DO GOODERS

Despite the chronic cynicism that pervades Kathmandu, there are many people across Nepal who are working with integrity and diligence to build a better country. They are not the types that will fold their hands and complain, or give up and migrate. You don’t see them much in the mainstream press, nor do they have many Facebook followers. In fact, they actively shun the media glare. In this edition of Nepali Times we profile a small sample of individual Nepalis who have shown through dedication and determination that it is possible to build a better future for this country.

There is a young woman who decided to leave an academic career in the United States, and return home to Nepal to help rebuild it through politics. A Muslim woman from Nepalgunj refuses to be just a token human rights activist. A public interest litigation lawyer gave up his passion for skiing to pursue the corrupt. A honest policeman who cleaned up football and restored respect to Nepal’s national team. A journalist who struggled against a male-dominated profession and patriarchy to reform the Election Commission.

There are hundreds of Kulman Ghising, Leela Mani Paudyal, Sitaram Kattel and Kusum Chami, Swar RECEIVER Wagle and Bikash Gachhansi working in the bureaucracy, in hospitals, police stations, courts, all over Nepal.

For every kleptocrat heading a public sector enterprise, there is another with integrity and vision to take the organisation and the country forward.
When the storm from the Bagmati started getting too much to bear and the banks of Kathmandu’s sacred river became a garbage dump, many of us just covered our noses, averted our gaze and blamed government. Then, top bureaucrat Leela Mani Paudyal led a citizen’s movement to collect trash every Saturday. In two weeks, Bagmati cleanup became a campaign that lifted hundreds of tons of rubbish. Paudyal is now our ambassador to China, but the momentum of his work continues.

Yet, there were those who accused Paudyal of tokenism. As Chief Secretary he should have solved the structural problem of urban garbage disposal instead of collecting the trash himself, they pontificated. Couch intellectuals wrote op-eds accusing him of [burnou]t trying to be popular.

Three years ago the UML’s Energy Minister Radha Paudel sacked Kulman Ghising for being too honest. When the Maoist Centre Energy Minister Janardan Sharma brought him back to head the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), Ghising stopped load-shedding in Kathmandu within three weeks. The capital hasn’t had power cuts for the past two months. As we reported in this newspaper last week Ghising simply stopped corruption in the distribution of electricity to favoured customers, and he would not have been able to prevail had he not got the political backing of Energy Minister Sharma.

We have become so conspiratorial in this country that even consumers who are now enjoying 24 hours electricity are cursing NEA Managing Director Ghising because (Oh, no!) he succeeded. It seems we are so disillusioned that many of us will believe the wildest rumours, doubt the most honest, besmirch the most righteous. We make sweeping generalisations about all policemen being corrupt, all policemen being honest. When the Maoist Centre Energy Minister Sharma accused him of (horrors!) trying to be popular.

The Maoist Centre Energy Minister Smriti Basnet brought him back to head the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). Ghising stopped load-shedding in Kathmandu within three weeks. The capital hasn’t had power cuts for the past two months. As we reported in this newspaper last week Ghising simply stopped corruption in the distribution of electricity to favoured customers, and he would not have been able to prevail had he not got the political backing of Energy Minister Sharma.

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Mourning the loss of King Jigme Dorje Palbar Bista

SIENNA CRAIG

Jigme Dorje Palbar Bista (1946–2016), the King of Lo on Upper Mustang, died in Kathmandu on 16 December. He was 69, and had ruled his kingdom for more than half a century with equanimity. We shared an affinity for horses and a love of the landscape he called home.

In Nepal, people referred to him as the Mustang Raja, one of four “petty kings” – including local rulers in Bahun, Salyan, and Jijjurkot – who retained regional power even as their territories were incorporated into the emerging nation-state of Nepal in the mid-18th century. These kings were recognised by Nepali law from 1961 until 2008, when Nepal transitioned from a Hindu monarchy to a secular republic.

In Tibetan, Bista was called Lo Gyalpo evoking a sense of respect and deference. The fact that Jigme Dorje Palbar Bista had been officially stripped of his raja title by the Nepali state did little to affect his importance in the lives of Loba, people from Upper Mustang.

Bista was 29th in a lineage of rulers that dates back to the late 14th century, and the founding of the kingdom by a Western Tibetan leader named Amapal. In 1946, when he was in his mid-30s, Bista assumed the title of Lo Gyalpo after the death of his father. He was his father’s youngest son. Bista married Sidol Palbar, a refined, elegant woman who traveled from Shigatse, Tibet, to Lo as a bride in 1959, before the political upheaval of 1959. They had no living biological children, but the couple adopted their nephew, Jigme Singye Palbar Bista, as son and heir.

Over the past half-century, Bista ushered his community through massive political, economic and sociocultural transitions: the stationing in Mustang of Chushul Gangdrak, the Tibetan Resistance Army, from 1961 until 1974, opening Lo to foreign tourists in 1992, the decade-long war (1996–2006) and its attendant impacts on all aspects of life in rural Nepal, even in a district that saw minimal direct conflict, the end of the Nepali monarchy in 2008, the recent completion of a motorable road that now links Mustang with the Chinese border to the north and Pokhara to the south, and the earthquakes of April 2015.

Bista has also lived to see the impacts of climate change on Mustang’s environment, a complex social ecology that balances irrigated agriculture, pastoralism, and trade. Two of Lo’s villages have been relocated.
in recent years as a result of water shortages as some of Mustang’s glaciers shrink. This and the recent discovery of uranium deposits in Upper Mustang indicate some of the environmental and geopolitical crucibles facing this region. Bieta also bore witness to profound internal transitions within Mustang’s communities, brought on through education- and economically driven ostination. Today, the population of Lobas in cities in urban Nepal and India as well as those making homes in Queens, New York, rival those who live in Lo.

When I picture the Lo Gyalo, I see his stately dignity. He was a beautiful, intense presence. During our meetings, he formal audiences at Kath, the palace and his residence in the walled city of La Manbang, or over quiet cups of tea with his family in recent years in Kathmandu, I remained in awe of him. He could be serious, even stern, but his expression would open up into a broad, friendly smile, his gold-plated teeth glittering brightly.

One of my most cherished memories of the king was traveling with him and his entourage up to the summer pastures north of Lo Montlang for days of sheep shearing, yak wrangling, picnicking, and ritually bathing his horses in a glacial stream. It was here that I saw him as a man at work, filled with purpose. I will hold on to that memory, and the one of him and his male companions walking kora early each morning, circumambulating the wall that runs around Lo Montlang, which means ‘plain of aspiration.’ There was also deep purpose in such moments: of conversation, of communion.

The king’s heir, Jigme Singe Pelbar Bieta, along with others who belong to this generation of Mustang nobility, are invested in the future of Upper Mustang. The family remains very important to the social life of Lo, even without continued recognition by the Nepali state of the local monarchy. And yet the death of the king marks the end of an era. His last words to his family members were reportedly: “Never migrate from the village and the district.”

Bieta loved his home fiercely, with his whole being. Despite the challenges and changes facing Mustang, those who bear his lineage will do all they can to honor his wishes as they work to protect and thoughtfully transform their culture.

Sister R. Craig, Ph.D., is Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology at Dartmouth College in the United States.

LEGACY OF LO GYALO: Jigme Singe Pelbar Bieta was Mustang's king until 2006. His funeral in Kathmandu was a state funeral, and the walled city of Lo Mustang where he ruled for half a century.
Saving one mother at a time

Nepal’s average maternal mortality rate fell from 801 per 100,000 live births to 238 in 2015. This dramatic progress took place despite a conflict and poor service delivery in rural areas. It was achieved by saving one mother at a time in underserved district hospitals across the country.

Among the facts that contributed to this drop was that the percentage of skilled attendants at birth went up from 4 per cent in 1990 to 33 per cent. Other factors included: lower fertility rates and increased age of marriage due to improving female literacy, better connectivity and transportation. But 338 mothers dying at child birth is still high, especially compared to the European average of 8 per 100,000 live births.

At the Baysalpa Hospital in Achham, where I am Medical Director, we came across a delivery case that is representative of the challenges and opportunities we face in reducing the maternal mortality rate further.

Baysalpa is staffed by family doctors and provides free, high quality comprehensive essential primary and surgical obstetric and orthopedic care to people not just from Achham but surrounding districts as well.

Last week, a 23-year-old female was brought into the Emergency by her mother-in-law, sister-in-law and husband suffering from lower abdominal pain and loss of menstruation for nine months.

The family doctor assessed her and confirmed that she was in labour pain with cervix dilated, and membrane ruptured on the way to the hospital. Obstetric ultrasound revealed that the baby was in breech presentation, and she was in probable need of c-section delivery.

The husband did not like the idea. “She needs to work and if we do surgery it would be difficult for her to work in the fields later,” he said. The family doctor explained that as the membrane had already ruptured, the baby had less amniotic fluid, and that she would be fine even with a c-section.

When he heard this, the husband ran away and didn’t pick up his phone. After waiting eight hours, there were signs of fetal distress, and the doctors could not wait any longer to operate.

Finally, despite concerns on the part of the mother-in-law and sister-in-law that the patient would not be able to work in the fields after an operation, they gave their consent for the c-section, and she was rushed to the operation theatre. Baysalpa only had one family doctor at the time, and the only anaesthesia assistant was on leave.

The doctor administered spinal anaesthesia for the surgery and requested one of the medical officers to monitor the patient while she was scrubbed, painted and draped. He started the c-section and delivered a baby who was passing meconium with some amount found inside baby’s mouth. The nurse and medical officer resuscitated the baby, which cried to the great relief and happiness of the mother, the medical staff and the family outside.

The value of first cry of a newborn is so vital that it gives happiness not only to mothers but also to doctors who clinically care for them.

This story highlights the importance of having trained family doctors saving the lives of mothers and neonates in rural Nepal. The significance of training family doctors during their residency in Doctor of Medicine (MD) for c-section so as to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality cannot be underestimated.

The Ministry of Health must create and recruit more family doctors for every district hospital so that the general public can have easy access to c-sections and similar life-saving services at rural hospitals around the clock.

Although Nepal’s success in reducing its maternal mortality rate by more than half in the past 15 years is commendable, 258 mothers out of every 100,000 dying at child-birth is still unacceptably high. Staffing rural hospitals with MDs with c-section training is vital in saving the lives of more Nepali mothers.

Rikesh Gauchan, MD, is Medical Director of Baysalpa Hospital in Achham which is run by Possible.

PHOTO: RAJAT BAJRACHARYA

THEATRE OF OPERATIONS: Medical staff attend to the c-section at Baysalpa Hospital in Achham last week (above), and the mother’s process over after giving birth to a healthy baby. Nepal’s Maternal Mortality Rate has fallen dramatically since 1990 because of better transportation, lower fertility rates and skilled attendants at birth.

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THE ART OF PRESERVATION

SMRITI BASNET

Canadian-born Irish artist Gary Worrall was introduced to local artisans in Patan during one of his trips to Nepal in late 2014, and it was then he decided the world needed to know about Nepal’s endangered crafts.

As a photographer and print maker, Worrall has 25 years of experience as a ceramic artist. He felt real admiration for Patan’s craftsmen and worried that the profession was that disappearing.

“I found a calmness and peace in their work, it was like a kind of meditation,” said Worrall who was awestruck by the beauty of the process and the people, seeing them work with such grace equipped with barely any tools or facilities.

It could have been this connection to fellow artists that opened Worrall’s doors to the world of Nepali artisans leading him to understand, connect and visualise their stories.

What originally started as an idea for a series of stories for art magazine eventually took the form of a book with profiles of skills such as copper casting, thanka painting, wood and stone carving, drum, jewellery and paper making and gilding. Treasure of Nepal will be launched at the Kathmandu Triennale in March 2017.

Having stayed with many of the artisans, Worrall shares photographs of them working. He also talks everyday stories and struggles of craftpeople like Nepal’s only female stone sculptor and gives unique insights into their world.

In addition to the book, an exhibition of Nepali handicrafts that Worrall curated is being currently showcased in Lahti Art Museum in Finland. He spent 20,000 buying the exhibits for display in his home country and the exhibition that will continue till 29 January, has already got 5,500 visitors.

“I wanted to bring Nepal craftwork to Europe to show that if you learn to use your hands there is so much pleasure you can gain from it,” said the artist who thinks the burgeoning IT industry and visual culture has increasingly pushed the Finnish people away from nature.

Hoping to recapture the essence of Nepal, the museum space in Finland has been decorated with prayer flags with sections of the walls dedicated to a specific skill. Each segment has the name of the craft painted in Devanagari.

But Worrall’s motives go far beyond just the exhibition in Lahti and the book. Seeing that there is no institution in Nepal that teaches traditional crafts, he worries that the knowledge and skills will die out in 15 years.

“Family traditions which have been passed down from one generation to the next for hundreds of years will break down rapidly,” said Worrall, who cannot hide his disappointment at seeing Nepal’s priceless traditions and the customs slowly fade away.

“For craft to live, it will have to evolve into something that makes a statement about where Nepal is now as a country,” said Worrall. He feels this can be done through institutions teaching such crafts and the willingness of the artisans themselves to morph traditional and contemporary techniques.

Worrall himself has learnt from Chinese methods for some of his clay work and feels it adds to one’s wider understanding of its form and function. “When you try this you can take all those things and start to make your own work,” he added.

Chronicling art forms which will soon disappear if not preserved, Worrall feels his Lahti exhibition of Nepali craft is unique and hopes to take it to China and other parts of Europe.

For now, Worrall is back in Nepal and actively involved with communities in Sindhupalchok and Makwanpur as part of Tearfund, a UK-based Christian relief and development initiative to help locals make video documentaries using mobile phones.
Remote corner of Nepal’s remotest district

Hurola, the last district not yet connected by road, is closer to China than mainland Nepal

PHOTOS and TEXT by
BHARAT BANDHU THAPA
in HUROLA

In the remote northwestern tip of Nepal is Humla, the last district that isn’t yet linked to the road network. At 2,900m elevation, Sankot is the highest-placed district capital and has a busy airport that services Indian pilgrims going to Lake Mansarovar across the border in Tibet. After the earthquake destroyed the main Nepal-China border post at Kodari, the number of Indians on Kailash pilgrimage crossing the tiny border settlement of Hilsa grew three-fold to 10,000 this year.

As Nepal’s trekking trails upgrade services, tourists seeking an unspoilt destination must go to Humla’s Limi and Haiz -- the remotest part of Nepal’s most remote district. After flying to Sankot, it is a five-day walk to Limi Valley with its perfectly preserved villages and Bon Po culture. Katmandu is so far away that locals do not expect anything from the Nepali state, and select their own elders to resolve local problems. In fact, it is China that is closer to Limi than mainland Nepal.

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Humla is a study in contrast between the Chinese side with its paved road, electricity, tarmac towers and buildings, with the decrepit facilties and dirt track on the Nepali side. The Karnali River bridge was inaugurated by Prime Minister Oli on Tuesday.

5. Many shrines and ancient buckwheat crop on the track from Limi Valley to Simikot.

6. The village of Hiji with its 3,000-year-old monastery is a hub for local culture and religion. There is no presence of the Nepali state here, and the locals have a sense of self-governance. Hiji is 336km and it is a three-day walk from here to Simikot, but less than a day to the Chinese border.

7. The Karnali forms the border between China and Nepal near Hiji.

8. Lagan Pass is the spot in Nepal from where Lake Manasarovar is visible. The border pass is open only seasonally for the inhabitants of Limi Valley to trade with Tibet.

9. The road that will ultimately join Hiji with Simikot and the districts of northeastern Nepal. The Tibetan trading town of Taliakar is only 35km from Hiji.

10. The airport town of Simikot is not connected to Nepal’s highway network. It is Nepal’s highest district capital at 2,500m, and also serves as a gateway for Indian pilgrims to Mt Kailash in Tibet.
Holiday Specials

A selection of the best Christmas events and activities in and around Kathmandu this year.

Christmas ride.
Gear up for a Christmas cycle ride followed by a sumptuous brunch at Mashal.
25 December, 9:30 to 11:30 am, Pokhara
(01) 4147999, Rs 5555 (for couples)

Live performance.
Get into the Christmas spirit and come along to a day of live performances by Joy Tara, Sabita Tiwari, Sugam Khatiwada, Akarma Upreti and more. With mouth watering food from restaurants all around Nepal, don’t miss out on fun day of music.
25 December, 11 am to 6 pm, Jawalakhel football ground, 9810428007

Artha live.
An Irish Christmas with Artha Band. Listen as they belt out some of their hits.
24 December, 7 pm onwards, Irish Pub, Lopan, (01) 4446627

Jhilumi Christmas.
Learn to make your calendars for a Christmas calendar featuring games, face painting, nail art, yummy food, prizes and more.
24 December, 17 to 7 pm, Barkas Agro, Civil Mall, Sun Square

Merry making.
Celebrate Christmas the German and Austrian way. Attend for songs, listen to Christmas stories and enjoy delicious food and drinks.
23 December, 2 pm onwards, WIS, Bhaktapur, (01) 4672687

Community arts.
Take part in a two-day training for arts, activities and teachers facilitated by MABIL Edu’s Leah Houston and Michael Burtt from Making Storm Community Arts.
24 & 25 December, Resort Culture Nepal, Mokshi Mong, mokshimong@gmail.com, Register at https://goo.gl/forms/9V6l3A4zvQxJfyoa2

New Year 2017 - Party on!

31 December Saturday 2016
Time: 7 PM onwards
Mysterious One
31 December Saturday 2016
Time: 7 PM onwards
Paradiso
Sports Bar & Grill, Lakeside, Pokhara

Dining

Shangri-La Hotel,
Make your Christmas eve memorable by treating your taste buds to a delectable meal. Menu includes turkey, pies, puddings and more.
24 December, 6.30 pm onwards, East Horizon Café, Shangri-La Hotel, Lopan, (01) 4470999, Rs 5555 (for couples)

Hyatt Regency,
Enjoy a scrumptious Christmas eve buffet dinner at the Cafe or go for a five course menu at Blue Restaurant with a glass of mulled wine.
24 December, 7 pm onwards, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Bhaisahi, (01) 5772228, The Cafe Rs 2,880 plus tax, Blue Restaurant Rs 4,500 plus tax

Cafe with No Name,
Support street children this Christmas, watch dance, music and much on same great shades, malls and Decors.
24 to 25 December, 10 am onwards, Cafe with No Name, Thamel, 9810382259, pulavacuum.org

Hotel Ghangri,
A special two-day, one-night Christmas eye package in Ghangri’s heritage rooms. Enjoy a lavish three course dinner for couples with a complimentary welcome drink.
24 December, Hotel Ghangri, Tara Pavilion, Ming, 9812564895, 9812577717, Rs 170 plus per couple.

Music

Gypsy Jazz.
Spend a musical evening listening to gypsy jazz with Narmad Thapa on this Christmas eve.
24 December, 6.30 pm onwards, ABC Art Cafe, Pokhara, 9810397778

Nabin live,
Attend a live concert on Christmas Eve by 90’s pop sensation Nabin K.Bhattarai and band.
24 December, 4 pm onwards, Food Court, City Center, Kankeshwar

House of Music,
Don’t miss out on Four Blacksmiths and IMR Trio as they play live.
24 December, 8 pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 9810755172, Entry: Rs 500

Events

Photo yatra,
Take a walk with fellow photographers and photo enthusiasts through picturesque alloys of the city organised by Kathmandu College of Management.
24 December, 7 to 11 am, Monjo-Kumari, (01) 2210434

Art talk.
Meet the high priest Bernardine Carval and learn about innovative art styles the artist uses in her experimental digital and performance art.
23 December, 4 pm onwards, Sattva Media Arts Collective, 9811345716

Yoga bootcamp.
Mark your calendars for rigorous, energetic and intense four-day yoga bootcamp.
18 to 21 December, Sojourn Wellness and Yoga center, Lopan, sojournsweat gmail.com

Morning Coffee Queries.
For interesting business ideas and experiences, entrepreneurs, students and start-ups can participate in Monday morning coffee queries.
26 December, 9 to 11 am, Shishir Books and Bistro, Manohorbag, Districts:www.citlucks.com/events/09

Community arts.
Take part in a two-day training for arts, activities and teachers facilitated by MABIL Edu’s Leah Houston and Michael Burtt from Making Storm Community Arts.
24 & 25 December, Resort Culture Nepal, Mokshi Mong, mokshimong@gmail.com, Register at https://goo.gl/forms/9V6l3A4zvQxJfyoa2

Hotel Kaze Darbar

Hotel Darbar
By locals, for locals

The Aju Dyo restoration 16 years ago should be a model for community-led rebuilding of sacred sites after last year’s earthquake

MONALISA MAHARJAN

The 2015 earthquake caused immense damage to the temples and monuments of Kathmandu Valley. The Aju Dyo (Bauhinia) temple in Buddhanath was one of the many affected. The temple was restored in 1999, five years after the earthquake. The temple was a significant site for the local community, and its restoration was a model of community-led rebuilding.

The temple was reconstructed by local artisans, with the help of the Community Keyfores, a group that operates under the banner of the Kathmandu Valley. The temple was restored in 1999, five years after the earthquake. The temple was a significant site for the local community, and its restoration was a model of community-led rebuilding.

The restoration of the temple was a joint effort of the community, with the support of the government and international organizations. The community members contributed to the restoration of the temple, with the help of local artisans and professionals. The temple was restored in 1999, five years after the earthquake. The temple was a significant site for the local community, and its restoration was a model of community-led rebuilding.

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Rogue One: A Star Wars Story

When Disney bought all of the rights to the Star Wars intellectual property in 2012 no one quite knew what was going to happen, aside from a blinding clarity regarding future franchises based on beloved characters that have endured through decades. Unexpected use of all this precious material, a feat, and a possible folly, was accomplished by paying a jaw-dropping $4 billion to Lucasfilm, an entity that had been safely owned by the creator of the Star Wars franchise, George Lucas himself.

Since then, Star Wars has been resuscitated successfully with The Force Awakens (2015), the story of how Vader became, well, Darth Vader, a smash hit that was directed by J.J. Abrams, the go-to guy for all sci-fi despairing. Now, with the added success of Rogue One the aforementioned acquisition looks more than ready to pay for itself. Rogue One, a stand-alone film with no intended sequels, centres around Jyn Erso, played against her usual type by the lovely Felicity Jones, a joiner who is a crucial piece in the ongoing fight between the Empire and the Rebel forces. Jyn’s story follows a classic Star Wars trope; she is strong and furtive but traumatized by the loss of her mother and the separation from her father Galen Erso (played by the wonderful Mads Mikkelsen), a talented engineer who seems to have turned away from the Force, choosing instead to build the Death Star. Running wild after she has been reluctantly forsaken by the rebel leader Saw Gerrera (Forrest Whitaker), who saved her from her desert planet (ring a bell?), Jyn is the diamond in the rough, a female iteration of Han Solo or James T. Kirk, but unfortunately without too much of the irritating, initial abandonment syndrome melodramas displayed by the aforementioned archetypal space heroes.

Watching Rogue One in the theater sitting next to a highly excited sibling who grew up inhaling the original Star Wars films like myself was a particularly rewarding experience precisely because the film reproduces everything that made the first three installments so great. The lushly forested, desert, and ocean-filled planets across the galaxy glow on the big screen making for breath-taking backdrops to epic battle sequences. The starships are implausible and sleek, the Death Star terrifying, the rebels break into seemingly impregnable Byzantine labyrinths on Empire controlled bases with the help of smart-talking robots who steal the show, and while there is only one light saber in action, the variance of the ensemble cast of characters more than make up for the lack of a Luke Skywalker or Princess Leia.

Rogue One is visually stunning, full of adventure, non-stop, and not with the kind of senseless despiration of lesser films. Above all, it is a welcome and worthy addition to the Star Wars universe.

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HAPPENINGS

GRIDLOCK: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, JML, Chair KP Oli and NC leader Ram Chandra Paudel meet in Speaker Omast Gharti Magar’s office on Monday in an unsuccessful bid to break the political stalemate.

BOTH LANDLOCKED: Nepal’s foreign Affairs Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat signs a bilateral agreement with Mongolian Foreign Minister Tsend Munkh-Ochir in Kathmandu on Monday. The two landlocked nations were recently blocked by respective giant neighbours to the south.

NEW ENVOY: Nepal’s new envoy to China, Leela Man Paudyal, submits his letter of credence to Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Monday.

LIU CAME, XI DINT: The Communist Party of China (CPC) Political Bureau Member Liu Qibao commits posix on Monday for a photo at Shiva Shankar’s temples temple that survived last year’s earthquake. Liu is the son-in-law of Chinese leader to visit Nepal in 2015 when Kathmandu was expecting Chinese President Xi Jinping.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: Joint secretary Balkantha Kaji and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Chef Jun Sakuma sign a Rs. 15 billion loan agreement on Thursday to build the 2.7 km Kathmandu-Nagpur tunnel bypass.
“Political will ended load-shedding”

Translated excerpts of interview with Energy Minister Janardan Sharma in Himal Khadupatre (18-24 December)

Himal: So, no more load-shedding?

Janardan Sharma: It is now getting increasingly more difficult to supply 24-hour electricity, with water levels going down in rivers. But we are exploring multiple options to ensure that people’s joy will not turn into sorrow.

But how can we be sure?

The power of the Shivalinga-Muzaffarpur transmission line has been built in the last two months is one reason. If we get this transmission line ready, we can import more electricity from India. But that will still be insufficient to meet demand, so we will add solar electricity to the national grid and promote energy-efficient LED bulbs. We are confident that we can supply 24-hour electricity even in the dry season.

How did you manage to provide Kathmandu with 24-hour electricity when others had failed?

A week after I became Energy Minister, I presented a 37-point wish list to end load-shedding. To implement it, I formed an expert panel to recommend ways to curb leakage and pherage of electricity and repair transformers.

When I was president of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, I had opposed selling cheap power to industries by forcing the people to live in darkness. I wanted to redistribute electricity, and called a meeting with industry leaders, but they were not bothered to attend the meeting. When I became minister, I instructed the MDA to redistribute electricity, and that is how it happened.

But a lot of the framework had been laid by the former government.

The former government announced an energy emergency plan, but that was not implemented. Ending load-shedding was possible because of our political will. We formed a strong team and moved forward step by step.

But people are saying you did this by taking power from elsewhere to give it to the capital, and that you are draining Kulekhani.

It is not true that we have diverted to Kathmandu electricity from other places. Kulekhani was built for peak power in winter, and it is not true that we cannot use water of the reservoir in other seasons.
DOING GOOD by BEING GOOD

Despite the doom and gloom and the chronic cynicism of Kathmandu, there are many who are quietly building a better Nepal. You don’t hear much about them in the media but they are making a difference.

In this edition of Nepal Times we profile a small sample of such Nepalis who have shown through dedication and determination that it is possible to build a better future for this country.

There is a young woman who decided to leave an academic career in the United States, and returned home to Nepal to serve through politics. A Muslim woman from Nepalgunj refuses to be a token human rights activist. A public interest litigation lawyer gave up his passion for singing to pursue the corrupt. A honest policeman cleaned up football and took on all of Nepal’s national team. A journalist who struggled against a male-dominated political system and patriarchy to reform the Election Commission.

Many more Nepalis across the length and breadth of this land for whom the common denominator is the quiet satisfaction of knowing that they have given all they can to their communities and their nation.

Not a token

I have been just two years since she appointment as a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and Meena Ansari has already proved that she is not just a token Muslim woman in office.

For this, she made headlines by demanding a probe into the killings of 55 people during the Madhes unrest during the Oli’s Universal Period Review (UPR) meeting in Geneva. She held a joint agreement Prime Minister Khadga who reprimanded her for having Nepal’s image as an international forum.

Ansari remains unapologetic about her statement, and makes it clear that the state used excessive force to quell protests in the Tarai in 2015. “I have nothing to say about Nepal, and same every time I meet the Head,” she said. The observations were taken from Ansari’s own visit to the Tarai to investigate the violence that followed the call for the unification of the two sides, which was strongly resisted by theings of eight police and shooting of a child by protesters in Khaptad on 27 August 2015.

Today, amidst the political gridlock in Kathmandu with the main opposition, NCP, rejecting the second amendment to the Constitution and Muslims parties threatening to launch a fresh agitation, Ansari’s role as human rights commissioner will be even more critical in 2017.

Before the NCP, Ansari served as a lawyer as a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and committed to drafting of laws against dowry and witchcraft. She is firmly

Young turk

What started as an anti-corruption trained movement led by young, educated Nepali professionals transformed itself into a political party in the 2013 election. Since its inception, Bista Nepali has been mostly working to build an image of an alternative political party that is not led by hardened politicians, but by average Nepalis with a vision for the country and looking for and being a part of change.

There are three elections planned for 2017, and if they happen (a big if) Bista Nepali hopes to secure seats in village, district and municipal councils including in Kathmandu. Bista Nepali means transparent and and it always maintained that it does not compete with other political parties but strives to change the political culture of Nepal.

Anuwa Thapa, 31-year-old PhD, is representative of the kind of young people Bista Nepali has managed to draw in. Thapa is CEO of the party, the only political party in Nepal that has a Chief Executive Officer, and not a chairman or president.

“Even though I was never directly associated with politics, I always wanted to help the people of Nepal. So my dreams from when I was little were always about helping the people,” says Thapa, who was born and raised in Singapore and returned to Nepal after completing her doctorate in sciences from the University of Virginia in 2014.

The CEO’s job is to lead the party’s organizational team that the leaders can focus on strategy and planning out elections. Even if doesn’t win any seats in upcoming elections, all eyes will be on the party to show if it maintains transparency — a value that members place high in their agenda.

As CEO, Thapa heads the management of the party and is responsible for ensuring that the party runs like a well-oiled engine. After completing her education, Thapa realized that making a difference in the field of her studies would take a long time. So when the opportunity to work with Bista Nepali, she accepted and has been seen in Nepal since then.

“Let it be people like them and I will gather together the change for the country that I envisioned would come faster,” says Thapa.

She joined Bista Nepali as a volunteer after the second earthquake in May of 2015. A month after she was hired as International Coordinator and Alliance Building Officer. Ten months later, the party’s Central Committee through the Executive Board headquarted and appointed her as the CEO of the party.

Thapa’s new resolution for 2017 is to improve Nepal’s language skills, and work harder as an independent, successful woman. She is especially interested in contributing to Nepal’s education, since it was the opportunity that got her into schools and universities.

“The real and dedication of the Bista Nepali party members at home and abroad is what motivates me to work harder,” says Thapa, “our hopes and aspirations are very powerful but the meritocracy system to continue what I am doing.”

Shaheen Shaheen

Ila’s elections

While the big three parties are buckering over the amendment and Parliament is stalled, elections are looking more and more by. But it doesn’t mean Election Commissioner Ila Sharma can sit back and relax.

Political insecurity and instability have made Sharma’s job as the Commission a constant challenge, but the former journalist is not one to give up. Her perseverance and determination to maintain the integrity and preparedness of the Election Commission keeps her going.

“Management wise we are ready from our side,” said Sharma confidently. This is her second election after her appointment in March 2013.

Sharma is reliably lobbying with Members of Parliament for important reforms, such as public funding for elections and changes in the Political Parties Registration Act. The government removed some of these provisions from the draft election bill, but she is determined to reinsert them through MPs every time it is taken up.

“What we do, we do for the people and democracy,” said Sharma who is a coordinator on legal drafting, political party relations, media, gender and inclusion, voter rolls, voter education and training.

Sharma’s determination and focus comes from her previous career as a reporter in Ayesh Nepal and the constant clipping of women journalists. “I was treated like a wall flower and was assigned softer stories when my real interest was politics and economics,” Sharma recalls, adding that the leadership ability of women is still being underestimated today.

“If you are passionate about it, it was only when she started writing editorials that her colleagues started viewing her in a different light. She needed all the personal strength she could muster when her husband was killed during the war.

One of her first initiatives after joining the Election Commission in 2013 was to introduce a gender responsive system in elections. For the upcoming elections, she has introduced a gender responsive budget and has urged focus on women and youth when it comes to voter education. Even in the draft bill, Sharma has been pushing for a 50 per cent women representation in the local level.

Women are ready for local leadership, and there will be a critical mass of women leaders who will be capable of taking on national level leadership,” Sharma said. In order for the Commission to take a more proactive approach in the run-up to the elections, Sharma has also been working on her pet project called the “Knowledge Initiative.” She feels the Commission’s duties remain just holding elections, and the project takes into consideration engaging with the press, civil society and emphasizing women education.

With three elections slated for 2017, Sharma is busy and anxious at her watch as she dives into her duties. Her paring message is: “I am not afraid of anything, I may have been if I was young for fear of money, but I am not, that makes me strong.”

Sneha Dinesh
A man of conscience

A head of the Supreme Court hearing this week on whether Limam Singh Karki’s appointment as the head of the anti-corruption watchdog (CAG) was legal, advocate Om Prakash Aiyal appeared a bit worried. Aiyal is one of the key plaintiffs preparing to present evidence and arguments at the hearing to prove why Karki was not qualified for the job, but that is not why he is worried. After moving deadlines by breezily standing up to Karki’s parallel regime by taking him to court in 2015, Aiyal’s powerful interest groups want to manipulate him. He is trying hard to avoid taking the bait.

“When I went after Karki, I wasn’t trying to hurt him. It was in the self of my conscience,” he told us at his office in Thapathali. “But now various vested interest groups want me to file suit that could benefit them.”

When Karki was accused of abusing his power as Chief Secretary during the 2016 Democracy Movement, Aiyal was a lawyer at the National Human Rights Commission. He witnessed how Karki abused his authority to silence pro-democracy activists, carry out a witch-hunt in the bureaucracy and media. Karki was therefore against when Karki was nominated to hear the Commission for the investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIA) in 2017, and filed a writ against his appointment. His petition argued that Karki was disqualified for public service, and lacked requisite experience and moral character to hear a constitutional body. His petition was quashed by a joint court and Karki was confirmed.

But when Chief Justice Sushila Karki removed the case against Karki in 2016, the public interest litigator came into the spotlight again. Karki has already been suspended after an impeachment motion was filed against him in parliament in October. Karki now faces five legal cases, and four of them were filed by Aiyal himself. Karki has to appear himself in one of the cases against his alleged attempt to disrupt court proceedings.

“People say I brought Karki down, but he has been brought down by his own arrogance, and disregard for the rule of law,” says Aiyal, who is also vocal about judicial corruption and politicisation of the judiciary. In 2012, when the then Chief Justice Kirti Rana was named caretaker Prime Minister, Aiyal had argued that it violated the doctrine of the separation of powers in a democracy.

“A democracy is a dangerous precedent. It tells other Justices that they too can have political ambitions, and this does not bode well for the future,” he says.

Aiyal came from Guwahati to Kathmandu to be a singer, but ended up being a lawyer instead. He knew Kirti Rana personally, but that did not deter him from taking a stance. He has never met Limam Singh Karki, but says he will look him straight in the eye if they meet.

“People who are greedy are isolated,” he says, “but I do not crave power or money, so I have no fear.”
Going to hell isn't as easy as it used to be. Flights are all booked, seats on economy are sold out, and there are only limited slots in Executive Class. Which means you have to be really, really wicked if you want to be consigned to the eternal flames.

It's not enough anymore to fleece migrant workers, pocket fat kickbacks from NEA consumers for 24 hours of electricity, or firebomb school buses. Everyone does that these days. No, the benchmark is higher now and all of you desirous of spending eternity in purgatory need to show a much greater aptitude for pure evil than you have so far.

Just look at the growing competition out there: mass murderers, narco-terrorists, hired assassins, droppers of barrel bombs on children's hospitals, and you think you have earned the right to go to hell just because you scammed the Roads Department?

It pains me to say this but standards for depravity are slipping not just in Nepal, but globally. And it's a disgrace. There was a time when we had real pros around like Sir Adolf Hitler, Generalissimo Mussolini, El Caudillo, Emperor Bokassa, Papa Doc Duvalier or Comrade Pol Pot. Alas, they don't make despots like that anymore.

To be sure, Unpresidented Trump is one helluva guy and shows promise, but he's still an amateur. We hear Robert Mugabe is trying hard to go to hell, but sources in The Netherworld tell us it is still touch and go for him. Then there are an assortment of wannabe tin pot dictators around the world, including one in a country that requests anonymity, and another president elect from BEEEEEEP BEEEEEP BEEEEEP, but he still has to prove to us the banality of his evil with action not just words.

So, in order to ensure that only the World's Most Heinous make the grade, Devil's Advocates (Nepal) Pvt Ltd, the firm responsible for Mr Satan's legal affairs here on Earth, has been contracted to carry out written exams for those applying for resident visas in the Godless Federal Republic of Hades.

Of course, for that, the applicant first needs to expire but due to the rush it is better to register early. Only if you pass this test do you get a slot in the long queue down to Hellfire. All those who think they don't have a chance in hell to go to heaven are eligible, and women are encouraged to apply.

You have one hour, cheating via WhatsApp is allowed and beating up the invigilator during practicals will be a demonstration of eligibility.

1. Give us one good reason why you want to go to Hell (tick one):
   a. I think I'd feel at home down there
   b. So I can continue doing what I was doing here, but be even more evil
   c. Because it's nice and toasty and it's getting cold in Kathmandu
   d. All of the above

2. What was your profession here on Earth?
   a. Really really bad guy
   b. Kleptocrat
   c. Enforcing indefinite bands by setting fire to taxis with drivers still inside
   d. Convicted criminal with skeletons in the Cabinet

3. How can we be sure that if your visa is approved you will stay in hell forever?
   a. I can lie in my asset declaration form to prove how untrustworthy I am
   b. I could bribe the Devil
   c. I'm cashing all my miles and not buying a return ticket
   d. Anywhere is better than Nepal

One helluva move