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WORTH THE PAPER IT IS WRITTEN ON

It has often been said that the reason for the current political standstill is the trust deficit among the narrow-minded and short-sighted parties.

But it has been clear for some time now that the main obstacle to the peace and constitution project is the Maoist party itself. To be more specific, they are the so-called Baidya faction that wants a “people’s revolt”, and the even more hardline Ram Bahadur Thapa clique that on Wednesday threatened to take Nepal down the path of a multi-ethnic civil war. Why doesn’t the party just split and get it over with?

This week the ultra-left wing of Nepal’s extreme leftists once more put a spanner in the works by announcing a series of escalating protests till May. Protest against whom? For what? Mohan Baidya lashed out at Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal for double crossing him. Essentially, Dahal had assured Baidya he would help bring down what both saw as an “anti-nationalist” Baburam Bhattarai government and replace it with one that would push a “revolutionary people’s constitution”. But when Dahal said this week that the constitution would be drafted in time and hinted that Bhattarai should remain till then, Baidya blew a fuse. It’s getting difficult to tell who is stabbing whom in the back

It’s getting difficult to tell who is stabbing whom in the back within the Maoist party anymore.



BIKRAM RAI

within the Maoist party anymore.

Dahal and Bhattarai keep blaming the UML and NC as being the reason for the delays in the constitution. They can’t fool all the people all the time that the main obstruction is and have always been the hardliners that they have flirted with time and again to improve their short-term bargaining positions. As for Dahal, this is a man with a single-minded and vaulting ambition to be an executive president, and is willing to do anything, give anything away, threaten anyone, to get his way. Which is why he has suddenly gone soft on ethnic federalism, given in on the rank of Maoists to be inducted into the new directorate, and abandoned just about everything his party fought a ruinous war for.

Most Nepalis don’t buy this

nonsense anymore. They’ve heard it all before, and know that the Maoists will blow hot or cold depending on internal party dynamics. The integration of Maoists into the Nepal Army should have been finished by December, and it kept being pushed back because the Maoists kept moving the goalposts. Every time there was an agreement in the Special Committee on the terms of integration, compensation packages, or the composition of the directorate, the Maoists would pull back from already agreed terms. What do they take the rest of the country for, “useful idiots”?

With two months to go for the unextendable constitution deadline, the real issue is that there is no time left to resolve the stumbling blocks in the new constitution on federalism and government. It is unlikely that they can be miraculously resolved in the next few weeks, especially since there has been so much politics played around ethnic federalism and presidential system.

Our humble suggestion would be to start thinking about post-27 May scenarios by readying a national unity government to protect Nepal’s national unity from the centrifugal forces threatening it. Then, we can approve a new federal republican constitution that guarantees in its preamble fundamental values like democracy and pluralism, ensures social justice and gives every citizen the right to food, shelter, health care and security. We can shelve the deeply divisive issues for later when there is more stability and Nepal’s politicians exhibit more maturity.

After all, there is no point passing a constitution that is hardly worth the paper it is written on. It is a dynamic document that should evolve, and can be changed to suit the times.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

WHOSE MADHES?

I completely agree with Rubeena Mahato (‘Whose Madhes?’ #595). Being from the Madhes myself, I don’t see any signs of conflict between the Madhesi and Pahadi people. Selfish politicians who have been earning large sums of money in the name of poor Madhesi people, and intellectuals in the national dailies, are creating this propaganda and misleading Nepalis.

Dibya

- Thank you Rubeena Mahato for another superb piece. I visit the *Nepali Times* website just to read your articles. Your reporting is original, you don’t have the bias of foreign writers or the lack of insight of local reporters. Keep up the excellent work.

Pranab

- Thank you *Nepali Times* and Rubeena Mahato for an insightful report. I am a Madhesi myself and during my visit to Janakpur some months ago, many of my friends who are longtime residents of Janakpur, expressed extreme sorrow over the loss of their Pahadi neighbours who shared their culture and created a vibrant community. You do not have to tell them that diversity is good, they already appreciate it. It’s the political environment and ethnic mind-set of Pahadi elites and politicians, who are unwilling to accommodate Madhesi people which are harming the region. Madhesi leaders are also at fault because they have failed to focus on real issues and are only after narrow interests.

Sukhdev Shah

- What the Madhes wants is also

what rest of Nepal wants: good delivery of services and development. Similarly, the disenchantment with party leaders is not limited to the Tarai, it is pervasive throughout the country. I think the root of our problems lies in our inability to choose the right leaders.

K K Sharma

- You can easily replace ‘Madhes’ and ‘Madhesi’ in Rubeena Mahato’s column with ‘Nepal’ and ‘Nepali’ and it will portray a true picture of the entire nation. What Nepal (and the Madhes) really need are honest, smart and capable leaders who will introduce new models of governance in the country. Until then corrupt politicians - from different regions, castes, parties – will continue enjoying good lives while ordinary Nepalis will keep on suffering.

A Nepali

- Why are there so many articles just on the Madhes? Is it because journalists can easily access the region? What about the Himalaya? I would urge reporters to spend few weeks in the freezing cold Himal and uncover the living conditions of the people there

Sagar Panthi

- Rubeena Mahato’s ‘This Is It’ column truly reflects the sentiment of the Tarai, where I also come from. The people of the Tarai want jobs, better roads, schools and hospitals, they do not care about politics that much except during elections. Madhesi and Pahadis live together, share labour and enjoy festivals. My villagers, the Tharus, say the Tarai is their land, not Madhes.

S Shrestha

- Now what prevented other writers in *Nepali Times* and elsewhere to say it like it is. All this political nonsense is

completely pointless, nobody bothers about this identity business other than politics-obsessed buffoons who have destroyed this country completely. Ever since industrialisation began, the Madhes as a region has benefited immensely. With most industries based in the region, fertile land, and benefits of close cross-border relations proved advantageous. This is a big positive and its beneficiaries have been Madhesi, just as much as Pahadis, if not more.

Soni

- Rubeena Mahato’s article should be translated into Nepali, it articulates the voice of a majority of Nepalis today. And as long as we have journalists like her, there is still hope for the country. Thank you *Nepali Times*.

Fan

REVISIONISTS AND REFORMISTS

Nepali Times refused to call the Maoists ‘terrorists’ during the war even when they were killing innocent people, and instead justified it as a ‘liberation movement’ (‘Wanted: revisionist and reformists’, ditorial, #595). Then in the 2008 election the paper said the Maoists were ‘the only party that is for change’. Since the media and civil society wholeheartedly supported murderers and brought criminals to power, they are largely responsible for the existing mess. But it’s good that *Nepali Times* has finally realised what the Maoists really are

Kiran L

- I have been reading your editorials every week and I have come to the conclusion that we Nepalis are cowards. We are letting people who are responsible for the death of 17,000 Nepalis run the show, if this not cowardice what is? The editor claims

Bhattarai is an ‘honest and upright’ man, when we are all aware of his past deeds. This to me is cowardice.

Gopal Shrestha

- It’s such a shame that UN officials, diplomats, and civil society in Nepal cosy up to the Maoists even when their abuse of human rights is well documented. And the international media which reports on dictators around the world has so far remained silent on Nepal’s despotic leaders. If the Nepali media and civil society still believe in human rights and rule of law they should campaign for the murderers and convicts in the current government to be sent to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

Poudyal

- The Maoists have fooled everyone in Nepal and in the international circles and looted billions in the process. But very soon the Dahal and Bhattarai factions will split and it will be the best day for Nepal. There are also other options: we can put them behind bars and let them rot there. It’s not like we don’t have solutions, we just need to exercise our rights.

Meera Sharma

- Nepalis are running out of patience and will not be silent any more. Our message to Dahal and Bhattarai is clear: no more license to kill and loot. India should also stop supporting these murderers and not meddle with our future.

Sunita Rana

NOT GETTING REFUGE

Thank you Anurag Acharya for your effort (‘Seeking, but not getting refuge’, By the Way, #595). As a member of the

UN and party to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Nepal should honour a person’s right to seek refuge and respect minimum standards of human rights. Also sitting on the fence will neither help the refugees nor will it improve Nepal’s reputation in the international arena. It’s time the government realised the gravity of Tibetan refugee problem and made its position clear.

Laxman Lamichhane

- With the kind of political leadership we have in Nepal it will take at least a generation to show maturity and stop acting like a border sentry for our northern neighbour.

Bishwa Nepal

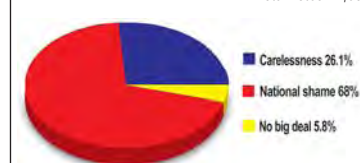
- It’s clear that the west is using Nepal as a battleground to embarrass China, and since Nepal is so politically weak it cannot stand up to them. Nepal cannot allow itself to be used for anti-China activities. It’s not our fight and the Americans should take their Sinophobia elsewhere.

Anil B

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #596

Q. Tourism Minister Bista’s arrest in Abu Dhabi Airport for travelling without a travel document is:

Total votes: 2,087



Weekly Internet Poll # 597. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the government stop the leaders from making official foreign trips until the constitution is drafted?

Wrong visit at the wrong time

The questionable wisdom of Ban Ki-moon's proposed visit to Lumbini



GUEST COLUMN
Kul Chandra Gautam

The proposed visit by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to Lumbini on April 2012 should have signified a welcome new commitment for the development of the birthplace of Lord Gautam Buddha which is a UNESCO world heritage site.

However, it would be untimely and inauspicious for the Secretary-General to visit Lumbini under present circumstances. Nepal is at a critical juncture, struggling to overcome the legacy of a decade-long civil war that killed 15,000. Genuine peace has not yet dawned, the drafting of the new constitution has been delayed by two years, and there is rampant lawlessness and impunity.

The war saw horrendous human rights violations, some amounting to crimes against humanity, but not a single individual has been prosecuted. Many known perpetrators occupy high positions in government. Instead of establishing a credible Truth and Reconciliation Commission consistent with international norms, the ruling Maoists are negotiating the terms of a blanket general amnesty with other major political parties.

The United Nations' Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) was asked to leave the country unceremoniously before completion of the peace process. The

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is being thrown out of the country before the core issues of transitional justice and accountability are satisfactorily completed. And now, Ban Ki-moon is being lured to co-chair an international conference on Lumbini with Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Dahal was recently appointed to chair a national committee for the development of Lumbini by the Maoist-led Government. This is a man who led a violent armed insurgency resulting in the death and disappearance of tens of thousands, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. Although Dahal's party signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, contested elections, became the largest political party and formed a government under its leadership twice, it has not formally renounced violence. It continues to be the party's official policy to "capture state power" by any means, either through ballots or bullets, backed up by a "people's revolt" from the streets.

The main rationale for the UN's involvement in Lumbini is to spread the culture of peace, not to condone the glorification of violence. It would be most ironic for the Secretary-General of the UN to co-chair a meeting with an unrepentant leader with blood on his hands at the holy birthplace of the Buddha.

If Ban Ki-moon is to co-chair a high profile meeting with Dahal, he must first insist that Dahal's party officially renounce the use of violence in politics in the spirit of the Charter of the United



Nations. The Secretary-General co-chairing such a conference at a holy site would be a sacrilege insulting not just peace-loving Nepalis but millions of Buddhists around the world.

Ban Ki-moon must not ignore recent attempts by a rather mysterious Hong Kong-based private foundation called the Asia-Pacific Cooperation and Exchange Foundation (APECF), of which Dahal is Co-chairman, to sneakily involve the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) rather than UNESCO for the development of Lumbini. When this highly unusual deal involving the Beijing office of UNIDO was exposed last year, UNIDO headquarters in Vienna embarrassingly

disowned its country office's decision and reprimanded its Country Director.

It would be most unwise for Ban Ki-moon to lend his name and the prestige of the United Nations to whitewash the image of a political leader who continues to believe that political power flows out of the barrel of a gun. The Secretary-General could help expedite Nepal's peace process and regain the tarnished image of the UN in Nepal by insisting on three preconditions for his planned visit:

- a) that Dahal and his party abjure the politics of violence
- b) announce that the UN will not cooperate with the proposed Truth

and Reconciliation Commission if it does not fully comply with the norms enshrined in relevant UN Conventions to which Nepal is a State Party, and reject attempts to grant blanket general amnesty for heinous criminal acts, war crimes and crimes against humanity c) insist that the long-delayed integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants is completed in the next few weeks to close all remaining cantonments prior to the April visit.

Ban Ki-moon must convey such messages clearly and forthrightly, not in the ambiguous diplomatic language calling for "flexibility and compromise by all parties". If these pre-conditions are not fully met, he should either cancel his visit or come prepared to deliver such a message bluntly and boldly.

Part of the reason for Ban Ki-moon's strong interest in the development of Lumbini has to do with his devout Buddhist mother's wishes. We Nepalis deeply respect her wishes, and Mr Ban is welcome to visit Lumbini any time for a pilgrimage, but without hobnobbing with Maoist leaders who refuse to fully abide by Buddha's teachings of peace and non-violence.

Kul Chandra Gautam is a former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations.

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In the land of the Buddha, #567
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In search of new avenues

The illusion of a loss-proof banking sector is slowing breaking

PRABHAT BHATTARAI

Since the end of the Maoist insurgency, an average of three commercial banks has opened every year, with 32 commercial banks operating in the country today. The industry, which once showed immense growth even through the sluggish economy is now challenged by high liquidity, decreasing profits and increasing bad debts.

Excessive investment in the real estate sector is deemed responsible for the troubling clouds over the banking industry. It was suspected that growing loans in trading and manufacturing sectors were also making their way into real estate because even five years ago, banks were offering loans for housing and consumer durables at an average of 10 per cent interest rate.

"This money should have

instead been directed to productive sectors and only then to consumer loans," says Governor Yubraj Khatriwada, adding that the opposite flow of money was also liable for creating an imbalance in the economy.

The financial indicators from banks have not been

encouraging either. In the first six months of the current fiscal year, banks' profits declined by 29 per cent, even as bad debts doubled. In the last quarter, interest income grew by only 13 per cent, while interest expense soared by 28 per cent. The provision for bad and doubtful debts has also doubled. The

interest spread is at 3.16 per cent. "The liquidity crisis has eased, but banks have to bear the high costs of funds, which is in turn affecting profits," explains Rajan Singh Bhandari, Vice Chairman of Nepal Bankers Association and CEO of Citizen's Bank.

The anti-money laundering

acts, which Nepal is supposed to ratify within two months, also pose a threat to the banking industry. If Nepal fails to endorse the bills before the deadline, Financial Action Task Force, the international anti-money laundering body, will blacklist the country. This means that the letters of credit



BIKRAM RAI

"I am worried about the peace process"



BIKRAM RAI

German Parliamentary State Secretary for Development Cooperation Gudrun Kopp spoke to *Nepali Times* at the end of her three-day visit to Nepal this week.

Nepali Times: Did you get any indication in your meeting with senior Nepali ministers that they really understand or have a commitment towards transitional justice?
Gudrun Kopp: Yes, I did. When I first prepared my trip to Nepal, the priority was different. We intended to look at renewable energy, health, decentralisation empowering local government in the villages to prepare for the bilateral negotiations on future cooperation between Nepal and Germany in May. But when I read about the state of the peace process, I was really worried. I talked to my experts in the ministry about the proposal to grant general amnesty. Of course, we can't be telling another government what they should and shouldn't be doing. But we bear our share of responsibility when it comes to the question for whom and what we are going to spend our taxpayers' money for. We underlined towards the government, the importance of good governance, respect for human rights and justice. The government of Nepal asked for more private investments and therefore I urged the prime minister to first build a conducive economic framework to attract foreign investment. The rule of law is absolutely essential for further economic development.

Is progress on truth and reconciliation and disappearances going to be linked to future aid?

As a friend of Nepal I wish to make it quite clear that progress on the two mentioned commissions and the entire inclusive peace

process will be crucial for our forthcoming government negotiations.

Do you think the message went home?
Absolutely.

Are you optimistic that they will act on it?
Personally I had the impression that the prime minister is really willing to act accordingly. I don't know whether he will be able to bring all parties concerned around the table to find a compromise including representatives of the victims and actually dealing with the cases. I know it is difficult, but it will be even more difficult not to do so.

Is the relatively more nuanced way Germany deals with these issues a result of Germany's own history?
Definitely! We as Germans made mistakes in the past and had to suffer from the country's division for more than four decades, families were separated and society broken up. Reunification and sorting out our past – including severe offences – were tough. We know how harmful it is to be a divided nation and therefore would like to share our experiences and lessons learned with others. Denying the past can never help build a bright future. Sweeping away past injustices will doubtlessly lead to future conflict.

You included Purnimaya Lama and Suman Adhikari in your press conference in Kathmandu. What struck you the most about what they had been through?

Both were calling out for justice – not revenge! We could feel their suffering. How a woman, who has a weaker standing than a man in this society, could keep her strength, perseverance and still have the will to make others feel the injustice she has been suffering was very moving. It is absolutely admirable how powerful she is in a country where a woman's voice is often so feeble. Suman is not angry with the government, he is not seeking revenge, and he is not "carrying a weapon". Both just want justice. Maybe this reaction is typical for Nepali culture, where deep inside people are peaceful.

Given Nepal's progress in health and education, do you anticipate Germany's aid policy to have a different emphasis?

It will have to be more inclusive. We will focus on women and children in focus. For example it will be wise to train midwives in villages since many young pregnant women don't go to hospitals and therefore training and sending midwives to villages is important and effective. People with disabilities who are still being neglected need special attention, too.

Are there any concrete thoughts what might be on the agenda in the May assessment of aid policy?

We will be moving away from further big national energy projects like the Marsyangdi project which cost over 150 million euros. Instead, we will put an emphasis on smaller decentralised projects with biogas and solar that can function independently.

Banking on banks

The increase in liquidity has to be followed by an increase in investments

issued by local banks will not be easily accepted by foreign banks.

Banks will also have a hard time collecting funds. "The acts will require depositors to disclose minute details about their sources and not everyone will be willing to comply," explains Suman Joshi, CEO of Laxmi Bank.

The liquidity crisis earlier was partly caused by a regulation introduced two years ago which required sources for deposits of Rs 1 million and above and sources for car and property purchases to be disclosed. It was only after easing the regulation that money started flowing in the system again.

It is estimated that over Rs 50 billion is sitting idle inside the bank vaults right now. Banks say that despite high cost of these funds, they are being cautious while choosing their clients.

The government is also unwilling during this time of the fiscal year to soak up this fund in the form of loans. In the absence of a competitive private sector, the central bank is urging banks to identify new investment sectors. "Right now, the demand for credit is low. It's time banks started coordinating and directing funds for economic development," says Annal Raj Bhattarai, CEO of Commerce and Trade Bank.

Governer Khatiwada argues that there are opportunities in other sectors such as livestock farming and commercial cash crop farming, even in the periphery of major cities. Says Khatiwada: "In Nepal, if one business idea succeeds, everyone joins the bandwagon. It is important to identify new sectors for long term investment." 🇳🇵



BIKRAM RAI



This time, last year, banks and financial institutions in Nepal were reeling under a severe liquidity crunch. Interest rates went up, lending went down, and investments suffered.

The good news is that the crisis has been resolved and banks can boast of liquidity surplus now. According to the latest half yearly review of the current fiscal year conducted by Nepal Rastra Bank, liquid assets of banks have increased by 24 per cent in contrast to a decrease of 15.3 per cent in the same period of the previous year. Relaxation on income declaration requirements, low credit flow, higher interest rates on deposits and elevated level of remittance inflows have contributed to the current improved liquidity position.

However, the increase in liquidity has not had the obvious effect of decreasing the credit crunch. Credit flow of banks and financial institutions has been lower than their deposit mobilisation. Credit flow has grown only by Rs 36.54 billion, while deposit mobilisation has grown by Rs 73.77 billion. Banks and financial institutions have been criticised for hoarding money, not moving towards new areas of market or expanding the traditional lenders.

Last week, at Himalmedia Roundtable on Banking, bankers admitted to continuation of credit crunch, but attributed it to the lack of productive investment options. Earlier, the banking sector faced uncertainty when it doled out easy loans to real estate and consumer

sector borrowers without assessing their capacity to honour interest and principal payments in time. "Banks have learnt their lesson and will give ad hoc handouts like they had previously and invite trouble," said the CEO of a leading commercial bank.

The bankers also said that there isn't demand for credit due to the risky investment environment in the country, with investors being plagued by power shortages and labour problems. At a time when even big players are struggling, not many new entrepreneurs have the courage to take the risk. The lower suppression of credit demand over the last few months, coupled with regulations imposed by the central bank regarding capital adequacy and liquidity have reduced the capacity of the banks to lend aggressively.

But banks are in the business of collecting deposits and issuing credit. The mismatch between the two will obviously affect the balance. Returns from earlier credit will not be able to hold up the cost of new deposits much longer. This is already being reflected in the decrease in profits of the financial institutions, with more than half of the banks reporting decline of profits in double digits in the last quarter. Banks have also seen a surge in their expenses, with over 15 per cent increase in operating costs.

A proportional increase in depositor base and diversification of investment portfolios is a must if we want a healthy financial system. The banking industry needs to be proactive now, and not just respond to demand or wait on the traditional big creditors. The banking sector has now reached 60 per cent of the population. And a majority of that population represents lending avenues in small and medium enterprises. The central bank has issued a directive to financial institutions to lend out 10 per cent of their total credit in agriculture, energy and tourism. But perhaps that is not an adequate measure. The attitude of bankers in the way they treat alternative investment options must change.

The bottom line, again, comes down to having the political will to improve the investment environment. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Mind your own business, #591
Dirty business, # 589

BIZ BRIEFS

Smart viewing

Dish Home, sole DTH service provider in Nepal has launched Smart Box enabled with recording facility. Smart Box is the newer version of the Dish Home set-top box. Users can record the programs by setting a timer or by recording through an electronic program guide. The smart box is available for Rs 5999.

Smart seats

Qatar Airways unveiled revolutionary new Business and Economy Class seats for its Boeing 787 aircraft at the ITB Berlin that it says has more space, comfort and a revamped in-flight entertainment system. The seats will be key features of the airliner that will be inducted into the fleet



this summer. The new seats will feature touch screen Android technology control units that will debut on Qatar Airways' 787s.

Hot wheels

Laxmi Intercontinental, the authorised distributor of Hyundai four-wheelers in Nepal, has introduced new models of Hyundai Eon. The four models of Eon namely Eon Dlite, Dlite Plus, Era Plus and Eon Sportz were unveiled by the company.

Refreshing offer

Bottlers Nepal has reduced the retail prices of Coca-Cola, Fanta and Sprite in Kathmandu Valley. The price has now been slashed to Rs. 20 for 250 ml from its earlier price of Rs. 22.

Slice of life

Slice has launched promotional scheme for Slice drinkers to meet famous Bollywood actress Katrina Kaif. With every purchase of a bottle of Slice from 6 March to 6 April, consumers will receive a scratch card with 10 digit mobile number that will help them become a part of the party with Katrina Kaif. Three lucky winners from Nepal will get the chance to meet the beautiful actress.

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Never Ending Peace

ALONZO LYONS in MYAGDI

The people of western Myagdi are returning to the roots of trekking tourism where guests and Nepalis meet on common ground.

Led by Mahabir and Chitra Pun, homegrown, inspired leaders operating outside the mass tourism industry, the community below the Annapurnas here has quietly built a network of trails and facilities beyond the trekking highways. Routes with a full complement of services have been set up to the nearby Khopra Danda and Mohare Danda, with exceptional viewpoints adjacent to the iconic Pun Hill.

These magnificent locations may one day outshine Pun Hill in terms of vistas, and because they offer ridge-top accommodation sorely lacking elsewhere. Khopra Danda (3650 m) is the highest and closest vantage point to the massive Annapurna South, and the well-furnished inn at Mohare Danda (3300m) has jaw-dropping views with a panorama that extends from Gurja Himal right up to Himalchuli, and looks down on Phewa lake.

Visitors are treated to


This spring go to Khopra and Mohare which have all the benefits of the main trekking routes, but none of the crowds

stupendous sunrises without the hour long pre-dawn hike to Pun Hill. The only requirement at dawn is emerging from a warm bed, daunting at a cool 3,000 plus meters.

Mahabir Pun, the man who has single-handedly plugged the digital divide in Myagdi by bringing internet to schools

and received the 2007 Ramon Magsaysay Award for it, knows a good thing when he sees it. He is now tapping into the tourism potential of these amazing mountains to fund his work in education and health. For this he is offering all the benefits of the main routes and none of the crowds.

Much of the work was completed with local funds and the UN-Micro Enterprise Development Program. The group prefers performing tasks within the community and has income generating ventures such as a lokta paper mill in Nangi Village and a yak-cow crossbreed project at Mohare Danda, as well as a 150-strong yak farm at Khopra. Prospective income is reserved for school and health clinic funding.

These routes are for the unique tourist seeking an experience that could once be had on popular routes in an industry that is becoming over-regulated. Khopra Danda and Mohare Danda provide alternatives to well-established areas and will be a pleasure for returning visitors and all Nepal lovers. 

www.himanchal.org



PICS: ALONZO LYONS

Away from it all



NEPALI PAN
Tashi Sherpa

It's sunrise on Rishal Dara, on Lakure Bhanjyang on the eastern rim of Kathmandu Valley. We are a thousand feet higher than Kathmandu, an hour-and-half drive from the city and yet we could be a

world away.

The tranquility, the crisp morning and the abundant oxygen make a heady combination. Last night's thunder shower has cleared the horizon and we can see the

bracing green expanse of forests and beyond it, the northern ranges.

We are at the Summit Lodge, as guests of my friend Phunstok Ongdi, absorbing the pleasures of a rural throwback

to gentler times. Since driving up here last evening, the stress of that choked up Gotham we call Kathmandu has all but vanished.

Recently, I have begun to value the innate advantages of

Want to get away, but not too far from the mass-metrometamorphosis of Kathmandu?



And Love



ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH: The vista of Machapuchre, Gangapurna and Hiunchuli from Mohare one recent afternoon (left) and the view of Dhaulagiri from Khopra (above) with terrace farms being readied for sowing corn.



living in suburbia, USA. It's reduced my immunity to the ravages brought on by all the unsettling paradoxes so pervasive in Kathmandu. The crude, jagged ever-changing skyline, concrete totem poles of a new lifestyle, sit on tackily decorated store fronts, contrasting with the stench and squalour of river side slums. Add the choking atrophy of traffic, the overpowering pollution, the noise and dust, and the shrinking value chain of social courtesies, all plotting to mercilessly grind down your defenses. Eco-compassion is at a premium in the mass-metrometamorphosis of Kathmandu.

All this I can do without, and hence the decision to visit Kathmandu frequently but never stay too long. I've often wise-cracked that I consider myself a "non-returning Nepali". So, it is with deep gratitude that I have accepted this invitation to get away from it all, even for a brief weekend. And what a discovery the Summit Lodge is.

We drive through the congested chaos of the Ring

Road, where until recently were pristine green terraces. We make the zigzag climb up the hills past straw-roofed orange huts that still dot the hillsides and farmers tilling their fields welcome us with smiles. The farther you go from Kathmandu, the further back in time you travel to the previous tranquility of the Valley.


The drive ends close to the ridgeline and a short walk past an Ashram leads to the resort. The lodges are perched on a steep ridge, spread in a semi circle around a main double storey house. A neat little wooden balcony invites you, the architectural ingenuity of it all, the tastefulness and simplicity is soothing.

Inside, there are cosy old wood floors and ceiling beams with recycled wood; the roof is thatch. The rooms are spotlessly clean, with warm brick tones, small and functional, and lending a sense of reflective quiet. The only nod to modernity is the bathroom with handheld shower and solar-heated water. Each room opens up to a spectacular vista of the Valley below and the

mountains beyond.

I am glad we brought light fleece jackets to ward off the sudden twilight nip. The amber glow of the airport dominates the night city, with dark patches where neighbourhoods are suffering power cuts. There is a fleeting sense of having stolen something sublime from the scenery, because we are not part of that maddening rush down there.

The sincerity and hospitality of the staff are evidenced in their ready smiles. This is not the bland and modern demeanour of posh franchised hotels but a genuine sense of wanting to make the visitor comfortable and relaxed. Again, there is a sensation of regaining something long lost.

At 10, we all head off to our rooms. Sleep comes easily under the stars, as I look forward to my hike next morning.. 

Tashi Sherpa lives in Seattle, comes to Nepal frequently on business and is a sucker for sixties rock.

Summit Village Lodge
www.summitvillagelodge.com

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Purusottam Dahal
Quest for peace by
Radheshyam Adhikari

REPORT
Tell the truth
Bihari Kiratis
UML's new course

INTERVIEW
UML leader KP Oli

HIMAL
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EVENTS



SCREEN. IN: The Desert Eats Us, watch the award winning documentary about migrant workers in Qatar. 17 March, 3 pm onwards, Sattya Space, Jawlakhel. Call 5523486 for more information

A Candid Portrait, photography exhibition by Laxmi Prasad Ngakhushi. Till 18 March, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal



Mars Attack, dance till you drop at the fabulous party with non-stop music. 17 March, 2 pm onwards, *Insomnia*, Durbar Marg



HOLLYWOOD WORKSHOP AND HOLLYWOOD NIGHTS, five day workshop on filmmaking techniques from Hollywood's experts. 17 March to 21 March, Hotel Malla Thamel. For more information call 9849961407
6th International Folk Festival 2012,

performances by cultural groups from thirteen countries in Kathmandu, Dang, Pokhara and Butwal. Till 18 March

Buchanan Hamilton Exhibition, celebration of 200 years of biodiversity research in Nepal. 24 March to 1 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Spring Camp, 10 days Spring Camp for children to empower themselves through music, art, dance and outdoor activities. 2 April- 6 April and 8 April to 12 April. For more information call 5013554

ANUSARA YOGA WORKSHOP, learn and practice yoga with the internationally renowned teacher Jonas Westring. 23 March, 5 pm to 7:30 pm, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath, info@pranamaya-yoga.com



MUSIC

KUTUMBA PLAYING FOR HERITAGE II, Kutumba will be travelling across Nepal to generate awareness on preservation and protection of local heritage till 15 April.



Nepfest March, bringing together all the metal heads with performances by Antim Graham, X-Mantra, Kalodin, Garudh, The Exorcist, Disintergrated, Fractiucals. 24 March, 1 pm onwards, Bhrikuti Mandap. Call 9841277757

Shabnam and Cannabiz band playing every Wednesday, Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex.

Baja Gaja, playing live every Tuesday 7: 30pm onwards at Mosksh, Pulchowk. Call 5526212

DINING

Celebrate St. Patricks Day with lots of Green beer, silly hats, Irish Shenanigans and Irish Stew at Kilroy's, Thamel, 470043



THE OLIVE GARDEN is offering a revamped dinner menu from March 14 onwards with various trout dishes. Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat



MANNY'S EATERY AND BAR introduces special lunch packages. Jawlakhel, Shaligram Complex, 5536919

Enjoy Sunday Pranzo at Rox Restaurant from 12:00 noon to 3:30 pm, Hyatt Regency, 4491234

PYONGYANG OKRYU-GWAN, for the



rare taste of North Korean cuisine and hospitality. Durbar Marg

Him Thai Restaurant and Bar, for authentic Thai cuisines in town. Lazimpat, 4418683

Café Du Temple, famous for its delicious food, warm ambience and the beautiful roof top view. Patan Durbar Square, 5527127. Boudha, 2143256

Cinnamon Grill and Lounge, mouth watering delicacies with live music. Try the grilled tenderloin steak and quiche lorraine with fresh fruit salad. Jhamsikhel, 5521339



SAL'S PIZZA, almost round, almost cheap, always delicious, the cheesiest pizzas in town. Lazimpat, behind Jazz Upstairs



COMFORT ZONE, expansive restobar with a decent range of cocktails and barbeque meals. Thamel

Home delivery

After a long tiring day, you come home starving, only to find that you are home alone and your fridge is empty. You are too tired to cook, and might have to settle for a noodle dinner. But wait, with foodmandu.com, you can enjoy food from your favourite restaurants, without stepping out of your house.

Foodmandu.com is an online portal that allows you to order food from restaurants all over Kathmandu, which will be delivered right at your doorstep. The site lists over 70 restaurants, and you can browse through their menus and pick your favorites. Foodmandu has roped in the most popular food joints in Kathmandu, including the likes of Roadhouse, Bawarchi and Delicias de France. A couple of clicks and a Foodmandu delivery boy will come cruising with your steaming order. Foodmandu also takes orders over the phone.

"Most restaurants here don't have home delivery services, we are simply allowing them to outsource," says Manmohan Adhikari. The

idea struck him when, at his previous job, he had limited lunch options and wished restaurants would deliver his order at his office.

An IT enthusiast, Adhikari saw an opportunity and began foodmandu.com. The price listed is the same as the restaurant's menu and minimal delivery charges are levied for long distances. Foodmandu delivers within Ring Road and few kilometres beyond. Sixteen months since it began, the service is in high demand, keeping their 10 delivery boys busy throughout the day.

The volume of orders used to be equal online and over the phone when the service began, but traffic is now heavier online. "It is easier when people use our site to order- they can browse menus, give clearer instructions and we can maintain their database for the future," says Adhikari. Although Foodmandu now operates on cash basis, the site plans to incorporate online payment services. Visit www.foodmandu.com or call 4241732

Paavan Mathema

BIKRAM RAI

News from Ujyaalo

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Cafereena, the extensive menu has something for everyone. Try their famous chips chilly. *Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg*



ALFRESCO, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. *Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999*

Milk Coffee and Cocktail Café, coffee house during the day and a cozy lounge serving cocktails at night, try their yarchagumba and molecular cocktails along with the famous Starbucks. *Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg*



LAZY GRINGO, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. *Jawalakhel*

1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted aristocratic residence. Walled ambience and green surroundings make it an oasis within the city, *Kantipath, 4215068*



BHOJAN GRIHA, traditional Nepali restaurant that serves up great local food with folk music and dance. *Dillibajar*

Dhaba, for an excellent range of North Indian delicacies, try their unbeatable Kashmiri Gosht. *Thapathali*



CAFE HESSED, for those with a sweet tooth, the cafe offers a delicious range of cupcakes and doughnuts. *Jhamsikhel*

GETAWAYS



7th ANNUAL SUNDANCE MUSIC FESTIVAL, join the musical extravaganza with bands like Joint Family, Soul Train Featuring Rainer Pusch (Germany), The Acoustics (Shanti Music), Himalayan Connection, and DJ Phuchhey. *24 March to 25 March. The Last Resort. Call 4410753/4700525 for bookings*

The Pranamaya Yoga retreat, enjoy yoga, nature and healthy food as you recharge and restore your energy levels. *16 to 18 March, Namo Buddha, Kavre. For more information call 9851002920.*

Spring Break @ RSR, welcome spring in style away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and party alongside the mighty Trisuli river. *16 March, 7 pm, River Side Spring Resort, Kurintar. Call 56540129 for more information*

Chitwan Safari Tour, exciting wildlife safari in the Chitwan National Park at Rs 49990. *Call Ace travels at 4411830*

Cycling for light

Laxmi Cares, a registered NGO and a social initiative of employees of Laxmi Bank, is organising the “4th Annual Laxmi Care Annual Mountain Bike Rally” on 22 March as a part of its ‘Go Green’ campaign. The rally will begin from Patan Durbar Square and conclude at St. Xavier’s Godavari School, covering 12 kilometers. The funds raised from the event will be



utilised to install 14 Solar Street Lights at Bagmati Bridge, Thapathali. Laxmi Cares will be looking after the maintenance of the lights for the next five years after which they will be handed over to the local community. Last year funds raised from the bike rally were used to install solar powered lights

at Patan Durbar Square. The participants and guests will also get to enjoy musical performances by Yogeshwor Amatya, Jems Pradhan, Lyrics Indy and a host of other talented artists.

Date: 22 March, Thursday (Ghode Jatra)
Route: Patan Durbar Square to St. Xavier’s Godavari School
Begins at 7 am
Transportation to Lagankhel Bus Park from Godavari available after 11:30 am

Deadline for registration: 20 March
For details, call 9841298400



SOMEPLACE ELSE



PICS: MARCO POLLO

Flavour

appetising treat. Ask for a toasted sub. The Bratwurst (pork or chicken) (Rs 260) at Flavour is one of the best-cooked wieners in town, but is sadly complemented by a measly portion of grilled veggies. A side of mash, slaw or—dare I crave—sauerkraut would be more adequate. Other dishes sampled like the Shrimp Curry (Rs 285) and the Hamburger (Rs 160) were just decent.

The coconut curry carries a kick, and the shrimps are perfectly cooked. But once again, better pairings could be made, like a simple side salad or a fan of sliced tomatoes to cut the heat.

Like the sub, the burger’s bun could be toasted. Otherwise, the sandwich is comparable to that of a typical, hunky-dory food stand.

Drinks at Flavour are relatively cheap for dine-in. Domestic beers for Rs 275 and Carlsberg for Rs 300 make it, for now, an affordable waterhole. For sweets, look elsewhere. 🇳🇵

Marco Pollo

Off a corner due north of the Pulchok footbridge, where micros and tempos for Ratna commonly stall



Bigger ain’t better. Flavour in Pulchok, not to be confused with an unrelated plural in Boudhanath, is a tiny joint with promise.

In contrast to the slew of manorial haunts in nearby Jhamel that on a normal day resembles a ghost town of bygone saloons, the three-month-old Flavour features limited seating (six settings to be exact, three of which are loungeable) and a kitchen in plain view. Wide windows,

fulvous paint and beige decor draw an elegant, modern and clean space. No frills, no cutbacks.

Likewise, its menu is evenly set and priced. And although it jumps from bar snacks to Thai to Indian to continental, the choices are not overwhelming. Improvements, however, can be made.

Among the appetizers the Saturn Potato (Rs 170), sauteed baby potatoes wrapped with bacon, is tender and well-

prepared, but lacks a necessary touch of sweet mustard or blue cheese.

Highlights for mains include the Chicken Sub (Rs 165) and the Bratwurst (Rs 260).

The Chicken Sub (vegetarian and ham alternatives available), served with fries, is a six-inch sandwich dressed indiscriminately with BBQ, chili, plain mustard and honey mustard sauce. The punch of flavours renders a surprisingly



Top Gun remembered





MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

For any one growing up in the late 1980s, the *Top Gun* phenomenon, the fighter planes, motorcycles, bomber jackets, aviators, steamy locker room scenes, and of course, the classic genre defining 80's music will probably induce a wave of the fondest kind of nostalgia.

To its detractors, *Top Gun* is the worst kind of sentimentalising action movie, one with no particular lofty message to make it more worthy. To those who love it, it is the best kind of action movie, a highly entertaining, fast moving, sweet-talking adventure that makes the heart pound. Even the love story is unusually integral to the story, featuring one of the first woman characters who actually has a life beyond love. "Charlie"/Charlotte Blackwood played by a

cool, blonde, tousled Kelly McGillis drives her own vintage Porsche, is a civilian instructor at Top Gun, knows a lot about fighter planes and is actually older than Tom Cruise's character "Maverick"/Lietenant Pete Mitchell.

The story is formulaic enough for the viewer now, but when it was first released in 1986 it was ground-breaking. The screen-writers, Jim Cash and Jack Epps, Jr were hired by the now very famous Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson duo to write a screenplay based an article titled Top Guns that came out in a California magazine in 1983 about the elite air force training school at Miramar in San Diego. The writers were determined from the start to create a new kind of action movie using real fighter jets, and filmed on site vs. in a studio (this was much before the now ubiquitous CGI era).

For three years the producers and writers struggled to create a script that would have the endorsement of the United States Air Force, without whose approval they wouldn't have been able to use nor film the fighter jets. Finally, with Tom Cruise on board, the film was made for what seems like a now paltry \$15 million. When it was released it went straight to the top and grossed \$353 million worldwide and sealed Tom Cruise's status as one of Hollywood's biggest stars.

Top Gun has so many memorable moments that it is hard to pick a few to describe here, the locker scenes after training exercises where Maverick and Iceman, played by a then very lean and muscled Val Kilmer, confront each other wrapped only in white towels with glistening chests are unforgettable and have spawned more than a few academic papers about homo-eroticism in male dominated fields like these. Similarly, the highly enjoyable volleyball scene on the beach: Goose and Maverik vs Iceman and Slider (all half-naked with oiled chests) is almost hilarious with its overt machismo made even more so underscored by the song 'Playing with the Boys' written especially for the scene by Kenny Loggins.

One could go on and on, but hopefully the reader will finish by pulling out an old dusty copy of *Top Gun* instead and settle back to a few hours of unabashedly manipulative entertainment, the kind of movie magic that allowed even an 8-year-old girl in the 1980s to dream of flying really, really fast fighter planes. 🇳🇵

All DVDs reviewed in this column are available in Music and Expression, Thamel, 01-4700092

nepalitimes.com



Watch trailer



Guinness addict

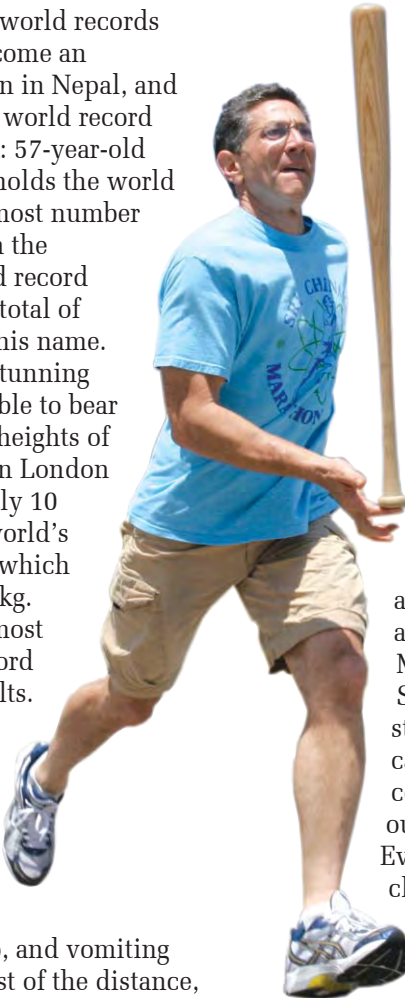


DHANVANTARI

Buddha Basnyat, MD

Guinness world records have become an obsession in Nepal, and here is another world record we could break: 57-year-old Keith Furman holds the world record for the most number of inclusions in the Guinness world record book. He has a total of 131 records to his name. Many are just stunning feats in being able to bear pain and great heights of perseverance. In London he walked nearly 10 metres in the world's heaviest shoes which weighed 146.5 kg.

One of his most memorable record is for somersaults. He did 8,341 somersaults over 20 km which took him 10.5 hours. He had cramps, vertigo, and vomiting throughout most of the distance,



but he kept going.

Endurance clearly is his forte. He has clapped for 50 hours non- stop. Each clap had to be audible at a hundred yards. Contrary to what you may think, you can't just go out and do something arduous and call up the Guinness people. To own a record you have to break one that exists, undertake one that Guinness has created, or propose one to Guinness and seek their approval. Guess what, most proposals are rejected.

Furman also attempted to climb a mountain near Machu Pichu in South America on stilts. Perhaps we can entice him to come here and try out his stilts on Mt Everest. Or perhaps climb an 8,000m peak walking backwards if he fails the stilts.


In all likelihood just like world-famous mountain climbers who have been tested for physical strength and ability and found to have nothing physiologically exceptional, Furman (1.8m in height) too probably does not have any measurable fitness quantity that sets him apart. So what's helping him break records even at the ripe age of 57?




For sure his threshold for pain is very high. And he is extraordinarily motivated. Clearly these two qualities make a great combination for breaking Guinnesssport (as it is called) records. But Furman also uses something else: the teachings of an Indian Guru, Sri Chinmoy, who changed Furman's first name Keith to Ashrita (protected by God).

Sri Chinmoy, who settled in the US, believed that extreme physical pursuit offers the means of transcending the self. Furman took this this message to heart, literally. When he is totally exhausted, he says he meditates on a flame within his heart. Clearly many things in medical science are inexplicable, perhaps ineffable. 🇳🇵

WEEKEND WEATHER

The westerly disturbance that brought in moisture into Nepal's midhills didn't bring much rain, but it infused enough moisture for the afternoon convection systems to get going over the mountains. The rains doused some of the huge forest fires raging in Bhojpur and Dolakha and was welcome news for the spring corn crop. The system also brought in some unseasonably cold temperatures, about 4 degrees below normal for this time of year. The weekend will start out sunny, but there will be afternoon buildup with windy conditions throughout Nepal. Passengers on domestic flights will witness bumpy rides even when the air is clear.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
		
24-07	24-07	25-09



LOOSE BALL: Nepal plays its second game at the AFC Challenge Cup against Maldives on Saturday at Dasrath Stadium. Nepal lost the game 0-1, eliminating the country's chances of progressing to the semi-finals.



ROGER THAT: PM Baburam Bhattarai with Tourism Minister Lokendra Bista Magar at the 51st International Conference of Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Association in Kathmandu on Monday. The conference was attended by 73 countries.



CASHING CROPS: Local farmers sell mushrooms and ginger at the National Agriculture Fair in Bhrikuti Mandap on Friday.



FRAME BY FRAME: A visitor at an exhibition of potraits, 'A Candid Portrait', by photojournalist Laxmi Prasad Ngakhusi, at Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, on Friday.

A step back to step forward

There is plenty to be cynical about, but we are inching ahead on peace and constitution



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

As we approach another constitutional brinkmanship, the best we can hope for is that the political parties stay engaged. They may have predictably failed to stick to their commitment to formally kick-start integration this week, but behind the scenes the situation doesn't look that dire.

The satellite cantonments and make-shift camps are being vacated. Those who have opted to move on have left, and those who remain are packing their bags. The political climate in Kathmandu may look gloomy, but frayed nerves have been soothed and both the Maoists and the opposition parties at least agree on one thing: there will be no more extension, because constitution is possible by May 27.

In private conversations, opposition leaders and members of the coalition have been seen laughing and cracking jokes, which is annoying to a bemused public, but it means that there is still civility and the leaders appear to sense that a compromise on the constitution is possible.

The cynics, of course, are used to lumping politicians together as good-for-nothing louts and wisecracking about lazy CA members. Sure there have been delays, but this is what you get when an elected body is both a functioning parliament and a constitution-writing body.

The Prime Minister bluntly, and unwisely, warned recently that disaster awaits us all if the constitution is not written by 27 May. As the head of



BIKRAM RAI

government he is supposed to assure us, not threaten us. But even there, the only thing the prime minister is really guilty of is indiscretion. He has delivered on emptying the camps, is trying to strike a compromise on integration and getting at least a skeletal constitution signed off in May.

Constitution drafting has its ups and downs, and it had another down at Tuesday's meeting of the Special Committee which ended indecisively. But sensing resentment the leaders are now calling on the public to keep their spirits up. NC leader Minendra Rijal told me: "We disagree with the proposal tabled on Tuesday but we are still positive about the Prime Minister's request to discuss it further." Ah, so all is not lost.

Rijal thinks the Maoists have sufficient incentive to cooperate, and his party's effort will be to engage with them until they finally do. Rijal may be right in his assessment of the mood in the Maoist camp. The cantonments have become a political liability for the party and there is no doubt even those living there are anxious to leave. The leadership seems ready to take a step back but are nervous they may find themselves against

the wall. To complicate things, the hardliners are once more on a warpath. While the UML leaders offered nothing besides criticism, even the NC's fiery Ram Sharan Mahat indicated the possibility of consensus through further debate.

Mohan Baidya admitted in an interview last week that there is no alternative to peace and constitution, but has since taken

another one of his numerous U-turns and threatened the nation (yet again) with another revolt. This gives the NC and UML a valid reason to question Maoist intentions. But on the constitution making front, their unwillingness to give up the Westminster system also stems from anxiety over having to leave a turf which they have learned to maneuver over the

decades, and step into the unknown.

To cut a long story short, there is no real point of contention except for the lack of trust and self-confidence among the bargaining parties. It isn't about the ranks of combatants, names of the federal state, or which system is better anymore. The opposition just isn't convinced that the Maoists will behave as a mainstream party even in the changed context, and suspect Pushpa Kamal Dahal is out to write a constitution that will install him as an executive president for life. Likewise, the Maoists are annoyed that the opposition is out to demonise them and reluctant to accept them as a mainstream party.

The fears on both sides are well grounded, but flogging one another will not help. The time for blame games and finger-pointing has long gone. Conflict mediation always tries to bridge the trust deficit and remove mutual fears. The Maoist leadership can begin by asking its unruly comrades to stop shooting their mouths off and the opposition must end the constant hate-mongering, and keep the Maoists engaged.

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Afghanistan's unsung heroes

The past two weeks have seen an escalation in the level of violence here in Afghanistan, including an attack on the UN compound in Kunduz that was successfully repelled by Afghan forces in tandem with Gurkhas.

The men in this photo (*right*) taken on the rooftop of our office in Kabul recently are the Nepali Gurkhas who keep me safe, and who allow me to get my work done every day here in Afghanistan. They guard our UN compound around the clock, always heavily armed and prepared for any potential attack.

New reports from Afghanistan rarely mention the role played by Gurkhas, focusing instead on members of the 50-nation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). But for most UN agencies and many embassies and consulates across the country Gurkhas are relied on and admired.

Nepali soldiers are credited with saving the lives of employees at the British Council in Kabul when it endured a fierce assault by the Taliban in August 2011 that lasted more than nine hours and resulted in at least 12 fatalities, including eight Afghan policemen and a member of New Zealand's elite SAS forces.

While the Gurkhas held off insurgents who were armed with AK-47's and rocket propelled grenades, British Council employees were able to make their way to safety in an underground bunker. According to local police reports the attackers had packed enough weapons and ammunition for a full day of combat. One insurgent exploded his suicide vest while pressing up against the bunker door,



PETER DALGLISH

“One of the best things about my job in Afghanistan is working alongside such courageous and dedicated people as the Gurkhas.”

which withstood the blast.

On 1 April 2011, four Nepali soldiers and three international staff members of the United Nations were killed in an attack by an angry mob of more than 1,500 people on the UN compound in Mazar-i-Sharif that was sparked by reports of the burning of the Holy Quran in the United States, orchestrated by the American pastor Terry Jones. It was the deadliest attack ever experienced by the UN in

Afghanistan.

The Nepali Gurkhas who lost their lives were Dil Prasad Gurung, Chhabilal Purja Pun, Min Bahadur Thapa, and Narayan Bahadur Thapa Magar. One of the men killed that day was Buddhist, and so I arranged for a khata that a child in Kathmandu had given me for my own protection when I departed for Kabul several months earlier to be wrapped around his body just before it was returned

to his family in Pokhara.

Afghanistan is enduring its coldest winter in more than a decade, and so one of my responsibilities is to deliver hot coffee in my metal thermos to our Gurkhas at their firing stations late at night. They send every dollar they earn back to their families in Nepal to pay for their children's school fees and uniforms, or to improve their homes. I have never heard one word of complaint from any of them about their spartan living conditions in the compound, their long hours of work, or their extended periods away from friends and family. One of the best things about my job in Afghanistan is working alongside such courageous and dedicated people.

From our rooftop the snowcapped mountains stretching along the northern horizon appear tantalisingly close when caught in the day's last light, prompting our Gurkha commander to speculate that if it were possible for the two of us to trek along their base we would eventually reach his village in Kaski district.

But hearing the constant chatter coming across his walkie-talkie and with the very building under our feet shaking from the reverberation of a pair of ISAF Apache helicopters flying low overhead his beloved homeland to me seems as if it's a million miles away. 🇳🇵



Peter Dalglish is a Canadian lawyer who serves as the Senior Adviser for UN-Habitat in Afghanistan.



बम्पर उपहार

एक जनालाई काठमाडौं नयाँ बानेश्वर नजिक वागमती अपार्टमेन्टमा २ बेडरुम अपार्टमेन्ट



हरेक महिना

TATA Nano कार र Mahindra Rodeo 125 स्कूटर एक एक जनालाई



हरेक साता

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हामी आउँदैछौं तपाईंको घरदैलोमा फेरि एक पटक

रजिष्टर गर्नका लागि CIR टाइप गरी ५२२५ मा एस.एम.एस. गर्नुहोला। यो सेवा नेपाल टेलिकममा मात्र उपलब्ध छ।

नोट : वार्षिक ग्राहक यी सबै योजनामा सहभागी हुन पाउनेछन्।
अर्धवार्षिक ग्राहक बम्परबाहेक अन्य योजनामा सहभागी हुन पाउनेछन्।
त्रैमासिक ग्राहक भने हरेक दिन र हरेक क्षण योजनामा मात्र सहभागी हुन पाउनेछन्।
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Between taboo and tolerance

TRISHNA RANA

When Sunil Pant started the Blue Diamond Society in 2001, Nepal's gay and transgender community was entirely underground. There was no legal protection, and police brutality against 'unnatural' sexual behaviour was the norm.

The turning point came in 2007 when the Supreme Court granted basic rights to all sexual minorities, passed an anti-discrimination legislation and ordered the government to use gender-neutral terms and pronouns in all official documents. It also recognised third gender as a new category entitled to citizenship.

After the 2008 election, Pant became the first openly gay CA member. Nepal's oldest school, Darbar High School, admitted a transgender student. And pride parade has become the highlight event during the annual Gai Jatra festival (*pictured above*). While the most developed and 'progressive' countries are still divided over gay marriages, Nepal is on its way to becoming the first country in Asia to legalise same-sex union.

Pant agrees that the progress and achievements of the community have been unprecedented: "India started its gay rights movement in the early 1990s and it took more than 20 years to repeal Section 377 of the Penal Code and decriminalise homosexuality," he says, "in comparison we have



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

managed to introduce equal rights for sexual minorities in 11 short years. There has been a big drop in discrimination and abuse."

Roshan Mahato, coordinator of the Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities, played an active role in improving the curriculum in universities to make instructors and administrators more sensitive to the needs of sexual minorities. Today courses in sociology and anthropology in government universities are incorporating gay and lesbian studies.

However, Nepal's archaic bureaucracy and the lack of political will are still obstacles to further progress in the rights of the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual) community. Soon after the SC passed the

verdict to allow citizenship for transgenders as well, the Home Ministry, under Maoist Krishna Bahadur Mahara, issued a circular that ended this practice. Today, when third gender people request citizenship they are first met with stares for their 'unusual appearance' and then the habitual 'we don't have permission from above'.

"Until one of the leaders has a transgendered family member, or until the community becomes a large vote bank for the parties, the citizenship issue is likely to drag on," Pant admitted.

It's the same story for same-sex marriages. Bibek Poudyal, a human rights lawyer, says: "Our leaders' hardline ideologies and stereotypical views about gender and sexuality will be difficult to change. If our parliament couldn't grant equal rights to

Sexual minorities have made a space for themselves, but complete integration and acceptance is still hard to find

Nepali women, despite the 33 per cent representation, I am not sure how far we can push for LGBTI rights with just one gay CA member."

The degree of social tolerance and acceptance in Nepali society has also not kept pace with legislation. Urban youth seem to accept people of diverse sexual and gender orientation, and a recent magazine poll showed 81 percent of the respondents approved of homosexuality. On the other hand, cases of physical violence, emotional coercion, abandonment and termination from jobs are still common.

Bhakti Shah, a physical training instructor in the Nepali Army and her girlfriend understand the stigma only too well. The couple was fired for being lesbians. Although Shah has filed a case in the Supreme Court, they are unlikely to receive justice. Shah's partner, who is currently studying in Kathmandu, was disowned by her family and says she is constantly bullied by her classmates.

Family pressure is perhaps the hardest to overcome. The demand to continue the family line is so intense that many are forced into marriages and end up leading dangerous double lives,

while others escape to bigger cities or to India.

"Given our religious society, even if same-sex marriage is adopted in the new constitution, it will take time for Nepalis to accept them as natural and equal to heterosexuals," says Poudyal.

Sex, class and regional divisions within the LGBTI community threaten to blunt the movement. Mahato says people who have migrated from villages to the anonymity of the cities are most open about their sexual and gender identity. "Members of the upper caste elite are the most hesitant to come out of the closet, since they feel they have a lot to lose," he explains, "rich people also can afford the privacy of hotels or to settle abroad. So the middle and lower class have to carry the movement forward."

The LGBTI movement in Nepal has a visible hierarchy with a strong focus on third gender issues due to which gays and lesbians are frequently grouped together in the same category. Also since majority of international funding is funneled towards HIV awareness and prevention for gay men, lesbians find themselves at the bottom of the ladder.

A proud woman

BHUMIKA SHRESTHA

I was born a male, but I never felt I belonged to that body. I was very lucky because I was supported by my family from a young age and they have come to accept me as I am.

But school was another story; the boys would constantly tease me and teachers would single me out in class and embarrass me. I was expelled from school because I was a 'bad influence' on other students. The administration told me to change my behaviour and act like a man or leave school. It was also difficult walking on the streets. The moment people realised I was 'different' they would taunt me and call me names like 'chakka' and 'hijra'.

I remember when I started working with

Blue Diamond Society whenever we invited people for meetings they refused to attend because they thought they would be contaminated with our 'disease' and would turn into homosexuals or third gender. I think this has changed a lot now and there is greater acceptance. Having said that, I feel Nepali people are much more willing to accept transgendered and transexuals, because our presence is more visible, whereas homosexuality still baffles them.

Since 2010, I am an active member of the Nepali Congress party. Like most Nepalis, I used to think politics was a dirty game. But after working with the community for the past seven years, I have understood how important visibility in the media and in national level politics is. The only way sexual minorities will make real progress is if we can politicise our issues and make it a part of the national agenda.

Right now there are only two of us involved in

politics, Sunil Babu Pant and myself. Unless more people participate we won't be able to make an impact. I am happy that the entertainment industry is finally growing up and learning to respect us. Earlier Nepali movies used to make fun of transgendered and gay people and used them for comic relief. But recent movies, like Highway where I act as a transgendered character, portray our real problems.

My biggest suggestion to families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexual, queer children is give them all your love and treat them like regular kids. The moment they have the support of their families, it becomes much easier to deal with the discrimination from society and the nation.

Bhumika Shrestha is a transgendered activist and Human Rights Officer at Blue Diamond Society. She joined politics in 2007 as a member of the Nepali Congress.



BIKRAM RAI

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“I am also a Madhesi”

Interview with CPN-UML leader KP Oli ,
Himal Khabaratrika, 14-28 March

हिमाल
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There are talks of a new wave in UML. What are you planning?

When it comes to the peace process and national politics, CPN-UML moves with a progressive democratic perspective. We will take a balanced approach to identify and solve the problems in our society. Initially we were divided in our understanding of the Maoist’s motives. But their unchanged

stance has brought us together and we are now a united party.

Some people say UML’s leadership is complicated, while others call it “a party of Pahadi pundits”, what do you have to say to say about this?

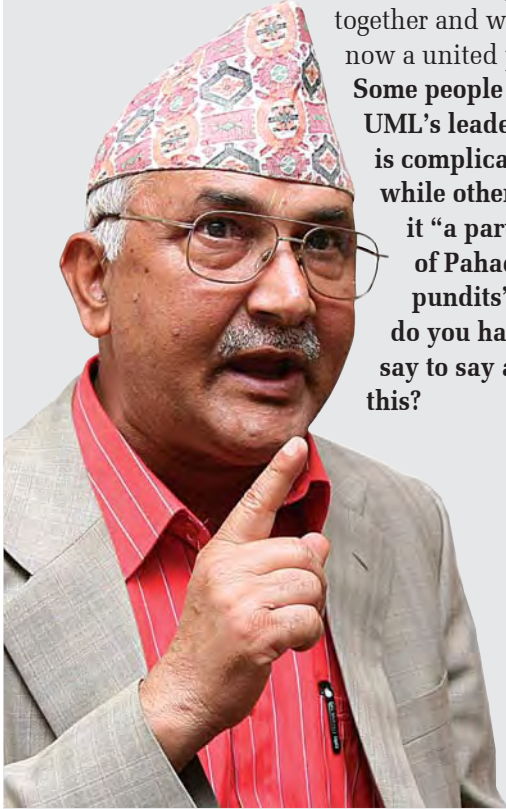
The party was not formed for the sake of few thousand votes or for a few seats in the CA. Rather our aim to is work towards a prosperous Nepal, while being sensitive towards the sentiments of people from all castes, ethnicities, regions, religions, genders and professions. We are against dictatorship and fully support democracy. There is no chauvinism in that.

But your own ethnic CA members disagree and have defied the party whip.

In our party, just like in the country, the lines between democracy and anarchy have been thinned. If one does not agree with an issue, there is a tendency to break laws and express dissatisfaction. We have to be careful of this behaviour.

In your recent speech in Dolakha you said “new citizens cannot break the Tarai”. What did you mean?

I am also a Madhesi, and have been living here for generations. It is not appropriate for recent settlers to challenge the Madhesi identity of old inhabitants. Many old settlers are categorised as “others”, the parameters of this category need to be explained. Nepal should not be divided. Regardless of our caste, religion or language, we are a single country and the idea of driving a certain group out from a region will not work here. We have to create a modern democratic society that respects the constitution, law and equality.



BIKRAM RAI



BIKRAM RAI

Say no to indigenous states

Gopal Gurung, *Naya Patrika*, 11 March

नयाँ पत्रिका

Despite advocating for federal states in Nepal, I strongly feel that the country should not be divided based on ethnicities. Doing so would only invite further conflicts among people from different ethnic groups. For the past few years the issues of indigenous people have hogged the limelight. However, we must reexamine the very definition of indigenous because the category was created by people in power and does not represent the genuine desires of ordinary Nepalis. Therefore, state restructuring should be done in such a manner that will bring together resources from different regions and promote development of all groups.

Advocates of ethnic states. on the other hand, are not only uninformed, but they have also failed to take into account negative outcomes. For example treating the Tarai and Hills as completely different entities will only pave way for violence and discord among people who have lived in harmony for so long. The good news is that Nepali themselves are aware of what communal disharmony can lead to. This might be one reason why our country has had little ethnic strife despite our diversity.

Bhattarai’s new enemies

Jana Aastha, 15 March

आस्था

The European Union is furious with Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, because he is showing signs of rejecting the proposal for ethnic federalism. Norway, Switzerland, Denmark and Finland who were openly supporting Bhattarai until recently are now dissatisfied with him. Apparently, the only people who are pleased with Baburam’s change of heart are former American ambassador to Nepal, Scott H DeLisi, Indian ambassador Jayant Prasad and his own chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The Europeans have so far successfully incorporated secularism in the interim constitution. They are now spending Rs 3.5 billion annually in the name of federalism and ethnic inclusion and actively pushing the ethnic agenda in Nepal. However, the EU’s opposition can prove costly to Bhattarai’s government.



Footballer: Parties
Goal post: Peace and constitution

कान्तिपुर Abin Shrestha in *Kantipur*, 14 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Even I want to become the PM. I am sure I can do better if given a chance. ”

Bamdev Gautam, vice chairman, UML quoted in *Nepal*, 18 March

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The ones who got away

Babaram Baniya, *Kantipur*, March 10

The cabinet meeting on February 27 has decided to withdraw 367 cases filed in various district courts against top Maoist leaders like Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, Hisila Yami and the prime minister’s political adviser Devendra Poudel. Most of the 34 cases are serious criminal offenses which include extortion, abduction, murder, and an 11 year-old bank robbery suit. However, the government claims that most of these cases were forged by former governments to falsely implicate the Maoist leaders. Under pressure from the NC, Maoists and the Chure Bhawar Party, nine infamous dacoits who are serving time for looting a passenger bus in Nawalparasi are also being pardoned. Withdrawing genuine cases of political malice is

acceptable, but the perpetrators excused by the government have long criminal records.

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निक्लिहाल् ह्याँबाट तँ !

Nagarik, 15 March



Eleven people convicted in Sanjay Lama’s murder case and two others including Siraha’s Uday Narayan and Banke’s Shagir Khan have been granted blanket amnesty from the government. The impending cases against the nine accused

were withdrawn following political pressure from the Nepali Congress, in the aftermath of Shiva Poudel’s murder. While Khan, a Maoist cadre was serving time for abduction, another convict, Uday Narayan Adgaria is a member of Tarai’s powerful armed group led by Jaykrishna Goit and a notorious criminal who was involved in the murder of lawmaker, Krishna Charan Shrestha five years ago.

Illegal caucus

Rajdhani, 15 March

Since the caucus of women parliamentarians in the Constituent Assembly is not registered with any government office, its legitimacy has been called into question. However this has not stopped the CA secretariat from providing generous facilities to the caucus such as an office space and six government staff.

“It is irresponsible to give legal status to an agency that has not been registered anywhere or mentioned in the law. We are not sure on what grounds these facilities were offered to the caucus, but such use of the secretariat’s resources is an outright abuse of power,” said an official from the secretariat. He added that even though the CA is a sovereign entity, if there are irregularities going on within the parliament the anti-graft body CIAA can investigate.



The caucus has spent more than Rs 10 million from the state coffer till date and there is no record of the money that has poured in from foreign donors in the name of constitution building and women empowerment. However, female lawmakers like ex-caucus member, Uma Regmi claim that male CA members are preventing the group from gaining legal status.

Chairman of Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, Narayan Man Bijukche says that allowing the women’s caucus inside the parliament infringes upon the sovereignty of the CA and takes women away from the purview of their parent party. Questioning the objectivity of the caucus, Bijukche’s party has already called back its CA member, Lila Nyaichai.



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The top leadership of the parties have all given up on having a full-fledged constitution by May. At least they agree on something. Is this is why everyone is so relaxed during the meetings of senior leaders? The loud banter and raucous laughter can be heard right down the hall. One particular tripartite meeting last week of top notch leaders of the three main parties was even more boisterous than usual. The **Mule's mole**, who was a fly on the wall, said the leaders put the decision on state restructuring in the back burner and the subject drifted to the more serious issue of the sex change operation carried out by the scion of Nepal's top comedian, and what this would mean for Nepal's territorial integrity. The conversation was freely sprinkled with Nepali colloquial terms for genitalia

and punctuated by full-bellied laughter and detailed speculation on what happens when a man becomes a woman. The long and short of it is that we now know how little Nepal's political leadership grasp human biology. Advice to politicians: before you ask for autonomy, study the anatomy.



Have Nepal's donors also given up on the constitution? Why else would they send members of the Special Committee off to Zurich for two weeks right in the middle of crucial negotiations on demobilisation? The theory is that when taken out of their domestic context members may be better able to forge a consensus. But experience with past junkets to South Africa, Denmark and Norway have shown that it doesn't always work. They

get on like a **house on fire**, but as soon as they land back at Tribhuvan they are at each others' throats again. All major decisions are centralised in the top three honchos, so flying the second rung leaders halfway around the world increases their carbon footprints, but doesn't get the constitution written on time.



After awarding West Seti to **3 Georges, Inc.**, the Baddies seem to have realised what it feels like to have the shoe in the other foot. The Maoist energy minister said this week: "Protests against West Seti will be detrimental to future investment in hydropower." Ha ha ha. Look who's talking. Our PhD prime minister loves to talk in equations, which is why he announced the discovery of a new theory of quantum mechanics at the Power Summit

this week: **Hydro Power + Democracy = New Nepal**. So, remind me again, why did we have to fight a war to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat during which hydro projects were bombed?



Going by the full page ads in the papers offering Super Bumper Offers for office space in a new downtown mall, one would think Nepal's economy is registering double digit growth. But sales of apartments must be slow if they have to bribe people with Range Rovers to buy a flat:

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Our ministers are all ministering to themselves. **Irritation Minister** Mahendra threatened Secretary Brinda Hada with physical harm when she refused to include "pre paid" Yadav appointees to juicy posts. **Minister of Labour Pains**, Sarita Girlie has replaced the chief of the Dept of Foreigner Employment for the fourth time in a year with a afno manchhe. **State Minister for Deforestation** Lax Man went on a transborder shopping spree in Jogbani and tried to sneak in a pressure cooker and saris for wifey but was caught red-faced by locals who turned out to be lackeys of none other than our very own Upadro Yadav. Gotchha!





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