Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has proven himself a true gentleman by keeping his promise to step down, and install NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba as new Prime Minister.

In August last year, Dahal made a “gentleman’s agreement” to hand over the PM’s chair to Deuba after local elections in return for the NC’s support to the Maoist-led government. But such agreements have often been broken in Nepali politics, and there was speculation Dahal would do the same. But after the first round of local elections this week, the prime minister said he will resign “in a few days”.

Maoist Centre Secretary Sushil Koirala confirmed that Dahal will step down at the next parliamentary meeting, and the party will back Deuba to become Prime Minister for the fourth time.

“Deuba will be Prime Minister, but the Maoist-NC ruling coalition will remain the same,” Koirala told Nepal Times on Thursday. “The cabinet will be reshuffled, with induction of new faces.”

As the ruling coalition enters a new phase, the alliance of Madhesi parties, Rashtriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN), looks anxious that it might be left out once again. It is still backing the ruling coalition, hoping the government will amend the Constitution as a face-save so it can participate in the second phase of local elections on 14 June. RJPN leaders met Dahal and Deuba and asked them to amend the Constitution before the PM swap.

But NC leader Amresh Kumar Singh told us Thursday amending the Constitution is unlikely even before the election – a line that Indian ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri is reported to have conveyed to Madhesi leaders. The Hindustan Times reported this week that Puri told Madhesi leaders to drop their demand for the amendment and participate in the 14 June vote.

But RJPN leader Biratnath Poudel is adamant about not taking part in elections without the amendment even if India tells them to. “How can we go for elections without amendments, and make the sacrifice of so many Madhesi lives worthless?” he asked.

Still, it is unlikely the RJPN will ignore India’s advice. The success of the first round of elections is also too tempting to resist. The Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN), another Tarai-centric party, took part in the first round, and is preparing for the second one. If the RJPN boycotts the second phase, the Forum may emerge as the biggest Madhesi-based party.

With less than a month to go for the second phase, and the ruling coalition still unable to secure the two-thirds majority needed to amend the Constitution, Maoist and NC leaders are trying to persuade Madhesi leaders with other offers. On Thursday, a cabinet meeting recognised recent Madhes and Tharu strikes as “political movements”. Outgoing PM Dahal also directed the Law Ministry to table a proposal to the next cabinet meeting to withdraw criminal charges against those arrested by police during Madhes-Tharu agitation last year.

Om Astha Rai
THE RADIO WAVE

One of the exigencies of Nepal’s development saga is that despite the absence of local elections for two decades, ten years of violent conflict that left 17,000 dead, weakly politics and poor governance the country has been cited by the United Nations as a country that has taken the dramatic strides in health, education and poverty reduction among developing countries.

Most Nepalis have no idea about how much progress we have made in socio-economic development in the past two decades. So, our national past-time is to run our country down every chance we get. What is it about our people, culture and government that in spite of all the glaring shortcomings, including a lack of national self-appreciation, we have achieved so much. And it is tantalizing to think how much further ahead we would have been had politics been more stable, our governance cleaner and more efficient.

It has been said here before that everything that has worked well in this country in the past three decades has been the word ‘community’ attached to it: community forestry that has restored countless forests over a large part of the midhills, traditional community-run irrigation systems, schools and health posts managed by local communities, rural cooperatives.

But one of Nepal’s greatest showcases is the community radio movement that next week marks 20 years since the pioneering Radio Sagarmatha got its broadcasting license. That decision in 1997 firmly established the radio spectrum as a public domain, putting Nepal far ahead of other countries in the region. As our report on page 14-15 shows, Radio Sagarmatha opened the floodgates for decentralised radio in Nepal with more than 400 FM stations now all over the country. As a result, the pervasive idea that Nepal did not backtrack in development despite a war and 20 years without elected local government was a vacuum in democracy was partially filled by radio. It allowed people’s indirect participation in decision-making and compensated for the absence of accountability. Radio also fostered inclusiveness, and engendered progressive values. Being locally-run, community FM radio stations helped spread tolerance about Nepal’s ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, blunting social discrimination.

Perhaps understanding the power of radio, King Gyanendra prohibited FM stations from broadcasting news for six months after his 2005 military coup, only music was allowed. Some stations ridiculed the ban by singing the evening news bulletin. Radio proved to be resilient enough to survive threats from left, right and centre.

Bharat Koirala received the Magasayar Award in 2002 for his contribution to the establishment of community radio in Nepal. As he argues in the Guest Column (below) Nepal’s radio revolution seems to have strayed from the original mission, and is now commercialized, syndicates centralised content, and many are owned by local politicians.

There is an urgent need to revive the values of public service broadcasting that saw the birth of Radio Sagarmatha 20 years ago so that it continues to build grassroots democracy and local development.

— G Ramag

20 YEARS OF SAGARMATHA

The first independent community radio station in South Asia, Radio Sagarmatha, is celebrating its 20th anniversary today. Nepal is home to three community FM radio stations which are backed by the TBI platform. They are Community Radio Nepal, the first community radio station in South Asia, radio station in Kathmandu, was backed by Fair Nepal and the Canadian Foundation for Journalism. Another station, My FM radio station in the midhills, is backed by the UNDP and UNICEF. Radio stations that today pump into the airwaves are the result of huge investments in radio in Nepal, broadcast and communication.

PEOPLE’S LEADER

have been travelling to Rayale VDC and observing Dhim Neware since he was elected Chairperson of the Panchayat in the 2012 local elections and was a key force in propelling the PDPD project that used decentralised local governance to push rural development (‘Electing for a better future’, Kunda Dixit, RMS). It is clear that the Panchayat system has been an important part of Nepal’s story. As people think about what will happen the next 20 years, one thing is certain: there will be hope for development. Let’s see.

K K Sharma

Nepal has received billions in aid, taken up state loans, received vast sums from migrant workers. Why don’t we look at roads, pollution, health and nutrition at all levels? What will it end?

DO

Understanding LGBT

Great news, from my experience of a transgender living in Nepal there is a lot more understanding or tolerance. The Police force do not hold any understanding or tolerance of LGBT issues, however the Police force do not hold any understanding or tolerance of LGBT issues, however the Police force do not hold any understanding or tolerance of LGBT issues. Projects like this can help bring the issue into the public domain. I am not gay, but I believe if you stand for equality you must support these people.

roddy
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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER
press releases are used by embassies in a considered manner to express nuance that the spoken word may not be able to carry. Hence, we must read them as trying to get across an intended meaning, which allows us to analyze the urge and tilt of the embassies and incumbent ambassadors. Three press notes of the past week, from the Indian, UK and US embassies, need to be taken up vis-a-vis messages as well as tone of delivery.

ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

Buddha Purnima, where he spoke with concern about the grave challenges facing Nepal following the earthquake of the week previously. That video resurfaces on YouTube last week, presented as a fresh speech by Modi, which if true would have amounted to grave intervention in political affairs in the context of local elections. The Annapurna Post daily carried an editorial on 14 May saying as much, and many in Kathmandu believed that the video displayed Modi’s attitude toward Nepal’s political process. The Indian Embassy was rightfully incensed and on the very same day produced a strongly worded press release condemning the editorial, which it stated was ‘inappropriate and mischievous’ representing ‘yellow journalism at its highest’.

But the air did not clear as much as it should have, because the Kathmandu press as a whole failed to report the Embassy statement. This may be partly ascribed to the reluctance of media outlets to critique a competitor, but it also reflected poor news sense. The fact that Modi’s speech was being read in the wrong context was news in and of itself, and editors should have sought to correct the mis-impression on their own. But even the release was not picked up.

The media also did not register a brewing resentment among some Western embassies for not being allowed to observe last week’s local elections. The British Embassy came out with an terse statement on 15 May, which after perfunctorily welcoming the commencement of local elections, added: ‘We are not commenting on the process at this stage.’

If the embassy was not commenting, why was it commenting? The country has gone through a lot heartbreak and heartache to finally get to this point of local elections after a period of two decades, there have been so many unconscionable compromises made, and the exercise was so enthusiastically embraced by the voters, that Nepalis deserved something more than a ‘no comment’.

We urge progress from all stakeholders to work to create the necessary conditions to ensure that the people of the remaining four provinces are also given the opportunity to exercise their democratic right to directly elect local representatives on 14 June,’ the statement continued.

Other than the awkwardness of the ‘urge progress’, the substantive problem here is with the diplomatic code that is impermissible to decipher. We know where the knot is: the Rastriya Janata Party demanding amendment of the constitution (on province delineation, electoral college, local entity numbers) the willingness of the government coalition to go through with it, and the refusal of the parliamentary opposition to consent. If it has to speak, the embassy could tell us where it stands on the matter, rather than send out a statement that can be interpreted any which way.

The U.S. Embassy press release of 15 May also is cagily when it comes to premises that is rightfully deserved. The embassy ‘recognizes the efforts of all stakeholders ... in conducting what appears to have been a largely peaceful and broadly supported first round of local elections in Nepal’. The term ‘recognizing’ is rather like the Indian government ‘noting’ the promulgation of the new Constitution last year, a pointed refusal to say ‘welcoming’.

The phrase what appears to have been obviously refers to the Embassy’s inability to observe the elections by itself. Granted, the Election Commission should have allowed Western and other embassies to have free range of hill, dale and plain – the way it has in the past and the way no other country in South Asia allows you to, but there are many ways that the ambassadors could have confirmed the enthusiasm and participation in the first round, and there were thousands of poll observers in the field. A substantive press release rather than one emanating from a sense of loss of personal entitlement would have cited the importance of local elections after two decades of vacuum, that it will give rise to the birth of local political leadership. If a critique were required, how about the lack of women and Dalit candidates on the non-reserved seats, so that mistakes are not repeated in the second round?

The embassies could also have weighed in on the compromises made by the political parties and Election Commission to get to the first phase, and how internationally acceptable principles were diluted. Should we have announced the first phase results before the second phase? Is it correct to amend constitutional provisions relating to local level entities in midstream, between the two phases?

There will be sensitive subjects which the embassies may not broach or breach, but universal democratic electoral principles should surely be open to discussion. Say something, or say nothing. And one could sign off by suggesting that perhaps Nepal should be having public positions on elections being held, with far less turnout than our 73 percent, in the land of the triumph of Trump and the Brexit vote. (Smiley.)
From subjects to citizens
Reconnecting Nepalis with a democratic political process

For too long in Nepal, local-level needs have been set aside, first to cope with the insurgency during the 1990s and then to implement the transitional political process that followed the comprehensive peace accord in the late 2000s.

However, the aspiration of interest groups to be included in the formulation of political parties caused political instability in the country and its allies, and in the early parliamentary elections, the political parties were again set aside. Although political parties have a say in the country, the authority of the local government is not recognized. As a result, the people of Nepal have become disconnected from the local government, and the people of the country are not aware of the local government's role.

Over the past two decades, the distance between Kathmandu and the local government has been exacerbated by the alienation of Nepal from the country. From the division up among local party elites, it is clear that the alienation of Nepal from the country has caused political instability in the country, and the people of Nepal have become disconnected from the local government.

During the decade-long transitional period ending in September 2015, Nepal's new Constitution sought to ensure that all political parties have a say in the country, the political parties in the country, and the people of Nepal have become disconnected from the local government.

By George Varughese
Rebuilding together the cooperative way

When news of the earthquake in Nepal reached Jens Wasmund and Jørgen Thomasen in Denmark, their first thoughts were of a little village outside Patan where they had spent a year studying local architecture and society nearly 50 years ago. What had happened to their host families and the sleepy old village and its rows of clay-mortar houses with delicate roofs? What had happened to Nbüche Maya, the 15-year-old girl who had helped them in 1968?

When they reached Bungamati a few months after the earthquake, they saw that most of the old houses were destroyed or damaged, including Nbüche Maya’s three-storey clay brick home. “The village where we had spent a year studying and surveying in 1968 did not exist anymore,” recalls Thomsen.

Even before the earthquake, the Danes had been worried about the rapid, uncontrolled urbanisation that was eating into Bungamati’s charm and unique way of life. They felt the earthquake was an opportunity to rebuild better, while preserving the town’s original physical grammar. “Even till 2012 much of Bungamati’s traditional architecture was still intact, but after that new concrete blocks were replacing the old façades, and the earthquake has made everything worse,” says Thomsen. Borrowing from Denmark’s own urban renewal projects that preserve history and society, the two have come up with a Bungamati rehabilitation plan through cooperative housing.

The idea is to build two houses that will function as a single unit, with a communal staircase, shared bathroom and space for livestock in the yard. Each house will have five flats for rent. The houses will have traditional Newari façades, with earthquake secured corners. The use of wood will be minimised and replaced with steel rods and a concrete ring beam on each floor. A cooperative housing association will manage the project, including land acquisition and financing. Funding will be raised from private donors, investors, the buyers and as loans from banks. In a society that values private ownership, Thomasen and Wasmund know that convincing people to live in a space that they do not own will be difficult. But there is precedent in post-earthquake community housing projects, like Piläschten in Patan.

Now 72, Thomsen says as he walks Bungamati’s cobblestone streets: “We are here out of our love for this town and its people, but we know that this project cannot move forward without genuine and strong local ownership from the beginning.”

Sahina Shrestha
Nhuchhe Maya’s home

With a little help from her friends: 50 years later Danish architects return to help rebuild Bungamati

SAHINA SHRESTHA

On 25 April 2015, Nhuchhe Maya Shyakya was giving her grandnephew an oil massage when her house started shaking. Thinking it was another older grandnephew being mischievous, she didn’t give it much thought. But as the room started swaying, she heard her husband Buddha Ratna Shyakya shout from upstairs and the family ran down the stairs and out.

Buddha Ratna couldn’t make it out on time and the house collapsed on top of him. Their son ran to his rescue and although they saved him, he had horrendous injuries and is still paralysed. Only the ground floor of the three-storey house remains, and the extended family of 13 have lived separately in temporary shelters for two years.

“It feels like the earthquake not only took our house but separated the family,” says Nhuchhe Maya, 68. “I wish we could rebuild faster and live together once again.” Her three sons work as woodcarvers in a town known for its artisans. Although they are registered in the earthquake victims’ list, the family hasn’t received government aid because of delays in getting proper land titles.

Although the disaster separated Nhuchhe Maya’s Nepali family, it has brought help from far-off friends. Danish architects Jens Wærner and Jørgen Thomsen (pic, left) are raising Rs 500,000 to renovate the ground floor of the old house.

Wærner, Thomsen and six other architecture students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen had taken a year off from courses in 1968 to study Bungamati’s unique semi-urban heritage. They rented the house of Nhuchhe Maya’s father, Prem Lal Bare, and at 25 she ran errands for the Danish guests and showed them around town. She didn’t speak English, they didn’t speak Nepali, but they seemed to have no problems understanding each other.

In the past 50 years, every time the Danes visit Nepal, they make it a point to seek out Nhuchhe Maya and see how her family is doing. They have come back after the earthquake with a community renewal plan.

“I am happy that they still remember us and want to help us out,” says Nhuchhe Maya, who still remembers the names of all eight Danish students, and even their quirky habits.

Nhuchhe Maya’s family wants to rebuild with concrete because their traditional mud and brick building collapsed. But with limited income, rebuilding will take time. Says her son Bhaja Ratna: “If we rebuild in the old way, there will not be enough space for all of us. The family is growing and we all want to live together.”
Best years of their

Photo book about Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia could very well have been about Nepalis there

Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam’s book, The Best Years of My Life, helps us see through the numbing numbers about overseas migrant workers. The images humanise their hopes and hardships.

The statistics are staggering: an estimated 3 million Bangladeshi workers (65 per cent of them men) work in the Gulf, Malaysia and Europe, sending home $14 billion every year, making this a major source of revenue for the country of 161 million.

Although the earnings figures for Nepal are much less, the $6 billion in annual remittances sent home by an estimated 3 million Nepalis abroad form a much larger proportion of our population and economy – making the revenue equivalent to nearly a third of Nepal’s GDP.

The analysis of the macro trends of our migrant economies makes us forget the individual stories of the foot soldiers of this mass movement of people for work abroad.

Being a world class photographer with a social conscience, Shahidul Alam is perfectly placed to tell the stories of his compatriots, and has done so with expected sensitivity and empathy – focusing on the single biggest reason migrants migrate: to change their destiny.

Alam meets Bangladeshi migrant workers like Ali Hossain, who sells roses at intersections along the boulevards of Paris, Abdul Hossain (pictured above), who works in a Malaysian construction site, and follows Mamun as he flies out of Dhaka for the first time to a job the middleman promised in Malaysia. He meets officials at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, profile activist Gireesh Das, whose organisation Tanah Adu helps workers in trouble in Malaysia, and even gets an interview with former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad.

The pictures, words, tales of exploitation by agents, of trafficking, and of hopes for a better life are all wrenchingly familiar – we hear them all the time here about Nepali migrant workers.

It is the universal story of the rich and powerful taking advantage of the desperately poor and vulnerable. They can cheat and abuse with impunity because of weak and corrupt governments who are often in cahoots with the recruiting agencies. Even the Bangla word for manpower middlemen is the same as in Nepal: dilshad.

In Paris, Ali Hossain stops awhile to talk to Alam while sprinkling water on the roses he has packed in a bucket in his bathroom before heading out to...
Sunita Aryal has 10 years of expertise in cosmetology, but it is not recognized by Nepal’s education and training authority. The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CETTV) has granted her decade-long experience as Level 2, equivalent to higher secondary school by international standards.

“I have enough experience to get certified as Level 4 in technical education if we are to follow international standards. But we don’t have a proper grading system that recognizes my vocational education,” says Aryal. Another problem facing the 33-year-old beautician is lack of recognition for her Bachelor’s level studies in management, after which she switched to the vocational sector. She was not allowed to transfer those credits to technical education.

With more than 500,000 young men and women leaving for work abroad every year, Nepal is one of the major source countries in the international labour market. Through the proposed National Vocational Qualification Framework Authority (NVQFA), the government is working on a vocational qualification certification system to provide international recognition to technical and vocational education.

“I decided to go for jobs abroad again, I will be paid less as I don’t have proper recognition of my work. Sometimes I feel my efforts are being undervalued,” said Aryal, who runs a small beauty parlour. She has already worked as a cosmetologist in the UK for two years.

And trainer Dambar Bahadur Thapa is an aspiring migrant worker who wants to gain international experience. His CV to date is sufficient to qualify him for a skilled overseas job, even in the destination country, but he won’t get it because he lacks certification.

“Most Nepali migrant workers have trained and worked abroad, but they are not allowed to certify their skills because of our current legal framework,” says Thapa.

Professor Baburam Bhattarai agrees that the new framework would benefit people with technical skills looking to work abroad. But he sees big challenges in implementing the NVQF.

“The current system only goes up to Level 4. It doesn’t have the skills that allow credit transfers between general and vocational education,” Shreewuna Shrestha.

**Socio-political impact of migration**

The findings of a new study at the remittance economy link that migration, both in and out of the economy, has triggered various social and political changes in Nepal that have affected local policies and practices.

Impacts in the rural areas to remain the primary activity at Nepal’s economy. The research has identified that the core factors of return migration include social and political relations, poverty and discrimination.

Labour Migration and the Remittance Economy is published by the Center for the Study of Labour and Migration for the Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, and confirms that the role in political economy does not necessarily have an impact on community politics. The study found that how the migratory trend affected on how people are structured by their and family members.

“The findings of the study have helped the government to design policies that are more beneficial to migrant workers,” Sunita Aryal, a graduate in the NVQF certification system, a 10-year project focusing on the construction and hospitality sector.

“Nepal’s technical education is in dire need of regulation and international recognition,” says the NVQF’s Dinesh Dubey. “The new system will help people document their vocational skills and develop profiles.”

The proposed NVQF goes up to Level 8, equivalent to a PhD in formal education. The current system goes only up to Level 4. It has not certified the skills of 300,000 people, as per the research.

Prof Pramod Bahadur Shrestha agrees that the new framework would benefit people with technical skills looking to work abroad. But he sees big challenges in implementing the NVQF. This is an extremely ambitious goal for a developing country like Nepal as private and public employers, the key players, need to participate in the entire process.

Adopting the international system would require revamping the entire system with new foreign financing, acceptance of foreign training institutions, including with modern equipment. In order to provide vocational education equivalency to studies in general education, as Sunita Aryal’s Bachelor’s degree, Nepal’s Ministry of Education needs a fair and effective qualification framework that allows credit transfers between general and vocational education.

Shreewuna Shrestha
EVENTS

Barefoot Walkathon, Participate in a 60-minute Barefoot Walkathon to support education of children in the Kathmandu valley. 20 May, 7 am to 8 am, Mul Chowk to Basantapur. (01) 4425236, 9802188662

Poetry with Anil, Join for a night of poetry, comedy and performance with a guest non-conforming writer and entertainer Anil Vidya Memon. 22 May, 6pm onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, Pratapnagar Marg, Kathmandu. Rs 500, info@anilvidyamemon@gmail.com

Girls Futsal, Register your team for the first girl power futsal tournament organised by the Girls Power. 20 May, 8am to 6pm, Bheshjanpur Futsal. Kathmandu. Entry fee is Rs 5,000. (01) 4406563

Feminist Friday, Be part of the discussion on social and gender issues on the occasion of 70th anniversary of Nepal’s first elections. 19 May, 4 to 6pm, Trishul Maya Kendra, Patan Dohar. Entry free.

Watch Ma, This exhibition by Ryan Elisabeth Reid features photography, video and textile installations, including a post-modern dance workshop based on the experience of multi-generational women from Nepal. 19 to 20 May, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Budhanilkantha. Rsv’d, 9845579922. info@anishdavidphotography.com, cct.geetan@ymail.com

Tribute night, Exhibit 97 will be playing 15 heavy metal songs as a tribute to Iron Maiden. 3 June, 2 to 6pm, People Have Rock Bar, Thamel. Ticket, Rs 500 (before) Rs 550 (after)

Musician Night, Enjoy live music by Mumbai-based duo Sompal & Rani Mahto, with the display of artwork urban artists from Nepal. 19 May, 6 to 10pm, Friends Restaurant, Thamel. (01) 4790663

Miss Motivation, Kripa Joshi, "Over every mountain there is a path, although it may not be seen from the valley."

Acoustic Friday, Top of the lists of acoustic and rock by KrumApra. Nepali. 19 May, 7 to 10 pm, Wicked Spoon Fork & Rock, Thamel. 9841781865

Acoustic Friday, Top of the lists of acoustic and rock by KrumApra. Nepali. 19 May, 7 to 10 pm, Wicked Spoon Fork & Rock, Thamel. 9841781865

Kashmiri Feast, Step in for scrumptious Kashmiri starters (8 veg and 7 non-veg items). In a series of promotions, authentic Kashmiri delicacies, patrons and caregivers can enjoy rich mutton, mutton ragi, gajar ka halwa and many more. Till 28 May, 7pm onwards, Soobe Crown Plaza, (01) 4773999

Landmark Forest Park, Eco-friendly resort that offers safari packages. Beach and breakfast at Rs 4,000 per Pax per night. Chitwan. (06) 5837211, 9851052453

Shivapuri Cottage, Escape the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food and fresh air. Shivapuropalaya, 9841787327

Khajane Hal, Enjoy the beauty of nature and a peaceful weekend. Perfect for biggies, families and family gatherings. Dhekchoke, (01) 4625232, 9851781489

Famous Farm, Wake up to the sounds of crying birds and a fresh morning zombie walking in through the azalea field. Kawad, (01) 4747878, srijadwurHeritage.com

Milla Guesthouse, If you prefer the Guesthouse, and are in a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not far away from the city, yet miles away. Bhaktapur. 9815707317

Club Himalaya, For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend escapades, special package available. Nagarkot, 9841402162

The Last Resort, Embrace nature and rest your limits with canyoning, kayaking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking and bungee jumping. Bhadaga, Sindupalchok, (01) 4980535/24747
Fine dining on Phewa’s shore

Dunga met all our needs after a week on the trekking trail

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Culminarily speaking, Pokhara always amazes, and especially after a long trek with dal bhat as staple. Because of this, Phewa’s restaurants offer a spectacular view of the lake, or guests can dine facing the busy street and people-watch.

We decided to sit in the middle section of the first floor, facing the bar, where we could breathe fresh air as well as listen to the live music. Settled into our comfortable chairs, we quickly decided to satisfy the carnivorous cravings developed during our week-long trek to Annapurna Base Camp with pork chops and Dunga Special Trout Salad. Both were winners. We had been seeking out tasty pork chops for a long time and the well-barbecued ones here were succulent. (The smell of raw meat had been one of the reasons we had kept our meals at other restaurants). Served with boiled seasonal vegetables and French fries, the portion was ample for the price (Rs 620).

Recommended by our host, Dunga’s trout salad (Rs 430) delighted our palettes. It was simple yet satisfying: an amalgamation of home-made noodles, fresh lettuce, oven-baked trout, fillets, gherkins, charred onions, pickled ginger and cucumber, mixed with miso sauce. Somehow ARC seemed very far away.

Extremely happy with the first two dishes, we sought to satisfy our thirst with cocktails, ordering a watermelon martini (Rs 450) and passion refresher (Rs 350) for a dining-in-ascension experience. Both drinks with their vodka base had a watermelon. We were tasting the passion refresher for the first time, and the mix of passion fruit syrup, lime juice, egg white and pineapple juice gave us a tingle. The bartender rocks.

We ordered chicken parigiana (Rs 580) to go with our cocktails thinking that it would do justice as a pub-food classic, but but the dish turned out to be just pieces of crumbed chicken breast topped with mozzarella cheese.

Aside from that, Dunga was full of tasty treats with a service to match. While service in some well-known restaurants in Pokhara tend to be lackadaisical, at Dunga the bar seems to have been set high for service — starting with the smart uniforms of white shirt, black pants and waist coats.

We received our food within minutes of placing orders, possibly because the restaurant has two kitchens: the one on the ground floor cooking continental and the upper floor serving Nepali and Indian food. Thanks to the open kitchen concept, customers can inspect the construction process.

Dunga ticks all the right boxes. No wonder it has become one of the most popular new on Lakeside after just three months of opening.

World-class ambience, great food and service make this place deserving of a visit.
The highly anticipated “Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2” is here in cinemas, and it is pretty good: net as eternally memorable as the first film from 2014 that spawned hope in all of our hearts about mainstream cinema’s potential but still, by today’s standards, not bad at all.

**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pandey

HAPPENINGS

Every vote counts: Health Minister Gagan Thapa of the NC cast his vote from Makawanpur in Kathmandu during the first phase of local elections on Sunday.

Ceylon tea party: President Bidya Devi Bhandari attends a tea reception hosted by Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena at his official residence in Colombo on Monday.

Adding it all up: Officials start laying roses at Kathmandu Metropolis at City Hall on Monday, amidst mounting criticism about the pace of the course.

Hail to the chief: Chief of Army Staff Rajendra Oli inspect a Nepal Army Guard of Honour at Tribhuvan International Airport on Wednesday before flying to the US.

Being human: “My brother is now my sister, and I love her very much,” said Kusik Kapi at a ceremony at UN House to mark International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia and International Family Equality Day, on Wednesday.
Dalit candidates in running
Disenfranchised women in Saptari encourage other women to run in elections

MINA SHARMA
in SAPTARI

As per the new Constitution, 6,680 Dalit women will be elected in the current local polls — a significant achievement for this group, who have been discriminated against for decades. CPN-UML deputy mayor candidate of Surunga Municipality, Silam Kumari Parswan, 24, describes this as an historic opportunity. “Dalit women are ignorant about their rights; we should inform them, and I will encourage them to fight for justice.”

She adds: “Very few in the Dalit community are literate. I am currently doing my Bachelors. Many people in my community do not understand Nepali. The fact that lower-caste people need to tolerate discrimination or untouchability has been wedged in their mind.”

Likewise, 60-year-old Ramrati Sada, a Dalit ward candidate representing the Nepali Congress says: “Dalits have neither land nor citizenship. They are oblivious to acquiring birth, marriage or death certificates. Dalit students struggle in the Nepali language despite being in school for 5 years.”

Sada’s election promises include creating a conducive environment to ensure enrolment of Dalit children in schools. She has already served as a ward member and says she doesn’t suffer discrimination but members of her community do. “It breaks my heart to see how badly they are treated.”

Nepali Congress ward member candidate of Surunga-7, Shanti Devi Mandal, says: “The time has come for us to provide justice, not beg for it.”

According to the 2011 census, 19 out of the 26 Dalit castes live in the Tarkari and they are often victims of caste-based discrimination and ostracism. Dalit women now see local elections as a way to escape from discrimination and untouchability.

Rather than promising monopolies and highways, Dalit women candidates are raising social issues, including sharing meals together with so-called upper classes, permission to enter temples and enroling Dalit children in schools.

Shiva Shanker Das was killed for having an inter-caste affair six years ago. Sheriv Ram of Deuri village was instigated for sitting with upper caste people during a feast. Many believe things like this will happen less after local elections result in greater representation of Dalits.

Manasa Devi, 21, of Harper is campaigning day and night for a Dalit candidate even though she is not a voter and doesn’t even have a citizenship certificate, like 20 other Khatwe women of her neighbourhood. She applied for citizenship but was denied it by the district administration office (DAO), which cited lapses in the recommendation from the VDC.

Despite being married for four years, Mamata’s in-laws aren’t bothered about providing her the necessary papers. She is compelled to get help from other people to receive the money sent by her husband, who is working overseas.

Mamata is campaigning because she thinks she can get citizenship once a Dalit candidate is elected. “People of higher caste do not support us. Therefore, there has to be someone from our community to understand our problems,” she says.

Married for the last five years, Manisha Devi Mandal, 23, also doesn’t have citizenship because her marriage was never registered. She blames her husband and in-laws for not paying attention to registration. Without citizenship, she can’t vote.

“It will be easy for me to get all these things done if Shanti Devi Mandal gets elected since she understands my problem,” she says. Mamata Khatwa, 20, has neither a marriage certificate nor a citizenship certificate. “I talked to my in-laws but in vain,” she said. Similarly, 23-year-old Lalita Mandal of Suranga has made up her mind to get her citizenship once her husband returns from Malaysia. She wants it not only so she can vote in the next election, but to be a candidate.

Dalit activist Bhola Parswan says the role of Dalit women to date was limited to clapping during campaign speeches. “Now they are taking to leadership so their voices are heard,” he said.

Compared to untouchability, the citizenship issue is trickier for Dalit women because they don’t know how to work the system in the DAO and do not get much help from in-laws. Lack of literacy and language issues add to the problem.

“Only a woman can understand a woman’s problem,” says candidate Shanti Devi Mandal. “That is why I am standing for election.”

Surendra Sah of the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal is not surprised that Dalits are being discriminated against: “When literate Madhesis are discriminated against by the state, what can an illiterate Madhosi Dalit expect?”

Centre for investigative journalism
Nepali Radio, Nepali Awaz

Two decades on, South Asia’s pioneer community radio keeps defending its founding values of a public service broadcaster

OM ASTHA RAI

When South Asia’s first community radio went on air in Kathmandu in May 1997, Nepal was electing representatives to VDCs, IDDCs and municipalities in the midst of a war that had just started. Democracy, development and the free press were under threat.

It had taken four years of relentless lobbying to get Radio Sagarmatha broadcasting on 102.4 FM, the first ever challenger to the state monopoly of the airwaves. This month, as the station marks its 20th anniversary, Nepal is once again electing representatives to self-governing local structures under the new Constitution.

Radio Sagarmatha soon gained popularity for its fresh new sound and trustworthy bulletins, as the war spread quickly across the country. The royal government used the conflict as an excuse to cancel or postpone local elections in 2002, and three years later staged a military coup when it gagged Sagarmatha and other new FM stations that had sprung up.

Throughout it all, Radio Sagarmatha kept broadcasting, circumventing government restrictions on news by camouflaging current affairs bulletins between songs. Successive governments have since realised that the Nepali people believe strongly in an open society, and are willing to defend democracy by protecting their right to information.

In the absence of locally-elected representatives in the past two decades, it was community radio that helped keep democracy alive, which would have been difficult had the Doordarshan for radio not been opened by Sagarmatha.

“Radio Sagarmatha sparked Nepal’s radio revolution, it was a landmark not just for Nepal but the whole region,” recalls Bharat Datta Koirala, who was present at the 2002 Maganayak Award for his tireless lobbying to get the radio its license. Koirala, now 75, is still active in promoting public broadcasting.

After the National Communications Policy 1992 paved the way for public broadcasting, Koirala led a team of freedom of information activists to register South Asia’s first community radio. A year later, Parliament passed a bill to allow community ownership of radio, but the information bureaucracy was reluctant to let go of the state monopoly on broadcasting.

Despite more intense lobbying, the license had to wait for Pushpa Khanal of the UML to become information minister in 1997. Sagarmatha’s parent organisation, the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), got the permit, but with a proviso that it could not broadcast news.

Frequently modulated

The establishment of Radio Sagarmatha in 1997 ended the monopoly of state-owned Radio Nepal, and there was hope the country’s airwaves would be independent and dedicated to public service. The community radio revolution launched by Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu and Radio Madanpurkhar in Palpa initially lived up to this ideal.

But soon, just as with every sphere of national life like health and education, radio also got hijacked by commercial or political interests, sometimes both.

“We have deviated from the original philosophy of community radio as a public service. Most stations are not local anymore, they are commercial or overtly political,” says Bishal Rimal, 90, who till recently used to run a daily program on Radio Sagarmatha.

The most glaring recent example of politicians abusing community radio was during the five-month Tarai strike, when FM radio broadcast inflammatory hate speech. Some community FM stations in Birganj exhorted people to join protests by spreading rumours that police spat and urinated on the corpses of those killed in demonstrations. Radio had become communal, instead of being community-owned.

The Nepal Press Council warned FM stations to adhere to the code of conduct, but the watchdog is also run by political appointees, and it lacked the will to take action.

Aleys Yadav of Birganj-based

699

licenses for radio stations since 1997. Map shows locations of just the community radio stations.

Over 400 FM stations.

45 in Kathmandu Valley alone.

295 community FM are members of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACARB).

170 community FM are members of the Broadcasting Association of Nepal (BAN).

35 Kathmandu Valley commercial FM with the Radio Broadcasters Forum (RBF).
Radio Sagarmatha is celebrating its 20th anniversary next week. Watch a video and listen to the founders like Bharat Koirala (pictured) and radio journalists speak about their initial struggle to register the station in 1997.

Follow us as we take you on a tour of Radio Sagarmatha where studio hosts this week were busy preparing programs in Nepali, Newari and Tamang languages.

Working at 102.4

Everyone has a pet memory from their early careers, and for me that is the time I served as a reporter at Radio Sagarmatha. I was just 18.

I was an exciting time, and we all knew we were making history just by being associated with South Asia’s first community radio station. There was an immense sense of self-fulfillment that came with having a job that fit perfectly with my idealism.

I was fresh out of journalism and went to radio, but we had meteors who did not just teach us the art of radio journalism, but also inspired us with their commitment and passion to the pioneering project. I used to be both nervous and hesitant to attempt to approach people on the busy streets of Kathmandu with these big old-fashioned recorders and microphones for my vox pop interviews.

I was assigned to the brick factory in Bhaktapur, the marble quarry in Gosainkund, every corner of the valley searching for hidden stories and sound bites.

I have interviewed hundreds of eminent Nepal for our profile segment in the flagship ‘Jholina Pamda’ program, which became immensely popular. We used to work 18 hours a day, but never got tired, even when I survived on dried noodles. Sometimes we would not be paid, but that did not matter because I was learning more at Sagarmatha than at any university. It was when people didn’t know a thing.

Sangita Marhatta worked as a program producer at Radio Sagarmatha (1997-2000).
Nepal elects Hitler

Her Hitler Shakes is Unsce of Lallitpur Ward No because most people put the swastika on him. It appears that people with first names Stalin, Lenin, Mao, Mussolini, Pol Pot, and Darth Vader all voted for him. A new Nepali movie named (what else?) Hitler with Shakti Manandhar, Menaka Pedradal et al is being released on 17 May. It is not a historical biopic of the fall of the Third Reich, but shot on location with fight scenes at Rara Lake. Meanwhile, the Election Commission has expedited vote counting as there is a good chance Ranjit Dhakal could be Mayor of Kathmandu in her Lifetime. In Bharatpur, First Dotlu Rezu Dahi has insisted all ballot papers for the NC Mayoral candidate should be counted as hers since Daddy Dez has made a pact with Dubby Uncle. The new party is called Nepal Communist Party (Centrist). Furthermore, the Once-Royal Nepal Embassy in Washington DC has brought its much-awaited press release on the landmark presidential elections in the United States last year. Here is the full text of the statement:

Nepal Statement on the U.S. Presidential Elections

WASHINGTON DC — Nepal recognises the start by all political parties in the United States, including the majority party's candidate, Donald Trump, and candidates in contesting what appears to be a fair and free election. The country next year's presidential election.

Before going, Gomas獨立 would think that the two-year period that follows the U.S. presidential campaign is the period in which the world needs an immediate American President. All efforts should be undertaken by the international community as well as the American people to engage in creating a more viable society, based on the principles of the electoral process, and make America Great Again.

Not to be outdone, 12A Kensington Garden has also issued a statement about the forthcoming U.K. elections:

Nepal Statement on U.K. Elections

We do not want to comment on the proposals at this stage of preparations for the upcoming U.K. elections since it's Nepal's policy not to comment on the internal affairs of another country, but we will do it the same way and call the fish and chips both of them may say. We absolutely insist that the necessary actions are taken to ensure that people who want to separate from Britain, and those who want Britain to stay, are able to separate from Europe all get their voice. We don't want to discuss with who gets what, but we take advantage of an opportunity to do what they believe is the best for them and the country.