Trial balloons

As protests over the Second Amendment continued for a second consecutive day on Thursday, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal tried to persuade Madhesi leaders to go along and prepare for local elections.

Madhesi leaders not only rejected Dahal’s proposal but also threatened to disrupt elections if the bill was pushed through without their consent. The Maoist-NC coalition will fail to secure a two-thirds majority to pass the bill without the Madhesi support. The main opposition UML has been even more vocal in criticizing the bill, disrupting House proceedings on Thursday and also carrying out protests, particularly in west Nepal.

The Tarai Madhesi Democratic Party (TMDP) leader Laxman Lal Karno said that inserting Sunar, Miosis, Bajaa in the east and Kailali and Karnapar in Far West into Tarai-only provinces is still his party’s bottomline. “Until we get these districts, we will not go for elections,” he told Nepal Times on Thursday.

Dahal’s new targeting to Madhesi parties will eventually support the bill, probably after a few corrections in its content. If he wins over Madhesi support, the newly unified RPF and other fringe parties could also come on board, enabling the Maoist-NC coalition to secure a two-thirds majority.

NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba is confident that the UML too will support the bill if the top three parties reach a deal to endorse the impeachment motion against the CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki, which is still being debated in Parliament. There are powerful NC leaders who are not backing Deuba on impeachment, but he may use this card to strike a deal with the UML over the constitution amendment.

It was the UML that initiated the impeachment motion, after learning that Karki was about to go after its leaders. India did not welcome Nepal’s constitution and backed Madhesi protests last year, but has sent positive signals about the amendment. This could be the main reason the UML is unwilling to amend the charter under which five hill districts which were in Province 4 have been granted to Province 5. Now Nepal has two Tarai-only federal provinces.

Last year, during the constitution-making process, the UML had presented a similar federal map in the Political Dialogue Committee of the Constituent Assembly (CA). Naya Shakti Party Chair Baburam Bhattarai, who was the President of that CA committee, has slammed the UML, saying it is important to be ‘nationalist’ when it proposed two Tarai-only provinces in Madhes but is now dubbing others ‘anti-nationalist’ for fouling a similar idea.

UML leader Ramesh Koirala, a close confidante of the party Chair KP Oli, retorted: “This is not a party. That was one of the many ideas we floated. If that idea works now, why was it not accepted when we were in power?”

The UML is suspicious that India is pushing the second amendment bill to fragment Nepal. “The second amendment is part of a conspiracy to divide Nepal,” he told Nepal Times. “They first create two Tarai-only provinces, then the five disputed plains districts will be separated from hill provinces and eventually the Madhes will be separated.”

Om Astha Rai

PASSAGES

Mourned this week

THUNDU SHERPA

Died while climbing on Annapurna when the 7.3 magnitude earthquake on the morning of 26 November brought blocks of ice crashing down on mountaineers.

ALEXANDER MAXIMO

Killed when his light plane crashed while towing a glider in Kaski.

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KAKISTOCRACY

‘Government by the most incompetent elements of society’

The Cabinet’s endorsement of the Second Amendment to the Constitution has left no one happy. Not even its chief architect, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, sounds content. Like all compromises, the seven changes don’t satisfy anyone in Nepal’s zero-sum politics where the kakistocrats are used to winning take all.

The opposition UML, still smarting from having been removed from power in a coup in August, is angling for revenge and has decided not to make it easy for the Maoist-led government of Pushpa Kamal Dahal to sit easily on the Prime Minister’s chair. The Madhesi Congress, waver ing as always, is not even able to convince its rank and file about the wisdom of backing the amendment.

Defence Minister Bal Krishna Khand of the Congress, is openly critical of the Amendment, especially the plan to chop his district in half. The Madhesi are divided about whether to back the Amendments, but they cannot be happy with the fact that their original demand for a single Madhes province spanning the Tara has now been watered down to such an extent that it is unrecognisable. Prime Minister Dahal himself looks war weary, and prefers to issue directives to bureaucrats and hobnob with Indian goddess-tycoons.

The anger is spreading, especially in the five districts of the mid-western mountains which have been shunted around like pieces in a game of Chinese Checkers. The UML has been the most vocal opponent of this move to take out five districts from Province 5, and fuse them into Province 4. This is the UML’s heartland and the party sees it as a strategic outside move to keep the plains and hills separate, a strategic outside move to keep the plains and hills separate, Maoist-NC ploy to dilute its vote bank. Others consider it as [something].

4. This is the UML’s heartland and the party sees it as a

Khand of the Congress, is openly critical of the

Minister’s chair. The Nepali Congress, wavering

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number of representatives from each province in the federal

relaxation of rules on naturalised citizenship for foreign

Tarai province. In the east, the dispute over the fate of Jhapa,

Kanchanpur remain in his Province 7 stronghold and not in a

answer: because the NC’s Sher Bahadur Deuba would

put forward as a lollipop for the Tharu community, not

The pollution is recent, dating back maybe 40-50 years and compared to a river like Danube which passes through several countries, the actual polluted part of Bagmati is too small and only limited within the Valley. It should be an easy task. The only thing missing, apart from the funds, is the political will. Maybe if government officials spend more time planning this than constructing an exotic walkway along the river bank then we can have a clean Bagmati/Vishnumati in no time!

Ravi Bajrayacharya

WOMEN FREEDOM

What Vishnumati has done is commendable, and I’m sure it has inspired many women around the world (‘Freedom is not free’, #834, Rajani Maharjan). The world knows about Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s journey from revolution to two-time prime minister. (‘Shadowing Prachanda’, #834, Shreejana Shrestha).

The load shedding of Kathmandu Valley ended in his tenure, hats off! Now his highest concentrations of West Tharus? Actually we know the answer: because the NC’s Sher Bahadur Deuba would have none of it. Deuba has also insisted that Kailali and Kanchanpur remain in his Province 7 stronghold and not in a Tara province. In the east, the dispute over the fate of Jhapa, Moming and Sunnari which deadlocked negotiations on this amendment for most of 2016 is mysteriously not an issue any more, again because they are the vote banks of powerful local politicians.

The other six points in the amendment concern the relaxation of rules on naturalised citizenship for foreign wives of Nepali nationals, recognising as official languages those spoken by a majority in a province, and determining the number of representatives from each province in the federal Upper House. Mixing populism and vote bank politics with boundaries and languages can be volatile in an unstable transitional democracy like ours; but nothing seems to deter our male kakistocrats from being narrow-minded and short-sighted. It is clear that the amendment is more about gaining an upper hand in present power politics and ensuring future electoral vote banks, than an effort to address the real demands of the Madhesi and other marginalised communities for autonomy.

The Madhesi parties are on a permanent agitation mode and are keeping their radical options open with an eye on cashing in on disenchantment with the constitution for local and provincial elections next year.

To be sure, the reason the amendments look watered down could be because Dahal was trying to appease the UML and keeping its coalition partners in the Nepali Congress happy, while showing the Madhesi parties and India that he has tried his best to push the amendments through. In doing so, however, he appears to have antagonised everyone. It is unlikely that the amendment that has been registered will get the necessary two-thirds majority in Parliament without the UML, the second largest party in Parliament, on board.

The long and short of it is that such arbitrary and inconclusive amendments, instead of steering the country finally towards stability and prosperity, will keep us tangled in day-to-day politics. It will polarise Nepali society further, and make local, provincial and federal parliament elections even more difficult to hold by the 21st January 2018 deadline. The only solution is for the Maoist-NC coalition to sit down one more time with the UML and Madhesi parties to hammer out a sustainable and meaningful agreement on setting aside intractable disputes for now, and conduct free and fair elections. At the moment that sounds like a tall order.
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It was late afternoon after a three-hour walk uphill that Potti finally reached his home village of Bhaktakatiya. Children who had heard of his arrival had come down the trail to welcome him, shouting “Potti, Potti.”

The boy recognized some of them and laughed about the time long ago when he fell off a nearby cliff while chasing a rabbit. All around, the scenic mountains of Central Nepal stretched away to the horizon in fading shades of blue.

“That is my home there,” Potti pointed up the hill. “It has become rundown now. I am sure I’ll get a scolding from my parents when they meet me.”

His thin, frail mother and three siblings were at home to welcome Potti. Her eyes teared up as the long-lost son respectfully touched her mother’s feet. They were meeting after nine years.

“I used to run around these hills, it’s all so different now. I am nervous and excited at the same time,” Potti said as he looked out at his once-familiar neighborhood.

Potti’s father used to work in India, and would occasionally come home with his savings and urge his son to go to school. He didn’t want to and during one of his visits, the boy stole his father’s money and ran away from home.

After walking half a day to the district capital of Mangalsen, Potti washed clothes and once he had saved enough, took the bus down to Bhaktakatiya in the plains. He was dazed by the city.

“I was excited to see so many vehicles, big houses, shops and I was enjoying my freedom so much that I spent all my money in two days,” he recalled.

Potti made friends at the bus station and started to work as a conductor, and liked the job because of all the travel. Sometimes the bus took him back to Achham, but even though he missed his family, he avoided going home.

Soon he was lured by the even brighter lights of Delhi, about which he had heard exciting stories. As he was getting down into the platform at Delhi’s railway station, he was rescued by activists of the group, Childdine. He was taken to a shelter in the city where he lived with many other lost boys from India and Nepal. Initially it felt like a prison, but Potti soon started blending in and made lots of friends.

He started calling himself Prakash, learned carpentry and excelled in cricket and volleyball. He realized the importance of education and requested Childdine to send him to school.

“It was a life changing experience for me, everything suddenly became clear and I worked hard,” Prakash said.

Back home, Potti’s parents looked for him everywhere, but as the months turned into years they started to give up hope. Potti’s father even brought a dog home in his son’s memory.

“We had given up hope that he was alive, today my happiness knows no bounds to see him so big and healthy and safe,” said Potti’s mother, wiping away her tears.

Prakash sat with his mother and told her how he stole his father’s money to run away to Delhi. How he started studying and excelling in sports, right up to the time the group Childdine...
Home coming

Hundreds of Nepal boys who have run away from home, and girls who are trafficked end up in shelters in Indian cities. CharaChori Nepal works to bring them home and reunite them with families.

Most Nepali boys are rescued as they arrive at New Delhi railway station. From 2010 to 2015, over 200 Nepali children lived in Central Delhi homes, 84 per cent of them boys. Given that there are more than 500 children homes in the Indian capital and over 5,000 across India, the total number of Nepali children here is estimated to be in the thousands. The children mainly came from western Nepal and make their way through the open border, usually in groups of two to three. It is a matter for boys to cross borders without attracting attention, stop police are mainly on the lookout for young women being trafficked.

Since it was set up in September 2014 CharaChori Nepal has repatriated over 50 Nepali children from shelters in Delhi and Bengaluru. Prakash (17) was among 17 boys from four children’s homes in Delhi brought to Kathmandu in March. The boys aged 16-17 were first taken to CharaChori Nepal’s temporary shelter in Kathmandu’s Godawari area and another in Itahari where efforts are made to trace the families. In cases where the familial environment is deemed unsafe for the child, CharaChori Nepal places the child in a long-term care home and forwards for their education.

www.charachori.org.uk
Survey reveals young women in Nepal are exposed to greater dangers than just cat calls and wolf whistles

ASMITA GAUCHAN

That women are harassed at home, in the workplace and in the streets of Nepal is well known. What was hidden was the true extent of the problem.

Now, an online survey by Code For Nepal’s #IWalkFreely has shown not just the shocking extent of the problem but even more disturbing are the testimonies which speak of the horror Nepal’s girls and women face daily.

“I was once harassed by my own relative,” wrote a 12-year-old girl. Another 13-year-old female respondent said: “I was walking alone in an alley in the evening and a man (not so old) groped me. I was totally shocked, couldn’t process what had just happened and he ran away.”

By staying silent when a woman is being teased on the streets, bystanders accept that women will always be oppressed and let it flourish.

“Verbal teasing and unwanted looks are things that I don’t go a day without facing. Molestation has happened so many times you can’t count it on 5 fingers. Because that doesn’t mean this is only happening to me, thousands of other females in Nepal are just like me — and that shocks me,” wrote another respondent.

There is little repressed anger in their words because what is happening to the girls and women is unfair and unjust. There is hurt, resignation.

“Once I was returning from school and some vagrant was flashing. Another time I was returning home from college in a bus and a guy was running his fingers over my thigh. I scolded him and he left the bus. I was walking in a crowd during Machindranath Jatra and an old man pinched my ass. Every day as I leave home I hear comments from people, no matter if I dress up in shorts and a tight dress or in a kurta,” wrote another.

The #IWalkFreely survey collected over 1,000 responses and 98 percent of all women said they had been harassed. Besides the streets, 71 percent of respondents of both genders also reported harassment in public transportation, 43 percent said they were subjected to physical harassment of some form, and 25 percent reported sexual harassment.

Here is another respondent in the Code for Nepal survey: “During the India-Nepal Blockade, it was 7 pm and carpooling was a highly chosen option. I also chose to take a lift at KNAC. My home was 30 minutes far and with a bike it can take only 10 minutes. So the motorcyclist and I were talking and going. Just some simple conversation. Then on the way there was a place where there was a bit of darkness. I turned to touch my legs. I told him to stop there and then. But he didn’t stop. Then he advanced his hands backwards again and touched my thighs. I screamed and he told me not to. I lied to him and said that my father is a DDC then he halted. I jumped off his bike and ran away. Crying and crying. I didn’t stop till I was near my home and didn’t even look back. I didn’t have the guts to tell anyone at home. I just cried all night and promised myself never to take a lift from strangers.”

Nearly half the participants who said they had faced harassment were between 20-29 years old, and 43 percent were between 13 and 19. It isn’t only the figurative abdication of girls and women that we should fight against as a society. Street harassment, so often mistakenly seen as harmless, is a precursor to more severe forms of violence against women.

So many of the stories respondents shared didn’t stop at confessing to being harassed on the streets. As illustrated by the sampling of anecdotes in this piece, girls and women in Nepal are exposed to greater dangers than cat calls and wolf whistles.

“As I’ve grown older, I’ve learned to become more straightforward and unafraid of such men and stare directly at them and tell them exactly what I’m thinking or just throw up the middle finger and a dirty look,” wrote one. It may be time to take some pointers from this brave young woman.

Don’t shrug at these horrifying, heartbreakingly stories. It is upon every man and woman to think of what can be done to change how these stories are shaped, to ensure they do not end with helpless rage or leave scars.

Imitating nature

Nepal’s most modern printing facility, Japadamba Press, now makes natural colours come alive with its state-of-the-art equipment.
On course to be champion

Pratima Sherpa literally grew up on a golf course and wants to be Nepal’s first female professional golfer.

The tranquility of the Royal Nepal Golf Club next to the chaos of Kathmandu Airport is what Pratima Sherpa calls home. She was born and raised in a maintenance shed near the fourth hole of the golf course where her parents work. Exposed to golf from an early age, the 17-year-old grew up watching club members play. She mimicked their movements with wooden sticks, and was just 10 when a club member spotted her and invited her to hit with real golf putters. Coached by Sachin Bhattachar, Sherpa started practicing weekly, and won her first trophy in a junior chipping competition two months after being initiated into the game. She is now Nepal’s top-ranked female golfer and hopes to soon become the first female golf professional in Nepal.

"The whole process of planning, picking the right club and calculating where the ball might end up is stimulating," says Sherpa. "It is really exciting to watch the ball travel when you make a good shot."

A shelf in her home brims with trophies she has won over the years. In May, she won the female division of Carlsberg Classic Golf Tournament and in September she placed second in the Faldo Series Nepal Championship, a global amateur series for boys and girls in more than 30 countries around the world.

The winners from the Nepal Championship which sees participation from golfers in India, Italy and Bhutan are rewarded with a ticket to play in a tournament in Mission Hills, China. Sherpa has won championships in 2012 and 2015, but is yet to play in an international arena.

"Pratima has the makings of a winner. She is dedicated, disciplined and diligent. She never misses practice and not only does she know her shortcomings but works hard to improve," says Bhattachar, who thinks this gives her an edge in a game that depends as much on the equipment as passion, planning and skill.

Sherpa’s favourite golfer is Tiger Woods, and she credits her success to encouragement from her parents, her coach and all others who helped her over the years with equipment and scholarships.

"In pursuit of her dream, the hardworking 12th grade student is not leaving anything to chance. Her days begin at 6am by taking care of the chickens her family keeps for extra income. Then she finishes her school homework, but by 7am she is at the golf course practicing for at least two hours before heading to college.

Four days a week she has practice sessions with her coach and is back at the course every chance she gets. She is currently preparing for pre-qualifier matches to get a pro-card. Although the dates are yet to be fixed, Sherpa has her eyes firmly fixed on her goal of professional golf.

"The plan is to keep the pro card on hold so that she can play more amateur tournaments, which take place more frequently, to work on her game," says Bhattachar. After college Sherpa wants to dedicate at least six months to honing her golfing skills. For her undergraduate level she wants to study Golf Management to bridge the gap in Nepal’s golf scene and improve the overall quality of the game in the country.

Says Sherpa: "There aren’t many female golfers in Nepal. I want to play in the international arena and show the world that there are Nepali female golfers who are on par with everyone else. I want to urge my friends to return to the game and other girls to give golf a shot."
Perhaps the biggest honour a man can aspire to is to be called A Hero To Men. On the outside, Laipa Thundu Sherpa was an unlikely candidate for this high compliment. Of slight build, endowed with a quiet voice and an unfailingly humble demeanour, Thundu was nonetheless considered a giant among his peers — the exclusive club of Nepali mountain guides.

Math has been made of these brave people in Western folklore. What few Westerners realise, however, is that Sherpa men only turn to high-altitude mountaineering as a job, not for fun. It was thus out of necessity that a teenager, Thundu signed on to his first expedition in the role of kitchen boy. A few seasons later, he advanced to cook at one of the higher altitude camps and then went on to become a high altitude porter before graduating to the esteemed and rarefied position of mountain guide. A calm character and natural cheerfulness belied his supreme agility and strength at higher altitudes.

Thundu became known as a quiet giant. He carried the biggest, heaviest loads and effortlessly moved at the fastest pace, all the while maintaining his trademark cheerfulness. Yet no one can remember hearing him speak of his own achievements. Khame Sherpa, Thundu’s sirdar, his bosses Iwari Paudel and Henry Todd, his colleagues and his clients would speak all the more boarishly of Thundu’s prowess. Climbers fought over the privilege to have Thundu as their guide. The British explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes refused to make his third attempt on Mt Everest unless Thundu was assigned as his guide. Ran’s wish was granted and together with Thundu, his climbing partner Ang Namgel Sherpa, Kenton Cool and my future wife, Anita, we all reached the summit on 25 May, 2009.

In 2010, we found ourselves on Mt Everest again, and it was then that Thundu, as well as Namgel, would show their true greatness. After the reaching the summit, we returned to Camp II, where Anita began experiencing difficulty breathing. She suffocated and soon expired, pronounced dead by our physician Rob Cassenley. On
TIME TO CLIMB Thubu Sherpa on the summit of Mt Everest in 2013 with the author, and trained as a watchmaker for Kodak.

hearing this Thubu and Namgel ran out of the mess tent where Anita lay stone cold and blue as ice, only to return a few minutes later, painting and holding a med bage containing syringes of adrenaline and steroids.

This cocktail jump-started Anita’s heart and she began breathing again – over four minutes after the episode began. With Anita still unconscious and after almost 40 hours of climbing, I told Thubu and Namgel that I would take a short nap. My last memory before falling asleep is of our friends standing resolutely on either side of Anita.

On waking, the first thing I noticed was that Thubu and Namgel had not changed their position at all, so I naturally assumed I had only napped for half an hour or so. I checked my watch and was stunned to discover that it had been over five hours. Thubu and Namgel hadn’t moved. An hour later, Anita woke up and to our surprise spoke as if nothing had happened. The frigid temperature had preserved her cognitive abilities. After breakfast, and without sleep in over two days, Thubu carried his and Anita’s rucksack out of Camp II, nimbly crossing the long, shaiey ladders spanning deep crevasses.

Out of gratitude, we invited Thubu and Namgel to America where we taught them watchmaking. Thanks to their low resting pulse, their natural aptitude at this task was unrivaled and a year later we opened the world’s first Kathmandu-based watch company owned and operated by two Sherpas. The BBC, The New York Times and other media covered their incredible transition from mountain guides to watchmaking Sherpas.

Yet Namgel, and Thubu in particular, felt very uneasy about their newfound fame and celebrity.

The goal was simple: to keep “our” Sherpas off mountains forever and to train other Sherpas in watchmaking, so that they, too, might escape a life of mountaineering. Unfortunately, I made some grave mistakes by assuming that Thubu and Namgel would enjoy this thoroughly sedentary occupation. Moreover, it became evident that watches ‘Made in Nepal’ did not create quite the buzz I had envisioned.

The earthquakes and India’s unofficial blockade in 2015 only accelerated its demise: Thubu and Namgel would not be able to keep their families afloat with watchmaking.

On 24 November, Thubu was making his way up Mt Anna Dublam with his usual effortless speed. The earth shook, an avalanche descended and Thubu was struck by a large block of ice. That day, the diabolically opposed worlds of mountaineering and horology lost a legend. Thubu Sherpa, really was a hero to men.

Michael Kohfeld is a German-born watchmaker based near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA.

the plane so we could see the summit pyramid of Machapuchre another 12,000ft: vertically above us. Maximov once told me “every flight is pilgrimage” because it reminded him of how humans paled into insignificance amidst the majesty and magnitude of these mountains.

Maximov was with a tourist on one of his sightseeing flights up the Sei on 22 May 2012 when, as he completed a 360 degree turn to gain altitude, he saw an unusual brown cloud of dust billowing beneath Annapurna 4. Captured on the plane’s wingtip camera it is distinctively different from the puffs of white clouds and the icy cliffs.

The pilot immediately recognized this as a huge rockfall avalanche and soon saw a turbid tsunami racing down the narrow gorge of the Sei below. Maximov promptly radioed Pokhara and warned the air traffic controller who passed the message to police and FM radio stations. He then flew back, following the flood back to Pokhara. Officials credit Maximov’s alertness and early warning to saving many lives that day.

Avia Club, the pioneering Pokhara-based sports aviation company that Maximov flew for had suffered another tragedy in 2013 when owner-pilot Stephan Shrestha, 35, was killed together with a Chinese tourist when his plane hit an electricity wire above the Peace Stupa.

The Club was beginning to recover from that loss, and had started air safaris on powerless ultralight gliders from its own air field in Larung near Pokhara. On 21 November 2013, Maximov was piloting a Dragonfly aircraft with a Canadian passenger, towing an ultralight when something went wrong with the cable. Maximov lost control of his craft and it plunged into a paddy field soon after takeoff.

Nepal’s tourism industry has lost a devoted and professional pilot for whom flying in the Himalaya with the wind on his face was life’s greatest passion.

Kandu Dhill
GETAWAY

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Healing Langtang

Australian researchers caught up in avalanche last year building a cultural museum to boost tourism

JESSICA CORTIS

Emma Waterton and Hayley Saul from Western Sydney University were in Langtang last year researching its archaeology, heritage and development when the 25 April earthquake set off a massive avalanche that buried the village. At least 200 people were killed. 70 of them trekkers trekking along the scenic valley in the Langtang National Park. Surviving villagers were rescued by helicopter and spent months at the Yellow Monastery in Kathmandu.

“We had just finished our research in the village and were half way through our trek. There were so many reasons why we should have died,” Saul said, recalling the horror of watching the cliff face opposite them peel away and fall into the river below. When Waterton, 34, and Saul, 33, trekked to Langtang five years ago, they knew nothing about it. Last year they were helping write its history when they narrowly escaped the disaster.

This week, Saul and Waterton were visiting the village for the first time since the tragedy. It was a silent descent as they arrived in Kyajin Gompa by helicopter. They were greeted with khadas and a quiet exchange filled with emotion.

“I think about it a lot more than I normally would so I was very nervous going back,” Waterton reflected.

Tenzing Lama, head of Reconstruction and Management in the Himalaya saved the two Australian academics from the landslide last year. “They both have very good hearts so it was very emotional seeing them. I’m happy that they’re here, but it reminds me of everyone who is not,” he said.

Since the earthquake, research objectives have shifted with plans to use the data collected to make a commemorative Sacred valley of Langtang Museum. With funding from Western Sydney University, an exhibition will extend outside to various locations attached to stories and histories of the people in the village.

“It is much better than us presenting our research in literary form. It will be more special coming from the words of the people,” Waterton said. Imbedded to the people of Langtang, Saul and Waterton have started a Langtang Survivors Fund which has raised over Rs 7,000,000.

The earthquake struck just before noon on 25 April. Shaking off a large chunk of Mt Langtang Lirung (7,227m) which fell on a glacier and swept the debris to the valley below. The shock wave that preceded the avalanche blew away the village, and most of the bodies were found on the other side of the river. Langtang village still lies buried under 100m of rock.

It is hoped that the museum will not only be a reminder of the cultural history of Langtang, but will bring tourists back to the village. Even though the Langtang Trail has been repaired, there has been a 50 percent drop in the number of trekkers since the earthquake.

The project will be a big step in the reintroduction of the village. Wind and hydro technology has been incorporated in the design and will make the outdoor exhibition multi-modal and interactive.

WSU and KU

During their visit to Kyajin Gompa, Vice-Chancellor of Western Sydney University, Barney Glover presented a scholarship for a student from Langtang to study a Bachelor of Tourism Management in 2017. In Australia, WSU academics also attended the consecration ceremony at Kathmandu University where a billboard agreement was signed to enable use of overseas study exchange between the two institutions.

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Jason Bourne

The most riveting part of Jason Bourne is the irresistible titular character played by Matt Damon as he weaves and punches and slams his way through the film there are now five in the franchise to date. Fear of which star Damon in action sequences that are

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

now go to standard for those who aspire towards this kind of visceral, fast-paced drama first pioneered by Paul Greengrass in the second Bourne film The Bourne Supremacy (2004).

Greengrass went on to direct The Bourne Ultimatum (2007) and now Old latest film that continues to follow Jason Bourne’s tortured struggle to find out how his life was co-opted by the CIA, making him into the formidable killer that he is.

Years after Bourne has (somewhat) come to terms with the CIA’s nefarious and murky programmes designed to train killers like him using morally untenable methods, he is still plagued by bouts of lucy memories surrounding his father’s death just before he chose the (thinks willingly) to go into the murky ‘Treadstone programme that made him who he is now.

Pursued by the CIA after an old friend and former CIA agent Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles) alerts Bourne about the anomalies regarding his own recruitment into Treadstone, Bourne is once again caught in a web where he must stay a step ahead, both to uncover the truth and to save his own life.

There are a few new characters to livens up this film which is not as good as the preceding ones but still exhilarating enough action wise to give it a chance. Talent is wasted with the usually compelling Alicia Vikander as the one note Heather Lee, a young, brilliant CIA cyber ops whiz who ought to be enigmatic but isn’t given enough screen-time or real depth to truly mystify. Tommy Lee Jones is similarly squandered as the boring, evil CIA Director Richard Dewey, and Vincent Cassel plays an endless iteration of his usual baddie as an unnamed assassin with a personal vendetta against Bourne.

Jason Bourne is a bit of a washout for Matt Damon who really came of age as an action hero with the Bourne character in the early 2000s. This is a film which desperately tries to bring an old story into the new age with a worn out subplot about hacking, government spying (guess which agency is behind it) and a certain not-so-veiled hint regarding a ubiquitous social networking phenomenon that has, however unwillingly, facilitated big brother’s interests in listening in on individuals’ private lives.

At the end of an interminable chase some finale, the only thing that will keep you from walking in the rough-hewn charisma that is Matt Damon as he surprises you one more time.

nepalitimes.com

HAPPENINGS

SAJHA SARARA: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal goes to Singha Darbar by a new Sajha Yatayat bus. Sajha Yatayat has added 30 new buses to its fleet, which were inaugurated by Dahal amidst a ceremony in Pulchowk on Sunday.

NO TO AMENDMENT: All Nepali National Free Students’ Union (JNANUS) and Youth Association Nepal (YAN) burn tyres to protest against registration of the second constituent amendment bill in Parliament on Wednesday.

YOGA THERAPY: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal performing yoga with Ramdev in Bangkok on Tuesday.

MEMORIAL DAY: Denotes light oil lamps in memory of their deceased family members during the Bahu Chaukundhi Festival at Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu on Monday.

SPREADING AWARENESS: Students participate in a rally organised on the occasion of 29th World AIDS Day in Basantapur on Thursday.
Amending the amendment

The Second Amendment to the Constitution bill has sparked the expected protests. Last year, after the promulgation of the Constitution, the country had faced a similar situation. Back then, some people lit lamp in jubilation to welcome the charter while others set fire to the document. The past year taught us neither of them was right.

The parties that registered the bill in Parliament this week are divided, and not trying their best to justify why an amendment was needed. The parties that oppose the bill are just angry, and are not criticizing it logically.

Federal Alliance leader Upendra Yadav has rejected the bill, saying it does not address the grievances of Madhesi and Janajati peoples. The UML has decided to intensify protests in Parliament and on the streets. In fact, it was fueling fire in the hill districts of Lumbini Zone even before the bill was registered. The protests over the bill have reignited debate on the assumptions of federalism and provincial demarcation.

The way boundaries of Province 4 and 5 have been redrawn in the amendment bill is closer to the concept of identity-based federalism. It creates clusters of communities sharing the same ethnicities and cultures. But this redrawning of boundaries does not make sense if we look at it from the perspective of administrative decentralisation. Ifkickam, Rolpa and Pyuthan are inserted into province 4, people living there will have difficulty in accessing public services. The debate on the readjustment of boundaries can continue, but it needs to be more constructive. Getting all worked up will not help. The present political stalemate is the result of the government’s failure to implement the constitution. And this failure is the result of Madhesi resistance. We need to find a fine balance between Madhesi demands, Janajati aspirations for identity-based provinces and the fears of the nationalists that Terai-only provinces will only serve Indian interests. Only then will it be possible to uphold national unity.

Save KC

Crusader Govinda KC’s tenth fast unto death has entered the 18th day, and cumulatively the doctor has been on hunger strike for 119 days. He is the only citizen of Nepal’s history, probably in the world as well, who has risked his life repeatedly to reform the medical education sector. Yet, it is our responsibility to address his demands and save his life.

Recently, the government breached the agreement signed with KC by appointing a new person in a new post at the Institute of Medicine (IOM). The Chancellors of Tribhuvan University (TU) and Kathmandu University (KU) appointed KP Singh against existing norms and this prompted KC to stage another fast unto death. Some politicians have said KC’s demand is impractical and uninspired. They argue that the appointment of a dean should be based on seniority and working capacity.

KC’s mind is as sharp as his arguments. He is aware that a person working at an inexact post should be pinned up on the basis of various factors. Past irregularities have only helped for the for-profit medical education under the IOM. If capable deans were appointed at the IOM, there wouldn’t have been fake doctors in many hospitals, students would have received quality education, and medical colleges would not have got additional seats every year by paying big bribes.

WITH KC: The Kathmandu Post editor Ashish Upadhaya briefs editors of other publications about Govinda KC’s surprising health. The crusader’s hunger strike entered its 19th day on Thursday.

KC’s first strike was against the culture of appointing deans close to politicians. There were signs of improvement at IOM and medical colleges only after deans were appointed on the basis of seniority. Singh wasn’t made dean because of his skills and qualification. The condition of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) was unacceptable and was heard when he was director of the IOM. There were even charges of irregularities on equipment purchases which the CMA is still investigating.

Singh is a close ally of KC and helped him in previous hunger strikes. KC is demanding the expulsion of Singh and Khajja from their posts because KC’s fight is for a system and country.

Khajja himself is an outcome of corrupt politics. Late Prime Minister Bishweshwar Pratap Singh appointed him as TU Vice Chancellor despite charges and proof of plagiarism. KC is fighting for his life. His health is deteriorating rapidly. Who will be responsible if anything untoward happens to him?

The resignations of Singh and Khajja is the only solution for now. The government must ensure that the IOM’s demands are addressed on the basis of seniority and competence in future.

We appeal to the political parties not to waste time to sack the Vice Chancellor, Khajja and Dean Singh of the IOM. KC’s life is more important than any of these points. Singh was appointed the IOM dean four months prior to his retirement and Khajja had expected that KC would remain silent on this issue.
Nearly two decades after Nepal initiated a multi-million dollar project to bring snow melt to its parched capital, the residents of Kathmandu Valley are finally hoping to get regular water supply piped to homes.

The good news is that the 27 km tunnel from the fringes of the Langtang National Park to Sundarjal on the Valley rim is nearly complete. Soon, 170 million litres/day from the snow-fed Melamchi River will be flowing into Kathmandu.

So far so good, but political interference is delaying the agency responsible for distributing that water in Kathmandu, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which is the primary lender in the $177 million project, is so exasperated it is threatening to pull out.

Also, since the Valley's population has more than doubled since the project was launched, there will not be enough water for everyone.

The public-private utility, Kathmandu Upayakya Kisanepani Limited (KUKL), is responsible to manage water supply to the Valley's 3.6 million people and needs 460 million litres/day if it is to touch everyone. But even after bringing Melamchi water there will be a shortfall of 175 million litres/day.

“The valley residents are probably hoping for abundant water supply when the Melamchi project is complete, but they will be disappointed,” warns KUKL General Manager Mahesh Bhattarai, who fears an outbreak of public anger when some neighbourhoods get water and others don’t.

More than 425 km of water pipes have already been laid, and an additional 245 km of pipes are expected to be laid before the arrival of Melamchi water to be pumped into over 100,000 households inside the Ring Road. This network will be fed by nine new and five existing reservoirs on the city’s outskirts. The construction of a receiving facility in Sundarjal is also nearly complete.

“We will get the infrastructure ready well before the Melamchi River is diverted to Kathmandu,” says Tirtha Khatru, Chief of the Project Implementation Directorate (PID), a government project to replace the 100-year-old water distribution network in Kathmandu.

But even if the PID and KUKL finish laying the pipes in the next two months, two large parts of Kathmandu inside the Ring Road will still be left out of the grid. This means over 40,000 houses in Maharajgunj, Dhobighat, Gopeshwor and Chobhar areas will have to rely on antiquated and leaky Rana-era mains to get Melamchi water (see the map above).

Bhattarai is not even included in the current phase. And KUKL will have sufficient water to meet the demand of the entire Valley only when an additional 170 million litres/day is brought from Yangri and Larke Rivers 12 km upstream from Melamchi in the tunnel.

The ADB is not happy with political interference, which has resulted in chronic underperformance at KUKL. The utility needs strong management and a visionary board of directors, but is crippled by a dysfunctional board backed by corrupt politicians.
After the World Bank, Norway and Sweden pulled out in 2005, the cost of the Melamchi project was lowered from the original $464 million. KUKL was set up in 2008, and it carried the legacy of its predecessor Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) which was politicised, over-staffed and debt-ridden.

Political leaders used the NWSC to dump unemployed cadres, and KUKL inherited many of them. What was supposed to be a new and efficient water supplier was shackled with the same bloated system that ruined the NWSC.

The KUKL board is virtually paralysed with board members divided and accusing each other of obstructing reforms. At a time when the KUKL needs to get its act together for smooth distribution of Melamchi water, its Chair Sureb Bhattarai has been abroad for weeks.

The KUKL has redundant administrative staff, but lacks technical manpower like engineers, overseers and plant operators. To end this mismatch, KUKL advertised vacancies and interviewed candidates to choose 236 technical employees. But Bhattarai is allegedly dangling these vacant positions in front of politicians and promising to recruit their family members, relatives and cadre.

"Without sufficient technical and trained staff, it would be difficult to manage Melamchi water smoothly," says KUKL General Manager Mahesh Bhattarai who is trying to introduce reforms like Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition but needs to be supported by the KUKL board. Instead of making policy decisions and enabling Bhattarai to introduce reforms, Bhattarai is blamed for trying to oust him.

The induction of Rudra Gautam into the KUKL board is a sign that Bhattarai is still wielding influence. Both Bhattarai and Gautam have high-level political protection.

Two months ago, Bhattarai approached Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to appoint Rudra Gautam as a board member and the Chair of the KUKL recruitment committee. When other board members opposed him, he called Dahal’s adviser Kamal Karmacharya straight from the meeting room and told him that the PM's directive was not being followed. Gautam was finally appointed, but not as recruitment chief but a board member.

A board member told Nepali Times: “Bhattarai’s motive was clear: he wanted to intimidate us by name dropping the PM.” Bhattarai is also said to have influenced former Urban Development Minister Naryan Khadka to include his nominee into the board. “It was during the general convention of the KUKL Congress, and Khadka needed money to be elected as a central committee member of the party,” the board member said.

Bhattarai had previously appointed Gautam as KUKL General Manager, but the Supreme Court dismissed him on legal grounds. Gautam says he is not interested to besmirch the KUKL, and has nothing personal against Mahesh Bhattarai. “Instead of being suspicious, he should just focus on running the company,” he said.

The ADB also expressed its dissatisfaction about Gautam’s appointment. In a letter to the government, the ADB said that the “selection procedure needs to be on the basis of merit, and it should be transparent”.

In the past, Gautam had to step down as the KUKL Chair after being accused of misusing KUKL vehicles and arbitrarily raising his own salary. He and Bhattarai also created difficulties for an ADB hired consultant to introduce reform measures in the KUKL. Gautam denies these charges.

ADB Nepal Country Director Kenichi Yokoyama refrained from singling out individuals wielding political clout within the KUKL, but told us: “Since the Melamchi water is finally coming, strengthening and reforming the KUKL should be a top priority. And the KUKL management must be facilitated and supported by its board.”

Last month, a parliamentary committee instructed the Melamchi Water Supply Development Board to complete tunnel construction by September 2017. As the Italian firm hired by the Board now needs to dig only a 6 km stretch of the tunnel, the new target seems achievable.

The Board’s Executive Director Ghanshyam Bhattarai is optimistic: “The tunnel will be complete before the next monsoon, and the Melamchi water will arrive in Kathmandu before the Dasain festival.”
Workable models for federalism

As political discussion in Nepal these days is not complete unless you have uttered the word ‘F’ which means Federalism. Federalism is a popular choice, but it is not the best solution. Because the parent party is not the only one that can make decisions, and the provinces have their own independence. The key to making federalism work is to create a balance between the center and the provinces.

2 Province Model: The most economical federalism model where Nepal is divided into two provinces. This model is suitable for small countries with similar history and culture.

6 Province Model: The second-best choice, dividing the country into six provinces. This model is suitable for medium-sized countries with diverse cultures.

12 Province Model: The best model, dividing the country into 12 provinces. This model is suitable for large countries with diverse cultures and geography.

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