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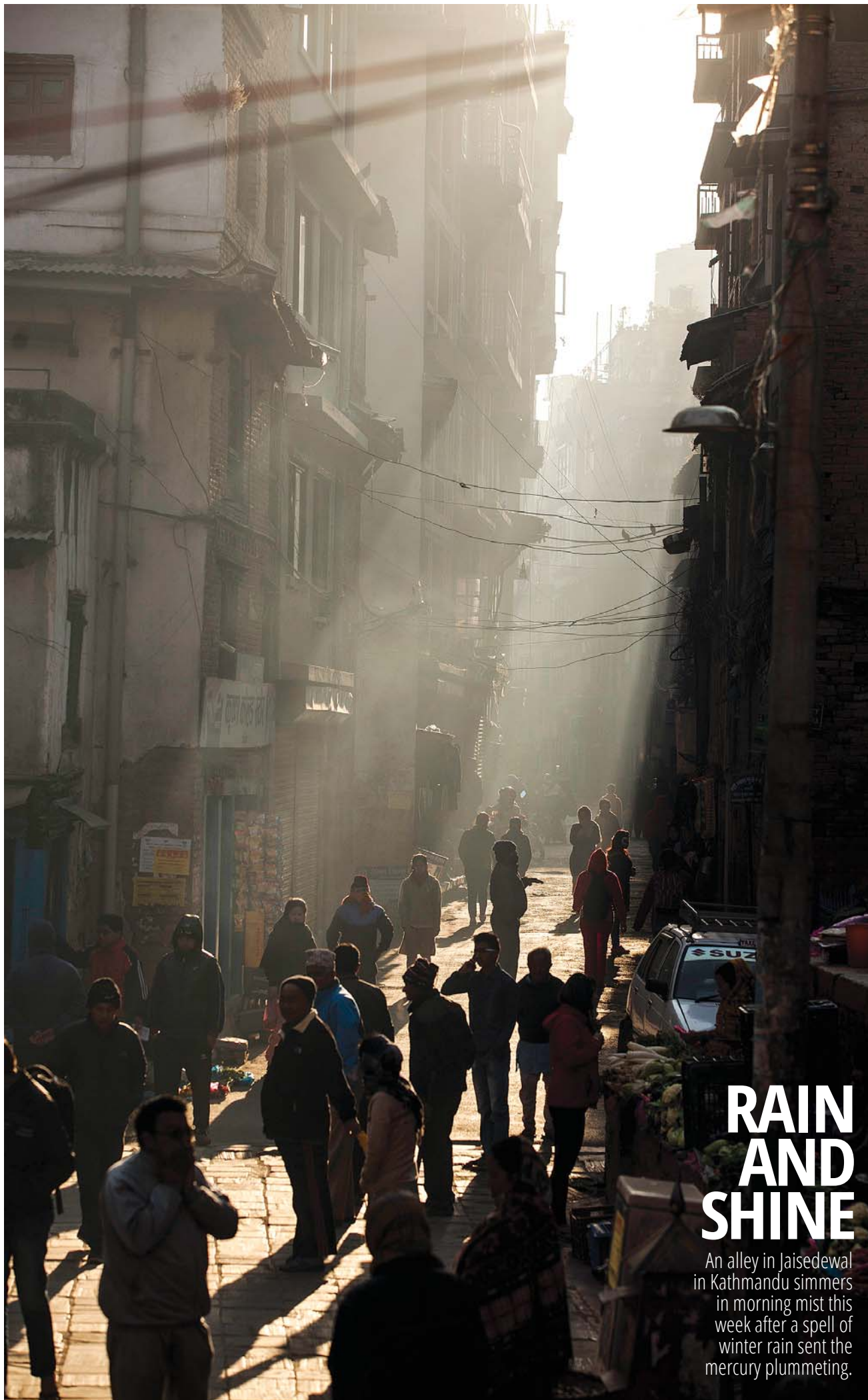


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RAIN AND SHINE

An alley in Jaisedwal in Kathmandu simmers in morning mist this week after a spell of winter rain sent the mercury plummeting.

DEEPENDRA BAJTACHARYA

One month to go

Politicians agree to agree, sending a sense of cautious optimism about the constitution, but they need to settle their power struggle first.

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There is much more to the constitution debate than the constitution.

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SHELFIE



Nepali Times selection of books for holiday reading.

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ONE MONTH TO GO

After a six-year pregnancy, the Constituent Assembly is finally ready to give birth. The contractions have started, and all it needs now is for one mighty push to get the baby out.

Confronted with the reality that the deadline is a month away, and faced with the prospect of destabilising uncertainty if the constitution is not passed by 22 January, the top leaders have suddenly woken up from deep slumber. What has goaded them on is that they suddenly appear worried about public opinion, and are apprehensive about what the electorate will say if they miss another deadline.

The other reason for the sense of cautious optimism in the capital is that the political parties have one by one sorted out their internal power struggles. Madhav Kumar Nepal and KP Oli have buried the hatchet in the UML, emboldened by the split in the Baidya faction Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai have also patched up their differences for now. The Madhesi parties have distanced themselves from the UCPN(M) and revived their Madhesi Front.

After the Dialogue Committee under Baburam Bhattarai failed to present a viable compromise to the Assembly, there is no one else left to blame. CA Chair Subhas Nembang had had enough and summoned all top leaders to this chambers last week. He was uncharacteristically blunt in putting pressure on them to compromise on federalism and form of government. This prompted all sides to agree to agree on the remaining issues in the constitution.

Part of the reason that the obstacles to constitution-writing have suddenly been removed seems to be that a deal has been struck on the post-22 January power equation. It has been known for sometime now that the real reason for all the closed-door meetings at resorts was to decide whose turn it is to be prime minister after Sushil Koirala steps down post-constitution and who should replace President Ram Baran Yadav.

Politicians agree to agree, sending a sense of cautious optimism about the constitution, but they need to settle their power struggle first



The UML’s KP Oli has anointed himself as Koirala’s successor, and we hear that certain other assurances of important portfolios have been made for leaders of other parties. The Bhattarai-Dahal dispute within the UCPN(M) was resolved after Dahal accepted Bhattarai’s leadership

of the party in return for a promise to give him a post commensurate with this stature, viz: presidency.

Leaders who used to emerge from meetings lashing out at opponents have suddenly started singing a different, more hopeful, tune. The most difficult issue on the constitution has been federalism, and after Nembang’s meeting Dahal indicated that he was willing to reduce the number of ethnically-demarcated provinces from 10, allow future provincial legislatures to decide on their names and an expert committee to decide on their boundaries. But the fly in the ointment is the fate of five districts in far-western and eastern Tarai – should they be a part of the Madhes or hill provinces? Again, the bone of contention here is not so much political devolution, but the ambitions of individual politicians who want to be warlords in those provinces.

Although Dahal is holding out for either a directly-elected president or prime minister, he is in the minority among the top parties who favour a reformed version of the current parliamentary system. Dahal is being offered a face-saving provision of electoral colleges at the provincial level, and some augmentation of presidential powers.

On electoral provisions, there has been a meeting of minds with only the proportion of candidates from the proportional representation list to be agreed upon. The smaller parties have been nervous about the threshold in future elections, and this is holding up an agreement on the election formula. However, since future legislatures will shrink from the current 601 it will automatically weed out parties that get less than a minimum number of seats, while leaving open their representation in provincial legislatures.

We have now come to that same point in May 2012 when all parties had agreed on these issues after the Hatiban Retreat, but the Maoists took to the streets leading to the dissolution of the CA. Let’s hope the constitution process will not be similarly aborted this time. And that it is not another false alarm.

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

DECENTRALISED PLUNDER

Great editorial that hits the nail on the head ('Decentralised plunder', Editorial, #736). This is why only investors who are crooked themselves or who want a quick bang for the buck will invest in Nepal.

Jens

■ It might be relevant to add that central-level 'plunder' usually precedes 'decentralised plunder' like the ones mentioned in the editorial. It often takes place under the protection of central-level higher ups (who in that way allow their local supporters to benefit too and/or who get a share of the locally collected 'earnings'). Highly placed interests typically get a share before these projects even reach the local level. Reading the article, one might be left with the impression that 'extortion' in connection with big infrastructure projects (politicians, bureaucrats, and others asking for a 'share', 'commission', 'bribe') only takes place at the stage of implementation. In fact, it also occurs even on a grander scale at the planning/budgeting stage where percentages are 'calculated in' as the budget of the project is decided. So, illicit interests in and around big infrastructure projects are diverse.

Hans G N Anderson

■ When Norway discovered oil and natural gas, they employed an

Iraqi citizen who showed them how to nationalise untapped natural wealth. "How" being the operative word here. Google Farouk al-Kasim.

N

■ Money goes bottom-up, by the way. *The Guardian* reported yesterday that \$1 Trillion is siphoned off each year from poor countries.

@Lohars5

■ The question remains how do we replicate two models in other areas of governance ('Dichotomy in development', Bihari Krishna Shrestha, #736). It is interesting to note that when a natural resource (forests) was nationalised (power was ostensibly concentrated with the central govt) and individual resources (mother's control over her body and health) were distributed, both achieved great results. Hence the wisdom lies in being able to decide when, how much and to whom the power needs to be given.

Namah

■ Everyone in Nepal, including the Police and the CIAA, organisations created to serve and protect the people, know that our politicians and leaders are corrupt to the core. Yet, no action is ever taken against them. Why?

Mahesh

SAVING KATHMANDU
Kathmandu used to be a walker's paradise ('Rescuing Kathmandu from its future', Kunda Dixit, #736).

I remember winding through the amazing byways of Ombahal and Asan as a kid. Today it's a war zone with pedestrians and bikers (motorcycles) playing chicken. I am not an urban planner, but one thing which common sense does tell me is: First build the roads, then the houses...not the other way around.

Na

■ I couldn't agree more. In a shared economy you need to share resources and space.

Dev Rana

■ If only the leaders had implemented late Dr Harka Gurung's urban planning four decades ago, Kathmandu would be a totally different city.

Yam Gurung

■ Cartels selling vehicles will never let mass transportation take off ('Needed: political will for public transport', Elvin L Shrestha, #736).

Sujeev Shakya

■ Hope the focus will be on developing better public transport - of all kinds.

David Seddon

EVEREST
'Everest is a huge part of Nepal's economy, it is literally a license to print money ('The long game', Ted Atkins, #736).' It looks like the Nepal Government is taking your advice literally, Ted Atkins, fleeing expeditions dry and not returning the

money from this year's cancelled climbs.

Malla

■ Everest needs respect like all the environments of the world.

Oli Larsen

LOCALLY EXTORTED
Living near a source of energy entitles me to 35 per cent of the revenue from a hydropower project? ('Rs 6.5 million extorted', From the Nepali Press, #736) Where is the logic in that? It is a different story if the residents had actually been displaced and were seeking compensation.

N

BACKSIDE
Best Backside ever, Ass (Botox on the buttocks, #736). Your sense of humour and satire is unsurpassed.

Mandy

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AMRIT GURUNG



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TOUCHING HEAVEN: View of the Annapurna Range on Monday morning from Niyal Danda with Pokhara and Phewa Lake shrouded in fog.



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Rescuing Kathmandu from its future by Kunda Dixit (23 retweets, 7 favourites)



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After Everest and K2, Sherpa women sets sights on Kangchenjunga by Tsering Dolker Gurung (1,369 views)



Most commented

Decentralised plunder, Editorial

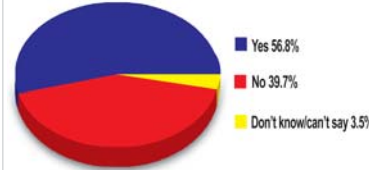
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Weekly Internet Poll #737

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To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Which social media site do you use the most?

Kailash, Malala and Nepal

This year's two Nobel Peace Prize winners have already benefitted thousands of Nepali children and will inspire them

The barbaric attack and killing of innocent school children in Peshawar this week is a poignant reminder of the relevance of this year's Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Kailash Satyarthi of India and Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan, and their tireless advocacy and activism



GUEST COLUMN
Kul Chandra Gautam

in support of children's right to quality basic education, and against hazardous child labour. Their work and example is a source of pride and inspiration to the children of Nepal, thousands of whom have already benefitted from their initiatives.

Satyarthi will be visiting Nepal this weekend, meeting political leaders, child rights activists, and Nepali youngsters whom he has helped rescue from the bonded labour. His *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* rescued many Nepali teenagers trafficked to India to work in slave-like conditions in garment and leather factories, circus troupes, dance bars and brothels. Nepali child rights organisations like BASE and CWIN have been partners in his celebrated Global March against Child Labour.

In the 1990s, Satyarthi helped establish an innovative organisation called RugMark, now known as GoodWeave, to help end child labour in the carpet industry. At that time there were over one million children weaving carpets in South Asia toiling in dusty, dirty looms. At an age when they should be going to school, playing and developing their personality, children worked long hours, without any health care or proper sanitation and nutrition.

GoodWeave designed an ingenious scheme whereby in exchange for not employing children in their factories and supply chain, carpet manufacturers and exporters could tag a 'child-labour free' GoodWeave label on their products. Conscientious consumers in Europe and America who bought these carpets felt



happy that they were not inadvertently condoning child labour.

GoodWeave promoted a market-based approach to foster social change. It charged a modest fee of 0.25 percent of the sale price from the exporter and 1.75 percent from the importer for its services – which included surprise inspection of factories to ascertain the presence or absence of child labour, rescue of children found there, help for their rehabilitation and education, improvement of working environment in the factories in terms of safety, sanitation, hygiene, and other facilities like breastfeeding breaks and child care facilities for working mothers.

With a growing demand from consumers for ethical products, and the cooperation of importers, GoodWeave was able to persuade owners and managers of carpet factories to voluntarily join its program, and allow inspectors and social workers.

The results were impressive. Within a decade, prevalence of child labour in the carpet industry in South Asia declined by 75 per cent. So far, 11 million carpets with GoodWeave certification have been sold. This is still a small number in the global market of handmade carpets, but GoodWeave now serves as a model of a voluntary industry initiative to combat forced and bonded child labor and human trafficking.

Two decades ago, hand-made Tibetan carpets were among Nepal's top exports. Factories employed many children, but after GoodWeave started its operation in Nepal in 1995, several hundred carpet manufacturers joined it voluntarily and started following more child-friendly employment practices. Child labour declined drastically, as unemployed adult carpet workers took their place. The Nepal GoodWeave Foundation provided valuable service for the education and rehabilitation of children rescued from carpet factories. Working conditions in many factories improved as day care facilities

DÉJÀ VU: Nobel Peace Prize winner Kailash Satyarthi consoles co-winner Malala Yousafzai after she breaks down at the sight of her bloodied uniform at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo last week. On Tuesday, Taliban militants attacked an army run school in Peshawar that left 148-mostly children- dead.

and breastfeeding breaks were provided for working mothers. In partnership with the government and other NGOs, GoodWeave even started preventive programs in communities that were the principal source of child trafficking.

Unfortunately, the combination

of deteriorating security situation during the decade of Maoist insurgency and the global economic downturn affected Nepal's economy, including the carpet industry. A shrinking global market, the rising cost of raw materials, and extortion by militant trade unions led to closure of many factories. Recently, the massive exodus of adult migrant labourers has led to increased risk of child labour in domestic industries, including in the supply chain of carpet industry.

As vividly portrayed in a new GoodWeave campaign, Stand with Sanju inspired by the true story of a Nepali girl who went from carpet loom to classroom, Kailash Satyarthi's campaign against child labour continues to be relevant in Nepal.

Quality education is the best antidote to child labour, and this is where Malala's campaign to promote girls' education is also relevant for Nepal. Although Nepal has reached virtual gender parity in primary schools, many parents send their sons to better quality private schools while daughters are enrolled in government schools with high dropout rates. Malala's campaign including through the Global Partnership for Education mobilises significant financial support for basic education in Nepal.

Kul Chandra Gautam, a former Deputy Executive Director at UNICEF, is a Board Member of GoodWeave International, originally founded by Kailash Satyarthi and a Champion for the Global Partnership for Education along with Malala Yousafzai. www.kulgautam.org

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ANANDA RAM DANGOL

Abstrusity has always been the hallmark of Nepali politics so it is not surprising that even the best in the business have given up trying to make sense of it.

When I met political science professor Krishna Khanal earlier this week to seek answers, this is how he began: “Let me be very frank, if we go by the logic that the parties are concentrating all their



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

efforts on constitution drafting, we will miss the whole picture.”

To be sure, overall environment for drafting the statute has improved. The sentiments have calmed down, the streets are quieter and parties are now trying to reason on issues where they

Contentious consensus

There is much more to the constitution debate than the constitution

earlier were impulsive. However, the political environment remains murky.

As early as 2011, I had argued in this column that the sticking point was not so much on the number of provinces, name or the forms of governance. They only appear as immediate factors of contention among the parties who are looking to score long-term brownie points for their role in drafting the new constitution.

There will always be many sides to the story, but one of the main reasons why the first CA was dissolved is because NC and UML were scared that the Maoists and the Madhesis were running away with their share of the credit. Three years later, the tables are turned and this time it is the Maoists and the Madhesis who

harbour similar fears about the NC-UML taking all the credit for the new constitution

Then there are also the personal political ambitions at stake here. UML’s KP Oli wants to wait till January and push for the unity government under himself, while Prime Minister Sushil Koirala is determined to see the statute written while he is in office. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhav Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Bijay Kumar Gachchhadar are all looking to secure their positions within their parties and in the government beforehand. They all know that once the statute is finalised the political alignments can change dramatically.

Fingers can be pointed in any direction, but the reason Maoists

and the Madhesis will not agree to the NC-UML joint proposal today is the same reason why NC-UML decided to reject State Restructuring Commission’s report and go back on agreement of 15 May 2012, which they are now calling ‘obsolete’.

The good news is that the parties aren’t as insecure of their legacy and contribution in the drafting process as they were back then. So, despite being in the opposition and disagreeing on several issues, the Maoists and the Madhesis will still have sufficient incentive to cooperate in finalising the draft.

The decision to take the contentious issue for an open debate in the CA is an encouraging development in this regard. However, the ruling parties must

not stifle the debate and use numerical strength to dictate their terms inside the house.

“Particularly on the issue of state restructuring, the parties must arrive at an agreeable model even if it has some economic implications, rather than the one that will breed conflict in the long run,” Prof Khanal told me. “Because the issue of inclusion and identity has been at the heart of all recent political movements.”

Indeed, constitution drafting is not just a technical exercise where the focus is exclusively on content. It is as much a political exercise which requires broader ownership and acceptance. The personal credibility and negotiation skills of the leaders matter more than the numerical strengths to back their decisions. The Maoists realised this once they were in the government, Sushil Koirala and KP Oli know that by now, too.

In the end, like all things political, it may still boil down to give-and-take. @AnuragAcharya



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“THE CLOCK IS TICKING”

- CA Chair Subhas Nembang



DEVAKI BISTA

Nepali Times: Now that the Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee has submitted its report, is the waiting period over for promulgation of a new constitution?

Subhas Nembang: No, the report presented by CPDCC wasn't in accordance with the directions given by CA and CA regulations. The CPDCC not only failed to forge a consensus, but also couldn't settle disputed issues. The committee only forwarded a descriptive report on what they did. My question to them was if a committee made up of the top leaders along with leaders of the 31 parties in CA cannot come up with a consensus, who can? I told them that reaching a consensus was their responsibility. When they said consensus can be reached within two hours, I told them to do it. The report hasn't resolved any issues, the only positive outcome is that it allowed discussion to move to the CA.

Aren't there any other alternatives if consensus isn't reached?

We sent the disputed issues to the CPDCC precisely because it was supposed to forge a consensus. Now the issue of how to come to a consensus and who will prepare questions on disputed issues remains to be addressed.

Will the disputes be resolved by the Constituent Assembly (CA) or will it be sent back to CPDCC?

The report will be discussed in the CA. Although I have been working to get concrete results, the truth is it depends on the 601 members of the CA and 31 parties. Since the CPDCC failed to fulfill its

objectives, the decision to send disputed issues back to the committee or look for an alternative lies within the CA. The best option would be for the parties to agree, otherwise we will be in trouble.

What would you say are the three most likely scenarios on 22 January?

We have reached an agreement on some issues from the previous CA, only a few others remain. The draft committee has started work on issues resolved by various committees. It's only the CPDCC that is holding things up. But the parties are narrowing their differences. It shouldn't be difficult for them to find common ground. It is taking longer than expected, but if they do come to an agreement, the secretariat and I will amend any regulations to promulgate the new constitution.

By 22 January?

That date is not a constitutional stipulation, the party leaders set that self-imposed deadline. When I was chosen as the chairman for the second CA, it was I who declared that the constitution will be drafted within a year of the first CA meeting. In this sense, 22 January is the

date committed by the parties to promulgate a new constitution. It is still possible to meet that deadline.

What are the points of agreement and what hasn't been agreed to yet?

Perhaps this is not an appropriate time to go into details. The new constitution is for the citizens of Nepal regardless of their geographic location, caste or creed. For example, they have resolved the issue of federal structure, a topic that was thought to be difficult to agree on. But, if they aren't flexible the constitution will not be drafted on time. So I urge all Nepalis to stand up and demand the leaders come to an agreement on time, or they should tell the public the difficulties they are facing.

What if there is no constitution on 22 January?

It is better not to define too many things. The question of what difference will it make if 22 January passes has come up during internal and external negotiations, too. What I have to say is that if the 22 January deadline passes without a constitution, the integrity of the parties will be questioned.

Has the termination of the previous CA in any way affected the present CA and has it exerted any pressure on you?

Even though we worked hard, the previous CA failed to draft a new constitution. Since I was the chairman, I should take responsibility. But keeping aside everything else, they elected me once again. We have learnt our lessons from the past and we have tried to work towards a broad agreement. It is imperative that the constitution is promulgated by the deadline. The political parties should be ready to explain to the public why they couldn't agree. The public is giving them a chance, even when the CPDCC didn't achieve anything worthwhile they supported it. But I don't think the Nepali public will be this forgiving for much longer.

If a new constitution is to be delivered by 22 January, when should there be a consensus?

The draft committee should write it up first. The CA has specific procedures, but before that the parties have to reach a consensus on the contentious issues. Only then can the new constitution be promulgated in January. But the clock is ticking and it will be better if they find a common ground this week.

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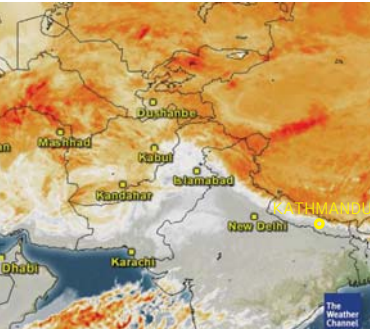
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HELPING A FRIEND: Ram Nagarkoti joined Kathmandu Animal Treatment Center nine years ago as a part-time kennel builder. Today, he is both the ambulance driver and operating room assistant at the center (*left*). Vets Bidur Piya and Dr Banga treat an injured dog (*below*).



To the rescue of Kathmandu’s canines

Man’s best friend has friends when he is in trouble

DONATELLA LORCH

The phone calls start early morning. They are strikingly similar. “There is an injured dog on the street. Can you take care of it?”

Ram Nagarkoti, the 31-year-old ambulance driver at the Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT Centre) often spends his days zigzagging through traffic, waving at police officers as he edges across intersections and squeezes into labyrinthian alleyways to find his patient — one of 20,000 stray dogs in Kathmandu.

In flip-flops, baggy pants and a well-worn white T-shirt, Ram looks more like a wandering hippie than an animal ambulance attendant. This morning, the injured dog is a mutt of medium build with thick black hair who lives with seven other strays at a Hindu temple. A shopkeeper made the call when she noticed the dog could no longer walk and refused food handouts.

Ram knelt down, caressing the dog as he tried to figure out what was wrong.

Before moving the mutt, he also did a quick health survey of the temple’s other canine residents. As the shopkeepers began hovering around him, he slipped into an impromptu talk on animal health and the need for birth control.

“A healthy dog means a healthy community, and these dogs all need to be vaccinated and fixed,” Ram told the gathering crowd, explaining to a curious lady how females are spayed. He then turned to one of the temple beggars and to the man’s surprise taught him how to carry the dog to the ambulance. The beggar was grinning from ear-to-ear and asked to pet the dog after setting him down.

It is easy to lump the stray dogs of Kathmandu into one large category: destitute, miserably hungry, unloved, unhappy and most critically, unvaccinated and unneutered. Yet, some Nepalis keep dogs as indoor pets or as guard dogs, chained outside their houses. Many others contribute to the care of ‘community dogs’.

These strays roam across a few blocks of streets. They drink from drainage ditches,

politely beg from shops and fill the night with their baying, howling, snarling, yelping and ululating barks. In winter, cold kills the weak. In the dry, hot months, thirst kills. Puppies have a particularly high death rate. Wounds from nighttime fights fester. Many dogs suffer from starvation, infected open sores and mange.

The KAT Centre is one of three nonprofits that divide up the city and its stray dogs, vaccinating, doctoring and conducting neighborhood awareness programs. Based in a house with a large yard, the center has eight employees, including two vets, a flow of local and international volunteers, and about 50 stray dogs and a few cats in its compound on an average day. The operating room is open five days a week.

KAT’s goal is to humanely reduce the number of stray dogs by creating a healthier, rabies-free street dog population. Founded in 2004 by Jan Salter, a painter who has lived in Katmandu for almost 40 years, KAT conducts on-the-street rabies vaccination (950 dogs in one neighborhood this autumn), as well as spaying and neutering campaigns.

By contrast, a couple of decades ago, the government conducted dog-poisoning campaigns, once killing 10,000 in one go. New packs of strays moved in to fill the void.

Injured animals are treated at the center, then vaccinated and neutered or spayed before being released. About five to seven dogs a month, usually puppies, are adopted. A constant struggle for donations has meant discontinuing distemper and parovirus shots.

Dogs are everywhere in the KAT Centre. They sleep in the driveway or curled up in baskets, in stairwells, in the room with the overfull, chugging washing machine. Or they may be recovering from sterilisation in kennels. Some, like a blond short-haired male who lost a leg in a car accident, are too weak to return to street life and become permanent residents.

There are visible signs that KAT has made inroads. More Nepalis are adopting dogs — and making emergency calls about dogs in distress.

After the temple pick-up, Ram is called to fetch another dog with leg injuries. Everyone at KAT multitasks. Ram joined the center nine years ago as a part-time kennel builder. Since then, he has learned English and is also operating room assistant. When Ram is not driving, he assists Bidur Piya, a 32-year-old vet, in the triage room.

They muzzle the injured dog and Piya strokes him as Ram shaves the fur around the leg wound. Once the patient is anesthetised, Piya cuts out the damaged tissue, disinfects the wound with honey and bandages it up. The dog will be neutered and then should be back on the street in another month. 🇳🇵

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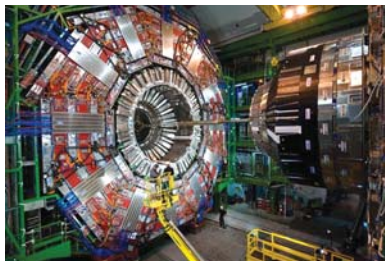
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HONDA

EVENTS

**Particle fever,**

Watch this film that gives you a front row seat to a significant and inspiring scientific breakthrough – the Large Hadron Collider.

Free entry, 20 December, 2 to 4.30pm, Embassy Restaurant, make reservations: (01)4424040, 9802024040

Masters of Janakpur,

Crisis Recovery International showcases traditional Mithila art by women of Janakpur.

Till 23 December, 10am to 6pm, Taragaon Museum, Hyatt Regency, Boudha

Photography workshop,

A unique photography workshop for all

budding photographers- hobbyists, non-professionals and beginners.

18 to 29 December, 7 to 9am, SCC Kathmandu, Kupondole, www.facebook.com/scc.kathmandu

#Occupy,

A collection of art objects with global conscience.

Till 7 January 2015, 10am to 6.30pm, The City Museum Kathmandu, Darbar Marg

Tokyo to Kathmandu,

Recollections in print of artist Kabi Raj Lama's artistic and spiritual quest from Tokyo to Kathmandu.

Till 30 December, 11am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited

Gion,

A lecture by Eiko Ikegami on gods, power and common folks, and the history and contemporary practices of the Gion festival in Japan.

22 December, 4pm onwards, The City Museum Kathmandu, Darbar Marg

**Yerma,**

A folk musical tragedy by the great Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca. Rs 200 (adults)/ Rs 100 (students), 19 & 21 December, 5pm onwards; 20 December, 1pm onwards, The Village Theatre, Lajimpat, (01)4001089, oneworldtheatre.np@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS FEVER

Making merry,

Treat yourself to some traditional Christmas delights at Coffee & Cakes Bakery (20 December onwards) or enjoy a traditional Christmas brunch.

Rs 1500, 25 December 10.30am onwards, Lost Horizon Café, Hotel Shangri La, Lajimpat, (01)4412999

**X-mas feast,**

Celebrate Christmas Eve with a special buffet dinner and a glass of mulled wine, Rs 2,800, 24 December. Or revel in some live music and select from an assortment of barbeques, soups, desserts and more for brunch, Rs 2,300, 25 December.

The Cafe, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01)4491234

Ho ho ho,

A warm Christmas setting, festive turkey dinner, free glass of mulled wine, and a visit from Santa with gifts.

24 to 27 December, Kilroy's of Kathmandu Restaurant, Thamel, (01)4250440

**Festive buffet,**

Join in on this annual Christmas Eve party with an exquisite buffet and live performances by Marta del Grandi (Italy), Nagore Etxaburu (Spain) and Kutumba (Nepal).

Rs 2,000, 24 December, Park Village Hotel & Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01)4375280, 9851057642

Jingle bells,

Enjoy a carol singing by the choir troupe along with the Himalayan Beauties. Then celebrate Christmas Eve with a Christmas dinner, special pastries and free chocolates and cookies.

Rs 1,999, 5.30pm onwards, Lost Horizon Café, Hotel Shangri La, Lajimpat, (01)4412999

Celebrations galore,

Choose from a selection of places to celebrate Christmas Eve: Buffet dinner with turkeys, pies, puddings and more at Durbar Restaurant, Rs 1,800. A four-course set dinner at Club House

Restaurant, Rs 2,000. Or a six-course set menu at Hunter's Lodge Restaurant, Rs 2,500. 24 December, 6pm onwards, Gokarna Forest Resort, (01)4451212

Pack your parcels,

Donate to Local Women's Handicrafts through PayPal and have local Christmas gifts sent to your loved ones.

Local Women's Handicrafts, www.facebook.com/localwomenshandicrafts, 9813538909

Otaku Christmas,

A Christmas-themed manga fest with awards, cosplay, Japanese food, anime merchandises and a manga-art competition.

24 December, 12pm onwards, Grill Me, Jhamsikhel

Yogic holiday,

A yoga session with Kicky Zammit followed by a Christmas Kirtan.

24 December, 9.15am onwards, Pranamaya Studio, Patan, 9802045484

**Family feast,**

A festive family friendly feast with live music.

Rs 2,000 for adults & Rs 1,500 for children, 24 December, 7pm, Hotel Shanker, Lajimpat, (01)4410151

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१ जनालाई टि-सर्ट, गोपीकृष्ण हलको मुनी ठिकठ र साङ्गीतिक सिडी

र २ जनालाई थप ३ महिनाको नि: शुल्क सदस्यता

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१ जनालाई Seiko Chronograph घडी

४२" एल ई डी टी.भी

१ जनालाई

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MUSIC

**Acoustic night,**

Audio Ignition will be performing here this Friday night.

19 December, 7pm onwards,
Backyard Food Pub & Joint, Jhamsikhel

**Deathfest,**

Accomplished – local and international – Extreme Metal bands come together to celebrate the glorious genre.

9 and 10 January, venue to be announced

**Music night,**

An evening with the popular rock band 1974 AD.

Rs 400, 8pm onwards,
House of Music, Thamel

We celebrate,

A lineup of performances with students and popular bands like 1974 AD and Anuprastha, along with food and game stalls.

27 December, 1pm onwards,
Jawalakhel Ground, 9843147057

GETAWAYS

Shangri-La Village Resort,

Set amidst peaceful surroundings with a breathtaking mountain views, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience. *Gharipatan, Pokhara*, (61)462222, (01)4410051

Park Village Resort,

Far away from the madding crowd, yet so close to the city. *Budhanilkantha*, (01)4375280, pvh@wlink.com.np

**Temple Tree Resort and Spa,**

A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour, and sauna, it'll be hard to leave once you go in. *Gaurighat, Lakeside*, (061)465819

Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park. *Bhetani, Bardia*, info@mangotreelodge.com

Hotel Barahi,

Enjoy a great view of Phewa lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises. *Lakeside, Pokhara*, (061)460617/463526

Atithi Resort,

A perfect place to stay, nearby pool, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice. *Shantipatan, Lakeside, Pokhara*. (061)466760 /400207, info@atithiresort.com

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SHEER



The Prospector JMG Le Clézio

French writer JMG Le Clézio, laureate of the Nobel Prize in literature in 2008, keeps in close touch with his second home, Mauritius. The Indian Ocean island halfway between Africa and India, has influenced many of his novels. *The Prospector (Le Chercheur d'Or)* is one of these.

The novel is about Alexis, a white Mauritian whose earliest memory from the 1900s is the sound of the ocean. His passion for the big blue grows when he embarks on his first sea voyage at the age of eight with Denis, a descendant of slave.

After the death of his ruined father, Alexis finds documents about the existence of a treasure on Rodrigues Islands - 560km east of Mauritius. He waits to come of age before going on a frantic treasure hunt. After four years searching he finds nothing, but falls in love with a local girl, Ouma.

Mauritius being a British colony at that time, Alexis joins the Royal Army to fight in World War I. Back from the trenches he returns to Rodrigues to search for his treasure, once again in vain, and goes back to Mauritius where he dreams of Ouma.

The theme of the sea is omnipresent in *The Prospector*. And during his voyages, Alexis experiments with a few shipwrecks: the bankruptcy of his father and the demolition of the family house during a cyclone. There is also the emotional wreckage after the protagonist abandons his sister, Laure, and loses Ouma, the love of his life.

The beginning of the novel may seem monotonous because of its overloaded lyricism and slow rhythm. But Le Clézio writes vivid descriptions of the islands, the brutality among the communities, that allows the book to pick up pace and eventually make the story thrilling - even for those who have never been near Mauritius. *Stéphane Huët*

The City Son Samrat Upadhyay

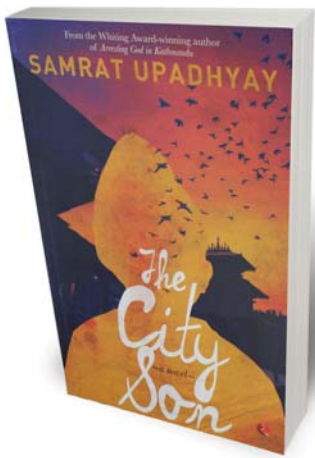
When Didi learns of her husband Masterji's secret second family in Kathmandu with the attractive Apsara and their young son Tarun, she ups and leaves the village to join him in the city with her two sons.

True to her domineering personality, Didi takes over her husband's household and hounds Apsara out. Although no beauty herself, Didi has a fierce libido which manifests itself in her affection for her good-looking step son, Tarun, which turns into possessive obsession and abuse.

In her grief, Apsara begins to lose her mind and Tarun turns to Didi for the mothering he longs for. Though Apsara and Tarun are taken in by Mahesh uncle, he cannot escape Didi's grip on him. At 23, out of family obligation, Tarun gets married to the wholesome Rukma, but the young man is too scarred to make himself and his new wife happy.

Samrat Upadhyay is a master storyteller, and although his books are set in Kathmandu the plot of unconventional abuse in *The City Son* is universal. His writing is simple, stark, and sparse - as if the author doesn't want to let language get in the way of storytelling. Most of what happens is deeply unpleasant and disturbing, making this a haunting read. A woman's manipulation and sexual jealousy exposes the hypocrisy of urban values, and a young couple keeps up appearances although everything is not all right at home. Both exhibit distinct public and private facades.

Infidelity has been a constant theme in Upadhyay's previous stories, as in the rocky marriage between Raja and Nilu in *Buddha's Orphans*. Upadhyay's couples don't have fairytale love stories, relationships are never smooth, they are soulful, bold, daring, but beautiful. His books are populated by people who are imperfectly perfect. Like us.



Samrat Upadhyay lives and teaches in the United States, the Kathmandu of his youth is long gone. But his descriptions of Ratna Park, Thamel, the old houses, hippies and the pubs will make younger readers wish they were there in the 1980s to see it all. *Sonia Awale*



A Song of Ice and Fire Game of Thrones George R.R. Martin

If there is a book series that inspires a cult following similar to that of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, it has to be *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin. Set in medieval times, the series encapsulates the entire genre of epic fantasy, bringing together adventure, drama, mystery, magic, romance and a disconcertingly large number of deaths.

Thanks to its massively successful HBO television series of the same name, many readers are understandably apprehensive that the book may not hold the same level of intrigue. A few chapters in, and it was clear that my apprehensions were misplaced. I was hooked.

The story is first told from eight perspectives and several storylines occur together and, at times, overlap. Although the beginning of the book sets the background of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros and King's Landing, the series gains pace after King Robert Baratheon gets killed. With the throne empty, the Lannisters, Starks and Baratheons wage wars to claim the Iron Throne in *A Clash of Kings*, the second book in the series.

With an extensive list of characters, be prepared to spend a fair bit of your time flipping back to the appendix and surfing Wikipedia to remember names and the relationships the characters share with each other. In spite of the complexity, Martin's writing is simple and concisely captures the vastness of the imaginary world of Westeros without being too elaborate. Unlike other authors, Martin doesn't shy away from killing off his main characters, usually putting readers on the edge of their seats thinking of the possible impending demise of their favorite characters.

There seems to be no end to the Game of Thrones mania with a television series, blogs and a couple thousand memes dedicated to the series. *Ayesha Shakya*

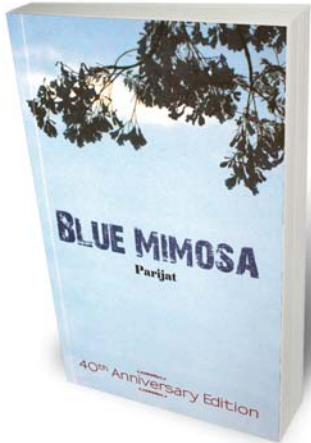
Blue Mimosa Parijat

Blue Mimosa is the English translation of *Shirish Ko Phool*, recipient of Nepal's book of the year Madan Puraskar award in 1965. The author is Bishnu Kumari Waiba, who is better known by her nom de plume, Parijat and is regarded as the first modern Nepali novelist. Forty years after it was first published, the story is still as relevant as ever.

A middle-aged retired solider, Suyogji, is back from the Burma front and visits his drinking partner, Shiva Raj, who has three unmarried sisters. Later, Suyogji falls in love with the middle sister, Bari, but cannot bring himself to declare his love. Still, he cannot stop thinking about her. He recalls the other women he has met in the past, but this time the feeling is completely different.

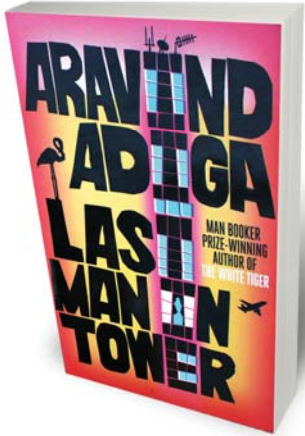
The story is written under the first person of Suyogji, so we can sense his happiness and bitterness. Parijat takes considerable effort to get into the psyche of a Nepali man, and describe his yearnings, desires and fears.

Suyogji lives on in his meaningless life, so does his friend Shiva Raj. We do not know what the girl thinks, does she also have feelings for Suyogji, and like him is she unable to express them? Is it mutually unrequited love? We will never know.



The dialogue between Suyogji and Bari is not just simple daily stuff, there is depth and an existential angst that must come from Parijat's own life of a physically handicapped person. Their discussion about god is one that spans time and space, each one of us seeks these deeper meanings from deep inside our souls. And the author's message that although sometimes life may seem meaningless one has to move on seems almost autobiographical.

Besides these questions about the meaning of life, Parijat shows the nature of true love. Suyogji's feeling for Bari is quite different from any he had before, it transcends sexuality as he is spiritually conquered by the young girl. Parijat takes us on a journey into Suyogji's inner world so we see what he sees, feel how he feels and hear his private thoughts. We go on a journey of love to see a Kathmandu bloom with blue mimosa. *Claire Li Yingxue*



Last Man in Tower Aravind Adiga

Not knowing Aravind Adiga from Adam, and having never read *The White Tiger* I expected his latest book, *Last Man in Tower*, to be a lighthearted tale. But it soon became clear that Adiga specialises in the sins of businesses, and the injustices that economic growth throws in its wake.

Last Man in Tower is about how residents of an old community housing colony (the Vishram society) react when a powerful real estate developer, Dharmen Shah, offers a suspiciously large amount to buy out the entire apartment block and convert the site into a luxury apartment complex. As we are introduced to the characters and their daily encounters, we get a real-life glimpse of middle-class values at play.

The plot gains traction as opposition gathers momentum against the developer. Adiga brings in manipulations, threats and bribery which are all too familiar to land aquisition cases for us here in Nepal. Then one of the residents, a recently widowed retired teacher, Yogesh A Murthy (Masterji) remains the 'last man' standing on the tower.

Adiga keeps the plot line simple, but it is rife with collusion, machination, and intrigue to keep us guessing about the fate of Vishram society. The book delves into the nuances of human nature - desperation, ego, greed - as the residents turn against the once-venerated Masterji.

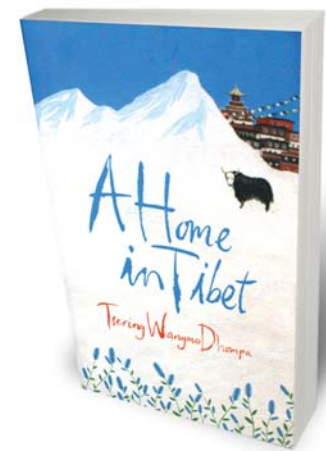
Adiga endows his cast with depth, and leaves it to us to judge the character of the characters as they negotiate conflicting interests of personal attachment, convenience and money. The characters are dynamic and the readers' perception of them changes frequently depending on the decisions they take and we toggle between sympathy, suspicion and disregard for them. *Elvin L Shrestha*

LIFE

A Home in Tibet Tsering Wangmo Dhompa

It is easy to dismiss a book written on Tibet as being just another romanticised narrative of a country that holds much awe and mystery, given its forbidden and forbidding nature in the past and the present. And, when the author happens to be a Tibetan, that conclusion is perhaps even more logical. "Here is another nationalist pushing praise for her land," we think.

Set these preconceived generalisations aside, and you will see *A Home in Tibet* is more than just a Tibetan writing about her love for her country. It is about a daughter's longing for her mother, about an individual's search for identity lost in refuge, and about a land on the road to change.



Like many young Tibetans born in exile, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa had only heard about the land of snows from her mother. Tsering's mother, an employee with the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, was a single parent and the two shared a close relationship. After her mother dies in a car accident in India, Tsering decides to embark on a journey (initially planned with her mother) to the country she calls own but has never seen. The book is a detailed account of that trip, a personal memoir told beautifully by a poet in prose.

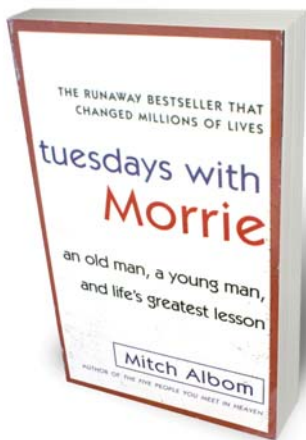
Once at her mother's village of Dhompa in Kham in eastern Tibet, surrounded by families and friends, Tsering feels both at home and like an outsider. If some of the nomadic traditions are beyond rational understanding for this America educated writer, she also doesn't mind the discomfort of leading a primitive lifestyle.

Tsering Wangmo speaks for many Tibetans living in exile when she writes:

"My attachment to the land makes me want for it to remain unchanged but I know this world is desirable because I can leave it any time I want."

Filled with such poignant expressions, *A Home in Tibet* is a wonderfully written story that will resonate with all those, who have at one point in their lives, felt a loss of sense of belonging.

"At last, I am a Tibetan in Tibet, a Khampa in Kham, albeit as a tourist in my occupied and tethered country."
Tsering Dolker Gurung



Tuesdays with Morrie Mitch Albom

Every one of us has that one person who is not only older and wiser but also understands us like no one else. Whether that person is a friend or a family, they have helped you see the world as it is and held up the lamp while you were searching for a way.

For writer Mitch Albom it was his college professor Morrie Schwartz and this book, a memoir, is what they refer to as their last thesis together. Morrie was Albom's college professor, a friend and a mentor, someone who he looked up to and promised to keep in touch with after graduation. As Albom takes on life he trades a lot of dreams for a bigger paycheck and although his old professor crosses his mind a few times, he is too busy being a successful journalist in Detroit. It isn't until he finds out through a television show that his beloved professor is terminally ill, that he finally reconciles with him. Over the period of next few months, on most Tuesdays when Morrie isn't too tired or ill, the two sit for their last class together and Morrie teaches him the meaning of life. The book gives a glimpse of Morrie's attitude towards life, death, greed, fear as well as family and society. Through flashbacks of their time at Brandeis University and the time he spent visiting Morrie, the author lets us peep into the man that was Morrie and the extraordinary relationship they shared together.

Tuesdays with Morrie will make you introspect your life and people in it like few other books. It forces you to think about your life, all the moments and people who are important. Morrie has pearls of wisdom, like: "Death is as natural as life. It's part of the deal we made."

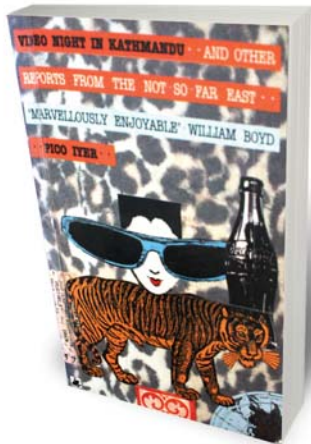
The book will make you miss that one person who you shared a bond with, but with time decided to leave behind. And what better a time than the holidays for a little soul searching?
Sahina Shrestha

Video Night in Kathmandu Pico Iyer

Want to do some time travel to transport you to a Kathmandu of 30 years ago? Join Pico Iyer, an Indian writer born and raised in Britain, as he travels around the world and arrives in hippie-era Nepal. During his trip across Asia he finds a continent in flux: cable tv is spreading its tentacles transforming cultures. *Video Night in Kathmandu* is a classic travelogue, combining personal experience and fascinating facts of Nepal, China, Japan, and Southeast-Asian countries.

There, inside an inner sanctum, sat fifty or so men on folding chairs, absolutely silent,' Iyer writes about the inside of a video parlour showing a Hindi film. Today, video parlours are extinct, replaced by cybercafés. Most people buy Rs 40 pirated DVDs and watch movies at home or stream them through the Net.

Other things have changed: apple pies are no longer on the menus of restaurants, a VCR is no longer as expensive as a house, Nepal's literacy rate has gone up from 60 to 80 per cent, and the number of doctors has increased ten fold. Ask a taxi driver to take you to Freak Street today and you get a blank stare. Back then, it was what Thamel is today.



Nevertheless, many remnants of old Kathmandu are still retained. The menus in touristy restaurants still have chopsuey, Indian paratha, but almost nothing Nepali. The streets are still dusty and populated with bulls and dogs. If you want to reach the centre of town, "following the paved road" is still a sound advice. Music still spills out of bars as live Nepali bands belt it out on on Friday nights. The cheerful spirit and heartfelt smiles of the people, it seems, remain -- as everlasting as the mountains above.

The city has changed its face with time, and so has Pico Iyer. Thirty years after *Video Night in Kathmandu*, Iyer has travelled far in his quest for tranquility and harmony. He finds the real spirit of life in his new book, *The Art of Stillness*.

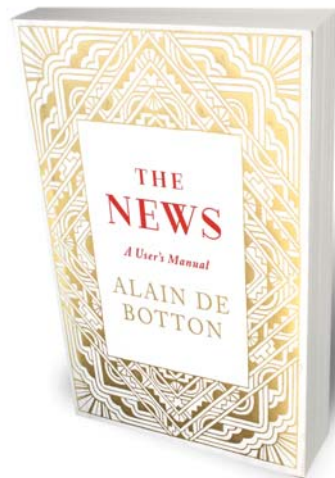
"It's only by stopping movement that you can see where to go," he says in a memorable TED talk quoting from his new book. "And it's only by stepping out of your life and the world that you can see what you most deeply care about, and find a home."

Elaine Wang Yiwei

The News: A User's Manual Alain de Botton

In most journalism schools students are taught that news has to be New, Near, or Negative. If it happened two hours ago it is already stale, if it happens in Novosibirsk it is not news, and if it is about midwives saving lives in Jumla it is not news.

News is whatever is out of the ordinary. Much as we like to poke fun at the criteria of what makes news, or try to shift the priority to positive news, it is the public's voracious and voyeuristic craving for disaster and celebrity coverage that drives the news business.



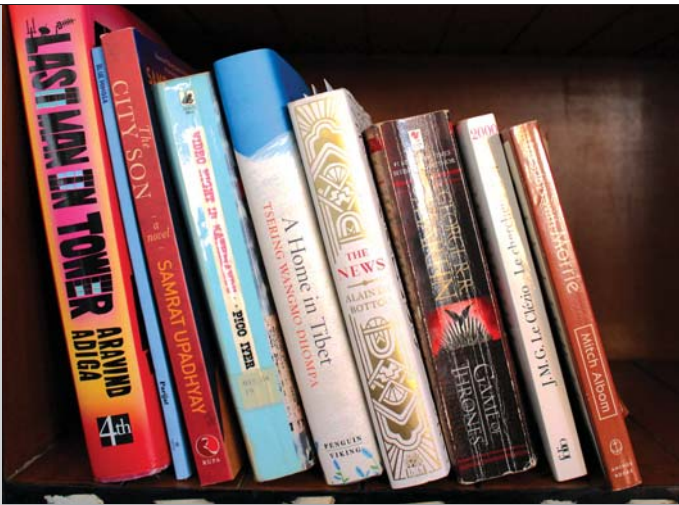
Every day, we editors try to strike a balance between the public's desire for certain types of 'stories' with our responsibility for public service journalism. Is our job to give the public what it wants, or what it needs? And who are we to decide what the public needs? When the lines between news and entertainment gets blurred, as it does on *BuzzFeed* or *Aajtak*, it is clear that news is also escapism. A salaried breadwinner at home doesn't want to be reminded of his daily struggle in front of the Tube or YouTube.

The nature of news is mixed up with human curiosity and our desire to be tickled or titillated, which is why it takes a philosopher to ruminate on the production and consumption of news in the cyber age. Alain De Botton starts with Hegel's analogy of news and religion. If news has replaced religion, how do we make moral judgements about right and wrong?

Botton writes in easy newsbites, and *The News* is full of witty insights that help us make sense of our own inexplicable addiction to visuals of disasters and celebrities. Is it because they 'invite us to feel sane and blessed by comparison', Botton asks. With a tinge of guilt we go back to our daily routines, thankful that it wasn't the bus we were riding in that got bombed, or grateful that we got a glimpse of a film star's nipple during a Oscar wardrobe malfunction.

Don't look for answers here to the news bombardment now that it breaks on Twitter and not on the ticker. Allow yourself to laugh at yourself either as producer or consumer of news and think about: 'We may be looking to expose ourselves to barbaric tales to help us retain a tighter hold on our own more civilized selves...'

Kunda Dixit



The Theory of Everything



It is extraordinarily hard to write a good script about a legend. This is why most people: producers, directors, and viewers approach “biopics” with a great deal of caution. After all, what can these films really teach us about Keats, or Moses (think the newest Christian



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Bale vehicle *Exodus* directed by Ridley Scott)? So it was with great care that I approached *The Theory of Everything*, a film about the life of Stephen Hawking, the living, greatly revered physicist, diagnosed with ALS (a neurodegenerative disorder) when he was a budding but clearly

brilliant student at Cambridge in the 1960s. Most of us have heard of the *The Brief History of Time* a work that contextualised Hawking’s findings regarding the origin of time that would be explicable even to the layperson. While I may not have read it, I remember the excitement that accompanied its publication in 1988, two decades after Hawking was first diagnosed with his disease, at which point he had been given two years to live. In this case, it is perhaps apt then, that the film concentrates on that rather trite saying that behind every great man there is a strong woman, for it is Jane Wilde Hawking (played by the lovely Felicity Jones), on whose memoirs the film is based. Jones is almost as compelling (if not more so) than Eddie Redmayne in his powerful performance as the valiant Hawking who slowly loses control

of motor functions, bodily, as well as in speech, all the while retaining his brilliant brain. From beginning to end, this film is a soul searching account of what it takes to love someone for their mind, even as their body deteriorates, becoming a shadow of itself; a tragedy leavened only by Hawking’s extraordinary will, and his ever present, self deprecating sense of humour. Instead of maudlin sensationalism with the extraordinary and compassionate performances of Jones and Redmayne I felt that I came to an understanding of a real life couple who stood by each other in mind and in body as long as they could. Instead of drifting away from each other, in acrimony or resentment for perceived wasted years, they continued to remain friends, for their romantic relationship had always been based on a meeting of the minds (Jane had been a highly talented scholar herself, earning a Ph.D. in Literature while at Cambridge contemporaneously with Hawking). This is a rare film that gives you an insight into the making of a living legend. Whether you revere him or not, his is a story of a man who has fought the unfairness of the cosmos while trying to unravel its mysteries.

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■ Trailer

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HAPPENINGS



LOOKING NORTH: Prime Minister Sushil Koirala meets Vice Minister for International Department of Communist Party of China Chen Fengxiang at his official residence in Baluwatar on Tuesday.



BIZ MEET (l-r): German Ambassador to Nepal Matthias Meyer, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, NBI President Padma Jyoti and Managing Director of Mahindra Steel Uday Gupta at the opening ceremony of Nepal Responsible Business Summit 2014 at Hotel Yak & Yeti on Tuesday.



THE HERO: Founder of Maiti Nepal Anuradha Koirala speaks at the 21st edition of Voices at Nepal Bharat Library on Tuesday.



ROLL CAMERA (l-r): Actress Karishma Manandhar with the cast and crew at the launch of an upcoming film produced by Manandhar in association with Gopi Krishna Movies.

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SAHINA SHRESTHA

Spreading warmth this winter

For the past three years, the women of Miteri Recycle Center have been organising donation drives for clothes. This is not new, there are many charities that do this. What sets their work apart from other collection drives is that they do not simply handout the worn clothes.

The donated clothes are first sorted for

recycling and reconditioning, then packaged as new and handed over to women in remote villages of the far west to be sold at an affordable price. Depending on the quality, clothes are priced from Rs 10 to Rs 250, and the women earn a 10 per cent commission on each piece of clothing they sell.

"We sell the clothes instead of distributing


them for free so that the dignity of the people buying them is intact. This also provides a sustainable income to the women selling them," says Laxmi Pandey of Miteri.

The project is the brainchild of award-winning social worker/writer Radha Paudel who won the Madan Puraskar last year for her book *Khalanga ma Hamala* (The Attack on Khalanga).

'Miteri' in Nepali means a friend for life. And the people at Miteri Recycle Center urge the donors to keep the same in mind while donating clothes: donate as you would gift a friend.

"We only send wearable, good quality clothes, the rest are recycled into other useful items," says Shova Chalise of Miteri. Because women in the villages rarely wear jeans, Miteri recycles these ubiquitous urban wear into bags. Likewise, large sized clothing is also recycled. The center makes distribution trips once or twice a month. However, with operation costs trumping income, the center says it is running at a loss.

Says French volunteer Bérengère Daviaud, "What Miteri needs is a sustainable business model where more clothes come in and revenues and profit can be generated."

Miteri's Christmas collection drive lasts until 20 December, and the center plans to ship out the clothes by mid-January. Miteri's clothes have so far reached Jumla, Humla, Dailekh, Kalikot and Accham.  Sahina Shrestha

Clothes can be dropped off at Alliance Française in Tripureswor or at Action Works Nepal's office at Thapathali. (01)4227730

Nyano Sansar

Nyano Sansar aims to collect 8,000 blankets and unused clothes for distribution this winter. Last year it donated 5000 blankets to poor communities affected by the cold. Instead of simply donating blankets the team this year is organising a blanket exchange program in Saptari and Siraha district.



Each family will weave two hay mattresses, out of which they will keep one for themselves and exchange the other for a blanket, some clothes and medical check-up. The collected mattresses will be donated to elderly, physically challenged people and community schools in the area. "This will prevent the community from totally depending on the donors and instead they can earn these rewards and give back to the community," says Sharad KC of Nyano Sansar. The collection will continue till mid-January and clothes and blankets can be dropped at following locations:

- City Center, Putalisadak
- Civil Mall, Sundhara(Adidas showroom)
- KL Tower, Chabahil
- Red Mud Cafe, Thapathali
- Cafe Cheeno, Patan Dhoka
- College Cafe, New Baneswor
- Sodh Puch, Baneswor(behind apex college)
- Adidas Showroom, Jawlakhel/ Durbarmarg
- Red Carpet- Sherpa Mall, Durbarmarg



PICS: ELAINE WANG YIWEI

Tucked a little way off Pulchowk, the Entrance Café provides a quiet and comfortable ambience. The relatively new establishment boasts a three-storey building with an outdoor sitting option. The inner dining area reminded us of traditional Nepali homes with wooden stairs and low ceilings while the outdoor garden area was decorated with peak styled tents, perfect for winter afternoons.

Since nothing beats eating under the sun during cold lazy winter afternoons we chose to dine outside. The menu offers Italian,

The Entrance Café

Continental and Chinese flavours along with the usual fast food variety.

Since we were starving, we jumped right to the main course. Spaghetti Carbonara (Rs 349) and Penne Arabita Pasta (Non-veg) (Rs 349) were chosen from the Italian section. The Spaghetti Carbonara served with white sauce, egg drop, bacon and cheese was creamy and

not at all oily. It perfectly satiated our craving for a creamy pasta. The Penne Arabita Pasta although boasting good flavours had cooled down by the time it reached our table.

From their Continental section we ordered Chicken Sizzler (Rs 429) and Tofu Steak with creamy Brandy Sauce (Rs

299). The tofu was pan grilled with creamy brown sauce and the taste leaned more towards Chinese. The chicken sizzler was served with rice and the chicken was tender and well seasoned, our only qualm with this dish was its meagre portion.

If you like sweet and sour flavor, you could give the Szechuan Chicken (Rs 349) a try. Even though it's placed under the spicy Chinese cuisine section, the dish was not spicy at all. This dish does have Chinese flavor and is cooked

with red hot Chinese ingredients.

The last dish to arrive was Spicy Bean Curd Chicken (Rs 399). True to the saying save the best for the last, served with rice the green pepper's light spicy taste had perfectly blended into the chicken and the dish was a treat to eat. We noticed a large screen beside our table and the waiter informed us about live-football matches in the evening and also live music on Friday nights.

While it also offers some expensive choice such as Grilled Salmon steak with creamy cherry butter sauce (Rs 999), the price is affordable with a normal meal costing Rs 450 per person.

Although the waiting staff were friendly and the food consistently good, the waiting time was a tad long (45 minutes).

With Christmas around the corner, the Entrance Café is hosting a special music night for everyone to celebrate together, and they will also design a Christmas-special menu for the holiday. Bring your family or friends to experience a lovely night with delicious food and drinks.  Claire Li Yingxue

How to get there: The Entrance Café is in Bakhundole.



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Plant intelligence

So you thought turning vegetarian absolved you from the guilt of killing a sentient being? Think again.

The moral high ground people associate with vegetarians is based on the premise that plants are sessile, inanimate, and unresponsive organisms. But recent



SCIENCE BYTES

Roshan Karki

research into plants has unraveled surprising and sophisticated modes of communication by which they engage dynamically with one another conveying seemingly 'intelligent' responses much like animals.

Plants under stress emit a scent, comprised of volatile organic

compounds, like the smell of freshly cut grass. Scientists call this the 'silent scream' of plants. When a plant is under attack, like a caterpillar chomping on its leaves, the leaf releases a chemical and when other plants pick up this distress signal, they ramp up their own chemical defenses specific to the invader. More interestingly, the scent also alerts neighbouring plants about invading caterpillars.

The chemicals that deter caterpillar pests may also attract nearby predators like wasps inviting them to a juicy caterpillar meal. Wasps inadvertently become plant bodyguards in this mutually beneficial partnership. Chemicals like caffeine found in the nectar of many plants act not only as a predator repellent, but also attract insects like bees to visit the same plant and facilitate pollination. All



plants have elaborate modes of chemical communication.

Plants can 'listen' for specific cues and tease out dangers. In a first study of its kind, a recording of a caterpillar's nibbling on leaves triggered an increase in defense chemicals when played back to certain plants. But sounds of wind or insects harmless to plants did not elicit such responses. Scientists believe that plants are responding to specific chewing vibrations of caterpillars. More studies are needed, but plants are definitely listening.

Plant communication via roots is even more fascinating. Roots of

same kind of trees form an underground network so as not to hinder access to nutrients and water but compete with non-kin trees. The tips of roots behave like animals and race (at plant speed) towards nutrients but slow down once reaching them.

Roots of many plants laden with fungi are more resistant to pests than those that are not. In a dense forest where competition for light and nutrients is fierce, a 1000-year-old mother tree spanning a huge area provides necessary nutrients to many younger cousins through its inter-connected root system. This concept of a mother tree was depicted in the movie *Avatar*.

How do plants process information without a brain, sensory organs, or the central nervous system? That is a million dollar question. Some scientists contend that there is an analogous nervous system in

plants that is yet to be discovered. This may not be far-fetched considering the discovery in plants of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and glutamate that are found in brains of animals, but their functional roles in plants is unknown. Other scientists dismiss this, and suggest that the very sessile nature of plant has allowed complex evolution to account for all their perceived intelligent functions. Both sides do agree that plants are much more than just ornaments, food-source, or furniture pieces.

The destiny of the human race is deeply rooted in plants that provide us resources, along with the essential oxygen for survival. Our ancient texts talk of sages meditating in forests feeling interconnected with nature. With recent evidence of plant communication and ensuing scientific development, we may do that literally someday. We may even decipher the messages plants may be sharing with us—perhaps the message of how to live together in harmony as a single community. 🇳🇵

GIZMO by YANTRICK



A grand entrance

and professionals alike. Think DSLR cameras and Canon pops up in most of our minds, and with that reputation to uphold, Canon has introduced a new entry-level DSLR camera, the EOS 1200D.

Sporting a carbon-fibre reinforced polycarbonate body, the Canon EOS 1200D follows the DSLR design to a 'T.' The construction feels really solid, the design is easy on the eye, striking an excellent balance between durability and portability. As you might expect then, the 1200D is a pleasure to handle and shoot with. It sits well in the hands and is extremely easy, comfortable and light-weight. At 480 grams you never feel the danger of losing hold of your valuable new purchase even if you are using it for an extended period of time.

Thankfully, the number of buttons has been

kept to a minimum, as befitting an entry-level camera. All buttons are big and labeled clearly. The EOS 1200D has a 3 inch fixed LCD screen to review your shots. It comes with a boxed 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 lens as standard and built-in flash for those low-light/night shots. The hotshoe on top of the camera allows for optional flash accessories to be added.

The EOS 1200D's massive 18 megapixel sensor allows for incredibly detailed images and the videos record at full HD resolutions. Low-light images also look detailed, owing to EOS 1200D boosting its sensitivity in low-light conditions (up to ISO 6400). In auto-mode, the EOS 1200D automatically analyses the scene for brightness, colour and the presence of movement and faces to set the camera to the most appropriate settings

for you to capture that perfect shot.

The Canon EOS 1200D also allows for 9 Auto Focus points in a scene allowing you to place your subject either in the middle of the frame or off-centre, for a more interesting composition. The camera is backed up capably by a battery that powers the camera for up to 500 shots on a single charge and comes with an 8 GB memory card, which might not be enough for some users. Canon's EOS Companion app is a handy guide for amateur DSLR adopters, assisting you in exploring the features and controls of the EOS 1200D.

The Canon 1200D proves to be an ergonomically designed camera that new users should be able to quickly and painlessly get comfortable with using. 🇳🇵

Yantrick's Verdict: Great shots, and an easy learning curve is what the Canon EOS 1200D brings to the table, and at approx. Rs 60,000, is a great bargain.

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Only half free

Freedom of expression can't be selective, it includes the freedom to speak about changing one's religion

An open letter to Constituent Assembly members by Britain's Ambassador to Nepal, Andrew Sparkes, has set off an intense debate in the public sphere both in favour and against, but more of the latter.



THE DEADLINE

Damakant Jayshi

The letter published in the op-ed page of *Republika* on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day on 10 December spoke about the need to safeguard a plethora of rights in the new constitution.

Among the rights that Ambassador Sparkes wrote about were 'advocat(ing) citizenship provisions which treat men and women equally, allowing children born in Nepal to acquire citizenship from either parent.' He went on: 'We hope that the constitution will enshrine equality for all without discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, caste, ethnicity, religion or language, with a particular focus on ensuring enjoyment of those rights by the most marginalised in society such as Dalits.'

All fine so far. But some individuals and political parties focused exclusively on this part of his write up: 'We encourage you to ensure that the right to change religion is protected, and that the right to hold opinions and to express them freely will remain strong.'

Whether or not an ambassador of a foreign country should be

speaking about this issue is actually moot. The more relevant question is to ask why we left it to a foreign envoy to bring this up. Since when did talking about right to change religion become a taboo? Why do we keep entangling ourselves in matters that are an individual's choice and basic right?

Moral policing on an individual's right is not uncommon in the overgrown village that is Kathmandu. Be it sermonising in Reporters' Club Nepal a few years ago on barring Nepali women from participating in Miss Nepal contest, preventing youth from going to disco or arresting students from cinema halls – we have seen it all.

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala reportedly told a RPP-Nepal delegation that he would summon Sparkes over his remarks. The British Embassy overdid its damage control by issuing a 'clarification' about 'unintended misunderstanding' and so forth. Very similar to the capitulation by the Norwegian Embassy when UCPN (Maoist) members and a section of media made such hue and cry over its grant to Southasia Trust, which was always in the public domain and open to all to see. (Full Disclosure: I am a member of the Board of Southasia Trust).

In all the hulabaloo and righteous indignation over l'affaire Sparkes, we should actually have been asking ourselves whether the ambassador had a point. The ambassador's remark was like a red rag before the RPP-Nepal bull which advocates return to monarchy and champions a return to Hindu Rastra. By the way, elected members of the RPP-N have taken oath under the Interim

Constitution that says Nepal is a secular republic. Affected by a southerly breeze, RPP-Nepal obviously thinks it can use the fracas over the British envoy's remarks to political advantage.

Freedom of expression, like the rule of law, cannot be applied selectively as some have been doing. Baburam Bhattarai is trying to obstruct justice in the name of conflict-era crimes in cases of murder-convict Bal Krishna Dhungel, shielding convicts in Dailekh over murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa and denying justice to Nanda Prasad (now dead due to indefinite hunger strike) and Ganga Maya Adhikari. But we have witnessed some silly and idiotic defence on this front.

The speed of reaction from PM Koirala and RPP-Nepal on the Sparkes' article is nowhere to be seen when it comes to the rights of citizenship for offspring of single mothers. Nepal is only one of two countries which doesn't grant citizenship rights on the basis of the mother. The condition of Dalits in the country is bad, but much worse in the Madhes. But some of the highly-rated intellectuals have no time for it because of their obsession with the 'pahade domination'.

The reason why states based on ethnicity is a bad idea also applies to having a State identified with a single religion. Merely saying minorities (be it in ethnicity-based states or religious ones) will enjoy rights is not good enough. It is double-standard on the part of those who speak against Hindu Rastra but have no qualms in calling for single ethnicity-based federation. And vice versa for the advocates of Hindu Rastra. 🇳🇵

@damakant

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS



Brand new

Sipradi Trading, the sole distributor of Tata Motors in Nepal, launched the all new eXETA in the capital this week. The eXETA is being offered with a two year warranty at an introductory price of Rs 1,795,000.

Moisture test

Vaseline is set to start the fifth edition of its Mero Amazing Skin Test in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Biratnagar. The campaign tests participants' skin's moisture level and winners receive a Vaseline Skin Therapy session.



Slim cell

Gionee, a Chinese mobile brand, launched two new mobile phones, Elife S 5.1 and M3 Marathon priced at Rs 29,995 and Rs 19,985 respectively.

While the Elife S 5.1 is touted as being the slimmest phone, the M3 Marathon boasts a really long battery life.

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GUNA RAJ LUITEL
in KAVRE

Ram MK Shrestha sits behind his desk with a backdrop of the sprawling Dhulikhel Hospital and green mountains beyond, and says: "To be a true leader, one has to push from behind, not pull from the front."

It is clear that this medical doctor, founder of a world class district hospital that serves as a model for affordable medical care in Nepal, is a philosopher who is also a do-er.

Shrestha was born in Dhulikhel, was sent by a benefactor to Austria, struggled with language and culture shock to become a doctor. But unlike most other Nepalis, he decided to return to build a health care and education system in his home district of Kavre.

This week, Shrestha was beaming with pride as he sat on stage with Prime Minister Sushil Koirala at the graduation of another batch of students from Kathmandu University where he is also vice-chancellor.

Dhulikhel Hospital and the KU College of Medical Sciences now provide care to 550,000 patients a year from Kavre and surrounding districts with over 22,000 surgeries and 3,000 deliveries – all this for only Rs 25 per patient, Rs 250 a day for hospitalisation and no surgery costs more than Rs 25,000.

It is rare in Nepal to see someone like this who walks the talk, a man of work not words. He rarely gives personal interviews, but encourages the media to focus on how his hospital runs so that the model can be replicated elsewhere.

Shrestha's office exudes the man's simplicity, good taste and



KUNDA DIXIT

Walking the talk

Ram Shrestha proves it is possible to provide affordable, quality health care and education to Nepalis.

attention to detail. It is bright and open, minimally furnished, with a simple table, an indoor plant and a painting on the wall of a rural home. The carpet is a Nepali straw *sukul*. The ambience here is vastly different from over-staffed government offices piled high with dusty files where people are mostly chatting and sipping chiya.

"We Nepalis are lagging behind not because of a lack of ideas but lack of implementation," says Shrestha, "when I come up with an idea, many people tell me it is not possible in Nepal. It is possible. It can be done."

Indeed, it is mainly due to Shrestha's commitment and drive that Dhulikhel today has the highest density of academics and professionals in Nepal, it has become the epicentre of higher education in the country.

"Nepalis are not lazy, they are the hardest working people I know and I have been all over

the world," says Shrestha with a slight German accent in his English, "we just need to be given the opportunity to show what we can do."

For Shrestha, having one simple idea that can be implemented is better than having too many plans and thinking about them. Dhulikhel Hospital started from a two-room community hospice to grow into what it is today, not as is commonly believed through foreign aid, but through sheer hard work.

"If countries could develop through foreign aid, Nepal would have been a developed country long ago," he says, "besides resources you also need a vision and the management skills to make it happen."

In his convocation address recently, he reflected on his life's philosophy: "Try to understand yourself first, constantly challenge yourself, be patient and have perseverance."

Shrestha is carrying on the pioneering work of Suresh Raj Sharma who set up Kathmandu University as a centre for excellence. His future plans are to expand Dhulikhel Hospital and its ties with Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences. And now that Dhulikhel has become a major junction of two highways, to establish a trauma centre to deal with road accidents.

Shrestha's day starts with a 8AM meeting at the hospital where the staff talk about their cases from the day before, so there is peer evaluation of treatment and care. It sets the tone for the day, and Shrestha usually has a guest or two who can inspire his staff.

Shrestha says even more important than skills and training is the motivation of staff, and to keep commitment levels up, proper internal communication is essential. The secret of his management style is to build teamwork by letting everyone

DETAILED ATTENTION: Ram MK Shrestha's (second from right) morning meetings at Dhulikhel Hospital begin promptly at 8AM and set the tone for teamwork throughout the day.

know what the others are doing.

Motivated staff means patients are also well cared for. Dhulikhel Hospital has earned a reputation for treating rich and poor the same way. While touring the maternity ward, visitors are struck by the contrast to the filth and noise of other hospitals in Nepal. "A good hospital is one where you don't hear even a newborn baby cry because the environment is comfortable and relaxed," Shrestha quips.

When he was prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited Dhulikhel Hospital where he heaped public praise on Shrestha's work. Shrestha told him: "Comrade, you call yourself a communist, but we are the real communists." The room burst into laughter.

Despite the current scandal about granting affiliation to new medical colleges, Kathmandu University is working with Devdaha Medical College and Birat Medical College to extend its medical training, administration and course content.

"Demand for medical care is growing, we need to expand and it's a win-win situation," says Shrestha.

The doctor was waxing philosophy again at the convocation ceremony about how much more development Nepal needs. He said: "I don't agree when people say this much is enough for Nepal we don't need any more medical colleges. We should not limit ourselves to a village, or a city, or a country because education is not limited by national boundary." 🇳🇵

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Wheels of death

Kantipur, 13 November

कान्तिपुर

Twenty-eight-year old Nisha Basnet was on her way home when a truck hit her scooter from behind, dragged her 50 metres further, crushing her lower body. She died the next morning.

Nisha, an employee at Paragon Travel Agency in Kamalpokhari, had made plans to celebrate new year in Thailand and was to leave for Bangkok the day of the accident but cancelled her trip after a friend couldn't get a visa in time.

"She would still be alive if she had just gone," says Nisha's aunt, Henu Basnet, who was with her at Teaching Hospital. Nisha tried to get up on seeing her aunt. "They killed me," were her last words.

It had only been a day since Nisha moved into a new flat with her brother and sister-in-law after living with her uncle for 11 years. Nisha's parents who came from Udaypur arrived too late to see their daughter alive. Nisha's husband lives overseas.

Just two days before Nisha's death, another young woman lost her life in a similar accident. Twenty-one-year-old Shanta Hamal died after a bus ran over her scooter at Babarmahal. Shanta who worked in a cooperative was in the process of going to Denmark for her studies.

The week that these two accidents happened, Kamal Kiran was recording a song in memory of his wife, popular folk singer Manju Mahat, who died last year in a similar scooter accident in Samakhushi. Kamal is raising their two-year-old son.

"Whenever he sees her photo or her face on TV, he asks where's mamu," says Kamal of his son. Manju and Kamal had plans to release their new albums this year. Everytime Kamal sees a red scooter pass by on the road he is reminded of Manju.

After his wife's death, Kamal filed a case against the micro van driver. While the driver is in police custody, the court has yet to issue a verdict. The court's decision will determine if Kamal is eligible or not to receive third party insurance. The transport company paid him Rs 500,000 in compensation.

The latest accidents prompted even CA member and NC leader Gagan Thapa to post a facebook status (*see adjoining piece*). Thapa urges drivers to be more careful on road and says Nepalis are not yet qualified to drive. Every month, some 150 people lose their lives in road traffic accidents.

Nisha's family has decided to donate her eyes. Said her grandfather Durga Bahadur: "We hope her eyes won't have to see such accidents again."



Let's all walk

CA member Gagan Thapa's Facebook post on the spate of recent road fatalities, 12 December

facebook

When I reached the Neuro Hospital to check on CA member Hari Bahadur Khadka, who had been in a highway accident on 3 December, the air was tense with anxiety. Family members were worried about his condition and the slow rescue had angered many.

Upendra Devkota, the neurosurgeon treating him, said, "We have done all we can but his condition isn't stable."

Four days later, Hari Dai died. On 8 December Hari Dai's body was taken to Baglung for his last rites. I was planning to attend his funeral, when I got a call informing me about my sister Nisha Basnet's accident. I was hoping it was a minor mishap. But when I saw

her in the Emergency Room, I was shocked. Nisha's lower body was crushed and her internal organs lay scattered on the bed.

Our hopes were raised when the doctors said they'd operate on her. Six hours later, I was called into the ICU. When I saw her on CPR, I knew all we could do was pray. At 10 the next morning, the doctors informed us that Nisha was no more.

I began to think what Hari Dai's family must be going through, pondering on the list of what ifs that must be running through their minds: What if the road had been better? What if he had been operated on sooner? What if there was a trauma center in Dhaulagiri? I knew my uncle and aunt, Nisha's parents were also asking similar questions.

When an accident occurs on a mountain road, we find fault with the road. But the roads in Kathmandu are fine. When it happens outside the valley we blame the drivers and police.

More than 1000 people have lost their lives and 6000 have been injured in road accidents in the past few months alone.

It's not just the roads, drivers, police or authorities who are to be blamed. We are the ones at fault. The truth is we don't have the ability to drive on roads yet. We are not prepared to drive a car or fly a plane, although we have constructed roads and airports for them.

Maybe we should stop using cars and planes until we are prepared for this technology. Let's start walking again. Let us go back to the time when there were no road accidents. Let's stop and think how we can improve our ability to ride and fly safely before doing so again

On Wednesday, while Nisha's last rites were being performed, the bodies of a young couple who died in an accident in Sisneri were burning on the pyre next to her. Bodies of those killed on our roads are being cremated everywhere.



President

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

Basu Kshitiz in *Annapurna Post*, 18 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ We will never be in agreement with those who try to instigate ethnic violence and turn this country into Rwanda. ”

UML Chair KP Oli speaking at the party's central meeting, *Rajdhani*, 18 December

Back to religion

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 16 December

नयाँ पत्रिका

Karl Marx's views on religion was subtle, but his critics usually only cite the last sentence from his writing: 'Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'

At the moment religion is once more in the news. While the prime minister is talking nonsense about secularism, a British ambassador is pushing an irrelevant discourse about the right to religion conversion. Nepal's interim constitution already accepts the division of state and religion, while protecting the citizens' right to their faith. This means we already have the freedom to follow whichever religion we choose, or the freedom not to have a religion. Just as the British envoy's statement is irrelevant and undiplomatic, the prime minister's views are also anti-political.

Foreign hand

Editorial, *Annapurna Post*, 16 December

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

The country's increasing dependency on foreign aid for development has turned many people to hold out their hands rather than use them for hard work. When leaders start appealing donors, foreign interference becomes direct.

The Indian-led 12-point agreement in November 2005 between the parties and the Maoists against the king is a stark example of direct foreign interference in Nepal's politics. Since then, other foreign powers have openly backed NGOs, INGOs, the various committees of the CA, civil society and media.

But the open letter through the media to CA members by British Ambassador Andrew Sparkes to protect religious conversion crosses all norms and boundaries. It seems his understanding of secularism is defined in terms of the right of conversion. In other words, he is for giving conversions through inducement or coercion legal sanction in the new constitution.

Just as India started its political interference after 2006, the UK and Scandinavian countries have tried to disturb communal harmony through INGOs, churches and their diplomatic missions. Political parties must warn Ambassador Sparkes about such outrageous meddling, and instruct foreign missions from further interference. The parties should also analyse their own role in giving in to diplomatic pressure to promote secularism, republicanism and federalism in the new constitution. If not, the public anger against Ambassador Sparkes may soon be directed at them.

THE BIKER

Senchelung Limbu, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 18 December

हिमाल

Thirty-year-old Ashish Kumar Shakya went to America seven years ago with only a driving license in his wallet. Today, he is a professional superbike racer and a racing coach based in the US and has participated in races in India, Malaysia, and Australia.

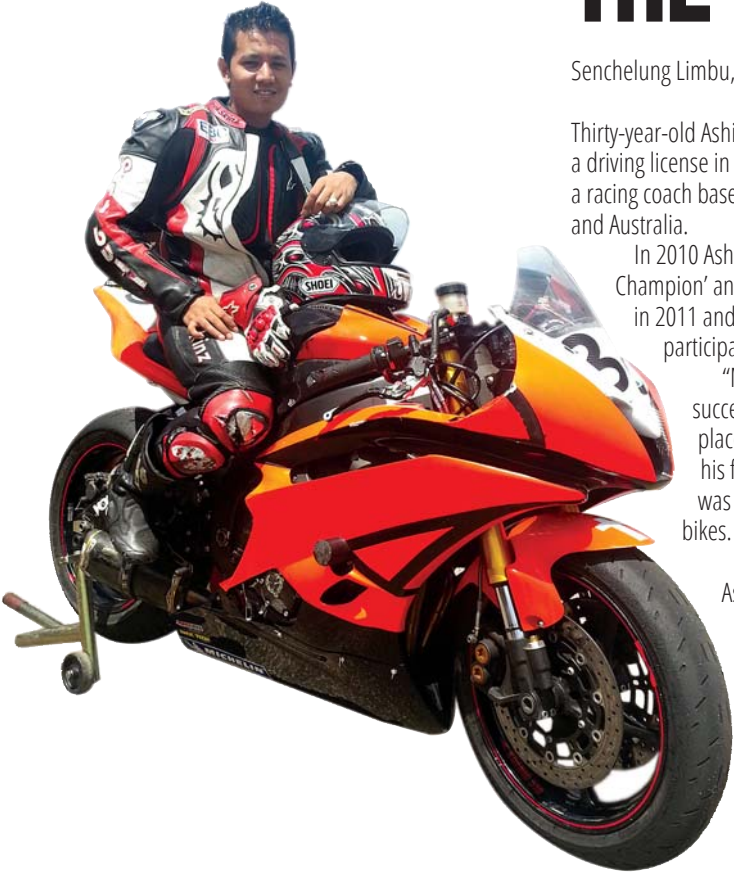
In 2010 Ashish was named the rookie level 'Suzuki 650 cc Class Champion' and became the expert level 'Yamaha 600cc Class Champion' in 2011 and 2012. Last summer, he won 31 out of the 33 races he participated in.

"My passion for bikes and hardwork has earned me this success," says Ashish whose professional career started after he placed in the top five of 'rookie air level'. As a child, Ashish rode his father's old motorcycle and practiced his stunts in MotoGP. It was only after going to the US that the biker got to test out sports bikes.

Ashish races in expert class races in Central Roadracing Association and Midwest Karting Association both of which are considered professional superbike racing in the US.

Ashish's dream is to participate in the World MotoGP Championship, but he admits he has been spending more time coaching than racing.

"Superbike racing is not only dangerous but also expensive," he says. But with sponsorship from companies including Kawasaki, Bridgestone, EBC, GoPro and Super 8, his goal doesn't seem far-fetched.






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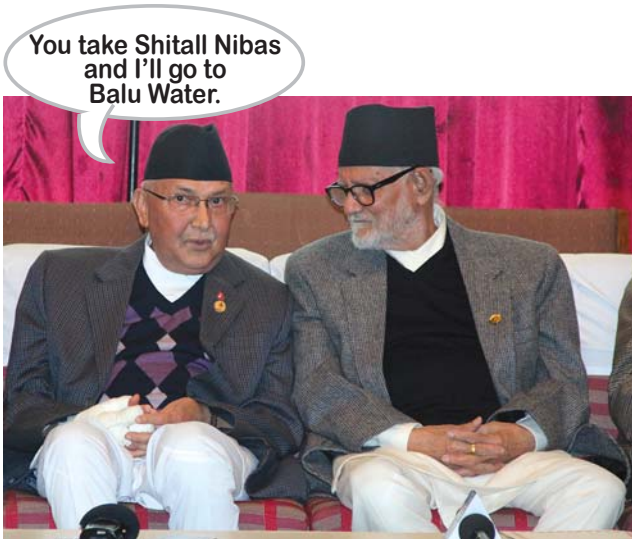
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Asstrologers and horrorscopes



Some of you have approached the Donkey individually and in groups at social gatherings in the 'Du in recent weeks to ask if the constitution will be finished by the 22 January deadline. To which my response is, and has always been: "I'm an Ass, not an Asstrologer."

Really, how is an average anal-ist supposed to make head or tail of what's going on in this country anymore? Which is why to drum some sense into all this confusion we fill the pages of our newspapers with endless blow-by-blow accounts of every permutation and combutation of the moves and countermoves of our beloved politicians with whom we are by now on first name basis: "KP met Ram Baran, Sushil met Jhallu, Baburam went to see KP, Pukada and Barabha patched up, Suko met Ramba..." and so on and so forth.

In a land where gossip is often the truth and nothing but the truth, the word is that the haggling is not over the constitution at all, it is about who should get which plum post the day after the constitution is written. And the only reason things are held up is because everyone wants the same plum posts. To simplify things here is a by no means exhaustive list of goings-on:

PKD got BRB to agree to take over party chairmanship in return for his endorsement for him (PKD) to be the next President. Whether or not Comrade Red Flag has the mandate to dispense presidencies, or whether Comrade Lotus Flower has the authority to nominate party chiefs is a moot point, it's the thought that counts. Back in 2008 Pukada had already declared himself Nepal's first Executive President, but then he stabbed Girjau in the back and vice versa, and Ramba became prez. He is now willing to be unceremoniously

declared ceremonial president. However, he wants the new constitution to grant the President discretionary powers to nominate pre-paid ambassadors.

We have it on good authoritarians that Comrade Pukada has sent word to UML-NC that he will let the constitution sail through and lift his insistence on ethnic federal provinces if he can have a go at Shit All Nibas. The man has a long memory and the reason he wants presidentship is to be the titular head of the Army so he can exact revenge on the institution that led to his downfall in 2010.

All that would have been fine and dandy, but Suko, too, has got a secret pact with Oily that if the constitution is passed Oily becomes prime minister and Suko gets to be president. If that happens Nepal will score one more mention in the Guinness Book of World Records as the country where both the Head of State and Head of Govt need dialysis and chemo between them respectively.

Not to be outdone, and emboldened by the British ambassador's remarks on conversion, Swami Kamaleswor also has an eye on the presidentship and the RPP-N figures that even if it can't restore the monarchy it will settle for a Hindu President.

When he met Barack in New York earlier this year, Suko randomly asked the US president to "drop by Kathmandu anytime". But after Obama agreed to be guest of honour at the Indian Republic Day, Suko thought a formal invite was in order, put it in writing and handed it over to the ambassador last week. Methinks DC shouldn't say 'no' just yet, let's use the prospect of an Obama visit as an excuse to get solar street lights repaired and saplings replanted on traffic islands.

If Nepal ever reverts to being a constitutional monarchy again, PKD is so desperate he'll even agree to be crowned king and start a new dynasty. The only downside with that is we'd be saddled with another good-for-nothing Clown Prince.

Speaking of kings, it seems Gyan Bahadur has his hopes up again after an Indian asstrologer told him that horrorscopes show him being king of Nepal not once, not twice, but three times.



The Ass

PAST PRESENT FUTURE

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

INCORRECT STATEMENT

Tanakpur is a part of India... I don't understand what's all the fuss about!



HILARIOUS STATEMENT:

The new Constitution will be written within the deadline.



PLAIN LIE:

REALLY? I haven't heard anything !



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