Cliffhanger

The bad news is that it required political intervention by the Nepali Congress to bring back Govinda Raj Pokharel to head the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). The good news is that during his previous tenure after the 2015 earthquake, Pokharel had moved quickly on preparing a Needs Assessment report and convened a donor pledging conference.

This week, Pokharel hit the ground running to launch the distribution of the second installment of the Rs 200,000 rebuilding grant to survivors in Gorkha, Sindhuli and Makwanpur. However, as our report (page 14-15) shows, many families in Nowakot have not even made it to the list to receive the first installment.

The delays in distributing the rest of the reconstruction grant and excluding eligible families from the list points to governmental negligence and mismanagement. The buck stops in Kathmandu, but the delays in delivery are due to political interference in the NRA as well as lack of coordination between line ministries.

Pokharel was appointed by the NC government in 2015 and was sacked when KP Oli became prime minister to be replaced by UML apparatchik Sushil Gyawali who faced obstacles because his party was in the opposition. He was finally sacked last week, and Pokharel brought back. In an interview (page 14-15) Pokharel assured us no genuine earthquake victim would be left out during his watch.

Meanwhile, in roadless Upper Gorkha cut off by landslides since the earthquake, engineers have built Nepal’s first ever cantilever pathways (pictured, above). Mules trains carrying earthquake relief, school children and trekkers on the Manaslu Circuit have returned as the steel paths have made it possible to follow the narrow gorges of the Budi Gandagi (in Yara Buger and Syaz Khola).
parliamentary strength of the parties. The KU vice-chairman and the NSA chief are selected on bhagbanda basis. Not being accountable rulers politicians fine. Why risk an election if things are turing dour! Things aren’t that bad, we’re still some way off from the edge of the cliff, so why make any precipitous moves? Everything, therefore, is in wait-and-watch mode.

The parties appear to have spent all their energy in the past month haggling over the constitutional amendment, announcement of elections and the impeachment of the suspended CIAA chief. They had wanted to sort this out in a package deal, but their stands cancelled each other out which is why politics is now in a state of rigor mortis.

Politicians are using the lack to recharge their batteries. The Prime Minister even found time for a jacket to Abu Dhabi. Most politicians are busy travelling to their home constituencies, and are behaving as if they are already on election campaign mode. Competition is heating up among the political parties to grab the holy grail of Nepal’s elections: the Tarai which now has more than half of Nepal’s population.

No surprise, therefore, that politicians are fanning out across the plains addressing rallies, strategising with local cadres, trying to understand the mood of the masses.

The conclusion of the mainstream parties after these trips seems to be that the Medhia party leaders who were truncated in the 2013 elections are still not held in high regard. They detect a divide between the Medhia people and the leaders of the Medhia-oriented parties, and see an opportunity to exploit the simmering distrust. The party that can restore linkages between bills and politics will have the upper hand, not the one that tries to divide the region.

For their part, the Madhesi parties have concluded that their electoral future can only be assured by keeping the federalism pot alive. It is in their interest to stoke Madhesi sentiment against Fabahes. Last year’s violent agitation radicalised young Madhesi, and they feel that level of anger needs to be maintained for their political survival.

The mainstream parties also sense that many people in the Madhes towns, particularly Birgunj and westwards, do not have the stomach for another prolonged separation. The economy of the Terai border towns suffered due to the blockade, so even Madhes-based parties have softened their rhetoric of late. The four main parties see the demographics shifting with disproportionate out-migration of young men from the eastern Terai. Hill settlers of the plains may flourish and form a larger proportion of voter turnout on election day than they would otherwise.

The other wildcard is the Hindu votebank. A recent report in this paper from Janakpur suggested a strong backing for the RPP, and even for a return to a constitutional monarchy among the middle class and traders. If this translates into votes at the ballot box, it will be at the cost of support for the other parties.

The politicians may be doubtful about a lot of things, but of one thing they are certain: they must conduct elections in 2017 even if they don’t really want it. According to the constitutional roadmap, there should be elections: local, provincial and voting for the federal parliament by 18 January 2016. For now, though, the top leaders seem to have shelved the idea of local elections because of intractable differences over provincial boundaries, their demarcation and rearranging electoral constituencies.

Holding federal elections will be the fig leaf that the parties need to demonstrate to the public that they are not against polls per se. This would prolong the political transition, but that doesn’t worry wheeling-dealing coalitions who benefit so much from extending bhagbanda politics.
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Separating powers

Judicial Council nominations of judges are always controversial, this year was no different.

Every time the Judicial Council nominates judges, its members are usually criticized for being partisan. They are accused of violating the doctrine of separation of powers by politicizing appointments to the judiciary.

In today’s Bhagamandala politics in which the parties divide up every appointment among themselves, the controversy is a given. Last Thursday, the Council finalized the nominations in a late-night decision by the majority after the two members left the Chief Justice residence in Bhaluwakot.

Among the 80 recommended judges, the Council decided on 37 judges from the district courts, 27 advocates and 16 joint secretaries and special class legal officials from the Attorney General’s office. The appointments come amidst a huge backlog of pending cases in the High Courts and their extended benches.

The Nepal Bar Association (NBA) and other lawyer-based organizations and government lawyers from the AG office expressed their displeasure at the list, accusing the Council of not following the principle of proportional representation. They threatened to pull out of the NBA if the decision was not rescinded.

Despite the opposition, the newly appointed 80 judges took their oath of office under a tent in the Supreme Court premises on Wednesday (above).

The decision would not have been criticized to this extent if the two members of Judicial Council, Baidya Nath Upadhyay and Ram Prasad Sitaula, had not left the meeting in a huff. Their displeasure is centered, as before, mostly on the perceived politicisation of the appointments and on nepotism.

Some of the newly-appointed judges are indeed close relatives of the members of the Council and some are affiliated to the three main political parties.

However, looking back at previous selections of the Judicial Council, it would be fair to say that they are never above controversy. The most recent was the appointment of 11 justices of the Supreme Court by the Council led then by Kalyan Shrestha, a Chief Justice known for his integrity and fair judgement.

Much more controversial was the Judicial Council’s decision three years ago to appoint eight justices to the Supreme Court. Three of them are now courted in line to be Chief Justices when Sushila Karki steps down in April.

Senior Nepali Congress leader Narahari Acharya was among the Council members involved, and he had fiercely defended the disputed nominees. That decision was controversial because all nominations were from among career judges, excluding some well-deserved professional lawyers, the Attorney General’s Office, Law and the judicial administration.

The Judicial Council is led by the Chief Justice, and includes the Law Minister, senior justices of the Supreme Court, one lawyer recommended by the Prime Minister and the other by the NBA. Of the five members, three already have partisan interests because of their positions. It would be really difficult to find lawyers without political affiliations.

This time, after Upadhyay and Sitaula left the meeting, Law Minister Ajay Shankar Nayak and Padam Baidik (both from the Maoist party) were in the majority in the Council. Even so, the appointees cover nearly all sectors including government attorneys, lawyers, civil servants and judges from district courts. Those nominated from the judicial administration and Law Ministry are also expected.

To make the decision inclusive, some less deserving candidates are also in the selection and lack experience to be High Court judges. This is why sitting judges in the districts are dissatisfied with the system whereas novice lawyers become more seclusive to them just because the process needs to be inclusive.

Even so, the Judicial Council’s selection this time is comparatively less controversial. In future, the makeup of the Council should be changed with a majority from the judiciary. However, it will be difficult to reduce the political influence in the judiciary, as it is in every sphere of national life today.
Stigma and silence

Economic hardships, political chaos and natural disasters have lead to an increase in the incidence of mental disorders in Nepal

KETAN DULAL

I had just returned to Nepal from Germany after experiencing my first psychotic episode, and like most patients with mental disorders in those days my parents took me to a shaman.

Behind the curtain, the female faith healer shook violently showing that she was under the spell of spirits that would tame my demons. She emerged from her trance to give us a small pouch of rice. I was to bathe before dawn and chew on one grain of rice every day.

My mother would dutifully wake me up at four every morning, force me to bathe and then hand me the single grain of rice.

Things have moved on a bit in the diagnosis and treatment of mentally ill people in Nepal, but visits to the shamans are still common. Most people, it seems, have more faith in faith healers than in modern psychiatry.

Indeed, society had conditioned me to regard psychiatrists as people who deal with ‘crazy’ people, those who were ill because of their own fault. Psychiatric disorders brought shame to the family, and I had seen patients stigmatised and ostracised. Persistent ignorance of mental disorder has meant that society labels people afflicted with everything from epilepsy to schizophrenia as being ‘mad’.

Then I was diagnosed with schizophrenia myself, a disease that had greater stigma than any other mental illness. For decades I kept it hidden because of the indignity attached to the condition in Nepali society. I could not talk about it openly with friends and relatives, and although I acted normal the disease was killing me and my family. I was lucky that my affliction was not severe enough to induce hallucinations and delusions, and I did not succumb to substance abuse.

But what my mother and grandmother did to me was also a form of abuse, the kind of treatment that people with mental illness endure from their families across Nepal every day.

A recent study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that the situation of the mental health system in Nepal remains dismal.

The study shows that the ratios of psychiatrists and psychologists in Nepal (0.22 and 0.06 per 100,000 population) are one of the lowest in the world. A quarter of Nepal’s psychiatrists work outside the country. This leaves most mental patients alone to fend for themselves and battle both the disease as well as the social stigma on their own.

The conflict, political instability, migration, economic woes and the earthquake have combined to take a serious toll on the mental health of Nepalis which has gone largely unnoticed because of society’s reluctance to talk about it. A recent study in The Lancet outlines the increase in the prevalence of mental health problems in Nepal (see left) and argues that mental health should no longer be regarded as just a health issue but a socio-economic burden on the country.

Help can be provided to patients only if they seek it in the first place. The stigma attached to mental illness is so strong in Nepal that most people would not seek help when they need it. Even some of my own family members used to believe that if I do not have the motivation to work then it is my own fault. If I wake up with hallucinations they believe that an evil spirit has possessed me. It has taken years for them to understand that mental conditions are treatable and there are medicines that can reduce the symptoms of the disease.

If we just remain silent about the epidemic of mental illness in Nepal tens of thousands of patients will continue to suffer in silence. Nobody will understand mental disease unless the people who suffer from it first speak out. Society will only listen if we make ourselves heard.

Ketan Dulal is a PhD candidate at the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada.
Feminine FM

Women in radio stir a nationwide conversation

EMMA STOLARSKI
in MORANG

As Nepal’s hinterland gets steadily more feminized because of the outmigration of men, community radio stations have stepped in to offer women an alternative support network with companionship and advice. Women working in radio have proven to be especially effective in addressing issues like domestic violence, child marriage or family problems. Women are obligated to work in the kitchen, and as one listener here said, radio often plays in the background making kitchen work more tolerable.

Nepal’s community radio network now extends across all 75 districts and is broadcast in more than 70 of Nepal’s 125 spoken dialects. While only 60 per cent of the population speaks the national language, community radio is able to transmit content in local languages. Radio has also been instrumental in the aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake to spread information on relief and rehabilitation.

It was in 2007 that South Asia’s first women-run radio station, Radio Purunchal, was founded by Kamala Kadel. Today there are seven AM radio stations run by women across a country that is beginning to counter patriarchal values.

“My motivation was to give a voice to the voiceless, it was important that women’s stories and ideas are heard,” said Kadel. While the station is a success, she received a lot of criticism from her male peers when she started ten years ago. Many doubted that a station could be maintained entirely by women. “They didn’t think we could do it,” she recalled.

Some men took it badly that they were being excluded. “They thought that a women-run radio station was reverse gender discrimination against men.” However, such criticism motivated her even more to create a platform for gender activism and to educate the public about discrimination against women.

It is very common for women to lack support systems within the family and society to turn to community radio for solidarity.

RADIO ACTIVE WOMEN: A Radio Purunchal journalist interviews women in Lamjung for a radio program.

Listeners describe women in radio to be like friends they can turn to when in need, they often call or write to the stations about problems they are facing at home. In the studio, the women are more than journalists; they are counselors dispensing advice on a diverse range of subjects. Radio stations also invite survivors and activists to share their own stories on air.

At Radio Dilli Bahasi in Tanahu, Durga said: “A woman can understand another woman best, and that is an indication why women related programs are important. We can learn from each other.”

Besides their ability to build a community for listeners, women in radio are also able to collect data and stories for others to tune in to nationally and globally. Through community radio networks like ACDRAS and others, stations connect villages that have developed especially effective programs or have gathered pressing stories to syndicate nationally.

Women in community radio have proven to be especially successful in extending support in ways that national stations based in Kathmandu have not. While the capital is quick to pass laws to protect women, rural areas do not receive the benefits, such as awareness or accountability. Community radio becomes especially important in the absence of local elections, which haven’t been held for two decades. Here in Morang, Radio Purunchal still struggles to survive. Part of the reason is that the station is selective about the commercials it chooses to promote. It endorses Nepali products, but does not air advertisements for soft drinks, junk food and the like.

nepalitimes.com

Listen to live programs in Radio Dilli Bahasi, a community radio run by women in Parbat.
SMRITI BASNET

Sarita Thapa was only 11 when her father was disappeared by the army, the same day Congress politician Govinda Poudel was killed by the Maoists in Bardia. For 17 years, Thapa was carrying the weight of her father’s loss in her heart until she met others like her while working to get stories of conflict survivors.

“When I compare my pain with them I see how similar our problems are. I forget my own pain,” said Thapa, now 28.

Thapa is part of The Story Kitchen (TKK) which has been training 19 others like her to collect, record and prepare radio reports of the victims of the conflict and their relatives. There are reporters each in Junjia, Kaliyar, Raikam, Rolpa, Sindh, Dang, Bardia, Banka, Kalikot and Kanchanpur.

A selection of 26 programs by the group has already been broadcast on Radio Nepal and syndicated through FM stations around the country.

“We read Nepal’s history and it is always about what the men have done, we wanted to present the women’s narrative, to look at major events in history from a woman’s perspective,” said TKK’s Jaya Luitel. In the last five years, the Kitchen has documented stories of Nepal’s conflict told from the perspective of women. Last month, the organisation was presented the Tomorrow’s Peace Builder award by Peace Direct based in London.

The reporters are given resources and trained to conduct interviews and approach victims with sensitivity prior to being sent to the field. A member of the National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders serves as a coordinator in each district, and the reporters say journalism has boosted their confidence.

“It has changed how society views me now they talk to me in a much respectable tone,” said Hira Bhandari (pic), above who is working in Kanchanjung, Bhandari’s husband along with her nephew and five others from the district were killed during the conflict.

The women do not just report, their radio documentation is also valuable testimony for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Bardia, Thapa has single-handedly collected 500 complaints and sent them to Kathmandu. Having already served as an active member in the Conflict Victims’ Common Platform (CVCP), Thapa says that the women find it easier to talk to her because she too is a victim.

Many have trusted her with their war experiences, some of them of torture and rape, which they haven’t registered with officials or anyone who is basically meant.

“For women social justice is important, and even more important now is to tell them that it was not their fault,” explained Luitel.

TKK is supported by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Governance Facility, and hopes to extend its work.

Said Bhandari from Kanchanjung: “I don’t know if I am qualified to be a radio reporter, but I really wish to work in this field in the future.”

nepalitimes.com

Healing through radio

Conflict victims and their families are sharing and broadcasting stories of their war experiences

The Story Kitchen (TKK) is a community radio program that aims to document and broadcast the stories of conflict victims and their families. The program was founded by Sarita Thapa, who lost her father to the conflict. The TKK trains women to collect, record, and prepare radio reports of the victims of the conflict and their relatives. The stories are then broadcast on Radio Nepal and syndicated through FM stations around the country.

The TKK is supported by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Governance Facility. The program hopes to extend its work and provide a platform for conflict victims to share their experiences.

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CANTILEVER TRAIL

Workers needed mountaineering skills to build unique steel pathways to reconnect Upper Gorkha after the earthquake.

WEEK 1 The Syar Khola cliff in Tsum Valley where the trail was destroyed by a landslide after the 2015 earthquake.

WEEK 2 Local workers were trained in rock-climbing techniques to drill into the cliff face.

WEEK 4 Using experience in bridge construction, Nepali engineers built the new pathways.
The April 2015 earthquake triggered landslides that destroyed many sections of the Budi Gandagi Trail, cutting off Upper Gorkha, affecting the movement of local people and trekkers on the Manaslu Circuit.

Now, engineers have used cantilever technology to restore damaged sections of the trail along the narrowest and steepest parts of the Budi Gandagi gorge. A 195m metal path along a cliff at Yaru Bagar now allows mule trains and porters to connect the Tsum Valley and Larkya La for the first time after the earthquake.

A second cantilever path is under construction in Tsum Valley where the earthquake wiped out an entire section of the foot trail to the scenic region near the Tibet border. Yaru Bagar was only 5 km from the epicentre of the earthquake on 25 April 2015, and it uplifted the Budi Gandagi, forcing the river to change course and wash away the trail along its gorge. Eight VDCs in northern Gorkha were cut off for more than a year, and 8,000 people had to depend on helicopter ferries for food and relief.

The construction of the cantilever pathways was supported by the British aid agency, DfID, through the Samarth program, and the Swiss company AF-Uteco used the bridge-fabrication experience of Rawal Yantra Shala in Kathmandu. After considering several options, the engineers selected a cantilever pathway as the most suitable option.

I am very proud that DfID has, through our tourism programme SAMARTH, invested in this cantilever bridge. Having an open trail is very important to the livelihoods of the people living in the hills,” said Gail Mazetti, Head of DfID Nepal. “The cantilever is a new technical solution in the mountains and we are keen to do more to support communities. Workers had to be trained in mountaineering to hang from ropes on the cliff to drill into the rock, and 400 local people were also employed for the project. Yaru Bagar was completed in two months at a cost of Rs 38 million. Today, the pathway is busy with school children, males and trekkers going up and down the Budi Gandagi Valley.

The same team is now working to build the Tsum Valley steel pathway which is nearly complete. "We have people with necessary skills and proper design for cantilever pathways. With that confidence we can now build them in other places as well,” said Bishnu Shah, project manager with AF-Uteco.

Cantilevers can be dismantled and 80 per cent of the material reused to erect the pathway in another location. The technology can be used in other gorges in remote parts of the Himalaya.

Sondra Amsale
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Spend a musical evening at the Wool Hotel and celebrate their second anniversary.
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Champadevi hike,
Escape the hustle of the city and enjoy a day hike to Champadevi hills for charging. The event is a fundraising event to support Asia Pacific Veg. Congress – 2017 to be held in Kathmandu.
21 January, Morning point: Bindih Mathmandir. 7 to 7.15 pm. Registration deadline: 19 January. (01) 4677277, (9880) 606078, thamel@hyatt.com

Tribute to Coldplay,
Get to hear covers of famous British rock band Coldplay as part of Phase 10 at Trabu’s series. Nepal event, 21 January, 6 pm (Gates open). Maurice Road Club, Thamel. Rs 200 (advance ticket), Rs 200 (door ticket).

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The place to head to for Japanese and Tibetan cuisine. A pleasant and spacious garden is also ideal for big gatherings.
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Night of Ideas,
Attend a panel discussion on the emerging development of landlocked countries featuring experts: Dr Ankush Basu, Ray Chadha, Pierre Jacquet, Valerian Jardin and Swamin Narula.
20 January, 6 to 7 am. Shreekumar Kandel, Kapan, Kathmandu. Before 20 January. Communication@shreekumarkandel.com

Agro fair,
Don’t miss out on the fair! A fair between 50 stalls of organic tea, coffee, vegetables, juice, honey, spices from across Nepal. 21 to 25 January, 10 am to 6 pm. Patan Durbar Square. (01) 4677268, shreekumar@shreekumarkandel.com

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Every Friday & Saturday. Green Leaves Restaurant, Thamel.

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Dolakha reincarnated
The earthquake destroyed the historic trading town of Dolakha, rebuilding it would revive its historical importance

SAHINA SHRESTHA IN DOLAKHA

A 107, Dalab Bahadur Shrestha has fond memories of his scenic hometown of Dolakha Bazar. Three days after the earthquake of 2015 destroyed the historic town. Now living in Kathmandu, Shrestha recalls how townsman all knew and greeted each other, rejoiced during festivals, worked hard in the terrace fields and boasted on buffalo meat that cost next to nothing. Shrestha’s ancestral home was near the town’s famous Bhimsen Temple, which was one of the few structures that survived 2015.

The Newar inhabitants migrated to Dolakha from Kathmandu in pre-Malla times, hired by the nobility there as artisans and to work in the famous mint that supplied coins to Tibet. Both the ancient mint and Shrestha’s 333-year-old three-storey ancestral home with intricately carved lattice windows were damaged.

“The house was built by my female ancestor after her husband passed away,” says Dalab Bahadur in Dolakha Newari (see box). The foundations were strong enough to withstand multiple earthquakes including the Big One in 1934. Over the years, except for the tin sheets that replaced the original thatched roofs, the house has remained as it was. Like the old house locally called puniachhe, much of the historic town including its numerous temples and chaityas and historic buildings are in ruins.

Nearby, the old mint is also partially collapsed (pic, above). Weakened by the 25 April 2015 earthquake, the structure collapsed in the 12 May earthquake which had its epicenter only 4km away from Dolakha. Dalab Bahadur Shrestha, 85, is a descendant of the people who made the famous silver coins used in Tibet.

“My family made those leather coins before they were replaced by copper and silver,” Shrestha says. “Some of the leather coins remain, and we had the house. Now even that is gone.”

A year and a half since the earthquake, some of the residential buildings in Dolakha are being reconstructed, but there is a danger that the original look of the old town will change with the use of concrete. Rebuilding Dalab Bahadur and Dhan Bahadur Shrestha’s homes will require the expertise of conservation architects.

“It is not just about rebuilding the private and public houses,” explains Surey Bhakta Sangaachhe of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NESSI). “It is about reconstructing heritage sites and festival routes, reviving the economy and the cultural heritage and developing skills and social infrastructure.”

NESSI is working with the community and the Municipality to plan the reconstruction of Dolakha’s core areas. “The task here is to regenerate and redevelop a town that has seen a major decline in recent years,” adds Sangaachhe, “and it is the locals that need to take the lead.”

Dolakha’s history goes back before the 16th century when it flourished as a kingdom on the ancient trade route between India and Tibet along the Tama Kosi Valley. Newar traders from Kathmandu Valley settled here, bringing with them the vibrant culture and festivities, adapting it to suit their new habitat. Dolakha even has its own version of the Kumari.

There was already outmigration, but with the earthquakes 70 per cent of Dolakha’s original inhabitants have moved out. The town wears a deserted look and locals admit that keeping the history and traditions alive is an uphill task.

“The town used to be vibrant and people from as far away as Patan came to see our Machhindranath Jatra. But the festivals are not the same anymore, and now even the house of the gods are gone,” says Surya Krishna Shrestha, 76, living on the building in Pingal that houses the chariot.

While the earthquake brought down many temples including the famous Tripures Sundari, Pathupati, and Narayan Temple, some of the heritage sites including the Harisiddhi Temple, Rajjale and Rama Sengda had lost their original form even before the earthquake.

“There was a house here, and the idol of Harisiddhi was on the first floor,” recalls Som Prasad Shrestha. “After the property was nationalised, the house came down and the municipality built a smaller structure, but even that was damaged by the earthquake.”

Because the building is gone, so are the dances performed in the dabai in front of the Harisiddhi Temple. Som Prasad says, “There is no one to carry on the traditions.”

The old Kumari Cibam, from when the Bhairav Kumari jatra begins, is disappeared. Every year, Remika Shrestha, 65, donates money to the trust to celebrate the Kumari jatra.

“But finding people willing to participate in the festivals is becoming more difficult,” she says, “I am not sure how much longer the festivals can go on.”

On the last day of Khadga Jatra, from the Thami community used to suck the blood of buffaloes during ritual sacrifices, but that no longer happens. The Three Kings of the town each had their lakhey dance during the Hiliya jatra but not these three kings any more anymore.

Bhikwan Das Shrestha has written: “The festivals have vanished one by one. He says, “Most people don’t live here anymore, so the godhis don’t get an invitation to perform the festivals. We need to figure out how we can move ahead without looking back.

We need to revive our cultural heritage by rebuilding a stronger community.”

Speaking in tongues

There is an apocryphal tale how the Newari dialect spoken in Dolakha came into being. When the five Pandavas were passing through the jungle during their exile, they developed a secret language so as not to be identified, and that is how the Newars of Dolakha speak today. No one is sure if this is the original Newari language. There are even those who claim that the Newari language originated in Dolakha and came to Kathmandu, and not the other way around. This is a story that Nath Tamang relates. Han says: “The Newari language did not originate from Dolakha, but the Newari spoken in Dolakha is claimed to have been spoken in Kathmandu 500 years ago. The language reigned in Kathmandu, but because Dolakha is in isolation it remained intact.”

In Dolakha Newari got a dialect spoken, in the valley it is called Dhas, in the valley, it is called Dhas. It is from that the word for cat eventually became dhas. Shrestha also says that the Newari spoken in Dolakha is strongly influenced by the indigenous ‘hum and Farmer’ languages.

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CULTURE 11

KUNDAYOUTH
UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS

The fifth installment in a largely slammed series, Underworld: Blood Wars is a film for all the fans of Selene (played by the very game Kate Beckinsale) who is a long persecuted elite vampire death dealer, with aristocratic blood running through her blood, but hunted by her own kind and an adept in battle. She is the ultimate anti-heroine, a similarly brooding analogue to Milla Jovovich’s Alice in Resident Evil films that are equally disparaged but continue to provide endless entertainment for the people who are mesmerized by these kick-ass protagonists who, despite what anybody may say, are better than the usual cardboard cutout action hero tropes that continue to proliferate.

The Underworld films represent a franchise that draws on the lure and endless fascination that people have about vampires before the Twilight books and films had even become a part of public consciousness. Included in the film lore is the now well-known animosity between the vampires and the lycans, or werewolves, factions who have engaged in an age old war for domination over more humans, upon whom they feed and sire.

Despite the breakneck action that marks the films and an unforgiving proximity for gore, one being no different, the makers of the films understand that there is a great power in creating sleek, dark, albeit fairly superficial, action movie universes where everyone is dressed in black, the settings are straight out of gothic romances, and even the bad guys are gorgeous.

Underworld: Blood Wars is dazzling to look at, the 3D enhances the beauty of the action sequences, and Beckinsale does not disappoint, her ferociousness and her exquisite features tempered over the years by the loss of her love (the was a lycan), her hybrid daughter Eve (the product of that strange union), and her now itinerant lifestyle as she strives to live the millennia that the vampire is blessed with.

This is not a film for those who have not seen the previous installments and have no stake in the future of Selene, Eve, or the incredibly handsome David ( Theo James from the Divergent films), a vampire who has a surprising ancestral history that manifests as a major plot point. For those who do care through, and have stuck through the past four films, there is much here to look forward to, particularly the settings, a rather fun villainess, and several surprises, small and large, that add a bit to a film that makes quite a bit of something out of nothing. This is Beckinsale’s show, she has the knows it, she does her role and her fan base justice, and the director, Anna Foerster, wisely allows for Selene’s character to show some nuance, however slight, bringing some levity to what might otherwise have been the equivalent of a bloody video game.

nepalitimes.com

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

HOMECOMING : Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal returns to Nepal after participating in the World Future Energy Summit in United Arab Emirates on Monday.

HAPPENINGS

I SWEAR: Newly-appointed judges of the High Courts take their oaths at Supreme Court on Wednesday.

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MADE FOR EACH OTHER: President Bidya Devi Bhandari’s daughter Nisha Kunum Bhandari wed former president Ram Baran Yadav’s grandson Adhikesh Yadav at Shital Niwas on Monday.

MADE FOR EACH OTHER: President Bidya Devi Bhandari’s daughter Nisha Kunum Bhandari wed former president Ram Baran Yadav’s grandson Adhikesh Yadav at Shital Niwas on Monday.

LORDS OF LAUGHTER: Comedians Madan Krishna Shrestha and Kishan KC attend a program for senior citizens in Kathmandu on Sunday.
“This much.”

Rupa Joshi in Himal Khaborpatika, 15 – 21 January 2017

All through the night Dada (our father) lay on the hospital bed, as his life was sapped out of his body. My brothers, sisters-in-law and myself lay vigil at his bedside.

As I watched Dada wailing weep, I nurtured a wish but was not able to say it out loud. Just before dawn, Dada left us, leaving a huge void in our lives. He joined our mother who had passed away just a year earlier.

Dada was a reformist, broad-minded and always open to new ideas and innovation. Despite that, it was hard for him to entirely shrug off the notion of letting a daughter spending money on him. “Don’t burden me this way,” he would say. “How much will you keep on doing?”

I used to shrug at his oftentimes enthusiastic complaint, saying: “ Sons and daughters are equal, these days, Dada. And I do it also because I can afford to do this much.” Dada would shake his head in complacent discipline.

I did not get to spend much time with my family after being married off right after school more than four decades ago. When we began losing Devriji (our mother) to Alzheimer’s I started spending more time with Dada. I began spending even more time with him in the past four months when he became ill and was in and out of hospitals. I got more time to care for him, which gave him more opportunities to tell me: “How much will you keep on doing?”

As Dada’s hold on life began to wane, the memory of my mother’s cremation flashed before my eyes: how a year ago my brother had performed Devriji’s last rites, paying the ultimate tribute a child can for a parent by lighting the funeral pyre.

It would be Dada’s turn soon. If only I could join my brothers for the final cremation rites, I thought, it would be the most definitive way of expressing my love and respect for our father. But I was not able to voice the wish despite my seemingly educated broadmindedness. It must have been the unspoken social norms and the boundaries drawn around what a girl can and can’t do that held me back.

Hours later at the electric crematorium, as the priest was instructing my brothers about various rituals, I was just a sad bystander. Once everyone present had paid their last respects, the priest called on my brothers to wash Dada’s face and apply the sandalwood paste on his forehead.

When they were going around Dada, Kanak called out to me and asked me to join them. The priest did not object, and I soon was part of the rituals along with my brothers. A sense of fulfillment welled up deep inside me. When it was time for the final rites in front of the crematorium kiln, the priest once again called my brothers to light the funeral pyres. Emboldened by being included in the rituals earlier, I mustered the fear of my heart saying, “What about me? Can’t I join too?” The priest shook his head. Another priest nearby said, “No, you can’t.” A third voice nearby said sternly, “Of course you can’t!”

My heart sagged. My brothers had already started encircling Dada with the flame. It was then that my maternal uncle urged me to join them. My sister in law said: “If you want to, then go.” Then Kanak pulled me up behind him. The priest did not complain.

We three siblings then encircled Dada two more times, before laying the flaming piece of wood on his chest. Bowing at his feet we bid a final goodbye to our father before he was immersed into the kiln.

When the cremation was over in an hour, I followed my brothers to the narrow window on the ground floor to collect the ash in a small urn. “You take it,” Kundu told me. The clay vessel was hot as I cradled it in my palms. Tears welled up, bitter sweet tears of sorrow faced with a deep sense of contentment. We three siblings then dispersed the ashes in the nearby Bagmati.

In my line of work, I often spout theories about gender equality and equity, and how women in Nepal should be provided equal opportunities. That day I realized it was not enough just to provide opportunities or to wish for change. You need someone to push you, and you need someone to pull you. On 29 December, it was my uncle and sister-in-law who gave me the push, and my brothers who pulled me.

With everyone’s support I was able to answer my father’s perpetual question “How much will you keep on doing?” by saying, “This much.”

Rupa Joshi’s father, noted Nepal Shrestha (Gyan Keshar Dut) passed away on 29 December. See himalabharat.com for Nepal original of this tribute.
Failing to make the list

Many genuine earthquake survivors are missing from the list for housing grants due to frequent changes in government

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
in NAWAKOT

The flimsy tent doesn’t protect Kamawawa Pudasaini and his family from the biting cold and wind, but nearly two years after the 2015 earthquake he has resigned himself to treating this as his home. There are dozens of families here in Jiling of Nuwakot district who have found out that their names are not on the list of survivors entitled to receive the first installment of the Rs 200,000 government reconstruction grant. There is renewed hope in many of the 14 worst-affected districts that with the changing of the guard at the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and the reassignment of Govinda Rai Pokharel as CEO, the remaining money will materialise. But not here.

“My house was certified unsafe by engineers, but my name is not included in the government’s list,” says Pudasaini. “I don’t understand why, when even people without land ownership certificates have got their Rs 50,000 first installment.”

For now, all he can do is file an appeal at the NRA, but seeing the slow pace of relief, he is not very hopeful. For now, he has taken loans to rebuild a small house from salvaged material, but says: “I cannot keep my 80-year-old mother and small children in a tent for another winter.”

The plight of the Pudasaini family is in stark contrast with Prakash Dhungana in Ward 4 of Jiling. Although the government has a policy to provide housing grants only to those who have only one house that was destroyed in the earthquake, Dhungana’s name is on the grant list even though only one of his two houses was damaged in the quake.

His neighbor, Ratan Dhungana, whose only house is inhabitable because of serious damage, also found out his name not on the list. Like many other earthquake families in Nuwakot, he doesn’t know why. Although most of the 600,000 families who have registered have got the first tranche, there are many like Pudasaini and Dhungana who have somehow fallen between the cracks because they cannot work the system.

Prakash Dhungana is a teacher and says: “I don’t understand how they decide. Some people have received grants while others haven’t even though the damage to our homes are the same.” He blames engineers deployed to inspect the houses, saying they lacked experience.

Subba Tamang, 31, of Jiling has no idea how to get on the list and be eligible for a grant. Engineers told him his house was

“We also need socio-economic reconstruction”

The newly re-appointed CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority Govinda Rai Pokharel is a busy man because he has to make up for lost time on post-earthquake rehabilitation. He spoke to Nepali Times on Monday at his office.

Nepali Times: What did we lose in one year?
Govinda Raj Pokharel: We failed to utilise the immense opportunities that we had amidst the crisis. We couldn’t adopt an integrated model settlement which could have saved our infrastructure cost per houses. The NRA has already distributed the first tranche of the housing grant and we can’t undo this now. Since we couldn’t implement the integrated model settlement, people have lost livelihood opportunities. Likewise, massive training should have started as soon as the NRA was formed last year and at least 25 masseurs should have been ready in each ward by now.

People are skeptical about how much you can achieve because you inherit the same system from your predecessor.
I have just started free health checkups in the earthquake affected districts. The mason training will start to train as many masons as possible. The second tranche of the housing grant will be paid in the district office so that they receive it directly. The current process is too lengthy. At least 7,000 fresh graduates from CETIT (Kousal for Technical Education and Vocational Training) will be sent to the earthquake affected districts as volunteers to help people rebuild.

How are you going to pick up where you left off last year?
We have been very successful in terms of rescue and relief. However, there are certain lapses in reconstruction. I am planning to clear the complaints within a month. The main challenge is to settle the cases related to Trust Fund and claims of people who don’t have land ownership certificates. I will form a special committee to address those issues and come up with concrete solutions.

Where would you like to see reconstruction in the next six months?
Our immediate target is to provide as many houses as possible to earthquake victims by the next monsoon by fast tracking reconstruction. The security forces are committed to help us build masons. We must improve the supply chain to ensure smooth supply of reconstruction materials. Private housing is only 2.5 per cent of reconstruction, we also need socio-economic reconstruction. Our long term plan is to ensure that people have sources of income wherever they are resettled. We need to look at restoring livelihoods.
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WAITING FOR HOUSING GRANT

waiting for housing grant

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Leaked Driving License Test

Without any eating around the bush or harrying and swelling, the Donkey is making for your eyes only, this week's test. Good luck.

1. All motorcycle riders are required to wear helmets at all times:
   a. Unless you can present written proof you are a conscientious objector.
   b. Except your three children aged 2, 4, and 5 sitting on the tank who are required by law to only wear fairy shades and tiny hats.
   c. At all times.
   d. Including when you are asleep, or in the bathroom.

2. The best procedure for taking a vehicle from a parked stationary position into the traffic flow is to:
   a. Swing out into the lane without looking behind for approaching vehicles, especially if you are a mad micro driver whose days are numbered on Kathmandu’s streets.
   b. If there are school kids waiting to cross the road, accelerate so you can beat them to it.
   c. Look in the rearview mirror and wait for a safe gap in traffic to move into lane, even if it means waiting till the next batch by the Big Map factor.
   d. Don’t stop, don’t look. And jet.

3. A blinking right signal light usually means:
   a. Turning right, but not sure yet.
   b. You can overtake me now if you dare.
   c. My left signal is broken.
   d. All of the above.

4. You honk on the highway to:
   a. Scare fellow travelers.
   b. Curse fellow travelers.
   c. Discuss the back of the truck says “horn please.”
   d. To keep yourself from falling asleep at the wheel.

5. When a high velocity VIP convoy approaches on Putali Sadak, you:
   a. Speed up, and give the Honorable Prime Minister to Bahu Water.
   b. Pull over and give the Cammed Prime Minister the middle finger.
   c. Pull over and salute the national flag.
   d. Pull over, wait for convoy to pass, and then drive it to get to your destination faster.

6. A motorcyclist caught in a traffic jam should:
   a. Queue in every available space, knocking out the rearview mirrors of cars.
   b. Ignite airbrushes, climb up the ramp to overhead bridge, ride down onto the roofs of buses to get to destination.
   c. Follow traffic rules patiently to reach offer after you have crossed retirement age.
   d. Ride on the sidewalks and don’t let sleeping dogs lie.

7. If a Red Bull is sitting on the road, your:
   a. Treat street bums as traffic islands and pass them dutifully on the left.
   b. Wait for animal to get up, which could be until the cows came home.
   c. Air out car, lift beverage can, pull tap and drink.
   d. Air out car and worship holy cow.

8. You are driving down Naxal your mobile vibrates. Do you:
   a. Let it vibrate and enjoy the message.
   b. Pull up on speaker phone, shout obscenities and gestural wildly so everyone thinks you have road rage.
   c. Pick up the phone, chat with the caller and when they ask you to slap phone down your shirt and pretend to be excavating our wax.
   d. Pick up the phone, chat with the caller and have a life too rare ready on the dash board.