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Us Nepali

After four postponements in four years, the political parties got together and once more tried to buy more time by extending the CA's term by another three months. But the Supreme Court's stay order on Thursday has abruptly and dramatically changed the scenario. Now, there is no alternative but to pass a new constitution by the existing deadline of Sunday midnight. Across the country, across all social strata, across ethnic and caste groups, citizens when asked, have serious misgivings about federalism by identity. The silent majority wants peace, justice and democracy, and is against stoking ethnic tensions for political gain. If our current crop of leaders had half the common sense that ordinary Nepalis show, we would not be in the mess we are in today. Sunir Pandey of *Nepali Times* approached a cross section of Nepalis to ask them what they thought of federalism:

- "Instead of ethnic, the states should be named after temples, cultures etc and only then would these conflicts and struggles end."

Sumita Joshi, Darchula, Student
- "I don't agree with it. It's not good for us."

Aishwarya Rayamajhi, Sarlahi, Student
- "Ethnic federalism will fracture the country and invite conflict and civil war. Who knows, we may need passports to travel from one state to another."

Samir Shrestha, Sarlahi, Armed Police Force
- "I hope it doesn't happen like that. Every group has different demands - they won't be satisfied and conflict will arise."

Jeni Ojha, Pokhara, Nurse
- "We need stage-wise development for minorities, but this is the wrong way to do it and will only bring violence."

Susmita Limbu, Kathmandu, Nurse
- "Talking about ethnicity will only bring violence, and conflicts of all sorts. There are only two types of people: male and female."

Rajendra Sahi, Kathmandu, Butcher
- "There are so many ethnicities that don't have a majority population, our priority must be to include minorities."

Lalan Bachhar, Sarlahi, Civil service aspirant
- "There are over 100 ethnicities in Nepal and I also don't even agree with the One Madhes demand."

Rupesh Shah, Bara, Jobless
- "Ethnic division is not a good thing, one undivided country is better."

Nandakishor Shah, Rautahat, Jobless
- "We must do federalism according to geography and not according to ethnicities."

Khina Dhakal, Jhapa, Student
- "There are so many ethnicities that the country will fragment into tiny countries."

Devesh Pokhrel, Palpa, Kitchen worker
- "It is wrong, it will bring ethnic wars."

Sagar Shrestha, Nuwakot, Cook
- "I don't like it."

Sagar Lama, Nuwakot, Rickshaw puller
- "Federal states are all right, but they should not be on the basis of ethnicity."

Sudhir Karki, Kathmandu, Student
- "It might be the only way: the struggle for equality is long and hard."

Laldhoj Lama, Kabhre, Goat-herder
- "It will create misunderstanding, there will be little to agree about and plenty to fight - not good for the country."

Abu Bakar, Kathmandu, Trader
- "Right, wrong, good, bad, none of it will bring anything good for people like us working on daily wages."

Rudra Magar, Dolakha - Labourer
- "Ethnic federalism will segregate the population and create tension among Nepalis who have lived in harmony for ages and spread distrust."

Drona Koirala, Jhapa, Student
- "It will create conflict, and put Nepal back hundreds of years."

Niraj Magar, Jhapa, +2 Student
- "Making ethnic divisions and conflict feels wrong."

Apsara Acharya, Kabhre, Tailor
- "If ethnic divisions take place, everyone will live separately, there will be infighting."

Bikram Shrestha, Banepa, Electronics shop



“Division according to ethnicity will create new high-low categories of people. It will segregate us all and that's not good.”
Kabita Poudel, Tanahu, Student



“It's wrong. We must live together with unity in an undivided Nepal, not in ethnic states.”
Jenisha Maharjan, Kathmandu, Student



“It will bring conflicts between ethnic groups. It may turn out like India-Pakistan partition.”
Puja Gurung and Prabina Limbu, Dharan, Students



“Because of ethnic division, each group will be the enemy of the other, meaning more violence and conflict.”
Rohit Magar, Hetauda, Trader



“I think division on the basis of ethnicities is wrong.”
Sunil BK, Pokhara, Student

More on page 13

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HARM REDUCTION

After four postponements in four years, the political parties got together and once more tried to buy more time by extending the CA’s term by another three months. But the Supreme Court’s stay order on Thursday has abruptly and dramatically changed the scenario. Now, there is no alternative but to come up with a new constitution by the existing deadline of Sunday midnight.

If there is no more politicking, no more wheeling dealing, and no more short-term bargaining for power in exchange for provisions of the new constitution, it will still be possible to meet the deadline. But the party leadership will have to work night and day, fine-tuning a draft constitution along the lines of agreements already made and give it a finishing touch as they go along. The 2 May pact between the four main political forces where they agreed on compromises on the two contentious issues of state structure and form of governance lays the groundwork for the constitution,

However flawed, the 11-state model and a mixed system of governance were the best compromises the parties could reach. It is unlikely that they can come up with anything better in the next two days. It is not the best way to do it, but it could be worse. Constitutional law experts say that there is now a legal imperative to have closure on the constitution by the stipulated date. The alternative is a referendum, an immediate election, or the declaration of a state of emergency to fill the void.

There are challenges, but also opportunities now to leapfrog on the constitution. This is not to minimise the dangers of extreme identity-laced politics that has characterised the last year. There is still the danger that we will be passing a faulty constitution that will make everyone violently unhappy and create long-term



BIKRAM RAI

The Supreme Court deadline has left no choice for the parties but to work night and day, fine-tuning the draft along the lines of agreements and declaring the constitution on 27 May.

structural damage to the nation’s body politic.

But if mindsets don’t change, having a relatively good constitution or a relatively bad constitution will make no difference at all. As we know from the previous 1992 exercise, the constitution is only as good as the people who implement them.

No matter which side of the divide you are on, it has been clear for some time now that issues like state structure and form of governance cannot be decided at a time of volatile politics. In the past months we have witnessed politicians negotiating long-term provisions in the new constitution on the basis of immediate gain in the power dynamics of government.

Early British residents posted by the East India Company in Kathmandu in the 19th century marvelled at the inability of Nepal’s rulers to see what was in their own self-interest. Not much has changed. Both sides of the ethnic federalism debate are in a state of denial.

The post 1990 neo-elite ruling class refuses to see just how ethno-centric and caste-dominated the composition of the current leadership of their parties is. Why are they surprised that even moderate Janajati leaders have united across party lines to form a caucus to protest exclusion? Any attempt to point out this lopsidedness is taken as an attempt to divide up the country. And on the other side are activists who have no qualms about using identity politics and taking the country to the brink by carrying out a dangerous experiment in slicing up Nepal into ethnic bantustans.

Neither side is listening to the people. In this edition of *Nepali Times* we have talked to people across the country, across social strata, across ethnic and caste divides, and they all have deep misgivings about federalism by identity. The silent majority wants peace, justice and democracy, and is against stoking ethnic tensions for political gain. But in this country when was it ever about what the people want? If our current crop of leaders had half the common sense that ordinary Nepalis show, we would not be in the mess we are in today.

The brinkmanship of the past month must now yield to saner politics. The only thing we can do is to put some harm reduction measures in place: come up with a workable constitution on 27 May, work towards patching up the country’s frayed social fabric, keep channels of communications open and protect open society and ethnic harmony in the coming days.

ON THE WEB www.nepalitimes.com

DAMAGE CONTROL

This is an extremely well-balanced and sensible editorial (‘Damage control mode’, #605). The country can’t afford to go down the path of dictatorship and fragmentation. But we won’t see any meaningful change until the top male leaders are held accountable for their actions and made to pay for their mistakes either through impeachment or a few years behind bars.

Kiran L

● This editorial is a refreshing departure from previous ones and looks at the current crisis from all angles. I agree with the editor wholeheartedly: we must save the country from dictatorship and disintegration. But we also need to save Nepal from high-handed Indian interference and learn to make decisions on our own.

JK

● The Maoists claim they waged a decade long civil war to bring about social equality and give voice to Nepal’s marginalised communities. But the dangerous identity politics game they are playing is harmful to all Nepalis regardless of their class, caste, ethnic or religious backgrounds, because now more than ever before, we will treat each other on the basis of narrowly defined identities rather than on merit or achievements.

Vija Shrestha

● While our leaders make grand promises of identity-based federal states where people from all ethnic, caste, religious backgrounds are treated fairly and given equal opportunities, they forget that this ‘naya’ Nepal will come at a great cost. And it is us, ordinary Nepalis who will have to suffer and pay for their ego trips.

Subeedy

● The future of Nepal depends

on political parties and as our elected representatives they have to care about our needs and forgo their narrow self-interests and egos for the greater good of the nation. Otherwise, we will show them their rightful place in the next election.

Chiranjibi Nepal

● Not only is there an immense trust deficit between Nepalis and their leaders, but we are not sure if the current lot of politicians is even capable of resolving the multitude of problems the country faces today. Unless we get rid of leaders who are so desperate to hang on to the status quo, the future of Nepal looks bleak.

Sita Ghimire

● Our dear leaders claim bandas and strikes are necessary to secure a more prosperous and peaceful future. But nothing could be further from the truth. Bandas disrupt the day-to-day life of common Nepalis, stunt our children’s education, ruin the tourism industry, cripple the economy, and make investors wary. How are we supposed to build a naya Nepal if the country shuts down once every week?

Sangita Rai

LOSING GAME
Thank you Rubeena Mahato for your unbiased reporting and no nonsense approach to debating (‘The losing game’, #605). Please continue examining Nepal’s complex social and political issues in a manner practiced by few of your peers. And I really hope younger journalists follow your footsteps.

Indraraj

● Rubeena is a great find for *Nepali Times*. Her columns are always bold, accurate and remarkably well written.

Naresh Newar

● Thank you Rubeena for a well argued piece, your thoughts echo the sentiments of common Nepali women

and men.

Salil

● Thank you Rubeena for conveying the thoughts trapped in many Nepali hearts so brilliantly on paper. Your columns are always a pleasure to read.

Kale Kisna

● I like reading Rubeena’s articles because she writes with great conviction. But I wish she had written on behalf of voiceless minorities rather than supporting those who want to maintain the status quo.

Abhishek Gurung

● Giving states to marginalised communities is not going to automatically right historical wrongs and columnists like Rubeena who oppose ethnic federalism understand this reality. They are not against justice, democracy, decentralisation or local management, but they know that in order for Nepalis from all corners of the country to truly prosper, we must first dismantle our hierarchical and feudalistic political culture. Otherwise how can we expect people’s lives to change, if the same old men with the same old mentality are going to run the show in the new ‘ethnic’ provinces?

Tara

● Although populist leaders clamouring on the streets of Kathmandu claim that caste or ethnic based federal states will solve the problems facing their communities and help them overcome oppression, I doubt they have any serious, long-term political, economical and social vision.

Nirmal

● I agree that a directly-elected presidential system has its drawbacks, but we must look at the positive aspects as well. A directly-elected president is likely to provide more political stability since there will be less rotation of

leaders. Also if the Nepali people elect Dahal as the next president, then we will have to simply accept it. Yes, 50 per cent of Nepalis are illiterate and they might not understand that Dahal is not the best candidate, but they are citizens nonetheless and they deserve to be heard as much as the educated, more politically aware class. Moreover, this system would give us a chance to practice a bottom-up approach in selecting leaders which I think will work much better than the top-down method we have followed for centuries, first with the kings and then with prime ministers (who were elected by a select few in parliament).

Anup

AFTER A PEOPLE’S WAR
Rather than carving out new districts or provinces, we should set up 500 rural and 100 urban local governments which means that even people from the most neglected communities like Thamis and Chepangs can become leaders at the local level and preserve their culture and identity (‘After a people’s war’, Bihari K Shrestha, #605). This way we will only need around seven ministries at the central level: foreign, finance, defense/ home, law and justice, aviation, roads and transport infrastructure, energy and natural resources and everything else can be handled by local governments who will have complete authority.

Neerajan Rajbandari

FOOLING SOME PEOPLE
I don’t agree with Anurag Acharya’s views (‘Fooling some people all the time’, #605). For the first time in six years, the leaders have finally agreed on a draft constitution and if nothing else it will at least be tabled in the CA. Also the 11 state model is the best option for Nepal, because it ensures that our multi-ethnic population is well-represented and given equal opportunities.

Sriram Singh

POVERTY TO PLENTY

The story of Begum Bahadur Shahi is very touching and provides an inspiration for young Nepalis who believe they have to migrate to foreign countries if they want to earn a decent income or be successful (‘From poverty to plenty’, Anurag Acharya, #605). Agriculture is still the back bone of Nepali economy and Shahi shows that if a person is committed and willing to work hard, it’s possible to live off a farm even in a drought affected region like Kalikot.

Bishesh Aryal

LAST CHANCE

This is a great article by Paavan Mathema (‘Last chance on FAFT’, #605). The last thing we need in Nepal is an economic crisis.

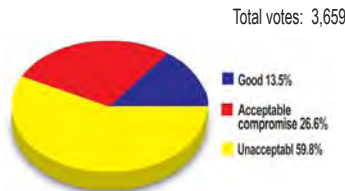
Sparrow

● It’s good to see someone talking about Nepal’s financial status and raising the issue of FAFT. It seems most Nepalis only care about politics and pay little attention to economics which plays an equally important role in the progress of any country.

Anonymous

Nepali Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll #606

Q. The 11 state model agreed upon by the parties on Tuesday is:



Weekly Internet Poll # 607. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you think of the Supreme Court’s stay order against the CA extension bill?





BIKRAM RAI

I am Amrit Nepali

From Syangja to Sydney, from Fikkal to Finland, the silent majority of Nepalis don't agree with the division of Nepal



GUEST COLUMN
Amrit Gurung

“Let me introduce my band members ... to my left is Subin on bass, Dhurba on drums ...”

In every one of my concerts, I introduce my band members to enormous applause. And as a matter of principle I do not use their surnames. During one of the shows of my Peace Concert Tour of Nepal earlier this year, someone in the audience shouted out:

“Dhurba ... who?”

This was one voice in an

audience of thousands, but it was loud enough for me to hear on stage.

I had to respond. “Subin SHAKYA on bass,” I said with an emphasis on the surname, “Dhurba LAMA on drums, Niraj GURUNG on guitars, Suraj THAPA on keyboards, Shanti RAYAMAJHI on percussion and I am Amrit GURUNG.”

But I went on: “We are all Nepali even though some are trying to divide us by ethnicity, that is why I don't take the surnames of band members. Look at the six of us here on stage, we are Nepal in a microcosm. Some of us have flat noses, others have pointed ones. Some have slit

eyes, others have round ones. But that does not stop us from working together as a team. In fact, it helps us create better music. Let us all say we are members of one big Nepali family.” The entire hall burst into sustained applause I hadn't heard anywhere else. I couldn't see the person who had shouted out for surnames, his voice had been drowned out.

I communicate with Nepalis through music on my concert tours. For the past decade my band has been crisscrossing Nepal with the message of peace, justice and national unity. I do this through the cementing role of the Nepali language, the lingua

franca that allows Nepalis everywhere to communicate with each other. In between songs, I ask audiences: “I am a Nepali and proud to be one. Are you?” There is a collective and deafening roar: “Yes!”

When I am not on concert tours, I travel across Nepal on foot. From the villages of the far-west to the east, from the Himal to the Tarai, wherever I go, I find food and shelter through my Nepali language. Let us not debate the origin of this language, the reality is that it is one of the few things that weaves our national fabric together, and unites all Nepalis everywhere.

All of us came from somewhere else to live in what is now Nepal, it is futile to debate who settled here first. Time has moved on, but one thing is for sure: none of the other languages, Gurung, Newar, Magar, Bhojpuri, Maithali, Tamang can be a common language. They won't even serve as common languages within the provinces that ethnic groups want to name after their own.

Gurung used to be widely spoken in my home town of Pokhara not only by us Gurungs, but by others as well. Similarly, Newari was spoken widely by all inhabitants of Kathmandu, not just Newars. If we want Nepal to be a strong and prosperous country, we need to spread the unifying message of the Nepali language and Nepali nationhood.

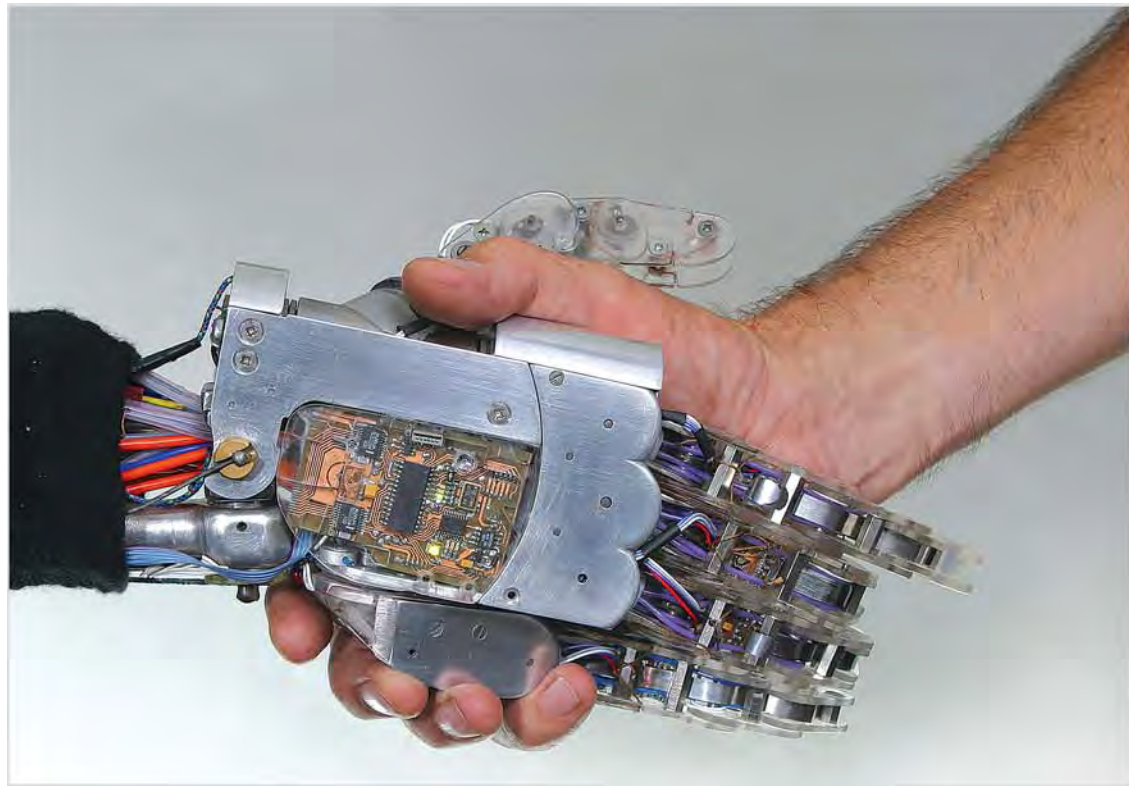
Whenever I speak on these issues during concerts from Syangja to Sydney, from Fikkal to Finland the forceful feedback from the audience gives me confidence that the silent majority of Nepalis feel the same way. It's just that these voices have been sidelined by divisive slogans magnified by the media. All Nepalis I have met, irrespective of their place of domicile, have one thing in common: their common Nepali identity and the pride in being a Nepali first.

Of course, there has been discrimination and exclusion throughout Nepal's history. Some have done better than others. But that does not mean all people from all marginalised groups were completely suppressed. My identity today is based on all people of Nepali origin liking my music, not just the Gurungs.

My friend Nabin Subba became a filmmaker because Nepalis everywhere appreciate his craft, not just because he was liked only by his ethnic group. Madhav Prasad Ghimire, Ambar Gurung, Gopal Yonzon, Bairagi Kainla and Narayan Gopal did not become national figures because they were Bahun, Gurung, Tamang, Limbu or Newar.

The CA can decide to carve up the country in however many pieces it wants, but my appeal is: don't confine me to one part of Nepal. I do not want to be a first class citizen of just one province and feel second class in the rest of the country. I want to feel I am standing on my soil, wherever I stand, from Mechi to Mahakali. ■

Amrit Gurung is the founder of the Nepali folk rock band, Nepathya.



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Healthy transformation

A community driven health post in Namche is setting the pace



BHRIKUTI RAI in NAMCHE BAZAAR

Nine years ago, it was rare to see a patient at Namche Area Health Post. Despite being the only health post in Namche Bazaar, its cabinets had only few medicines and supplies. It was difficult for the only Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) at the post to provide even basic health services to the few patients that came in. Few years ago, the post shifted to its own building from a rented one. However, the changes in infrastructure did not translate to better services.

“Although a new building had been set up, all we received in the name of support from the government were

medicines like paracetamols and painkillers,” says Lama Kazi Sherpa, chairman of the post’s management committee.

Continued government apathy towards the health post prompted the local community to take charge alongside Himalayan Environment Sustainable Services. According to Sherpa, locals raised about Rs 4 million to upgrade the facility at the clinic which now boasts of a doctor, nurse and health assistant.

Today the health post serves over two dozen patients in a day and offers services to locally treatable diseases along with emergency services related to altitude sickness. “Tourists who had to be airlifted from Namche and taken

to the cities even for altitude sickness, can now be treated here,” says Sherpa. “The income we earn is used to pay the operating costs.”

Locals who come to the clinic are charged a nominal fee. “A patient needs to pay only Rs 50 and we provide free services to those who cannot afford the standard rate,” says Ang Gelu, the sole doctor at the health post. Its extended pharmacy is now equipped with more medicines which are sold at the same price as in Kathmandu. A large number of people visit the post complaining of respiratory diseases and the managing committee plans to add a fully functional operation theatre in the near future.

Sushila Pariyar (see box), the longest serving staff, says the health post has undergone notable changes, “With better facilities there has been a significant rise in the number of locals seeking basic healthcare in the past one year.”

Forty-year-old Sangye Sherpa, a cook for a mountaineering expedition team, is at the health post for whooping cough. “Earlier I had to travel to Kunde hospital for even minor illnesses since the health post had no doctors and limited medicine,” recalls Sherpa. “This has been a blessing for us locals”. According to the staff, patients from as far as Monju and Phakding come to Namche for treatment.

However, the health post is unable to perform medical evacuations for critical cases or provide complicated emergency services due to the lack of infrastructure. Gelu laments: “Things have improved significantly, but we still cannot provide certain crucial services. The only thing we can do is refer patients to hospitals in Kathmandu, and not all of them have the means to make it there”. □



Nursing Namche to health

Sushila Pariyar has single-handedly run the clinic for many years and played an instrumental role in establishing the Namche health post as the leading healthcare provider in the community. She was assigned to Namche as an ANM after clearing her civil service exams in 2002. “There were two other staff who started out with me, but they left in less than a year,” recalls Pariyar who lives Salleri in Solu Khumbu district. She worked relentlessly in the rundown building, without a doctor or proper equipment and showed great dedication towards her patients. “Since we could not deliver babies at our health post, I would go from home to home and help women with their deliveries,” says Pariyar. After working at Namche for nine years she considers the clinic her second home and is pleased to see the transformation. Says Pariyar: “Although we are far from being a full-fledged hospital, I feel like our perseverance and hard work has paid off.”



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ROBIN GIRI in DANG

Forty-two year old Rewati Chaudhary has completed only primary school, but she has probably saved more lives than a doctor in the city in Parsia, a village in Dang.

Chaudhary is a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) and a member of the local Watch Group, who has had basic training in obstetric care conducted by Dang's District Public Health Office (DPHO) with support from UNICEF.

She had called in to see Samjhana and her 18-month daughter, Prerana, whom she helped deliver. Prerana's airways were clogged with amniotic fluid at birth. "I laid the baby across my lap and followed the procedures to suck out dirt from her nose and mouth. Then she began to cry," says Chaudhary pointing to Prerana, now sitting on her mother's lap. This simple procedure can help save thousands of lives.

"If Prerana hadn't cried even after I used the Delee suction tube, I would have used the Bag and Mask method and pumped air into her lungs," explains Chaudhary confidently, pulling out an Ambu Bag from her FCHV kit.

Initiated about seven years ago, Watch Groups are made up of three women members for each ward in every VDC in Dang and other districts. The primary member is a female health volunteer, the other members can include a community mobiliser, an educator, another FCHV or a traditional birth



ROBIN GIRI

Born to live

Housewives help save thousands of lives in rural Nepal

attendant. In Dang, over 1,050 female volunteers have been trained and equipped, with Watch Groups in 39 VDCs.

Maternal and neonatal mortality, including complications at birth have dropped steadily in Dang, as it has across Nepal. The country's average maternal mortality rate has dropped from 880 twenty years ago to 300 today, mainly because of the work of FCHVs like Chaudhary.

"Our job is to keep an eye on all pregnant women in our village, to make sure they undergo the four mandatory prenatal checkups, eat nutritious

meals and supplement them with iron pills and vitamins," says FCHV Pima Khadka of Saruwa Danda in Dang.

The Watch Groups ensure that all pregnant women have health cards which are marked after each visit to the primary or sub health posts. This guarantees treatment at government health facilities, and are later used as proof to claim the government stipend for women who seek institutional delivery.

The Watch Groups also provide small loans for pregnancy related expenses. They monitor vaccinations for

SUPERWOMEN: Watch Group members Pima Khadka (left) and Parbata Khadka (extreme right) with Basanti Chaudhary and her one month old baby in Saruwa Danda village in Dang district

infants and toddlers. The most unique aspect of the job is that the volunteers are not paid to do this, although they receive nominal stipends for birth referrals.

"This is the true meaning of community-based healthcare," says Hanaa Singer, country representative for UNICEF. "When women are taught basic skills, they bring lasting changes in the lives of their neighbours and communities."

nepalitimes.com
No home delivery, #561
Nepal's real heroines, #371

BIZ BRIEFS

Easy investment

Hulas Investment formally started its operation on 11 May from its branch office in Teku, Kathmandu. Promoted by Golchha Organisation, the company has been established to provide financing facilities to the customers who buy products dealt by the different units of the organisation.

Quality counts



Himalayan Distillery has received the International Arch of Europe award for its strong commitment to quality, leadership, technology and innovation at the International Quality Convention in Frankfurt.

Midnight shop

Ford's Mid Night Sale received positive response from customers. Ford dealerships across Nepal

remained open from 8am to midnight.

Besides cash discounts and exciting offers, customers also received free gifts on every purchase.

Better banking

Kailash Bikas Bank, which was previously known as Annapurna Finance, has now been upgraded to



a national level development bank. It was formally inaugurated by the honorable Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, Yubraj Khatiwada on 13 May.

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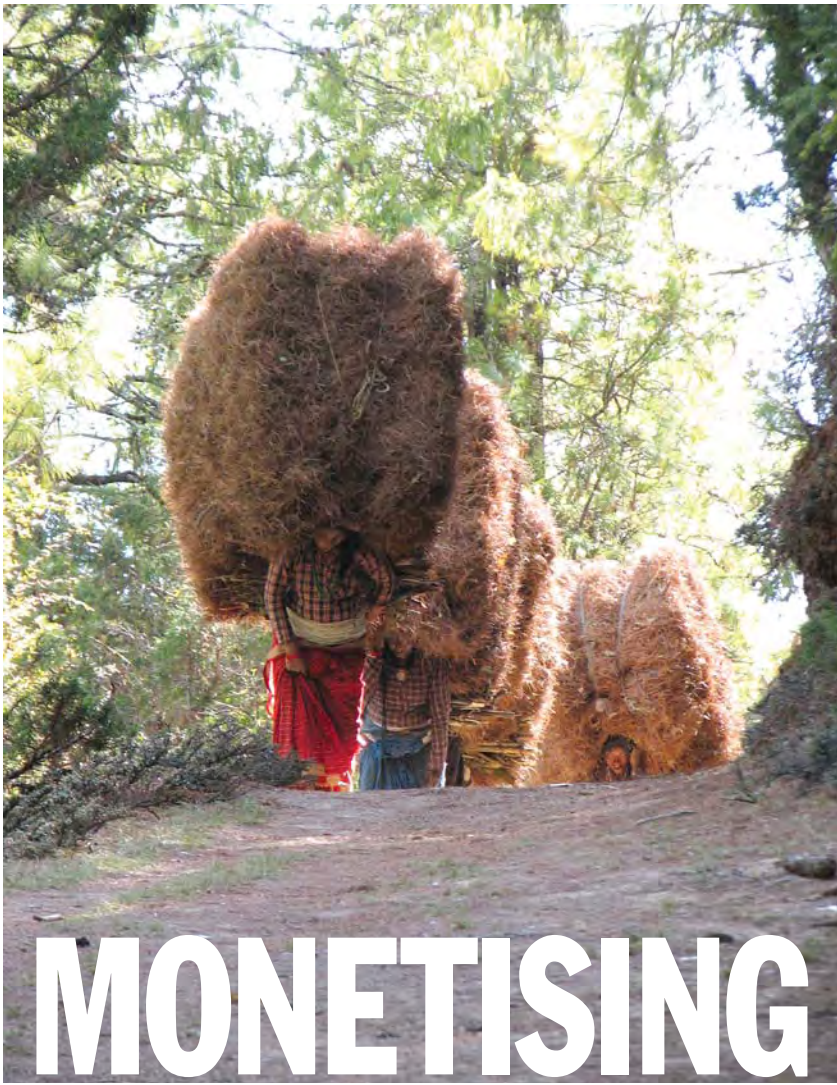
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MONETISING NATURE

An international study to calculate dollars and cents that locals can earn from conservation of Nepal's parks

MUGU - An international team of experts this month completed a survey of 27 important bird areas in Nepal to see how conserving them doesn't just save nature, but can also provide income to local people.

The team included staff from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Bird Conservation

Nepal (BCN) and the Cambridge-based BirdLife Secretariat, and they used a concept known as "eco-system service" to quantify the impact of conservation on local development.

The last of the selected sites to be surveyed was Rara National Park, where the lake is an important habitat for

indigenous migratory birds. "Rara provides refuge for the globally threatened chir pheasant," explains Rara's warden, Durga Poudel, "and its pine and mixed forests are populated by red panda, musk deer and Himalayan thar."

BCN is working on a UK Government-funded Darwin Initiative project

that assesses and quantifies the resources provided from nature by areas with rich birdlife. Field surveys are being carried out by the project at four sites: Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park and Phulchoki Community Forest in Kathmandu, Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve and Rara National Park. The team is

measuring how much carbon is being stored in the vegetation, the provision of clean water, harvesting of wild and cultivated products, and eco-tourism.

Two years ago Nepal signed the ambitious Nagoya Convention on Biological Diversity that agreed on targets for 2020 and achieving them can

The vultures are

South Asia registers progress in saving vultures from extinction, but more needs to be done

HUM GURUNG in NEW DELHI

The governments of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal along with conservationists and scientists gathered in New Delhi last week to assess efforts to save their vulture populations from extinction.

Twenty years ago, there was a widespread decline in three Gyps vulture species (oriental white-backed vulture, long-billed vulture and slender-billed vulture) across South Asia, and they were subsequently classified as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List. The vulture population crashed and was nearly wiped out, and the cause was the use of the veterinary steroid, diclofenac, which the birds ingested after eating carcasses of dead livestock.

Since an international vulture conservation conference in Kathmandu in

2004 decided to ban the use of diclofenac, vulture populations have begun to rebound. In New Delhi last week, vultures range countries and conservationists discussed further action to save the scavenger birds and reintroduce them in the wild. Even though the production of diclofenac has been banned since 2006, there is still a large stockpile of the medicine in the market.

"The most recent available information indicates that elimination of diclofenac from the vultures' food supply is incomplete, so further efforts are required to fully implement the ban," says Chris Bowden of the IUCN's SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction). Homi Khusrokhhan of the Bombay Natural History Society says human diclofenac is another threat because of the large number of drug manufacturers, many of them in the informal sector.

The encouraging news is



JYOTENDRA JYU THAKURI / BCN



PICS: HUM GURUNG

make a significant contribution not just to wildlife conservation but also poverty reduction and providing sustainable livelihoods to locals. “Most poor people in Nepal live in rural areas, hence there is a high dependence on the ecosystem services delivered to them by nature like timber, water, food,” explains Hum

Gurung of BCN. Gurung accompanied the international team to Rara and met park staff and buffer zone communities in Mugu. The aim was to understand how local people viewed the national park and the buffer zone, and which resources they considered important. “We wanted to see how they regard

NATURE’S BOUNTY: The resplendent scenery of Rara National Park can be a source of eco-tourism revenue, but it already provides local communities with fuel like the pine needles these women from Murma are allowed to harvest.

the regulations to control the use of resources, how the environment is changing, and what people see as the main threats to its biodiversity and natural resources,” explains David Thomas of BirdLife International. The Park issues permits for harvesting forest resource from Rara’s Core Zone, but it was clear to the team that unregulated harvesting of timber from the buffer zone is growing and there is encroachment of farmland into the forest. The team also studied household use of firewood and other forest products. The fieldwork in Rara National Park will also yield an estimate of how much carbon is ‘locked up’ in its trees. Payments for stored carbon by rich to poor countries can provide future income for communities and government agencies that protect forests. “Within five years we can re-measure the trees to see how much they have grown, and calculate how much extra carbon is being stored in parks like Rara,” says assistant warden, Bhogendra Rayamajhi. The results of the study will be presented by BCN at a conference in India later this year. Says Gurung: “We believe this research will provide new data to guide decisions on forest and park management. And will reveal how conservation can have wide ramifications for poverty-reduction, local development and the economy.”

circling again

LUNCH TIME: Vultures feeding on a safe carcass at the Vulture Safe Feeding Site in Gaidatal, Rupendehi.

that there are now vulture breeding centres in India, Pakistan and Nepal where 252 vultures are under captive breeding. But the critical question is will there be a safe environment for the new chicks when they are ready to be released in the wild? Two immediate actions are required to secure a safe environment for vultures in the wild:

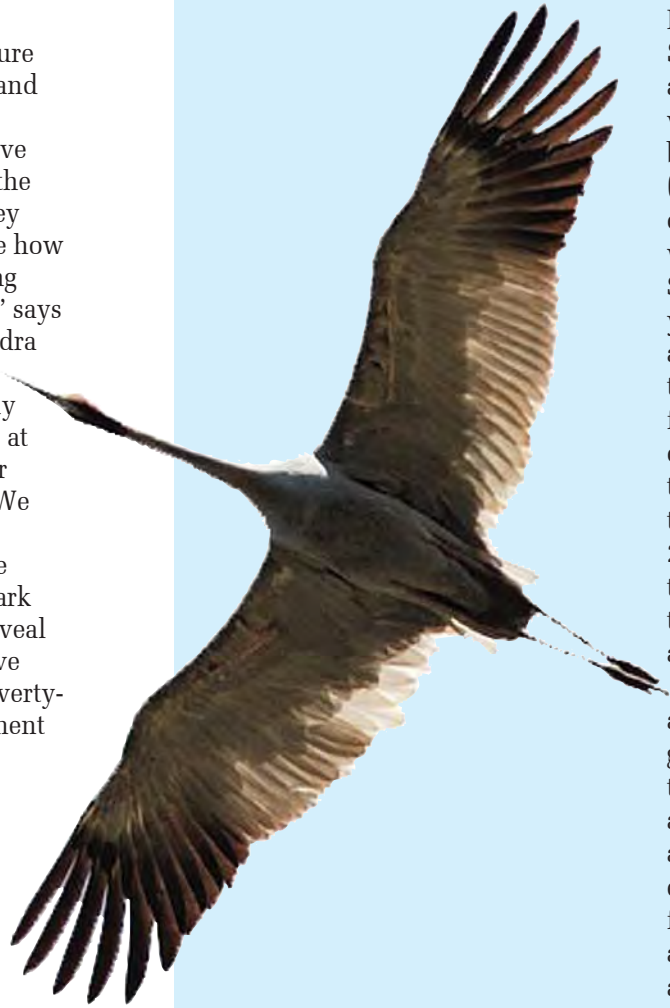
- South Asian vulture range countries must enforce the monitoring of the already banned diclofenac
- Vulture Safe Zones (VSZs) need to be set up

India has made significant progress in setting up vulture breeding centres in four states. Nepal has led the establishment of community managed

provisional vulture safe zone (PVSZ) in 18 districts covering more than 32,657 square kilometres. Satellite tracking of vultures by Bird Conservation Nepal shows that at least 100 km radius is required for vultures to be safe and the area should be declared Vulture Safe Zones. Vultures are not charismatic species like celebrity mammals, but they perform vital ecosystem services. They are professional scavengers which add to nature’s sanitation processes by consuming dead carcasses and thereby prevent the spread of disease that may be harmful to human beings. For example, the cost of managing disease in humans and domestic livestock caused by an increase in the population of feral dogs was estimated to be \$ 34 billion in India alone from 1993-2006. Additional cultural cost to the

Parsi community in Mumbai which relies on vulture for corpse cleaning was estimated to be \$ 1.6 million during the same period. Vultures are sharply declining and local people across Nepal have already started to report the negative impacts of drop in vulture population in their villages, according to Maheshwar Dhakal, ecologist at Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. At the end of the Delhi conference, South Asian countries passed a declaration to set up trans-boundary Vulture Safe Zones. This makes sense since the birds do not recognise man-made boundaries.

Hum Gurung, PhD, is CEO of Bird Conservation Nepal and a member of the IUCN’s Saving Asia’s Vultures from Extinction (SAVE).



Not just for the birds

NAIROBI -- Migratory birds undertake some of the most daring journeys in the animal kingdom, often covering thousands of kilometres, and the growing fan base of these winged adventurers is now presenting economic opportunities through sustainable tourism. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlighted the economic benefits of supporting the world’s bird species by marking World Migratory Bird Day on 10 May under the slogan, ‘Migratory birds and people -together through time’. Many regions are now recognising the economic potential of bird-related tourism in response to an increasing interest from the wider public. There is also a growing trend among bird tour operators to practice sustainable and socially responsible eco-tourism, while relying on local goods and services or supporting local conservation projects. Indeed, the UNEP Green Economy Report shows that global spending on all areas of eco-tourism is increasing by about six times the industry-wide rate of growth.

A survey by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service puts the annual economic value generated by bird watchers (or ‘birders’) and other wildlife watchers at around \$32 billion per year in the US alone. in Scotland, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds found that tourists spent up to \$12 million in 2011 to see White-tailed Eagles on the Isle of Mull alone. Birding plays a significant and growing part in the tourism industry, and creates direct and indirect economic benefits for many countries and communities, and wildlife

watching is increasingly a factor in tourists’ holiday choices today,” said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) is monitored by BirdLife International, Wetlands International and the Secretariat of the Partnership for the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAFP). “The scale of the problems and the actions required to reverse the fortunes of our migrant birds are daunting, but international collaboration offers the best chance of achieving effective conservation for these species,” said BirdLife’s CEO, Marco Lambertini. Conserving migratory birds is highly challenging because their annual migration often spans several countries, each governed by its own jurisdiction and national conservation strategies. Which is why AEWA tries to protect migratory birds for whom national boundaries don’t exist.

www.unep-awea.org
www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb/spotFlyway

nepalitimes.com

Circling back, #484
Soaring again, #286

EVENTS

**EXHIBITION ON EVEREST,**

a photography exhibition by Jeff Botz which showcases Mount Everest in its true glory. *26 April to 26 May, 9.30 am to 5pm, Image Ark Studio, Kulimha Tole, Patan*

Master Harold and the Boys, explore a beautiful play by Athol Fugard set in the apartheid era of South Africa. *Rs 200 (students) and Rs 500 (adults), Tickets can be purchased from Dhokaima Cafe (Patan Dhoka), Bookworm (Jhamsikhel or Radisson Hotel (Lazimpat), 31 May, 5.30 pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 9808554122*



Buddhism in Russia, an exhibition by the Russian Centre of Science and Culture and Lumbini Buddhist University. *27 April to 27 May, 10am to 5pm, Russian Centre of Science and Culture*

Haiku Hangout, be creative this summer as you share your haikus and sip green tea. *Rs 100 (apply before 26 May), 9 June, 9.30 am to 3pm, Sarwanam Theatre, Kalikasthan*

Sattya in Pokhara, if you find yourself in Pokhara in the coming weeks, be sure to visit Sattya's events. Take part in their numerous workshops and film screenings. *16 May to 30 May, Freedom Café, Lakeside, Pokhara*



NEPAL APPRECIATION, an art exhibition by Miriam E Krantz. *24 May to 5 June, 10.30 am to 6pm, closed on Saturdays, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, 5522307, www.parkgallery.com.np*

MUSIC

Live Band at The Corner Bar, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu every evening except Saturdays and Tuesdays. *4411818 ext. 1330*



NEPFEST IV, Nepfest will be back for all music enthusiasts with Decapitated this September. *8 September, 12.45 pm, Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap*

DINING



OLIVE GARDEN, one of the finest restaurants in town serving fusion cuisine from the mediterranean. *Every Friday, 12 pm to 2.30 pm and 6.30 pm to 10.30 pm, Olive Garden, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, 4411818, outlets@radkat.com.np*



MOKSH, it may be well know for it's cultural events but the food in Moksh is mighty fine. *Jhamsikhel*

Summit Hotel, savour the succulent ribs basket, and add the finishing touch with a hot Dutch apple pie. *Jhamsikhel, 5521810*

Bhojan Griha, traditional Nepali restaurant that serves great local food with folk music and dance. *Dillibajar*

Rum Doodle, a hodgepodge of flavors and a must for trekkers and mountaineers. *Thamel*

Hankook Sarang, from Bibimbab to Samgyeopsal, Hankook offers a wide range of Korean delicacies at affordable prices. *Thamel (opposite Road house café)*

Ghangri Café, a quiet and relaxing place with delicious food. Although known for their open momos, their Chef's Salad is equally mouthwatering. *Pulchowk, 5528703*



ALCHEMY, an authentic Italian restaurant which serves dishes like Pizza Quatro Stagioni and Spaghetti alla Puttanesca. *Thamel*

Comfort Zone, expensive restobar with a decent range of cocktails and barbeque meals. *Thamel*



BENCH BURGER, be it fish or steak burgers, Bench Burger offers varieties that will satisfy your palate. *Krishnagalli, Patan*

Dhokaima Cafe, exquisite ambience, friendly service, cozy bar, place to see and be seen at. *Patan Dhoka, Yala Maya Kendra, 5522113*



IMAGO DEI, be it casual hangouts or business meetings, Imago Dei is the place for you. *Nag Pokhari*



SOL DELICATESSEN, a range of gourmet food that will satiate the most refined palates. *10am to 6pm (closed on Mondays), Babar Mahal Revisited, 4216433, soldelicatesse@gmail.com*



ROX RESTAURANT, enjoy Sunday Pranzo at Rox Restaurant. *12pm to 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, 4491234*

THE FACTORY, a trendy restobar perfect for a refreshing stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and

Let's go to Namche



BIKRAM RAI

Namche Festival 2012 will be held from 27 to 29 May at Namche Bazar in Everest Region. The festival's inauguration coincides with the Fifth International Sagarmatha Day and the last day will

coincide with the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon. Namche Festival will feature cultural programs including folk dances, songs and will showcase the rich cultural heritage of Sherpas living in the Solu Khumbu

region. The event will also provide a platform to raise public awareness on the adverse impacts of climate change. The organisers say that they want to encourage domestic tourism in the Khumbu region through the festival. Lama Kazi Sherpa, member of the organising committee explains, "There is wrong message going out to Nepalis that Namche area is far too expensive for the locals which is not true and we hope to change that through the festival." This is the first time such an event is being organised to promote domestic tourism in Namche Bazaar. In the last few years, similar initiatives have been taken by people in neighbouring VDCs of Namche including Chaurikharga and Khumjung to promote domestic tourism.



BARDAAN RAI

One stop for adventure sports

The Himalayan Outdoor Festival is commemorates the spirit of adventure sports, taking adventure buffs through the trails and treads of Hattiban. The event will be held from 1 to 3 June in the Hattiban Resort. Tickets range from Rs 200 to Rs 8000, depending on room accommodation and competition entries.

Friday, 1 June

11am to 1pm Buses leave from Kathmandu
3pm Opening ceremony
5.30 pm Adventure sports documentary screening
7pm Marmot Night Uphill Challenge
7.15 pm to 9pm Dinner with live musical performances

Saturday, 2 June

6.30 Yoga session
9am to 12pm Cross country cycling and trail

run competitions
2pm to 4pm Dual race competition (downhill)
17:00 to 19:00 –dyno competition
5pm to 7pm Dyno competition
8pm Dinner with bands (Lyrics Indy and Joint Family)

Sunday, 3 June

6.30 am Yoga session
9.30 am to 12pm Pull-up, slackline, muddy heaven, rope climb, sack run competitions
1pm closing ceremony and certificate distribution

(Activities like cycling, rock climbing, bouldering, rope work and slackline will be open throughout the festival)

For more information call 9841386652, 9841470186

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drinks, with zesty music. Don't miss out on their cheesecake, it's a must. *Mandala Street, Thamel*

Picnic, enjoy this Korean restaurant with affordable prices and heaping portions. *Thamel*

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

Pasto Vostro, a pretty place with some great pasta. Their bacon wrapped sausages are a must. *Thamel*



CHONGQING FAST FOOD, gear up for some mouth watering Chinese dishes like Sour and Spicy Pork and Kung Pao Chicken. *Thamel*

Fire and Ice, home to some of the most delicious pizzas in town. *Thamel, 4250210*

Grill Me, a restaurant with a warm ambience and delicious grilled delights. *Jhamsikhel, 5535294*



BLACK PEPPER CAFÉ & PUB, cosmopolitan dining and drinking in a traditional style courtyard, try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service. *Kopundole Height, Lalitpur, 5521897, 5536926*



KAISER CAFE RESTAURANT & BAR, have a BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams. *Thamel, 4425341*

Byanjan, enjoy great food at an affordable price. Shrimp cocktails, Grilled Fish and desserts are favourites among guests. *Lakeside, Pokhara*

GETAWAYS

Riverside Grind II, an annual pool party organised by Partynepal Outdoors and Voodoo Entertainment with beach volleyball and water polo. *Prices range from 1700 to 15000 depending on accommodation (20 per cent discount if tickets are purchased by the end of May), 15 June, Riverside Springs Resort, Kurintar*



FULBARI RESORT, enjoy the scenic view of Pokhara as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. *Rs 6500 per person for 2 nights and 3 days, Call 4461918, 4462248*

Hotel Barahi, enjoy a great view of the lake, cultural shows, a big swimming pool to beat the heat this summer or scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery in the hotel premises. *Lakeside, Pokhara, 977-61-460617/463526*

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, a peaceful place to stay complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna- it also hosts three different restaurants to cater to your needs. *Gaurighat, Lakeside, 977-61-465819*

Night Bazaar to end

The Night Bazaar, initiated by Change Fusion Nepal, is coming to an end for this season. It will resume as the monsoon ends after two months in operation.

The Night Bazaar, which started from 29 March, was being held in the last Thursday of each month. The monthly night market was held inside Baber Mahal Revisited premises with small businesses and ventures setting up stalls to promote their products. The main aim of the Night Bazaar is to give small firms a platform to share their products with organisations like Newa Décor, Quixote's Cove and Ekadeshma participating.

Apart from 19 exhibitors showcasing their handicrafts, the Bazaar has also featured portrait artists, musicians, tarot card readers.

A highlight of the Night Bazaar has been the recent launch of the audio book version of Chaitanya Mishra's *Badlindo Nepali Sama* by a voluntary youth organisation, Youth Participation Nepal. An energy audit venture by Prakash Acharya, supported by Change Fusion Nepal has also been featured.



31 May, 5pm to 9pm
Venue: Baber Mahal Revisited Courtyard
Night Bazaar

SOMEPLACE ELSE

New Dish (ND) has been around for almost 25 years. In all this time, it has never advertised or organised events to promote itself. The restaurant has the most basic décor and doesn't pamper its customers. ND serves no tea or coffee. Lingering about is frowned upon and if you question the time it takes for the food to arrive or speak to the waiters rudely, you are asked to leave. Also, there are only 14 tables and there is always a rush. You either have to share the table with other hungry souls, not the most conducive environment to have a heart to



heart, as there are people waiting outside, peering in through the door, reminding you that the least you could do is gobble up your food and leave so that they can come in and do the same. You go to New Dish to eat, eat good food quickly and leave.

The food is basic, nothing to excite or confuse a repressed taste bud with flavours novel or bold. But it is good food. The menu now lists just about twenty items after its latest culling that has done away with favourites like the mixed grill sizzler and various Chinese curries.

This is not a place you walk into expecting to be surprised but a place you


know will provide comfort and succour in its constancy. The menu clearly displays this ethos. It's got soup, momos, fried rice, noodles, a few well-loved Nepali snacks and not much else.

Momos are what New Dish is famous for and the only options available are - steamed pork momos or fried pork momos. Anything else is considered sacrilegious. And what momos they are. Thin translucent skins encase a masala-free mixture of the aforementioned meat with finely diced onions and a hint of ginger. In its fried avatar, they are crisp on the outside and meltingly soft on the inside. Both come accompanied by a runny chilly sauce and what is described as clear soup but in truth is the stock garnished with shallots.

The spring rolls here are quite wonderful though they are quintessentially New Dish's own. Bits of steamed meat are rolled in a thin omelette which is then folded into a flour wrapper, generously coated in bread crumbs and deeply fried. It is a wonderful mixture of flavours and

textures and a favourite for all age groups.

The Chili Chicken was a pleasant surprise, being completely ketchup free, with the outsides slightly charred and packing a punch of flavours. The noodles in the Mixed Chop Suey were delightfully crisp and there was an entire nest of it. However, the sauce was thin, drizzly and destroyed by too much soya sauce, a pity really because the vegetables and meat were delectable.

This completely family run business is confident about the quality of the food they serve and this allows them to be almost blasé about everything else. The waiters could be more efficient and they could do hire a few more. The toilet, for that is what it is, not a 'restroom', needs to be cleaner. But why do I complain for I know the next time I am in New Road and am looking to grab a bite, I will in all likelihood head to New Dish. For the food is fuss free, unsophisticated, straightforward and yet good, filling and satisfying. Plus it is excellent value for money, the entire meal, accompanied by cold drinks, cost me less than a 1000 rupees. 

RUBY TUESDAY

In New Road, enter the road leading to Khichapokhari and look out for a little Shiva Linga. In front of it is a little dark entrance, the shops surrounding it sell musical instruments and cheap lingerie. Enter, walk up the flight of stairs and you are there.



PICS: RUBY TUESDAY

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Black Butterflies



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Ingrid Jonker is often called the South African “Sylvia Plath”. The similarities are obvious; the two were precocious, headstrong women poets, both of whom committed suicide at a young age. Jonker, born in 1933 in South Africa, wrote in the Afrikaans language and lived a turbulent life often on the brink of poverty. After publishing a series of critically acclaimed poetry collections, she walked into the ocean and drowned herself in 1965 at the age of 31.

The film *Black Butterflies*, directed by Paula van der Oest, is titled after a fragment of one of Jonker’s earlier poems, and is a heart-wrenching film chronicling the life of this troubled and brilliant poet. Few people have heard of her today, poetry being the fastest waning art of the 21st century, yet Jonker’s legacy is treasured in her home country: an example being that Nelson Mandela quoted from her poem *The child (who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga)*, in Afrikaans, during his

opening speech at the first South African democratic parliament on 24 May, 1994.

(On a side note, watching film after film trying to find something worthy to write about during three interminable days of bandas, I couldn’t help but think about the importance of words, poetry or prose, in the fight for civil rights. Call it what you may, our current struggle for ethnic parity is just as much a civil rights issue now as apartheid was then).

The main drama of the film starts with Ingrid’s early adulthood at which point she had already been married, with one daughter, Simone, and separated from her husband Pieter Venter. Jonker is impatient, impulsive and straightforward about her relationships with men, discarding Pieter, and starting an affair with another writer, Jack Cope, who is much older, and who is to become an important person in her life.

As the film develops we are confronted with a woman battling her many demons: her father, from whom she always seeks approval (another similarity to Plath, whose father, however, died while she was eight years old), and her struggles with the men with whom she is intimate. On one hand, Jonker is fiercely independent, a forward thinking activist who is unafraid to speak out against the horrifying status quo, and on the other hand, she is a messy alcoholic - always afraid of being abandoned.


Yet Jonker’s talent never deserts her – it is clear that she has an amazing facility with poetry, able to channel her emotions and observations into her art, always using new, striking, resonant turns of phrase. That is, until she is admitted to a Paris sanatorium on a trip to Europe for electro-shock therapy brought on by a nervous breakdown. Upon returning home she tells Jack, “I can’t write any more”.


Shortly after, she takes her own life.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of *Black Butterflies* is its unflinching portrayal of Ingrid’s character and her tendency towards instability. There is a fascinating and disturbing link between genius and madness, or a certain mental fragility. A surplus of creativity so often goes hand in hand with periods of manic depression - there are any number of examples, from Van Gogh to Rothko and Plath, that one might quote. While not in any way a scientific fact, it is undeniably unsettling to think of the scores of legendary figures through the centuries who have been afflicted by this very distinctive malaise.

Ingrid struggled with her weaknesses, yet it is clear from the film and with the help of Carice van Houten’s brave and vulnerable performance as Yonker, that despite being dealt a losing hand, this singular woman struggled to create her art, speak the truth, fight against Apartheid, and remained indelibly in the hearts and minds of her friends and lovers as a brilliant and ground-breaking poet. 🇳🇵

All DVDs reviewed in this column are available at:
Music and Expression, Thamel, Phone # 014700092

nepalitimes.com 

Watch trailer 

Everest Stampede



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Everest summit fever is raging dangerously. From the second week in May to the first week in June, climbers who have taken about six to eight weeks to acclimatise at high altitude are now attempting to scale the summit. However this has been a very hostile season with an “active” icefall and the precarious rock-fall ridden Lhotse face which the climbers have to pass by. Noting the dangersthis season, well-respected mountain guide, Russell Brice, has recently abandoned attempting to put any of his sixty clients on the summit. Perhaps others planning to climb Everest need to take note.

Indeed just this weekend, three climbers have died and two are missing. The problems this season are two-fold. The first problem, crowded conditions, is an old issue.

The second problem has been excessively dry weather conditions leading to more rock falls in the Lhotse-face area. The congestion in the mountain probably enhances the chances of rock falls and avalanches. In addition, weather conditions have been so poor near the summit that it will encourage a climbers’ stampede when there is a window period of good weather.



Furthermore, climbers are so determined to reach the top that they forget about the “turnaround time”. Because descent in the dark from the summit of Everest can be more treacherous than the ascent, climbers are cautioned to turn around and not go for the summit after 11 am. But some of the climbers last weekend were heading for the summit even at


2:30 pm.




Many of these climbers at altitudes near 8,000m try to save up on their supplemental oxygen to use it for the final summit bid. With long waits and devoid of adequate supplemental oxygen at such altitudes, the vital organs of the body are compromised setting the stage for tragedy to unfold.

Clearly there are a multitude of factors that may influence a successful ascent on Everest. Travel and trekking companies need to raise the level of awareness in their clients of the potential medical (and other) dangers of attempting to climb the world’s highest peak and other 8000m peaks as many of these new climbers are just novices without a notion of what goes on up there. This awareness campaign may seem counterproductive for business; but just like Russell Brice, if you have a reputation for safety first, it may actually help business. Perhaps the Nepali government could also consider decreasing congestion and avoiding tragedy while climbing Everest by limiting the number of climbers. 🇳🇵

WEEKEND WEATHER

With a month to go for the normal breaking of the monsoon, long-term forecasts are predicting a slightly delayed onset. But these predictions have been wrong before. The monsoon has yet to break over Kerala, and when it does, it takes about a month to reach us here in Nepal. But in the meantime, we will be seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of pre-monsoon showers, usually in the late afternoon and night accompanied by thunder and lightning. The maximum temperature will creep into the low 30s and a significant rise in minimum temperature touching 20.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
		
33-19	32-18	32-20



RIGHT WALK: Locals in Pokhara join a rally coordinated by the Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industries on Thursday, calling for social harmony and an end to strikes.



ROAD TRIP: A French family arrives in Lumbini from Butwal on Thursday, traveling over 50km in a rickshaw. A banda by Tharuhat Struggle Committee in Butwal had halted transportation in the area.



FLAG BEARER: A flag of the Federal Limbuwan State Council planted on the statue of poet Bhanu Bhakta Acharya in Sunsari on Wednesday along with a banner announcing a three-day banda demanding a Limbuwan state.



SIDE EFFECTS: Garbage remains unpicked at Mangal Bajar, Patan, on Wednesday after three days of banda, called by Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN).



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

Nepal's political parties painted themselves into a corner, and are now trying to buy three more months to be rescued. A citizenry increasingly worried about ethnic radicalism on the streets would have played along in panic, had the Supreme Court not issued an interim order on Thursday.

The NC and UML point fingers at the Maoists and Madhesis, but their willingness to trade CA extension for power while simultaneously mouthing 'consensus' has already exposed their bankrupt politics.

There are still three days remaining in which, if there is broad agreement, the parties can bring out a preliminary draft that could accommodate a provision of giving continuity to the existing house in a new form. That is the only way to constitutionally avoid the void, but if parties seem resigned to setting a bad precedent it will not only lower the stature of Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai and his government, but delegitimise their political agency which will be an even bigger blot on Nepali politics.

Behind the façade of consensus the parties spent precious months trying to outwit one another to get a better foothold ahead of the elections. The constitution was never their bottom line because if it was, things would never have come to this. After four years of bargaining, they have used the media to take the country to a dangerous level of ethnic street polarisation. The Maoists are guilty of stoking the flames, but the other parties have added fuel to the fire with their status quo ideology.

It may be irrelevant to assess what happened in the past weeks because damage has already been done.



ANURAG ACHARYA

May or may not

There is still enough time to forge an agreement if the parties can find room for it.

Whether rival Far-West movements were orchestrated by a Brahmin-dominated leadership, or protests by Janajatis and Tharus fuelled by the Maoists, is now moot. And if the parties had hoped to gain an upper hand by unleashing the ethnic genie, they haven't succeeded.

Amid reports of hooliganism and vandalism, call from the streets for a political solution acceptable to all went unreported. The media got sucked into the debate with fracas at the Reporters' Club, and the focus turned on the caste domination of the media itself. By exaggerating the statements of a few loud hate-mongers, the media became a part of the problem.

On the final day of the three day Janajati strike this week, I met three young Rai women who had Kirat Pradesh tattooed on their faces, dancing at a demonstration in Koteswor. I asked

them what they thought about the nation going into ethnic federalism and whether they felt it could upset Nepal's social harmony. One of them replied, "Can you please print in bold letters that we are not asking for ethnic federalism. We are only demanding that our identities be recognised in the states where we have lived for generations. How would that upset social harmony?"

The conceptual report prepared by the CA's State Restructuring and Power Devolution Committee in 2009 has clearly set five bases for defining identity, of which ethnic identity was only one. The debate on identity has until now been so misconstrued and misunderstood that it has left little room for negotiation.

The nine-point agreement between Janajatis and the government on Tuesday which defines identity in

the light of the 2009 report has opened up a window of opportunity and if the parties can work on State Restructuring Commission's report by taking into consideration the committee's guidelines, things could still be worked out. But if parties begin by setting pre-conditions, they will not only disappoint the people, but also erode their faith in the institution of politics.

Travelling length and breadth of the valley on foot during the strike, I met men and women, young and old, dressed in their traditional attire singing and dancing to folk music. At a time when hate speech peppers social and mainstream media, I must confess I have never seen such a diverse celebration of Nepali nationhood. We keep extolling this country's 'unity in diversity', maybe it's time we appreciate the beauty of this diversity instead of constantly demonising it. After all, we are all Nepalis trying to be Nepalis in our own terms.

The parties must work round the clock in the next three days to ensure that the statute, even in its draft state, is declared on 27 May. It is an evolving document that can be worked on as we go along. There will be few angry fists on the streets again, but it is now time for a closure. ■

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ANURAG ACHARYA

National identity crisis

At a time when we should be valuing our multiple, intersecting identities, we are being told to choose a single, overarching definition of ourselves



COMMENT

Rubeena D Shrestha

When I was 16, my sociology teacher, a Brahmin man, asked me, "What are you?" I did not understand his question and asked him to explain. He wanted to know my ethnicity.

I said I am a Tamang who had been raised as a Buddhist (though I studied in a Catholic school which is a whole different story in itself). But he told me very matter-of-factly that my surname clearly indicated my 'Hinduness' and advised me to tell everyone I am a Hindu, because then people would think highly of me. I failed sociology class and have identified as 'just Nepali' from that day onward.

Twenty five years have passed since that awkward question was asked and I am once again forced to think about my identity. I am told my caste, ethnicity and religion define who I am as an individual. My personal beliefs, aspirations, accomplishments, and the battles I have won are insignificant in front of the holy identity trinity.

I am a woman, born to a Tamang mother and a Hindu father and married into a Newar family. I believe everyone should have enough to eat and a safe shelter. I believe all children should have access to free and quality education. I believe men, women and third genders



BIKRAM RAI

are equal. I believe homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality are natural human desires and the state and community have no right to judge

or interfere. I believe abortion is a woman's right and prostitution should be legalised. And most importantly, I believe we should all be allowed to live our lives on our own terms, as long as we don't harm others intentionally.

However, I also understand that as a middle class, educated and employed woman, I speak from a position of extreme privilege and am not representative of millions of other Nepali men and women. My perception of identity, my beliefs, and my needs are vastly different from that of an HIV positive Dalit woman in Accham or a Tamang girl in Nuwakot who is sold off to a brothel in India by her uncle or a woman in Chitwan who is beaten every day for being a 'witch'. Despite my

background, I feel my voice is equally important as we try to sort out our national identity crisis.

When discussions about federalism

first surfaced six years ago, I wholeheartedly supported the idea of new federal states, because it no longer made sense for Kathmandu to withhold all power. I assumed handing power to local officials who have a better understanding of their areas, bringing leaders closer to the people and letting the public have greater control of state affairs would mean we would not have to live through another civil war. But the uproar of the past three weeks on the streets of the capital, the far-west and the districts of Tarai suggest we might be headed down slippery slopes again.

Powerful male (mostly Brahmin) politicians and leaders who no longer wield the same power and influence they once enjoyed, have played the dirtiest hand they could by inciting Nepalis into communalism. And now that Pandora's Box has been forced open by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Upendra Yadav and Ang Kaji Sherpa et al, I want to ask them a few questions.

Where does a Muslim girl from Mahottari married to a Gurung from Pokhara belong? Where does the fifth generation of a Chettri family in Biratnagar belong? Where does a doctor Pradhan who has lived and practiced in Ilam all his life belong? Where does my Mishra friend who escaped to Kathmandu many years ago to avoid being a victim of dowry belong? Where do I belong? 🇳🇵

Rubeena D Shrestha is the editor of *Wave* magazine.



“The leaders promised us a better future, but we feel cheated. I don’t think they love the Nepali people. Social harmony still exists between different groups in Nepal, but our politicians are trying to break this unity which is wrong. Although ethnic identities should be recognised and respected, I am scared that we might be heading down the path of ethnic conflict.”

Bishnu Tamang of Dharan



“People from many different ethnicities and backgrounds live together in this area. And we haven’t heard of any mistreatment. No matter which party is in power, the government gives rights to wealthy people and makes life harder for poor people. All I am asking from the leadership is to let us live in peace so that we can earn our day’s meal.”

Sita Bhujel lives in a squatter settlement in Bagarkot, Dharan.



PICS: SITA MADEMBA

“It’s hard to find work during bandas and I am struggling to feed my family. I neither understand nor support the disputes on ethnic identities. Political groups will keep making assurances, but I don’t trust them. Even the Maoists made promises to decrease the gap between the poor and the rich and failed to deliver. I have realised nobody cares about poor people like myself. I don’t expect much, I will be happy if I can live without fear in my country and if I am allowed to work for a living.”

Tek Bahadur Shanker of Panchakanya works as a daily wage labourer at construction sites and has a family of seven to look after.

“Too much politics... too many politicians”

SITA MADEMBA IN DHARAN

The national newspapers, evening news on television and local FM stations are full of debate about the new constitution, and especially the movement by groups lobbying for and against federalism with identity.

However, here in eastern Nepal, where there are conflicting territorial claims for ethnic autonomy, ordinary people are apprehensive that traditional social harmony will be irreversibly disturbed.

However, some like dairy farmer Lokendra Subedi say the ties across ethnic lines here are too strong to be broken by a few politicians. “We haven’t been affected at all,” Subedi says, “my neighbours are Newars, and they don’t bother me and I don’t bother them.”

Subedi delivers 150 litres of milk early every morning to Rai, Limbu and Madhesi customers in Dharan, but the only thing that worries him are shutdowns and transportation strikes which affect his business. “All I want is for the strikes to stop, and the constitution to be passed. There



SUNIR PANDEY

“This is a small country, we have many ethnicities but can’t give states to all, the ones who are getting ethnic states are the ones with strong political say.”

Devendra Adhikari, restaurant worker/student

is too much politics and there are too many politicians,” he adds ruefully.

In Dharan, Bishnu Maya Rai runs a small tea shop near the BP Memorial Hospital called ‘New aunty’. Her customers are a microcosm of Nepal’s ethnicities. “I wish people would stop talking about this ethnic group and that ethnic group,” she says, pouring tea, “they are fighting over

a problem they themselves created, while we ordinary people struggle to survive.”

She says she hears on the radio that there is tension between ethnicities in other parts of Nepal, but says she hasn’t seen any tension in her town. “We are living peacefully together, and I am sure we can live like this in the future as long as politicians don’t mess it up,” says Rai. ■

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BIKRAM RAI

Pushing the finishing line

Editorial in *Annapurna Post*, 23 May

अन्वपूर्ण पोट

At a time when Nepalis should have been congratulating each other and celebrating an important milestone, we are in a limbo once again. The CA deadline is less than hundred hours away, and we are uncertain whether the new constitution will be drafted or if there will be another extension. And looking at the events of the past few weeks, the country's unity and ethnic harmony are now in danger.

The major parties have been running away from sensitive debates of state restructuring, and focusing more on the forms of governance. The truth is that state restructuring is one of the core reasons for formulating a new constitution. The constitution was supposed to address issues of ethnic, regional and gender inequality. But even in four long years, the parties have been unable to find a common ground on how to go about restructuring the country. Although it seemed like the parties had finally come to an understanding on carving out federal states based on ethnic identities, they once again failed to stand their ground.

In addition to our leaders' indecisiveness, we are having to

deal with volatile identity politics which has not only divided political circles but also baffled ordinary Nepalis. The public has come to believe that only a single ethnic community will be allowed to live in each of the future ethnic provinces. And none of the leaders have bothered to explain to the people that we are not building countries within the country, but rather states within the country.

It is vital to understand that different ethnic groups are not actually demanding ethnic states. All they want is greater recognition and equal rights which the old system of districts and regions failed to deliver. These sentiments were also echoed during Janandolan of 2006, but today the debate is tinged with deep communal overtones. However, Nepalis must keep in mind that regardless of the name, future federal states will have to accommodate the country's political, social and cultural structure.

Federalism and communalism cannot coexist, but at the same time it is not enough to just say we are all equal. We must turn our words into actions and start respecting ethnic identities, providing full rights to minorities and ending all forms of discrimination. The parties too have a critical role to play during this difficult transition and they must not let the opportunity pass because of their egos.

Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, May 24

संविधानसभ

Six months after the Supreme Court verdict about the final extension, Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha has tried to defend the government's proposal to extend the CA deadline once again by arguing that the SC verdict must be understood in its essence which means drafting of the statute must happen. Shrestha and others who toe similar line may sound convincing, but the government's proposal has failed to impress the public in the wake of the apex court's rejection of extension appeal.

The rule of law and principle of judicial and constitutional supremacy require that judicial rulings be upheld and respected. In this regard, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai must heed to President Ram Baran Yadav's advice and act in accordance with the SC verdict. It is important to maintain the balance of power between the three state organs to ensure that we do not set the wrong precedent which might lead to a power struggle among the three. Even though the extension seems both unavoidable and necessary, it must be done in a way that does not lower the stature of judiciary.

One way of doing this, as some have suggested is for the president to untie the deadlock using his prerogative powers. This move will help diffuse the present crisis, but is a risky move nonetheless and raises suspicion. The sensible choice would be to make the most of the next 100 hours to thresh out the remaining issues and declare the constitution on 27 May. If the intent is there, 100 hours are more than enough.

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 24 May

नागरिक

Parties are at loggerheads on extending the CA's term. The Maoists and Madhesi alliance have made it clear that the constitution can't be drafted within 27 May and extension is inevitable. The NC and UML, on the other hand, have opposed the extension proposal saying it transgresses the Supreme Court's verdict. But both the NC and UML are willing to support the extension if Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai resigns from his post. It is clear that their objection to CA's extension has nothing to do with constitutional correctness and they are simply bargaining for political power.

We are standing at a critical juncture and parties should work to forge consensus instead of engaging in petty power play. If the parties are serious, we can still have an agreement on main issues of the constitution before 27 May. Of course it will take some time to draft the statute once there is an understanding as to why we need an extension. In three months we can declare a constitution that will address the valid demands of minorities. If the Supreme Court does not want us to be constitution-less, it should have no problem supporting the extension if agreements on contentious issues can be reached before 27 May.

There is no point declaring a new constitution in haste just to meet the deadline. Politicians are now talking about due process and legalities when all this time they flouted it. A constitution is not just a legal document. It should reflect the aspirations of people and instill a sense of ownership. And it will be foolish and immature to issue a constitution that does not accommodate the demands of ethnic minorities.



Giving lives

Ramji Dahal, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-28 May

हिमाल

Hemraj Shrestha's wife Gyani saved his life by donating her kidneys to him in 2009. He was the first patient to undergo successful kidney transplantation in Nepal. Three years since kidney transplantation started in Nepal, 211 patients have undergone the operation. 80 per cent of kidney donors in Nepal are females while 90 per cent of the recipients are males. Before kidney transplantation was allowed in Nepal, patients travelled to India for the procedure which was very costly.

Although kidney transplantation has become more popular, the organ transplantation act of 1998 stipulates that patients can only take organs from their blood relatives, which in turn forces many

people to seek treatment in India where such a rule does not apply. Six months ago the organ transplantation co-ordination committee advised the state to reform the law to ease the process. However, the government has not responded yet. Another problem which plagues patients is the unusually long waiting list. Both Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital and Bir Hospital have already been booked for months in advance. Taking into consideration the problems faced by patients and families, the government set up a transplantation centre with 100 beds in Bhaktapur last February. According to Dr Pukar Shrestha, the centre will begin dialysis services, and kidney transplantations from next month, while transplantation of other organs like liver, pancreas, heart, lungs will start in the next few months.



First day: Why didn't you report our protest strikes?

Second day: Why did you report our striking?

नागरिक Rajesh KC in *Nagarik*, 23 May

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The other name of conspiracy is Pushpa Kamal Dahal.”

Madhav Kumar Nepal quoted in *Kantipur*, May 24

Identity minus extremism



Hari Roka, UCPN-M lawmaker in *Kantipur*, May 21

कान्तिपुर

Identity politics has taken centre stage in Nepal, and the debate is getting increasingly polarised. There are those who are suspicious and think it's blasphemous to raise the identity debate and those who will settle for nothing less than ethnically demarcated provinces. However, both sides seem to have missed the point. The only way to resolve the growing hostility is by engaging in healthy debate. We all have multiple, intersecting identities, of which region, language, religion, and culture are important elements. While language, culture and customs are at the centre of the indigenous movement, in Madhes regional and linguistic identities are of major concern. Hence, any federal model must take these nuances into consideration.

Names of future federal units are secondary; the discussion should instead be focused on whether the new states can ensure equal rights and opportunities for people living within the boundaries and how to promote equal cultural and social relations among the residents. However, in order for this conversation to take place, people standing on the opposite sides of the identity debate must come to a compromise.

Banda blues



Mohan Bhattarai, *Naya Patrika*, 23 May

भार्यो पत्रिका

The three day nation-wide banda called by Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities severely disrupted the day-to-day life of common Nepalis across the country. In Morang district alone, 57 government and 312 private schools were forced to shut down. BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan had to stop all surgeries because there was a shortage of oxygen cylinders and vital medicines. Similarly, the district hospital in Tamghas, Gulmi also remained closed.

There were also numerous instances of violence and attacks during the banda. Several vehicles were vandalised throughout the capital. A businessman in Dolakha was manhandled by banda enforcers which led to tension in Charikot, the district headquarter and a protestor was injured in Makwanpur while setting a car on fire. Police had to use force and fire tear gases to control the crowds in major cities.

The banda enforcers were particularly hostile towards media houses and journalists. Sagarmatha Television's Nepalgunj correspondent Deepa Ale Magar was beaten by members of the Joint Tharu Struggle Committee in Chitranagar on Monday night. Similarly journalists in Bardiya, Palpa, Kaski, Kathmandu and other districts also found themselves under attack. All newspapers from Kaski published blank editorials and local FM and TV stations halted the broadcast of their morning news bulletin in protest of the assaults. Likewise, newspapers from Nawalparasi stopped publication for a day.

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New constipation by August

It was Marx (**Groucho**, not **Karl**) who once said: "If you come to a fork on the road, take it". And being a true blue Marxist, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai has done just that. Ignoring the Supreme Court's stipulation that there would be no more extensions, he got his attorney, General Mukti, to advise him on how the cabinet could pass another teensy weensy little postponement of the CA deadline. Comrade Godawful, of course, helped by egging NEFIN to create mayhem on the streets. Now, the Supreme Court has told the Supremo to finish the constitution by Sunday, or else...

ॐ

The folks down in Sindhuli have the right idea. With no jobs going around, there was intense competition among the political parties to fill a vacancy at the district post office. The local party leaders started putting so much pressure on the post office chief that last week he announced a race, and whoever came first would get the job. Well, it's not an original idea, that is how the ancient kings of Gorkha were chosen by making potential candidates run a marathon at **Liglig**. Why not revive this grand tradition to also chose the next prime



minister to replace BRB. That would rule out anyone whose name has the word 'Ram' in it.

ॐ

Bunds are not what they used to be. There was a time when hartals were hardcore, nothing moved. There was no time limit, and even bicycles were not spared. These days there are all kinds of exceptions, and the rule of thumb seems to be "three wheels good, four wheels (and two) bad". Which is why

aeroplanes fly unhindered, except if you are stranded in Dhangadi, rickshaws are allowed to ply, but cars and motorcycles are not. And these days bunds are strictly 9-5, probably because the hired goons demand overtime to burn tyres after office hours. Saturday, being a day of rest, is also exempt from bunds. How are we ever going to attain ethnic federalism if we are so lazy and lax about enforcing bunds?

ॐ

Remember the fracas over the minister in the JN Khanal cabinet who had to step down after it was found out he was a free-Tibet activist and had three nationalities? Well, there may be a similar scandal over the appointment of one Ek Dhakal, the sole CA member from the **Family Party**. Yes, there is such a thing, if you don't believe me google him. This is the same Mr Ek-Dui-Tin who organised that controversial visit by the vice-prez Paramanand to go to South Korea on a junket sponsored by the Unification Church. Well, it turns out the new minister, who hasn't been assigned a portfolio till press time, is a Moonie himself. He is a follower of **Sun Myung**, not **Ban Ki**, and should be made Minister for Proselytisation Affairs.

ॐ

One of the hardest questions the judges asked Miss Nepal contestants at the Annapurna Hotel during the recent pageant was: "What makes a person a **genius**?" It is a sign of the times that the lass who answered "You have to be **indigenius**" got the most applause.

ॐ

It was bound to happen sooner or later. The Rautes

want the forests of northern Chitwan declared Rauteland, the gold digging Sonahas want rivers to be declared their zone, Marwaris want a non-territorial Mewar state. Also, Nepali Sikhs do not want to be lumped with Madhesis. Why not declare Kopundole a **Sikh Autonomous Province**? And the people of Okharpauwa in Nuwakot which happens to lie in the future Tamsaling Province have refused to let KMC dump the Valley's garbage in its landfill site anymore, despite past agreements. They sent the entire stinking fleet of trash trucks back to the 'Newa Rajya' and said, "We don't want your do-do."

ॐ

Queen Liz the Second invited a whole lot of kings, queens and emperors for her diamond jubilee lunch at Windsor Castle recently. All the world's monarchs were there, including ex-kings of Greece and Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. We have it on good authority that KingG waited till the last mom for the invite, which never came. Even the Crown Prince of Yugoslavia was invited though that country ceased to exist 10 years ago, and was a republic for 60 years before that. Ouch, that must have hurt.




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