Bulldozing democracy

Last year, when Nepal held its first local elections in two decades, people hoped that there would finally be development, transparency and accountability at the grassroots. But just seven months after they were sworn in, many of the mayors, village council chiefs and ward committee members are showing more interest in using their office for personal gain rather than doing public service. A third of the representatives elected to local governments are contractors with shady reputations.

For the past 20 years of conflict and post-war transition, the absence of elected local councils, construction contractors with political protection plundered natural resources. Most of these businesses are now elected local politicians, and most are from the Nepali Congress (Story: Page 18).

At least 300 mayors and village council chiefs are members of the Federation of Contractor’s Association of Nepal. Many were elected who are not affiliated to the Federation, but still own small and medium-size construction firms or rent heavy equipment.

Many of them have been found to be abusing their authority to award road, bridge and other construction contracts to their own companies. Some have transferred their company ownerships to family members or relatives, but many have not even bothered to drive – blatantly swarding contracts to themselves.

Kail Tul Devkota, an expert on local governance and fiscal federalisation, told Nepali Times “One third of mayors and village councils seem to have (just one goal): amass personal wealth rather than serve the people who elected them.”

Many had anticipated this problem when political parties openly sold election tickets to wealthy and influential businessmen rather than political and social activists with integrity. UNM Vice-Chair Yubraj Gyawali was one of them, but his call for fielding honest candidates was ignored by his own party.

Today, Gyawali cannot hide his disappointment and says this is what happens when political parties give tickets to contractors and people elect them.

He says: “If we want good governance we need to elect good guys, it is a threat to our democracy if we elect overnight millionaires who plunder natural resources. The people will be disillusioned with democracy and look for alternatives.”

Former Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Upreti says the fact that so many contractors with questionable pasts have been elected exposes deep structural flaws in the system. “Our electoral process needs reforms and one of the most urgent reforms is to make elections as inexpensive as possible,” he says.

Allowing absentee ballots could be one way to make elections less expensive since that would mean many voters will not be physically present and prone to intimidation and vote-buying.

Bikash Satish and some political activists have demanded absentee voting in our country, where a large proportion of the population is internal or overseas migrants.

Last month’s Himtal Mediacal Opinion Poll Survey 2018 showed that a majority of Nepalis support this demand. 15% of the 3,012 respondents, 63% approved of absentee voting while only 36% were against it.

Om Astha Rai
TRICKLEDOWN CORRUPTION

Last year, we predicted optimistically that this year, inclusive local councils would remove kleptocrats and improve governance. Indeed, in many cities and villages across the country local governments have moved quickly to catch up with the times. They have formed a network of local government leaders and members of the public, including ethnic minority leaders, to lobby for a vision of Kathmandu to follow the spirit of the constitution to devolve revenue-generation and decision-making.

However, as our report shows, it has not always been easy to make progress. Many elected leaders, especially those from ethnic minorities, have feared the crooks get themselves elected. Candidates who are from various ethnic backgrounds who have been rejected by their constituents for lack of a right set of political credentials, have tried to use their positions for their personal benefit. Many of them are elected on the promise of making their respective communities benefit. As a result, the trend of local governments running on the basis of personal relationships and personal allegiance, and not on the basis of their own companies, has continued.

It is not the job of the mayor or the village chair to draper an electorate. The people have put great trust on their elected representatives, they must not squander this trust and prove themselves. If they do their own businesses, they should direct immediately to avoid conflict of interest. Indeed, what we have seen are many village and city governments handling over management of their own companies to relatives or personal assistants, and making sure their own companies buy goods from contractors or rent equipment.

Last month’s Himal Media Public Opinion Survey 2018 showed that the people still have great hope in local governments improving their livelihod. People in rural and urban areas, especially the poor, have the highest percentage of respondents who said that services have improved since local governments took office. See charts, below). Asked what they expect from the new local governments, almost all of them said they want their children to get better education, better and faster service delivery at their local level. But there is also considerable scepticism about whether the new local councils will be able to utilize these funds.

The national government has trickled down to the local level. It is up to the state, civil society and local FM radio to spotlight this reckless abandonment of the promises of democracy.

Q. Have you been able to access services more easily and effectively from elected municipalities and village councils?

Q. What do you expect from elected municipalities and village councils?
WE WISH FOR A WORLD FULL OF LOVE
IT INSPIRES US TO BRIDGE DISTANCES
No tiger, no mountain

Visiting Tiger Mountain when the peaks are not visible forces us to experience the forest and birds

The air is surprisingly clear for most of this winter over Central Nepal, and the Himalayan peaks were out in full glory. A holiday plan to see the Super Blue Blood Moon on 31 January from Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, therefore, promised to be a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Needless to say, a ride on the Tiger Mountain command an unparalleled view of the snowy Himalayas in the west, along a jagged horizon of the Annapurnas, Machhapuchre’s skyscraping pyramid, Lamjung Himal, right up to Manaslu and Himchuli to the east.

People don’t come to Tiger Mountain to see tigers, although an occasional leopard does stroll by at night. They come here for the mountains after seeing tigers in Bardia or Chitwan.

Last week, the wind direction suddenly shifted and the whole of Nepal was enveloped in thick brown haze. After a 7-hour wait at Kathmandu’s domestic airport, the view from cruising altitude was spectacular. You could see that the pollution leveled off at 3,000 m and the Indo-Gangetic plains were shrouded in a thick blanket of smog that was being blown up the valleys to the mountains.

Visiting Tiger Mountain when the peaks are not visible, and when the smog had blocked out a rare total lunar eclipse was an important life lesson: things don’t work out as planned; there is no point getting worked up about something beyond your control, make the best of what you have, and value the smaller things in life that you take for granted. The Zen masters taught this long ago, but it has happened in an age of instant gratification and the pursuit of value for money.

The next morning, a hesitant sun rose from behind the forested ridge that faded into lighter shades of grey in the distance. Of all the plant species on the planet, 3% are found in Nepal, many of them in and around Pokhara with its great altitude variation and heavy annual rainfall.

The trees and thick undergrowth of the community forests around Tiger Mountain are a favourite for birds, with 312 of Nepal’s 684 species here. Two new sightings were recorded last year: White-browed Owlet and Short-tailed Owl. There are 279 species of butterflies, and a wide variety of dragon and damselflies.

**NOW YOU SEE IT; NOW YOU DON’T:**

Many species in Tiger Mountain are in 65 minutes are meeting spot of Tiger Mountain when the peaks were covered by haze.

On clear days, the same swimming pool has a stunning reflection of Machhapuchre and Annapurna I right.

Within 45 minutes of setting off, bird guide Hari Shandar had spotted 21 species: Greater Barbet, Blue-throated Barbet, Blue-winged Pitta, Himalayan Drongo, White-throated Fantail, Rufous Gorged Flycatcher, Crimenzon Sturnbird, and many more.

Coming across a gregarious flock of Grey Tree Pie, Shandar whispers it is probably because there is an owl nearby, and sure enough he makes out with binoculars an Asian Barred Owl perched on a branch.

The ridge where Tiger Mountain is situated was once located by trekking pioneer Jimmy Roberts while trying to find prominent hilltops to erect radio masts for the 1960 elections. It then became a camping spot for Prince Charles’ trek to Nepal in 1975, and the

**Royal Trek** that it popularised as an alternative to the classical trek; more relaxed day hikes in a relatively accessible location, with good views and rich flora and fauna.

This year marks Tiger Mountain’s 25th anniversary, and the resort which has got a Gold award from Travelfive for sustainability, offers a model for the kind of tourism Nepal should be promoting: homestays, high-value eco-tourism that uses local products and showcases the best of Nepal’s scenery, nature and culture.

Says owner-manager Marcus

**POKHARA FLORA**

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is set in a luxuriant ecosystem with temperate Salicka-Cassinia evergreen forest which is a haven for plants and wildlife. The forests are in excellent condition with a high diversity of trees and shrubs, including the Rhododendron arboreum, Nepal’s national flower. The community forest is managed to promote the sustainable use of plant resources, and local people use many of the trees and shrubs for food, fodder, medicines and energy needs. Walking through the

**Istanbul more frequent**

Turkey Airlines will resume daily operations between Istanbul and Kathmandu, by adding two weekly flights from 24 September 2019, indicating a growth in passenger demand on this sector in the post-earthquake and holiday season.

**Aged JW**

Johnson & Willis introduced a new blended Scotch whisky, Johnnie Walker aged 18 Years, which has hints of vanilla, almonds, orange peel and a waft of oak smoke. The whisky is said to be crafted from Scotland’s finest malts and selected 18-year-old whiskies, each hand-selected by Master Blender Jim Beveridge.

**Tabs and phones**

Samsung Galaxy Tab 4 10.1 and Galaxy Tab S4 + Smartphone in Kathmandu with price range of Rs. 6,999 and Rs. 13,999.

**SAMSUNG**

Samsung staff state for educational content, and permitted control to set usage time limits and restrict access. The water and dust resistant AI allows users to get information without unlocking their phone and use Samsung VR area.

Cotton: “Nepal should be trying to meet revenue targets from tourism, not just chase numbers.”

A long scan is just visible through the haze to the south, the runway of the new regional airport that will be completed in 2021, allowing direct international flights into Pokhara for a lot more tourists.

Most will come for the Annapurnas, but Pokhara has a lot more to offer than mountains. Tour operators and hotel investors need a Plan B for days and seasons when the mountains are not visible.

Kamla Bhatt
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Relearning to build back better

Earthquakes provide Nepal with a regular opportunity to revive traditional art

There will be challenges. For example, artists and handicrafts craft and art cannot compete with mass-produced ‘Made in China’ souvenirs. Assembly line Ganesha figurines have been replicated cheaply and with very little effort. There are a number of short-term projects to help artists keep up with the changing landscape, but these efforts need to be sustained.

There is also the issue of incentives, and the middlemen and women who seem to make much more than the artists themselves. Everyone wants to sell and few want to produce. Finding the right balance for the way prices and profits are distributed along the value chain is critical if we are to encourage masterpieces in the market and not just cheap replicates.

Copyright is often non-existent. It has become a joke that ‘copyright’ means copying without making any profit. How do we go about protecting the intellectual property of the designer and master artist? It seems that all the art pieces in our cities and towns in the form of open museums are referred to as ‘priceless’ – until they are stolen and auctioned globally.

Anil Chitrakar, President of Shadbhurti

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Rebuilding ourselves

Anil Chitrakar

The demand for their unique skill sets to rebuild better homes with traditional features can promote local skills and materials, as is happening in parts of Patan and Bhaktapur. The first monumen that was restored after the earthquake was Bouddhanath after it raised $286 million in cash and $386,000 from devout donors. Similar restoration of the hundreds of other monuments could generate a lot more funds to revive the traditional art of wood carving and metalwork.

Nepal needs to keep its young people at home by providing them gainful employment, and a revival of the vernacular art and craft could do just that. Politics related to the diverse identity of Nepal is also a great opportunity to re-design, re-create and recover the jewelry, musical instruments, textiles, utensils and food heritage of each group — skills and knowledge often preserved by families across Nepal.

As each group celebrates its new year, perform rituals and give away gifts, the demand will grow and create a new economy at the local level. If tourists like these objects, it could translate into more revenue. As people become richer, they will want many of these objects in precious metal and as an investment or savings as it has been the culture for a long time in Nepal.

There is a great demand in the West for Tibetan artifacts. As new trade routes and pilgrimage sites open up between Nepal and China, the demand for art and craft with Tibetan designs and themes is also going to rise. Tibetan carpets woven in Nepal are still popular souvenir items, and can be upgraded.

In the Kathmandu Sacred Landscape and among the growing number of pilgrims there will be a demand for ritual objects to offer and bring back.

The need for silver and brass water vessels (instead of plastic bottles) to take back holy water from Lake Mansarovar could revive the brass and silver industry.

The demand for Buddhist art can grow if we think beyond Lumbini and the Kathmandu Valley and integrate Kishnapar, Narath, Bodhgaya, and later maybe even venture beyond to Taxila, Nalanda and Xuan.

Design input is critical in this process, and the objects must be as functional as possible. These need to be of use in our daily lives, not just collectibles in show cases. They have to be easy to use and easy to repair and clean.

With the Belt and Road Initiative we could even be exporting craft into the European market in bulk by train. The Silk Road was historically both the means and an end for trade. It kept this whole region prosperous for a long time and can help our art and craft to thrive again.
Mira Rai racing to help other runners

DUKANGH SHERPA

After gaining speedy international recognition as a trail runner, Mira Rai now wants to offer the same opportunities she had to other young Nepali athletes. Desperate for a job, Mira Rai nearly migrated to Malaysia for work, but decided instead to devote herself to the sport. With the help of mentors who spotted her talent and supported her training and participation in international tournaments, Rai is now a world class runner and a familiar name in international races.

Last week, Rai flew straight back to Nepal from Hong Kong after participating in Vibram 196km Ultra trail race to organise a 12km mountain marathon in Pharping, the last in a series of ten races organised by Trail Running Nepal.

Rai herself has set an example to others about how to overcome adversity to achieve goals. After major win in 2014 and 2015, Mira suffered knee injuries and a ligament tear requiring surgery. This did not hold her back for long— not only did she return to running but also started organizing major races in Nepal. Rai has accomplished in four years what most athletes take a decade. From winning numerous national and international trail races, sky running championships, ultra marathons, to being named National Geographic Adventurer of the Year 2017, Rai is now devoting herself to helping others like her.

“Everything that I have achieved so far has been possible because of the opportunities that I got through my mentors and supporters,” Rai told us last week in Pharping. “Without that, I would have never become the Mira that I am today.”

Last year, Rai took the rising running star Humi Budha Magar who won the Nepgun Trail Race to Hong Kong. Magar also won last week’s Pharping race in the women’s category. Rai is now selecting and training a group of young Nepali runners for the December 2018 Oxford Trailwalker 100km race in Hong Kong. Several male runners from Nepal have participated in this event, but there is still little participation of female Nepali runners. “It’s time for change,” she adds emphatically.

Despite her accomplishments and determination, Mira Rai remains humble and grounded. She says this is because of her background of struggle and single-minded pursuit of her goal. Four years ago, just before she became a celebrity after winning her first 196km race in Nepal, Rai had just put her Malaysian work visa and was all set to leave.

Her coach兼朋友Dhurba Bikram Malla convinced her not to go, and instead train further in martial arts. She stayed and met other runners who encouraged her to participate in an upcoming race, which she won. This got her noticed by Richard Beal from Trail Running Nepal, who then went on to mentor and support her training.

Mira Rai hasn’t looked back since. She is currently part of the Salomon trail running team which has been sponsoring her since 2016. Rai is now in a race against time to help others, providing a platform through which talented female runners receive the same breaks she received.

She says: “I want to give back the help I got when I first started.”

Photo: Supplied

Work a short film about Mira Rai where she explores what motivated her to remain in Nepal, her fuel to win international medals as a trail runner, and why she now wants to help other talented Nepali girls like her.

Photo: nepali.com

December 2018 Oxford Trailwalker 100km race in Hong Kong.

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Photo: nepali.com
How humans can live in BARDIA

Conservationists are testing early warning devices to reduce damage from increasing conflict between people and wild elephants in Nepal and other parts of South Asia. As human settlements encroach on traditional routes for elephant migration, fiercely protective adult elephants demolish buildings, overturn cars and gore farmers who have tried to chase them away.

In Nepal, 18 people were killed in 27 wild elephant attacks in 2016 alone and two elephants were killed by villagers in retaliation. India saw more than 400 people and 100 elephants killed in wildlife encounters, and in Sri Lanka 88 people and 279 elephants were killed in the same year.

A photograph last year of an elephant and calf being torched with tar balls in India won awards and drew international attention to the hostility the pachyderms face near human settlements. While such conflict cannot be completely eradicated, they can be reduced.

Now, conservationists in Nepal are exploring both traditional and modern knowledge to devise conflict-prevention and mitigation strategies. Particularly, experience with Smart Early Warning Systems (SWS) that employ motion detectors and automatic dissemination through mobile SMS that have saved many lives in India, can be shared with neighboring countries.

Bardia National Park and WWF Nepal collaborated with Engineering Aids Nepal to test the warning system in Patharhajo village between January-June 2017.

Located within Khaiki Wildlife Corridor connecting Bardia National Park with Katerniatighat Wildlife Sanctuary in India, the village faces frequent and intense conflicts with elephants. Two people were killed and 16 houses destroyed by elephants in the last two years.

Strategically placed hybrid sensors using a combination of acoustic and seismic signals detect elephant movement, automatically setting off a siren, and sending SMS alerts to selected phone numbers in the vicinity.

The sensors were tested on captive elephants to record data on sound and motion associated with elephant movement, and this was integrated into an algorithm to accurately identify elephants and remove false positives.

For the trial, sensors were placed at 5 metre intervals in the periphery of Patharhajo village with its known entry points for elephants. During the six months last year, some 21 instances of attempted entry of elephants were identified. The SWS had a 82% success rate in sounding sirens and sending SMS alerts worked 70% of the time.

A review of the cases showed two main causes for missed alarms: the sirens system was compromised due to rats chewing up the wires, while SMS alerts were halted by service provider after the pre-paid amount was consumed.

The team is working to resolve these issues by upgrading the wi-fi mechanism, and is on a deal with the telecom service provider. The next trial will be conducted in the Bardia...
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Buildicon and wood expo, the 4th Nepal Building and Wood Industry International Trade –where architecture, building, construction, design and engineering meet, woodworking machinery, furniture production technologies, tools, fittings, components, raw materials and products.

8-11 February, Bhairabnagar, Kathmandu. (01) 4537250, 4537255, info@kms.com

Bikes vs cars screening. A fundraising program to support Shail Shrestha representing Nepal at the 2018 World Bicycle Forum in Peru. Bikes vs Cars is a relevant documentary about bicycles, high-gearing culture in city planning between bikes, cars and a growing reliance on fossil fuels.

10 February, 17:45, Nepal Tourism Board, Pullahari Monastery, (01) 8100000-500 (for students with ID only). Ticket: 9811265293, gandaki.nepalkindle@gmail.com

Children’s literature festival Enthralling reading among children, the 4th Golok Nepal Mahatstva is here with British storyteller, author, and teacher trainer David Hailsham as a special guest. There will be workshops for children and parents, panel discussions, laureat of children’s books, YouTube video series of Nepali children and many more such events.

10 February, Patu Bunglo School, Patan, 8:00-11:00, (01) 5522294, etalim@gmail.com

Kalapatthar mithai A mithai written and performed by Padmini Khatun Chaudhary.

9 February, 5:30pm, Mondial Theatre, Asanotri, (01) 4537162, info@mondialtheatre.com

Odissi dance recital A cultural performance by Indian Cultural Centre Kathmandu and Odissi (ancient Indian classical) dance recital by Dr Sujata Mishra to celebrate 70 years of diplomatic ties between India and Nepal.

10 February, 8pm onwards, Nepal Army Auditorium, Sundarabindu, Near I-Taxi (01) 4322221. Reservation: 01 5107042, kalmik@gmail.com

Male nude Celebrating the beauty of male figures in a society that is judgmental towards male nude paintings, Kapoor Main Diet and Roshan Mishra exhibit their paintings at Gallery Mcbc, 9-15 February, 4-7pm, Mitro Boud, Chobrap, Lalitpur, 9811710710, lalitpurmuseum@gmail.com

7th himalayan Outdoor Festival A call to outdoor enthusiasts from all over Nepal and around the world for three main sports: trail running, rock climbing, and mountain biking. 7-18 February, Westin Resort, Phewa Lake, 9811088878, hek@westinphewalakefestival.com


14 February, 6-11pm, Yeti Amphitheatre, Durbar Marg, Rs1,500 (natives), Rs700 (tickets including buffet and dessert), Rs4,000 (dancing), Rs2,000 (couple), For queries: 9809807951

Kanthamandu Guest House Children and gurus, Sangay Khel, Shrestha noodles, Kungfa chicken, dumplings and stir-fried veggie, All Chinese dishes for Chinese New Year’s Eve celebration.

15 February, 6pm, Kirti Dresden Garden Cafe, Thamel, 981108, info@kirtidines.com

Olive Garden Enjoy Italian dishes at the specially designed restaurant with its new and revised menu, 6:30-10:30pm, Lumbini Hotel Kathmandu, Lompat, For Reservation: (01) 4411818, soe@olive.co.uk

Plait in Nepal Australian musician Pint will be in Nepal performing along with a special guest, David Malles Mecic.

16 February, 6pm onwards, Tongvelop Court, Hotel, Rs1,500 (early bookings) Rs3,000 (no deals), (01) 4462503, tongvelop@gmail.com

Bob Night A tribute to the king of reggae Bob Marley at the annual celebration of the great singer in Nepal.

3 February, 6pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 98088, 980701717, harley@nchm.com

Retro Valentine’s Away from the crowd of Kathmandu city, enjoy a romantic and musical evening with live performance by Uday and Manish Satang.

14 February, 6pm onwards, hotel Greenland, Wadepal, 9811761715, info@greenlandgh.com

Rox Restaurant For a special Valentine-themed four in one dinner to drive with your loved one.

14 February, 6:30, Hotel Regency, Bhaktapur, Rs3,000 onwards, (01) 5717234, monroieh@roxtel.net

Agaone: The Hestia Special Goan special and a heart cake to all the couples booking in advance for live music, BBQ and special packages for Valentine’s Day.

14 February, 8am onwards, Dibighat, Lalitpur, Reservations: (01) 553810, 9811707951

Fairily by Marriott Experience authentic flavors and aromas of China, as the hotel’s guest Chef Noah Le prepares a special menu for the Chinese New Year and spring festival, 8-17 February, 9:10-10:15pm, Ktika Restaurant, Thamel, 981169, 9811741999, info@trollenmarriott.com

Kathmandu Guest House Children and gurus, Sangay Khel, Shrestha noodles, Kungfa chicken, dumplings and stir-fried veggie, All Chinese dishes for Chinese New Year’s Eve celebration.

15 February, 6pm, Kirti Dresden Garden Cafe, Thamel, 981108, info@kirtidines.com

Fresh Farm Nepal A relaxing and rejuvenating getaway that offers fresh foods straight from the farm.

Sandor Resort, Bhaktapur, 981107836

Royal Empire A blend of classic and contemporary, get immersed in the music, get immersed in the music by Kaushik, multiple dance performances by Fire and Fire, show to accompany you and your beloved for the evening.

Gandhina, Bhaktapur, For Reservation: (01) 4462504, info@royalempireboutiquehotel.com

Retreat at Damaara A retreat for contemplatives and creative minds: an undisturbed sanctuary to enrich and enlighten your inner self, awareness, passions and spiritual exploration.

Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, 9811052442, info@retreatmadhara.com, www.retraintmadhara.com

Park Village Resort Lamps All Over package for a blissful Valentine’s Day getaway. Park Village offers a fully customized deal including gifts, dinner and more.

14 February, Budhanilkantha, 9811700290, parkvillagekathmandu.com

Shangri-La Village Resort Spend a calming romantic night at the resort with Nepal village-regional architecture, garden rooms and a splendid swimming pool that mirrors the splendor of the Himalayas. Take the Valentine’s package for dinner, dinner, dessert, massage and more.

14 February, Pokhara, 9811777, 9809455, cocotree@shangrilavillageresorts.com

Yatri Suites and Spa Pamper your partner and yourself with a relaxing spa treatment which includes full body massage, body oil, sauna and steam.

14 February, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs3,000, Reservation: 9811061996, reservations@yatriktathi.com

GETAWAY
Ganga Maya Adhikari refuses to give up her struggle for justice

Ganga Maya Adhikari was preparing dinner for her husband Nanda Prasad when someone knocked on their door in Phujel village of Gorkha one late evening in 2004. What behind the door would change their lives forever.

The visitor told the Adhikari couple that their son, Krishna, had met with an accident in Chitwan. It was already late, but Nanda Prasad decided to go to see his son that very night.

When Nanda Prasad reached Bhairupur after a night long bus ride, he learnt that his son had not met with any accident — he had in fact been kidnapped, tortured and killed by Maoist cadres.

“My husband saw a bullet wound in my son’s head, and he screamed,” Ganga Maya recalls. “He asked what had happened but the Maoist quickly poured kerosene on the body and set it on fire.” She said they wanted to destroy all evidences before his wounds could be documented.

The Adhikaris came to Kathmandu seeking justice for their murdered son. Even after Nanda Prasad died after a prolonged hunger strike, Ganga Maya has not given up. She has now been on a continuous hunger strike, being fed intravenously by doctors at BIC Hospital, for three years. She vows to not break it until there is justice.

Krishna Prasad was just 17 when he was accused of being a spy and taken away, dragged behind a motorcycle in a sack and executed. Ganga Maya says their son was not spying on anyone. “He was just an innocent boy.”

She says the men who killed their son repeatedly thrashed her husband. They were forced to flee their home in Phujel and came to Kathmandu for safety and justice. They went to the courts but were always turned away. When the couple staged a sit-in in front of the Prime Minister’s residence in Baluwatar in 2014, they were arrested and thrown in jail for “disturbing the peace.”

Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai, who was elected from Gorkha in the 2008 elections, was prime minister at the time.

While in prison for 49 days, the Adhikaris vowed to not eat anything until justice was done. Even after being released, they continued with their hunger strike. Nanda Prasad died after 334 days of fasting, leaving Ganga Maya alone to fight for their son.

She is currently being force-fed glucose, insulin and other liquids while her husband’s body is slowly decomposing in the morgue of Teaching Hospital up the road in Maharajgunj. Three years ago, the government decided to compensate them for their son’s life. But they refused to take the money. That same year, a district court issued an arrest warrant for the 13 men charged with Krishna’s murder. One of the accused, Rudra Acharya, subsequently fled to Northern Ireland, according to Amnesty International.

On 21 December 2015, the Supreme Court ordered the police to take Chhabibai Paudel, the main accused, into judicial custody, but the ruling has not yet been implemented while he is being protected by the Maoists.

Despite the delay in justice, Ganga Maya has not lost hope that her son’s murderers will be behind the bars one day. “Sometimes I ask myself: why am I living?” she says. “But I tell myself: if I die, no one will fight for my son.”

Charm Prasain, a human rights activist for Amnesty International since 1996, says, “If the Adhikaris do not get justice, it will prove that everything is justified in politics. But it should not be justified. A crime is a crime, and criminals must be punished.”

It has been nearly 14 years since Krishna Prasad was killed, but justice is still elusive in this long drawn out case. Like thousands of other conflict victims wait for justice.

The government this week extended the tenure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by one more year, but the Human Rights and Public Opinion Survey 2018 shows a majority of people do not believe the transitional justice body will complete its mandate even in the extended period.

In early January 2018, the Chitwan district court postponed hearing in the Krishna Prasad murder case for 10th time. But that did not discourage Ganga Maya from seeking justice. She held a press conference to warn that she would go to any extent.

Ganga Maya enjoys support from some human rights activists, but not from political parties. Even if everyone abandons her, she is determined to keep up her lonely struggle.
The Age of Shadows

For those seeking something different to watch at home, when there is nothing to be seen in the theatre except for a controversial Bollywood film and a tired sequel or two, the Korean film The Age of Shadows (2016) is now available in its original glory, all 140 minutes of it.

Made as an ode to the resistance movement against the Japanese takeover over of Korea that stretched over decades in the early 20th Century, starting in 1910, the film tells the story of a team of committed fighters who will stop at nothing to release their beloved country from the possession of the haughty Japanese who rule over it, and part of China with an iron fist.

The crux of the story is centred around several key figures including a resistance fighter turned policeman informant for the Japanese, Lee Jung-cheol (Song Kang-ho). Lee’s allegiances are tested when he is caught and manipulated by the resistance fighters held together by the ingenuity and fortitude of a key figure, Kim Woo-jin (Song Yoo), an antiquities dealer who plays the game of savvy businessmen while organizing for explosives and anarchist experts from Hungary to be smuggled from Shanghai into Seoul.

Beautifully filmed with an attention to lighting and framing that echoes in the tradition of the great film noir of the Hollywood studio system, the movie exhibits the exuberance of Korean filmmaking, underscored by great acting from the leads who take a complex, sometimes convoluted storyline and make it rivetting by focusing on the strong, complicated personalities that inhabit the film.

This is a story of a woman faced with an understanding of what it takes to be a resistance fighter; the film is strongest when the characters are showing their mettle, unfalhing at the manipulations and hardships they have to endure in their fight for freedom.

Enticed by Kuma for the Best Foreign Language category, but missing the nomination, this is a fine film out of a country that now produces gems of independent cinema, albeit, in this particular case, also supported by the behemoth Warner Brothers.

World cinema has always pushed the boundaries of form all over the globe, and while The Age of Shadows does follow a ballyhooed Hollywood tradition, the film breaks boundaries in its depiction of good and bad, with Kang-ho’s character playing one of the most interesting, conflicted characters I’ve seen on screen for a long time.

It is a shame that films don’t pay more such attention to character development the world over, with Nepali films sticking to tropes that make you nauseous even when watching the trailers. Bollywood films no less clichéd in their hackneyed resolutions of men and women, and Hollywood, the great trend-setter and shaper of tastes, all over the world no less lazy when it comes to portraying the complexity of people through our evolution.

The Age of Shadows is a refreshing, grave portrait of a multifaceted set of people who are not blindly naive, making sacrifices that illuminate their humanity.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande
nepaltimes.com
Watch trailer online

LOVE THY YOUR NEIGHBOUR: India’s External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj calls on outgoing UKIP Chair KP Oli at Balawatar on Thursday. She conveyed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s message that New Delhi is ready to work with the new government, likely to be led by CIIP.

ALL SMILES: Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya casts his vote during National Assembly elections in Jawalakhel polling station on Wednesday.

INVESTMENT IN SCIENCE: Korean Ambassador Park Young Sik with Finance Secretary Shankar Prasad Acharya (far right) in Kathmandu on Tuesday after signing an agreement to provide $5 million grant assistance to promote science and technology.

HOMES SWEET HOMES: President Bidya Devi Bhandari inspecting a model Dalit settlement in Kausani on Tuesday built by the Dharma Suntali Foundation set up by comedian duo Sital Khatik (left) and Kajri Devi (right).

DIVINE CHILD: Five-year-old Nilima Rajabahana, newly appointed Kumari Living Goddess of Patan at the residence of her high priest on Monday.

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Elected contractors

The Nepali people had great hopes that the first elected municipality in 20 years would bring a new wave of development, but recent trends show that many elected mayors, village heads and ward members are construction contractors. They have not divested from their companies, but instead are awarding projects to themselves, which is a clear case of conflict of interest.

“About one-third of elected representatives got themselves elected to profit from their businesses, the other one-third want to get to work but don’t know how. We have to monitor those who want to profit, and warn those who want to contribute to development,” says expert on federalism and local government Kishalal Devkota.

A nationwide investigation has shown widespread conflict of interest as hundreds of elected local government officials are awarding themselves construction contracts. According to the Federation of Contractors’ Associations of Nepal, more than 300 construction company owners were elected to last year’s local elections. There is no figure for how many are among the representatives elected to provincial and national assemblies. For example, Yam Bahadur Malla was a well-known Parbati-based construction entrepreneur, after the first phase of elections he became the Nepal Congress head of Jaithal village where he has been awarding his own Ramabhatar Construction Service and Kali Gandaki Crushar Industry company major construction projects. He plundered money he earned from his business to get himself elected, and now has nominally transferred ownership of his company to his cousin, Indra Malla.

Seel one ward chair, “He has all the excavators and bulldozers, and we have found it is easier just to use them.”

Bhim Bahadur Thapa of the NC was elected mayor of Sunauli municipality in Nawalparasi. He is also the owner of a magnetite mine in Palpa that supplies raw material to cement factories in the region. He is the owner of Tirupati Construction Pvt Ltd, and his company has got contracts to build roads.

“Thapa dominated all the sand mining and construction projects here even before elections, after he became mayor himself it has become much easier for him to get contracts,” says a ward member here.

After getting elected as NC mayor of Kuma in Parbat district, Thapa transferred the ownership of his company Suryodaya Construction Service to his personal secretary. That company is now involved in all major construction work in Kuma.

Newly-elected head Roshan Gunung of Mahashahi village has hired an excavator from his own company to a construction project claiming that his rental is less than other companies. In Parbat, Bhimman Gunung who is the head of Pailiya village is also a contractor.

The Ward chair of Butwal sub-metropolis Bhim Shrestha owns Aarnko Construction Company which is building a bridge nearby. Over in Okhaldhunga, Navraj KC, NC chair of Champadevi village, also owns a construction company that was awarded Rs.10 million for a road construction contract. In Manohariyay village of the same district, the NC village council chair Moti Rai has got the village to buy a bulldozer.

In Arghakhanchi, Tika Majar, Mayor chair of Sitganga Municipality, has hired his own heavy equipment for road construction. The ward members of Sitganga have also bought bulldozers and rented them out to their municipality.

In Bajura in the far west, the NC Mayor Ratna Gurjar of Bhuban Municipality is the owner of Aatish Construction Service Pvt Ltd which is now building the District Police Office in a school whose construction is funded by the Indian Embassy. The Mayor of Parsuwasa Municipality in Dedha is also a well-known construction entrepreneur, his Rajendra Construction Service Pvt Ltd has not been able to complete major construction projects in the district due to multiple breaches of contract. The Construction Association in Sankhruwashahi brought out an ad in the local paper congratulating its members: Mayor Munari Khatriwala of the UML in Khadibari, Mayor Bidur Lingleh of the UML in Madhi Municipality and village chair Pasang Nuru Shrestha.

Village chair Ayub Ansari in Sunsari owns Jaya and Brothers Pvt Ltd. In Dhankuta, the newly-elected chair of Sagurigadi village Kuma Takti adds on construction companies.

Elected representatives continue to be involved in earthquake reconstruction contracts, like the NC’s village chair in Gorkha Dhurbahakuru Gurung who owns a construction company involved in a Rs.30 million earthquake memorial. In remote Rakut, most village council members are busy buying excavators.

Any civil servant who opposes the elected officials is harassed or even beaten up. Samsher Rai was transferred four months after he was brought in as an administrator to the Nechu-Sulay village council in Soti Khumali because he refused to sign the payment for past road construction by the elected village chair Dugbasamber Barala, as it had no proper paperwork.

Inputs from Kamal Krishna in Butwal, Sunam Shrestha in Palpa, Surej Sharma in Parbat, Dipak Ghimire in Budhanil and Lalchandra KC in Kuma.
Not pushed around anymore

A young school girl from a remote Nepali village dares to take a molester to court

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Dressed in pink trousers and a jacket, Anamika fiddles with her fingers as she sits in a chair. She is petite, has beautiful dark eyes, her long hair is bennia dyed and she speaks with a strong Tamang accent. When she smiles, deep dimples form on both cheeks.

In her hometown of Tipling, in Dhading, a two-day journey up tortuous roads from Kathmandu, she was often scolded for her direct manners. But even her teachers and family admit she is courageous and at times pretty. “I don’t like nonsense and I don’t trust men,” she says, adding with a smile, “my brother always wonders if I am actually related to the family at all. My sisters are all girls.”

Just this morning Anamika heard that Kaji, the man who had attempted to rape her, was released on bail in Bhadgaon. She is now in a shelter in Kathmandu.

“I don’t know what will happen now,” she says, eyes downcast. It had taken a lot for her and the family to lodge a complaint against Kaji, who was a friend of her brother Phayum.

Kaji is from Tipling and is 23 years older than her. He is known to have political connections with local leaders. Kaji had a job with a relief NGO that distributed rice in the village after the earthquake, which meant impoverished villagers were obliged to him.

On a chilly Saturday morning last month, Kaji and her brother were taking in the sun outside the house when Anamika returned from Thadgaon.

Silent no more

The government school and the only health post in the village are short of teachers, nurses and medicines. The nearest police station is two hours away. The cell phone signal only became available since last year.

Very few of the girls here go to school and even those who do, drop out by Grade 5, making them vulnerable to abuse, abduction and early marriage.

“There are many cases of child marriage and pregnancy in the village,” says Tek Reh, Paudel, a Jesuit priest who teaches at the local school. Girls as young as 11 slope and there are a few 13-14 year olds who are pregnant.

The child protection agency ChharaChhuri Nepal has helped bring some of the girls to Kathmandu, where they can continue their education and get skills training.

“We won’t be here, we would probably have had children by now, like many of our friends in the village,” says 12th Grader Reena. Children are left alone in the village, as parents take livestock up to high pastures.

“One of the major problems girls face is that at night if a girl is single, there are men who sneak into the house and harass and abuse girls,” says Madha, another 12th Grader. “Even when she speaks out, there is hardly any support as people say it is a custom. Instead the blame is put on the girl.”

The police station is too far away, and even when they do complete, they are intimidated by local men. Many young girls from the village are now leaving for the Gulf to work as domestic help, must have lied about their age to get passports.

Some have genuine reasons to earn, like someone in the family is sick. But most often it is to escape predatory men and early marriage,” explains Reena.

The girls say there is no support mechanism in the village, where poverty, lack of education and awareness makes it all the more difficult to fight back.

Says Jesuit priest Paudel: “The girls here are brave. But sadly they are not aware of their rights.”
#UsToo

Two weeks ago, a woman from Lalitpur was late to return home from work. When her husband set out to search for her, he met three policemen who told him, “Oh, she is pretty. Maybe she ran off with someone.” He came to know what had happened. 

In Darbar Marg earlier this month, four men raped a 22-year-old woman behind closed doors in a hotel. They put her in a taxi and directed the driver to take her home. The woman asked the driver to take her to the police station saying she had been raped. Instead of registering the complaint, the police allegedly tried to settle the case. The victim disappeared for a few days after which she changed her statement saying it wasn’t rape. Investigators say she may have been coerced.

In Kathmandu, two men raped a 14-year-old girl. When the matter went to the police, the girl named both the perpetrators, one of whom was caught. But instead of registering the case, the police helped mediate a Rs4.8 million settlement between the family of the perpetrator and the victim.

These are just some of the recent cases in the past few weeks which prove that even when girls do come forward to report rape cases, the police and court system are the first hurdles. In the past six months, 60 rape cases have been reported in Kathmandu Valley alone. Many more went unreported because of fear and social stigma. Last year 156 cases were registered and there were 135 the year before.

“If you want to look at the real picture of patriarchy, just look at the judiciary,” says Mohini Amaru, member of National Human Rights Commission. “These cases are hardly a priority and they rarely appear in discussions and directives.”

While a lot of money has been spent by donors and the state on ‘capacity building’ and behavioural correction of Nepali Police and the infrastructure of the judiciary, there hasn’t been much of a change in attitude towards women even when they overcome enormous social pressures to not report crimes.

There have even been cases when defence lawyers have argued that by saying it is rape and punishing the perpetrator, the victim’s future may be tarnished. During cross-examination, the victim’s personal character is often questioned. In the Darbar Marg case, medical examination results showing that the victim had been ‘previously sexually active’ is being widely used in the public discourse to say that she wasn’t raped.

Last year, a young victim told the reporter that when she went to register her case, the way the police questioned her made her uncomfortable and she was made to feel guilty. “Rape is a crime against the state, it is not something that can be settled,” says lawyer Rashmi Gautam. “But unless the victim blaming stops, and the victim support mechanism is made stronger, women won’t even be able to come forward.”

Sahina Shrestha

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Day 5: I was able to return to work, and I was able to resume my normal activities. The surgeon's skill was impressive, and I felt nothing.

Day 6: I was able to return to my normal activities, and I was able to resume my normal activities. The surgeon's skill was impressive, and I felt nothing.

Day 7: I was able to return to my normal activities, and I was able to resume my normal activities. The surgeon's skill was impressive, and I felt nothing.