when they were rebuilt. The Durbar Temple in Patan was a three-tiered pagoda-style structure dedicated to Lord Shiva. It was rebuilt as a smaller one-stor ystructure with a Majli-style cornice roof. After three years of planning to restore the temple to its original style, construction had just started when the April 2015 earthquake struck. Work has now resumed.

Kathmandu’s clocktower, the Ghanta ghar, was modified after London’s Big ben by the British and was reconstructed in its present form after the earthquake in 1949.

This issue has come to the fore once again, with the rebuilding of Rani Pokhari. A case study of Rani Pokhari that shows the temple in the middle of the pond in Shikhar style, was founded by heritage conservationist Dwight Neal in the archival German publication, The Journey of an English Architect to the Near East, in the last days of 1866.

“Rani Pokhari is like other temples with jat and stupa, and a part of our heritage,” says Joshi. “As we need to make sure that it is not destroyed or damaged, they are rebuilt according to the original design, instead of a rush job of what Raj Bahalgi rogue versions to it.”

Conservation architect Sudashan Raj Tiwari says that while Shikhar style was popular during the time of Pahupati Malla, the German image is just a sketch by an architect and not photograhic evidence.

Says Tiwari: “I am not mandatory that the temple be built according to the sketch, in which the proportions of the temple are alluring. It is far better that it looks like it and could be a mistake the artists. We have got several proposals for the ‘1944 earthquake that looks the temple in a dome structure. More research is needed about whether it was actually in Shikhar style.’
PETE’S DRAGON

Children’s movies are tricky — if too light, the adults get bored, if heavy and complex, both kids and adults (perhaps even more) get traumatised. These films try to pull their punches but most end up being pretty upsetting regardless; more so to adults who have first-hand knowledge of love and loss than to the little people who, one hopes, have not experienced separation anxiety, death, and viciousness at close quarters just yet.

Pete’s Dragon — Disney’s newest live-action remake of its 1977 classic animated musical — is a bit wrenching for grownups, who know how cruel fate can be, with its blind reckonings and bad hands dealt to the sweetest of people, while liars and thieves reign free. It’s a certain very morally ambiguous presidential candidate with a toupee comes to mind.

Pete (Levi Alexander) is a very cute 5-year-old who is in a car accident with his parents when they are on a road trip adventure. Pete crawls out of the car with only his little red backpack, which contains his book Elliot Grez Lost — the story of a little dog who finds himself separated from his family. Wandering in the vast woods, Pete meets his Dragon, a big, green, flying, furry version of Scooby-Doo who immediately falls in love with this fearless little creature who fits into his paw.

The film moves into its main meat six years later when a logging company begins to encroach on Elliott the Dragon (named by the little boy) and the older Pete’s (Oakes Fegley) habitat. Suspicious, acquisitive adults ruin things, particularly Gavin (Karl Urban), a logger and hunter to boot, who is always in conflict with his brother Jack (Nes Bently), both of whom co-own the said lumber mill.

The logging brings Grace Meacham (Gwyndol Dallas Howard), a dedicated forest ranger and the girlfriend of Jack, into the ken of Pete and his large friend as she is marking special trees that are not to be touched. Disputes over high-powered logging in restricted areas is a venal exercise of pure greed on the part of Gavin. Also, Jack’s 10-year-old daughter, into the vast forest, and a fascinated Pete is discovered and taken to child services while Elliott is sleeping in their underground lair.

The anxiety that followed for me — Elliott is so well-christianised, though he never says a word, that you can feel his heart break at the loss of his only friend Pete. Luckily, Bryce Dallas Howard and Oakes Fegley bring so much love, warmth, and genuine compassion to this film where, in the end, things do thankfully go well.

You have been forewarned: if you weep over furry creatures, this film will extract tears from your eyes.

nepalitimes.com

The Old Man from Thabang: Legendary community leader Barman Jhutu of Thabang, the cradle of the Maoist revolution, meets Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu on Saturday.

ENDLESS WAIT: Family members of the disappeared became tearful eyes at an event held in Kathmandu on Tuesday to mark the International Day of the Victims of Informed Disappearances.

REVIVING RANIGAT: European Union envoy to Nepal Remje Teerink enjoys rafting in Sagarmati River on Saturday.

FIVE OFFERINGS: A boy receives Pancha Dahi (five offerings) during the eponymous Buddhist festival in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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I am not a rebel
Sarala Gautam in nepalpress.com, 2 August

I do not need to be a rebel, I just want to live each day as it comes. I leave my own destiny, decide for myself what I do with my life.

Srijana Basnet in Setopati, 13 August

I have thought a lot before writing this letter to you. I have probably been branded as a woman of ill-repute by you and your society.
I was in Grade 8 when my parents agreed to give me away, after hearing from your folks that I could continue going to school. I was 17 and completely opposed to marrying you.

On our wedding night a month later, I was terrified having to share a bed with someone I didn’t even know. You were five years older, and quite plump. After all, you were a migrant worker, and you had just returned from Qatar.

We didn’t talk much, you held me tight, and I couldn’t sleep the whole night. Everything was new: new place, new man, new relations. Your mother kept telling her new daughter-in-law: do this, do that. Within a week, she was acting nasty and I later realised it was because my family was poor and couldn’t afford a decent education.

I never saw you much. After a day of work, you’d claw at me for sex and I always had to be ready to offer it. What I needed did not matter. I never did get back to school. You said you were going to Qatar in six months, and I would run a shop. There was no need for an education.

I cannot tell you in this letter how much I was tortured by your mother after you left. I cried on the phone with you. The money you sent all went to your mother. She just gave me enough to buy soap to wash clothes. Your mother treated her dog better than me. When you did not return, neighbours started asking about you.

At 21, I went and stayed at my parents’ home for two months. The day I returned, it was late when I got to your house. Your mother was waiting and said I could have stayed with whomever I was going out with. She told me to go back to where I had come from.

I tried calling you many times. Some said you had probably married again, others said you may have died and I could find another partner. I couldn’t stay in your house, and I couldn’t get into your parents’ house.

So I went to Kathmandu with a friend from the village who tried to help me heal my wounds. She found work for me in a garment factory, and I got a room nearby.

A contractor named Saima was very helpful. I once fell ill, and found out later he had saved my life by donating his blood. He brought his sister to look after me. After I got better, Saima did not let me work and brought me fruit and medicine. He asked me to marry him, and we were happy. We were happy to see your grandparents.

There must be many women like me who are forced to marry again. Society is judgmental about us, and never understands. I couldn’t care less how society looks at me. I waited seven years for you, now I have cut you off. I wanted to tell you all this but in person, but since it is impossible, I have written this letter.

Your first wife, but now someone else’s, Srijana

Where is my home, mother?
Mita Prasad in Setopati, 9 August

Ram: Don’t keep criticizing, if you want to live in this house, do what I say. What’s it to you if I go, or what? Where are you? You have to change your behaviour. It can’t go on like this. The children will be upset.

Rani: If you don’t want to say with me, don’t I can change myself to suit you. Get out of the house. If you come back here, I’ll break your legs. I am a man, I can do what I want.

Sita: This is also my house. Where can I get? Shiva and Kushal ran to their mother when she cried and wiped away her tears. She held their hands, and left on a journey without a destination. She stopped at the crossroads to her parents’ home, it is where you were born, she heard an inner voice say.

Shiva and Kushal were happy to see their grandparents. In the evening, father asks: “You’ve come home, is son-in-law OK?”

Sita was quiet. Mother: Why don’t you speak?

Sita: I am tired. I think I’ll sleep. So thought her husband would come to get her. It had been two weeks.

Mother: Go home to your husband now, there is no one to cook for him.

Sita: Where is my home, mother? Where is a women’s home? Your son-in-law drove me out of the house, and you want me to go back? My husband’s house is not my home, the house where I was born is not my home. Shiva and Kushal are listening to their grandmother’s cry. They tell their mother: “Father’s house is not your home. Grandfather’s house is not your home. We’ll build you a home. Your own home. A home as loving as you.”
Long before the earthquake hit last year, the districts around Kathmandu were already hotbeds of trafficking.

OM ASTHA RAI

Ten years later, Nepal has introduced multiple measures, most importantly the 1998 National Plan of Action (NPA) to eliminate human trafficking, to allow the government to stop the scourge. But although reduced, trafficking is still rampant in Sindhupalchok, Nuwakot, Dhading and other satellite districts of Kathmandu. Tamang founded Shakti Samuha along with 14 other trafficking survivors and fought against trafficking. Their organization won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2013. “Things have improved, girls are now relatively more aware and protected than they were in my time,” says Tamang who was honoured by the US government in 2013 at the USIP Trafficking in Person Report Hero Acting to End Modern Slavery Award.

However, new forms of trafficking are emerging, and the problem is now becoming much more complex than it was two decades ago. Whereas in the past trafficking rings sold young, uneducated and poor girls into Indian brothels, the destination has now shifted to the Gulf and even East African countries. Shakti Samuha’s Executive Director Sunila Danzor — herself a trafficking survivor — lists foreign employment, inter-country marriage and surrogacy as the new and most prevalent forms of trafficking. “Combating these new forms of trafficking is more difficult than fighting sex trafficking,” she says. According to a 2014 report by the Labour Ministry, Sindhupalchok tops the list of districts with the most female migrant workers. Kavre, Makwanpur, Nuwakot and Dolakha trail close behind. These were also the districts worst hit by last year’s earthquake, which has deepened the crisis of human trafficking.

Two convicted traffickers, Sukhman Dong and Kails BK, fled when the walls of the Sindhupalchok District Prison collapsed in the earthquake. They have not been arrested yet, and there are fears that they are back in business.

“This is alarming, women who obtain individual labour permits often end up being trafficked and exploited,” says Maqso Durgun of the migrant welfare group, Paurakhi Nepal.

Bhiva Kati Rai, in her 50s, a former Joint Secretary involved in formulating several anti-trafficking policies, says it is Kathmandu’s periphery where most women migrate from, because that had always been the hotbed of traditional trafficking. “It is like using the old slaves to catch new slaves,” he says. “The source districts of trafficking are the Nepali border.”

Hiding hidden wounds

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Sandhi tried to kill herself several times after being sold by her relative to a brothel in Delhi when she was just 11. After five years as a virtual sex slave, during which she had to serve multiple clients every day, she was rescued and brought back home.

However, the euphoria of freedom was short-lived. After being saved seven years ago, she had to struggle against societal stigma and ostracization, and faced the strain of hiding her past life. “I was so elated after being rescued but the happiness didn’t last forever. It is painful to be cautious all the time and pretend nothing happened to me,” says Sandhi.

She still remembers her first night at the brothel, when she was raped by a 40-year-old man, and then by seven other men that same night. Her little feet made footprints in her blood on the floor in her room.

Sandhi is from the Badi community in Surkhet, which has one of highest rates of trafficking.

After facing years of abuse in Indian brothels, rescued young women have to then struggle to fight stigma back home in Nepal.

Light House Foundation Nepal brought her to Kathmandu after her rescue, and trained her in sewing and making jewellery. Raju Sundar of the Foundation says trafficking survivors are given life skills so that they can better reintegrate into the society. “If they don’t earn on their own, they might return to the same profession,” he says. Sandhi wants to start her own business, and has to constantly guard against people finding out about her past. Being ostracised by her community was bad enough, but what hurts Sandhi more is the fact that the relative who sold her into prostitution lives across the corner from her in Surkhet (see box).

Despite crackdowns, at least 7,000 Nepali girls are still being trafficked to brothels in India every year, and there are about 200,000 Nepal girls there, according to a 2015 report by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Bimala has lived with her daughter in Kathmandu since her marriage failed. For her own family and neighbours, she is someone who resided in India for many years, married, and is living happily.

What they do not know is that she, like Shanti, was also sold to a brothel in India when she was 11, and spent seven years as a sex worker. After being rescued, she got married to an Indian man but could not endure the torture from her husband. She has not met any members of her family, although she is back in Kathmandu with...
Demography of migration

Endruladhara and Dhunga are a list of districts with the highest number of female and male migrant workers, respectively.

Top 10 districts with highest number of male migrant workers

Top 10 districts with highest number of female migrant workers

(10 - highest numbers)

the trafficked girls are same, the modus operandi of trafficking is also the same, only the destination has changed.**

Most of the migrant workers who obtain individual labour permits to reach Arab countries as housemaids, and some of them, are sexually exploited, not just by employers but also relatives and peers. Some of them also reach African countries as dance bar girls.

The preoccupancy to trafficking can even be traced back to the Rana days, when young girls from Sindhupalchok, Kavre and Nuwakot used to be sent to the palaces in Kathmandu as concubines. But with the construction of highways connecting Nepal with India, traffickers began selling girls, mostly from Janajati communities, into Indian brothels.

An ethnic breakdown of the 336 trafficked girls rescued from India in 2014 and sheltered in the rescue and shelter agency, Mantra Nepal, revealed that 60 per cent of them were Janajati.

"It is mostly Janajati girls who are sold into Indian brothels because they are easily manipulatable, and they are not the ones trafficked to the Gulf and Africa," says Bhagwati Nepal, a Sindhupalchok-based anti-trafficking activist.

The Human Trafficking and Transnational Crimes (Control) Act 2007 defines trafficking not just as an act of forcing girls into prostitution, but also transporting people without their consent and forcing them to work. But the legislation does not clearly describe luring women into foreign jobs with false promises as an act of trafficking.

Sunita Nepal, of the anti-trafficking section of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, admits that the lack of clarity over whether tricking women or men into foreign work is an act of trafficking has made it difficult for the victims to get justice.

She says: "We are revising the Act, but this is not enough. There should be more awareness about trafficking itself."

Turning the tables

Both Shanti and Binita knew the relatives who resided in India and had sent them to India and sold them to brothels there. But neither wants to blame the price.

"The person who sold me in Delhi lives near my house, she apologised to me after I was rescued. But once she is a relative, I didn’t want to file a case," Shanti explained, loud and clear. "My life became a living hell because of that person, but I cannot punish her."

Young girls and women from Nepal are sold to India mostly by their close relatives, and that makes the prosecution process difficult, Nepal Police had 195 trafficking cases registered in 2014 and 2015 even though the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) estimates that about 17,000 women and children were trafficked from 2013 to 2015.

Kamati Thapa (Ojha) of the NHRC explains: "Usually victims and their families try to settle the case inside the court system. Due to this, the number of cases registered with the police is low compared to our data."

Victims avoid filing cases against the perpetrators to steer clear of social stigma, having no hope of compensation and facing a sluggishly justice mechanism, Ojha adds. In addition, most perpetrators are relatives who live in the brothels with promises of jobs, and rescued women generally prefer to keep quiet.

Mugling this Daasin.

Sundas says trafficking survivors need years to overcome the stigma and be rehabilitated in society. So we keep them in shelter houses, and try to boost their confidence through counselling," he says.

Bimala says: "I don’t want to tell them anything about my past life and my broken family because I will be blamed for everything, even though none of it was my fault."

(Names have been changed)

STOP, LISTEN AND GO: Prospective female migrant workers: Training centre run by Shafi Samiha in Sindhupalchok, the district with the highest number of female migrant workers.

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Course dates: 7th November – 2nd December 2016

Deadline for application: First come first served basis

Entry requirements: 18 years of age with a good command of the English language

To Apply: Application Form and Language Analysis Task

Turning the tables

Both Shanti and Binita knew the relatives who resided in India and sold them to brothels there. But neither wants to blame the price.

“...”

Young girls and women from Nepal are sold to India mostly by their close relatives, and that makes the prosecution process difficult, Nepal Police had 195 trafficking cases registered in 2014 and 2015 even though the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) estimates that about 17,000 women and children were trafficked from 2013 to 2015.

Kamatu Thapa (Ojha) of the NHRC explains: “Usually victims and their families try to settle the case inside the court system. Due to this, the number of cases registered with the police is low compared to our data.”

Victims avoid filing cases against the perpetrators to steer clear of social stigma, having no hope of compensation and facing a sluggishly justice mechanism, Ojha adds. In addition, most perpetrators are relatives who live in the brothels with promises of jobs, and rescued women generally prefer to keep quiet.

Mugling this Daasin.

Sundas says trafficking survivors need years to overcome the stigma and be rehabilitated in society. So we keep them in shelter houses, and try to boost their confidence through counselling,” he says.

Bimala says: “I don’t want to tell them anything about my past life and my broken family because I will be blamed for everything, even though none of it was my fault.”

(Names have been changed)
Fasting for the longevity of dorks

Because his logic is often backward, the Ass can’t figure out why women need another festival to celebrate the fact that they are downtrodden. What’s the fuss about anyway? They already assure 30% of all our senior jobs and ministries. Even if they make up only 3% of the current exactor, so what? It’s the thought that counts.

In case you hadn’t noticed, our ancient republic has females as President, Speaker, Justice, Editor-in-Chief, and Head Barrister. Parliament has also passed legislation allowing daughters to inherit parental property, and is working on a new family law providing parents their daughters to marry certified dorks, thus making doubly sure that the property remains in safe hands. We have no problems with girls joining the ranks and file to stand shoulder to shoulder with us, we just want them to be grateful. That’s all.

This Tj, women will last, as they have for millennia, so that their present or future husbands have health, wealth and a minimum birth in the new coalition. Those who, for technical reasons, do not wish to their spouses to have any of the above can of course just secretly stop by at the Ah! breastshopa and give gorged a few of their thigh monsters. Menlinks Parliament may be overcompensating. At the rate there will be too few left for men. What is it doing to help broad-minded men like us who, the last time we checked, were still a majority holding the other half of the sky? Oh, ok, ok, one-third. What is the Central Non-Working Committee of the recently formed All-India Federation of Apna Makeup and Drapes (Revolutionised) to want to know? how is Parliament going to guarantee that this epidemic of politically correct legislation in favour of members of the female persuasion will not leave us all beard-styled high and dry and out in the wilderness? Should we guys get worried? You bet.

And what shall we gentleman be doing about it? Kicking dust, yes, taking a leaf out of the book of the Great Herman Melville, who said (and I quote), “In the afternoons the best form of detestiveness, we men have to recreate but to follow this wise dictum and start behaving in an even more obvious and outinmane manner than we already do. And if of us who wear K-Round underls must launch a multipronged campaign throughout madison, starting last January right now, to request our motherhood and reclaim our past honour? We will protect the basics of our maidenhood from female encroachment into the last man’s self-standing.

But, some good news at last—just when we card-carrying members of the unfair sex were feeling a little bit aggrandized, comes word that Kathmandu is getting its first male beauty parlour. At last there is a place we boys can go and get on our makeup squashed by professionals without any danger of those things getting infected and going into pus-filled carbuncles and suchies.

So, let this be a warning: we are not going to sit idly by while women out run us, ok? and take away our jobs. This Tj, we will counter-attack by sitting outside Parliament till all our demands are met. What means we will wage all jobs traditionally held by women to be reserved for men. Only through affirmative action can men also have a chance to prove themselves to be as good housewifes and homemeniers.