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DAVID DUCHEMIN

Lost innocence

Nearly 1.5 million Nepali children have never set foot in a classroom, don't know what a playground is and do not have a childhood. Instead they are toiling in restaurants, brick factories, massage parlours and homes. While the number of child labourers has dropped drastically in the past 10 years, new, more dangerous hotspots for child abuse have sprung up. Plateauing female literacy rate is likely to throw in more children into the workplace in the future.

The carpet industry is one of the few businesses to clean up its act and is no longer a colony of underage workers. The girl pictured above used to work as a wool spinner. She is now studying on a scholarship. But there are hundreds of thousands of others who find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. The government has committed to eradicate the worst forms of child labour by 2016 and stop all children working by 2020.

CAUTION: CHILDREN WORKING
EDITORIAL
page 2



CHEATED OF THEIR CHILDHOOD

by **BHRIKUTI RAI**

page 12-13

Taking care of the caretaker


Constitutionally, the government has the mandate to hold elections and cannot be challenged until then. But for the sake of stability, and to show statesmanship, Prime Minister Bhattarai should begin serious negotiations on forming a government of national unity. Like nature, nations also abhor a vacuum.

BY THE WAY

by **ANURAG ACHARYA**

page 3

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CAUTION: CHILDREN AT WORK

More than half of Nepal's population is below 20 years of age. Nearly 8 million of them are children between 5-17 years, and 3.2 million of them are skipping school to work. Half of all working children are deprived of education, and have to toil in hazardous conditions.

Those are the numbers. But behind the appalling statistics are tragic individual stories of stolen childhoods, and of children who suffer physical and psychological abuse. Each story of abuse is an indictment of an uncaring state that has left its future citizens to fend for themselves. The political class is so busy politicking, it has no qualms about preying on the most vulnerable section of its society.

They say you can tell a lot about a country from the way it treats its children. From the way we mistreat ours, our criminal neglect in giving them normal childhoods, we should be hanging our heads in shame. Nepal signed the UN Child Rights Convention in 1990 and other international treaties to protect children from the worst forms of child labour. Parliament passed the Child Protection Act in 1992 and the law prohibiting bonded child labour. Yet, as with many of our laws, they exist only in paper.

To be fair, there has been a sharp drop in the absolute numbers of child workers. The National Labour Force Survey of 2008 shows that child workers in the 5-15 age bracket dropped from 2 million in 1998 to 1.5 million in ten years. The number of older working children also showed a decline as the carpet and pashmina industries collapsed, spreading education brought down the number of bonded labourers, and the expansion of

Behind Nepal's appalling child labour statistics are tragic individual stories of stolen childhoods and of children who suffer physical and psychological abuse



DAVID DUCHEMIN

road networks reduced the number of children working as porters.

However, there has been an alarming increase in the number of children in the 15-17 age bracket who are working in exploitative sectors like brick factories, domestic work, fabric embroidery, manufacturing,

garages, and in the sex industry. The national-level exclusion of marginalised groups from decision-making is also reflected in the children. A Rapid Assessment survey conducted by World Education and Plan International this year showed that nearly half the children in a sample group working in brick factories were Janajatis and 20 per cent were Dalits. The figures are similar for tea shops, restaurants, and domestics. More girls than boys were found to be working, and 60 per cent of those toiling in hazardous circumstances were, in fact, girls.

The opportunity cost of such staggering numbers represents a huge loss to the nation. The repercussions of this will be felt long into the future as the child workers of today grow into teenagers, young adults and citizens of tomorrow.

The government has re-adjusted the targets and now says it wants to ban the worst forms of child labour by 2016 and all child labour by 2020. Given the political disarray, the lack of focus on service delivery, the public's lack of awareness and even acceptance by families of child labour, it will be a challenge to meet even those extended targets.

More worrisome is the progress Nepal made in child and maternal survival in the past 15 years seems to have stalled largely due to a plateauing in the female literacy rate. This is bound to have an impact on efforts to reduce the number of child workers as well.

Political transition can no longer be an excuse. We have to get our children out of the workplace and into schools, and we have eight more years to complete that task.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA

The danger of 'hate speech' on Facebook and online sites is exaggerated ('Anti-social media', editorial, #610). I agree that it is a way to let off steam, and very different from the hate radio in Rwanda where there was a direct incitement to inter-ethnic violence. I see a greater danger in the politicisation of community radio and the use of air waves to broadcast incendiary material.

Jimmy

- I am more worried about hate-speech in mainstream media like newspapers, tv, radio etc, which has the potential to provoke violence. At least social media lets everyone express their opinions. Mainstream media, on the other hand, has been publishing the views of a select few for many years. There has been a single-minded attack by violence-hungry commentators on mainstream newspapers and because they are "established", no one can ask them to stop using racist or hateful words. Until the print media corrects itself, people will feel compelled to retaliate on social media.

Ushaft

- Call for harmony is as much a part of so-called freedom of speech as is the call for hate. The problem with freedom of speech is that no one knows for sure whether the speech is coming from the fools or the wise.

KK Sharma

DIGITAL MULTIPLY

As Rubeena Mahato points out, social media is here to stay and it will have an even bigger impact than television did between 1970 and

2000 ('Digital multiply', #610). Social media encourages freedom which is why people are quick to embrace it, however, as with all new technology people are experimenting with it in many different ways. A small number is using social media to fuel ethnic tension and spread hate. But we shouldn't be too worried, because online media will gradually start to self-regulate itself for the sake of credibility and sustainability.

Indra Dhoj Kshetri

- Social media is an easy tool for positive action, but also a cheap weapon for people with evil intentions. Somebody from the diaspora with graphic design skills could post a nasty image, others will follow and share and even a hoax could cause great damage. The original poster might not participate in physical violence, but others who take things at face value may incite violence.

Kumar Paudel

- Social media can and should play a big role in Naya Nepal's politics. Perhaps it's beyond the grasp of old white bearded politicians, but younger ones like Gagan Thapa should use their Facebook page more often to garner support. President Obama uses the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, iPad, Blackberry etc to reach out to his followers and gain political leverage.

Bikas Gurung

REVENGE OF THE RADICALS

I feel like Kanak Mani Dixit is being dishonest in his assessment of the Maoist trio ('The revenge of the radicals', #610). All this while he and

his civil society friends put Bhattarai, Dahal and Baidya on pedestals and now suddenly they are the villains. It's outrageous how quickly the debate changes in Nepal. People have lost track of what is right and what is wrong and who is on whose side.

I care

- Dixit's commentary is a little too late. Bhattarai isn't going to leave his chair and the Maoists are almost on their way to capturing the state.

Haribabu

- Nepalis had recognised the true intentions of Dahal and the Maoist party a long time ago. There was some doubt about Bhattarai and people were willing to give him benefit of the doubt. But his pseudo-nationalism and pretentiousness have been exposed.

Shiva Lal

- Why waste time analysing Nepali politics? We ordinary citizens are tired of reading commentaries on parties and leaders and break-away factions. Our politicians are experts at fooling the public and they will continue their game. All we want is a society free of violence and corruption where we can earn a good living without constant interference.

Nirmal

- It's not just the Maoist leaders, but leaders across the political spectrum are the same. Nepal needs a true revolutionist like Che Guevara and mass education for the public.

Ajay Subba

- Nepali parties and leadership are outdated. What the country requires is a party that actually reflects the needs of a unified Nepal. A party that will address the energy crisis, bring more people out of abject poverty, create an investment-friendly environment, build much needed infrastructure and give Nepalis a future rather than just another retread of the past.

Peter Thompson

- The problem with moderates in Nepal is that they have been unable to explain their philosophy to the people. Their never-ending cries for consensus at any cost and their desperation to hold government positions suggest their lack of firm ideological beliefs. Even though misguided, the radicals at least believe in something. What the people want to see is economic growth and improvement in their living standards, and not empty slogans either from the radicals or visionless moderates.

Dev Batsya

- Bhattarai is now running the country like an absolute monarch, while rest of the leaders are mere spectators, unable to challenge one man. Dahal has lost his power base and charisma and looking at the egos of our politicians, a unity government seems impossible. The only force in Nepal that can bring stability is the Nepal Army. It's time to punish the leaders that have violated the trust of the Nepali people and declare martial law. It's better to live in peace and prosperity under military rule than chaos and daily suffering under a gang of criminals.

Sushil Thapa

WHERE IS THE BATHROOM

It's not just modern bathrooms, but simple toilets are also making their way into Nepali households ('Where is the bathroom?', Stuti Sharma, #610). According to the latest joint report by UNICEF/WHO, which tracks Nepal's progress towards MDG targets related to water and sanitation, 51 per cent of Nepalis now go to toilets instead of defecating in the open. More than 400 VDCs have declared themselves as 'Open Defecation Free' zones. Although we still have a long way to go before every Nepali has access to a clean and hygienic toilet and human waste is properly managed, we are at least moving up the ladder.

Bhushan Tuladhar

- Nepali Times should do a report on public toilets. There are hardly any around Kathmandu and even the few that exist are in appalling condition. I usually just go to a café, drink a cup of coffee and do my business. It's expensive but when nature calls there is no way out.

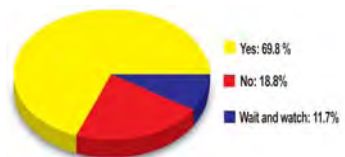
Girly girl



nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #611

Q. Do you think the split in UCPN-M will weaken the largest party?

Total votes: 2,289



Weekly Internet Poll # 612. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai step down immediately?



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BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

The stone-throwing at the airport as Prime Minister Bhattarai departed for and arrived from Rio de Janeiro could point to more serious protests unless Bhattarai reverts back to engaging the opposition. The confrontation, however, may not just be on the streets but also within his own party.

After a month of deadlock following the CA dissolution, the parties were willing to negotiate, but Bhattarai's statement that he would not quit before another election not only irked the opposition but also left his chairman red faced. For now, the party has decided to put the matter to rest but it is no secret that Pushpa Kamal Dahal is getting restive about Bhattarai's growing national and international stature hindering his own ambitions.

Smelling blood, the opposition NC, UML and other assorted parties could be tempted to launch a decisive street protest to bring down the Bhattarai-led coalition that has been weakened by a vertical split in the Maoist party. But the coalition feels it cannot be ousted legitimately in the aftermath of the CA dissolution.

Interestingly, both the dissident Maoists and the opposition have been using op-eds in the mainstream media to label Bhattarai as the next 'Jung Bahadur', so the prime minister must be careful not to let his political stance be misconstrued as arrogance and despotism. He can rest assure that Dahal will not rock the boat for now, he can't afford to.

For their part, the NC and UML who are now campaigning to bring down the government must realise that it was their own lack of vision and irresponsibility that dragged the country into a void from where there is no democratic alternative without holding elections. Besides, the article 38 (1) of the interim constitution that they have been citing does not make a case, as the present government was formed under 38 (2).

Prithvi Subba Gurung of the UML says the opposition including his own



RSS

Taking care of the caretaker

The opposition may not like it, but the caretaker government can remain legally in power until elections are held

party has been behaving irresponsibly by asking the government to resign without offering any alternative. "In what capacity will Ram Chandra Poudel or KP Oli for that matter lead the government?" asks Gurung.

He believes the only option is to either hold new elections or reinstate the old CA for a certain period to pass the constitution. Gurung maintains there is no way the NC and UML can mobilise the people, because the Madhesi, Janajatis and Dalits who represent three-fourths of the country's population are sceptical about their stance on federalism.

Sadbhavana Party leader Laxmanlal Karna of the Madhesi Front agrees that in the absence of a legislature, parties must either go for CA elections scheduled in November by giving the

present government a national shape under Bhattarai's leadership or reinstate the CA, which will pass the constitution and form an interim government to hold parliamentary elections.

The dissolution of the legislature has taken away the numerical backing of the Madhesi, Dalit and Janajati leaders for the government, but the strength of the constituency they represent in the streets is still untested. President Ram Baran Yadav, who has so far played his cards close to his chest is under pressure from the opposition to play an active role in ending the deadlock. But Yadav knows this will put his office on a collision course with the government which could set a bad precedence and invite further instability.

The president's political adviser, Rajendra Dahal, told me last week there

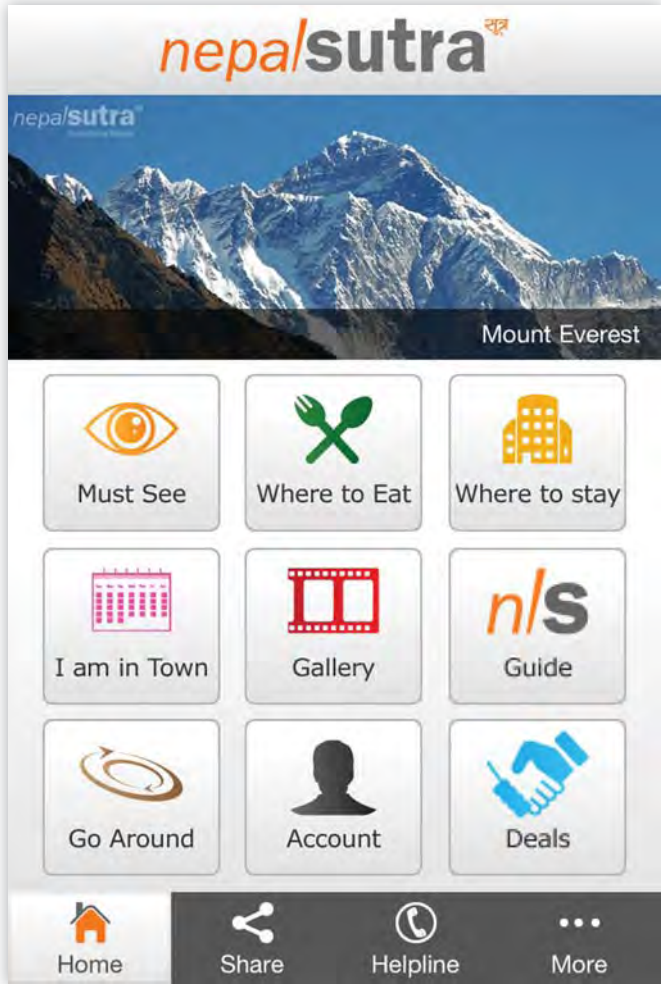
is no constitutional basis for the president to intervene in executive matters, and the most he can do is appeal to the parties to forge a consensus which he has done on more than one occasion.

For the first time in the history of this nation, an elected assembly had given the Madhesi, Janajatis and Dalits direct access to state power from where they could rewrite their political destiny. But now that the house has been dissolved, the current coalition seems to be in no particular hurry to yield power.

Constitutionally, the government has the mandate to hold elections and cannot be challenged until then. But for the sake of stability, and to show statesmanship, Bhattarai should begin serious negotiations on forming a government of national unity. Like nature, nations also abhor a vacuum.

More than just mountains

An online travel portal offers a unique look into everything Nepali



ON THE GO: A view of Nepal Sutra's iPhone app, which offers details on events, restaurants, hotels and other useful information. The app is synced with maps and contact information of the chosen location.

The internet is overloaded with information on Nepal, but the materials are usually scattered, inadequate and even outdated in some cases. Now you can log on to www.nepalsutra.com and find up-to-date information on just about everything a traveller would like to know about Nepal.

"We wanted to offer a one-stop tourism portal that will help bridge the gap between travellers and Nepali tourism enthusiasts," says Sunil Sharma, Managing Director of Nepal Sutra.

Travellers interested in Nepal can browse the site for hotels, tour packages and flight information and book their rooms and itineraries. Nepal Sutra also helps them find travel buddies, and tells them about places to visit, events, restaurants and shops that offer good deals. Even after they leave, visitors can remain involved by reviewing and rating their experiences and interacting with fellow travellers.

The site also features options for "social travellers" who want to volunteer by providing a list of credible social organisations. The company's expert segment includes founder of Nepal Wireless Networking Project, Mahabir Pun and mountaineer Apa Sherpa.

Live since April, the site receives over 300 hits per day, with top three users from Nepal, the US and the UK. Initially, vendors were not very eager to be listed on Nepal Sutra, but there are now more than 80 shops and businesses and the list keeps growing everyday. "We feature businesses of all sizes and prices and are trying to focus on small hotels and organisations that don't have independent online platforms," says Sharma. Nepal Sutra's team will head to Pokhara soon where over 50 businesses have shown interest in being profiled on the site.

"I listed my hotel because the concept really impressed me," says Sabin Shrestha of Heritage Hotel in Bhaktapur. "Usually only foreign websites provide such booking services so it's good to have a local platform. We are already seeing positive results."

The most innovative aspect of Nepal Sutra is that it has developed its own iPhone application, allowing not just tourists but even locals to find information about events in town or restaurants, complete with maps and contact info while they are on the move. Already, the app has over 1,300 users. The company is in the process of developing an app for Android phones as well.

"We hope to start a new trend," says Sharma. "Nepal Sutra is a platform to collectively market Nepal, and everything Nepali."

BIZ BRIEFS

Football fun

Chevrolet, the official partner of Manchester United, will give away 1.5 million footballs over the next three years. These footballs will be distributed in impoverished areas, conflict zones and refugee camps.

More winners

Pepsi announced 12 lucky winners of its 'Drink N' Drive' campaign for week two and week three. The campaign which will run until 29 July will give away a Suzuki Alto car as the grand prize.

Luck on wheels

Sykar Trading, the sole distributor of Honda Motorcycles in Nepal, has announced Qut Buddin Sheikh from Chanai, Kapilbastu as the winner of the CBR 250R models scheme. Sheikh who was chosen through a lucky draw will be awarded a special Honda Racing tri-colour CBR 250R.

1000 and counting

The number of Ford vehicles has reached 1,000 only 19 months after the company began operations in Nepal. To mark this milestone, Ford is offering free servicing and check up camps from 26 June to 3 July.

Flying high

Qatar Airways has introduced special economy and business class return fares from Kathmandu to various destinations. The sales are valid until 1 July and travel is valid from 10 July to 17 October.

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Banking on cell phones

Financial institutions should piggyback on Nepal's high mobile penetration rate



MY TWO PAISA
Paavan Mathema

Even after relentless expansion of branches, only 28 per cent of households in Nepal have access to bank accounts. Compare this number to the mobile penetration rate which stands at 55.40 per cent, with spread across 75 districts. It's time financial institutions understood the opportunities this difference represents, and move forward with mobile banking (m-banking).

With innovative features and applications, especially in smartphones, there is little that a cellphone can't be used for. A mobile is not just a telephone service, but a portable digital companion that informs and entertains. Due to its universal reach and cost-effective technology, the device is being looked upon as an efficient tool for financial inclusion.

M-banking technologies let customers access their accounts to conduct a host of financial transactions and inquiries. In addition to basic services such as providing account information, m-banking allows real-time



transactions through mobile phones. Around the world, m-banking has not only made "anywhere, anytime, anyhow" services possible, but it has become a necessity in today's competitive market.

But banks here are still obsessed with physically expanding their branches, and have limited themselves to sending text alerts. Only a few like Kumari Bank and Laxmi Bank have started providing full m-banking services.

Nepal now has one of

the highest growth rates for mobile penetration with large geographical coverage. Furthermore, the central bank recently introduced regulations that cover e-commerce and m-banking. Financial institutions should cash in on this new channel to expand their customer base and enhance loyalty. Some may consider m-banking an added expense, but it has the potential to boost revenues by decreasing transaction costs.

Such technology can be used

ON HAND: Bal Ram Shrestha (centre), a Laxmi Bank m-banking agent in Dolalghat, Sindhupalchowk interacts with clients using Hello Paisa.

most successfully in rural and geographically remote areas where it is hard for banks to have a physical presence. With m-banking agents, families can receive cash directly from abroad and won't have to walk for days in search of bank outlets. Pensioners will be able to get their money in the

comfort of their homes. Women won't have to travel for hours to settle their microfinance loan payments. And paying utility bills will not cost a paisa in travel expenses.

Of course, receiving money through mobiles will only be valuable if customers can use it to make payments as well. This requires an integrated network of financial institutions, telecom operators, merchants and utility service providers that enable transactions through mobile phones. Shared m-banking platforms, such as the recently introduced Hello Paisa are being developed locally to enable inter-operability of all stakeholders.

Tapping into the mobiles of the unbanked population is certainly more economical and effective than a brick and mortar expansion for banks. Global financial institutions are tilting towards offering service that is fast, convenient and available on the move. Now that they have the technology to be on the fingertips of their clients, why not take the step?

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Leapfrogging with phone cash, #516

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The freedom to sing

CITRA DYAH PRASTUTI
in RANGOON

After decades of military dictatorship, the Burmese girl band Me N Ma Girls is taking full advantage of saying, and singing, what they think. The five young and talented women have broken new ground not just in Burma but also hit the international musical scene.

"Earlier, we could only write

love songs and sad songs," says band member Hitke Hitke, "now the laws have changed and we can write songs about politics, and we say everything we like."

The band came together in 2010 when Australian dancer Nikki May decided to help form a Burmese version of the British pop group Spice Girls, and organised auditions. At the time they were known as The Tiger Girls, and only performed cover songs.

Wanting to produce their own material, they split with

their producer last year and started up Me N Ma Girls with Nikki May as manager. The group's name is a play on words – in English meaning 'me and my girls', which also sounds like the other name for Burma, Myanmar.

Last December they released their first album titled *Minga Lar Par* (Welcome) and instantly captured international media attention with their performances. The band is more popular internationally than in Burma.

"In our country, people like white skin and beautiful girls, we are dark-skinned and not beautiful enough," says Hitke laughing, "but we can sing beautifully."

There's obviously more to these girls than singing and dancing. Hitke Hitke studied computer science while Cha Cha holds a bachelor's degree in zoology. Ah Moon studied Russian, Wai Hnin Khaing is a chemistry graduate and Kimmy moved from Burma's poorest Chin state to Rangoon to study mathematics.

All five band members are from different parts of the

country and follow different religions. Ah Moon comes from Kachin state, but she says she wants to appeal to a broader audience.

"When I write, I feel like all the other girls in the world. When I write a political song, I feel like rest of the people in Burma, not like a Kachin girl," she explains.

Their new song is called *Come Back Home*, a call to millions of Burmese who fled to escape military repression and poverty. Ah Moon, who co-wrote that song, already has another one lined up for their next album called *War*, which is about the violent conflict that flared up again in her home state of Kachin.

At the forefront of controversial political issues, it hasn't been easy for the band members, all in their early twenties, to convince their families they can survive just by performing.

But Cha Cha says she decided to follow what she loved doing.

"At first my parents did not allow me to have this artist life. My father wants

me to become a business woman, but I'm not interested. I love singing and dancing, so that's why I choose my way. My dream has nearly come true," she says, adding she dreams of going to Hollywood.

And it might no longer be just a dream. The band has been offered the chance to record its next album in Los Angeles.

Me N Ma might be making it big, but off stage they're just girls next door. Cha Cha still has a curfew from her parents to be home before 7 pm, while Ah Moon's father is a Christian priest and her mother, Lu Nan, a housewife. 🇲🇲

This article was first broadcast on Asia Calling, a regional current affairs radio program produced by Indonesia's independent radio news agency KBR68H. www.asiacalling.org

Me N Ma Girls is a Burmese girl band with a mission



nepalitimes.com

Watch music videos
of Me N Ma Girls





And dancing Afghan boys

At a private wedding party in Afghanistan's northern Balkh province, all the guests are male. So is the entertainment.

In the centre of a big circle, a 15-year-old young boy dressed in women's clothes twirls around to the music as guests clap eagerly. It's an ancient tradition at all-male parties called *bacha bazi*. The practice was officially prohibited in Afghanistan because of sexual abuse of some of the boys, but it's on the rise in the post-Taliban period.

Faheem, 18, is another *bacha* or dancing boy from Afghanistan's west. Asking not to use his real name, Faheem explains that he is owned by one of the local warlords as a sex servant.

His father was a carpenter but when he retired, 12-year-old Faheem was expected to support his family. "I used to work in a shop, but Majeed Khan, a warlord and some other people suggested I become a dancing boy so I could make more money," explains Faheem.

"Now Majeed Khan uses me as his *bacha*. Whatever he wants me to do, I do it. He has done everything with me, including things I can't tell you about," he says. Faheem's family knows he is a *bacha* for Majeed Khan, a commander since the country's civil war in the 1990s. Faheem is paid a wage, and he has to do what he is told.



Bilal Siddiquee is the Head of Juveniles and Adults Department at the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission. He says *bacha bazi* is one of the biggest challenges for Afghan youth and children because they're used as objects of entertainment, and for sexual purposes.

"Those who are using the boys are wealthy individuals, government officials, and public figures," he says. "There's very little awareness among our people that this is wrong."

For his part, Faheem wants to quit, and has been telling other boys like him not to do the work.

Gayor Waziri, Kabul

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer of The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan



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EVENTS



COLLISION, artist Binod Pradhan presents a series of paintings which depict nature fused into urban landscapes. 5 June to 30 June, 5.30 pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal



EXHIBITION ON EVEREST, a photography exhibition by Jeff Botz which showcases Mount Everest in its true glory. 6 June to 6 July, 9.30 am to 5pm, Image Ark Studio, Kulimha Tole, Patan, 9813186573

International Night Market, the night bazar is back, this time with fashionable products by M.A.A.U.R., a brand new boutique in town. 27 September, 4.45 pm, Garden of Dreams, Thamel

In Search of Peace, Bhairaj Maharjan depicts various forms of Buddha in his art exhibition. 5 to 30 June, 5.30 pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Babar Mahal

Maya, M. Art Theatre and Sarvanam present Maya, a drama written by Hari Maya Bhetwal. Rs 100 (50 per cent off for students), 15 June to 29 June, 5.30 pm, Sarvanam Theatre, 4438947, www.sarvanam.org

MUSIC

SIGN, Live music by SIGN band every week except Tuesdays and Wednesdays. 7:30 pm onwards, Corner Bar, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. Call 4411818

ASARE MAINAMA, House of Music celebrates the month of Asar with great Nepali bands like Kutumba, Rock Sitar and Rudra. Rs 300, 15, 22, 29 June and 6, 13 July, House of Music, Thamel



NEPFEST IV, Nepfest is set to return to delight music enthusiasts with Decapitated this September. 8 September, 12.45 pm, Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap

DINING



THE HERITAGE, escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta. Thamel

Dechenling, the place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, their pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings. Thamel

Alice, a family-oriented restaurant with amazing food at a reasonable price. Gairidhara, 4429207



BRONCO BILLY, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, make sure to also try their margaritas. Pulchowk, opposite Namaste Supermarket



G CAFÉ, spic and span with a palatable menu, this restaurant is definitely worth the visit. Bouddha

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



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

Dragon Café, enjoy momos, sizzlers and vegetable coins at the most affordable prices. Kumaripati



BENCH BURGER, be it a fish or steak burger, Bench Burger offers many types and tastes to suit your palate. Krishnagalli, Patan

Mike's Breakfast, huge breakfasts and a never-ending supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterises this café, popular among tourists and locals alike. Naxal, 4424303



HANKOOK SARANG, from Bibimbab to Samgyeopsal, Hankook offers a wide range of Korean delicacies at affordable prices. Thamel



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Pyongyang Okryu-Gwan, for the rare taste of North Korean cuisine and hospitality. *Durbar Marg*

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



PASTO VOSTRO, a pretty place with some great pasta. Its bacon wrapped sausages are a must. *Thamel*

Yellow Chili, enjoy renowned chef Sanjeev Kapoor's dishes as this restaurant serves mouthwatering Indian delicacies. *Thapathali*

Chili Bar and Restaurant, from Nepali to European cuisine, this restaurant serves delectable dishes along with a dance floor and happy hour serving some amazing cocktails. *Lakeside, Pokhara*



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

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

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



NEW TUSHITA RESTAURANT, relaxing ambience and good food. Don't miss out on their Penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. *Lazimpat, 44432957*

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SOMEPLACE ELSE

Mojo, Jhamsikhel's newest eatery is a pocket-sized restaurant. With a maximum capacity of 30, Mojo sets out to do everything on a small scale. This includes maintaining a small and manageable menu offering only about ten well-thought out dishes. The bar too, while extremely well-stocked,



PICS: RUBY TUESDAY

MOJO

offers just a handful of classic cocktails like manhattans, martinis and margaritas-subscribing to the true, tried and tested traditional styles of mixology.

I headed there during my lunch hour and was immediately intrigued by the 'Eastern Nepali Dal Bhat Thaali' (Rs 250 inclusive of all taxes). I love my *dal bhat* in all its avatars from the daily home-cooked meals to the Thakali versions to the extravagant platters allegedly akin to those served to the erstwhile royals and now catered to attract the palettes of well paying tourists. East Nepal, West Nepal, north or south, *dal bhat* in all its manifestations will always find a willing eater in me.

So let's deconstruct Mojo's Eastern Nepal thaali. Contrary to the usual oil-dripping Thakali



thalis, little oil and masala are used to cook the curries. The *rayo ko saag* (mustard green) is just mildly tempered with the taste of dry red chilies and is crunchy to the bite. The *bhute ko alu* (fried potato) wedges are flavoured only with cumin seeds and the ground tomato chutney, without which no Nepali meal is complete, has chimping added to it. This tiny herb found in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas has a sharp pungent taste that adds more dimensions to the chutney.

In place of the usual *sandeko gundruk* there is dried Bombay duck *sukuti ko achar* (not a duck, but a lizard fish with a

powerful pungent pong). And of course, there is the rice with thick hot *kalo dal* (black lentils), accompanied by either chicken or pork curry. The pork curry features thick chunks of fat free pork in sauce that is vaguely reminiscent of vindaloo and the chicken curry is well cooked and full of flavours. Besides the meat, you get second and even third helpings and at Rs 250 a person, this meal is definitely a bargain.

I washed this sumptuous meal down with a tall glass of perfectly chilled Coblenzer Märzen. It goes through a longer fermentation process than many other beers and thus benefits by

gaining a roasted almost nutty flavour. It is dark, robust and delicious.

Mojo is the perfect little place to hang out with friends after work and the intimate interiors give it a feel of a neighbourhood pub.

Since Mojo does not serve desserts, I headed to Civil Mall to get my fix of frozen yoghurt served at Choco Berry. Choco Berry opened a fortnight ago and is already on the radar of every food loving denizen of Kathmandu. You can choose your own combinations (my favourites are the kiwi, plain tart and strawberry) and add any number of toppings. It's sweet, tart and above all healthy. Well as healthy as it can be after I added lashings of chocolate sauce to it. But it made me feel healthy and that is all that matters.

Ruby Tuesday

Mojo: on the Jhamsikhel road, opposite St Mary's School gate, enter a little gate and climb a flight of stairs on the left.

Choco Berry: It's on the seventh floor of Civil Mall in Sundhara, on the same floor as the QFX ticket counter.



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Machete



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Graphic violence, blatant sexism, bad words in two different languages, and obvious over-indulgence on the part of the director. These are the superficial elements of the initially seemingly distasteful *Machete* - the latest film by Robert Rodriguez made in 2010 and spawned originally as a trailer connecting *Death Proof* and *Planet Terror*, the *Grindhouse* film-concoction thought up and executed by Quentin Tarantino and Rodriguez respectively in 2007.

A closer look however reveals some surprising things. Rodriguez has always tended, like Tarantino, towards overtly stylised, violent themes. Also like Tarantino though (but a little bit less so) his dialogue though seemingly puerile and almost unnecessary in some action scenes is actually quite clever, wittily tongue in cheek, often punning on dialogue from past similar films that have now become classics, and very often with a surprising underlying political sarcasm.

Machete is based on the eponymous character played by the great, but undersold Danny Trejo - a dangerous looking man, with scars on his face and deadly skills with blades of all varieties. Initially a federal agent in Mexico, Machete is caught in a deadly drug raid when his superior officer turns on him and hands him over to Torres a drug-lord played by a now very wide girthed Steven Seagal. Torres kills Machete's family and leaves him for dead.

Fast forward a few years and Machete has crossed the border into Texas and is scrounging a living as a day-labourer.



As films go, *Machete* simultaneously catches the eye of Luz (played by the always feisty Michelle Rodriguez) who runs a taco truck that feeds the labourers and who might also have a secret alter ego identity as "She" (punning on Che Guevara) - a vigilante that protects the rights of illegal immigrants; Jessica Alba's slightly banal Immigration Officer, Sartana, becomes interested in him and runs a trace on him; and finally when goaded into a fight (which he wins easily) he is recruited by a certain Michael Booth (played by Jeff Fahey) to assassinate the Texas Senator John MacLaughlin (Robert De Niro) who is campaigning on the promise of stopping immigration from Mexico by building an electrified fence along the border.

Needless to say, everything is connected. Booth is actually MacLaughlin's aide, and has set up the assassination attempt to boost the Senator's political chances. Machete is implicated as the Mexican who tried to commit the "hate crime" and goes on the run where he's helped by an underground network of immigrants and hidden by Luz for a while.

Through the various ludicrous but hilarious twists and turns, Machete gets his revenge, the Mexicans get their justice, and the evil Texan white man hegemony is shattered - all with the help of some great cameos by Don Johnson and, surprise, Lindsay Lohan as the nymphomaniac daughter of Booth who appears, unforgettably, in the final scenes wearing a nun's habit and carrying a shotgun.

I won't deny that *Machete* glorifies violence, and though it has political edges, it doesn't dignify its message in any way. Still, at the risk of sounding terribly uncritical - sometimes a film can be just "fun" and even though it has its weaknesses - it can be more than worth watching just for the pure ridiculous joy of watching a talented director letting it all out. 🇺🇸

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

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer



Chikungunya



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Since the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) has decided to conduct a surveillance in Kathmandu on chikungunya, a strange-sounding viral illness, it is relevant to find out more about this disease. Clearly even healthcare experts in Kathmandu do not know much about this 'new' illness.

Chikungunya is a viral illness that is closely related to the dengue virus which is known to be present in Kathmandu. Both are transmitted by the vector mosquito (*Aedes Aegypti*) and result in a similar set of symptoms.

The patient complains of fever, headache, back pain along with skin rash. A remarkable distinction between chikungunya and dengue fever is the inflammation (arthritis) of small joints of the hands which is usually not found in dengue fever.

For chikungunya, as in dengue, there is no specific treatment, only paracetamol and other symptomatic treatment. There is also no vaccine available. Protective clothing, use of insect repellents (odomas) and other measures to prevent daytime mosquito bites (as opposed to nighttime mosquito bites for malaria transmission) are important



prevention methods. Public health measures like not letting water collect in used tyres, flower pots, and plastic containers where mosquitoes breed are also vital. The good news is that in most instances like dengue fever, this disease is self-limiting and most people recover.

Both dengue and chikungunya may be brought

to Kathmandu by large number of migrant workers and others from the Tarai (where both dengue and chikungunya are thought to be more prevalent). The specific mosquito vectors are in plentiful supply there, and when people afflicted with the disease come to the Valley, the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito enjoys a hearty blood meal including the virus from them. The same mosquito then happily bites another victim and transmits the virus.

With the Kathmandu surveillance, MoHP is trying to determine the extent of the problem as the stage is set for both specific mosquitoes and the virus to create outbreaks. This preemptive approach (surveillance and follow up public health measures) of the ministry has to be lauded because our health institutions are usually known to simply respond to health crises.

Finally, the emergence of chikungunya is a good example of travellers from rich countries being sentinels for diseases from poor countries. Since 2005, thousands of travellers from South Asia have been afflicted with this disease, and as a result, investigators in well-resourced countries were able to study and provide information about this emerging illness. 🇺🇸

WEEKEND WEATHER

The monsoon is settling down nicely into its normal rhythm despite its slightly weak and late start. The Bay of Bengal arm of the southwest monsoon is holding sway, and the rain will be intermittent during the day in the Valley with more sustained precipitation on the hills of the rim and most of it will be falling at night. There is a major low pressure trough building up in the Bay but that may take about a week to get to us. When that arrives the rains will be more relentless and last several days.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
31-19	30-20	30-19



BIKRAM RAI

WELCOME BACK: PM Baburam Bhattarai arrives in Kathmandu on Monday after his trip to Brazil to attend Rio+20, the UN Conference on sustainable development, amid protests from various political parties.



BIKRAM RAI

MATCHING MATCHING: The newly formed CPN-Maoist led by Mohan Baidya (centre) sits for its first central committee meeting at the office of Newa State Committee in Lalitpur on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

DOCTOR'S CALL: Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre captures street dogs from Basantapur on Tuesday. The dogs are treated for rabies and other diseases and then released.



BIKRAM RAI

WATER PROOF: A conductor spreads plastic on cargo on a passenger bus in Kalanki station, Kathmandu, on Tuesday evening after a sudden rainfall.



PICS: ANURAG ACHARYA

ANURAG ACHARYA

Dharmalal Maharjan, 47 has taken a week off from his air-conditioned office in Nepal Telecom. But he is not going on a vacation. Instead, the tech-savvy executive has been toiling all day in the field in Dhapakhel, Lalitpur, barely 10 km from his office. “Every year I take a leave from my office during the monsoon to plant rice paddy,” says the sixth grade assistant engineer who was supervising more than a dozen men and women in the field.

Maharjan’s son is a civil engineer and daughter-in-law is an architect. The entire family is technician by profession, “but I am a farmer’s son”, he told *Nepali Times* proudly. At a time when land prices have skyrocketed in the area and many are selling their lands to builders, Maharjan is not willing to let go of his rural roots.



“I get to eat what I grow with my own hands. It’s healthy and gives me immense satisfaction,” says the farmer whose one hectare land is among the few green patches in a sea of concrete structures.

Today, Dhapakhel is one of the fastest growing residential areas in the Valley. The expansion of the city beyond Ring Road has changed the landscape dramatically with blacktopped road networks running through plots of farmlands, giving it a semi-

urban look. But many residents are uncomfortable with the speed of urbanisation.

“It’s sad to see our clean, green village transforming into a concrete jungle,” says Keshab Dongol who runs a local dairy shop. Dongol, along with his 60-year-old mother, wife and beautician sister, were busy planting rice when we met them. His mother is proud her son is not running after money and has kept the land his father and grandfathers toiled upon. “We have a small plot of land,

Agriculture in an urban culture

Despite assimilating into city life, former farmers are not ready to let go of their rural roots


but it keeps me attached to my history,” he says.

The high productivity of Dhapakhel’s soil can provide farmers with healthy yield. After investing around Rs 80,000, Maharjan managed to harvest 7,000 kg of rice last year which earned him a profit of Rs 200,000. “I hope the prices don’t fall this year,” he chuckles as he invites us to visit his wife’s dairy farm which supplements their farm earnings.

But the return on investment


is not encouraging enough for small farmers like Dongol to sustain themselves only through agriculture. Lack of farm help, expensive fertilisers and machineries, coupled with real estate agents and brick kiln owners willing to pay premium price, mean that only those who want to keep their family legacy alive are holding on to their lands. Says Dongol: “It’s our love for farming and our attachment with this land that keeps us going.” 🇳🇵

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NEEDLE OR PENCIL?
Children from Sarlahi work as jari embroiders in Thankot.

A jari embroider attends a non-formal education class in Naradevi (right).



Cheated of their

There are fewer Nepali boys and girls working, but the ones who do are in dangerous occupations

BHRIKUTI RAI

Every day Bikash gets out of his makeshift bed at 5 am and can't get back till late at night. The eight-year-old came to Kathmandu from Morang and has been working at this

restaurant in Baneswor for the past six months. With half-opened eyes, which makes it seem like he is sleep-walking, Bikash drags himself towards the kitchen where his scrawny little hands dip a tattered towel in a bucket of water.

"It's difficult especially in winter but I have been

working since I was six," he tells a visitor matter-of-factly, and with a swagger mature for his age. Then he goes back to mopping the restaurant floor.

There are an estimated 1.5 million Nepali child workers like Bikash between 5-17 years. Even though

the minimum legal age of employment in Nepal is 14, children as young as six can be seen working in roadside restaurants, factories, offices, and even in homes.

"Poverty and lack of opportunities are driving many families to use children as safety nets and sending them out to earn without caring about the physical and psychological dangers involved," says Helen Sherpa of World Education, which has been working on educational projects to combat child labour in Nepal.

Although the number of child workers under-14 has dropped from a staggering 2.6 million ten years ago, surveys show there has been an alarming rise in the number of children working in hazardous environments like mines, brick kilns, factories and entertainment industries.

Embroidery factories that make jari fabric, dance bars, massage parlours and cabin restaurants have become new hotspots for the exploitation and abuse of child workers in Nepal.

"Eleven to twelve year old girls are working in dance bars and restaurants," says Pramesh Pradhan of Change Nepal, which works with women and children in the 'entertainment business'. "These days Nepali girls are smuggled not just to India but also within the country. There has been a surge of young girls forced into commercial sex work."

After the clampdown on jari factories in India, many young

RIGHT TOOLS: A child miner in Dhading is now enrolled in a school.



PICS: DAVID DUCHEMIN





PICS: H SHERPA



HEAVY LOAD: A former worker at a brick kiln in Sunsari has resumed her studies.



PICS: DAVID DUCHEMIN

childhood

Indian boys and girls have been found in fabric factories across Nepal. Children as young as five are forced to work up to 14 hours a day because they are docile and have nimble fingers. Although the government had pledged to end all forms of child labour by 2014 it was revised in 2010 and extended until 2020 due to the political instability. "The issue of child labour had to take a back seat, because of the turmoil in the country. But now we are committed to end the

worst forms of child labour in the next four years and all child labour by 2020," says Krishna Prasad Dawadi, Under Secretary at the Ministry of Labour and Employment. However, child rights activists believe that legislation alone will not be enough, there has to be job opportunities for adults so the children don't have to work. Says Madhav Pradhan of Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), a children's organisation that runs a free helpline and carries rescues children from risky working

environments: "Protecting former child labourers is important and so is making sure parents are earning enough so that they don't make their children work, all this takes time." Unfortunately for hundreds of thousands of children like Bikash, time has passed them by, and they will never enjoy childhood. 🇳🇵

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Mind the children, #512
Kathmandu kids, #483

Bonded child labourer to CA member



SUNIR PANDEY

Shanta Chaudhary, 32, former SCA member, was addressing a conference on child labour earlier this month, speaking confidently about the need to end the exploitation of children. But when she started speaking about her own past, she broke down and wept. Chaudhary was forced to become a kamlari (girl-child indentured labourer) when she was eight. She remembers her landlord's family kicking and taunting her mercilessly for the slightest mistakes. "I could bear the physical pain," Chaudhary sobbed, "but what I could not bear was not being able to see my parents." The ridicule she faced as a child inspired her to struggle against bonded labour. Her own family was not very supportive because they thought rebelling against the system

would take away their only means of livelihood. Chaudhary, her parents and her six sisters continued working as bonded labourers long after it was made illegal. "We knew nothing else but farming and since we didn't own any land we had to work for the landlords as bonded labourers," she explains. Chaudhary's journey from a kamlari to lawmaker in the CA was a long and difficult one. Even after she came to Kathmandu and sat in the Constituent Assembly, she faced contempt from other representatives and the media because she could not read and write. But she taught herself not just to write, but also to read technical papers at the Natural Resources Committee which she chaired. Chaudhary whose husband Harsha Lal also worked as a kamaiya has been

her strongest support, taking care of their two children while she was busy trying to complete Nepal's new constitution. Now that she is free from her CA duties, she plans on finishing her autobiography by the end of this year. "We fought against bonded labour so that our sons and daughters wouldn't have to go through the suffering we experienced. But there are still many young children who are being robbed of their childhood," she says, "the first step is for politicians to practice what they preach and not use underage domestic help in their own homes."

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A costly freedom for Kamlaris, #441
Kamlaris in Dang, #315

“Unity is possible only if Prachanda mends his ways”



Interview with Netra Bikram Chand, secretary of the newly formed CPN-Maoists in *Kantipur*, 24 June

कान्तिपुर

How do you justify the breakup of the party?
Comrade Prachanda and Baburam digressed from the core values and objectives of the Maoist party. We formed a new party to give continuity to our ideals.

When do you think the establishment began drifting away?
We noticed a visible change right after the monarchy was abolished. We raised the issue of the establishment moving away from the party's goals during our meeting in Balaju in 2006. The establishment stopped practicing what they preached. Living like millionaires in mansions while talking about the welfare of proletariats didn't make sense.

The new party doesn't seem to have a clear plan for the future. Is another people's war or revolt on the cards?
A pure parliamentary system is unacceptable to us, because it has clearly failed to guarantee people's rights. The system needs to be rebuilt. However, the form of struggle is not as important as the aim. Our sole objective is to ensure that all Nepalis have equal rights and make sure the PLA is integrated into the Nepal Army in a dignified manner. If these things fall into place, there is no need for a revolt. We are being blamed for all the wrong reasons.

Lust for power is thought to be responsible for the split and there are rumours that you wanted the post of general secretary.
Despite our personal friendships, there were major ideological differences within the party. How can you call that a fight for power? We could have easily enjoyed the perks of our counterparts, but we refrained. I wanted to change the country for the better and I still believe I can. People shouldn't have problems with my aspirations. Without aspirations, one cannot accomplish anything. I feel hurt when people wrongly accuse me of being power hungry.

Is there still a possibility of reuniting with the establishment?
Transformation comes first and then comes unity. We never raised questions over the leadership, but we had hoped chairman Dahal would mend his ways. If he is willing to change, unity is possible.

Are you willing to be part of a national unity government, when it is formed?
We will make a decision depending on the future situation. If an interim government is formed after a successful round-table meeting then we will join the government. However, we are still undecided on this matter.

Dahal's firm stance on ethnic federalism has been blamed for failure to draft the constitution. Is this true?
No. If that was the case then two thirds of the CA would have easily passed ethnicity-based federalism.



BIKRAM RAI

United at heart

Phurpa Tamang in *Nagarik*, 25 June

नागरिक

Three days before the constitution deadline, my 72-year-old mother Nhimalthamu Tamang passed away at Nepal Medical College in Jorpati. After performing her last rites according to Buddhist tradition, her body was taken to Swayambhu on the back of a minivan.
On the way to Swayambhu our vehicle was stuck in a traffic jam in Chabahil. When I looked outside, I noticed a traffic police paying respect to my deceased mother. Soon I saw that everyone who passed by our van stopped for a while and paid respect to my mother's lifeless body. From Chabahil we drove past Maharajgunj, Balaju and Banasthali before finally reaching Swayambhu and all along the way I witnessed the same thing. The strangers who bowed their heads were clearly Hindu Brahmins and Khas. Yet, irrespective of their castes, they paid their respects.
I felt the thread that unites us as Nepalis is still strong. I had feared the new constitution would divide the country along ethnic lines. But this incident restored my faith in Nepal's social harmony and unity.

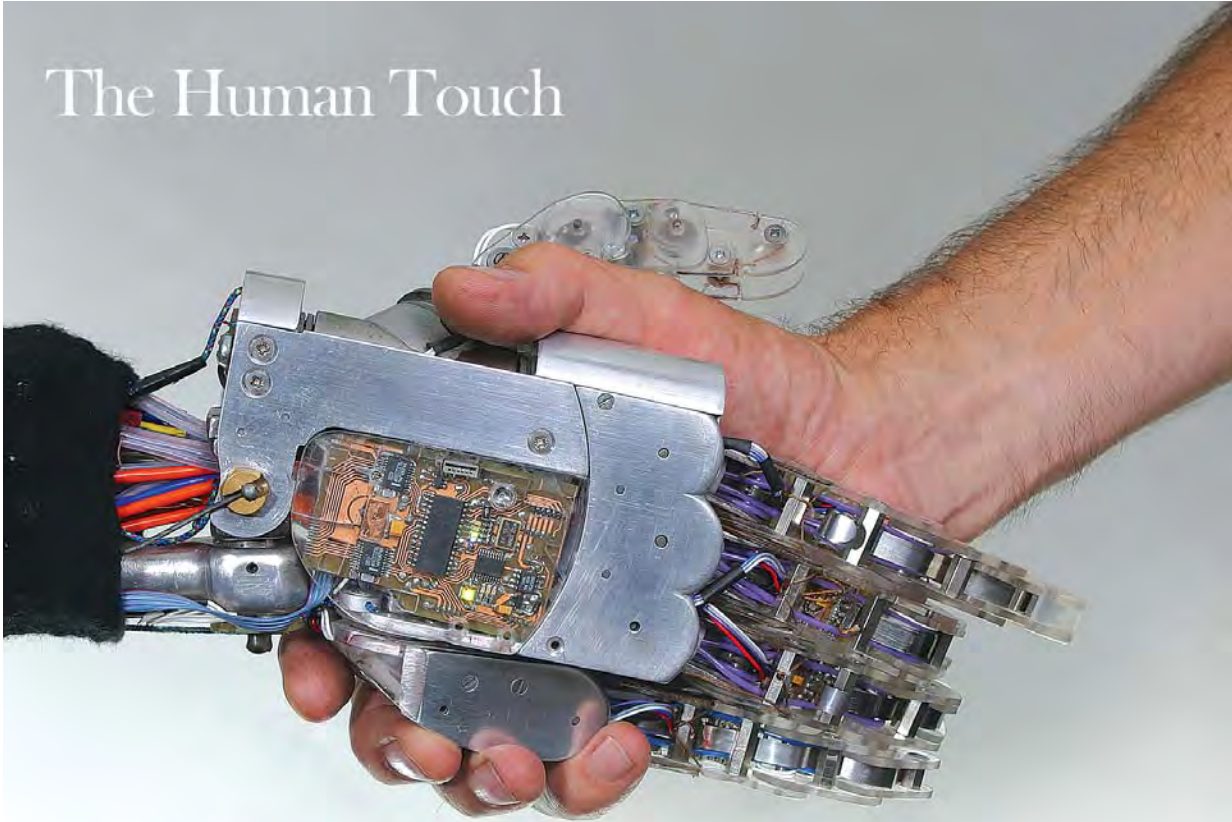
Drowned by the state

Upendra Lamichhane, *Nagarik*, 25 June

नागरिक

Chandrika Rai, a landless squatter who lives on the banks of the Bagmati is angry at the government for tearing down houses at the UN park just before monsoon. Her makeshift hut is swamped with water after the roof gave in. All the children's books are damaged and her family can no longer use the bed and blankets. "My children have nowhere to sleep and we are spending our nights under an umbrella inside our rooms," says Rai who works as a labourer in Kathmandu.
After the government cleared illegal settlements along the Bagmati in May, Prime Minister Bhattarai had promised alternative housing for the settlers. Apart from a few foreign NGOs who distribute supplies from time to time, the state has neither provided any compensation or accommodation for the settlers. "Bhattarai made grand speeches, but has failed to deliver on his promises. How will our children go to school with spoiled books and wet uniforms?" fumes Phulmaya Pariyar, another squatter.

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कान्तिपुर Abin Shrestha in *Kantipur*, 25 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“It is impossible to accept federalism given Nepal's geopolitical situation.”

CPN (UML) leader Bhim Rawal quoted in *Rajdhani*, 24 June

Soldiering on

Retired Gurkhas have residency rights, but fulfilling the 'British dream' has been extremely challenging

BADRI PAUDYAL in ALDERSHOT

When visitors get off the train at Aldershot, they are greeted with a memorial that reads "proud to be the home of the British Army". Located 60 kms south-west of London, Aldershot is home to 9,000 Gurkha Army veterans and their families, who make up almost 10 per cent of the town's population. 3000 more reside in nearby Farnborough. Towns like Reading, Plumstead and Wembley which are closer to London also have comparable Gurkha population.

Many families moved to the UK after May 2009's landmark ruling granted residency rights to Gurkhas who retired before 1997, and who had served at least four years in the British Army, along with their wives and children under 18.

Despite respectable and relatively comfortable lives in Nepal, they left their homes, relatives and friends to resettle in England in hopes of better state benefits, free healthcare, greater savings and educational and employment opportunities for their children.

Ex-Gurkha servicemen have struggled for years to receive equal pension, allowance, and citizenship rights as their British counterparts. However, even after winning important legal battles, their quality of life remains poor. Fulfilling the 'British dream' has been especially difficult for older veterans and their wives.

Language barrier, lack of workplace skills and qualifications, along with diminishing physical abilities put elderly couples in an extremely vulnerable state. Although the British government permits some veterans to bring their 18-plus children under 'special circumstances' or after winning court cases, most parents over 60 years migrate on their own. Living without

children or caretakers becomes their biggest challenge.

"We got our rights, but have no one to look after us. We are helpless," says 74-year-old Bhim Bahadur Gurung from Thulo Pelkachaur in Syangja district who came to the UK 18 months ago with his wife Lalmaya. The Gurungs had to leave behind their two daughters and a son in Nepal because they were over 18.

Whenever Bhim Bahadur and Lalmaya visit hospitals, the doctors simply prescribe medicines and send them off. Since they don't speak English and don't have a caretaker, they are unable to explain their problems and are denied proper care. "We have to pay extra to hire a translator. If we had our children or a relative, our lives would be easier," says Lalmaya.

83-year-old Surdhoj Rai and his wife Phangla from Khadbari, Sankhuwasabha share a similar story. Rai suffers from a fractured back and poor eyesight, but he can't describe his pain to the doctors. When Phangla falls sick, there is no one to cook and they sleep on empty stomachs. They have five children back in Nepal.

Another father of five, Jeet Bahadur Sunuwar who is originally from Ramechhap district and owns a house in Kathmandu is a diabetes, blood pressure and arthritis patient and is confined to his wheelchair most of the time. His wife Lalmaya is recovering from breast cancer operation and is also not fully healthy. "There is no use giving us rights if our children don't get the same rights as well," says Lalmaya Sunuwar.

There are numerous couples in Aldershot like Gurungs, Rais and Sunuwar who have no one to turn to in case of emergency. Although there are plenty of organisations dedicated to the welfare of retired Gurkhas, none have paid much attention to the plight of elderly veterans and their demands to bring adult children have been largely ignored.

Krishna Kumar Rai, Chairman of Gurkha Army



ON OUR OWN: Phangla and Surdhoj Rai (front, L-R) taking an evening stroll in the neighbourhood with their friends Bhim Bahadur, Bam Bahadur and Lalmaya Gurung (above).

Lalmaya Sunuwar helping her husband Jeet Bahadur with his jacket (right).

Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) says his agency helps out elderly veterans by accompanying them to banks, hospitals and government offices. GAESO, which has brought the largest number of veterans to the UK, also offers two-hour English classes once a week. However, these efforts are not adequate considering the large number of ageing Gurkhas.

"We recently filed a case against the government and are fighting for the rights of veterans to bring children over 18 with them," says Rai.

Prakash Gurung, public relations officer at British Gurkha Welfare Society (BGWS), however, argues that instead of fighting for the rights of residency of children over 18, ex-Gurkhas should demand for pension that is on par with other British servicemen.

"If Gurkhas received as high a pension, most would not even migrate to the UK. This way the host government wouldn't have to bear additional responsibilities," he explains. The case for equal pension is currently in the European court.

Meanwhile, Gyan Raj Rai of United British Gurkhas Ex-Servicemen's Association insists that the British government compensate Gurkhas who retired before 1997 for all the years they lost fighting for settlement rights and the



PICS: BADRI PAUDYAL

resulting difficulties.

To make matters worse, anti-Gurkha sentiments have been growing in the past few years and Aldershot youth are using Facebook to express their discontent. And it's not just commoners; even local leaders see the arrival of new Gurkha settlers as a burden on their cities' limited resources. Aldershot's Member of Parliament, Gerald Howarth has repeatedly requested the prime minister to spread out the Gurkha population across the country like refugees.

The next five to six years

are going to be tougher for elderly Gurkha couples. As their health deteriorates they will have to be placed in nursing homes, which will put them under greater financial pressure. And the responsibility of performing last rites or taking the body back home will fall solely on the surviving spouse. 🇳🇵

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The Comma Communists strike back

This week, taking the reading public's mental health into account, the Ass will try to desist from making any reference to the Baidya faction splitting off from the Mau Party. But that doesn't mean we are not going to poke fun at the split within the CPN (Matrika). Yes, Matrika the Yadav who claims to represent the original Maoist party has just suffered a vertical split as well between the Gruntled and the Disgruntled factions. This means we will have to update the glossary of Maoist parties that was carried in the last edition of this Backside column with two more Maobaddie parties, taking the total to 22. This is looking increasingly like a mass outbreak of binary fission in a gastric amoeba colony just before an explosive diarrhoea attack.

✂

It was bound to happen sooner or later that the friction developing between BRB and PKD has gone public. After the prime minister changed his mind about stepping down to make way for a unity government, Awesome couldn't hold back any longer. What really gets PKD's goat is that here he is defending



his govt in front of farang envoys, and BRB is off at Ipanema. With no one of any public stature left in the higher echelons of the UML and NC, Com Chhabilal sees Com Laldhoj as his only credible challenger to be the top honcho. The question everyone is asking is: what made the prime minister say one thing before he left for Rio and another thing when he returned? But by calling the parties baying for his resignation "childish" at his airport press conf, the PM may have gone a bit far and insulted the intelligence and common sense of the world's children. If I was a child, I

know I would take umbrage at this uncalled for and ageist remark.

✂

Extra kranti-curry comrades from the Comma Maoists need a place to work and have refused to move out of Paris Hill which is under command of the Hyphen Maoists. One Comma Comrade was overheard telling a Hyphen Comrade: "You take the South Block since you seem to love the sound of it, and we will stick to the northern part of the building." This is called the Two-Parties-One-Headquarter system of governance, which on the

face of it, seems like a good way to save money. But, irked by speculation about the stature of their rump party, the Comma Communists are doing all they can to promote themselves as an important political force. They have made the right moves by calling on the Prez and trying to get him to declare them the third largest force and demote the Madhesi Morcha to the status of a regional party.

✂

Speaking of Shit-all Nibas, the Ass doesn't envy the Prez who has to meet an endless stream of political wannabes. The Eh-maleys come to pester him to kick BRB out of office, the Kangresis come to push for a govt under their leadership, Kiran Kaka comes to say hi, BRB pops in after Rio to brief him on what Mohan Man told him in Rio, then PKD insists on talking about sidelining BRB. And when that doesn't work, they all send the president SMSs at ungodly hours. The president is thinking of getting a new SIM card so they'll leave him alone.

✂

If you are among hundreds in KTM who this week received an email from the CoAS saying his wife had an accident and

needed 2,000 pounds for treatment at a hospital in the UK and called him to commiserate, you probably know by now that it was a spam. In any case, as in-law of the owner of a supermarket chain, the Jarsap is not exactly hard up.

✂

The excitement was getting too much to bear for Lord Ram Chandra and he had to go and have his heart examined. Next time it may be his head. Anyway, Poudel Baje is hale and hearty again and all set to promote himself as the next PM. You have to give it to the guy for sheer persistence.

✂

This intelligence just in: the head of Nepal Television was removed ostensibly because he broadcast an opposition rally. But the real reason, it seems, was because the Disinformation Minister convinced BRB that he had to install a Madhesi as chief otherwise his party would pull out of govt. Prime minister must have thought: "They are already calling me a dictator, so might as well act like one."



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