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BIKRAM RAI

Ruined future

Dangerous new highrises are springing up even before ruins of buildings that collapsed in the April 2015 earthquake are cleared (above), despite warnings of more catastrophic disasters in Nepal.

The country marks National Earthquake Safety Day on 15 January with a focus on preparing for the really Big One. Geological evidence of a massive earthquake 800 years ago that uplifted terrain by more than 10m was discovered recently south of Kathmandu. Enough tectonic energy has accumulated since then for another magnitude 8 earthquake, scientists warn.

"If we fail to prepare for the next Big One, there will be much

more damage than we suffered in 2015," says Bijay Krishna Upadhyay of the National Society for Earthquake Technology.

All this comes even as the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) is blamed for delays in rehabilitation of the estimated 2 million people who lost their homes in the 2015 quake. So far, only 40,000 families have rebuilt homes.

The NRA is mired in politics, and the Cabinet on Wednesday sacked Sushil Gyawali and re-appointed Govinda Raj Pokharel to replace him. Although Pokharel is highly

regarded, there are doubts if he can get the NRA to make up for lost time.

Meanwhile, desperate families enduring their second winter in the open are rebuilding with traditional salvaged material without waiting for reconstruction grants. Which means that Nepal hasn't learnt the lesson of 2015 to build back better.

In his previous tenure, Pokharel presided over the Post Disaster Needs Assessment report and the formation of the NRA, and it is hoped he can hit the ground running.

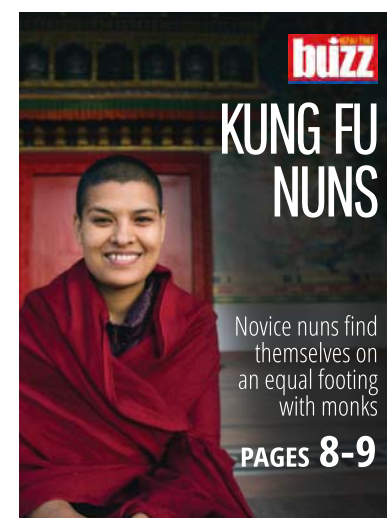
A day after taking office on Thursday, Pokharel told *Nepali Times*: "I promise most earthquake-affected families will have new homes before the next monsoon."

FUTURE SHOCK
 EDITORIAL
 PAGE 2

Not out of danger yet

BY SONIA AWALE
 PAGE 14-15

So far, the only first Rs50,000 instalment of reconstruction grants have been distributed, and it is not sure when the next tranches will go out. Pokharel has pledged to expedite, but families are already building homes that may not be able to withstand the next big earthquake.



buzz
KUNG FU NUNS

Novice nuns find themselves on an equal footing with monks

PAGES 8-9



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FUTURE SHOCK

25 April 2015 was just a slap on the wrist compared to what is coming.



BIKRAM RAI

It is that time of year again, and the government is getting ready to mark the annual National Earthquake Safety Day on 15 January. Once more there will be speeches, pledges and promises but no one has any hope of any quantum leap in making up for lost time on reconstruction, or in preparing for future shocks.

People tend to have short-term memory, and in 20 months since the Gorkha Earthquake, despite multiple studies warning of more powerful earthquakes to come, the nation and state are back to business as usual. Even as survivors try to overcome the impact of the last quake, they have to prepare for bigger ones in future. The cold reality of a second winter out in the open forced many to rebuild with salvaged material using traditional methods. Without government help, many did not have the wherewithal to build back stronger.

In Kathmandu Valley, the earthquake damage convinced many that cement buildings are safer. A stronger earthquake that lasted longer would have pancaked most concrete structures on 25 April 2015. As our special report in this edition (*page 14-15*) points out, scientists have warned of much more catastrophic earthquakes in the vicinity of Kathmandu Valley and in Western Nepal. Existing and new buildings are just not capable of withstanding the intensity of shaking we are bound to experience in the Central Himalaya at any time.

The 7.8 magnitude Gorkha Earthquake and its 7.3 aftershock in April killed nearly 9,000 people and displaced 2 million. Central Nepal tilted like a see-saw: Kathmandu Valley rose by 1.6m and the terrain to the north sank. Tragic as the loss of life and property was, April

2015 could be just a slap on the wrist compared to what is coming. The quake did not fully release accumulated strain along the Main Himalayan Thrust, the fault along which the Indian landmass ploughs under the Eurasian plate at 1m every 50 years.

Now, scientists from Tribhuvan University, Hiroshima University and the University of Nevada have found evidence of surface upliftment of as much as 10m in a major earthquake eight centuries ago. This finding confirms historical records of a megaquake in Kathmandu in 1255 that killed one-third of Valley’s population, including King Abhaya Malla.

The 2015 rupture travelled eastwards along the fault line, but petered out to the south of Kathmandu, not allowing stored tectonic energy to be released. This section of the Himalayan Frontal Thrust is ripe for another rupture, and an 8.5 magnitude earthquake so close to Kathmandu would be 20 times more powerful than April 2015.

In addition, the region west of the 2015 epicentre is sitting on a seismic gap where a megaquake has not occurred for more than 500 years. The last one probably created the landslide dam burst on the Seti that deposited a debris field 100m deep on which the city of Pokhara is now located. A big earthquake in Western Nepal, scientists reckon, would cause the terrain to be lifted by 10m or more. And that is not a matter of if, but when.

A stronger Nepal

We do not intend to spread panic, but the sad fact is that Nepal has squandered the lessons of 2015, and we are woefully unprepared for a disaster sure to come. This doesn’t just mean rehabilitating structures that came down two years ago, but also retrofitting buildings in western Nepal where a Big One is imminent.

The delayed and ineffective response to 2015 and the lack of serious preparedness is a result of a larger failure of governance. As our report shows, the whole corrupt building permit process has to be overhauled so that safety comes before revenue. We cannot afford to wait for the politics to fix itself, our greatest concern now should be on pre-disaster preparedness and to learn from past experiences.

Ward 17 of Kathmandu is an example that readiness with stockpiled of relief equipment and material pays off, and that neighbourhood offers a lesson for other communities not to wait for the government to get its act together. Some organisations had started working on retrofitting schools and public buildings in western Nepal even before 2015, and these efforts need to gain momentum.

As Himalayan seismologist Roger Bilham points out: “The mitigation of earthquake risk requires the knowledge of hazards to be delivered to the people that need it.”

Times.com

WATCH VIDEOS



MUCH MORE THAN A ZOO

The Central Zoo in Jawalkhel is much more than just a fun park for children, it is fulfilling an important role as a rehab home for endangered wildlife rescued from different parts of the country. Meet to rehabilitate rescued animals from across Nepal. Meet rescued Himalayan Black bear cubs, Red Pandas, and Leopards.



LIFE OF A LONELY GODDESS

Follow ex-Kumari Chanira Bajracharya as she strolls around Patan where passersby still bow respectfully at her. Listen to her talk about plan to support other former living goddesses like her. It has been a difficult adjustment, but Chanira is taking it all in her stride.



KUNG FU NUNS

Find out how novice nuns spend their day at the Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, where they get lessons in martial arts, and are taught to be on an equal footing with monks.

RECHARGING MOUNTAINS

Great article with lots of key lessons indicating subtle (and less subtle) shifts taking place in Nepal's rural communities ('Recharging the Mountains', Sonia Awale, #840), deterioration of local soil and habitat, dependency on expensive external inputs, migration for employment, sell off their land to migrate to urban, powered by urban populations seeking lucrative investments, uncertain impact of earthquake on water supply, climate change creating uncertainty in monsoon, changing roles of men and women in livelihoods -- impacts society which impacts culture, multiple challenges nurturing innovation ... Thanks for the coverage.

Colin McQuistan

REBUILDING HERITAGE

The government should work on how it can involve the local community in rebuilding heritage sites ('Owning up to the past', Sahina Shrestha, #840). Even after the 1934 earthquake Nepal rebuilt monuments on its own, so why cant we do so now? Why depend on donors and contractors? Why not seek the counsel of local artisans? The government should call public hearings and train local craftsmen for reconstruction.

Amina Sharma

WHAT'S TRENDING



Most reached and shared on Facebook (11,305 people reached)

Recharging the Mountains

by Sonia Awale
As natural springs dry up, more families are selling their land and moving out of the mid-hills of Nepal. But new techniques to harvest rain have convinced others to remain and make a good living off the land.

Most popular on Twitter (49 retweets, 122 likes)

H₂O

Editorial
How to rehydrate Nepal's thirsty villages



Most visited online page (1,429 views)

Kamal Mani Dixit (1929 - 2016)

by Ashutosh Tiwari
Tribute to Kamal Mani Dixit, who was the closest Nepal came to having a Renaissance man, and who died on 29 December.



Most commented

Who will bell the cat?

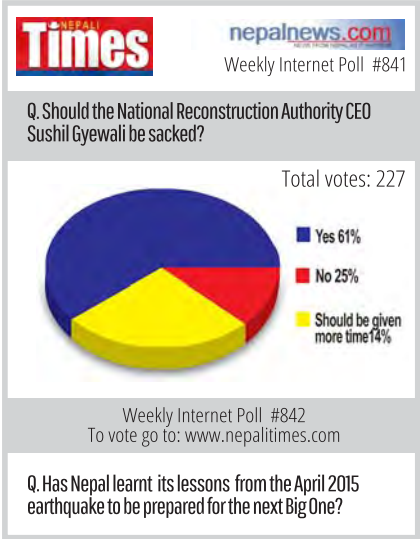
by Binita Dahal
Lokman Singh Karki's future hangs in the balance between Parliament and the Supreme Court.

Ashata Dahal@AshataDahal
It's the people who should be happy not the donors! Make people happy.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Government sacks National Reconstruction Authority CEO Sushil Gyewali.
http://bit.ly/2hTH9Z7

C.N. Khadga@CNkhadga
Young Nepalese migrate not only for quality education but for better future, career security & earning. Lust of western life style is another cause.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Nepalis are migrating for studies abroad because of falling quality of education back home
http://bit.ly/2iJ5tfx
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The end of diplomacy

Nepal's disastrous international positioning is the result of decayed domestic politics



Not since the precarious days following the departure of the British from India has Nepal been as internationally vulnerable as it



ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

is today. Its outreach is scraping rock-bottom, with foreign policy as much in shambles as domestic affairs.

This is a time when Kathmandu needs to carefully calibrate its relationship with New Delhi and Beijing, even as India's Nepal adventurism continues and China flexes its muscles. Kathmandu is more alone than ever in the international arena, with many overseas friends having seemingly ceded their Nepal policy to India.

We are so engrossed in internal affairs that we do not look up and notice what is happening to Nepal's global standing. The

immediate issue is that we have a prime minister whose overriding concern is personal political survival, for which he is willing even to squander the national interest. He is given to intemperate rhetoric in public while being totally subservient in private with select embassies, as required.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal's self-serving term at the helm of government only adds to Nepal's internal instability, which in turn makes a mockery

of Nepal's diplomacy. His most egregious departure was the so-called 'trilateral meeting' at the Goa BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in October. The prime minister collaborated with his son-cum-personal-secretary Prakash Dahal in publicising what seems to have been an informal and inadvertent meeting with Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi in a lounge as they waited for conveyance.

The son took a picture of Mr and Mrs Dahal together with a

Chinese president in laid back pose and an attentive Indian prime minister – and posted them on Facebook! The Nepali side went into overdrive selling the meeting as a trilateral démarche, the Indian Foreign Ministry spokesperson called it 'entirely coincidental', while the Chinese chose not to belabour the matter.

But that show of cavalier immaturity on the part of the Dahal duo damaged Nepal's credibility at the highest echelons of the two paramount powers

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PRAKASH DAHAL

that Kathmandu has to deal with. It will take a lot of effort, and much time, to rebuild reputation when we are led by childish, self-centered, unrepentant leaders who have no sense of history, reality, protocol or decorum. Instead of challenging the prime minister on the Goa misadventure, many commentators took it as a diplomatic coup before going silent on the matter. There is another long-running international public relations

GOINGS ON IN GOA: (From l-r) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sita Dahal, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Chinese President Xi Jinping wait for their limousines at the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa in October. Dahal's son Prakash posted this photo on his Facebook.

disaster that has more or less been ignored by the commentators – the outbreak of cholera in Haiti, said to have been introduced by UN peacekeepers from Nepal. In December, the United Nations apologised for the cholera outbreak, which has tragically taken 10,000 lives. But Haiti's cholera epidemic has failed to breach the public consciousness in Kathmandu, where there is no discussion on the matter. We would all much rather *not know*.

Diplomatic stupor
There was a time when high international dignitaries used to make a beeline for Kathmandu, starting with Queen Elizabeth II in 1961. During BP Koirala's years in government, including as prime minister in 1959-60, Kathmandu had begun to carve a leadership role in Asia. Even if India's cold shoulder weakened the idea, King Birendra's Zone of Peace proposal was able to garner the support of more than a hundred countries. Most recently, Sushil Koirala was able to organise the 18th SAARC Summit in November 2014 as well as host Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi. KP Oli signed a slew of agreements in Beijing, including on trade and transit,

on the rebound of the southern blockade. In contrast, even as current chair of both SAARC and BIMSTEC, the Dahal government lacks the international gravitas to lead either organisation. He can do nothing but watch from the sidelines as SAARC is forced into decline. It does not help that key Western embassies seem so willing to sacrifice bilateral relationships cultivated over decades. Many are still in the stupor induced by Ian Martin of UNMIN and his support for anti-democratic forces in the name of post-conflict adjustment. Occasionally having dabbled in social engineering, these embassies are just not there to help a people in distress, proof of which lies their studious neglect of human rights concerns (consider the abandonment of Ganga Maya Adhikari). This descent in Nepal's international standing must be reversed, for which we first have to tackle the consensual, distribute-the-spoils *bhagbanda* politics that is destroying domestic solidarity. Only then can Kathmandu be politically stable enough to sharpen its engagement with Beijing and Delhi to begin with, even as the West collapses under the weight of Donald Trump. There was a time when diplomatic embarrassment for Nepal would be in the form of shoplifting ambassadors and embassies whose sole raison d'être was to serve the royal family. Today, it is the visage of a prime minister who puts personal survival before the people's interest. 🇳🇵

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BIZ BRIEFS

Blood bond
NIC Asia Bank has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Nepal Red Cross Society to conduct blood donation campaigns across Nepal under the bank's Corporate Social Responsibility. Together, the organisations will also conduct awareness and motivational programs for blood donation.

Travel fest
Qatar Airways' Travel Festival is back this year, offering passengers deals and discounts on business class along with special companion fares, discounts on group booking and a chance to win a zero fare Golden Ticket. The offers are valid until 16 January.

Warm winter
Dabur Nepal's Dabur Chyawanprash organised awareness programs on staying warm and immune during the winter season at schools in Kathmandu valley. The company collected warm usable clothes from the schools and handed it over to CNN Hero Pushpa Basnet's Early Childhood Development Center after adding its own contribution of clothes.

GLOBAL TOP BRANDS

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Chinese electronics manufacture Oppo won two honours from International Data Group. The company was awarded the 2016-2017 Global Top Smart Phones brand and also the 2016-2017 Global Top Smart Connected Devices Brand.

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Call of the wild

Besides serving as an attraction for children, the Central Zoo has also become a refuge for rescued endangered animals

GOPEN RAI

SMRITI BASNET

Three Himalayan black bear cubs whose mothers were probably killed by poachers for their gall bladders to be sold in China as traditional medicine would have most certainly died had the rescued animals not been brought to the Central Zoo.

Two of the cubs were found in Doti and one in Jumla, and transported to Kathmandu in May last year when they were just two months old. The triplets had little chance of survival without their mothers, and

without the specialised attention of vets at the zoo.

“Alone in the wild they would not have got the needed care and maybe the poachers would have got them,” said Ganesh Koirala, assistant curator at the Jawalakhel Zoo. Smugglers across the mountains are killing the endangered bears to take out their gall bladders, skin and paws for sale within Nepal and in China.

Fed six times a day, the cubs are now healthy and chubby and have become one of the most popular attractions at the Zoo.

The Zoo is now serving as an important sanctuary for rescued endangered wildlife: a man-eating tiger darted and transported

from Chitwan, rescued leopards, Eurasian owls, and more recently a pair of red panda cubs found and raised by a couple in Rolpa.

In the past year alone, 368 rescued animals have found their way to the Central Zoo, and this figure is double that a year before. Among them 148 were adopted by the Zoo, 133 were released back into the wild, and 87 died in the quarantine facility.

“We release them once we know they can make it out there, otherwise we usually keep injured or the ones we think cannot survive in the wild,” said Koirala.

While some animals are brought from various parts of the



GOPEN RAI

WILD AT HOME: Orphaned Himalayan Black Bear cubs rescued from the forests of western Nepal last May are now looked after at the Central Zoo in Jawalakhel. (*left*)

Zoo vet Radha Krishna Gharti carries a tranquilised leopard from a house in Kuleshwor to be translocated to Shivapuri National Park. (*above*)

Red Panda cubs rescued in Rolpa were also given refuge at the Central Zoo last year. (*right*)



PAN LAN

country, what keeps the zoo busy these days are rescue operations in Kathmandu itself — especially since wildlife like leopards have started straying into the city.

“Our job is like that of a policeman,” says Zoo vet Radha Krishna Gharti, “we try to bring them in here as soon as possible. If it’s really urgent then we give them first aid about half a kilometre away from the area of rescue.”

Gharti has already rescued three leopards since July, and his expertise in capturing the spotted big cats has earned him the title ‘Leopard Catcher’. A Mahindra pickup equipped with tranquilliser dart guns and nets is permanently on standby for Gharti and his rescue team.

The government has a plan to set up wildlife rescue centres near protected areas across the country, but till that happens the Central Zoo in Kathmandu will continue to be a refuge for rescued animals.

“The Zoo is having a difficult time coping with the overwhelming number of rescues,” said Ghana S Gurung of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal. The Zoo is running out of space and is overcrowded.

There is a plan to transfer the bigger animals in the Zoo to a new 245 hectare facility in Surya Binayak, but the Zoo will have to manage the best it can till it

opens.

“With a bigger zoo in Surya Binayak it will be easier to house rescued wildlife, and other animals will also have more space,” said Deputy Director General of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Gopal Bhattarai.

The Surya Binayak site is being demarcated and levelled and will be designed to comply to modern zoo standards by providing animals space and vegetation much closer to their natural habitat.

“The zoo in Jawalakhel will be upgraded and continue with its conservation education programs,” explained Govinda Gajurel of National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC).

WWF’s Gurung believes bigger enclosures will be better to rehabilitate rescued animals and feels making it look like semi-natural habitats will contribute largely towards conservation education. He added: “For visitors, these semi-natural habitats as opposed to smaller cages is both visually appealing and can add to their understanding of the species.”



Watch a video on the efforts of the Central Zoo to rehabilitate rescued animals from across Nepal.

nepalitimes.com



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The westerly front that was supposed to bring some rain and snow petered out, dumping all the precipitation in western Nepal early this week. However, the system brought down the temperature considerably and this trend will continue until the weekend. Some cloud cover on Saturday will raise the minimum temperature somewhat and bring down the maximum. However, there isn't enough moisture for the clouds to deliver any more rain. The haze will filter the sunlight, taking away a lot of the warmth.

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A LONELY GODDESS

Ex-Kumari Chanira Bajracharya tries to adjust to the real world

KRISTINA SHPERLIK

Chanira Bajracharya may look like any other millennial girl, but after getting to know her it is clear that she has little in common with the lives of other young Kathmandu women. After all, she was once a goddess.

At 21, and six years after retirement from being the Kumari of Patan, Chanira admits that the life of a former goddess is not easy. She has a reclusive life, trying to fit back into society.

"As a Kumari you need to follow a lot of rules, you are not allowed to leave the house alone, you cannot speak to foreigners, it becomes quite stressful once it's all over," she says.



PAN LAN

The Kumari tradition is considered an important part of Nepal's national heritage, but for former-goddesses adjustment can be difficult. Lacking exposure, she had to learn social skills, and despite a business degree had difficulty finding a job.

One late morning this week, Chanira had just rushed home at lunch break from her job in a secondary school to chat with her grandmother. She looks relaxed and casual, dressed in black jacket, jeans, pink lipstick, and fabulous hair. Outside on the street, she blends in with the crowd, indistinguishable from other young women.

Chanira gets up early to walk to her school job by 7am, comes home for lunch with her family, and after work attends Newari *dhaa* music classes till 8pm before heading home for dinner.

"I just prefer to be alone, I don't like to show off,"

says Chanira in English. She is one of the best-educated ex-Kumaris and plans to pursue her Masters. Having been tutored at home while a Kumari, she values education a lot, which is why she works in a school.

Chanira plans to set up a support group for ex-Kumaris in the Valley and help them with peer counseling for education and jobs. It hasn't been tried before and Chanira admits this is uncharted territory.

"I was happy being a Kumari. It is an important part of our culture which should be respected, but we need some amendments and better facilities for the girls who will return to the real world," says Chanira. She says the old beliefs that Kumaris could not marry because the husband would die is not taken seriously anymore, and most ex-goddesses are married.

Chanira remembers how difficult it was to adjust

to the real world when she turned 15 after spending her childhood giving blessings and officiating in chariot festivals. She says: "I did not know how to join a conversation, could not understand how people behaved, everything was strange."

But Chanira has adapted well, and today waves confidently at people who recognise her on the street. Some people still bow respectfully when they pass her. She steps into a pharmacy to buy pink nail polish, shampoo and sunscreen. In a café in Darbar Square, she sips tea, and says: "I like to keep myself busy, because then I don't have to think about how I am doing."

In her rare free days Chanira prefers to stay home with her family or visit relatives. She now has a passion for travel and likes going to other towns in Nepal where she will not be recognised. She is planning her first trip abroad, to Thailand, next month.

Being on the *BBC* list of 100 women in 2016 made her a cyber celebrity of sorts, providing some unwanted attention on social media. Chanira admits she is tired of publicity and, she adds with a smile, talking to the media.

She recalls how on her first day at school the teacher introduced her as an ex-Kumari. Her classmates' attitude suddenly changed: they treated her with fear and respect.

From her third floor window at home, Chanira can see the Kumari Temple in Patan which was her home for six years. The walls have pictures of her as a little girl and presents from admirers: teddybears, Barbie dolls and Winnie the Pooh.

Life has been anything but ordinary for someone who has been a living goddess. 🇳🇵

Watch video of ex-Kumari Chanira Bajracharya strolling around Patan, and talking about her plan to support other former goddesses like her.

nepalitimes.com

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The westerly front that was supposed to bring some rain and snow petered out, dumping all the precipitation in western Nepal early this week. However, the system brought down the temperature considerably and this trend will continue until the weekend. Some cloud cover on Saturday will raise the minimum temperature somewhat and bring down the maximum. However, there isn't enough moisture for the clouds to deliver any more rain. The haze will filter the sunlight, taking away a lot of the warmth.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
17° 3°	18° 3°	16° 5°

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A LONELY GODDESS

Ex-Kumari Chanira Bajracharya tries to adjust to the real world

KRISTINA SHPERLIK

Chanira Bajracharya may look like any other millennial girl, but after getting to know her it is clear that she has little in common with the lives of other young Kathmandu women. After all, she was once a goddess.

At 21, and six years after retirement from being the Kumari of Patan, Chanira admits that the life of a former goddess is not easy. She has a reclusive life, trying to fit back into society.

"As a Kumari you need to follow a lot of rules, you are not allowed to leave the house alone, you cannot speak to foreigners, it becomes quite stressful once it's all over," she says.



PAN LAN

The Kumari tradition is considered an important part of Nepal's national heritage, but for former-goddesses adjustment can be difficult. Lacking exposure, she had to learn social skills, and despite a business degree had difficulty finding a job.

One late morning this week, Chanira had just rushed home at lunch break from her job in a secondary school to chat with her grandmother. She looks relaxed and casual, dressed in black jacket, jeans, pink lipstick, and fabulous hair. Outside on the street, she blends in with the crowd, indistinguishable from other young women.

Chanira gets up early to walk to her school job by 7am, comes home for lunch with her family, and after work attends Newari *dhaa* music classes till 8pm before heading home for dinner.

"I just prefer to be alone, I don't like to show off,"

says Chanira in English. She is one of the best-educated ex-Kumaris and plans to pursue her Masters. Having been tutored at home while a Kumari, she values education a lot, which is why she works in a school.

Chanira plans to set up a support group for ex-Kumaris in the Valley and help them with peer counseling for education and jobs. It hasn't been tried before and Chanira admits this is uncharted territory.

"I was happy being a Kumari. It is an important part of our culture which should be respected, but we need some amendments and better facilities for the girls who will return to the real world," says Chanira. She says the old beliefs that Kumaris could not marry because the husband would die is not taken seriously anymore, and most ex-goddesses are married.

Chanira remembers how difficult it was to adjust

to the real world when she turned 15 after spending her childhood giving blessings and officiating in chariot festivals. She says: "I did not know how to join a conversation, could not understand how people behaved, everything was strange."

But Chanira has adapted well, and today waves confidently at people who recognise her on the street. Some people still bow respectfully when they pass her. She steps into a pharmacy to buy pink nail polish, shampoo and sunscreen. In a café in Darbar Square, she sips tea, and says: "I like to keep myself busy, because then I don't have to think about how I am doing."

In her rare free days Chanira prefers to stay home with her family or visit relatives. She now has a passion for travel and likes going to other towns in Nepal where she will not be recognised. She is planning her first trip abroad, to Thailand, next month.

Being on the *BBC* list of 100 women in 2016 made her a cyber celebrity of sorts, providing some unwanted attention on social media. Chanira admits she is tired of publicity and, she adds with a smile, talking to the media.

She recalls how on her first day at school the teacher introduced her as an ex-Kumari. Her classmates' attitude suddenly changed: they treated her with fear and respect.

From her third floor window at home, Chanira can see the Kumari Temple in Patan which was her home for six years. The walls have pictures of her as a little girl and presents from admirers: teddybears, Barbie dolls and Winnie the Pooh.

Life has been anything but ordinary for someone who has been a living goddess. 🇳🇵

Watch video of ex-Kumari Chanira Bajracharya strolling around Patan, and talking about her plan to support other former goddesses like her.

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The Sorcerer Supreme, who has supernatural powers in the Hollywood blockbuster shot partly on location in Kathmandu *Doctor Strange*, has given nuns from Nepal a veil of infinite mystery. In reality, novice nuns at monasteries in the Valley cannot make magic, but are treated on an equal footing with monks in both education and martial arts.

A historic milestone was set in Buddhist society last month as 20 nuns, including two from Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, were conferred the Geshema, the highest academic degree awarded in Tibetan Buddhism. Since it was only given to monks before, the degree marks a new chapter in empowerment and education of nuns worldwide.

The Geshema degree in Buddhism is

equal to a PhD, but much more rigorous since it requires at least 21 years of study of the five main Buddhist texts, combined with a regular session of prayers and recitations.

“We used to just repeat whatever we were taught like puppets, having no idea what to do next,” admitted senior nun Chosang Palmo, “but now I have my own ambition, which is so motivating.” The nun is finishing

her studies in 2017 and begins four-years of exams to qualify for the Geshema degree in India.

With this degree, nuns are able to acquire higher positions like leadership roles in monastic and lay communities, as well as being qualified to teach Buddhism. The Venerable Jangchub Gyamo is one of the Nepali nuns who received the Geshema

STRONGER NUNS

Novice nuns in Nepal find themselves on an equal footing with monks in education and even kung fu

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PICS: PAN LAN

LEARNING TO EXCEL: A young nun memorises Tibetan texts in a classroom at Kopan Nunnery (*left*).

Chosang Palmo is talking some working details with a monk at Kopan Nunnery (*above, far left*).

Nuns at Druk Amitabha Mountain are distributing warm hats and scarfs to their reconstruction workers. Training in kung fu has made the nuns strong enough to carry out earthquake relief. (*below, far left*).

18-year-old nun from Bhutan.

In the traditionally patriarchal Buddhist monastic system, women used to be considered inferior to men. Monks usually still occupy all leadership positions, leaving nuns to household duties and other tedious chores.

All that changed with the head of the 1,000-year-old Drukpa lineage, His Holiness The Gyalwang Drukpa. He introduced the kung fu idea from Vietnam where nuns are trained in martial arts for self defence.

By practicing specific postures such as the zama step, boxing, and brick-breaking techniques everyday, kung fu nuns had become strong enough to play an important role in earthquake relief work last year.

Three days after the earthquake, 350 nuns were divided up into smaller groups to rush to remote villages out of reach of the government. One group with 80 people went to the worst affected and roadless parts of the Nepal-China border.

The nuns had to walk, carrying heavy relief supplies on their backs. The hard physical work also included moving broken furniture, fixing roofs and lifting stones, and the nuns worked for 16 hours a day.

"We would not have been strong enough had it not been for kung fu practice," said senior nun Jigme Yudoon Lhawo. "We stay fit so we were determined to do something for others, kung fu not only keeps our body strong, but also keeps our minds."

In addition to kung fu, nuns also learn the skills that men do: plumbing, electrical fitting, computers, riding bicycles, the English language and, of course, praying.

Now, monks at Nepal's monasteries are feeling the pressure. "This gives us a push," said Loseng Lourdup, a 31-year-old monk at Kopan. "But this makes us work harder, and do more good things for sentient beings together." 🇳🇵

degree last month, and plans to go to Chumchet in Tsum Valley.

In the past, nuns were not encouraged to become geshe and, unlike monks, were not allowed to take the exam. According to Chosang, this may result from the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism that only monks can learn philosophy, the main subject for the Geshema degree.

This gender discrimination ended in 2012 when the Sikyong of Tibet, Lobsang Sangay, expressed strong support to open the exam for nuns. "It is not only about honor, but also about equality," Chosang added. "Everyone wants to be the best. We study the same thing as monks, but why cannot we take the same exam as them?"

Eight years ago, the world's first order

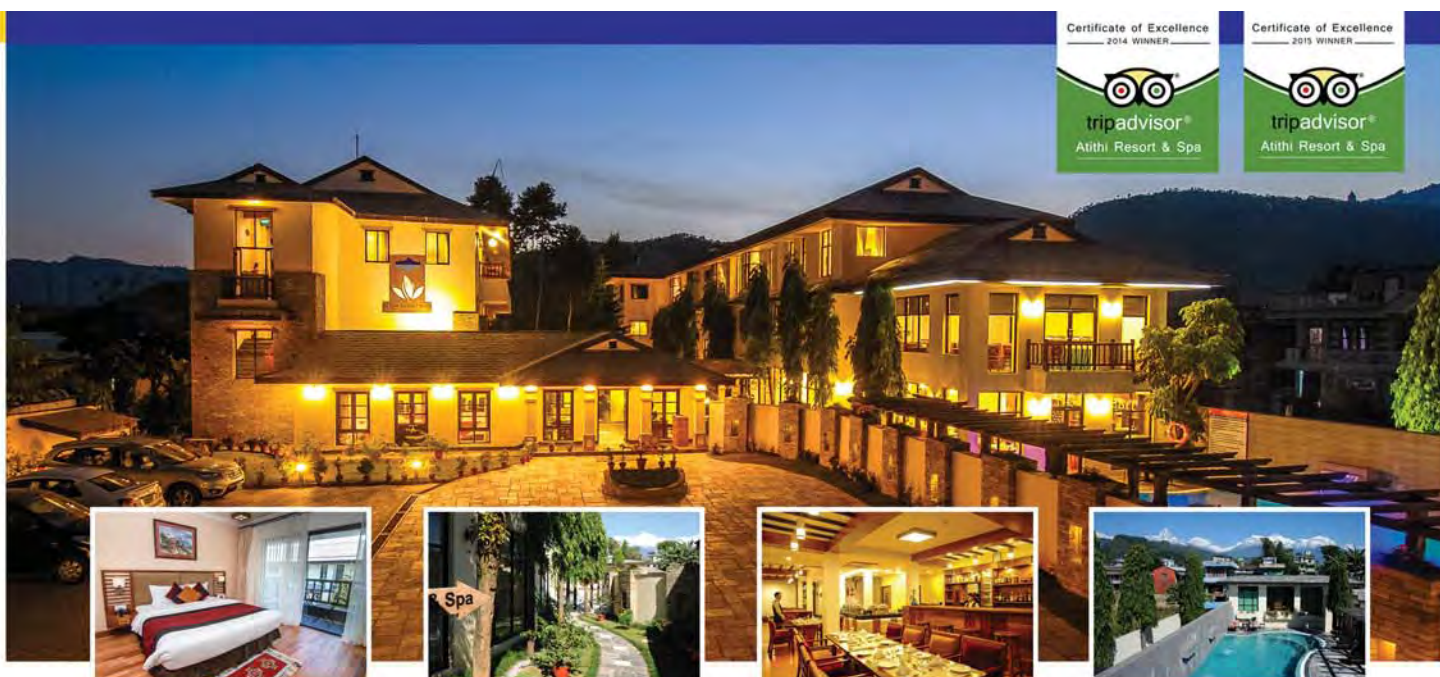
of kung fu nuns graduated from Druk Amitabha in Kathmandu, breaking from tradition to get training in kung fu, and making themselves equally eligible as monks on physical training.

"Kung fu offers us an opportunity to learn what only monks could do in the past, which let me feel a real fairness and equality," said Jigme Wangchuk Lhamo, an



Watch how nuns spend their day at the Kopan Nunnery in Kathmandu.

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EVENTS



Art Market,

A place to sell and buy art in the form of paintings, prints, posters and design products.

14 January, 12 to 4 pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, (01) 5553869, For bookings: ange@image-ark.com, nayantara@photocircle.com.np or pranidhi@image-ark.com

AFK opening,

Mark your calendars for the grand opening of Alliance Française de Katmandou in Pulchok. Also attend for the circus show.

14 January, 3 pm onwards, Alliance Française de Katmandou, Dhalko Bato, Pulchok (Next to St. Mary's School), (01) 5009221/9802022755, reception.afk@gmail.com

Bird watching,

Dedicate half of your Saturday morning to watch birds in Chobar and Taudaha with fellow bird lovers.

14 January, Meeting time: 7.30 am, Starting point: Jalvinayak temple, 9841330576/9801024777



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Pictures for a cause,

Attend a photography exhibition in tribute to poet and philosopher Kahlil Gibran to raise funds for cataract surgeries at the Sagarmath Choudhary Eye Hospital. The three-day long event will also feature poetry recitations, sufi and jazz performances.

20 to 22 January, Bikalpa Art Center, (01) 5013524

Birds of Nepal,

Visit an exhibition of artworks on Nepal's birds by artist Hira Lal Dangol.

Until 13 January, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, (01) 4220735

Karnali Dialogue,

Attend Karnali Dialogue's 17th series to get to know more about the art of storytelling in Mugu.

24 January, 3 to 4.30 pm, Martin Chautari, Thapathali, (01) 4102027



Mastering maps,

Hands-on workshop on digital mapping by StoryCycle and Google Map Maker Community.

9 & 10 February, Mahabir's Center for Nepal Connection, Application: <http://bit.ly/2lVVUhb>, 9845218281, Rs 1000

Champadevi hike,

Escape the hustle of the city and enjoy a day hike to Champadevi hill via Pharping. The event is a fundraising event to support Asia Pacific Veg Congress – 2017 to be held in Kathmandu.


21 January, Meeting point: Bhrikuti Mandap ground, 7 to 7.15 am, Registration deadline: 19 January, 9851149579/ 9856060734, Rs 1000

Self defence,

Participate in the self defence classes for women with Romee Giri, fourth dan and young national referee of taekwondo.

28 January, 10 am to 1 pm, RSTCA, Lajimpat, Tickets: <https://form.jotform.me/60151655603449>, (01) 4426258

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



Where there is no struggle,
there is no strength.

- Oprah Winfrey

Miss Moti-Vation
Angela Poudyal

MUSIC



Tribute to Coldplay,

Get to hear covers of famous British rock band Coldplay's tracks as part of Phase 10 of Tribute Series Nepal event.

21 January, 3 pm (Gates open), Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Rs 500 (Advance sales), Rs 700 (Door sales)

Impromptu Music Sessions,

First concert in the Impromptu Music Sessions series with indie-pop-folk-jazz singer and songwriter Marta Rosa accompanied by her band with artists Isu Shrestha, Pratik Baniya and Jagannath Dhaugoda.

14 January, 8.30 to 10 pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Tickets available at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory or Moksh, (01) 5528362

Kar.Ma sessions,

Live music featuring Nomad Radio coupled with hot cups of coffee and tasty snacks.

27 January, 4 to 8 pm, Kar.Ma Coffee, Jhamsikhel



Wave in concert,

A rock tour featuring famous bands 1974 AD, Sabin Rai & The Pharaoh and other Nepali artists.

14 January, 3 pm onwards, Jawalakhel Youth Club Football Ground, (01) 5538321

Sufi nights,

Spend a musical evening listening to sufi melodies with Amrit Chhetri every Fridays and Saturdays.

Every Friday & Saturday, Green Leaves Restaurant, Uttar Dhoka, Lajimpat, (01) 4433002

DINING



Hyatt Regency,

Rox in Hyatt has rolled out its winter menu featuring mouth-watering dishes like its prawn and thyme bisque, winter minestrone soup, winter tuna nicoise, tenderloin stew and more.

Until 15 February, 6 to 10 pm, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudhha, www.kathmandu.regency.hyatt.co

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12 to 3 pm (Lunch) & 7 to 10 pm (Dinner), Shambala Garden, Shangri-la Hotel, Lajimpat, (01) 4412999, Rs 1800 (per person), Rs 3400 (per couple)



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Green Canyon, Pokhara, (061) 432451



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The end of Karkistocracy

Lokman Singh Karki's departure raises questions about who mysteriously appointed him and why



This week, the Supreme Court ruled on the most eagerly awaited case concerning the legality of the suspended Chief of the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Lokman Singh Karki to hold office. It declared that he had neither the moral character nor qualifications for the post.



LEGALESE

Binita Dahal

The verdict on Sunday not only declared Karki ineligible for the post, but exposed how arbitrarily heads of constitutional bodies are appointed in this country. It showed the power of the hidden hand that leaned on the political leadership in 2013 to push Karki's appointment despite the initial reluctance of President Ram Baran Yadav to endorse it.

The Supreme Court has stepped in to prompt questions about Nepal's leaders who unanimously proposed one of the shadiest characters from the monarchy days to head the republic's anti-corruption agency. Why was he backed so desperately despite such vociferous protests from civil society?

In 2013 the High-level Political Mechanism led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal proposed Karki's name out of the blue when there were plenty of more qualified candidates with

reputations for integrity. The post had been vacant for several years and the leaders of all four major political parties hastily proposed Karki's name which was mysteriously ratified by the Constitutional Council headed by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Khil Raj Regmi, Chief Justice Damodar Prasad Sharma and three other ministers at that time.

How could two Chief Justices who had spent 80 years between them in the judiciary choose a man who lacked qualification and moral standing? Even if they accepted Karki based on the recommendation of the Mechanism they should be equally accountable for the dubious decision. President Ram Baran Yadav, who previously took the bold step of reinstating former Army Chief Rookmangud Katwal in 2009, surprisingly endorsed Karki's appointment.

As mentioned in the Constitution, the President cannot deny the government's or Constitutional Court's recommendation, but he could have taken the suggestion of legal experts and returned Karki's appointment for reconsideration.

Thanks to young lawyer Om Prakash Aryal who dared to file a writ petition against the appointment of Karki, and relentlessly pursued the case in the Supreme Court. Karki has finally been unseated after a reign of terror lasting nearly four years.

The credit must go to Chief Justice Sushila Karki and Justices

Bishwombhar Shrestha and Sapana Pradhan Malla who re-opened the hearing of the writ petition previously scrapped by the Justices Gopal Parajuli and Om Prakash Mishra.

Parajuli is next in line to become Chief Justice after Sushila Karki steps down in April. All previous decisions handed down by the Court in favour of Karki have now come under scrutiny. How can we now trust the Chief Justice and Justices who thought Karki was qualified for the post? How can the people expect justice from such Justices?

Lokman Singh Karki had violated the rule of law by overstepping the jurisdiction of the CIAA. He arbitrarily directed the cancellation of hydropower licenses, interfered in the medical education sector, and mercilessly hounded civil society activists and lawyers who opposed his appointment.

As the head of CIAA, there was an expectation that he would investigate fairly and file corruption charges against the 'Big Fish'. But all he did was go after bureaucrats in some petty cases. Not only did he overstep his jurisdiction, he also exercised unnecessary power and acted as the executive by ordering around ministries and related departments.

On the day the Supreme Court decided to reopen the case filed against his appointment, he suddenly called a press meet and announced that the Maoist cantonment scandal was under investigation. It was significant that this happened while Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was in India on a state visit.

Dahal retaliated by getting other political bosses to agree to file an impeachment motion in Parliament in October against Karki, automatically leading to his suspension. Political leaders were spooked that Karki may actually have evidence against them as well.

However, the leaders did not show much interest in pursuing the impeachment motion, and failed to prove that they stood for democracy and the rule of law. Even if they had chosen the wrong person, the political leadership had a chance to set things right by getting Parliament to impeach Karki. But the politicians chickened out, and it was left to the Supreme Court to do what the political parties did not dare to do.

Most investigations during Karki's tenure had the whiff of personal vendetta, extortion and the persecution of political opponents. Questions are now being asked about what will happen to the numerous cases against individuals and institutions that he got the CIAA to investigate. The Court could set a precedent if another public interest litigation is filed. 🇳🇵



UPASANA KHADKA

Two friends rescued miraculously after the 2015 earthquake build new futures

Life after near-death

UPASANA KHADKA

Ramesh and Pemba (*above*) had been friends for over four years, working in the bus park area in Kathmandu's Gongabu Bus Station as hotel guides to usher people to hotels. They worked all night and slept through the mornings. Together, they fought rivals who tried to steal clients.

Saturday 25 April 2015 was just another morning, Ramesh and Pemba were about to sit down for their meal after a night of scouting clients. Pemba had just served lunch for both of them when the ground started shaking.

Pemba managed to run a few steps towards the exit, but Ramesh did not. They were on the second floor of the eighth floor building and the floors above came crashing down, trapping them both.

Pemba was caught in between beams in a crouching position and was rescued dramatically after five days. He came out unscathed despite being without food and water, although he found ghee from the kitchen amidst the rubble.

"I really wanted to eat roti and that is what I asked for when I was rescued," Pemba recalls, "a foreigner brought me a pile of bread, and all I wanted was one."

Ramesh was also trapped for five hours, with a heavy beam on his legs. Ramesh remembers being parched and craving for the Red Bull which he knew was a few steps away in the fridge. He was rescued the same day, but he woke up a few days later in hospital.

"At first I didn't realise that I had lost both legs," he remembers. "I asked the nurse to remove the blanket and was shocked to find them amputated. I couldn't stop crying."

Pemba continues to try out odd jobs in the Gongabu hotels. He started learning English but quit, then worked at a slipper factory and is now considering going abroad.

The day the earthquake struck, Ramesh was supposed to leave in the 4PM bus for Dailekh with his Rs 30,000 in savings. Every time Ramesh passes Gongabu he is reminded of the place where he got a second life.

Since the earthquake, Ramesh has gone home twice using his prosthetics to visit his grandmother, a possibility that had seemed so distant just a few months back. "It was an emotional reunion," says Ramesh, as his grandmother had been convinced that she would never see him again.

He credits his successful rehabilitation to upper body strength that allows him to do the push-ups. He has gone back to school and is involved in a series of extra-curricular activities including racing in wheelchair marathons, swimming and basketball and has won trophies and medals in these activities.

On 31 December Ramesh was awarded first prize for the Differently Abled Idol Competition in which he wooed the audience with his solo dance performance. He is currently learning English and dreams to write a book one day about his experiences.

He had gone to Japan for swimming training, and is eager to enter competitions and train other physically handicapped like himself. "I was very excited about going to Japan but when I heard that it is a country where earthquakes occur frequently, I was a bit apprehensive" said Ramesh.

Ramesh's dream now is to swim in the 2020 Paralympics, but is worried that he doesn't have access to a pool for practice during winter.

Ramesh and Pemba have drifted apart, but the shared experience of miraculously surviving the earthquake has bonded them. On the first anniversary of the earthquake, the two spent the day and night together talking about their experience. 🇳🇵



ALLIED

It's awards season, and with it come the award contenders. By this I mean films that are designed from inception to execution with the aim of winning an Academy Award. *Allied*, directed by the heavy hitting



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Robert Zemeckis who has shifted in more recent years towards drama, graduating from *Back to the Future* (1985) to *Forrest Gump* (1994), is one of those films boasting two leads, Brad Pitt and Marion Cotillard, who cannot help but emanate a gravitas worthy of the golden statuette. The problem with *Allied* is that

while it is a perfectly okay, albeit slightly boring, film, it takes no risks whatsoever. Written by Steven Knight, the film is a 'romantic thriller' with more sap than thrills, opting for drama over suspense, putting the reader to sleep during the interminable obligatory lovey dovey sections that are meant to sizzle but fall flat, at least to this slightly impatient viewer. Starting out in Morocco, *Allied* centers on the story of Max Vatan (Pitt), a Canadian Air Force intelligence officer who is sent to Casablanca during the Second World War to work with Marianne Beausejour (Cotillard), a famous French resistance leader, on a top secret and very important mission. There are so few surprises in this film that I will not elaborate

further on the mechanics of the pl, it will suffice to say that the atmosphere of French Morocco is perhaps one of the most pleasurable parts of the film, depicting in pleasing detail the glamour of a place that has been so celebrated since *Casablanca* (1942) -- the classic film starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Unfortunately, Pitt and Cotillard are essentially mismatched in a romance that depends on their chemistry: Max Vatan is a blustery square who strives to seem mysterious thrown into extreme relief by Cotillard's Beausejour who is the real deal. Perhaps the actual reason why the film is so lame is that it claims to be based on a true tale told to Knight when he was 21 -- a fact that problematises the telling of a good story as the makers are limited by boundaries, and the film suffers from a lack of poetic license, even with true stories the viewer ought to be surprised. It is also a bit of a shame that Cotillard's talents are mostly wasted after that first act of the film, she is the most interesting thing in it while Pitt blunders along without as much finesse. *Allied* is no *Casablanca* but it could have been something if it had continued in the spirit it started, in that now almost mythical North African city where one of the most unforgettable love stories was set, in a far superior film that has truly stood the test of time. 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer 

HAPPENINGS



NRA

BACK ON SADDLE: Newly re-appointed chief of the National Reconstruction Authority Govinda Raj Pokharel assumes office on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

TABLED: Law Minister Ajaya Shankar Nayak (right) walks to the rostrum to table the second amendment to the constitution bill in Parliament on Sunday.



GOPEN RAI

POLITICAL ACTORS: Leaders of the RPP greet Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at a tea reception the party organised to mark the 295th Prithvi Jayanti on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

HOLY DIP: Women taking their holy dips on the first day of the month-long Swasthani Brata Katha Festival at Sankhu.



GOPEN RAI

TRADITIONAL CUT: A 40-year-old nail cutter, Kanchi Napit, clips finger nails of her customer in Bungamati on Tuesday.

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Nepalguni : 081-527092	Pokhara : 061-525300	Surkhet : 083-522488
Tulsiapur : 082-562575		

Lokman disqualified

Historical verdict

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 9 January

The Supreme Court’s ruling on Monday that Lokman Singh Karki was not qualified to be appointed to head the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) was courageous and historic. It has restored people’s faith in the judiciary. It is also a reminder that the Constitutional Council and the Office of President, which recommended and appointed Karki as the CIAA Chief respectively, should not have disregarded the spirit of the Constitution.

Karki was found guilty of suppressing the 2006 Democracy Movement. His career as a bureaucrat was marred by scandals, most notoriously in a case involving gold smuggling. He was previously investigated by the CIAA itself in a corruption case. Why the four major parties – the Maoists, the NC, the UML and the Madhesi Front – unanimously recommended such a tainted person as the head of the anti-corruption watchdog remains a mystery. By appointing him to the CIAA in 2013, the political parties and the caretaker government headed by Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi and the President not only insulted the constitutional body, but also the Constitution. Better late than never, the unpardonable blunder and unconstitutional move has been corrected by the Supreme Court.

Now, the leaders of the four political forces and Regmi must apologise to the public, and express the commitment that they will not repeat this mistake if they want to respect the Supreme Court verdict and regain the people’s trust.

The CIAA is only mandated to investigate corruption and the abuse of authority by public office holders. But Karki overstepped his constitutional bounds, and arm-twisted other government agencies to make illegal decisions for personal gain. So his exit from the CIAA is not enough, he needs to be investigated and punished for the abuse of power. He eroded the people’s faith in the CIAA, and to regain public trust the Commission needs to thoroughly investigate his abuse of authority and file a case against him at the Special Court.

Karki is also facing an impeachment motion in Parliament and if found guilty can be declared unfit for public service in future. But the Legislature has lagged behind the Judiciary in this case. Nevertheless, Parliament can still do its part by ordering an investigation into Karki’s wrong-doings.

कान्तिपुर



Arbitrary agency

Keshab Poudel in *Annapurna Post*, 10 January

अन्नपूर्ण

Towards the end of his simple living and high thinking life, Kamal Mani Dixit had to witness the arbitrary head of an arbitrary agency relentlessly hound his family. The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) arbitrarily targeted his sons, the human rights activist Kanak Mani Dixit and journalist Kunda Dixit. Even though both have been cleared by the Supreme Court, at his age the mental anguish weakened Kamal Mani physically, and pushed him to his deathbed. The injustice probably had an adverse impact on the health of someone who had lived such a long, upright and simple life. Lokman Singh Karki, the person who ordered the investigations, has now himself been removed as head of the CIAA by the Supreme Court.

Kamal Mani Dixit was not the first to fall victim to the CIAA’s arbitrary persecution. Politician Rabindranath Sharma died of the anxiety caused by a CIAA investigation, as did the wives of former Home Secretary Padam Pokhrel and Former Police Chief Motilal Bohara. Secretary Dinesh Chandra Pyakurel and the wife of Chiranjivi Wagle both committed suicide. The mother-in-law of Govinda Raj Joshi died. The wife of Police Inspector General Achyut Karel did not survive the CIAA’s torment. Former officials of the NEA and NTB are suffering psychological distress due to delays in obtaining justice. A few months ago the former head of the NTB and another functionary died of heart attacks. Both had been targeted by the CIAA last year. Who is responsible for the mental torture and physical harm on the health of someone of the stature of Kamal Mani Dixit? Who will atone for his death?

Truth triumphs

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 9 January

नागरिक

The Supreme Court ruling that nullified Lokman Singh Karki’s appointment as the CIAA Chief has reinforced our belief that truth eventually prevails. The SC verdict has not only questioned the Constitutional Council’s decision to appoint Karki as CIAA Chief in 2013, but also reversed its own decision to quash advocate Om Aryal’s writ which argued that Karki lacked requisite experience and moral character for this job.

After being appointed as CIAA Chief, Karki ran a parallel government, and doggedly persecuted those who questioned his credentials to lead a constitutional body. Actual investigation of abuse of authority was not his priority. He went after ‘small fish’, and hobnobbed with the ‘big fish’. It was an open secret that he was paid off by those involved in major corruption, so he investigated those suspected to be involved in petty irregularities. He constantly undermined elected institutions and representatives, amassing wealth and resources potentially to emerge as a future ruler of the country. His shenanigans tarnished the image of the CIAA itself.

Karki is now gone, but the mistake that political parties made to appoint him should not be repeated. The ruling by justices Ishwar Prasad Khatiwada, Ananda Mohan Bhattarai and Anil Kumar Sinha has not directly questioned the political parties’ decision to appoint Karki. But the leadership should feel morally responsible for this fiasco, and vow to resist external pressure or temptation of money in future. If they refuse to correct their mistake, the people must vote them out in future elections.



Box: **Lollipop**
Right hand: **Elections**
Left hand: **Amendment**

अन्नपूर्ण

Basu Kshitiz in *Annapurna Post*, 6 January

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“If we had not forwarded the impeachment motion in the nick of time, we would have lost face.”

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal after the Supreme Court nullified Lokman Singh Karki’s appointment as CIAA chief, *Kantipur*, 9 January



RSS

“Respect Prithvi Narayan Shah”

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bimalendra Nidhi interviewed by Vijay Kumar Pandey, *YouTube* 8 December

YouTube

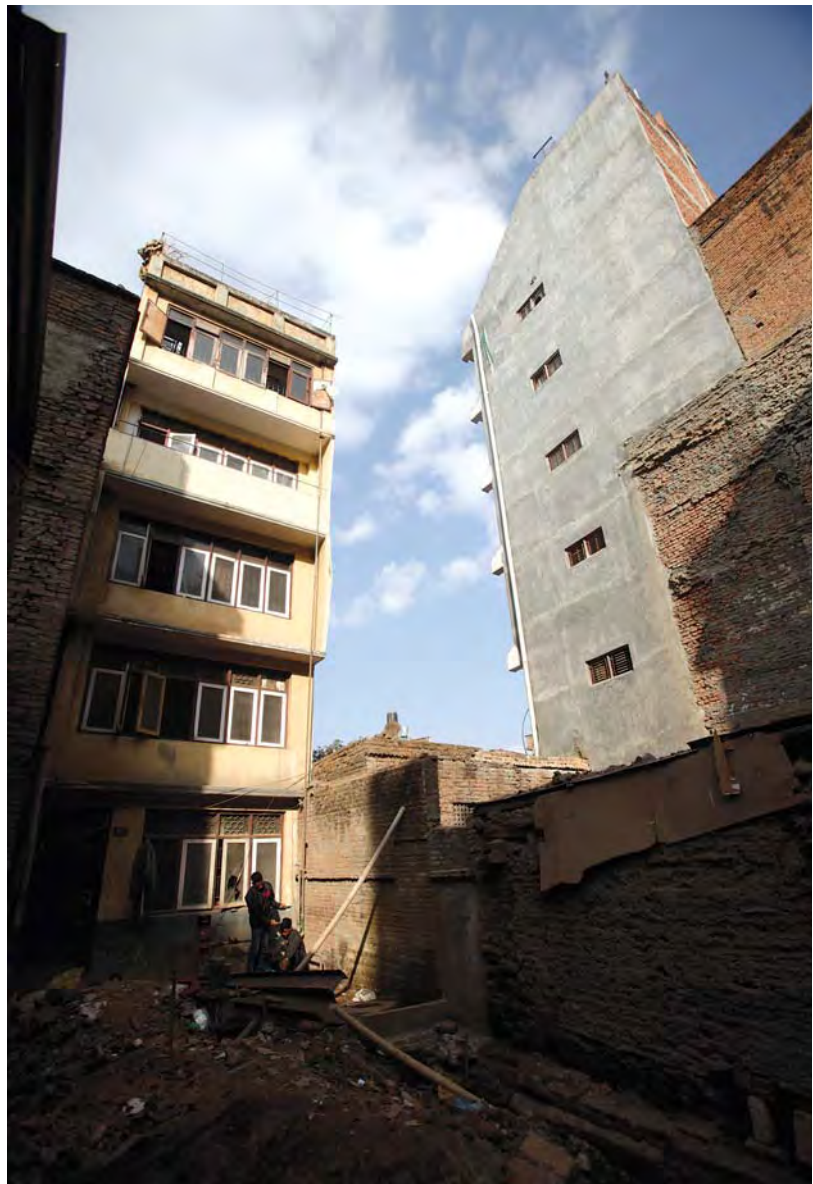
Vijay Kumar Pandey: What is your take on the debate over whether Prithvi Narayan Shah’s birth anniversary should be celebrated as National Unity Day?

Bimalendra Nidhi: Prithvi Narayan Shah should not be dragged into controversy. The Nepal we live in today was his construct. That is a fact and we should never ignore it. I leave it up to scholars to conclude whether he expanded his Gorkha kingdom or annexed other principalities into it. But he unified Nepal at least geographically. Whether his birth anniversary should be marked as National Unity Day is a political issue. One school of thought argues that multiple nations may exist within one country, on the other hand whether Nepal’s unification was an act of nation building at all can be a matter of debate. Even today, ideologues are divided over whether Shah should be remembered as a symbol of national unity. But modern Nepal exists because of him, and we should not belittle his contributions. We should all respect him.

Do you yourself respect or loathe him?

If royalists want to revive the monarchy by celebrating Shah’s birth anniversary, it will be short-sightedness. But if republicans like me belittle his contribution only because he was a king, it is also our narrow mindedness. These are both extremist views. Shah could have unified Nepal to rule it as an authoritarian leader, but what matters more now is the country that he left behind for us. His act of unification should not be judged by modern yardsticks. Republicans should not fear being labeled royalists for respecting a king who contributed to our nation-building process.

Not out of danger yet



BIKRAM RAI



SONIA AWALE

Damage from the April 2015 earthquake is still visible in the 14 worst-affected districts: uncleared rubble, propped up buildings, temples in scaffolding, and nearly 1 million people living in temporary shelters.

As Nepal gears up to mark National Earthquake Safety Day on Sunday 15 January, it is clear that the government and people have already forgotten important

lessons from the 2015 disaster and are unprepared for the next big one.

An international team from Tribhuvan University, Hiroshima University and the University of Nevada recently dug two trenches south of Kathmandu to find evidence of paleo-earthquakes, including the one in 1255 that triggered a surface rupture of more than 10m. They predict a similar earthquake of more than 8 magnitude in Central Nepal that would be much more catastrophic than 2015.

“The seismic strain is

not completely spent near Kathmandu and there is a dangerously long seismic gap in western Nepal,” explained Amod Dixit, head of National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET).

But Nepalis struggling to cope with the last earthquake, haven’t given much thought to warnings of the next one. A government embroiled in day-to-day politics is also too distracted to plan for a mega-disaster sometime in the future.

“The fact is earthquakes are a frequent occurrence in Nepal. We should neither be paralysed

by panic, nor relax and think that the big earthquake has passed,” warned Bijay Krishna Upadhyay, Urban Disaster Risk Management expert at NSET. “Our greatest concern should be preparedness and learning from 2015.”

Upadhyay said epicentres aren’t always the most affected areas, so the Valley could still bear the brunt of a megaquake striking far-Western Nepal. Next time we would not be so lucky.

“The 2015 Gorkha earthquake was a warning for policy makers, designers and public to update our policy and implementation

towards resilient structures, no one can say when and where exactly the next earthquake will strike but there is a risk and we have to prepare for the Big One,” says Rishi Ram Parajuli, a PhD candidate in earthquake engineering at Kyoto University.

Kathmandu already has a strict urban building code for structures up to three floors prepared in 1993, but it is outdated and rarely enforced. The main reason for unsafe buildings is the building permit process. Municipalities get one-third of their income from issuing permits, and safety is not

Ward 17

If there was one neighbourhood in Kathmandu that was prepared for the 2015 earthquake it was Ward 17. The community had a disaster preparedness plan, had stockpiled rescue material and emergency medicines, had conducted drills every Saturday on evacuation of wounded, and designated safe open spaces with water supply.

Such foresight is rare in Kathmandu, and in Ward 17 it has been spearheaded by the team of Bijay Mali at the Chhetrapati Free Clinic (CFC), a non-profit community hospital.

Mali is already preparing for the next big earthquake and has started retrofitting one of two hospital buildings even if it didn’t suffer any damage in 2015. The main hospital building was retrofitted before the earthquake, and survived intact.

Mali, a former representative in Kathmandu Municipality, said that it is crucial that the government coordinate with communities on preparedness plans.

“We live in a seismic zone, so disaster management must be a top priority,” he said. “We have been forewarned of a bigger earthquake, and we want to make sure we are prepared.”

Mali had to struggle against sceptical colleagues



SONIA AWALE



who thought preparedness was a waste of money. He says it was years of hard work in planning and preparing that helped Ward 17 in quick rescue and evacuation in 2015.

Local volunteers were able to rescue two people with equipment they had stored. They also managed camps, providing necessary relief materials, emergency medicine and water supply.

“We have yet to restart training after the earthquake but this time I want to work in a partnership with KMC on preparedness because it is their duty as well,” said Mali. The Clinic has drawn up plans and training manuals for six nearby wards.

By retrofitting the hospital building, he also wants to set an example for public that we need to start preparing now for the next big one.

He adds: “The only way to do that is by constantly reminding people of the lingering threat and by educating them about preparedness continuously and encouraging them to participate.”

“We should neither be paralysed by panic, nor relax and think that the big earthquake has passed.”



UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO

their priority, revenue is. Following the 2015 earthquake, the urban planning and building code was revised, but there is public reluctance to follow it. People in Kathmandu have been lulled into a false sense of security that cement building are safer, when in fact most Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) structures would also have collapsed if the 2015 quake was stronger. “It’s not true that clay mortar can’t resist earthquakes and that RCC houses are always safer. What actually kills are poorly-constructed buildings,” said Upadhyay.

He explained that our ancestors were used to earthquakes and used design elements that allowed Kathmandu’s ancient monuments to withstand tremors. Many of these building methods have been

UPLIFT: Scientists from Nepal, Japan and the United States in a trench on the Bagmati south of Kathmandu where the terrain was lifted by 10m during a megaquake 800 years ago. The enormous energy accumulated in the Himalayan Frontal Fault may be released in another massive earthquake.

Buildings like these (*far left*) in inner city Kathmandu could fall like match-sticks in a future earthquake of 8 magnitude or above.

forgotten, and modern buildings are not seismic resistant. However, masonry that is not enforced is vulnerable to shaking. “The ground motion in the 2015 earthquake had some unique features, and brought down brick walls. Safety depends on the shaking intensity and most importantly the quality of construction,” explained Parajuli, who is currently in Chile to study seismic resistant structures. Earthquake resistant buildings can be easily made with locally available resources and aren’t as expensive as the public perceive them to be. Retrofitting can also make buildings resistant to tremors for a fraction of the cost of a new building.

Another lesson from 2015 is in delayed, inappropriate or ineffective rescue and relief. Local communities did not have enough stockpiles of digging equipment or supplies. Some communities like Ward 17 in Kathmandu (*see box*) had a disaster preparedness plan in place and immediately went into action in rescue and rushing wounded to hospitals and assigning shelters for survivors.

Since Kathmandu is not out of danger yet, and with scientists warning of much bigger earthquakes in central and western Nepal at any time, the Valley needs to learn the lessons of 2015 and prepare to be prepared. 🇳🇵

For more pictures and an interactive map of Nepal’s earthquake history visit: nepalitimes.com

Himalayan tsunami

A future 8-9 magnitude earthquake in Central Nepal would devastate Kathmandu Valley, unleashing a disaster so catastrophic that no one wants to even think about it. But experts say the death toll in the city may pale in comparison to the destruction caused by landslide dam and glacial lake outburst floods in the Himalaya that would send huge walls of water downstream. Himalayan rivers bear geological evidence of past floods. For example, Pokhara is situated on the debris field of a huge flood on the Seti unleashed when a landslide dam probably triggered by the 1255 earthquake swept down from the Annapurnas. As global warming melts the mountains, hundreds of glacial lakes in Nepal and Tibet are on the verge of bursting. Their moraine dams could collapse simultaneously in a megaquake, unleashing Himalayan tsunamis. Geologist Shree Kamal Dwibedi at the department of Water Induced Disaster Management is reluctant to speculate on such a worst-case scenario, and says that the most recent study at Tribeni and Bagmati cannot yet be extrapolated to predict a catastrophic earthquake. “We need more studies in the Himalayan region, but we have to be prepared and alert as we essentially live in a seismically active region,” he said, adding that mitigation measures like the ones to lower the level of the Tso Rolpa and Imja are needed on other glacial lakes. “We also need an early warning system so people downstream can evacuate in case the lakes burst,” he said. “Nepal will always be at high risk and we need to develop an earthquake resilient culture for preparedness in our education system.”

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New year revolutions

Two weeks into 2017 AD, and there are already indications that this year may be one in which 2017 BS repeats itself as a farce.

A fortnight is also enough time to evaluate the new year resolutions of December 31st which I have forgotten because I was pretty much plastered when I swore by them. There is a sneaking suspicion that I may not be speaking just for myself when I make a public confession that I have already resumed being my usual cantankerous and obnoxious self.

After tweaking some resolutions and consulting lawyers, I have modified them so that they will stand up in a court of law. Listed below are some new year resolutions and their perfectly legal interpretations (in brackets):

- I will stop giving cash bribes.**
(I will use the PayTM phone payment app)
- I will cut down on carbs.**
(I will cut the cake into smaller slices before eating it)
- I will stop drinking and driving.**
(Stopped driving, only drinking now.)
- I will stop smoking cigarettes.**
(I'll stick to pot.)
- I will save water.**
(Haven't flushed the toilet since New Year's Eve.)
- I will stop using bad words.**
(WTF I'll just use acronyms STFU, LMFAO)

The main drawback of new year resolutions, as I see it, is that they are not legally binding. There is nothing there in writing. And in the absence of a Letter of Intent that will stand up in the International Court of Arbitration, such resolutions are easily broken.

That is why I have hired the Bhattarai, Bhattarai & Bhattarai Law Firm to draw up a MoU with myself, and got the document duly notarised by the CDO, LDO and two witnesses who are senior civil servants in the Fed-up Democratic Republic of Nepal that puts me under a contractual obligation to abide by all previous new year resolutions. There are stiff penalties for breaking one or more of the terms and conditions hereunder:

MEMORANDUM OF MIS-UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN I, ME AND MYSELF

Preamble

WHEREAS all Nepalis are entitled to earn karma points in their ongoing life so as to ensure reincarnation as higher primates (hereinafter referred to as "Monkeys");

AND WHEREAS we consider that it is the interest of every citizen to enjoy the fundamental human right to inadvertently break some, if not all, resolutions thus made;

DETERMINED to get intoxicated during every annual traverse by Planet Earth in its trajectory around the Sun;

BEING DESIROUS of making a perfect Ass (hereinafter referred to as "Donkey") of myself at the slightest pretext;

BEARING in mind that similar resolutions undertaken during other new year parties (Bikram Sambat, Nepal Sambat, Tamu Losar, Sonam Losar, Sherpa Losar and the Inuit New Year);

NOTING that although there is a case to be made for a moratorium on said new year parties, and a cessation of hostilities for the time being;

NOTING FURTHER that I can be made persona non grata;

I HAVE resolved with my unreformed self during the Gregorian New Year to carry out the following lifestyle changes:

1. I will get up every morning at 5:30AM, jog to Pashupati and be back in time for a breakfast of muesli, whole-wheat, and drink without prejudice a warm frothy health drink which used to be the favourite of a certain late ex-prime minister of a neighbouring country who shall remain nameless for the purpose of this document;
2. I will stop shooting the breeze (in more ways than one) unless ordered to do so subject to provisions of what is deemed in the national interest by a higher up authoritarian;
3. I shall not cast aspersions during the whole of 2017 about the female relatives of motorcyclists trying to overtake me from the left on the Pani Tanki uphill without prior express consent.

APPENDICITIS - A

A Court of Arbitration shall be established inter alia pursuant to the Preamble to resolve any disputes arising from non-implementation of any of the instruments in the above resolution, or if they are carried out in a manner not in consonance with the letter and spirit of this agreement.

APPENDICITIS - B

This agreement shall be deemed to be null and void if the contractual party and/or his boss decide to terminate this column in 2017 in the public interest.



The Ass

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