

Backseat drivers

Prime Minister K P Oli has hit all the right notes in his first two weeks in office, first by forging a UML-Maoist unification deal, inducting some promising faces into his cabinet, and then by trying hard to include Madhesi figures.

He chose economist Yuba Raj Khatiwada as Finance Minister, sidelining other senior but inexperienced aspirants for the post. Khatiwada's appointment has been hailed by many as the right move, and a recognition of the fact that the country now faces not a political crisis, but an economic one. Khatiwada is someone who could set right the wrong monetary policies, profligacy and misplaced priorities of the previous NC-led government.

Khatiwada is seen by some as having a socialist bent, and is expected to take some drastic actions: restricting credit flow into unproductive sectors, curbing imports, and getting the economy

cranked up. Oli promised prosperity, and Khatiwada is the right person to deliver that.

The 7-point UML-Maoist deal last week cemented the unity between the country's two largest communist parties, promising a stable government for five years. Once the two parties register Nepal Communist Party (NCP) at the Election Commission, Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal will find it difficult to oust Oli. He needs at least 40% MPs by his side, but around 70% MPs of the unified party will be supporting the government.

Oli and Dahal have also inched closer to a deal with Uppendra Yadav, the leader of the fourth largest party in the Federal

Parliament. After Yadav joins the government, the ruling coalition will have a two-thirds majority which will give Oli the leverage he needs to remove all constitutional hurdles to deliver on his promises of stability, prosperity and good governance.

Political analyst Krishna Khanal says the Oli government now cannot fail because there will be no excuse if it does. The NCP could then easily win another election even if it fulfills only 20% of its promises. His prophecy looks realistic because the main opposition NC, does not seem to have realised why it failed, and its leaders are busy blaming each other.

But the Oli government might end up promoting crony capitalism,

disappointing people once again. Both UML and Maoist leaders have openly hobnobbed with dubious businessmen in the past, and these lobbies have shown signs they are capable of meddling in politics to scuttle economic reforms.

There are too many backseat drivers in the united NCP bus, which will be jointly driven by Oli and Dahal for the next five years. The road itself is potholed and in drastic need of repairs.

Om Astha Rai



NATURE CULTURE AND ART

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PAGE 8-9



BHANU BHATTARAI

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EMPOWERING BOYS

It is an accepted truism that the best return on investment in development expenditure is when money is spent educating girls. Indeed, the main reason Nepal made dramatic progress in improving mother-child survival, or achieving a rapid decline in the total fertility rate were because of the doubling of the female literacy rate in the past 20 years. All this has happened despite having wasted two decades in a ruinous war, poor governance, and unconscionable corruption in service delivery to the neediest.

Now, as we embark on a hopefully new era of devotion and accountable politics, Nepal is facing a slew of second-generation problems: a persistently high dropout rate for girls at Grade 5, the high rate of neo-natal mortality, age of marriage for women that hasn't shown expected improvement, or very low participation of women in decision-making positions despite affirmative action clauses in the new Constitution.

There are also worrying signs in Nepali society of an increase in domestic violence, rape, and abuse of women. In fact, there appears to be an indirect causal link between the rise in female literacy rate and incidence of domestic violence. It is as if while education has empowered girls, given them more confidence, made them more outspoken and independent, the boys have not changed. They haven't been able to handle more assertive female family members, or young wives. The rise in literacy rate, therefore, hasn't made much of an impact on Nepal's entrenched patriarchal culture -- in fact it seems to have ingrained conservative values.

It seems to us that time has come to promote interventions in education systems that doesn't just prioritise improving

enrolment rates, but also in making the school curriculum more gender sensitive. The still predominantly-male teachers in the school system need to be trained and be made aware, so they behave in a manner that is sensitive to gender equality issues. In short, the solution to gender justice may lie in empowering boys.

Socialisation of Nepali boys and the cultural cues they pick up as they grow reinforces gender stereotypes, embeds their sense of entitlement, emboldens actions derived from power relations, and further embeds prevalent patriarchal norms. In short, the malaise is male.

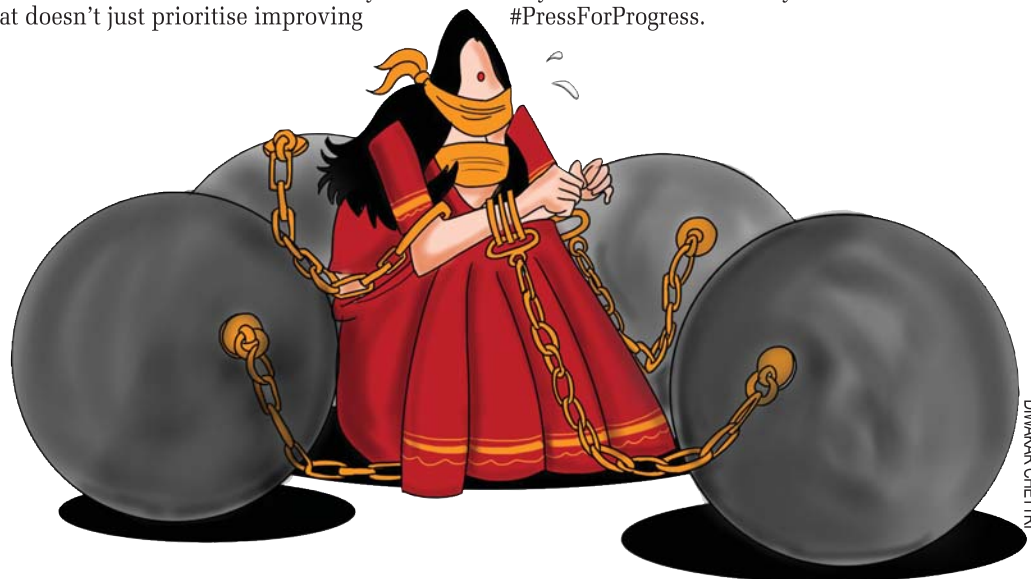
As Election Commissioner Ila Sharma eloquently argues in her Guest Editorial (*below*) it is now time to focus on boys and men. Despite an inclusive Constitution, we have seen that the participation of women is still token and ceremonial. The new Cabinet may have just two women out of 17 if we

are lucky. It is shameful the way male- and caste-dominated bureaucracy still treats women and minorities. Citizenship

laws that discriminate against the offspring of single mothers is a glaring national offence and needs to be urgently set right. Victims of wartime rape have been denied compensation and justice by the he-state (*See investigative report: page 14-15*).

Despite a repressive political structure and a societal system stacked against them, there are many Nepali women who have risen up through the dint of hard work and determination. We present some examples (*page 8-9*) in our special coverage in this issue to mark the International Women's Day on 8 March with this year's theme: #PressForProgress.

International
Women's Day 2018
#PressForProgress



GUEST EDITORIAL
ILA SHARMA

Good sons

I recently wrote on my Facebook wall that my one regret in life is not having a son, and raising him well. The post elicited responses like: 'Why do you want a boy when you have great girls?'

They had reacted without trying to understand what had prompted me to write that post. It is not that I want to raise a boy because I need one to protect and take care of me in my old age, carryout funeral rituals, continue my husband's lineage, or any such reason.

My regret is that I could not bring into society a good boy -- a role model kind of a human being. I want my son to be strong yet kind, independent yet rooted, calm yet sensitive, an outdoor type who enjoys doing household chores, who has deeply ingrained values of what is right and wrong yet is open-minded, who is outgoing yet takes responsibility, who stands up for the weak and voiceless, who cries with them, feels their pain, fails but is resilient, and is not ashamed to demonstrate these emotions: like my girls do.

Modern day women have started taking pride in 'knowing, being and raising' strong, independent, sensitive and sensible women. Where are the men to match such women? I believe even a boy must get an enabling environment to grow up with this kind of emotional intelligence. This opportunity is every boy's right.

News of sadistic rapists, cruel criminals and terrorists, who are mostly men, often makes me wonder how these

little balls of flesh and blood that came out of women's wombs, were nursed and taught by women to take their first step, turned out to be such vicious misogynistic monsters.

Surely a mother would have some role in shaping the sensibilities of her son, an elder sister of her little brother, an aunt of her nephew. If this planet is to be fit for habitation by civilised, compassionate, gentle, sensible, courageous humans, men need to grow up as mentally healthy as the women.

It is understandable that while women can be or do anything they want in today's world, most men do not have a choice. They have to live up to the unnatural demands and pressures of 'masculinity' on them that is toxic. It tries to turn them into emotionless hypocrites who cannot even cry in public. Not being able to cry or show emotions or talk about their feelings is a stifling handicap for men.

We must raise the kind of sons we would like our sons-in-laws to be. We need to redefine the notions of masculine and feminine for men and women, learn from our past and mould a new generation of good human beings who are a balanced blend of both these notions.



Ila Sharma is an
Election Commissioner.

Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



SPOILS OF WAR

For many, Nepal's political transition is over, but there is no closure for victims of wartime rape. They are off the government radar, abandoned by their husbands, ostracised by their families and society. Our investigative report takes readers to Kanchanpur where six conflict rape survivors narrate their stories and recount their endless wait for justice.



WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE

For International Women's Day on 8 March, meet a family with a long-standing contribution to girl's education in Nepal and its exceptional women. Watch five generations of women of one family under one roof in Kathmandu: from 103-year-old Chandra Kumari Joshi to her 3-week-old great-great grand daughter Kaavya.

DEAR EDITOR,

I want to correct several inaccuracies in last Friday's article "A Monumental Rivalry (Om Astha Rai, #898)." In reality, the U.S. Embassy and project partner Miyamoto Global Disaster Relief are working very closely with the Department of Archeology (DoA) and the local community on the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation Gaddi Baihak restoration project. Our goal is to ensure local awareness and the use of historically- and culturally- appropriate methods in this and all our other restoration projects.

In March 2017, before reconstruction began, DoA, Miyamoto and U.S. officials held a public forum between senior culture expert Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi, the DoA Director General, and community leaders. Local residents addressed questions to officials and technical experts, and the meeting was lauded as an open, transparent process addressing community concerns.

Miyamoto currently employs over fifty skilled Nepali masons, carpenters, and lime mortar experts -- with DoA approval -- to carry out the restoration. Apart from one consulting U.S. structural engineer, all the full-time engineers on site are Nepali. The DoA oversees two committees with representatives from Kathmandu Metropolitan City and the Hanuman Dhoka Museum Development Committee, meeting regularly with Miyamoto to supervise project implementation. The technical committee, led by Professor Prem Maskey, catalogued all necessary restorations, which was approved by our steering committee before the project began.

Far from excluding locals from what "foreigners are doing to monuments built by their ancestors," the United States has, and always will, go to extreme lengths to involve local communities, experts, and authorities in the projects we fund. We are committed to supporting the preservation of Nepal's cultural heritage with sound engineering, historically- and culturally- appropriate methods, and transparent engagement. We will continue working collaboratively with the DoA and remain committed to respecting the integrity of Gaddi Baihak's original structure, its importance within the larger heritage zone, and its resonance to Nepalis.

Alaina B. Teplitz
United States Ambassador to Nepal

WHAT'S TRENDING



A monumental rivalry

by Om Astha Rai

World powers are competing for high profile post-quake reconstruction of Kathmandu's monuments. The question is whether we need, or should allow, others to rebuild our heritage for us. Go online to watch this widely shared video of how China, US and Japan are rebuilding historic monuments in Kathmandu Darbar Square destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Kathmandu's silent spring

by Sonia Awale

Why are fewer migratory waterbirds making stopovers in Nepal's wetlands? Where have all the sparrows, mynahs and bulbuls gone? The *Nepali Times* investigation of the decline in bird numbers and species was widely shared on Twitter. Find out more in our coverage at nepalitimes.com

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Everest to Annapurna

by Sikuma Rai

Japanese entrepreneur Takashi Miyahara's new boutique hotel Annapurna View Hotel in Pokhara's Sarangkot offers everything: sunrise, the Annapurnas, view of Phewa Lake, serenity, and luxurious accommodation. Our introduction of the new property got large number of visits online.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

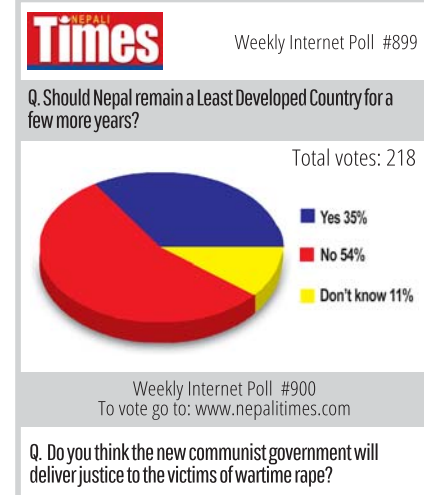
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
The question is whether we need, or should allow, others to rebuild our heritage for us.

Binija DhitalGoperma @BinijaDhital
Really unfortunate that we no longer are capable of rebuilding our own heritage!

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
#POLL Should Nepal remain a Least Developed Country for a few more years?

madhukar upadhyia @madhukaru
Is there a choice?

Kamlesh Giri @kamlesh8848
Upgrading to developing nation will be boost morale of people. Further, if we really want to develop, shouldn't be shun this quota mentality & seriously think about sharpening our competitive advantages?





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Oli here for good

It would be naïve to assume that there will be no international meddling, but for the moment the new prime minister will be left alone

If K P Oli, Nepal’s newly sworn in Prime Minister, successfully completes his tenure of five years, it will be a record. His will be the first government in Nepal’s history to do so.

Since the Rana regime was overthrown almost 70 years ago, governments have changed 42 times. And the Nepali state desperately needs a semblance of permanence.



Carrying forward the optimism seen during the elections, with almost uniform focus on economic growth by all parties, Oli has made some good early choices in picking ministers with clean image and technocratic abilities. This has gone down well with the public.

But many other variables will be at play for his government to last. Given parliamentary mathematics, Oli cannot hold forth without the support from other parties. The pre-poll alliance with the Maoists secured him the prime-ministership and the UML and Maoists together hold more than enough seats to form a majority government. But Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal is not an easy bedfellow.

Dahal has bargained hard to be

a part of the alliance, and later for the unification of the two parties. He demands his pound of flesh. Given his history of u-turns and predictable unpredictability, it will be wise for Oli to not keep all his eggs in the Maoist basket. The election sweep has put Oli in a comfortable position, and he can hold strong with the support of some of the Madhesi parties even without support from the Maoists.

Which is why Oli’s UML is already in talks to rope in some Madhesi parties into government, and they appear to be visibly inclined. But if Oli banks too much on the Madhesi parties, the key to his government can actually go to the sides he has already locked horns with.



BHANU BHATTARAI

face the consequences’.

Oli stood against India, and that locking of horns was translated into nationalism in Nepal at election time. That, along with some other sound political calculations in forging alliances, catapulted Oli to the high position he occupies today.

The changed political scenario in Nepal has put India on the backfoot, as even Indian commentators have noted. It has given Narendra Modi bashers in Delhi another good reason to pillory his foreign policy. Modi is blamed for pushing Nepal into China’s lap. Nepal is trying hard to break away from its total dependence on India for connectivity, this has always been the biggest leverage for the southern neighbor which has not always honoured the responsibility that comes with the privilege. The

story of three blockades since India’s independence cry for a Nepal with more alternatives for access.

Oli tried to do that during his previous tenure, and has already proclaimed since taking oath this time that he is looking for a balanced relationship between China and India. For the Indians, the call for ‘equidistance’ itself is anathema, and it is interpreted as a shrinking of their sphere of influence. This gives all the reason for the South Block to try to ‘disbalance’ Oli at the earliest.

Dahal, who has re-emerged as a key player, will be the one India will try to manipulate if it tries to destabilise the Oli government. Although he has a dubious history with India, at the moment he seems impressionable.

As joint-chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal formed after unification of the UML and Maoists, he and Oli need each other too much to try to unseat each other right away.

The constitution has forbidden any no-confidence motion for at least two years, making it difficult for the kind of horse-trading we are used to in Nepali politics. Also, with India approaching the General Elections in 2019, Modi’s focus will be on perception management within, leaving little room for attention to micromanaging events in Nepal.

The political scenario therefore looks in Oli’s favor. And the realisation has sunk in with India as well, as was demonstrated by a surprise visit by the Indian External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj this month. Modi’s eagerness to prove his government’s keenness to work with Oli, since the elections, speaks a lot.

This is a sign that Oli is here for good, and that is good for Nepal. 🇳🇵

I am gay and I am not afraid



SAHINA SHRESTHA

In a poignant and powerful video released on Saturday, popular UK-based Nepali blogger Lex Limbu shares his story about his sexuality, family and life. Shot in a point, shoot and express format with no script and lines, Lex bares it all in a 17-minute-long video posted on YouTube over the weekend.

Limbu is unapologetically himself, being comfortably vulnerable and uninhibited in expressing his thoughts, challenges, fears and feelings. He opens up about being gay and how his family reacted when he first told them about himself.

Drawing inspiration from the people he met from the LGBTIQI community, Limbu has used social media to reach out to people to

share his story, and talk about the challenges which many others can relate to, but may not be able to express.

“I hope more people realise that we are not alone in the challenges that we are facing and most importantly, I hope this video encourages people to talk to someone regarding the difficulties that they are facing,” Limbu said in an email interview with Nepali Times.

When shooting the video Limbu wasn’t worried about positive or negative reactions, his most pressing concern was, “what if nobody watches it?” He wanted it to be seen by as many people as possible to be able to start a conversation on the importance of being able to freely express one’s self and to live a life that is true to your nature.

In the two days since its release, the video had already been watched more than 26,000 times on YouTube.

Many shared it, praising his courage for coming out in public. It is slowly but surely generating a discussion on acceptance, acknowledgement and equality in the social sphere.

Although Nepal’s new Constitution recognises the rights of LGBTIQI, and a section of society is comparatively tolerant and open-minded, a considerable majority is still homophobic. Hence, many from the LGBTIQI community are afraid to come out, fearing the worst.

Limbu’s brave step in publicly coming out is surely going to help others like him in Nepal to come to terms with their own sexual identity, and accept themselves for who they are. But more importantly, it will also help the families, friends, neighbours and others associated to homosexual people to understand the fears and concerns of their loved ones.

Since the video was released, Limbu says he has had an overwhelming number of people write to him. Messages of support and appreciation are pouring in from people who have shared their own stories with him, whether it’s about their sexual orientation or the challenges they have faced in their social and personal lives.

Limbu told us: “The past two days have been surreal and receiving video messages of people tearing up and crying has made me think a lot about us as people. I really hope that we connect with each other more, open up and make it okay to be vulnerable to share our worries. There’s so much we share in common and I sincerely hope that this video encourages people to focus on the things that bring us together.” 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Sanfebagar to reopen

Achham district is planning to revive its airfield in Sanfebagar by the end of April, according to Airport Manager Bijay



Bahadur Kunwar. The runway and terminal building destroyed in a Maoist attack in February 2002 are under construction and flight schedules will be fixed only after a tender is issued for airlines to offer flight services.

Flights to Freetown

Turkish Airlines this week launched a new route Istanbul-Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. The flights to the west African



capital will be bi-weekly on Tuesdays and Saturdays, via Ouagadougou.

Pro driver

Huawei showcased its Road Reader project that uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered smartphone to drive a car at Mobile World Congress in Barcelona from 26-27





February. The project uses AI features that are already in the Huawei Mate 10 Pro to recognise objects like cats, dogs, food, and other objects while driving.

Pure heat

After two years of market and consumer research, A.O. Smith has launched its line of water purifier and heaters in Nepal. Its residential range of Reverse Osmosis water



purifiers uses a seven-stage purification process.

Saving water

Bottlers Nepal Limited and Smart Paani have installed the first rainwater harvesting and ground water recharge system at



Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital on 26 February. The Coca-Cola bottler says it will continue to work on water efficiency, conservation, replenishment and integrated water resource management.

Start, continue, grow, repeat

Young Nepali women entrepreneurs share their experiences in starting successful businesses

SIKUMA RAI



Stage 1: Start

Nanny for your Nani, is an online portal for household childcare service. This was the winning idea pitched at the Global Startup Weekend in Kathmandu on February by a team of five women.

Digital marketing analyst Aishwarya Pradhan's 'Hire a Babysitter' was selected as the Top 10 highest voted idea out of 50 and she picked four other members from the participants including Manupriya, a graphic designer and Priyadarshani Shrestha, a business student. Namrata Khetan, a project manager and Aishwarya Shrestha, a software engineer at Pradhan's Leapfrog Technologies also joined to create a model website for the startup weekend.

"We all had our own areas of expertise. So, instead of assigning work to each other, our team cooperated and self initiated our own project," says Pradhan.

The team is attempting its first trial in entrepreneurship to establish baby-sitting as a sustainable profession in Nepal. Startup Weekend introduced their idea to the wider market, and the team will be going to Paris for the main Global Women's Meet on International Women's Day, where they will have a chance to find angel investors or donors.



Stage 2: Continue

After the success of her first jewelry collection which was part of her final undergraduate project in 2017, Bishesta Dhakhwa is ready to launch her second collection of brass jewelry.

Featuring bracelets, earrings and necklaces, Dhakhwa's first collection was inspired by the temple architectural elements. For the second series, she borrows inspiration from festival elements in which she works with craftsmen from Patan to implement her designs.

Dhakhwa had always known that she wanted to become a jewelry designer in Nepal. Her mother, a gemologist, used to teach her about gems and she honed her designing skills at Kathmandu University: "During my early teenage years I used to observe customers' behavior and judge if a certain jewelry suited the person or not."

International Women's Day 2018
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Stage 3: Grow

From age 13, Nishma Adhikari started being independent by tutoring juniors at school. She learned personal finance management and decision making, and now 25 Adhikari works at the IT company Bidhee looking after operations. She also collaborates with MakerKT to organise workshops such as SheEO for young women entrepreneurs.

"The world of IT really fascinates me, I am constantly pursuing innovative ideas whether it is cake or maternity health information, through technology and digital ventures," she says.

Adhikari recently participated in a competition where she pitched her idea of a for-profit maternity health and information mobile application, Pro Mom where she became a semi-finalist.



PHOTOS: GOPEN RAI

Stage 4: Repeat

For Sunita Nhemaphuki, the sole purpose of starting an agriculture-based magazine was to ease the struggle of her friend who worked in the field and complained of lack of information about agro-business. An idea that stemmed from a simple tea conversation has now turned into a venture in which Nhemaphuki works with her husband, Dambar Khanal.

After much research and two trials, the first issue of Krishak ra Prabhidhi was published in December 2012. Despite the growing demand and need for such magazines, there were difficulties along the way to alter the perspective towards farming and make it a sustainable profession.

Realising the lack of consultancy for farmers, she established Krishi Uddhyamshala to train and test new ideas, R&D Farms. She has also started Green Mart and Agro Centre to systematise the sale of vegetables and farm produce. She is now working on CoolBot, a cold storage and processing facility.

Says Nhemaphuki: "The first venture always takes longer. But after that it gets easier and easier."

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Hillary's 49th day

The climber's ashes were scattered on waters off Auckland on the holy day of the Sherpa commemoration in Nepal

High on the Valley rim I was walking through rough grass in the mountaineers' memorial park at Kakani, in search of a suitable film location. It was a cool day and Ganesh Himal was shrouded in clouds. My mobile rang, and it was Andrew Beattie from Wellington.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

“Just confirming arrangements for the scattering of Sir Ed’s ashes on the Gulf of Hauraki.” My heart skipped a beat, but Andrew was briskly efficient. “The date has changed yet again due to the Prime Minister’s schedule and availability of the tall ship, *Spirit of New Zealand*, and is now 29 February.” That was 2008.

Black crows were circling as I gazed across the Himalayan landscape that Sir Edmund Hillary had loved so much. Ed’s will specified that his ashes be sprinkled on the waters off Auckland, but Lady June had agreed to a special Sherpa request. Could some ashes of their beloved *Burra Sahib* be enshrined in a memorial chorten on a Khumbu ridge within sight of Mount Everest?

Thus it was that I had travelled back from the State Funeral last



LISA CHOEGYAL

month carrying a navy velvet pouch of precious grey powder in my handbag, and an official letter from the undertaker should I be challenged at any airport en route -- which I was not. The package rested reverently wrapped in a *khata* on our mantelpiece beside the Dalai Lama shrine, until Ang Rita was ready to take it to Lukla.

But Andrew was still talking: “And we wondered if you might

be in UK for the Queen’s private memorial service at Windsor for the family?” Since the convergence of her coronation with the first ascent of Everest, the Queen and Sir Ed had shared a lifelong bond. I was not, but it was nice to be asked.

There are confusingly many Junes and Hilarys in the Hillary family. June Carlile was the aged mother of Hilary and Ed’s elder sister. After the Windsor Chapel

service at which Sir Ed’s Knight of the Garter banner was formally returned, the immediate family were favoured with a royal audience in one of the castle staterooms. After a convivial chat the guests were made to leave (I was told later), but June Carlile doubled back, whispering something to the Queen and Princess Anne who both erupted in gleeful laughter. “What on earth did you say?” asked Ed’s widow June Hillary crisply, once they were safely outside. Ed’s elder sister smiled with satisfaction: “I just wanted the Queen to know that Ed always used to say he thought she was ‘a bit of all right!’”

No Sherpas were with us when we boarded the stately *Spirit of New Zealand* to scatter the ashes one blustery late summer afternoon in Auckland’s Basin Reserve. But Prime Minister Helen Clark was there, Andrew, Lady June, Peter, Sarah and all the family with baskets of flowers, sombre faces and dark glasses. Meanwhile in the mountains of Nepal, the Sherpas were busy marking the traditionally important 49th day of Sir Ed’s passing.

We cast off from the waterfront into the bright harbour, and Dean Peter Beck’s robes billowed in the wind as I explained to him the Nepali significance of how today had fallen by serendipitous chance on the most auspicious Buddhist

date. The Sherpa’s had expressed no surprise -- of course, today is the proper day. The Dean was equally stolid in his faith: “Lisa, this is not a coincidence.”

Dean Peter mentioned the 49th day implication in his prayers as we balanced on the swaying deck, struggling to hear over the rattle of the ship’s rigging. Ed’s last remains were blessed then cast carefully overboard onto the sea, followed by flowers hurled into the wind by his children and grandchildren.

A specially created ‘Hillary step’ on the side of the ship ensured they were close to the waves. Helen sat alone and thoughtful on deck. The harbour was full of activity – motorboats, dinghies and the massive curved sails of the historic America’s Cup yachts -- but the curious sailors kept a respectful distance.

The weather and water sparkled but it was a sorrowful voyage, the final farewell scratchy with sadness and family tensions. We returned to the Remuera House which felt forlorn, even though it bustled with caterers preparing dinner for us all in a white garden marquee. Ed’s big worn leather armchair was empty in the sitting room.

We perked up politely that evening, but I drank too much Kiwi wine and was late for breakfast the next morning. And my spine still tingles, knowing how tenuously the whim of arbitrary official New Zealand commitments had determined the perfect Nepali date for the scattering of Sir Ed’s ashes. 🇳🇵

**nepalitimes.com**

Go online to read other articles from Lisa Choegyal marking the 10th anniversary of the death of Edmund Hillary ion 2018.

Land title issues hit quake victims to new low

Absence of land title is hindering Community resettlement program in Taukhel, Machhengaun.

Dilbahadur Maharjan 41, is spending his third winter in a temporary shelter in Taukhel Chadragiri Municipality with his family of four. He was registered as the earthquake affected family in the government's list after a long tussle with the system. However, his woes have not yet settled and his family is already facing new challenges. Firstly, he has not yet received any support from the government. And even if he does receive grant support, he is still not eligible to carry out reconstruction work of his house. For the both, a support seeker requires to present the documents of land title which the family does not have. “The land is ours but we do not have the official documents which indicates so”, says Dilbahadur. “We have been living here on this land for generations. We did not find it that important to acquire the papers.”

Jitbahadur Maharjan 50, reluctantly sold the ancestral land used for agriculture to rebuild a new house. His concrete house has three rooms and currently he is busy preparing for second floor. He has not submitted the drawings in the municipality nor obtained any approval for the construction. “I have an old mother to look after. There is fear of weather and other calamities. We did not have the luxury to lose any moment so I took this decision”, replies Jitbahadur. The family collected the first grant however, they did not apply for any further assistance from the government.

Hindrance due to lack of land title
Locally known as **Ta: Khya** which means ‘Big Open Space’ in local Newari language, Taukhel is one of the oldest community of Nepal, with history dating back to 200 years. It used to come under Machhengaun VDC and in current system it is under Chandragiri Municipality.

Ram Krishna Maharjan, who works in a government office, has not yet constructed his house. The family of six does not have official document of the ancestral land on which their temporary shelter stands. As the result, even though they were only able to receive the first installment, the family could not apply for the rest of the installment since they were not able to present the required documents. “I actually planned to use the benefits of gratuity – now the plan is put to halt”, Ram shares his grief.

Tulsimaya Maharjan 65, is living in the temporary shelter constructed on the earthquake destroyed ancestral house. Her



father lost his life, buried under the same house and her mother was severely injured during the earthquake. She shares that her father’s pension amount can only cover the household expense and her mother’s medications. After receiving the first installment she has been illegible for the remaining amount. “How are we suppose to construct a complete house with that much amount?” questions Tulsimaya.

Sapana Shrestha 30, is Tulsimaya’s neighbor and her situation not that favorable either. Sapana has resided in temporary shelter with family of three. She has also acquired the first phase support but lack of official documents to prove their ownership of their own land, is hindering their possibilities to construct their house.

Taukhel is one of the oldest community in the valley, however, the government orders the genuine settlers – the earthquake affected and displaced families to bring documented proofs for their deserving supports. The community dwellers admit that lack of awareness and

ignorance have been the main reason behind for not acquiring the land entitlement in previous years before earthquake. Devendra Maharjan, Chief at the Ward explains that the community started realizing the need of the documents of property ownership only after the government announced the criteria and compulsion for the grant seekers to present evidences to be eligible for the reconstruction support. He further explains, “Land

without road does not get approval, the ones with road access does not have proper documents and the ones who can get approval are of small and inadequate land size. This is the situation of more than half of the households in the Taukhel community.”

Lumanti has conducted the ‘Heritage Workshop’ in Siddhipur, Thecho and Matchegaun highlighting the essentiality of conservation and promotion of our traditional culture and heritage just few weeks before the devastating earthquake hit the country. As the shocks struck, the locals from Taukhel appealed the organization to support in building a managed shelter keeping in mind the conservation of heritage of the old community. Lumanti Joshi, the programme manager at Lumanti shared that the planning for the safe and secured community building carried out despite the surfacing issues of land title.

The community was quite rigidly formed. It did not have direct access to the main road. Ambulance, fire station or any emergency services could hardly reach the community

at times of the need. Along with grieves of devastation, the earthquake brought new opportunities. With the removal of old houses, the land broadened which fitted well for planning a proper shelter including wide road, drinking water supply and better sewerage system in active participation of the Taukhel community.

The shelter plan is being undertaken in 42 ropanis land, out of plan surveyed 56 ropanis land. The owners of the houses that face the main road withdrew from the plan. They have to leave a portion of their land for the road in ring road. Milan Maharjan, Community Engineer from Lumanti says, “The initial plan was to include all the land. But when those land owners withdrew we only had 42 ropanis land to work on to.”

Piling problems
The 220 plot land have been planned for 120 households. The plan is to merge the lands of various shapes and size together for the construction of the houses. It further allowed the owners of small land can purchase from those having bigger portion. This made sure that the community members are pinned to their original location and that they do not have to migrate or feel being displaced.

Milan shares that walls are being constructed under the plan to separate the lands for plotting. The inner path measures up to four meters for the easy passage for any kind of transportation facilities. The community is being built in coordination with the local Taukhel Reconstruction and Community Development Committee which committed to keep the community well informed, and handle any possible issues. Hari Krishna Maharjan, Vice Chairperson of the committee admits that any delay in initiating the project would only create space for multiple petty conflicts. He further shared that addition to the lack of land title, few locals did not want to co-operate with the planning which escalated as a big problem.

According to Devendra Maharjan, Ward Chief at Taukhel, the road had been the main topic for debate and conflict in the area in the past as well. Moreover, the plan does not seem to come to fruition due to the land title certificate issues. “Reconstruction work would have already completed, if only the people had their titles.” he says.

New policies have been made by the Municipality to tackle the issue by providing leverage in approving the papers of the land by including the 11 witnesses for those who do not have land elsewhere. However, even by doing so, there are several legal procedures to be observed by the central government, for which Devendra claims the Nepal Reconstruction Authority should also take heed to.

(In partnership with Lumanti Support group for Shelter)

Who runs the world? Girls.

Five generations
of women in a
Kathmandu family
underline the
importance of
educating daughters

SAHINA SHRESTHA

In a quiet and leafy cul-de-sac of a side street in Bag Bazar, five generations of women live together and continue to inspire each other every day.

Chandra Kumari Joshi is 103 years old and learned to read and write at a time when educating girls was regarded as unnecessary. Her daughter-in-law Angur Baba Joshi is a prominent social activist and as the founder of Padma Kanya College, a pioneer in higher education for women.

Her grand daughter-in-law Rupa Joshi is Head of Communications at UNICEF Nepal, and her great granddaughter Priya Joshi is a wildlife researcher who gave it up to teach women to make things through her Maker Ketu initiative. The family recently welcomed a new member, Priya's 3-week-old daughter, Kaabya Siddhi Bajracharya.

All the high-achieving, independent women in this multi-generational clan credit the education they received and family support as the reason they succeeded.

“Women need to be educated because they are the ones who run the world,” explains Chandra Kumari, whose father *Badaguruju* Bishwa Raj Pandey made sure all his nine daughters received the same education as his only son.



GOPEN RA

Chandra Kumari was 15 when she gave birth to her son in 1930, the year she became a widow. When the time came for her to find a bride for her eleven-year-old son, she welcomed nine-year-old Angur Baba into the family.

International
Women's Day 2018
#PressforProgress

"I promised her father I would bring her up as my own daughter," remembers Chandra Kumari, still sprightly and sharp despite her years.

Even when others in society told her that educating girls would bring her misery, she made sure her daughter-in-law received the same opportunities as her son. She adds with a glint in her eyes: "I am a stubborn person and was adamant that she go to school."

Despite Kathmandu's

patriarchal culture, Angur Baba Joshi persevered and became the first Nepali woman to get an LLB from Banaras and a BL from Oxford University.

When she returned to Nepal, she was appointed principal of Padma Kanya, becoming the first woman in the country to head a school college. She went on to groom an entire generation of women.

"Women create life. She is responsible for the upbringing of the child. It is imperative that the mother is cultured, educated, and empowered," says Angur Baba.

Rupa Joshi was barely 17 when she was married, and a year later became a mother. "I was perfectly happy staying at home but they pushed me to pursue my studies," she recalls. Rupa went on to do her masters in journalism from the University of Southern California.

While Rupa was away in America, Chandra Kumari took care

NO GENERATION GAP: Five generations of the Joshi family (*from left to right*) with Priya with Kaabya on her lap, Angur Baba, Chandra Kumari and Rupa Joshi.

of her great grandchildren like she had done so many years ago with her own grandchildren. "It was easier for me to concentrate on my studies knowing that my children were in good hands back home, without that support, backup and understanding, it wouldn't have been possible," she adds.

Growing up, Priya Joshi never felt the pressure to become a doctor or an engineer. “My siblings and I had the freedom to choose what we wanted to study,” she says. “I am lucky to have the experience and lessons from so many generations. And now my daughter will hopefully have the same,” she adds, as Kaavya sleeps soundly on her lap.

The women all agree that it was education that made the family what it is today. Says Rupa: "Education teaches you to respect each other's point of view and thoughts, whether it is from a daughter-in-law to a mother-in-law or vice versa. That is one reason we live together in such harmony." 🇮🇳



Watch a short video of five generations of strong, independent women discuss why educating girls is important and how receiving education shaped the entire family.

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Visual engagement

Nepal's nature and culture connect in a month-long art exhibit

Culture is inextricably interwoven with nature in Nepal, but this connection is being slowly lost. Indigenous groups are being forced away from their cultural and natural heritage because they are undervalued by a globalised economy, and poor domestic planning and governance.

Natural resources that could be sustainably harvested are disappearing nearly as fast as the people who are skilled in using them. The 2015 Earthquake accelerated this loss – both in monuments as well as intangible heritage like festivals and community cohesion. Much of the reconstruction has been generic, cultural spaces and neighbourhoods have lost their charm.

Several artists from Nepal and around the world have responded to this steady erosion of nature and culture by engaging with local populations in innovative ways. The vision of these artists transforms aesthetic opportunity into social outreach and liberated dialogue, and some of them even help improve livelihoods.

One collective in Janakpur demonstrates women’s empowerment through group dynamics in painting and street theatre. The Mithila people adapt traditional architectural clay paintings to native *lokta* handmade paper. Loss of natural areas is combined with the loss of respect for such art forms in a technological world. Both the cultural practices that were based on nature and the resources that sustained them are vanishing.

An American artist living in Nepal collaborates with community members across caste lines in Mustang, establishing a rural learning centre. Her work

facilitates artist residencies and environmental education, exploring alternative approaches that are directly engaged with indigenous, local knowledge systems.

American curator Lillian Ball was moved to organise the exhibition after meeting several artists during visits to Nepal where she was involved with an ongoing project at the Lumbini Crane Sanctuary.

“These diverse artists share many concerns and creative ways of working with distinct populations which have inspired me. The art we make reflects the complex threats development poses,” she says.

In Ball’s case, video, photography, and objects relating to the Sarus Cranes come together in an exhibit of the symbiosis between an endangered sacred bird and local villagers who have lived amidst Lumbini’s wetlands for over 2,500 years.

She shows that Buddhism has an inherent respect for nature that is being undermined as Lumbini becomes a mass tourism destination. Venerable Metteyya and the Lumbini Social Service Foundation are working to halt environmental destruction that affects humans as well as wildlife in Lumbini, which already has some of Nepal’s worst pollution.

Joseph Beuys’ concept of Social Sculpture provides a framework for a wide range of practices as an exhibition in a contemporary art context. Some artists function as organisers, actively uniting participants. Some facilitate training workshops for rural people to cooperatively transform livelihoods. Locally gathered clays, plant substances, and dwindling horizons are reflected in painting, sculpture, media, and performance.

Sustainable attitudes are fading along with traditional skills, self-sufficiency is replaced by global markets. When an ethos based on biodegradable materials shifts to plastic, the waste stream brings destruction all over the land and oceans. Culture, natural landscapes, and material resources required for daily village life are then at risk.

The exhibition at Taragaon Museum will be accompanied by parallel events and performances. A catalog on the exhibition has been published, documenting the perspectives of the curator and artists which places the work squarely within the ambit of contemporary art and social practice.

This unique exhibition seeks to more than just display visual traces of engagement: it offers opportunities to share resources, approaches, and experiences. 🇳🇵

*Engaged Arts in Nepal
Taragaon Museum, Boudha
4-30 March
Open daily 10 am-5pm*





2



3

EXHIBITS

- 1 Shyam Badan Shrestha and Natural Resource Development Center
- 2 Jessica Kain and Marpha Foundation
- 3 Gina de la Chesnaye and 108 Lives Project
- 4 Ashmina Ranjit and Nexus Arts
- 5 Karan Shrestha and A Social Critique
- 6 Claire Burkert and Janakpur Womens Development Center
- 7 Lillian Ball and Lumbini Social Service Foundation
- 8 Gopal Das Shrestha 'Kalpremi' and Kapilvastu Ceramics



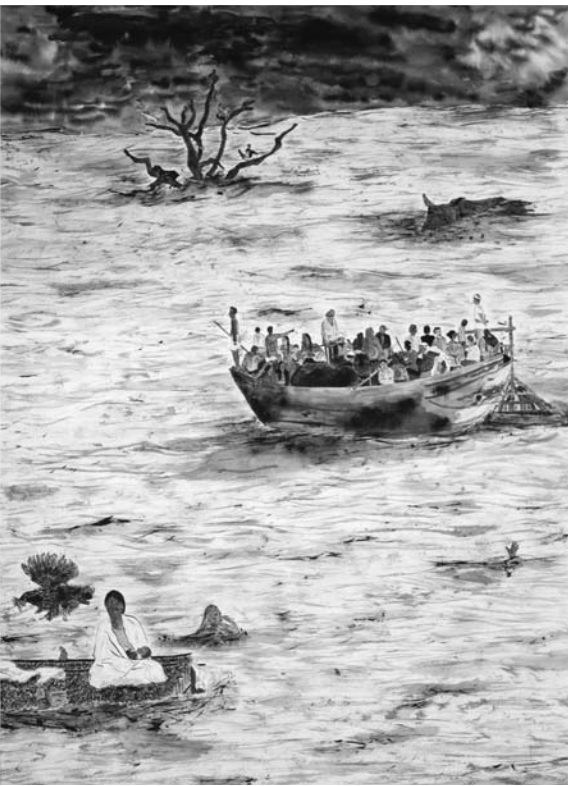
4




6



5



EVENTS



The Vagina Monologues

Nepali adaptation of The Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler is based on real stories of women's experiences of gender, sexuality, harassment and abuse.

2-6 March, 5pm onwards
(Saturday, 1pm as well)
Bhrikutimandap, Nepal Tourism Board,
Rs500/300 (for students with ID card),
9861315317, 9849140722
Special women's day show: 8 March,
6pm, Evoke Café and Bistro, Jhamsikhel,
Rs1,500.

Friday Holi hours

Play with colours while enjoying local snacks and drinks like Chyang at the Cargo Cafe Kathmandu.

March, 5-8pm, Nepal Communitere,
Pulchowk, (01) 5530229

Opening of Trisara

Trisara announces the opening of its 3rd outlet in Durbar marg, join in for the celebration.

3 March, 5pm onwards, Durbar marg,
(01) 4410200



Art Market

Paintings, art prints, miniatures, photographs, design products, art supplies and books on sale along with block printing workshop and live music. The Art Market is happening all around the world at this time, don't miss out on the experience in Kathmandu.

3 March, 2-6pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa,
(01) 5553869

Local Mini Market

Visit the bi-monthly mini market which features local products that are unique, creative and high-quality.

3 March, 10am-5:30pm, The Nana Hotels,
Chaksibari Marg, Thamel, (01) 4443701

The Awesome Human

Motivational seminar organised by Working As Angels fund raiser for menstrual hygiene management and sanitary pad making training in Terai. Speakers: Amrita Gyawali, Anil Chitrakar, Bhumika Shrestha and Prashanta Manandhar.

3 March, 11am-2pm, St. Xaviers, Maitighar,
Rs300, 9808082150



International Folk Festival

Be a part of the 9th edition of the festival promoting culture and tourism. Dance together with the participants from 11 different countries sharing their culture.

3 March, 1:30-5pm, Basantapur

Sisterhood Gathering

A gathering for all moms to connect, relax, heal and rejuvenate while well-trained volunteers take care of the children. Highlights: therapies including sauna, cupping with frequency music, food and drinks, homemade wellness products, group meditation, childrens workshop and fun music

8-10 March, 11am-5pm, OJAS Wellness B&B,
9841313990

Photo exhibition

A photo exhibition on human rights and women empowerment, for the 6th edition of Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival, organised by Human Rights Film Center.

7-10 March, 9am onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, Pradarshani Marg, (01) 4786486

MUSIC



Suman and the Blue Fret

Original music incorporating ethnic Nepali instrument Sarangi into Western style of contemporary blues.

2 March, 7pm-12am, The Old House Restaurant, Durbar Marg, Rs500, 9801101788

Kanta Dab Dab

The 2nd event of the month-long Base Camp Music Festival with performance by Kanta Dab Dab, a Sitar, bass and percussions trio from Nepal with unique contemporary compositions creating soulful fusions between Eastern and Western melodies.

3 March, 8pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chowk, 9841226397



Nepal Deathfest

Biggest death metal music fest of South Asia where bands from different country will be giving their sickest performances.

Bands: Nader Sadek, In the Flesh, UgraKarma, Severe Dementia, Breeding Machine, Clitgore, Onanizer, Ancestor and more.

2-3 March, 11am onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Rs800-2,000, 9860907357/ 9824019926

Sanam in Nepal

Also known as Fab Four, Sanam- an Indian pop rock band from Mumbai will be performing classic Bollywood songs. Joining along are Nepali artists Laure, Swapna Suman, Samishran and Sushil & Prasanna.

3 March, 1-7pm, Jawalakhel ground, Rs1,000-5,000, (01) 4442435/ 4430974



OUR PICK

Now Showing in Kathmandu

Hailed as one of the best films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the 2018 American Superhero movie is directed by Ryan Coogler and stars Chadwick Boseman as the titular character Black Panther/ T'Challa who returns home to take his place as the rightful ruler of technologically advanced nation of Wakanda, but is challenged by a vengeful villian, in a conflict with dire global consequences.

DINING



Sapporo Japanese

Serving typical Japanese food & drinks: known for homemade soba, udon, ramen, goma-ae and teriyaki. The menu is seasonal.

Anamika Marg, Baluwatar, 9803445405

Belle Ville

The café introduces it's new breakfast menu—try their fresh and delicious pancakes, sausage, and special egg dishes, for breakfast and brunch.

3 March, 9am-2pm, Baluwatar, (01) 4411266

Chez Caroline

Authentic ambience, marvelous French food, glorious sunshine and more. Quiches, tarts and sandwiches on the menu.

Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4263070

Mulchowk

Select your special dinner from their Ala-carte menu. Their fish steak with lemon butter sauce is soft, succulent, flaky, and rich in continental flavours.

Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4259801

Pauline's Garden

A cosy place in the heart of Kathmandu offering French and Italian cuisine as well as Nepali dishes. Enjoy their varieties of steaks, salads and spaghetti.

Baluwatar (Closed on Mondays), (01) 4221537/ 9803919575




The Vesper Café & Restaurant

Enjoy mouth watering delicacies along with a range of excellent wines they serve. The special menu consists of Cobb Salad, Roasted Pumpkin Soup, Roasted Turkey and Creme Brulee.

Jhamikhel, (01) 5548179

GETAWAY



Temple Tree

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Gaurighat, Lakeside, (061) 465819, www.templetreenepal.com

Pokhara Grande

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Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 460210, www.pokharagrande.com



Tangalwood

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Tangal, Kathmandu, (01) 4428655, www.tangalwood.com.np

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Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442, www.retreatdamaar.com



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AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 23 February - 1 March

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							

FRIDAY
Feb 23

SATURDAY
Feb 24

SUNDAY
Feb25

MONDAY
Feb 26

TUESDAY
Feb 27

WEDNESDAY
Feb 28

THURSDAY
Mar 1

The Saturday and Thursday (Holi) slight improvement in air Quality Index shows how much contribution vehicular emissions make to the concentration of suspended particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in size. Even so the AQI for those days are still in the Unhealthy band. The reason is that brick kilns, open garbage burning and crop burning continues even during holidays.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Untold stories of unsung heroes

Digital book profiles Nepali women for whom uncommon grit was a common trait

SARA PARKER

Over the past 30 years I have worked with Nepalis in the field of gender and education. Although a lot of progress has been made, much more needs to be done. The gender movement has grown with events such as 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Women of the World Festival amplifying the voice of activists.

One of the initiatives in Nepal

is Shrijana Yonjan's Celebrating Womanhood Award which recognises women in the name of the nine female goddesses and represents powerful women from all walks of life.

The award goes beyond the well known faces among women empowerment activists, advocates and NGO leaders to local women from various backgrounds. The award spotlights women who have contributed and impacted their communities and nation, but are not included or accepted as serious leaders and change makers, when in fact they are

creating change that everyone is aspiring for.

Six journalists fanned out across Nepal to collect stories of 50 women to include in an inspiring



e-book containing untold stories of unsung heroes. The digital book will be launched online on International Women's Day on 8 March.

Through their work and life

they have contributed to shaping the thoughts and actions of generations to come. Their grit has helped bring about a shift in conventional mind-sets and ideologies regarding the role of women (and men) in Nepali society. This is the time to promote and benefit from their stories.

The book includes a diverse range of experiences of women from different backgrounds, and shows that there is no one narrative of gender or women in Nepal. It also shows that we do not just need to celebrate women

who work to directly tackle 'gender issues', but should also focus on those, who through their work set a positive role model for young women.

These are testaments of the power of individual agency as a means to overcome oppression and stigma on many levels. 🇳🇵



Sara Parker is a Reader in Development Studies, Sociology at Liverpool John Moores University, UK with a long standing research commitment in Nepal.



Zubeda Khatun's husband supported her to go to school despite the fact that he was ridiculed by the wider community. Today, she has not only passed her SLC but plays an active role in the local Muslim Namuna Community group. Her determination shows how important it is for men to encourage and participate in empowering women.



Gulab Devi's activism in Saptari has played an important role in bringing positive changes in her community by challenging discriminatory daily wages for women. She is active on many fronts and despite not having any education herself, she did not let this stop her from challenging social stigma and working for equality.



Ram Devi Tamang overcame the stigma attached to becoming a widow at 22 and started a tailoring unit to earn money to sustain herself and to train other women. She became a local champion for gender equality and has now become the Deputy Mayor of Namobudha Municipality in Kavre, setting a positive example to all women in Nepal.



Laxmi Timilsina was refused to buy fertiliser by a shop owner and this led to her feeling depressed about being treated unfairly. This, coupled with her position in the family led her to start an organic farm movement which serves as an example to all. Her story shows that it is important to work in different sectors like agriculture to make women more independent.



Tripita Lungelee Magar not only overcame discrimination for being crippled due to polio, she also completed her Bachelor's education despite not having access to a wheelchair at Padma Kanya Campus. She then worked as a typist before becoming a teacher and establishing the Nepali Chelibeti Apang Samaj (Nepali Women and Girls Disabled Society).



Haridevi Koirala Despite professional singing being seen as 'below' her social status she sang, wrote songs that captured the situation of women in Nepal, and has now recorded over 80 albums. Her songs inspire other women by spreading the message of self-reliance and independence.



Renu Sharma (above) with **Kamala Upreti** and **Asharshila Barakoti** of The Womens' Foundation work to rescue, rehabilitate and counsel women and young girls on a daily basis. Over the last 30 years they have worked tirelessly to help thousands of women in Nepal, yet have remained out of the limelight.

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Lady Bird

Greta Gerwig's funny, sweet, kind-hearted feature *Lady Bird* has been nominated in the five most prestigious categories for the upcoming 90th Academy Awards on 4 March this Sunday -- for those interested in still watching this interminable ceremony. There is a Best Picture nomination,



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

along with one for Best Director for Gerwig, and two nominations for Saoirse Ronan for Best Actress as the titular lead. Yet another nomination has been reserved for the great Laurie Metcalfe in the Best Supporting role as Lady Bird's complex, warm hearted, hypercritical mother Marion McPherson.

As a young American actor,

writer, and now director, Gerwig has come far, starting off starring as an ingénue towards the beginning of her career, and now reaching perhaps the apex of her development with yet another Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay for *Lady Bird's* excellent, lucid script.

This is a classic American coming-of-age film about a young girl named Christine who insists on being called Lady Bird for the sake of her own individuality. While there are moments of great beauty and real transcendence in the film, aided by some exceptional writing by Gerwig, this is essentially the kind of high-school film that resonates mainly with an American audience, even while the carefully written chemistry between Lady Bird and her mother Marion ensures it captivates the older people as well.

The other travails of Lady Bird, such as being born to a lower

middle class but still privileged family, going to a Catholic school, and living in Sacramento will fall flat to the eyes of young Nepali teenagers who probably have angst of their own (as do all teenagers) but not to do the same kind of extreme individualism that is seemingly an American trait which does not quite manifest to the same extent around the world -- not even to Nepali teenagers who are struggling to find themselves and undoubtedly see themselves as unique in that struggle.

It is therefore unfortunate that such a fine film should have such a narrow range, with little symbolism and, aside from Metcalf's riveting Marion, few powerful archetypes to appeal to an international audience. We have become so inured to the insistent Americanism of the mainstream that most of us watch films about American life without questioning how little these films echo against our own. Cinema is meant to be universal, but without a far thinking director to wield it, the films become as narrow as the director's viewpoint.

This is perhaps an unfair criticism of *Lady Bird*, a film which does not pretend to be more than it is: a family drama about a young, callow girl with a good heart who goes through her share of teenage neuroses. It is a shame that these promising young American directors, like Gerwig, and her partner Noah Baumbach (the film-maker who made the equally insular *The Squid and the Whale* in 2005) do not look outside their world for the wealth of stories that could be told, were there a will.



Watch trailer online

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HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

NEW PORTFOLIO Matrika Yadav, Minister of Commerce and Supplies, Ram Bahadur Thapa, Minister of Home Affairs and Ishwar Pokhrel, Defense Minister pose for a photo with President Bidya Bhandari, Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Prime Minister KP Oli after the swearing-in ceremony in Kathmandu on Monday.



DINESH GOLE

CHEERS: Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and US Ambassador to Nepal Alaina B. Teplitz during a reception to mark the 242nd anniversary of Independence Day of the United States of America in Kathmandu last Friday.



INDIAN EMBASSY

HAPPY HOLI: Indian Ambassador to Nepal Manjeev Singh Puri and his wife Namrita Puri pay a visit to Prime Minister KP Oli at his residence in Baluwatar on the occasion of Holi.



SRAWAN SHRESTHA

KEY TO HEALTH: The construction team hands over the new building to the Bayalpata Hospital administration in Achham on Wednesday. The building will house the outpatient department of the hospital.



QATAR AIRWAYS

FLY HIGH: Australian Ambassador to Nepal Peter Greme Budd, Qatar's Ambassador to Nepal Yousef Mohammed Al-Hail and Qatar Airways Country Manager, Mr Jayaprakash Nair attend the launching ceremony of the Airways' inaugural flight to Canberra, capital of Australia on Tuesday in Kathmandu. -

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Ramesh Kumar in
Himal Khabarpatrika,
25 Feb-3 March

Gorkha Brewery must be happy with the Supreme Court. It has secured what it needed from the court: an interim order that could save its Rs510 million.

The country's largest beer manufacturer had filed a writ at the apex court, seeking an order against the Inland Revenue Department (IRD)'s decision to collect the amount as VAT and excise duty from it. The company argued that the IRD calculated the amount 'unfairly', and that it would incur a huge financial loss if it was forced to pay the amount.

On 15 February, the single bench of Chief Justice Gopal Prasad Parajuli barred the IRD from collecting the tax amount from Gorkha Brewery until the final verdict. Given how rarely the apex court reverses its interim order, it is almost certain the IRD will not be able to collect the tax.

The Supreme Court has been delivering a series of such verdicts rescuing big companies from huge tax backlogs. Towards the end of his controversial stint as the head of the judiciary, Chief Justice Parajuli has fast-tracked large tax-related cases, benefitting several multi-national companies and hurting the country's economy.

On 27 December, the Supreme Court stopped the IRD from collecting over Rs250 million from Surya Nepal. It was the taxable amount of the dividend deposited by the country's leading cigarette manufacturer into its welfare fund.

The IRD lawyers at the Supreme Court argued that Surya Nepal deposited up to 70% of its profit in the welfare fund to evade tax, but the justices did not find merit in their argument.

If companies do not agree to the amount of tax levied upon them by the IRD, they can usually appeal for a review. If they are not satisfied with the review, they have recourse in the revenue tribunal. They can go to the Supreme Court only if they object to the tribunal's decision.

However, after Parajuli became Chief Justice last year, most large taxpayers have begun to file frequent writ petitions



at the Supreme Court instead of following due process. And CJ Parajuli or justices chosen by him are all delivering verdicts that favour taxpayers.

IRD spokesperson Yagya Prasad Dhungel says: "The court is giving whatever taxpayers are seeking, and it has severely affected revenue collection." The biggest blow dealt by the Supreme Court to revenue collection was when Ncell was allowed to repatriate Rs31 billion in profit from

Writ and wrong

Nepal. The government had barred Ncell from repatriating the profit until a capital gains tax linked to company's sale by TeliaSonera to Axiata was settled. But Ncell moved the Supreme Court on 17 December, and CJ Parajuli acted the very next day to pave the way for Ncell to take the money out of Nepal.

Advocate Om Prakash Aryal, who shot to fame by filing a writ that eventually brought down the dreaded head of the anti-corruption watchdog in 2017, says: "Justices are now delivering verdicts so fast it is as if they have promised to settle all tax cases before they retire."

The Supreme Court also swiftly delivered an interim order in another case involving Ncell, benefitting billionaire Upendra Mahato's Synergy Nepal Company.

Concluding that Synergy Nepal undervalued the transaction of Ncell shares, the IRD had instructed the company to pay an additional tax amount of Rs3.25 billion. The court delivered the verdict for this case in just two days.

The Supreme Court settled another high-profile money-laundering case in just three days, baffling everyone who thought the justice system in Nepal was slow. Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) had not allowed controversial businessman Ajey Sumargi to bring in \$21.3 million from Cyprus for four years, questioning the source of his cash.

Sumargi filed a writ at the Spreme Court on 4 February, asking for permission to bring his money. On 6 February, the court ruled that 'there was no legal basis and reasons' for the Central Bank to freeze Sumargi's money.

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SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
in KANCHANPUR

The Tharu woman's daughter is nearly 15 years old. That is how many years have passed since she was raped by a group of Royal Nepal Army soldiers. That is also the number of years she has waited for justice.

She thought the culprits would be caught when the war ended, and that they would finally be taken to court when the Maoists were elected to power in 2008. She waited throughout the 11 years of political transition for truth, justice and compensation.

"I get very anxious about my past because I am not guilty. I have neither been compensated, nor have those who did it to me been caught," says Chaudhari, her eyes burning with fury.

International Women's Day 2018
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Her husband was away when 25 soldiers drove up in a van, entered her home and beat her up. "Then they took turns to rape me," she recalls. "I am lucky to be alive."

She battled the ensuing trauma on her own, adjusting to ostracisation by her community which got worse when she got pregnant.

"I have spent a lot of money on my treatment, I could do with a little help, the government should tell me once and for all if I will get compensation or not, since others have," she says.

Nepal has come a long way after the war ended in 2006. The monarchy was abolished, there were two elections to Constituent Assemblies that framed a federal secular constitution. Under the peace process the Maoist guerrillas were demobilised, some of them were integrated into the Nepal Army. For many the political transition is over, but not for war survivors like Chaudhari here in the plains of western Nepal which saw massive human rights violations by both sides.

Wartime rape victims are off the government radar, abandoned by their husbands, ostracised by their families and society. The

state, which is made up of the warring sides, has excluded rape in the interim relief process and in transitional justice.

There is no accurate data on wartime rape because many victims are still afraid of social stigma. There is a lack of social protection, and many are poor. The statute of limitation, that has now been extended to six months, has been another hindrance.

Advocacy Forum-Nepal alone has documented and worked with at least 250 cases of conflict rape. Around 300 cases have been registered at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where Madhavi Bhatta says: "First the registered rape cases need to be established through investigation and later we will recommend them for reparation."

When asked about how long that will take, she replied, "The process will definitely take years since the investigations have only just started."

Last August, the UN's human rights committee for the first time intervened in the wartime rape case of Purna Maya and urged Nepal to investigate it. Although it was a landmark decision, there has been no response from the government side.

Om Prakash Sen of Advocacy Forum-Nepal says the government has always ignored the demand for justice and reparations from wartime rape victims.

Jhpad Bohora a Maoist MP from Karnali Province told *Nepali Times* creating jobs for the victims of sexual violence will be a top priority of the provincial government.

"Apart from jobs we will also provide free education to their children," says Bohora, who has been appointed finance minister for a province which has the highest number of disappeared people and victims of wartime rape.

Centre for Investigative Journalism



Watch a short video of six conflict rape survivors narrate their stories and recount the endless wait for justice

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NO COUNTRY FOR WOMEN

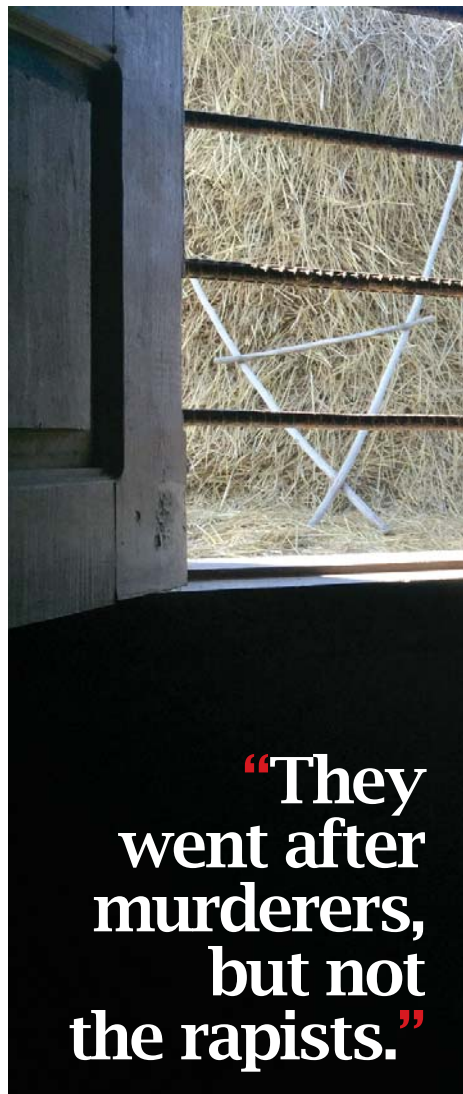
Nepal's political transition is over, but there is no closure for victims of wartime rape

"Why am I treated like the guilty one?"

My life became upside down in 20 minutes. After I was raped by a group of Maoists, my husband left me and never came back. He used to work in India, and I was happy. My husband said as a Brahmin I had "tainted" his family's reputation and he could not accept me anymore. He felt humiliated for something that did not happen to him, and for which I was not responsible. Raising the children alone has been financially and socially difficult. Neighbours treat me differently, and I have often contemplated suicide, but i've pulled back because of my sons. As they grow up, I am worried that they will also shun me. It was the Maoists who committed the crime 13 years ago, yet why am I being treated like the guilty one?"



"They went after murderers, but not the rapists."





“I didn’t kill myself for the sake of my children.”

I had been married for just six months when I was raped. The soldiers came in three vehicles, beat me and then raped me in turns. They suspected we had hidden weapons. My husband and in-laws threw me out of the house even though I was pregnant. I got married again. Now, my current husband also says he would have never married me if he knew about the rape. He is a drunkard. If I hadn't been raped, I would be raising a happy family now. I feel most miserable when people mock me. I often think of committing suicide, but I don't have the courage. I am surviving just for the sake of my children. I approached the government for compensation, they made me go everywhere. In the end they said there is no compensation for rape victims.



“Society will never accept me.”

I have a hazy recollection of a group of soldiers entering our house on 17 August 2004. Then they beat me so mercilessly I became unconscious. When I came to, there was blood all over my thigh. They had used condoms, so I did not conceive. They killed my husband too, saying he died in an exchange of gunfire. After hospital treatment in Kathmandu, I could walk again. I am not as strong as before, I still have abdominal pain. Although neighbours don't say bad things in front of me, they don't think I am good enough to fit back in society. They will never accept me.

ALL PHOTOS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA



My husband and I were on our way to my maternal home one evening 15 years ago when two soldiers stopped us. They threatened my husband with guns and raped me in front of him. They suspected us of supporting the Maoists. I had a miscarriage and was in pain for years because of infections. Just the memory of it

tortures me, and gives me severe headaches. The community ostracised me, people still hurl insults at me. But I am lucky I have a supportive husband. All these years, I have been waiting for the government to provide us relief that never came. Justice is a lost cause. They went after the murderers, but never the rapists.


“Now, my body can cope with any pain.”

After the rape, my husband has been mistreating me. He accuses me of having affairs. Initially he supported me saying whatever happened wasn't my fault, now he is ashamed of me. I lost my dignity and happiness. I was raped by two soldiers who entered our home, and forced me to undress. I was so afraid I could not even shout for help. Other victims of the insurgency have received compensation but I haven't got anything. I try to have positive thoughts, but I am haunted by the rape every day. I have health problems, I feel isolated and frightened. My husband beats me up, but having survived the rape my body can cope with any pain.






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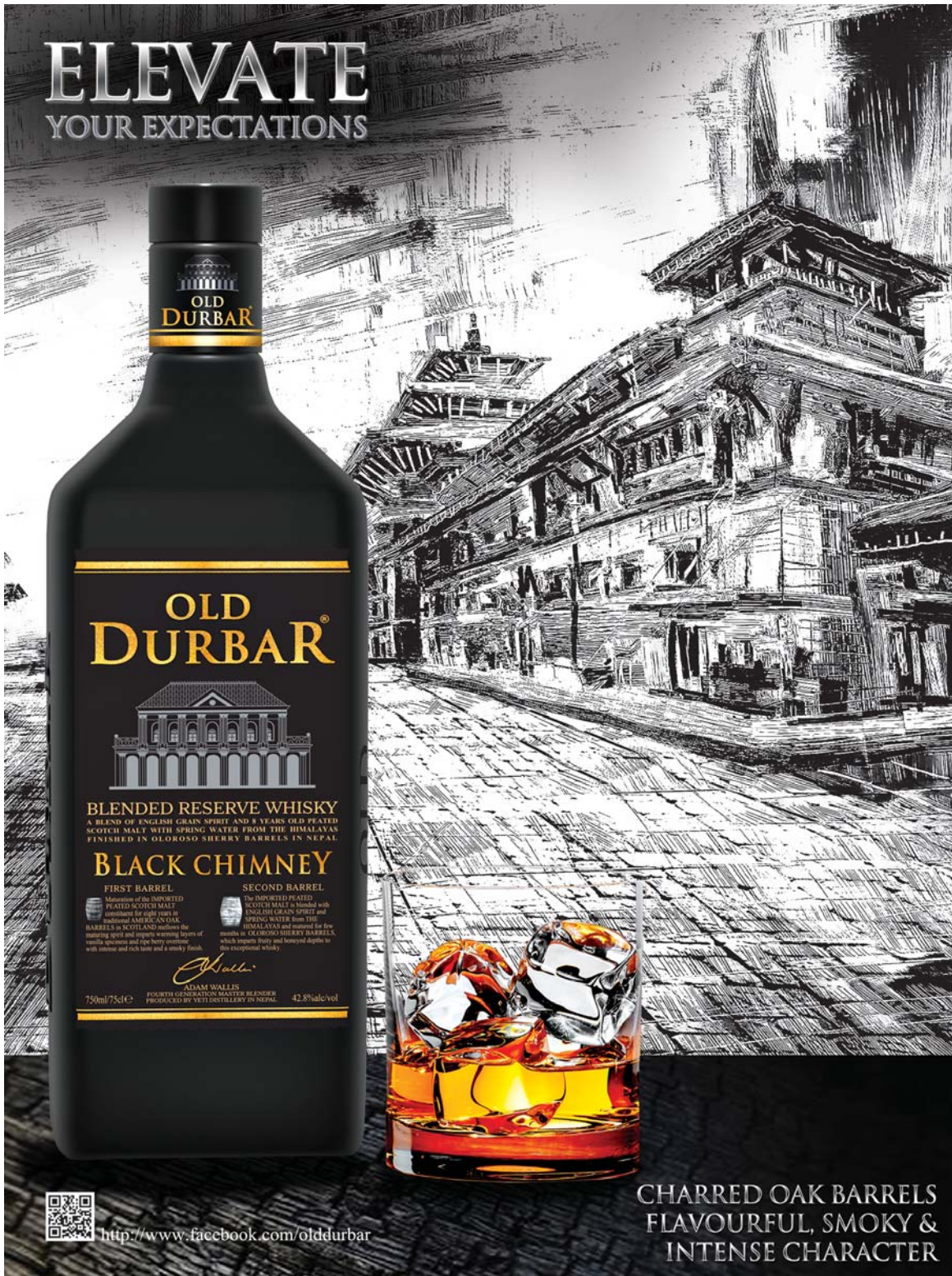
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Kissing ashes

Drastic situations need drastic remedies. And if there is one thing we have learnt since Nepal shed the Rana yolk, it is that our rulers need to be kept under constant surveillance so we the people can figure out where they are and what they are up to.

Since the election results were known three months ago and before the new government took over last week, however, bureaucrats had suddenly become hard to find. The reason we can't find them is because they are stalking us.

They blend into the undergrowth, hunt nocturnally and sleep in the daytime, making a killing every day: they avoid contact with other humans, and stay hidden in the urban jungle where they put our money where their mouth is.

There are two ways to track down the location of the servants of the people. One is to make it

Australia. Earlier, the well-known head of a constitutional organ was tracked by a GPS locator on an intercontinental migration to Canada via Mauritius and Monaco. This is a record for the longest migration undertaken by a Nepali mammal.

Meanwhile, reports are coming in of satellite-tracked civilian servants persuading fellow Nepalis to spontaneously part with their cash out of their own free will. These donations could be voluntary (and we have no reason to believe they are not) in which case they must be part of the instructions Mr. Zedong left for his proteges in his last will and testament ("Go forth and kiss their ashes, but give me my cut").

There is actually nothing new in all the give-and-take that is going on in broad daylight hours and in full view of the law enforcement agencies, even as we speak. In fact, extortion has been a national



NAVESH CHITRAKAR

mandatory for all gazetted officers henceforth and hereinafter to be radio-collared so that their whereabouts can be tracked by satellite telemetry. Some hefty section officers have put on added girth as their careers progressed, so it may not be easy to wrestle them to the ground and hold still long enough to strap on the radio collar. In such cases, it may be necessary to dart them with a tranquiliser gun before attaching the locator device on to the individual.

An easier way may be to embed new state-of-the-art microchips subcutaneously into the tissue behind their ears. These come with inbuilt SIM cards allowing the officer in question to be GPS tracked through satellite telemetry.

It is during political transitions between two governments that the civil service embarks on its annual migration. One way to trace their whereabouts is to install camera traps that will be triggered by motion detectors along routes that they frequent. For example, one bureaucrat who was supposed to be on an inspection of Province 7 has been camera trapped on Soi 9 in Bangkok.

For example, earlier this month the Secretary of the Ministry of Constructive Corruption disappeared from radar screens. Luckily, he had just been radio-collared so we could trace his migratory route to

revenue-generation technique in this country ever since Manjushree was told he could not slash Chobhar Hill in two unless he first paid *baksheesh* to unconcerned authorities, and slip another wad of elephants to higher up authoritarians. Good thing Manjushree had brought along plenty of small yuan bills for just such a contingency, otherwise we might still have been under water.

Squeezing fellow citizens dry is a quaint Nepali custom that has been passed down from one generation of Nepalis to the next, right up to the present day. It works on the very simple socialist principle of taking from everyone according to her ability and giving to anyone according to his or her greed. This levels the playing field, spreads the wealth around and enables us, as a nation in the throes of development, to make rapid advances towards utopia.

Nepal is way ahead of other countries in the region when it comes to extraction and extortion. But there is no room for complacency. We have to ask ourselves: is there a Darbar Square still untaxed, a peak still permitless, a tourist still ungouged? Are there businesses that have still not been shaken down? The long and short answer to these questions is: you bet. Devolution to the provinces opens up infinite possibilities for larceny and plunder.



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