Flood of recrimination

As the waters of last month’s devastating floods recede, bodies of the missing are starting to appear. Gudhi Kumar Singh, 12, was washed away on 13 August, and his body was found in Sitaliya near the Indian border. His mother is so traumatised she has been hospitalised, and his father is looking after her. Gudhi’s grandfather, Mahendra Singh, is alone at their flood-ravaged home with just the boy’s photo as a memory (above).

Singh blames the 10m-high levee on the Indian side of the border for the rising waters that killed his grandson and dozens of others here. “We never had to worry about floods before India built that embankment on No Man’s Land,” he says bitterly. When it rained heavily for four consecutive days starting 11 August, much of Nepal’s southern plains were inundated with water that flowed out through breached embankments on Tarai rivers. The exits to the flood waters were then blocked by east-west levees built across the border in India.

In Rautahat, over 70% of the land was under water for days. In Saptari, four people were killed and nearly 35,000 families displaced. In both districts there are many embankments, elevated roads, dams and other infrastructure restraining the water flow.

Damage was relatively less in Sindh, with no deaths and only about 1,400 families affected. Locals say this is because they didn’t allow the Indian side to build a levee, “Our struggle paid off this time,” says Raj Dev Yadav, who staged a sit-in against construction of a levee in a village across the border in 2012.

Flood survivors are angry at India for causing the floods, but angry at their own leaders for indifference. In Saptari, 42-year-old Kiran Dev Raya asks: “Where are the Madhesi leaders? They used to claim to represent us.”

With elections for Province 2 due in two weeks, Madhesi leaders in turn blame Kathmandu for doing nothing. Abhi Ramesh Sharms of the RJP in Mahottari, says: “We want the government to form a reconstruction authority, just like after the earthquake. We cannot help people on our own: this is not our job.”

In New Delhi last week, Prime Minister Deuba discussed with Indian Prime Minister Modi measures to tackle recurring floods. But the locals believe it was just “empty talk”. Deuba was also meeting Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on 27 August while the Indian side was rebuilding the embankment that inundated Rautahat (see story, page 14-15).

Flood relief is better organised in areas with new elected local governments. speedy relief distribution is also the main issue in local elections due here on 18 September. But most voters are not optimistic. They feel all parties do the same: make empty promises about flood relief.
DISAPPEARANCE OF JUSTICE

Our rulers keep sending us proof of an utter lack of humanity and morality: the historic neglect of the displaced, violence against women and children, and total apathy toward the suffering of the masses, all of which have led to nothing but the increasing levels of human suffering.

Instead of finding ways to make amends, the current government is doing everything possible to silence the voices of the oppressed.

Lack of government action has forced the people to seek justice on their own terms, leading to a rise in vigilante justice and a general breakdown of the legal system.

The government has failed to fulfill its duties and obligations, leading to an increased sense of frustration and anger among the people.

As a result, the people are taking matters into their own hands, leading to a rise in crime and violence.

REBUILDING RISK

The Fatu Islands in the Gambia could become a significant source of conflict if the government continues to ignore the needs of the people.

The government must take action to prevent a potential conflict, which could have serious consequences for the region and the country as a whole.

YOMARI SESSIONS

Yomari is a traditional gathering that is held in the Gambia to celebrate the New Year and express gratitude to the deities for their blessings.

This year, the Yomari session will be held in the province of Kiang West, and the people will come together to offer prayers and give thanks for the past year.

EFFECTIVE EARLY WARNING

The government has implemented an effective early warning system to prevent future disasters.

This system has been in place for several years, and it has helped to save countless lives and prevent significant damage.

THE TRUTH

The government has been criticized for its lack of transparency and accountability.

The people demand to know the truth about the government's actions and the reasons behind its policies.

WHATS TRENDING

Preaching on high

The government has been criticized for its lack of support for the church.

The government must take action to support the church and ensure that it can operate freely and without interference.

Leaving behind the past

The government must work to leave behind the past and focus on building a brighter future for the country.

The people demand to see a change in the government's approach and a commitment to improving the quality of life for all citizens.
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Middle ground in Doklam

The climax this week in the India-Bhutan-China dispute restored the status quo, but created a new normal in the trilateral relations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). It would have been pretty embarrassing to have a summit where two of its members are about to go to war.

Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi stayed in Hailey in 1948. ‘I shall be going to a country, Bhutan, which is more cut off from the world than perhaps any other country,’ Nehru wrote then from Gangtok. Nehru reached Hau after crossing the Nathu La pass in Sikkim, where India maintained ‘a political officer’ responsible for contacts with the Himalayan kingdoms of Sikkim and Bhutan. The assistant route to Paro, then the summer capital of Bhutan, was via Sikkim from Nathu La and across a far-flung corner of Tibet near the Yangtze trading post.

The Prime Minister’s entourage spent a night at Yatung, and crossed the Tibet-Bhutan border where they were met by the Prime Minister of Bhutan. Riding through the high passes, Nehru got to Paro, where the 28-year-old ‘Maharaja’ was waiting with a spectacular procession consisting of hundreds of knights, dignitaries of the Buddhist clergy in their special robes, troops of dancers, etc.

That took place at a time when Tibet was in trouble but hadn’t yet been annexed by China. And Bhutan was, in Nehru’s words, ‘another world’. Trouble with China was brewing, though, and many Indians had already started imagining their role as the saviours of Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. Soon, the Chinese overran Tibet, and the Dalai Lama fled to India.

In 1963, China and India fought a war over their Himalayan border, and Thimphu was spooked by China’s claim to Ladakh, Sikkim and Bhutan because it said they all belonged historically to Tibet, which itself was always under the suzerainty of the ‘Motherland China’. The Dragon Kingdom swiftly snuggled into India’s protective lap, accepting the offer that was ‘not formal but had always been there’.

In 1962, a team from the Indian Army went on a rescue mission to Bhutan. It was followed by a road construction project by the Border Roads Organisation under Project Dantak, and a year later, establishment of the Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) headquarters at Haia. The Himalayan War left Bhutan largely untouched, mostly because of China’s disinterest in drawing a third country into the conflict that started to ‘teach India a lesson’. India was, however, eager later to use Bhutan for military logistics, and had a treaty signed with Paro.

The geographical and geopolitical realities in the region have changed in the last 60 years. Tibet is now part of an ‘autonomous region’ of China, Sikkim a state in India, which even China has recognised. But Beijing has consistently maintained Bhutan to be a ‘strategic’ and ‘independent’ country and has criticised India’s role of ‘mediating’ on bilateral issues on behalf of Bhutan.

The Doklam dispute, owing to its colonial legacy, remains unresolved because of India’s strategic interest, and Bhutan’s own helplessness about not being able to move out of Delhi’s protective embrace. In the past, Bhutan and China had agreed to disagree over the border, and settled into a comfortable status quo in which both maintained their claims over the disputed territory.

There is a consensus within Bhutan to accept India’s offer to exchange the Doklam area with another disputed territory along the northern border that is almost the same size.

The trouble is, Doklam is situated smack at the entrance from the Tibetan Plateau into the Sikkim Corridor, and is therefore of utmost strategic importance to India. The territory swap proposal, therefore, is not openly spoken about in Thimphu.

This week’s agreement, in which the Chinese have agreed to step back, is a stopgap in a dispute in the disputed area in return for Indian soldiers stepping back in Sikkim. But China won strategically because now the whole world knows about Bhutan seeking direct diplomatic channels with Beijing. This is the new normal.

There is a standoff among the Bhutanese to untangle the big-brotherly embrace of India and Bhutan to derive benefits from this new reality soon.
**BIZ BRIEFS**

**FARM TO TABLE**

The US Embassy in Kathmandu hosted a "Farm to Table" event to highlight the importance to the national economy and family income of Nepal’s agriculture. Agri-entrepreneurs, farmers, suppliers, credit providers, and network and share innovative solutions to improve productivity.

L.C. Chang, the farms and food assistance officer, said, "We were pleased to support this initiative, which is a vital part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the agricultural sector and promote sustainable development in Nepal."

**DASHAIN WITH MI**

Customers purchasing Mi smartphones can win a trip for two to Bali, Bangkok, and Bali by participating in a registration form to enter the contest. TVs, laptops, and gadgets are among the many prizes up for grabs.

**HEALTHY FLIGHT**

Turkish Airlines has partnered with Dr. Mehmet Oz, renowned cardologist and producer of ‘The Dr. Oz Show’, to provide a more comfortable and healthy travel experience for its passengers. The collaboration will be part of the 'Hy-Care Feel Good Project' and will feature short videos with expert advice on the Airlines’ official website, social media, and inflight entertainment systems.

**HYUNDAI’S XCENT**

Launched by Continental Motors Pvt. Ltd., the authorized distributor of Hyundai vehicles in Nepal, the new Hyundai Xcent sedan car at the Motor Show being held at Siddhaeshwari. The new Xcent boasts of quality, comfort, style and premium look, and will be available in two petrol variants, Xcent (P) priced at Rs. 3,94,000 and Xcent (SD) priced at Rs. 3,35,000.

**NEW HEXA**

Spex Group, the authorized distributor of Tata Motors in Nepal, has launched a new Hexa premium SUV. It is priced at Rs. 1,95,000 in the domestic market. It is powered by a 150PS/320Nm or 156PS/440Nm 2.2-litre MHR CRDi engine, comes with standard five or six-speed manual transmission or a six-speed automatic transmission.

**MORE FREQUENT QR**

With the holiday season in full swing, Qatar Airways is adding a fourth daily frequency between Kathmandu and Doha from Friday. The overnight flight will arrive in Kathmandu at 6:55 AM. Passengers can now use the Doha hub to connect to the airline's 130 destinations around the world, including newly opened flights to Caracas, Chengdu, Daikou, Kuala Lumpur, and the Maldives.

**FORD FESTIVE OFFER**

Ford has launched a Dusser offer of ‘Cash Me liftback’ campaign. Those purchasing a Ford vehicle in the coming months will have a chance to win a lucky draw of up to Rs 1,000,000. Accessories worth Rs 50,000 are also on offer with every purchase.

**WHEEL OF FORTUNE**

Spex Motors that sells Honda motorcycles and cars has also launched its December Dhamaka offer. Wheel of Fortune 2 has scratch coupons worth up to Rs 100,000 on the purchase of Honda motorcycles and scooters. One draw up to Rs 50,000 on Honda Big bikes and accessories, etc. Ten customers from lucky draw win up to Rs 1 million.
One day of life in the jungle

Long before the term ecotourism was coined, an initiative in Nepal rooted in conservation and community was haled as one of Asia’s best.

Valiantly through the jungle with trays of village eggs balanced precariously on the back of his elderly bicycle. Unexpectedly one egg hatched, the chick comically attaching itself to Thapa, the veteran stooges, thinking he was its mother.

One day of life in the jungle

Valiantly through the jungle with trays of village eggs balanced precariously on the back of his elderly bicycle. Unexpectedly one egg hatched, the chick comically attaching itself to Thapa, the veteran stooges, thinking he was its mother.

Welcome to Tiger Tops. We’ll be leaving the elephants for a jungle safari once the aircraft has departed, so please wait in the shade.” I greet the guests emerging from the Royal Nepal Airlines aircraft, dazed by the bright April light, and usher them into the simple thatched shelter with wooden plank benches that passes as the Meghwali Terminal.

Today the guests leave on elephant back and I climb into the baggage vehicle as the driver hugs his door closed. Laughing, the boys perch on the luggage and staff families hitch a ride — a young wife spreeses into a rear corner of the Land Rover with her khaki-eyed baby.

At the height of its success, Tiger Tops’ elephant safaris, nature walks and guided boat trips were an iconic must-see of Nepal tourism, attracting not only regular guests but also celebrities, royalty, movie and rock stars. This was the beginning of nature tourism in Nepal, a responsible tourism initiative rooted in conservation and community, hailed as one of Asia’s best wildlife experiences long before the term ‘ecotourism’ was coined.

I relished the rhythms of jungle life, the complex logistics and the apparently effortless previson taming, which in fact required meticulous planning. The Tiger Tops Chitwan community numbered about 200 people, mostly men, if you included all the elephant camp and the shaps who laboured to pump the water and maintain the roads. Dressed in varying shades of buff and khaki green, we were a self-contained group with lives defined by our jobs: a hierarchy of interlocking relationships. Behind the scenes, back-stories were rife and interactions were complex, including with the surrounding wildlife whose habitat we inhabited.

The laundry workers had a tedious job, carrying endless bundles down the jungle path then back in neatly ironed stacks through the apricot afternoon light. Washed on the river’s edge, bed sheets dried on makeshift lines in the open sun, and clothes were spread on the warm grey sand. Heavy irones were filled with hot coals, like in Viertorian times. Without electricity, cleaning and replenishing the potmases and paraffin lamps used to light the Lodge, rooms and paths was an enormous daily task. Later, our solar power installation was the largest in Nepal. The egg man was a lonely figure, pedalling
On a lazy afternoon earlier this week, members of the contemporary folk band MiKu trickled in to Katha Haru’s studio in Dhusdhan. As they settled in, the production team joined them for a screening of their performance recorded in July. The silence was punctuated by whispers of lyrics and occasional jabs as members appeared on screen.

The band, Kohid Barza (susanji), Samyog Regmi (guitar), Pushpa Palanchekha (vocal), Riken Maharjan (base), Likhil Barza (magahe) and Merit Maharjan (sound effects/percussion) will open the new season of the unique web series Yomari Sessions on 6 September. Organisers say this year’s series will be bigger and better with a new episode every week.

Started by production company Katha Haru, the first season featured performances by Shresti and Banja, Stairs of Circus, Plekki, Sakhyum and Abhyu with Stairs of Circus’ ‘Raxim’ generating over 65,000 hits online.

“When we browse the web, there is a lot of focus on covers and while they do tend to get more audience, we felt the need of providing a platform to deserving artists where they can showcase their own music,” says Katha Haru Director of Photography Rocky Pradipati.

What emerged was an amalgamation of raw and candid music across a variety of genres, a quality that spelt the popularity of the first season. Each video of Yomari Sessions is a live, one-take recording where artists perform an improvised version of their original compositions.

“When you record a song in multiple takes any song can sound good. But what we wanted to show was that there are really good musicians in Nepal who can produce good music,” says Creative Director Shashank Shrestha. “We wanted to provide a platform for really good independent artists to show an unfiltered one-take version of their performances,” he adds.

Says Kohid Barza of MiKu: “For new bands like MiKu, performing live is an opportunity to get more people interested in our music, and working with Yomari was fun.”

The new season will feature original scores from bands MiKu, Pahelo Jati Muni, Ember Eyes, Mleka and Space. Departing from the indoor setting and black and white muted videos of the first season, this year’s season will see the bands performing in locations around Kathmandu Valley.

“The idea is to give the audience the raw and intimate experience of a live musical performance,” says Suyog Shrestha, CEO of Katha Haru. “When you watch a live performance you get to see the way the band interacts with each other and the instruments, and that is an experience we are trying to emulate in this season.”

Not sponsored or supported by any big brands, Katha Haru is adamant about controlling the creative space. Pradipati says music is all that matters at the end of the day. “The music has to be good and has to connect with everyone.”

As of now, the bands featured aren’t paid but can use the recordings from their session. “Yomari Sessions is a unique platform for the bands. Since both the audio and video is recorded simultaneously, the bands really have to be professional,” says Pradip’s Maharan, manager of MiKu.

“Kantha comes as a breath of fresh air, and a much-needed stage for the burgeoning indie music scene in Nepal. Producers and artists say they’re expecting more audience engagement this year.”

Says Shashank Shrestha: “There is a scene for emerging musicians and it is the same 100 people going to all the concerts. If we can at least open up the market and spotlight these musicians, I think we’ll have achieved a lot.”

Sahru Shrestha

nepalitimes.com

Go online to watch behind-the-scenes video of one of the recording sessions for this season and catch up with the performances from last season.
The daughters of Tibet
(4 unseen Tlb)

I still remember well when you carried me on your shoulders and couldn't stop
the magic, the music of your melodies and the power
I've always sought to know
the secrets of the unseen
How high does the eagle soar
to be above the clouded road.
Does that white cloudless hill,
on its way from the north,
or was it to the south?
If the Stommwall fumes with pilgrims,
and under the summer sun
do shrines still vibrate
in the happy time
The one called Pala
Where is Khasar now?
With his sword-red hair
Clearing demons and death
And why did the ragged mountain
Sing hymns of heroes and rogues?
In his boots and bowlded
Does the mountain fall silent
Of home, heart and longing,
even as her house in
Or is this all a figment of color
much like the hills above the hill?
Does the boy fall in love
with his thousand ponies
again at the setting day?
And when does the mountain graze
the wildflowers sprouting in the khang?
And can the sky float in the universe
where your white pony roamed?
Do its meadows glide endlessly
like some unending fantasy
And how liquid is that crystal
where the birth of the lakes?
The days in the snows
bogy horses
the Blue One meditates
from his summit,
no bird be there, no leaf
and a million others.

night, the light of diamonds,
Wind takes the wolf?
Darkest of green,
yOUy yarns.
Tears I can only imagine?
If the ranges sing freely.
Aren't turn to others
eyes up and below, perter your pure,
I say still close?
I'll remain as is
been visit
I was when I heard you,
you have been there
been the way for me.
I was, always elsewhere,
I vise, there.
I need and I have waited
until space
up for more again,
some of your land.

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Monsoon madness,
Two nights, 3 days at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, with cash back coupons worth Rs6,200. Rs6,299 net per person on twin-sharing basis. Pokhara, (01) 462222, shangrilavillage@synergynepal.com

Mango Tree Lodge.
Culture-walker, rattling in the Karnali, wildlife exploration and jungle safari at Bardia National Park. visitmangotreelodge.com Bhairakot, Bardia, visitmangotreelodge.com

Famous Farm
Up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze waiting in through the sun-kissed field. Nawakot, (067) 47023, visitfamousfarm.com

Atithi Resort
A perfect place to stay, nearby pool, massages, smoothies and delicious food of your choice. Shankopot, Lakeside, Pokhara, (066) 46678, atithihotels.com

Shivpuri Cottage
Escape the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food and fresh air. Boudha/Thamel, 9847727672

Park Village Resort
Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Hemdey Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Boudha/Thamel, (01) 477696, peacewellnesscenter.com

Jhulelu Mountain Resort.
Resting 135km above sea level, the estate resort boasts a farm house that stretches across 315 ha covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic home stay experience. Shivapuri Nagarkot National Park, Jhulelu, (01) 272339

Solid Rock.
Enjoy a relaxing stay in this traditional Nepali farm house away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu. Solid Rock Lodge & Restaurant, Dullu, near Pharping, 9803200893

Miss Motivation
Kripa Joshi.
Nature is not a place to visit.
It is home.

Events
Cosmic Shades.
Artist Sudha Singh is back with her second solo exhibition, which focuses on 3D geometric art. Uxus, 3rd September, 3pm-9pm.

Garden Art.
Save the date for the Garden Art painting event.
24-26 September, Uxus, Kirtipur.

Online safety.
Learn how to make your children safe from online threats and risks at Albania Trail head.
2 September, 6pm, Katimasthan Sabha Ghyas, Free entry, 9815091403

Blontensive Gardening.
Everything Organic Nursery (EONY) will be offering to buy. 3-day course in Nepali Blontensive Gardening.
5-7 September, 9am, Reservation: 9491020402, www.everythingorganic.org

The connection.
Participate in this charity event to support underserved dogs. Money collected will be used to build a home for incapacitated and elderly dogs.
1 September, 6pm onwards, Heritage Garden, Sano, Rs5,000, 9807056397

Displaced.
The part of an art exhibition that reflects the stories of refugees in Nepal.
30 August-17 September, 10am-10pm, Nepal Mandala, Kaveshwar Road, Free, 9847787260, 9871237794

Music
Dunga.
Indian band for some delicious continental food and don’t forget their signature drink, all served with free hair brushing in an excellent space. Lakeside, Pokhara, (01) 462277

Capital Grill.
The American style dinner offers a large assortment of appetizers and main courses to suit everyone’s tastes. BhadraKeni, (01) 462053, grillcapital@gmail.com

1905.
Lifestyle boutique suites with garden dining. 1905 Suites and Restaurants now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Booking open for four suite suites. Koghakhel, Kathmandu, For more information: 9863747850

Fuchi.
Cure yourself to the twin pleasures of lemon zen, cricket and mustard handi. Kumbharbhit, Lalitpur, 9826107437, aapjaysingh@gmail.com

Dining
Basuri duo.
Indulge in an evening of classical music with Hindustani vocalist from Japan and Nageshri in Carnatic from India.
2-4 September, 7:30pm, Alliance Française Katmandou, Rs600, Rs400 for students. 9814022277

Koto.
Japanese cuisine of the highest quality served with meticulous attention. Food fanatics will find themselves in a haven for sashimi and tempura. Pashupati (01) 5441996, or Darbar Marg (01) 4233846

Wine tasting.
Wine connoisseurs can participate in a wine tasting workshop. 9th-10th, 7:30pm for members and 10am for students.
2-3 September, 4:30pm, Alliance Française de Katmandou, Lalitpur, 9826081942
Sermon on the mountain

Last week’s Nepal Times package on Christian conversion in Nepal (‘The golden age of the gospel’ by Om Aotha Rai, ‘Preaching on high’ by brot Coburn and ‘Fake seclusions’ by Dambam Cheong, 9/7/73) generated vigorous debate online about secularism and proselytism. Here is a selection of the feedback.

Feedback

The golden age of the gospel

BY ROLF SIMHA

Evangelism came to Nepal under various guises driven by the ‘mission’ to convert people to Christianity. Often, their methods are questionable or outright deceptive, leveraging on the power of ordinary people by using them with financial aid. The imposition of one religion over another using fake arguments and threats should be tackled. Conversion is rooted in faith and trickery is unacceptable and should be noted. It raises the question of Christianity.

GERARD-FERNANDO HONG

Nepal should become a true secular country, that is the only way to be relative for all religions and non-believers.

ALEX WALKER

Christianity is an extremely important religion that has developed indigenous cultures around the world throughout the colonial period, and continues to do so.

KONCHONG DORJE

The so-called Christian missionaries in Africa have done more to destroy the culture of the different tribes than any other action. No person, religion, culture has the right to wipe and annihilate any other person’s culture or belief and impose definite negative traits such as women’s retirement during menstruation. It is evident that the white man makes the distinction between different tribes of humans. There are so many black people who are being treated with education and scientific research, and you have their aggressive evangelistic need to be made to distinguish and develop those who have no need to propagate Christianity and who are not of God in vain.

DANIEL ZHANG

They try to convert those to Christianity who are not ready to be converted.

JAPAN BISHOP

Meditations are back, but it is the Government that wishes to support these groups in order to develop the social prosperity for the people. They do not have faith, but education for the people to have a better understanding to govern a better country and to find better ways to deal with current and emerging issues.

ALBERT KAMPELMAR

Do not persuade people on many empty ways.

GINA MARIE

These American, evangelizing ‘Christians’ need to go to Texas and do some actual good.

PAUL MCCANNED

MARK PICKETT

How disappointing it was to read brot Coburn’s article ‘Threading on high’ (9/7/73). It is a heavy one on poor research, misrepresentation and unsupported accusation, and bears an arrogant attitude towards the people of the Himalaya.

It is ironic that Coburn should represent the director of the Samsa Learning Centre for his lack of scholarly research but reproduce a lot of sad and ignorant idios from an unnamed author’s blog as his own.

Coburn disowns the philosophy of the NGYJ by suggesting that a ‘Christian’ ideology links to a semblance of God. I wonder what ideological tibet may there be in the author’s own work: remonstrations perhaps, delusion mongering. He clearly states that he was driven by a ‘conviction of moral righteousness’ or that the author’s ‘judgment’? What is Coburn’s motivation? Completely disappointing he is not. Markedly convicted he clearly is. It is one foreigner’s conviction against another’s. It is arrogant for someone to have a conviction that is different from one’s own. Such a put-down is unbecoming of a quality newspaper. Did the director really say that he is attempting to oust a cultural system? Coburn puts words into a sacred mouth, the director himself is not allowed to speak. Coburn further misrepresents a text of the Bible: ‘make your enemies your friends’ (Psalm 110:10) is not a command to followers of Christ and is certainly contrary to the dear command of Jesus to your enemies (Matthews 5:44). This is rather plain ignorance of the text or wanton twisting of the text to suit the author’s argument.

We do not know of the opinions of the Nepalese villagers because they are not given a voice. The only other voice is the editor’s. The village woman is contemptuous of their presence.

Coburn informs us that the founder of the Footstool Project is a ‘Voodoo, godfather-type figuring’ in a YouTube video that is no longer available. We can’t assess this ‘shadow figure’ for ourselves since such events are simply alluded to.

The author asserts that ‘buddhistic evangelicals can be tricky because exposing their continual agenda might only drive them further underground’. Coburn states that Om Aotha Rai and Dambam Cheong in their articles, don’t seem to share such a fear. If Coburn disagrees with the beliefs of evangelicals he should do so in open debate, rather than simply cast accusations on their motives. Nepal’s press is still free. But it seems not to want an open debate. He wants the people of the country to be educated in a materialistic and expendable bubble. Hence his approval of the present Constitution, with its banning of ‘any act or cond that may prejudice another’s religion’.

Would Coburn be happy if such a constitution were promulgated in his own country? He sees for the imposition of obscenity laws in someone else’s country while etaving the freedom that his own country accords him. This is not sheer hypocrisy!

Does he really imagine that ‘playing in a Himalayan village’ had no impact on that religious faith? People only object to change when they don’t like the changes that others are advocating. As the author, I too lament some of the changes that have happened in Nepal’s recent history. But the freedom of the people to choose their own way of life is not one of the changes I lament. Coburn argues that the people of Nepal are truly ‘frightened’ due to the attaction of those who are rejecting the old world and the new village. But here the author confuse the freedom and independence of the will.

The people are indeed ‘independent’-they are constrained by their environment and the operations that are available to a village villager-he is under the influence of parents, luminous, leaders, government agents. But that does not mean he is not free. To deny them free agency is to enslave their humanity. The people of Nepal will decide what they do with both their material and the message brought to them by the project. Denying them that dignity smacks of imperialism.

Mark Pickett is a writer based in Khatlan who lived nearly 20 years in Nepal and has a PhD from Tulane University for his dissertation on Néwari social order. He is the author of ‘Caste and Kinship in a Modern Hindu Society’ (Seattle: Ortho Press, 2013).
Robin Griffin, played by Moss, screamed for more episodes. I never imagined that a few years later Campion would delve back into a series that changed so much for Moss, Campion and anyone who viewed this distinctive piece of work.

When there are films in the theatre that don’t warrant your money and your time, television and streaming is now the go-to alternative, with an astonishing scope of material, some of which is very, very good. The second six-part installment, Top of the Lake: China Girl, which just came out, is an example of long-form television that is extraordinary in its unfurling feminism. The series paints a picture of a tough woman detective who is imperfect but courageous, surrounded by an ugly, unequal world of sex and sexual harassment, where women are trafficked, go missing, and are used for their bodies via prostitution as well as for illegal surrogacy in a desperate modern world where couples are frantic to reproduce no matter the cost.

Robin Griffin has left her beautiful New Zealand hometown of Lake Top, a setting that underscored both the starkness and the almost ludicrous beauty of the first series. She has moved back to Sydney, broken-hearted yet again, and ready to throw herself into her work. When a woman’s body is found in a suitcase floating on the waters surrounding Sydney, Griffin is poised and ready to find the killer. Into this mix comes Griffin’s daughter, who she gave up for adoption at sixteen, a few very possessive mothers, a cruel left wing, pseudo-academic, a handsome grieving father, a lovable female sidekick in the police force with a sharp tongue, and a whole load of women from south-east Asia who are forced into prostitution by abject poverty at home. The mystery here is as strong as it was in the first series, and as with that story, this one too develops characters in a strong, unswerving fashion.

Campion does not direct every episode here, but she co-wrote the script and her stamp is evident from the trajectory of the story and the strong female leads that steal the show. It is heartening to see a director that I have followed for so long constantly pushing her own boundaries as she changes her subject matter and her approach with each project.

Jane Campion is not great because she is one of the few successful female filmmakers; she is stellar because she makes films about women, and about men, without any apology for her feminism. That is what means to stand up for your own sex. No bros burning or man hating or turning up one’s nose at women who don’t make the same ‘independent’ choices as yourself, just telling the truth, starkly, about what it is to be female in this difficult world.
Through the eyes of a blind king

Puskar Gajawar in Nepali Times, 28 August

When the sharpest of all swords—knowing for this year’s Madan Puskarwa—was announced recently, many of the titles and authors were well known. But a book of poetry, Dhrishtakshara, by Charnamari Kandel, which no one had heard about, was declared the winner of Nepal’s prestigious literary award last week.

A short epic in verse that deconstructs the myth of the Mahabharat, this slim volume bears its strong message of inclusiveness, respect for the differently-abled, and turns the story of the Mahabalpuram upside-down.

While everyone bet on big names and their macho hype-filled books, they are now curious about why, Dhrishtakshara was chosen by the Madan Puskar Gauri.

Charnamari Kandel, 70, wrote the epic’s prequel before Dhrishtakshara that earned him the fame that he rightly deserved. He also has four books of literary criticism and a collection of short stories, but the self-spoken author who likes to keep a low profile remains largely unknown. Besides, his use of traditional rhyme and meter has been going out of fashion.

In Dhrishtakshara, Kandel retells the story of the Mahabharat through the eyes of the blind king of Kurukshetra, a mythical kingdom for which the Pandavas and the Kauravas fought the epic war. A personal tragedy inspired the author, Kandel, to re-imagine the character of the Mahabharat. Six years ago, when he was head of the Nepal Department at Tribhuvan University, Kandel got an eye infection that never really healed. Despite the many operations in Nepal and India, he has lost the sight of one eye. It was then that he understood the pain and suffering of blind people, and conceived the idea of rewriting the Mahabharat through the eyes of the blind king.

The original Mahabharata depicts Krishna as a charismatic leader who fights for truth and justice. But in Kandel’s verse, Krishna appears as a really condescending whoL rides others into fighting the dual war at Kurukshetra and puts the murder of Duryodhan and Draupadi.

Dhrishtakshara is told from the viewpoint of Dhrishtakshara, the blind king and focuses on how he perceives the protagonists of the Mahabharat war. The book forces us to resemble the eyes from the perspective of a disabled character unified by the original version of the myth.

Kandel says, Dhrishtakshara is more about the modern world rather than the Mahabharat. “I just use the legends of the Mahabharat to comment on modern issues,” he says.

Born in a Hindu Brahman family in a remote village of Chitlang, Kandel went to Banaras for higher studies. This ancient Indian city on the banks of the holy Ganges river was then the alternate destination for Nepali scholars. Kandel admired the poetry of Lebharath Pandit, Laxmi Prasad Deshroti and Madhan Chemer.

Kandel’s contemporaries switched to prose, but he remained faithful to metrical verses. Decades later, his passion for a fading genre of literature won him what is to be the biggest accolade of his life.

Honour to humour

Bamdev Pandrol on RSS News Agency, 28 August

After King Gyanendra dissolved Parliament in 2002, pressure mounted on the Nepal Congress (NC) to renounce its long-held policy to support a constitutional monarchy. But the country’s largest party was insistent, even as King Gyanendra hinted he was preparing for a coup. Cartoonist Batsayan depicted NC President Girija Prasad Koirala carrying a carcass of a house marked ‘Constitutional Monarchy’ on his shoulder (above). The ‘logging a dead horse’ sketch was controversial, with the royal palace putting pressure on Kathmandu, the newspaper that Batsonay works.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“There’s a lot of noise about the border dispute, but the Chinese and the Indians are not fighting over it. They’re fighting to control the border. The Chinese don’t want the Indians to control the border. The Indians don’t want the Chinese to control the border. So, it’s a matter of who controls the border.”

— Dipak Om, an expert on Nepal-China relations, Nepali Times, 31 August
More than 70% of Rautahat was submerged in the flood of 12-15 August. The levees built a quarter century ago to protect this border district from the Bagmati to the east and the Lakhakaiya to the west collapsed in places, letting flood waters into the villages and farmlands.

This water had no outlet because right across the southern border in India, immediately adjacent to the no-man’s-land (dangai) was a 100-ft-high embankment, which acted as a dam. The water level rose rapidly, entering homes as families climbed stairs for safety, salving whatever they could. Fortunately for this district of 400,000 people, the southern embankment breached at its eastern end in the early evening of 13 August, otherwise the result would have been even more catastrophic.

The 600-m-long breach in the embankment was being hurriedly plugged this week by about 200 labourers and three tractors working day and night under the direction of Indian authorities. On the Nepal side, the administration, engineers, politicians and citizens’ groups seemed to have their minds elsewhere. The reconstruction of the embankment was happening on 27 August even as Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, on his visit to India, was meeting Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in Patna.

What this episode revealed is the inability of Nepal’s state mechanism and national civil society to resolve the inundation crisis along the border with India. It also provides further proof of the neglect of the borderlands by the ‘power centres’ in political parties and by civil society as a whole.

Local say that there was a time when the land spread flat on both sides of the border, including the dangai stretch. The southern embankment started to come up no more than 36 m from no-man’s-land and over the last decades additions were made to its height metre by metre. The Nepal state and civil society just watched.

From the start, this embankment has looked like a project to protect Gaur’s sister city on the Indian side, Bazgenia in Bihar state, no matter what it did to upstream settlements and farmlands in Nepal. The soil needed to build the dike was dug out of the land along its northern base, which meant that a gully was created, further endangering the Nepal side. For decades, Nepal has lacked the political will to monitor and control the expanding width and height of this levee.

With embankments on three sides, Rautahat was ripe for disaster. When the Bagmati and Lakhakaiya embankments breached three weeks ago, with the dangai embankment acting as a dam, the southern half of the district was converted into a large lake. This embankment has no sluice gates, and the 1m high pipes located every half km were not enough to drain the water. In addition, the gates for each of these outlets were controlled by the Indian authorities.

The question is why the Nepal side has been silent for years on end as the southern embankment gained height, and why it seems to be quiet even after the tragedy of August 2017. Firstly, the locals themselves thought that the Bagmati and Lakhakaiya levees would protect Rautahat. There was no elected local government to marshal local communities against the southern embankment, and because this was a cross-border embankment everyone looked to the state authorities in Kathmandu, where both the political parties and state administration were more than willing to shirk their responsibility.

By 13 August, Rautahat was inundated, and the waters were still rising. Families were perched on rooftops, and it looked like thousands would drown. Fortunately, the Bihar-side embankment breached towards the east at around 5pm due to water pressure, and the water began to recede at once. Even though livestock, foodgrain stocks, retail and wholesale items in shops and storage, and family valuables on the ground floor (including documents) were lost, human lives were safe this time.

With the embankment breach being repaired without hindrance, it is clear that Rautahat will once more live under threat of inundation. No discussions have been held after the breach about widening the culverts that do exist, nor concerning a protocol on when the existing ones should be managed. In the meantime, the Nepal Government superstructure...

### Flood

**Many farmers in the Tarai will have no harvest until next year**

**SUNIR PANDEY**

**in Saptari**

After working all day on his family’s rice fields in Sardaha, 36-year-old Chandan Kumar Raut went to bed on Friday 11 August hoping to spend Saturday with his wife and newborn son. For him, it would be a rare day off during a busy paddy planting season.

But overnight Nepal’s southern districts received their heaviest rainfall in decades, and by the time Raut woke up the next morning much of Saptari, including thousands of hectares of prime agricultural land, was under water.

“The water was chest high. I curried my son above my head and my wife held my shirt as we waded out on to the highway,” recalls Raut.
dangerous dike: barriers building a border embankment in India that was breached by the flood on 15 August, saving the town of Gaur from being completely submerged. (below).

The border region near Gaur after the flood waters receded. (below right).

saved by the bell

Legendra Rai, a girl in Gaur, was saved by the bell when she received a phone call from her brother-in-law who said, “There is a dike building on the border near Gaur. Please go and see.” She went and saw a large embankment being built on the border. She warned the Indian army to stop building the dike, as it was causing problems to the Nepalese villagers who depend on the river for their livelihood. The army listened to her and withdrew the dike.

The flood swept away all their belongings—clothes, kitchen utensils, money, and food stocks. Raut feared the worst for his crop. After the flooding subsided two days later, his worst fears were confirmed. “We would have had enough rise to last us a year, now it’s all gone. What am I going to do?” asks Raut.

Years of disagreements over

administrators and civic society should have been alert to protect Nepal’s citizens and the surrounding communities. However, there is a lack of coordination when it comes to building embankments along borders.

The area around Gaur is like a vast expanse of fields where rice and wheat are grown. The fallow fields are used to grow crops like corn and soybeans. The farmers have lost millions of dollars in the past. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development estimates that Nepali farmers lost up to Rs 2 billion due to floods and landslides. It is now working with the UN Development Programme to provide relief packages to farmers in 30 flood-hit districts.

The harvest season is crucial for the livelihood of many farmers. The Nepal government has issued a statement assuring farmers that help will be provided to affected farmers to recover from the loss.

vegetable farms across the Tarai region benefit from this package. The relief package includes seeds, tools, and other materials to support the farmers. The government has also provided financial assistance to farmers who have lost their crops due to the flood.
On a war-footing

Incumbent PM Duivya IV’s visit to India overshadowed Excubent PM Makhunay’s sojourn to Pyongyang last week, and would have gone largely unnoticed had we not seen this headline buried in the inside page: ‘Nepal in North Korea’. We can make an educated guess that MNK and RJI had a one-on-one about missile diplomacy.

GNKE can learn from DPRK about how small countries can leverage nuclear deterrence to defend against outside dalliance in domestic affairs. After Lion Brave’s Delhi visit during which he rolled over to say “Yes Sir, Yes Sir, Three Bags Full” while having his belly rubbied, Nepal has become a center of even greater urgency for Nepal.

So, now that the Department of Geology and Mines has found U285 in Mustang, we need to issue an international tender for centrifuges and reactors to turn our fuel rods into weapon-grade plutonium in an underground facility somewhere in the western sector near Okharpauwa. This is all top secret stuff, which I can tell you more about, but then I’d have to kill you. Suffice for now to reveal that we are working on our own weapons of mass self-destruction ASSAP.

It goes without saying that Nepal’s nuclear program will be solely for civilian purposes, meaning it will be used to vapourise civilians in whichever country crosses our path. Nepal will also have a strict no first strike policy (conditions apply) so we need to buck all this up with not just a conventional, exacting army, which is what we have now, but a much larger standing army.

Few people know that the most secret weapon in our military arsenal and urinal is the Army’s highly-classified biological weapons program which was successfully tested in Hail in 2010. Nepal has a long history of germ warfare – we kept invaders from the South at bay with our female anthrax moth Mazarie Army. But since malaria was eradicated, we have no forward line of defense, which is why the Nepal Army is clandestinely cultivating the Vihoho choboe and Giardia lamblia for the conduct of germ warfare. Cordially infiltrated into the endoplastic reticulum, the bacteria pokes an inflamed army on the run.

So, I am not losing sleep, like some pundits are, that the Everest-Royal Nepal Army Pvt Ltd has grabbed Tundikhel, is setting up its own radio station, is building the Tandi Fast Track and even the Second- or-None International Airport at Nigal.

If money is an issue, the Army can always raise funds by selling tickets to its annual Foopulti Circus. Instead of just guarding our national parks, 5-star generals could run 5-star resorts. And since we are now an inclusive democracy, and crooks can be candidates, there is no reason why commissioned officers shouldn’t also be allowed to contest elections to be the executive President of this Praetorian Secular Open-Delegation Free Fed-Style Republic.

The Ass