

# NEPALI Times

#676

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## FRESH AIR

Kathmandu can learn from the way Mexico City has cleaned up its air pollution problem, says Arnico Panday.

PAGE 16-17

## 6 weeks to go

The November elections is being held in a time of uncertainty, with neither the excitement nor the preparation that the country saw in 2008. It is as if the political parties ran out of excuses to keep postponing polls and have no alternative but to see it through. The CPN-M, despite its tough talk of shutdowns and protests, risks being marginalised.

The NC and UML now think elections are the only

way to shorten the lifespan of the chief justice-led interim electoral council. The UCPN (M) is worried about the effect its split will have on the result and would have liked to put the polls off. Sensing the unfavourable mood in the midhills, the party is concentrating in the Tarai, especially districts with large concentrations of hill settlers. The fragmented parties representing the Madhes are so hopelessly split that they may

end up cancelling each other out in many constituencies. The four have a tacit understanding not to let their most senior leaders lose.

Among the parties, the UML has fielded the most new faces. The NC tried, but just couldn't balance pressure from powerful party figures. The UCPN (M) was so desperate for candidates, it gave an NC defector a ticket overnight. All the parties have had a hard time finding women candidates to fill their quotas and none of them have more than 12 per cent female candidates. An NC aspirant who came to file his nomination, ended up having to give his seat to his wife. 🇳🇵



DIWAKAR CHETTRI



# HYDROPOWER AND MANPOWER

Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf are suddenly in the news again for all the wrong reasons. The exploitation, harassment, and appalling working conditions of Nepali labourers abroad is nothing new to people back home. The government knows it, the bureaucracy is fully aware, the Foreign Ministry and our missions in the Gulf know the extent of the problem, the Nepali media has investigated the chronic abuse and mistreatment of our workers.

Yet it took an investigative report in *The Guardian* linking the fatally dangerous slave-like working conditions of Nepali workers engaged in the construction of the 2022 World Cup to bring it to the world's attention last week.

For Nepalis who have become inured to the suffering of fellow citizens with stories every day of recruiters duping workers, of young women sexually abused and beaten by employers, *The Guardian* report was nothing new. Nepalis have become numb reading about our own people being forced to endure such extreme hardship, suffering, and death.

This is not a novel narrative. Nepalis have been migrating to Assam, Burma, and northern India for centuries, fleeing indebtedness, discrimination, and lack of prospects back home. Just as the outrageous lack of outrage over the trafficking of Nepali girls to brothels in India perpetuated the practice, so has the inertia and apathy about an uncaring state and ruthless recruiting agencies over this widespread prevalence of modern-day slavery allowed it to continue and grow.

So far both governments are in denial and have refuted allegations of bonded labour. The Nepal government doesn't want to jeopardise lucrative remittances from the estimated 500,000 Nepalis in Qatar and the Qataris themselves have been on damage control mode to salvage their World Cup.

Both hope that, with time, the fuss will blow over. We don't expect our own government to do much, but



KUNDA DIXIT

## These two sectors are proof of the spectacular governance failure of Nepal's rulers

the international media attention on the mistreatment of Nepali workers could spur Gulf states to put safeguards and labour protection laws in place. However, it goes without saying that the ultimate responsibility to take care of our citizens is on us, especially since much of the worst cruelty and abuse Nepalis suffer is perpetrated by Nepali officials and the middlemen who bribe them to look the other way.

Of the many examples of governance failure we see around us, perhaps the most striking is the way we have mismanaged our two most important resources: manpower and hydropower. We are headed to another winter with daily 14 hour power cuts and the most shocking thing is that it is happening despite everyone in government being fully aware for the past 10 years as the power crisis got worse.

A new constitution, general and local elections to vote

in more accountable governments would be the answers to these woes. But the candidate lists of the parties that were announced this week show that the November election is already rigged so that none of the top leaders of the four main parties will lose. We can be sure it will be the same failed faces that will dominate the new Constituent Assembly and you can almost predict that they will get stuck on the same issues as last time.

As long as the politics is fluid, there will be no investment. No new investment means no new jobs. No jobs means continued outmigration. One short term measure is to urgently begin vocational schools to teach graduates basic skills and trades. That way, they can be self-employed or employ others at home, or if they do go abroad, they can earn more.

We boast that the \$4 billion in remittances from the estimated three million Nepalis working in India and overseas props up our economy. But most of that is spent on imports or on basic survival. An investigation in this paper two weeks ago showed widespread malfeasance and extortion of overseas workers with airport officials collecting and distributing among themselves an estimated Rs 2 million in bribes from the 2,200 Nepalis flying out or in every day. The statistics break down into heart-wrenching stories of abuse and deceit, with an average of four Nepalis every day returning home in coffins.

There are steps the government can take right away without waiting for elections or a new constitution: reduce the cost of migration for workers by cracking down on bribery and exploitation by recruiters and immigration, prepare them for higher earnings by skills-based training before they go, and reduce the rate of official remittance transfer.

This will buy us time (and money) until we fix our politics and ensure that there is enough work on home soil for Nepalis so they don't have to die in some godforsaken desert.

### ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

#### TORPOR AND TURPITUDE

With the CA back to 601 members, I don't see how the circus of the last five years will stop ('Torpor and turpitude', Editorial, #675). If there is one thing we should have learned from the last CA, it is that having so many PR seats lends itself to the kind of instability and chaos that has plagued the country since Jana Andolan II. But that lesson just got tossed out in the interests of political expediency.

Things might change if one ideological alliance comes up with a 2/3rd majority. Anything short of that, even a majority government may not be able to deliver a viable constitution given the tyrannical and anarchic nature of our political minorities. The country will probably limp on from the slow battering it has suffered and our politicians will continue to be subordinated and controlled by foreign powers until such a time when the people start to revolt against the entire political class and their handlers.

Aideeah

- Now that the international observers have parachuted into Kathmandu, the parties have announced their candidates, and some of the dissenting parties have come on board, it looks like Nepalis will finally be able to vote for a new CA. But this sense of optimism is tinged with an underlying skepticism of just

how effective and efficient these newly elected members. Or will this turn out to be another tragedy like CA-1?

GVR

#### THE OBSERVERS

Well said Bihari Krishna Shrestha, calling a spade a spade takes courage in our country ('Observing the observers', #675). For too long you were labelled a reactionary, status-quoist, regressive element by the so-called progressives of New Nepal, I think a lot more Nepalis now share your views. I agree with your position that we should have a monitoring mechanism for the parachutist-monitors. For starters, we should bar the delusional Jimmy Carter and his likes from entering our country and from giving their stamp of approval to the cabal of bandits and murderers, who unfortunately, would most likely be legitimised through a 'free and fair election'.

Prithvi Raj

- I fully agree with Bihari Shrestha. The only advantage of having observers is that they keep an eye on the cheaters and irregularities. If they can't do their jobs then we don't need them.

Gofu

- Isn't Carter Centre the same delusional bunch that labelled the last CA election 'free and fair'? Why we allow unregistered organisations like CC to operate in Nepal is beyond my understanding. Surely Nepalis themselves can monitor what happens within our own borders?

Sarath G

- Am I missing something in this article? Foreign election monitors are here to supposedly provide neutral observation of how the election is conducted. How can we hold them responsible for the candidates that are running in that election? It is the responsibility of the political parties, of the government, and of Nepal's civil society to make sure that the people who aspire to be representatives are capable and responsible. That is not the job of Jimmy Carter and his minions. Yes, clearly nobody likes parachuters, but personal dislike alone is not valid criticism.

Amaleshwor Yadav

#### SACRED AND PROFANE

Rivers offer the cheapest option to expel sewage generated in urban areas while treatment plants need huge investments ('The sacred and the profane', Kunda Dixit, #675). Our rivers are in bad shape not because of cultural indifference but due to constant feeding of rivers by household sewage. The condition of our rivers can only improve if we invest in sewage treatment plants and channelling network. Being self-reliant in household solid waste treatment may sound ideally compelling, but it will not be feasible in a compact urban environment. It will get much worse before it gets better, if it ever gets better.

Armugam

- River and environment are just a small part of the bigger problem. Nepal has been blessed with natural

resources. Unfortunately, our leaders lack the vision, courage, and patriotism to make the most out of them. What we need is a new generation of leaders who can create transparent bureaucracy, equal opportunities, and secular system.

Prashant

- Kunda Dixit says: "Colopy avoids the trap of trying to find cultural reasons why Hindus in particular seem to not care about cleanliness of their sacred rivers and mountain tops." Maybe the author should have tried to get into the cultural explanation of why our rivers are dirty. It has all to do with fatalism and a culture that gives more importance to the afterlife than the present life. Indians and Nepalis have never learnt that unless you keep your surroundings clean, you cannot have a clean mind and soul.

Buddhist

- I had an Indian-American professor in the US who told me that when he visited his mother in Delhi, he found that Indians tend to keep the inside of their homes very neat and clean. And as soon as you step out it's a totally different atmosphere. There is garbage, foul stench, and paan spit everywhere. He said perhaps Hindu culture has something to do with it. If you notice in Nepal, the Buddhist monasteries are cleaner and better maintained than the Hindu temples even though it is not related to a monetary/budgetary issue.

Raj Kumar

#### FOR A KING

Thank you *Nepali Times* for keeping your eyes out for positive stories like these ('Fit for a king', Lawrence Miller, #675). The restoration of Patan Darbar Square is one of Nepal's best-kept secrets, thanks to the dedicated work of people like Ranjit Ranjitkar and his team at Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). This is sensitive cultural restoration at its best.

Yala

- I was very happy to read the piece on the restoration of Sundari Chok at Patan Darbar. It pains me to see the dismal condition of some of our heritage sites. I hope KVPT will work on other palaces and temples as well.

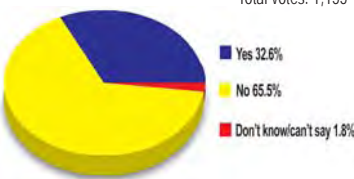
Ajay



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #676

Q. Would you consider becoming vegetarian over Dasain-Tihar holidays?



Weekly Internet Poll # 677. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Would you like to see more non-political figures as candidates for your constituency?



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# Failed experiment

New Delhi's overt and covert efforts to influence Nepali politics haven't been in India's own national interest

There is a popular story in *Panchatantra*, the collection of animal fables in Sanskrit passed down as oral tradition in the subcontinent for generations. Two cats fighting over a morsel of food are unable to decide for themselves and turn to a monkey watching from the top of the tree who of course gobbles up the food himself.



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

Sudheer Sharma's new book *Prayogshala* (Laboratory) is a blow-by-blow account of how our political actors handed over the stick to outsiders after they failed to manage things on their own. Not that Sharma breaks any new ground, but he weaves a gripping tale of what is only whispered in hush-hush tones in Kathmandu's cocktail circuit and the corridors of Singha Darbar.

If there were no dates, time, and protagonists behind the events, Sharma's book could well be the best political fiction of the year. But after you have flipped through 390 pages, you realise that in Nepal's hyper-reality we live in a make-believe world. What the realists call hard-ball politics in international relations is played out in the surreal world of subterranean Kathmandu and Delhi.

*Prayogshala* does not have much analysis, it simply chronicles major events of our recent history based on Sharma's copious interviews: the horrific years of the conflict, the royal massacre, Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006, the People's Movement and Madhes Uprising, elections and the dissolution of the CA, and the years of endless transition.

But while recounting the events, Sharma fills in off-the-record information, inaccessible to most, to expose the dirty tricks and back-stabbing behind the 'grand design' and 'hidden hand'.

Most of the book revolves around the role of India's secretive intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in orchestrating the 'safe-landing' of the Maoists in Nepali politics and their growing interference since. Sharma quotes a former RAW chief who tries to explain New Delhi's strategic interest in allowing Nepali Maoists to operate freely from India even as it was battling its own Maoists in several states along the Indo-Nepal border.

Sharma details the coercive engagement RAW and the Indian government had with different political players in the country to force the ceasefire

agreement, to their role in stand-off between the Maoists and the Nepal Army, making and breaking of the governments, and brokering various political agreements.

New Delhi's main intention all along, it seems, was stability in the region by containing Maoist conflict from spilling over into its own territory and countering growing Chinese interest by consolidating its own influence in Nepali politics. The idea of top level political engagement with disguised diplomacy was working well, but as Sharma notes, national and international developments distracted the Indian political establishment and exasperated with the Maoist tantrums they handed over the stick to South Block which made a complete mess of it.

So, what did New Delhi gain out of this protracted experiment? It could not weaken the Maoists even after the party went through a vertical split. In fact, the Baidya faction has become more anarchic. Despite their efforts, Madhesi parties remain a loose coalition of differing political actors who may be close to New Delhi, but remain independent and driven by political mood on the ground.

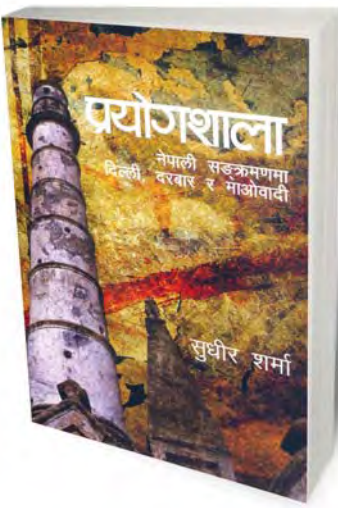
Traditional ties with the Nepali Congress that went sour after 2008 CA elections are still cold and frequent incidents of Indian soldiers bullying Nepalis in border towns have stoked anti-Indian sentiments among ordinary Nepalis.

Reading *Prayogshala* one comes to the sobering

realisation that India did what all strong nations do to weaker neighbours: use its vulnerable politics to influence actors and consolidate its own interest. What is appalling though, is our own greedy leaders continued their cat fight, salivating at the idea of the monkey sitting atop to drop the bread right into their mouth.

By now, every major political actor of this country, be it the ex-king or the president, the Maoists, Madhesi, NC, UML, and other institutional players including those in Nepal Army and the judiciary must have realised how it feels to be used and abused, discredited and humiliated in front of their own people.

The last CA was dissolved not because of foreign



conspiracy or big ideological differences. It was dissolved because the leaders refused to negotiate sincerely, instead seeking help from the 'hidden hand'.

The second CA elections is an opportunity for our netas to reclaim their pride and get their own house in order by finalising the statute drafted by the people and for the people in a true spirit of democracy. It is also an opportunity for India to salvage its image and support the political process in Nepal. The best way to do it, is to do nothing. 🇳🇵

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PIONEERING PILOT

Stephen Shrestha, 35, Nepal's pioneer sports aviation entrepreneur and pilot died Thursday morning when an Aeroprakt light aircraft he was flying crashed near the Peace Stupa in Pokhara. A Chinese passenger was also killed.

With his Russian mother, Shrestha had established Avia Club Nepal based in Pokhara in 2001. He was interested in sports and aviation from a young age and friends and colleagues remember him as a professional and perfectionist when it came to flying and maintaining his planes. He trained as a pilot in Arizona and returned to Nepal to set up a flying club and aviation school amidst Pokhara's dramatic scenery. Shrestha did not let bureaucratic hurdles, which were many, deter



him from his ambition. He had also pioneered cross country ultra-light rallies from Pokhara to Chitwan and Kathmandu. The blue Ukrainian-built Aeroprakt was one of two in the Avia Club fleet which also has four ultralights.

Shrestha had told *Nepali Times* three years ago: "I have flown in various parts of the world in various aircraft, but nothing can beat the view from the open cockpit of an ultralight on bright clear mornings flying past Annapurna."

It is an enduring tribute to Shrestha and Avia Club that every brochure and poster for Nepal's tourism includes a picture of an ultralight flying in front of Machapuchre.

Kunda Dixit

nepalitimes.com

Annapurna flying, #573  
Gone flyin', #140

AHMAD ISKANDAR

Low cost housing for low income families

Housing insecurity has become a pertinent issue in Nepal. Millions of citizens lack home ownership and are forced to live in decrepit conditions. For those lucky enough to possess home ownership, accessibility to basic facilities is still a far outcry. To remediate these housing issues, Nepali based NGO Lumanti, has been working to create a proliferation of safe, secure housing for the country's low-income demographics.

Four projects are currently underway which look at supplying low-income residents with low-cost, adequate shelters. Supported by UK-based Homeless International, the projects have provided safe and secure houses to 512 poor families in Pokhara, Lekhnath, Tansen and Kohalpur with the goal of completing 750 homes by next fiscal year. Having completed the first ever rental housing model two months ago in Dhobighat, Lalitpur, Lumanti plans on introducing these types of housing structures in Pokhara and Lekhnath.

**Safe and secure house for poor**

For most of her life Goma Devi Kami of Kohalpur, Banke district lived in a mud hut. The shanty house provided little protection against bad weather leaving her family to live in constant fear of rain and thunderstorms. "Whenever there was heavy rainfall, my children would all huddle together. We no longer have to worry about the poor weather," Goma reflects.

With a low-interest loan from a local cooperative with support from Lumanti's Community Led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF) program, the Kami family are now proud owners of a concrete house consisting of two rooms, a kitchen, and a balcony. Joyfully, Goma tells, "It was my life-long dream to have a permanent house. My children's future is now secured!"

New housing projects spearheaded by Lumanti were also completed in Prithvinagar, Siddharthnagar, Shantinagar, Babar Nagar and Bhawanipur benefitting some three hundred and eight families. According to Jagat Baragare, social mobiliser at Lumanti's Kohalpur branch, Lumanti aims to build 200 to 250 concrete houses in the area in the coming year.

Women Savings and Loan Co-operative in Kohalpur offer collateral-free home loans to women from lower income families with Lumanti's support. So far the cooperative has been giving Rs 150,000 worth of loans at seven percent interest which need five years of repayment. Starting this year, the cooperative will provide Rs 200,000 loans to be paid at eight percent interest in six years.

"Because of low interest rate and the five year repayment plan, it has become easy for poor families to take out loans," explains Geeta Oli, president of the cooperative.

**Changing Tansen**

In partnership with Tansen Municipality and Laxmi Bank, Lumanti has built 100 houses in Tansen at a cost of Rs 20 million for lower-income families. The easy installment and minimum interest-housing scheme, which allows borrowers to repay loans in seven years, has been especially helpful for dalits, janajatis, and other marginalised groups. According to Madhu Dayal Sainju, president of the Palpa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, "The loan program has made banking more accessible to the poor."



Housing ownership in the community has grown immensely due to the availability of such loans. Out of the 100 houses in the area, 82 are registered to the name of the owners while the remaining are registered under the names of Guthi (community group).

Along with building homes, Lumanti has been providing local citizens training in skill development, income generating activities, and instilling the practice of savings.

Housing the poor in Lekhnath

Housing rejuvenation and building construction has taken place in Lekhnath focused on supplying low-income families with secure shelters. A total of 82 families in Lekhnath have built new homes and 51 have repaired their dilapidated homes with loans provided through Kamana Development Bank with support from Lumanti. Individuals can take out loans of up to Rs 200,000 at an interest of eight percent which they are expected to pay back in seven years.

Bishnu Bahadur Kamal who earns 15,000 a month recently took a loan worth Rs 150,000 to renovate his leaking house. Says Kamal: "With my salary, it would have been impossible to collect such a large amount of money at once."

Lumanti is also providing technical assistance to families so that they can build earthquake resistant homes. In addition, a women's saving group has also been started in Lekhnath aimed at inducing women empowerment and women economic development.

According to Kishor Kumar Karki who serves as field coordinator in Lekhnath, "the second phase of the project will see about 200 families making use of the loan. In addition, we are planning for rental housing in Lekhnath with the municipality providing the land for this project."

**New community in Pokhara**

Forty-three year old Ram Mani Dahal always dreamed of owning his home. Occupied as a vegetable salesman in Pokhara for the past thirteen years, he assumed this dream would never formulate due to his lack of income and economic resources. But with support from Lumanti via Laxmi Bank, Dahal recently borrowed Rs 400,000 at eight per cent interest and is currently constructing his dream home. So far, 75 earthquake resistant homes are being built in Chauthe, Pokhara-14 through Lumanti's Community Led Infrastructure Finance Facility program.

Furthermore, Lumanti is planning to install bio-gas plant in the community and has started a project with the objective of supplying the community with clean water facilities.

Lumanti has started the second phase of housing developments for 63 houses in Kundahar, Raatmata, Pokhara. A total of 379 houses are under plan in Pokhara by next year with Lumanti planning the construction of rental housing units in the community.

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# All that glitters

Geetanjali Jewels, the world's largest integrated jewellery manufacturing company is launching its first authorised retail outlet in Nepal this month through Urja Ventures. *Nepali Times* caught up with director of Urja Ventures, Prausn Jan. to talk about the brand, their products, and the prospects in the domestic market.

## Nepali Times: What sets Geetanjali Jewels apart from its competitors?

**Prausn Jan:** Geetanjali offers the world's best brands and internationally certified jewellery under one roof. We are also providing a first of its kind scheme in Nepal whereby credit card holders from IME and Nabil Bank can make purchases at zero per cent EMI for 18 months.

## Who are your target customers?

There is a misconception in the public that because Geetanjali is endorsed by well known personalities, its products are very expensive. But Geetanjali is for everyone. We have jewellery starting from Rs 10,000 and our main aim is to give customers genuine quality products at affordable prices. Earlier Nepalis had to travel to India for Polki and other designer jewellery. Today they can find it right at Darbar Marg.

## How do you see the domestic demand for jewellery?

Nepalis mainly prefer classic and traditional designs. When it comes to diamonds, they generally look for big rocks because they think that the bigger the diamonds the better. But this is not true. Even small diamonds which are genuine have a lot of value. Gradually, the market is changing and the demand for well designed jewellery is on the rise. This is where Geetanjali comes in. We offer an eclectic selection

for people from different socio-economic background and all age groups.

## Do you think there is enough awareness among customers regarding the quality of jewellery here?

Very few people come into our store with full knowledge of what they want. So we not only sell products but also educate customers on quality and the different types of designs.

## How will fluctuations in the price of gold affect the market especially during holidays?

Fluctuation in price is something that no one can predict. It is

always wise to therefore break purchase rather than buy in bulk.

## In April this year, the government discovered that many jewellery traders in Kathmandu Valley were selling sub-standard products. What is your reaction?

The government's market monitoring drive created much needed awareness among people, therefore we welcome such steps and look at them positively. Earlier clients never asked questions about quality, but now they are becoming increasingly alert. For a company like ours which has always focused on quality, this is great news.



## EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS



## Expensive taste

Chivas Brothers recently launched Royal Salute 62 Gun Salute, a premium Scotch whisky. At Rs 300,000 per bottle, the 62 Gun Salute is currently the most expensive alcohol available in the market.

## Helping hand

Standard Chartered Bank has been working with VISCOSS- Nepal (Village School College Students Scholarship Project- Nepal), to support students of Shree Mahendra Shanti High School in Bhaktapur. The bank has been providing scholarships to 15 deserving students of the school since 2002.



## Festive offer



Syakar Trading, authorised distributor of Honda has introduced its Dasain offer. With the scheme, buyers of Honda bikes can win cash prizes from Rs 4,000 to 100,000 along with free servicing for five years and 10 per cent discount on spare parts, one tola gold, and a Honda Brio Car.

## In sync

Nexus Solutions has become an authorised partner of Polycom authorised providing the complete suite of Polycom solutions. The company has also achieved Cisco Select Certified Partner Status.



## Body beautiful

On the occasion of Dasain, Chaitanya Spa is offering customers a range of attractive massage packages. Clients can now purchase three massage coupons of 90 minute at Rs 4,800, three massage coupons of 60 minute at Rs 4,200. Also a 25 per cent discount on all services worth Rs 2,000 and above is up for grabs. The offer is valid until 15 October.



## Print happy

Mercantile Office Systems (MOS), the sole authorised distributor of Epson in Nepal, announced the launch of M-series range of economical mono ink tank inkjet printers. The new models Epson M100 and Epson M200 are priced at Rs 23,500 and Rs 38,000 respectively.



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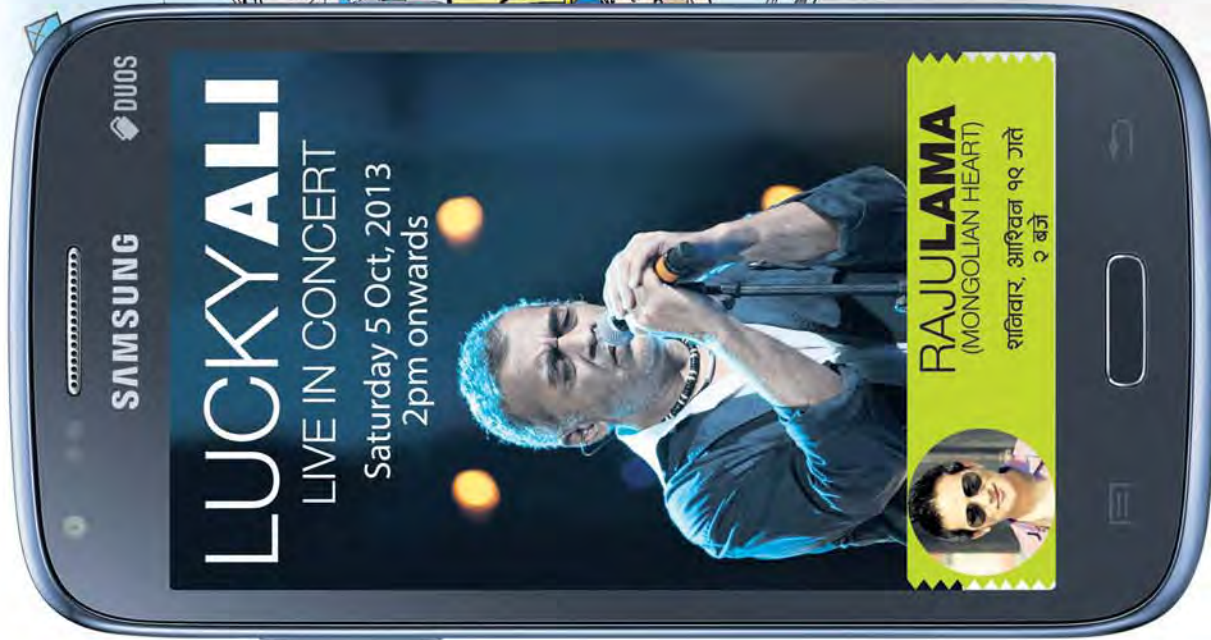


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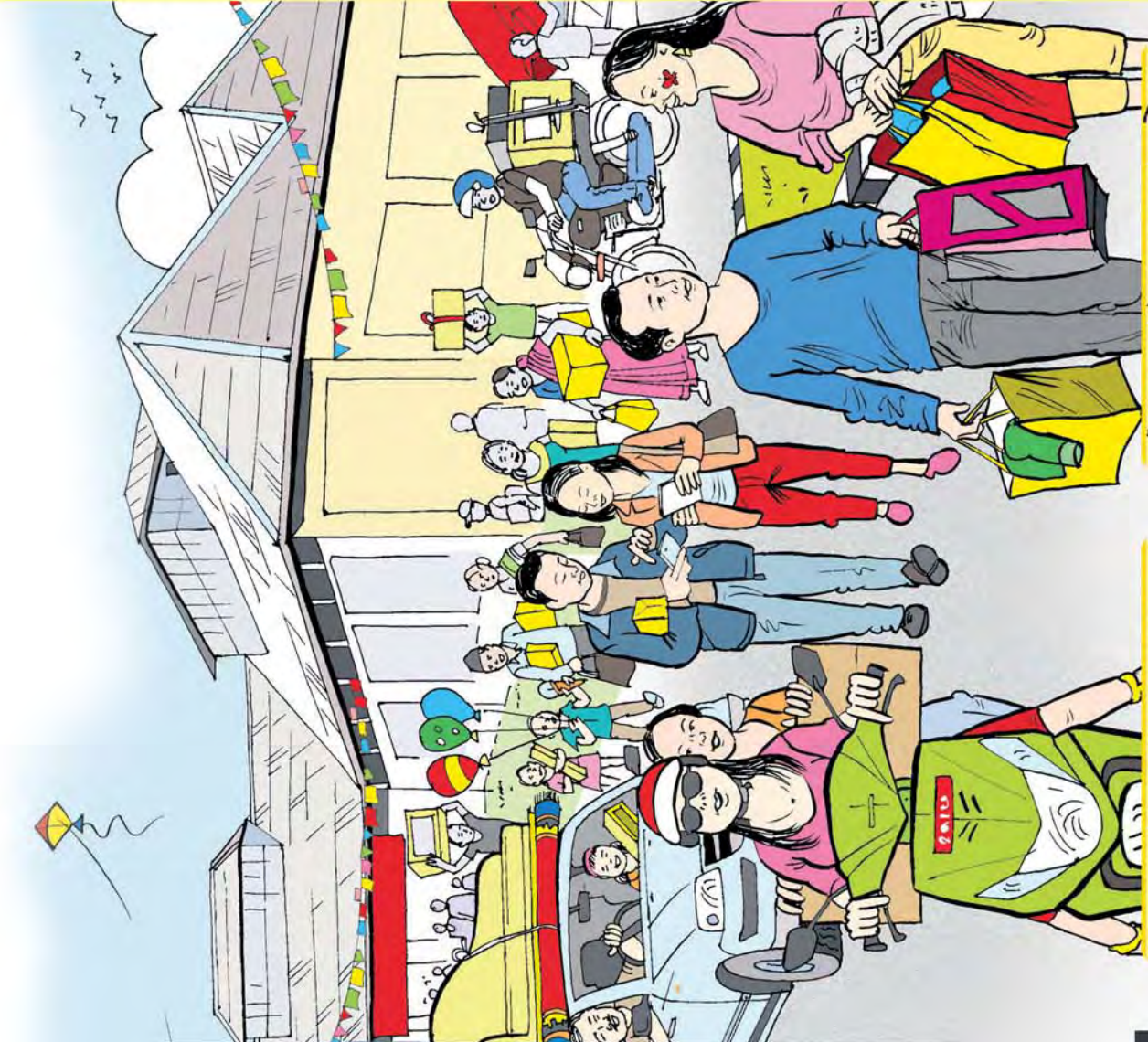
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# COLOUR PLAY

## Women in Janakpur are gaining financial independence through indigenous Mithila art

BHRIKUTI RAI in JANAKPUR

Fourty-seven-year old Shiribati Mandal from Janakpur in Dhanusa district has never seen the inside of a school, but always had a keen interest in art. Whenever she found time from household chores, she would paint the earthen walls of her home with stunning motifs. Wanting to break out of the confines of the four walls of her kitchen, in 1998 she joined Janakpur Women's Development Centre (JWDC), a cooperative of local female artists which has been promoting Mithila art and providing jobs for women in town and surrounding villages. Shiribati is among 39 women at JWDC who are earning a living, while also preserving an ancient

art skill passed down through generations. "I never imagined I could earn money with my paintings," she admits. The mother of two has graduated from wall painting and is now an expert screen print designer. She says her family has no problem when she leaves for her 'office' every afternoon: "Time management is the key and my husband is happy that I am contributing to support our family."

When JDWC was set up in 1989, women working outside their homes was unheard of in Janakpur. "People used to stare at me when I cycled to work in the 80s, so you can imagine what they must have thought of working women," says vice-chairman Manjula Thakur, who joined the centre in the early 90s. The



**THE ART OF LIVING:** Shiribati Mandal (*above*) of Janakpur Women's Development Centre works on a screen print design. Women at the cooperative paint Mithila designs on different products like clay pottery (*left*).

cooperative not only helps artisans sharpen the craft they learnt from their mothers and grandmothers, but also gives them literacy classes and business skills so they can market their products. The women even have their own savings and microcredit program.

Mithila art dates back to 3,000 years to a region in what is now north Bihar in India and southeast Nepal. Inhabitants decorated walls of their homes with scenes from everyday life, rituals, festivals, and Hindu gods and goddesses. Its capital Janakpur was a seat of

learning, a centre of spiritual and intellectual discourse, and the first city to make contact with Oriental cultures.

Although JWDC mostly produces traditional Mithila art on canvas, it has also ventured into ceramics, textiles, and papier mâché. Its products have been featured at national and international fairs including the famous Santa Fe International Folk Art Market in New Mexico, USA. Last year the cooperative made Rs 3.5 million in profits.

Says Thakur: "I am happy that women in Janakpur can now freely ride their bikes, earn their living, and make decisions for themselves." 🇳🇵

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## ALL THAT JAZZ

Party with musicians Yaite Ramos Quartet (Brazil), Claudia Quintet (USA), Mike del Ferro (Netherlands), Nick Aggs (Australia), Eliane Amherd (Switzerland), Cadenza Collective (Nepal), and 4th Element (India) at the 11th Jazzmandu Festival.

**Jazz for the next generation music competition.** 1 outstanding band will perform at Jazz Bazaar, plus interact and engage in a private workshop with Jazzmandu musicians.  
24 October, 2.30pm to 4.30pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel

**Groovin at Upstairs.** Cadenza and friends kick off the fest with a jam at the heart of Jazz in Nepal.  
Rs 350, 24 October, 6pm onwards, Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat

**Valley jams.** venues in Kathmandu will feature performances by various Jazzmandu artists.  
Claudia Quintet at Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat; Yatie Ramos Quartet at Moksh, Jawalakhel; Eliane Amherd Trio at House of Music, Thamel; 4th Element at Manny's Eatery & Tapas Bar, Ekantakuna /Jawalakhel; Mike del Ferro at Bhumi Restaurant, Lazimpat.  
Rs 500, 25 October, 6pm onwards

**Jazz bazar,** marathon of jazz and traditional Nepalese folk and classical music performed by international and Nepali musicians.  
Rs 990, 26 October, 2.30pm to 10pm, Gokarna Forest Resort

**Red hot latin jazz,** a night of Latin Jazz, featuring authentic Afro-Cuban sounds of the Caribbean.  
Rs 1,099, 27 October, 7 to 9pm, Hotel Summit, Kupondole

**Jazzmandu master class,** an opportunity for music students & jazz enthusiasts to interact with visiting musicians, share their experience and stories and learn different instrumental tips and techniques.  
29 October, 1.30 to 3.30pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel

**Jazz at Patan,** an evening of Nepali classical music fused with Jazz in a rich and soulful ambience.  
Rs 1,299, 29 October, 6pm onwards, Dhokaima Cafe, Patan

**Jazzmandu Finale,** musicians from different bands play their sets and later jam together, creating a high-energy, improvised musical treat.  
Rs 990, 30 October, 6pm onwards, Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor

[www.jazzmandu.com](http://www.jazzmandu.com)

## Taste of Europe

Every four months the menu at Hotel Hyatt's Rox restaurant gets a fresh makeover. Executive chef Subrata Debnath along with his team produce a choice selection of items for the revamped menu letting diners experience a little more of the Southern European cuisine the restaurant is known for.

Who wouldn't want to start their day with a crunchy panko crab cake? Served with fresh arugula on the side and a well cooked fried egg on top, this is chef Debnath's take on the classic American breakfast dish of eggs benedict. Another popular dish that makes its way into the menu is Caesar salad. The salad gets a refreshing new boost with the inclusion of crunchy maple glazed bacon.



If you want to lunch, there is prawn bisque risotto, parmesan chicken escalope, the more adventurous looking tagine of Australian lamb shank, and beet root mousse filled tortellini to choose from.

For those with a sweet tooth, don't miss out on the absolutely heavenly tiramisu and if you are a chocoholic, there's chocolate cannoli and mango panna cotta for those who need something fruity to end their meal.  
Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, Boudha

## Eyes on Afghanistan



To help audience sift through the many offerings of the festival, Film Southasia has organised two special curations for more directed viewings. While Alpavirama 2011, was screened on 1 October, Afghan Eyes, will be shown throughout the festival.

Curated by journalist Taran Khan, the selections from Afghan Eyes showcase the war-torn, globalised, and otherwise fluid environments of various communities in Afghanistan and offer insights that are often lost, despite extensive media coverage on the region. *Nepali Times* caught up with Khan over email to get her views on the selected films and her expectations of FSA.

**Nepali Times: What is the importance of showcasing Afghan films given the current circumstances in the country?**

**Taran Khan:** Afghanistan is at an interesting juncture in its modern history: on the eve of the NATO withdrawal and with uncertainty looming over its future. It is important to give space to voices of Afghans and Afghan filmmakers, who represent a window into the country. At the same time, while curating the package, we wanted to represent in some ways the process of these changes and how they have unfolded over the past decade. So watching these films will give a sense of movement and transformation, as they are from different periods over the last few years.

**What are your expectations from FSA 2013?**

Usually films made by foreign crews or well-known channels and production houses get good visibility and publicity, whereas films like the ones we are screening in Afghan Eyes are harder to access and fewer people know about them. The festival provides a good platform for such kind of work. When we screened these films at other venues we got very encouraging response and I am hopeful that the audience in Kathmandu will be similarly receptive. I also hope the films will create an understanding of the diversity of the kind of work being attempted by contemporary directors and encourage viewers to talk and look at Afghanistan differently.

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# The butterfly effect

Nepal is a treasure house for butterflies

JUANITA MALAGON

The flutter of a butterfly's wing, according to chaos theory, can cause a typhoon halfway around the world. But for most of us, the real 'butterfly effect' is the immediate joy in watching these insects in their own habitat.

Nepal is one of the best places in the world for butterfly watchers. Of the 17,500 or so species of butterflies in the world, 660 are found in Nepal, and 20 of them are on the endangered list. Because of Nepal's topographical and climate variation, they can be seen

round-the-year here in different parts of the country. Nepal is also located at the meeting point of the palearctic and oriental species. Like birders, there are tourists who come to Nepal just to watch butterflies.

Colin Smith is in his 80s and used to be a Nepal-based butterfly guide. He is so passionate about butterflies that Nepalis call him 'Putali Baje'. The British national has dedicated more than 50 years to his study of butterflies in Nepal, has published research papers and books, and his pictures of butterflies adorn calendars, postcards, and posters.

"People are happy watching and photographing butterflies and not collecting them, as it was fashion some time ago," Smith



**GLASSY BLUEBOTTLE**  
Common throughout Nepal, flies from February to October, often high round tree-tops.



says, citing increasing awareness in the public about the need for biodiversity conservation. Even so, butterfly watching hasn't caught on as much as birdwatching in Nepal.

Dhan Prasad of Ethic Himalaya Treks in Thamel says he gets many customers interested in birdwatching tours but not so many for butterflies. But he admits birdwatchers also look out for butterflies. Last year he handled a

group that came all the way from France just to look at butterflies in Kathmandu Valley.

Mahendra Singh Limbu is a tour guide specialising in butterflies and lives in Godavari, which is next to Pulchoki the mountain that alone has 350 species of butterflies. "My passion for butterflies comes from my appreciation for life," he says, showing an extensive collection of pictures of butterflies.

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JUANITA MALAGON

Lepidopterists Limbu and Smith both believe there is great potential if Nepal marketed expeditions in the peak butterfly watching seasons in March-June and August-October. Smith says it is important not just to show visitors Nepal's fabulous diversity of butterflies, but also detailed information about each species.

"We can provide not just anecdotal information but about their habitat, life-cycles, and why

certain species behave the way they do," explains Smith. Bhaiya Khanal of the Natural History Museum in Kathmandu says butterflies are not only beautiful but very important markers about the state of the environment.

Many butterfly species rely on just a single species of plants and if the flower disappears, so does the butterfly. Butterfly habitat shifts can also be early-warning signs of climate change.

**COMMON MORMON**

Very common across Nepal and found every month of the year.

**CORNELIAN**

Note the hind-wings tails and lobes imitating a head.

**COMMON JESTER**

Very common across Nepal and found every month of the year.

For instance, Khanal found in 2008 that the Apollo B species had shifted up the mountains as temperatures rose.

Butterflies have a delicately balanced seasonal cycle and lay their eggs on the food-plant when the leaves are still young. The butterfly comes out of its cocoon and chrysalis when certain flowers are in bloom and upsetting this balance could not only affect the feeding of the caterpillars, but the pollination of the flowers.

**SPOTS IN KATHMANDU**

Khanal has been taking a regular butterfly census in Nepal and has found that in the last three years there has been a decline in numbers of certain species like the Hockey Stick Seller, due to habitat destruction or perhaps pesticide use. 🇳🇵

[www.silkroadgroup.com](http://www.silkroadgroup.com)

[www.nepal-safari.com](http://www.nepal-safari.com)

[www.ethichimalaya.com](http://www.ethichimalaya.com)

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Butterfly man, #16

**INTO THE WILD**

There are 660 species of butterflies found in Nepal, which make up 4 per cent of globally known species

More than 300 species are found in Kathmandu alone throughout the year due to mild day-temperatures during winter and surrounding mountains

**PEAK SEASONS:**

March-June and August-September.

**COMMON:**

Common Mormon (Papilionidae), Indian Cabbage White (Pieridae), Pale Grass Blue (Lycaenidae), Lemon Pansy (Nymphalidae)

**LARGEST:**

Golden Birdwing (Troides aeacus) with a wingspan of up to 188 mm

**RAREST:**

Chrysozephyrus disparatus interpositas

**HIGHEST RECORDED:**

Banded Apollo in Manang (5,200m) in 1985 and in Everest in 1990



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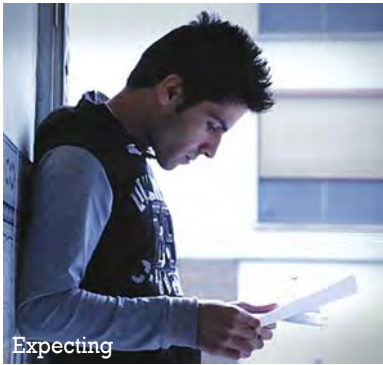
# No Fire Zone and Expecting

This year I have been lucky enough to preview two of the films playing at the Film Southasia, both of which are thought provoking, and one of which in particular is devastating in its portrayal of the final few, intense months of the 26 year long conflict in Sri Lanka which ended in 2009.



**MUST SEE**  
**Sophia Pande**

*No Fire Zone* chronicles the last bellicose attack on the Tamil dense north-eastern region of the island by the Rajapaksa regime. While it is true that Sri Lanka was able to end its debilitatingly long conflict in a few short months, the cost at which the army succeeded in defeating the rebels was intolerably high. While mainstream media spewed government propaganda claiming that no civilians were hurt during the siege on the north-east of the island, the truth is actually the horrifying opposite. *No Fire Zone* is named thus because it chronicles through anecdotal and video evidence, the targeted onslaught of the government's forces on areas deemed 'No Fire Zones' and more particularly on hospitals tending to the wounded even while they carried the banner marking them clearly as being part of the Red Cross.



Expecting



No Fire Zone

Skeptical? Well, any intelligent watcher should be when faced with such grave accusations. However, in addition to being brilliantly put together and narrated by the grave voice of Rufus Sewell, *No Fire Zone* is journalistically sound, every statement made in the film regarding human rights violations being backed up with searingly violent footage corroborated by expert forensic scientists.

It has been a long time since I have seen such a visceral and violent documentary, and yet, even though I paused while watching to collect myself on several

occasions, I firmly think that *No Fire Zone* is an absolute must see for all of us who have faced conflict in our own homeland.

Similarly *Expecting*, a short but poignant documentary about a couple, the Afghani Jawed and the Kosovar Dashurije, who meet and fall in love in a refugee camp in Belgium brings us into the reality of a world that is (thankfully) not our own. Young, imminently expecting a child and without legal work-papers, the two are fighting off penury in a country where they sought refuge from violence and discrimination in their own conflicted homelands.

Unsentimentally observed but sympathetic, *Expecting* gives us a window into the lives of people whom we would perhaps ordinarily never meet, filling in with colour and compassion the situations of thousands of such political refugees all over the world who are fighting their individual battles to try and gain a better life for themselves and more importantly for their children.

Go to Film Southasia for experiences such as these from films that will widen your horizons and wrench at your heart - but with good reason.

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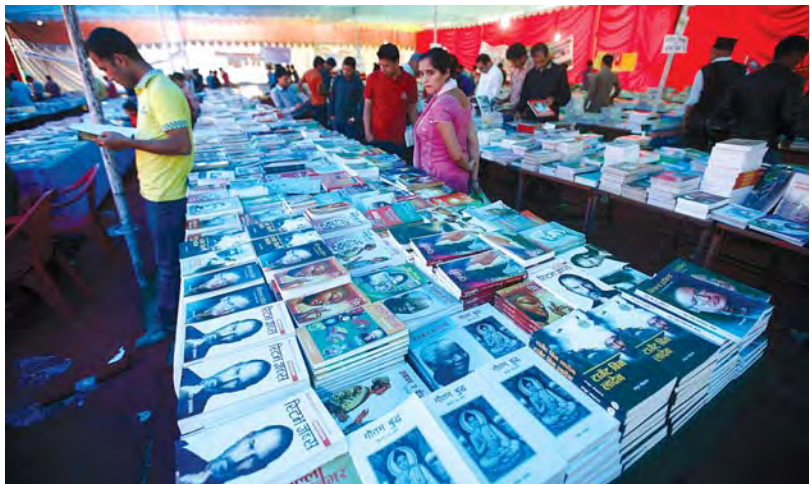
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**HAPPENINGS**



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**NAMASTE NEPAL:** Newly appointed Indian ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae (left) at a welcome reception organised by Nepal-India Friendship Association at Battisputali on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

**BOOKWORM:** Visitors browse through books during the National Book Exhibition at City Hall, Exhibition Road on Wednesday afternoon.



BIKRAM RAI

**FILLING IN:** An artisan puts finishing touches on a Ganesh statue at Lalitpur on Wednesday. The demand for Hindu idols soars during the festive season.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**HEAVY DUTY:** A year after it was marked for expansion, the road from Kalopul to Siphul Chaur is paved with concrete on Monday.

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Japanese Noodle Kitchen's bright, airy, and modern dining room is a welcome surprise: outside is the Dhobighat stretch of Ring Road, all chaos and cacophony, dust and debris. The staff may seem slightly overburdened, carrying out multiple duties at once, but the slightly manic lunchtime service doesn't detract from this

**SOMEPLACE ELSE** venue's food, ambience, or its welcome presence in a location not normally known for high quality, low cost cuisine.

The restaurant closes at five, making the lunch rush the restaurant's main source of business. Indeed, the hall was nearly at capacity at the time of our visit—demonstrating the interest owner Yuko Matsui's (pic, right) bowls of fresh udon noodles have generated among his predominantly Korean clientele.

Diners wanting to eat out in this price range—a very filling lunch for three came in at under Rs 900—will be used to Kathmandu's multicuisine eateries, with bewilderingly extensive menus and dishes that bear only a passing resemblance to their billing.

What's less common is the concept of simple, authentic food cooked sincerely and well, by chefs who know the component parts inside and out. JNK (as reads the restaurant's signage, hanging from an otherwise anonymous commercial property) offers such an experience: fresh, fast, uncomplicated Japanese dining.

## JAPANESE NOODLE KITCHEN



And for those of you unfamiliar with Japanese cooking, there's a handy display in the foyer with photographs of each of the dishes, so you can order with confidence.

Along with cute, handwritten menus, we were given complimentary glasses of iced 'bhote' tea with regular refills throughout our meal. First up was a sharing plate of vegetable tempura (Rs 100)—the delicate coating of crispy batter being the only overtly fatty thing we ate—and then looked ahead to our main courses.



PICS: TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

As the name suggests, JNK focuses on noodles, whether in 'dry', curried dishes, or by adding substance to steaming bowls of broth. The chicken curry option I'd seen delivered at the next table just moments before was unfortunately sold out—it looked fantastic, so definitely one for next time around. The fried chicken udon (Rs 250) was served in a slightly bland tomato sauce and didn't deliver the kick I'd been hoping for.

My fellow diners were more successful: seaweed udon (Rs 230)

and an udon noodle soup with prawn tempura on the side (Rs 320) delivered on the uncomplicated, clean flavours we associate with East Asian dining. All came with a side of kimchi and a range of condiments (powdered and pickled chili, soy sauce, and others) to spice things up a little.

We decided to skip dessert, as the offerings of pancakes and rice cakes seemed slightly underwhelming. Matsui knows his strengths lie in noodle production and has rightly chosen to expend his efforts in that arena. If

you're looking for variety, JNK is definitely not for you. But if you're looking for something different during your working lunch, in a part of town with few attractive or inspired options—a warm welcome (if they're not too busy) awaits. CC

*How to get there: coming from Jawalakhel, turn right onto Ring Road at Nakhu Dobato and you'll find Japanese Noodle Kitchen wedged between On the Grill and Kwaliti Food Café. Both of which, I'm sure, are lovely.*

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# RAKSI LAGYO

With Ghatastapana a day away, it's a good time to talk about alcohol. Many people, including doctors, do not know what comprises a single drink in terms of quantity. In order to know what alcohol abuse is, it is important to understand



**DHANVANTARI**

**Buddha Basnyat, MD**

how a drink is defined. We can broadly categorise drinks into three groups: beer, spirits (whisky, rum, vodka, gin), and wine. The regular alcohol content is about five per cent in beer, 40 per cent in spirits, and 12 per cent in wine. About 350ml of beer (one regular can), about 150ml of wine (about two thirds of a regular wine glass, not full), and 45ml of spirit (not a 'Patiala' peg) each comprise a drink.

Based on these figures, a

healthy man without any contraindications to alcohol may have two drinks per day and a healthy, non-pregnant woman can consume one drink per day, as women metabolise alcohol differently. Because it isn't known whether any amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy, the US Surgeon General urges abstinence for women who are or may become pregnant. The quantity should not exceed more than 14 drinks per week for men and seven drinks per week for women. When people cross this limit they risk abusing alcohol.

What about all the news about alcohol being good for you? Drinking like most things in life is a double edged sword. There is some good evidence to show that moderate consumption of alcohol may be cardioprotective. Alcohol in moderation also enhances the fun and frivolity of any

party. People are more keen to attend parties which say 'cocktail dinner' instead of just dinner.

All people who drink are certainly not alcoholics and individual responses to liquor vary. But homicides, liver diseases, cancer, strokes, certain heart diseases are all problems associated with alcohol. Heavy drinkers face greater risk of hypertension, gastrointestinal bleeding, sleep disorders, major depression, hemorrhagic stroke, cirrhosis of the liver, and several cancers. Being able to 'hold your drink' does not afford protection against the ill effects of excessive drinking. In addition, trying to drink in moderation is difficult given the addictive power of the drug.

Screening for heavy drinking is important because about three in ten adults drink at levels that elevate their risk for physical, mental health, and social problems. Clinical trials have demonstrated that brief interventions by clinicians can promote significant and lasting reductions in drinking levels in at-risk drinkers.

Heavy drinking, especially in our part of the world, however, often goes undetected. Doctors very rarely ask their patients how much they drink. Or, there is a misconception of what makes an alcoholic. For example: when a patient reports that he drinks only one drink a day, he may be mistakenly labelled an alcoholic by the physician.

Teetotalers should certainly not start drinking based on what they have read in the papers about alcohol being good for health, specifically cardiovascular health. By the same token, healthy adults who drink according to the above guidelines and have no contraindications, need not necessarily stop drinking because their mother-in-law does not like them consuming raksi. 🇳🇵

**GIZMO by YANTRICK**

## The Z effect

Successor to the highly successful Sony Xperia Z (reviewed earlier in this column), the Xperia Z1 is Sony's latest flagship smartphone capable of challenging behemoths like the iPhone 5s and the Samsung Galaxy S4.

Available in white, black, and purple, the Z1 retains the original Xperia Z's stylish aluminium, tempered-glass design, and a beautiful five-inch high definition screen boasting a resolution of 1920x1080 pixels (full HD). The five-inch screen is equipped with Triluminos display technology and combined with the 'X-Reality Picture Engine', offers vibrant colours and razor sharp pictures, videos, games, and web pages. The Z1 is also designed to be fully waterproof thereby protecting your expensive acquisition safe from all manners of liquid 'accidents' that would put an end to most other phones.

Running on Android's mobile operating system (version 4.2.2) and powered by a 2.2GHz Quad Core Processor and 2 GB RAM, the Z1 is capable of handling graphics and memory intensive videos, games, applications, and internet browsing with ease. The main highlight of the device, however, has to be its camera, which packs a whopping 20.7-megapixel sensor. The Z1's camera is built with the same components as Sony's legendary Cybershot compact digital cameras, meaning the Z1 really is the best camera phone available in the market today.

The gadget utilises the company's award-winning mobile image processing engine to deliver stunningly sharp, clear, bright, and detailed images even during low light, while Sony's clear image zoom and motion detection technology allow for blur-free photos. Capturing videos on the Z1 is also a treat as the

gadget churns out detailed and distortion-free videos at full HD resolution.

The pictures and videos that you are likely to capture with the Xperia Z1 demand heavy storage and the 16 GB of on-board storage might not be adequate. However, you can upgrade by a further 64GB (via a micro-SD card) to fulfill your storage needs. Expecting heavy multimedia usage, Sony has packed the Z1 with a massive 3050 mAh battery, which compares favourably to the Samsung Galaxy S4's 2600mAh battery and the iPhone 5s' 1570mAh. As with any high-end handset, the Z1 comes loaded with most of the standard connectivity options including LTE, NFC, DLNA, MHL, HSDPA, GPS, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth to meet your internet and multimedia needs. 🇳🇵

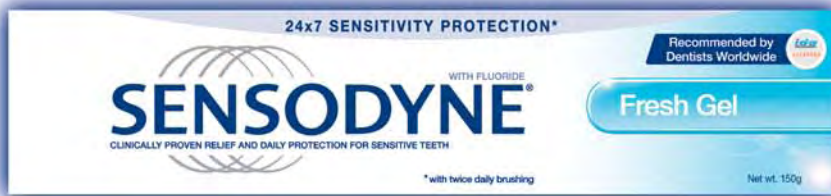
**Yantrick's verdict:** expected to sell in Nepal at approximately Rs 70,000 after its early October launch in Asia, the Xperia Z1 is a top of the range smartphone and truly 'the best of Sony'.



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# Scoops about spooks

Intelligence reporting is really embedded journalism

Come to think of it, retired GenVK Singh's recent disclosure about the Indian Army paying politicians in Kashmir had all the ingredients for a career-defining story reporters on the intelligence beat would have



**LOOK OUT**  
**Ajaz Ashraf**

loved to scoop. Yet, despite all the cups of coffee they have gulped with spooks in plush restaurants, they had little idea about what a serious subversion of democracy it was.

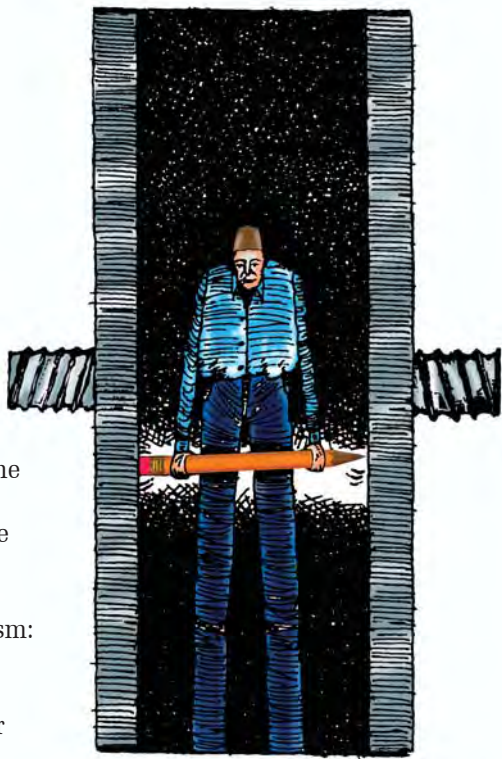
As Gen Singh spoke, Indian spooks mounted a special sideshow of their own. Through them we came to know that Yasin Bhatkal, guilty of killing at least a 100, had ordered an apple pie and cold coffee in Pune's German Bakery before leaving his bag with a bomb under a table.

Decidedly delicious stories, but begging the question: why do spooks mostly feed us the apple-pie-cold-coffee stories, instead of revealing information of the kind Gen Singh disclosed?

It tells you, one, that there isn't a whistleblower among our spooks willing to accord primacy to upholding the ideal of democracy and not just servicing organisational goals. Two, media reporting on intelligence agencies is an example of embedded journalism. Reporters are so embedded inside Indian intelligence that they report only what they are told, or rather, dictated.

The problem inherent to the intelligence beat is that, more often than not, it is impossible to verify what sources tell you, thus undermining the defining principle of journalism: counter-check information from informants who can't be identified. How can a reporter ever check the number of militant camps operating in Pakistan or Burma, or verify an intelligence leak about Nepal?

But over the last decade and more, the leaks from intelligence sources have become richer in description, conveying to Indians their deep penetration into subterranean terror groups. It is impossible for journalists to verify whether their claims are real or imaginary. Yet, if you were to read today the stories



spun in the months following the terrorist bomb blast in Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid on 18 May 2007, you can't but conclude that their authors were schooled in the genre of magical realism.

Almost all newspapers claimed that the Harkatul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) was behind the Mecca Masjid blast and its Indian commander, Shahid Bilal, executed it. Shahid's

real name was Abdul Rehman and around him breathless narratives were created, based, obviously, on the intelligence the agencies had gathered about him - why and when he left Hyderabad for Pakistan and the other bombings in Hyderabad he was involved in. Subsequently, though, these stories turned out to be fiction.

Nevertheless, they helped justify the picking up of Muslims in midnight swoops and their torture in custody. Months later, one Swami Aseemanand confessed that he and other members of Abhinav Bharati, a Hindu chauvinist group, organised the blast not only in the Mecca Masjid, but also at the dargahs in Ajmer and Malegoan and the Samjhauta Express. In all these cases, too, jihadi groups were blamed.

The flawed narrative around the Mecca Masjid isn't the only example of kite-flying by Indian spy agencies. Considering the blundering and bluffing by spooks, why do we rarely read stories not favourable of them? One of the few stories is of a wing of the intelligence agency intercepting telephone signals off-the-air, thus requiring no government clearance.

*The Meadow* is a chilling account Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark meticulously pieced together about the kidnapping of five Western tourists in Kashmir in 1995. The authors accessed senior police officers to claim the spooks were not only aware of the hideouts of the kidnappers, they had even aerial-photographed them. It turns out that instead of mounting a rescue operation, the spooks tacitly encouraged their killings, in the hope of giving a bad name to Pakistan's ISI.

Indeed, spies are never tarred because of the mechanism of embedded journalism: they are the sole purveyors of information impossible to gather from other sources or to verify. When there is a terror attack, for instance, it is they who help the reporter satisfy bosses keen on exclusive information, however inane and irrelevant. Keeping a source happy is part of the job description of an embed.

Indian editors must get together to evolve a protocol for covering the intelligence beat. Otherwise, we are doomed to consume intelligence stories that have the flavour of apple pie and cold coffee.

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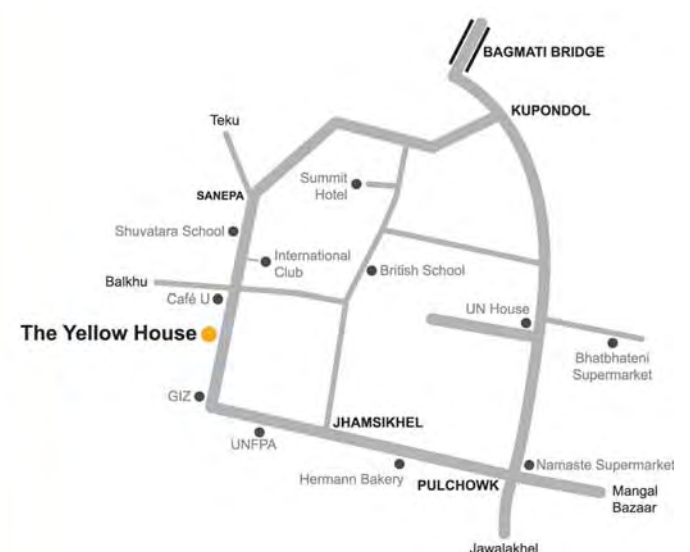
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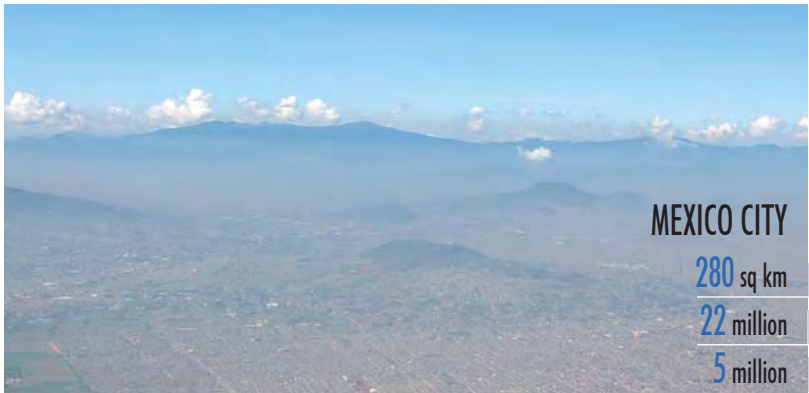
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# Mexico City’s lessons for Kathmandu

ARNICO PANDAY

In 1993 I published an article titled *Kathmandu: Another Mexico City?* describing the geographical similarities of the two cities, analysing population and vehicle growth rates to establish the potential for Kathmandu’s air pollution to get as bad as Mexico City.

Twenty years later, I finally visited Mexico City, met policy makers and scientists, and toured its air pollution monitoring network. The similarities to Kathmandu are uncanny: Mexico City is the historical capital of a remittance-dependent country sprawling out across a former lake bed that is water-starved outside of the rainy season from June to September.

Mexico City has fragile historical brick houses in an earthquake zone (a 8.1

magnitude quake in 1985 killed 10,000) and it is also surrounded by mountains that trap choking air pollution within an inversion layer that often obscures views of snow-capped peaks.

But while congestion and air pollution have steadily worsened in Kathmandu, they have improved in Mexico City. At its worst in 1990-94, Mexico City’s ozone levels exceeded WHO standards of 90 per cent of the year. 70,000 people a year died of respiratory illnesses. There were even serious discussions about leveling a mountain and installing fans to blow the pollution out. While still polluted, Mexico City today is much more liveable, with pollution levels often below WHO standards.

What can Kathmandu learn from Mexico City to improve air quality? Air pollution is reversible and disappears

quickly when emissions are cut. Mexico City closed its most polluting petroleum refinery in 1991. Fuel standards were gradually improved. It switched to unleaded petrol and reduced diesel sulfur content to cut atmospheric sulfur dioxide by three quarters. Catalytic converters cut carbon monoxide by two thirds. Focusing on taxis, minibuses, and buses yielded the biggest improvements, since those vehicles spend the most time on the roads.

Mexico City’s air quality monitoring network has 29 state-of-the-art stations that transmit live data to a control centre which uses radio, Twitter, and even a children’s website to inform the public about where the days’ air quality is on a scale ranging from ‘good’ to ‘extremely bad’. Local technicians maintained the network at a fraction of what it would cost in the West.

There were also failures. In 1989 Mexico City introduced ‘Hoy No Circula’ (no driving day), banning private vehicles one day per week based on the last digit of their number plates. Within a year people bought 275,000 used cars to drive on days when their primary cars were banned and then drove both cars on days when both were allowed. Lagos, Nigeria, tried a similar policy, but there people just ‘bought’ secondary number plates for their cars. Mexico City now has strict vehicle inspection and maintenance programs to restrict the most polluting vehicles.

Widening Kathmandu’s roads may provide temporary relief, but ultimately it just creates bigger traffic jams. A transport system that takes riders away from cars and motorcycles to bicycles and public transport is the

answer. Mexico City today has attractive bicycle lanes, a subway train network, and has copied the Bus-Rapid-Transit (BRT) system from Curitiba in Brazil in which big buses run on dedicated lanes, while cutting stopping times by having passengers prepay the fare before entering boarding platforms. BRTs match the capacity of urban trains at a fraction of the cost. It is not too early for Kathmandu to think about an urban train network, but road widening should include BRTs on the Ring Road. While Mexico City still has major air pollution problem, it has come a long way: 20 years ago it was used to warn Kathmandu. Now it is turning into a role model. 🇲🇽

Arnico Panday is Senior Atmospheric Scientist at ICIMOD in Kathmandu.





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# Earth, fire, and air

Like most visitors to Kathmandu, Norwegian professor Viggo Brunn was fascinated by what people of Kathmandu take for granted: the ubiquitous use of bricks for building construction. Wherever Brunn turned, there were 'bricks, bricks and more bricks': in houses, walls, and palaces, temples, wells, waterways, and the Darbar Squares. The professor's curiosity was further piqued when he couldn't find much literature on brick production. Thus began a decade-long research into brick-making in Kathmandu Valley and resulted in the book, *Fired Earth*, which was released in July by Himal Books.

Those outraged by the sight of the process of brick baking - the gouging of fertile topsoil in Kathmandu Valley, the black smoke from kiln chimneys, the exploitation of bricklayers and their families - will be disappointed by Brunn's dispassionate academic style. The book is the result of meticulous research into the brick business and goes into the technicalities of various types of kilns, from the bull trench to forced draught, to the Hoffman chimney. Since this is a qualitative study, there are no charts with breakdowns and percentages. Thus, one misses the statistics of total production, rate of growth, and what proportion of Kathmandu's pollution is made up of particulates - less than 10 microns small - from soot. But Brunn has also personalised his research with extensive interviews with workers and owners. *Fired Earth* has everything you wanted to know about brick-making, but couldn't be bothered.

Through Brunn's research, we learn that the bricks of the Changu Narayan temple were baked 2,500 years ago and are probably the earliest fired bricks found in the Valley. He uses Google Earth to take a census of the kilns and maps 114 of them. Brunn interviews brick workers who say harvests fall by 20 percent when the land is let out to brick kilns because of the loss of fertile silt. But the loss is compensated by the rental cash and the possibility of finding non-farm work during the peak brick season.

The author also looks at less polluting forms of brick baking, like the forced-draught Habla model. This kiln is cheaper and more energy efficient, but is yet to catch on. The biggest problem for brick kiln owners now is how to get land, which has become expensive. Farmers would also rather sell it to real estate agents than rent it for bricks.

After reading this book, the reader will not look at bricks the same way again. The conclusion is that brick baking will soon go extinct in Kathmandu, not because of popular outcry about urbanisation or the environment, but because there is just little suitable soil or real estate left. In effect, the kiln-produced bricks killed the kilns. 

Kunda Dixit



*Fired Earth: Bricks, Kilns and Workers in Kathmandu Valley*  
By Viggo Brunn  
Himal Books 2013  
Price Rs 1100  
102 pages

## DIRTY BRICKS

The hue and cry over air pollution caused by brick kilns in Kathmandu Valley prompted the government to outlaw moveable chimneys. However, demand from the construction industry fueled the growth and spread of kilns. Since more kilns were licenced and the use of low grade coal and other fuels increased, pollution has gotten worse. The government has fixed 700 micrograms per cubic metre as the maximum limit of suspended particulate matters in brick kiln emissions. However, there is little monitoring to see if this threshold is met. In winter, soot mixes with dust and diesel emission to form a toxic inversion layer of pollution. Other rules, like kilns not being allowed within one km of residential areas, are also flouted.

"We were hesitant to change to fixed chimneys in the beginning, but now we are glad we did, because it is fuel efficient," says Jitendra Khayamali of Shree Brahmayani Brick Factory in Bhaktapur, one of few that are part of the Brick Clean Network. With soaring land prices, brick kiln operators in Kathmandu are finding it increasingly difficult to find clay and have to transport raw material from Kavre.

"People think of brick and cement as the only available building materials," says Bhusan Tuladhar of UN Habitat, which is promoting soil cement blocks in its Green Homes initiative. "Soil cement blocks are just as durable as kiln-baked bricks and the production process is a lot cleaner." Bhrikuti Rai

nepalitimes.com

Green brick, #539  
Gasp, #137



## Alternative bricks

There is a way to make bricks without destroying the soil and fouling up the air. Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks uses a mixture of mud and cement in 96:4 ratio and compresses it with 15 tons of machine pressure (*see pic*). The resulting bricks are even stronger than kiln-baked bricks, while lighter and cheaper. Since customers want red bricks, they can be easily dyed.

Ecotech Building System in Lele makes compressed unbaked bricks and sells them through an outlet in Satdobato. Instead of mud, Badri Maharjan, director of Ecotech, uses stone dust from the quarries, which used to go waste, and mixes it with ash and rice husk. "The biggest problem is that people think bricks have to be red and that they think compressed bricks are not strong," Maharjan explains. His bricks sell at Rs 12 per piece while Bhaktapur bricks cost Rs 16.

A polluter tax on baked bricks would force others to also go for compressed non-baked bricks. But for that we need a more enlightened government.

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Bipendra Karki, Karobar, 29 September



With the nomination date inching closer, businessmen have started competing for PR seats and political parties are negotiating with interested individuals for donations ranging from Rs 10-50 million. Madhesi Janadthikar Forum, Forum Loktantrik, and Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik have openly offered seats to those willing to donate a minimum of Rs 10 million. Other major parties

including the UCPN (Maoist), NC, and UML are also in negotiations with business houses for contributions of up to Rs 50 million. Rajendra Khetan and Padma Jyoti, parliamentarians in the first Constituent Assembly, have decided to stay away from the CA this time round. "There is no point becoming a part of the CA when all the decisions are made by the four parties," says Khetan who was nominated by the Nepal Communist Party-ML in 2008. Many in the business community feel that the exorbitant amounts demanded by the parties and the subsequent negotiations are unhealthy. "The private sector shouldn't merely be used as cadre and donors for parties whenever they need money," says Manoj Kedia, vice-president of Confederation of Nepalese Industries.

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## फोहर सङ्कलनलाई सम्मान गरौं।

The final countdown

Interview with Chief Election Commissioner Nilkantha Upreti, Himal, 29 October

**Nepali Times: Are you certain elections will take place on 19 November?**  
**Nilkantha Upreti:** Well there are security issues and other concerns. But days leading up to elections are always uncertain, the day of the poll itself turns out fine. We are committed to holding elections in 10,017 centres across the country on 19 November. Our job is to make sure everything is in place, the government is responsible for providing resources to make it possible, and by now the parties should have realised they must reach all their constituencies.



**What about the role of election monitors?**  
It would be ideal if we could create an environment where election monitors aren't necessary, because we can then say that democracy in Nepal has been truly institutionalised. India has election observers who unlike monitors are not required to write reports. In the last elections there were complaints that some of the monitors were affiliated or close to certain parties and that the parties used them for political gain. Only 32 of 148 monitors submitted reports last time. We don't want a repeat of that.

**How much is the elections going to cost?**  
Polls are going to be really expensive and will cost around Rs 24 billion. The EC will spend a third of that and the rest will be used for security. Monitors will run on our expenses. We don't know how much the parties will spend – almost 1,200 candidates from the last elections still haven't submitted financial reports of their campaigns.

**How will this election be different than 2008?**  
This is the first elections in Nepal where voters will be required to bring IDs. This will help us cut down on voter fraud that was rampant during 2008. If by chance some people do not get their IDs on time, they should bring other forms of government documentation. And except for a few locations, people will not have to travel more than five km to and from election centres.

### NEPALI TWEETS

Madhu Acharya

वाकसमा आउने लाम र वैकमा आउने रेमिटन्सको क्यासलाई एउटै देखेपछि के लाग्छ र ! कतार र नेपाल सरकार दुवै समाचार खण्डन गर्ने व्यस्त छन् ।

People don't see much difference between a corpse that comes in a coffin and remittance that comes to banks. The governments of Qatar and Nepal are busy renouncing the Guardian report.

Kalpana Bhandari

जेलकालाई टिकट, थप्पड हान्नेलाई टिकट, नायक नायिकालाई टिकट, भ्रष्टाचारमा परेकालाई टिकट, तब न दोस्रो पटकको चुनाव

Criminals have tickets, slappers have tickets, actor-actresses have tickets, those involved in corruption cases have tickets. No wonder this is our second CA elections.

bachchu rai

दर्तीको बेला घर जाने टिकट खोसिएको होइन क्यारे भुवनको, त्यहि भएर खासै हंगामा गर्नु ठिक होइन जस्तो लाग्छ

It's not as if Bhuwan KC was robbed of his bus ticket to home during Dasain. So it's not right to make a big fuss.

Bhaskar Gyawali

अब चुनाव सञ्चम फेसबुक र ट्वीटर बन्द गर्नु पर्ला जस्तो छ भोट माग्ने थानी सके, कती टघर दिने हुन आफ्नो पार्टीको प्रचार गरेर, ट्वीट साधेरुले।

Perhaps we should shut down Facebook and Twitter until election day. Friends on twitter have already started asking for votes for their parties, how much more they will torture us on social media?

WEEKLY BAZAR POLL #30

In weekly polls conducted with the support of The Asia Foundation, *Himal Khabarpatrika* asks 375 respondents in 12 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on contemporary issues. This week's result of interviews is about Nepalis' opinion on the upcoming elections.

**Are you confident that your right to vote in the upcoming CA elections will be respected?**  
No 47.1%  
Yes 34.6%  
Don't know 18.3%

**What do you think about the government's decision to deploy the army at the polls?**  
Will tighten security 58.3%  
Will make army controversial 16.6%  
Will invite trouble at polls 11.4%  
Don't know 13.7%



Dasain

**नेपाल** Rabindra in *Nepal*, 29 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



**“ If 80 per cent of the parties take part in polls, it doesn't matter what the rest do. ”**  
Chairman of the interim election government, Khil Raj Regmi, *Kantipur*, 1 October



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Got a ticket to ride

No Ass column will be complete this week without some asinine comments about the way political parties have distributed tickets for candidates for the forthcoming elections. Kollywood actors and actresses are apparently running helter skelter and some have actually gone semi-underground to escape the dragnet of political parties vying with each other to pull screen idols who pull voters. But the most dramatic story is of yesteryear’s heart throb (today’s myocardial infarction) Bhuwan Kesi who had agreed with Lotus Thapa to join RPP Nepal for the Kathmandu #1 constituency. It was announced on FB, the journos had arrived for the photo-op, but no Bhuwan Dai. On further investigation, it turned out he had been hijacked overnight by the UML. So far so great. But guess what, after his name appeared on the UML’s



candidate list, the Unfettered Marxist-Leninists started having second thoughts and retroactively retracted Bhuwan Dai’s name. “BAMF-OMG-WTF,” Kesi was overheard swearing on the phone. Charisma, meanwhile, deserves the Nepali equivalent of the BAFTA Award for playing coy and refusing to hob-nob with politicians. Rekha can have

best supporting actress for pretending to be excited about standing in Parsa, where she’s never been.

The other breed of people fighting tooth and nail for tickets are family members of leaders. Now that the Koirala family has been further subdivided into five warring

factions, Sujata has leveled a serious charge against Jhusil Uncle and accused him of ‘nepotism’. She walked out of the kangresi konklave the other day and called a presscon where she invoked the wrath of her ancestors on the cousins and uncles running her party.

The Bracket Baddies have also turned out to be as naughty as everyone else so far as spreading candidates among kith and kin goes. Five Cash candidates are joining the election fray with their wives, including ‘Be Right Back’ BRB. And setting the trend is none other than the Great Helmsman himself who is fielding dotter Renu, dotter-out-law Bina and bro Narayan. Prakash (‘Son Also Rises’) Dahal was exiled for sowing his wild oats far and wide, but has been rehabilitated and his third wife Bina Magar also got a ticket.

This is all becoming nice and cosy and Comrade Atom

seems perfectly happy attiring himself in police, commando, and football uniforms and doesn’t want to run in no elections. Which is just as well because a Dash Baddie who was PKD’s former bodyguard has spilt the beans about the alcoholic and other escapades of Dahal & Son, Pvt Ltd. The other Comrade Prakash, on the other hand, is in the dog house and rumour has it he seriously mulled defecting to the UML.

And what’s with this outbreak of letter writing to Ban ki-Moon? First it was Shambhu Thapa, dashing off an email to Uncle Ban whining about being fingered by the CIAA’s Autopilot Baba. Thinking it was now de rigueur for Nepali politicians to tattle to Uncle Moon, Baidya Ba also shot off a note to tell him not to believe a word that Kill Raj told him.

At this rate, the Ass will also have to write to the UNSG and begin by saying: ‘Dear Mr Ki-Moon (or shall I call you Ban?) Will you be my penpal?’



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यो योजना २०७०, असोज १३ गते देखि कार्तिक २३ गतेसम्म लागुहुनेछ ।