Election in instalments

The good news is that the much-delayed second phase of local elections will be held on 28 June itself. The bad news is that voting will take place in Province 2 only after the monsoon.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, under pressure from the Madhesi-based RJPN, once more asked Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav if the polls could be put off again. Yadav replied: “It will be a political and electoral disaster.”

Yadav added that the EC is prepared for 28 June, the Home Ministry is ready to provide security, and delaying local polls will make it difficult to hold provincial and parliamentary elections before January 2018. Deuba just listened, and did not push Yadav to agree. After he left the EC office, an election commissioner told Nepali Times: “Looking at the PM’s body language, I could tell that he had already made up his mind to delay polls, at least in Province 2.”

Two hours later, PM Deuba persuaded the Madhes-based RJPN to not obstruct polls in Province 1, 9 and 7 to return for rescheduling elections in Province 2 for a fourth time. But it is uncertain if the RJPN will participate in polls even on the new date. “Postponing elections is not a solution, amending the Constitution is,” says Tula Narayan Sah, a Madhesi rights activist.

The RJPN is pushing for amending the Constitution on issues like provincial boundaries, language and citizenship. The ruling coalition has already tabled an amendment bill that largely addresses Madhesi demands, but it has been rejected by the main opposition UML.

The UML slammed the government’s decision to delay polls in Province 2, arguing that it will create a psychological divide between people from the hills and the Terai. Due to the UML’s stance on the amendment, some of its Madhesi supporters have defected to Terai-centric parties. But the UML knows its prime base is made up of hill settlers and mixed communities along the East-West Highway.

“We are taking a stand against the amendment because it is not a Madhesi agenda,” says Raj Kumar Gupta, a UML MP from Parsa. “The RJPN is using the amendment as an excuse to delay polls because they know they are weak and will be defeated.”

The RJPN has bought more time to deal with intra-party rift, organize itself and probably emerge as a big party in Province 2. But it has missed an opportunity to contest elections in other provinces and rise as a truly national party.

In the RJPN’s absence, Upendra Yadav’s FSNP and Bijaya Gaikwad’s Nepal Democratic Forum have better electoral prospects in other provinces, and will probably defeat the RJPN in Province 2 as well. ✎

Om Astha Rai
BLOCKADING QATAR

Out of every 20 people you meet on the street in Qatar, 18 are from Nepal. The country’s native population numbers only 333,000, and there are more than 3.3 million of whom 400,000 are Nepalis. In the last fiscal year alone, 130,000 Nepalis went to Qatar, and the numbers were increasing – till last week.

On June 5, 445 Nepalis were evacuated, a deal permits to Qatar by the Foreign Employment Department. Two days later, after Qatar was blocked, on June 7 only 15 permits were issued. Although the government has not officially banned Nepalis from going to Qatar, many employers were getting ready to fly back to Doha, fearing they’d end up sitting on the airport. Those who had already booked flights on the flights to Kathmandu via stopovers in the NRT or other Asian airports were also facing similar hurdles.

The exodus of Nepali workers abroad has increased after the 2015 earthquake as many affected families needed to earn to rebuild their homes. But the impact of the Indian blockade was far more devastating – as investments dwindled, jobs became scarce because of the economic growth plummeted to zero. Nepal’s economy is only limping back to normal.

Ironically, Nepal, who essentially fled an Indian blockade of their country, are now having to face a Saudi-led embargo of Qatar. In many ways, the siege of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, UAE, and their allies is much more serious: it is a land, sea, and airspace blockade. Food and other essentials, which used to be trucked into Qatar from Saudi and UAE, has been hit by Nepalis, drivers, have been stopped at the border.

With Maldives, Qatar is the most popular destination for Nepalese workers overseas. Official annual remittances from countries other than India topped Rs7.7 billion last year and of this, 17% was from Qatar. It is a popular destination not just because it is the richest country in the world per capita, but because of the relative ease with which visas and work permits can be organised. Also, despite negative media coverage, workers there have relatively better protection now. There is also a preference among Qatari employers for unskilled Nepali workers, who are regarded as being more docile. Indians make up the largest numbers of expat workers in Qatar, and Bangladeshis is the fastest growing source country for labour.

If the crisis drags on, Nepal is likely to lose job opportunities to just decreasing numbers of workers going to Qatar. A regional fund was established that the estimated 780,000 other Nepalis in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE would also be affected. Oil prices are already showing volatility and this would affect Nepal’s petroleum imports from the Indian Oil Corporation, which sources its gas and crude from Qatar and other Gulf countries.

Nepal’s economic diplomacy in the Gulf, especially Qatar, needs to get into high gear to help other Asian countries and other Asian nations in need.

The situation in Nepal is much more serious: it is a land, sea, and airspace blockade. Food and other essentials, which used to be trucked into Qatar from Saudi and UAE, has been hit by Nepalis, drivers, have been stopped at the border.

#863

GUEST EDITORIAL

BISHNU RIJAL

Warning bells from the Gulf

Perhaps few other peoples in the world feel the pain of being poor and jobless as much as Nepalis. If there is conflict anywhere in the world, Nepalis are impacted right away, not because they are numbers-murdering brigades in Iraq, Libya erasing into conflict, another attack in Afghanistan, or the battle on Kargil. It is the bodies of Nepalis that are sent in secret funerals back home. It would be surprising, therefore, if the current crisis in Qatar did not affect us.

The siege being blocked by its Arab neighbours over various allegations: its frenzies of dream operators at Al Jazeera support its territory, it helps the Islamic State and the Islamic Brotherhood, and that Qatar allowed the Taliban to open an office in Doha. As the heart of the dispute is the Shia-Sunni divide between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and a power struggle for control of West Asia.

Whatever the case, it is up to the Arab states in the region to resolve their problems peacefully. The most relevant question for us is what a Nepal does to reduce the impact on our economy from tension in that area of the world where so many Nepalis work. Are we doing all we can to persuade the world to talk things over? Are we listening to the people when they say, ‘Take a walk before you jump’?

We don’t care about passports and visas, but also because there is no language barrier. The prospect of higher earnings has, however, attracted them to the Gulf and the remittances they send home pays up our economy. It is clear that we need a long-term strategy to reduce our dependence on migration, create viable governments and build a robust state structure. We have none of these three attributes. We have no real plans in place to create jobs within Nepal.

Our economy is not poor; we cannot even spend the money we have. We pay out more administrative costs than an investment. How can we create jobs if we fritter away more than 20% of the annual development budget output?

We are embroiled in politics, and haven’t been able to make political change into economic transformation. If we can mobilise our resources and manpower for large infrastructure projects, Nepal’s labourer would have to migrate for services we need. We are working on that from today itself.

Bishnu Rijal is an editor and commentator.

SAVING ENERGY

It looks good in paper but there are other ways to make electricity an user less dependent on NEA. It’s how to avoid power cuts this winter. Shreemaya Shrestha (982).

We have to find ways to make daytime solar energy not just more day guide. With light bulbs, handpumps to keeping running silently a heavy load to get it first period. There should be more for cheaper and local solutions to save power.

Arunash

16 - 22 JUNE 2017

#863

GUEST EDITORIAL

BISHNU RIJAL

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Bishnu Rijal is an editor and commentator.
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Landlocked mindset
Nepal should wake up to the reality that it has rights and responsibilities regarding the high seas

ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

He was Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay, and while Nepal's Permanent Representative to the United Nations at a time when the country had a far higher international profile that it has now, he was involved as key negotiator in the talks that evolved into the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Besides Nepal, the flamboyant Upadhyay represented the landlocked and least developed countries at the negotiations, which led to the Convention being ultimately signed in 1982, coming into force in 1994.

Nepal's road to transit gained sudden prominence when the KP Oli government inked agreements in Beijing for third country access via China in March 2016, and there may come a time when this route becomes viable. However, for now, and given the proximity to the Bay of Bengal, the transit route is important for the passage it allows to Calcutta, Haldia, Vishakhapatnam, or even India to the Bangladesh ports of Mongla and Chittagong.

However, Nepal's interest in the Law of the Sea should go far beyond transit rights. Yes, access to ports allows Nepal to import and export goods, but the law of the Sea means so much more that. By now, there should have been vibrant Nepal scholarship on how Nepal as a country can take advantage of the high seas and deep oceans as the common heritage of humankind.

But we remain locked in "landlocked mindset," acting as if discussion and decisions on the high seas, including those relating to "your" Indian Ocean, are reserved for the littoral states. At the very least, Nepal should be facilitating discussion among the landlocked countries of South Asia, convening meetings with Afghans and Bhutan to develop a joint position.

UNCLOS, which represents a largely successful effort to codify as well as evolve customary law regarding the oceans, provides a graded level of rights and obligations to the littoral states, through territorial waters of 12 nautical miles off the coast, to the Contiguous Zone of 24 nm, and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nm, including the Continental Shelf. However, the Convention, in terms of passage, resources and environment, 'the high seas are open to all states, whether coastal or landlocked'.

Thus, the opportunities as well as the obligations that apply to the open seas apply to Nepal. These include the possibility of being a "flag nation" plying ships in the oceans, with Chitwanag or Calcutta as home ports (though it could be anywhere else). Incidentally, the Panchayat era did see Nepal launch the Royal Nepal Shipping Corporation and one ship (named after the queen of King Prithvi Narayan) was purchased, but the project sunk.

The oceans as world heritage, covering two-thirds of the globe's surface area, are suddenly being weakened and depleted, before landlocked countries like Nepal have even woken up to the promise of UNCLOS. The extreme dangers include over-fishing in all the oceans, as well as the catastrophic spread of plastic and other wastes. Nepal acts as if none of this is of its concern.

There is today an active push to exploit the deep ocean floor for minerals, a sensitive matter on which Kathmandu must take keen interest and have a point of view. It should be active in the various bodies born of UNCLOS, including the International Seabed Authority, even as the exploitation of the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian ocean floor gathers steam, not to forget the Arctic and the Atlantic regions.

Nepal should not remain content speaking on behalf of high mountains alone. It must become vocal on all aspects of use of the high seas, including transport, pollution, seafood/fisheries, seabed mining, security. There is no reason not to do it, and Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay would have approved.

Postscript: Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay (Shah) was an unconventional politician, who started out as a Communist but turned - around to join the Panchayat regime of King Mahendra. Over the years, he was rewarded with a string of important assignments, including foreign minister. Upadhyay followed the footsteps of Rashikesh Shah in providing dynamic presence in New York as Nepal's Permanent Representative to the United Nations between 1972-1978. Ever the maverick, in deep retirement at age 82 he trained to climb Mount Everest, and he died in the attempt on 9 May 2011. One day in about October 1968, while walking out of the UN General Assembly building where I worked as press officer of the UN Secretariat, Foreign Minister Upadhyay was coming the other way. We chatted, standing there on the kath, and I informed him of my plan resign the job and move back to Nepal. His answer is etched in my memory: "Kanak, don't leave the sun for the shade."
Nepal—watching from Delhi

Is there really a shift in India’s approach to election and amendment in Nepal?

There is heightened expectation in New Delhi that the government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba will tackle its concerns about consensus-building on the Constitution and addressing the grievances of the marginalized, especially the Madhesis.

India backed the power-sharing pact and urged Delhi to support Deuba’s predecessor, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, to stick to his agreement to step down in nine months and not break the NC to seek UML support.

Deuba’s immediate challenge, as perceived here, is to keep the coalition intact and subsequently conduct provincial and national level elections by January 2018. But there is concern that the rift within the NC rank and file could derail the transition process.

“Deuba is in an unique position to address the issues confronting the Madhes and hold elections by bringing everyone together even if that means postponing the second phase. Otherwise, there will be deepening conflict in the Tarai, even the rise of secessionists,” one academic here said.

Deuba underlined three priorities after taking office last week: implement the Constitution, accommodate Madhesi groups and push development. Since then, his government has had four bilateral dialogues with the Indian side: Prime Minister Narendra Modi called to congratulate him immediately after he took over; External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj spoke with her counterpart; and the Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu, Manoj Kumar Singh, met Deuba and his Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara this week (reported).

Sources here say that they were given “credible assurances” the Madhes-based parties can be persuaded to take part in elections with the Maoists and NC together and must support in Parliament to push for amendments. India will also urge Deuba to implement the three-party agreement between the SMM and other parties signed in August 2016, just before Dahal took office.

New Delhi is said to be wary of how Deuba will handle Nepal’s relations with China. He is expected to engage with Beijing after his predecessor endorsed and signed China’s Belt and Road Initiative in his last few days in office. It will be a tricky balancing act for Deuba in the post-Belt and Road period when China has stepped up its economic investment and influence in Nepal.

Sources in New Delhi downplayed reports in a section of the Indian media that there has been a shift in New Delhi’s position vis-a-vis Madhesi policies in Nepal. The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu was said to have urged Madhesi leaders to drop the demand for amendments to the Constitution and participate in the second phase of local polls. They said this was a “misapprehension” and that India still insist on constitutional amendments. It could be that the Indian establishment is urging the UPA to go for elections in the face of a threat of its political marginalization, with an eye on warding off agitation.

India did not strongly or seriously support Madhesi policies initially, and only realized its importance after Nepal became a federal democratic republic. New Delhi wanted a compromise amendment with the UKP government, and later with Dahal, to fit its blockades, and only supported the deal hesitantly, as it perceived Madhesi leadership as weak and divided.

In that sense, there could be a soft shift in the way India perceives local elections in Nepal. However, sources here say there has been no change in India’s belief that the Tarai is important to gain influence in Nepal, a country it sees slipping out of its sphere of influence.

The united statement by the Indian leadership stresses that India supports all initiatives by Nepal to move the new Constitution inclusion by taking into account the aspirations of disaffected communities, adding that it encourages dialogue and consultation among the political stakeholders in Nepal to ensure a broad-based political consensus and stability.

Akashya Shah is a Nepali journalist based in New Delhi. This is the first of her new Nepal Times column, DEL-KTM.
École Française Internationale de Katmandou turns 30

Nepali Times Why a French School in Kathmandu? Joel Keller: Some parents and teachers in Kathmandu felt that it was important for the French community in Nepal to offer French education to their children and to promote French language and culture with French style education here in Nepal. As most of the French families live in Nepal for a few years and then return to their home country, it was important to make sure that children could be integrated into the French education system wherever they went next, including those who returned to France.

Given your growth, it seems the need is even greater today. Indeed, the need is even greater today and this trend continues. The French-speaking community in Nepal continues to grow as do families who value a multilingual education in an internationally accredited program. Families from Britain, US, India, China, Canada, Japan have also joined our school. We now teach children from age 2-15, with 70 students of more than 15 nationalities. 30% are French, 3% Nepali and the rest are from various nationalities. Only 30% of our students are French and 10% are French-speaking students from Canada, Belgium, or Switzerland. Our objective is not to attract only French-speaking students but various nationalities in a French-style education. Our core values remain the same: education with a family spirit. We now offer a CNEED (Centre National d’Enseignement International) program, which is a semi-structured distance education program.

Where do your alumni end up? As the International French School of Kathmandu is part of the Agency for the French Education Abroad (AEEF), an official French network of about 500 French schools all over the world, students can join other schools when they finish their education. We offer language certification (both in French and English) to make sure that our students can be admitted in different systems without any difficulties. Our alumni are in France but also in India, USA, UK and elsewhere.

What has been your experience with students of Nepali parents? The school has attracted increasing numbers of Nepali students in recent years. We have had Nepali parents who speak fluent French and those who don't speak much. Children are amazing and quickly learn the French language. We are delighted that Nepali families are interested in a multilingual education.

What are the advantages of studying in French for Nepalis? Studying in a French school is not only about learning the French language, it is also about participating in a French-style education: respect for age-appropriate development, quality of teaching, individualised support and openness to the world are major priorities of our school. The teaching team and all employees of the school focus on the children’s progress in all areas. Therefore, for Nepali families willing to give the best education to their children and the possibility of following higher studies abroad, International French School of Kathmandu is a fantastic option. Fees in French universities are about 10 times cheaper than in UK or USA. The French language is also an asset to work in an international context. More than 300 million people all over the world speak French, which is the second international language after English.

What are some of the extracurricular activities you offer? During school hours, we offer swimming, rock climbing and other sports. After classes, we teach pottery, sewing, judo, badminton, football, thangka painting, cooking, origami, music, theatre, photography, etc. We also take students on field trips within the Kathmandu Valley or outside to Chitwan or Bandipur to discover Nepal culture and enjoy outdoor activities.

Do you plan to help other schools with French? French is offered in some schools, but it would be fantastic if more schools also did so. We have not supported French language classes outside, but plan to establish partnerships with Nepali schools and share more about French and French culture.
Charismatic Nikita

During the conflict years, Miss Nepal pageants were constantly threatened by underground Maoist guerrillas, and there used to be arson attacks outside the venue. Maoist leaders issued statements saying that they were against the ‘commercialisation and commodification of the feminine body by international multinationals sponsoring the events.

Eleven years after the war ended, this year’s Miss Nepal pageant was held while the Supreme Commander of those guerrillas was prime minister, and the venue of the former Miss Nepal contests is now the Parliament building.

Criticism of the Miss Nepal event is now muted, and restricted to a few outraged op-eds by gender activists. One such piece in Swayambhunath last week by Shubhiti Gautam dissected the premise of ‘beauty’ contests, of stereotyping and patriarchy.

The glamour industry is marketing the female body, parading women in swimwear on a stage and calling it empowerment,’ Gautam wrote. ‘Beauty pageants are the starkest examples of the commodification of a woman’s body, it shows how little families, society and the contestants themselves know about personality development, and their mistaken belief that such pageants empower them.’

However, the selection of Nikita Chandak as Miss Nepal last week was unexpected because of what many deemed to be her unconventional looks; the fact that she was not ‘tall’, and that this was the first time a person from the Marwari community and a Tamil resident was selected. The trolling on social networking sites proved that it is perhaps society’s notions about stereotyping and beauty that need to change rather than beauty pageants themselves.

Chandak, for her part, seemed unfazed by the uproar, refused to be drawn into the debate, and kept an upbeat, positive outlook on her win. She told me: ‘I believe positivity leads to happiness and when people are happy and have self-esteem they are naturally beautiful. I believe in tolerance, respecting everyone, being compassionate towards all.’

Chandak became a contender for the Miss Nepal contest by chance. The 20-year-old from Morang, who is pursuing a BBA degree in New Delhi, had come to Nepal to take part in a fashion show in January. She was approached by the organisers, who were impressed with her self-assured personality, to enter the Miss Nepal contest.

Chandak started developing an interest in modelling while she was still in high school, but because she came from a conservative Marwari family in which no one had ventured into the profession before, it wasn’t easy for her to talk to her parents about it. But when she did, she found them to be very supportive, and she has since appeared on many catwalks in Pune and Kerala Fashion Week in India.

“My win was mostly possible due to the support of my family,” says Chandak, who impressed the judges and audiences with her poise and confidence. The warm response she got during the Marwari celebration of Maha Shivratri the day after being crowned was confirmation for her that attitudes within her community towards the entertainment industry are changing.

“There is a minimum participation of our community in showbiz. In that sense, my win is in itself a big deal,” she says.

The Miss Nepal crown has also given Chandak an opportunity to represent her tribe and abroad and she wants to use social media to reach Nepalis all over the world. As part of her preparation for the forthcoming Miss World pageant, she plans to learn more about the experiences of previous Nepali participants.

For the future, Chandak has her eyes set firmly on a film career once she finishes her studies. And for the Nepali public, notwithstanding criticism, Chandak has proven through her win that Miss Nepal itself has become more inclusive.

Sahila Shrestha
Not catching the

Even before children have learnt to read or write,

CLASSROOM WITH A VIEW: Children at the Modern Model School in Lal village of Kaliakot (above) where trained teachers are trying to shift the mode of instruction away from traditional one evening.

The school playground (left) from where the other government schools are visible in Kaliakot. On the far ridge is the Kotho market, which was finally completed after being under construction for 32 years. But there are no flights yet, and the remote district is now connected by a highway to Sukhet.

PRAJEET BAJPAI

If you pick the right spot in Lal village and look east, you can see five schools dotted across these rugged and scenic mountains of mid-western Nepal. Clearly, Kaliakot does not lag behind in education because of the lack of schools. It is poor teaching at pre-primary and primary levels that sets back a new generation of school-goers from the start, affecting their
em young
they have learnt to hate school

Removing the class barrier

There is one school in Kalikot that is trying to change the way teaching is done. Modern Model Remedial School is a non-profit private institution in Lalu village, across the valley from the Karnali. It never used to have enough money for good teachers, but with new support it has become a catalyst for change in other schools in the area. The idea is to depart from traditional rote learning to allow children to be creative and knowledgeable about the surroundings through play and outdoor activities.

A partnership with Leo Clubs in Nepal has brought qualified and motivated teachers to the school under a ‘Rural Teaching Fellowship’. The school also runs a hostel for orphaned and needy students, and manages a farm and vegetable greenhouses (below) to generate revenue for the school’s sustainable upkeep.

http://www.modernmodel.edu.np

KEY INDICATORS

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<th>Per capita income $PPP</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>Kalikot</th>
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<td>1,160</td>
<td>578</td>
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Average life expectancy  

Mean years of schooling

3.9 | 2.4

Projects: Bajri is a Dartmouth College alum from India working in Kalikot to upgrade education.

BETTER SCHOOLS

KATHMANDU

9

16 - 22 JUNE 2017 #863
EVENTS

Mudfest, Celebrate this rice-planting festival by getting soaked in the rain, playing in the mud and mingling with locals. Included is a Newari fest at the end of the day. 24 June, 7 am to 5 pm, Khokana. Admission: Rs 100 for adults, Rs 50 for children, free for children below 6. http://www.socisamours.com

Israel Film fest, Don’t miss the opportunity to watch selected Israeli films at the 11th edition of the Israel Film Festival. Moviegoers can choose from two films that will be screened for three days in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Biratnagar. 21 to 23 June, 2:30 pm and 5:30 pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu. (01) 4269899

Ride for refugees, Mark this year’s World Refugee Day by participating in a cycle rally from Patan Durbar Square to Thakhek to show solidarity for refugees. 16 June, 7:20-11 pm, Patan Durbar Square, 9841129865. www.rdrc.org.np/rideforrefugees2

Artist in residence, A highlight of the seventh season of Art in Residence, a collaboration between SBC Art Space and Nepal Arts Council, is the work of artists CC Chung and Chen Sui at the Talok, Kapil Manor Bazaar, Jifo, Nepal. For more details, call (01) 4003220.

Off the Block, Take the afternoon off to view unique wooden print works by local student artists. 16 June, Park Gallery, Patan. (01) 5523577

Miss Motivation, Kripa Joshi, ‘We do not remember days, we remember moments. ’

MUSIC

Chaimale Resort, Enjoy the beauty of nature and a peaceful weekend. ‘Perfect for BBQs, games, and family vacations in the Kathmandu Valley’. (01) 4033172, 58174829

Monsoon madness, Head down to Pokhara and enjoy an exclusive 3-day 3-night package with Shangri-La Village Resort. Pokhara. Rs 6,500 per person. (01) 462252, 9817182277

Gokarna Forest Resort, A resort to relax your breathing, and encourage meditation, just a 20-minute drive from Kathmandu-Gokarna. (0144) 42212, info@gokarnaforest.com

Club Himalaya, For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend escapades, special packages available for Nepalis and expatriates. Baglung, 4410432

Patalen Vineyard Resort, Japanese-influenced restaurant with great views, jungle walks, and picnics in Chisapani, Kathmandu. 9841670364

Le Trio, The best momos in town. Baglung Bazaar and Thakhek. (01) 4454080, 5716476

La Bella Cafe, Let Italian cuisine ease your palette this weekend. A place to go for good portions of food. Chobhaching Bazaar, Thamel. (01) 4700078

Hello Cafe, Rekindle a love for Kana and Korean dishes this weekend. Don’t forget to try the Valley’s best chef’s Special Salad. Bhaktapur. (01) 4971678

Fête de la Musique, Celebrate this year’s international music day by participating in the annual Fête de la Musique where various artists will be performing. 23 June, 10 am, Alliance Française Kathmandu. Free entry

DINING

Around the Corner, Spend an evening for a slide-in-the nature experience. The family environment at this full service restaurant with tidal views to your heart. Basundhara (Inside The Standard Nursery), 9847161797

Koto, Japanese cuisine of the highest quality, served with meticulous attention. Food fanatics will find themselves in a haven for sushi and tempura. Kesho, (01) 5544296, Pokhara or (01) 4020848, Darbar Marg. (01) 4020848

Le Trio, The best momos in town. Baglung Bazaar and Thakhek. (01) 4454080, 5716476

Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Ideal for a walk and lunch outing. Budhanilkantha to escape the hustle of the city. Enjoy some quiet family time or a message or get a stay overnight at this cottage. Advanced booking recommended.

Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Ideal for a walk and lunch outing. Budhanilkantha to escape the hustle of the city. Enjoy some quiet family time or a message or get a stay overnight at this cottage. Advanced booking recommended.

The Last Resort, Test your limits with kayaking, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping. Bottles, Snorkelling, (01) 4030523/1247

Mango Tree Lodge, Culture walks, cycling in the Kavre wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park. Biratnagar, Biratnagar. (01) 4022089, info@mangotreelodge.com

GETAWAY

Asian time, Experience the flavours and diversity of Asian cuisine at the ongoing Asian Food Promotion. Naini Gore, Gupta ghar, salat, tiffin shop and mango sticky rice are the major attractions. 15-22 June, 6:30-10 pm, The City, Hyatt Regency, 1,000 per person. 9820302473, www.hyatt.com

Pauline’s Garden, A perfect place to enjoy the sunset and sip on a happy hour cocktail. Buy one cocktail and get one free on Thursdays. 4324230, Annapurna, (01) 4411637

Cafe Déjà Vu, Spend an evening at this burger restaurant that offers more than six types of burgers. Try chicken kirkfire. Budhanilkantha. (01) 4408695

Lapkas’ chulo, Offering a modest selection of recipes from around the world. Quick and warm sandwiches. Thapathali, (01) 5543786

Asie Asia, Enjoying a refreshment and21

Vatavati Reunion, Jain festival enthusiasts to find out about the latest trends, models and accessories in biking. Don’t miss out on live music and scrumptious food afterwards. 17 June, Pashupatinath Resort, Audubons Kathmandu. (01) 476280

Jay Sean live, Book tickets now to listen to British singer and songwriter Jay Sean perform live in Kathmandu on June 29. A one day event. Black Reggae, Kathmandu.

Saturday Night Live, Swing to the rhythms of alternative rock band Infull and spend your weekend with friends and family. 30 June, 6:30-9:30 pm. An Era Lounge Restaurant, Kamante. Rs 60/Nepali

Musical tribute, Kamera will be playing rap metal, rap rock and alternative metal songs as a tribute to rage against the Machine & Tool. 8.30, 2:30 pm, Purple Heart Rock Bar, Thamel. 9841598790

The Last Resort, Test your limits with kayaking, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping. Bottles, Snorkelling, (01) 4030523/1247

Mango Tree Lodge, Culture walks, cycling in the Kavre wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park. Biratnagar, Biratnagar. (01) 4022089, info@mangotreelodge.com

Fête de la Musique, Celebrate this year’s international music day by participating in the annual Fête de la Musique where various artists will be performing. 23 June, 10 am, Alliance Française Kathmandu. Free entry

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Piece by piece

Like a 3D jigsaw puzzle, Patan Darbar Square is coming together again

SAHINA SHRESTHA

It started within hours after the earthquake struck two years ago. As if in a fire-drill mode, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), along with Patan’s local community, immediately went into action to salvage precious religious objects from the ruins of fallen temples. Volunteers collected carved wooden columns, stones and metal figures of deities, even the bronze statue of Yog Narendra Malla that had toppled, and put them in the Patan Museum courtyard for safekeeping.

Two years after the earthquake, the monuments of Patan Darbar Square are ensconced in steel scaffolding, awaiting careful restoration and rebuilding. “If the funds come in on time and there are no bureaucratic hurdles and controversies, the monuments here can be rebuilt in three years,” says KVPT’s Rohit Ranjitkar, hinting that it can be a big ‘if’.

While the debate between the purists and modernists delays reconstruction of other monuments in the Valley, restoration in Patan is in full swing. Architects are clear about preserving the integrity of the historical configuration while ensuring seismic strengthening, introducing modern materials only where and when necessary.

“The idea is to reconstruct in a way that ensures human safety. If introducing a small metal nail ensures that the monument will last longer, why not do it?” asks Ranjitkar. “Conservation is always controversial but we need to move forward instead of wasting time splitting hairs.”

With the help of donors and the local community, KVPT has repaired the statue of Yog Narendra Malla and installed it back on its stone pedestal. It has repaired the east wing of Sundari Chok, which had collapsed in the earthquake, and work is underway to complete the interior layout of the exhibits of the museum by September.

The upper part of the North Taleju Tower, which was destabilised by the quake, will be repaired in two months. While the structural consolidation for the interior is completed, the team is working on completing the bronze shikhara finial.

“Many sections needed to be replaced as they were missing or not historically accurate because they had not been properly restored in previous renovations,” Ranjitkar explains.

For monuments that were completely destroyed, like the South and North Matni Mandap at the entrance to the Mangahiti, the Hari Shankar Temple and the oldest temple in the square, the Char Narayan, KVPT first studied the foundations to check if they would be safe to build on. In the South Matni Mandap, the team rebuilt the foundation using lime surki mortar, and in the North strengthened the foundation with a brick masonry padding. The foundation of the Char Narayan temple was found intact and its foundation replaced by brick work.

The Krishna Temple and Vishveshvara Temple did not go down, but the earthquake inflicted serious structural damage. The corner stones on all four sides of the second level of the Krishna Temple have to be replaced and the exquisitely carved stone work repaired.

“The Vishveshvara temple tilted to the South after the earthquake and although it cannot be strengthened, it is being retrofitted. Woodwork on the northwest is now complete, the walls are being reinforced, and the decayed carved wooden columns replaced.

“All the damage was not caused by the earthquake, but the lack of upkeep; but we are using the opportunity to repair them as well,” says Ranjitkar.

KVPT has launched a five-year campaign to raise funds for the reconstruction so that lack of money will never be the reason to stop work. “We will finish our job and move on, but the local community will once more have to take the responsibility of conserving Patan’s heritage just like they did in the hours after the earthquake,” says Ranjitkar.

nepalitimes.com

Go online for a complete slide show of ongoing restoration at the Patan Darbar Square.

Dabur Honey

Start your day

with Dabur Honey

STAY FIT, FEEL YOUNG.
It took a long time for this version of DC Comics’ iconic Wonder Woman to get to the screen, but now that it has, it is a resounding, wonderfully warm-hearted, sincere but not naive, funny but not hammy, exciting, fast-paced origin story that balances really good storytelling, satisfying character development, and action sequences that are breathtakingly good, making you want to stop and rewind to see them again and again.

Directed by Patty Jenkins who made Monster (2003), a film that won Charlize Theron an Oscar for Best Actress, Wonder Woman is proof that super-heroine films can be helmed just as well by women, a fact that was seriously doubted by the male decision-makers that run Hollywood. Now, with the inarguable success of this fun, memorable film, one can but hope that more will follow, directed by women, and starring women. The reasoning is simple: if women go to films about men, and made by men, why wouldn’t men also go to films about women, and directed by them? Are we supposed to be void of even that little empathy?

To get back to Wonder Woman though, all I can say is, the film is utterly elevated by the astonishing performance of Gal Gadot, who seems to have been born to play this beloved character. Gadot has, in the past, been very noticeable, mainly due to her incredible, feisty loveliness in some of the The Fast and The Furious films, and in her first turn as Wonder Woman in the execrable Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016); one of the only things good in that film was the appearance of Gadot as Diana Prince aka Wonder Woman.

We learn of how Wonder Woman came to be the defender of humankind in the first half of the film, which is also the most riveting. Wonder Woman, or Diana, Princess of the Amazons, lives on the island Themyscira, hidden from the world, placed there by Zeus to save us from the bellicose Ares, his evil son. The Amazons are fierce warriors, but also filled with compassion, veiled from the world, but training faithfully for the day they are called upon. When Steve Trevor (Chris Pine) crashes near the island during World War II, Diana rescues him, and so begins her journey to enter the often-cruel world that we live in today.

Diana’s life on Themyscira is exceptionally well defined, populated by scenes of breathtaking beauty of the Amazons in combat training, and setting up Diana’s relationships with her mother, Queen Hippolyta (Carrie-Anne Moss), and her aunt General Antiope (Robin Wright) who teaches her to be the phenomenal, true-hearted warrior that she is. The rest of the film is great, but this introductory chapter is golden.

This is a film that is as good as action movies get, slightly long but worth your time. At the end of it, you, and everyone around you will be captivated by Gadot; she is a star that shines so bright, you can’t take your eyes off of her.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pandey

SAY CHEESE: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and leaders of three major parties with leaders of the Madhes-based RJP at Singh Durbar on Wednesday. On Wednesday, Deuba offered to postpone local elections in Province 7 (see page 2).

SEE YOU SOON: President Bidya Devi Bhandari leaves for Switzerland to attend the Global Employment Summit on Tuesday. Vice-President Nanda Kishore Pun on left.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR: Indian ambassador Montje Singh Sindhi calls on the Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Upendra Shrestha to discuss further expansion and strengthening of bilateral relations in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

HE HAS A HEART: Serial killer Charles Sobhraj poses for a photo on Monday after a successful heart surgery at Cantiyal Hospital in Kathmandu performed by surgeon Ramchandra Pradhan who tweeted this picture after the operation.

JACK-KNIFE: Nawakya Shrestha of Nepal’s football team during the AFC Asian Cup qualifying match against Yemen at Bukhark Stadium on Tuesday. Nepal was held to a goalless draw.
Not free, nor fair

Centre for Investigative
Journalists, 15 June

Phase One of the local elections has been hailed ‘ground-breaking’ for the large number of women and Dalit elected, but some Dalit communities in Bajhang can only dream of being able to vote freely, let alone run for office.

During the 1997 local elections, some 35 Dalit families of Kallah VDC of Bajhang, voted for the RPP’s contender for Chairman. The Dalit vote played a vital role in the RPP’s victory, and infuriated non-Dalit supporters of the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML.

In retaliation, the Dalits were not only socially excluded, some 120 families were deprived of the customary practice of getting the traditional khola grain received in return for services rendered to their landlords, thus putting their survival at stake. Shiva Kami, who led the Dalit community in favour of the RPP during the election, says, “We rejected casting our vote as per our landlord’s will. Non-Dalits manhandled us, misbehaved with us. We could not even walk freely in the village any more.”

Kami said Dalits were forced to touch the feet of the higher castes, honouring them for being their guardians. “The higher castes were gracious enough to forgive us by accepting our assurances we wouldn’t repeat the mistake,” he said sarcastically.

Interestingly, 16 years later during the Constituent Assembly (CA) election, the majority of Dalits in Kallah VDC still could not vote freely because of fear of punishment. Indeed, 18 Dalit families of nearby villages were threatened with defying political pressure and not voting for NC and UML candidates. Among them was Giri Damai, now 62, who recalls: “They threatened to chase us out and demolish our houses.”

The issue was partially resolved by some non-Dalits of a neighbouring village. This time, Dalits are still facing similar harassment. “Let’s see what happens during this election because we know one or the other party is sure to intimidate us,” says Pudum Damai.

The underlying reasons why Dalit voters are not free is because they represent such an important vote bank, with half the 22,194 Dalit people in the district are illiterate, 1,063 Dalit families are landless and 1,063 families are homeless.

Of the landless Dalits, 2,848 are classified as Hariyans (bonded labourers) by the District Land Revenue Office. Many families have been in servitude for generations and are vulnerable because the land on which they built their houses belong to non-Dalits.

Lawmaker Affil Okheda says, “Almost all Dalits are financially poor and are glued to the traditional belief that non-Dalits are their rulers. Therefore, they do not want to disappoint their landlords while casting votes.”

For 65-year-old Chhakudi Damai, elections have always brought trouble. “Whoevers win is not a matter of concern for us. After all, we are always victimised, elections have no meaning for us,” she says.

In the 2013 CA elections, NC and UML cadres clashed at the voting centre in Chaitpur as each side tried to snatch ballot papers from the Dalit community, which had been wired and dined by both parties in exchange for votes. This time, too, alcohol is flowing freely as parties try to win Dalit votes.

Former Dalit representative of Bajhang, Dharmaraj Bi Ka, asks: “How can we expect Dalits to cast their votes in a free and fair manner when they don’t own the land on which their houses are built?”

Even non-Dalits who are poor are similarly intimidated by landlords to whom many are indebted. More than 14,000 out of 34,000 families in Bajhang live below the poverty line in Bajhang.

Says Birendra Bahadur Singh of the District Coordination Committee: “A feudal culture still prevails. I have seen several instances of well-off families coercing the poor to vote according to the will of the rich.”

CDO Keshav Bahadur Thapa says only self-reliance will guarantee free elections: “People cannot exercise their voting rights freely until and unless they stop relying on others for food.”

Affil Okheda Bajhang

Ecole Francaise Internationale de Katmandou

The International French School of Kathmandu (EFIK) celebrates

30 YEARS OF MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN NEPAL

Since 1987, International French School of Kathmandu has brought high-quality multilingual education to children in Nepal. The school is fully accredited by the Ministry of Education in France, and is part of a network of nearly 500 French schools worldwide.

Located in Kathmandu in an earthquake-resistant building, EFik has recently expanded: it now offers pre-school, primary and secondary education for children ages 2-15. The school year begins in September, with rolling admissions available throughout the year.

Learn more about EFIK on your website www.efiktm.com & +977-1 400 16 73
Modern-day

The practice of Kamalari was outlawed 10 years ago, but the traditional system of bonded labour still exists in other forms

HOME WORK: Sharmila Tharu, 21, has been working as a domestic helper since she was five, but she is now determined to make a better life for herself by studying hard and striking off on her own to open a beauty parlour.

Domestic dignity

Ma Shrestha (left) never feels ashamed to tell people she is a domestic worker. With 10 years of experience as a household help, she is proud of being the breadwinner of her family of three.

“I am happy to be known as a domestic worker despite its negative connotation, there is dignity in work,” says Shrestha, 38, who helps out part-time in two houses in Kathmandu, earning over Rs 13,000 a month.

Shrestha launched her career after separating from her husband, and moving to Kathmandu from Chitwan. She now lives in a rented flat with her son while her 21-year-old daughter recently completed secondary school and works in Jordan.

“My daughter is already independent and my son is studying. Isn’t that great?” she adds with a smile. Shrestha considers herself lucky to have found good employers who have now realised the value of domestic workers, and started treating them better.

It wasn’t always that way, she notes, advising others wanting to get into this line of work to be assertive. She also suggests that training centres be created for domestic workers so that they have the skills needed to be able to bargain for good salaries, in Nepal or abroad.
On International Domestic Workers' Day, 16 June, a Nepali Times video tells the story of Sharmila Tharu, who was forced to become a domestic worker at age five, and 15 years later is still a household helper. The practice of Kamalari was abolished in 2006, but this form of modern-day bonded slavery persists in Nepali society.

Sharmila Tharu's tale has a happy ending. After becoming a member of the GFPONT union, she found a job that pays Rs 4,000 monthly with free food and a place to stay. She is even taking beautician training in her spare time, and plans to continue her studies and open her own beauty parlor in the future.

CHILD SERVANT

The demand for domestic workers in Nepal, mainly in urban areas, is growing faster than ever because of the increasing mobility of women and rapid urbanisation. Because of the increase in double-salary households, there is a high demand for caregivers, babysitters and household help, resulting in child labour, forced labour, exploitation and even slavery.

“Domestic labour deficit often results in child labour. To curb this, we need a regulatory body,” says Prashant Dangol of Active Domestic Workers Consultancy, which was the first service provider of its kind in Nepal when it started six years ago. It used to receive 50 requests a month for domestics, now it has more than doubled and the company cannot keep up with demand.

Workers placed through the agency get a monthly salary of Rs 6,000 for working eight hours a day and Rs 3,500 for part-time (two hours daily). However, more than half the demand goes unmet.

“The demand will remain until there is standardisation of salary through a national regulatory body. Children will continue to fall prey to child labour,” says Dangol.

A proposed amendment to Nepal’s Labour Code includes regulation of domestic workers. It is the first time a Nepali law has addressed domestic workers, but right groups say it may take years to finalise. In the absence of regulations, arrangements between domestic workers and employers are mostly informal which means domestic workers remain hidden.

“Domestic workers continue to be an invisible force and their contribution to the economy is not counted, unlike remittances,” says Milan Dhirali from the NGO, Swastikoti Adhikar, which works for the rights of domestic workers. Registration of domestic workers, a minimum wage, weekend leave, social security, contracts and health insurance are some of the major needs.

Dhirali adds: “Cases of abuse of Nepali domestic migrants in destination countries make headlines almost every day, but the conditions of domestic workers in Nepal do not make news.”

Project Noah

The Betterment of Humanity

Roughly one in ten people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water. Climate change threatens to exacerbate this problem by fueling drought in vulnerable regions. At present, the planet’s population is set to grow substantially and global temperatures to rise steadily. This adds further uncertainty to the supply of fresh water. This is where Project Noah’s mission to supply clean drinking water to the underprivileged communities comes into action.

Project Noah started in 2013 with seed capital from the Rockefeller Foundation, Cisco Systems Foundation and three individuals.

By applying new, innovative thinking to formulate a solution for the underprivileged, excluded and impoverished people of the world.

Project Noah has been involved in various community projects in Nepal, Thailand and in Cambodia. In Nepal they are investing USD $500 000 in building Children’s Home for the orphans, supplying clean water filter systems to the underprivileged community all over Nepal. On 19th May 2017, Project Noah opened the water filter system in Gorkaneshwar, Jorpati, Nepal for about 200 families, another clean water project on 7th May in Padmait Ga Chilling School in Gorkaneshat. Our aim is to build 100 water filter systems in Nepal. Project Noah’s goal is to use the latest technology to extract water from the atmosphere to provide clean drinking water in remote villages where water is a scarce resource. Turbine or wind powered water extraction from atmosphere can supply about 11 gallons of water per day while solar powered system can supply about 10 gallons per day, depending on the humidity.

More than 600 million people lack regular access to clean drinking water on a daily basis and by 2050, half of humanity will live in areas where the demand for water outweighs the available supply. Project Noah is continually innovating and formulating a solution for the underprivileged, excluded and impoverished people of the world.
All in our stars

Unlike other parts of this paper, we don’t make anything up on this page. No story, our news is take so calling it fake news would be an overreaction. (Latin: ‘boy-in-ball’ meant in the old language for toy) Unlike other columnists, if fake news is already here, then it would be logical to assume that the double negative means this column is actually totally factual.

Like a lot of you loyal customers, I thought that they were fake news. But apparently it is deadly serious. Care to Bronte has been advised by scientists at NASA (National Academy of Science and Astrology) to wait until the Moon is in the seventh house and Jupiter is aligned with Mars in the sign of Aquarius.

“Since all the nine planets are in alignment with the Prime Minister’s zodiac, it will be smooth sailing for him after these small difficulties,” Astrogazer General Angras Narine, told a packed press conference. The future is now in the national Southwark’s reading of the prime minister’s zodiac, however, is that astronomers have discovered that there is actually a tenth planet in the prediction in this period. In addition, Nepali students have just assembled Nepal’s first mini satellite to be put into orbit on an Indian rocket – which means there is yet another browser’s body besides Miss Nepal that astrologers will have to take into account in their calculations.

The news item also mentioned that the Astrologer General is working with Interior decorator at Singha Durbur to make sure that the Prime Minister’s spiritual geometry is in harmony with the universe. But since Durbur is walking a tightrope balancing the geo-strategic interests of India and China, he is seen between using kants or Feng Shui, having one or the other neighbour will be ticketed off.

The Astro advice: Sit facing North when receiving visitors from China and hide under the table when receiving dignitaries from India.

The Ass

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ELEVATE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

The Ass

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I AM PERFECT

I AM Creta

Ajaya B. Shah
Laxmi Bank

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