





# THE ELECTION FESTIVAL

This year as Nepalis emerge from a month of Dasain-Tihar-Chhat festivities, they rush headlong into another festival: Provincial and Parliamentary elections on 27 November and 7 December.

Still smarting from the shock of the surprise announcement of an electoral alliance of the two main supposedly Communist parties (one of which was still in the governing coalition with his Nepali Congress) Prime Minister Deuba has been in damage control mode. He has met lawyers to see if there is a way to buy time by getting these polls postponed. He has been trying, not very successfully, to cobble together his own electoral alliance with the Hindu-royal-right as well as the Madhes-based parties.

There is no immediate danger of the NC losing its majority, since he has inducted the RPP into government which incongruously still has Maoist ministers without portfolio. This government is a mammoth 64 ministers strong, breaking not just the national record but also a provision in the new Constitution (technically not yet applicable) limiting government to only 25 ministers.

On Thursday, the Supreme Court ruled that irregularities in ballot papers were not serious enough to postpone elections. This means the governing coalition is now running out of excuses to put off polls. It is time for PM Deuba to seriously start thinking about his personal legacy. Having scuttled democracy twice during previous three tenures as prime minister, does want to do a hat-trick and go down in history as an anti-social democrat?

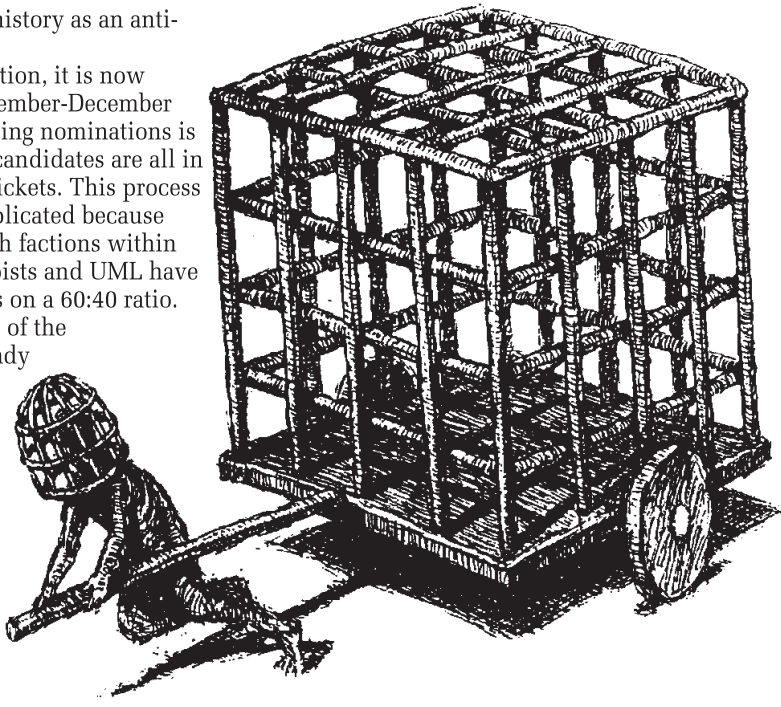
Barring a major disruption, it is now all systems go for the November-December polls. The final date for filing nominations is Sunday, and prospective candidates are all in Kathmandu lobbying for tickets. This process has been made more complicated because besides having to deal with factions within their own parties, the Maoists and UML have to divvy up constituencies on a 60:40 ratio.

But the names of some of the candidates who have already got tickets does not inspire much confidence. These first national elections under the new Constitution were supposed to be game-changers in laying the foundations of a new democratic federal republic. Yet all we see are tired and failed political personalities

from two decades ago (*see Flashback Editorial below and page 13*), the same feckless kleptocrats, the comrades who dragged the country into a ruinous war, the cartel of the three-party ‘mechanism’ that wasted 11 years in brinkmanship. What’s worse, they have nominated some known crooks and convicted criminals to content polls.

The favourite Nepali past-time during Tihar is cards. Politics is like poker, and elections are a gamble. If they want to wager well, the parties will use the next three days to review candidate lists and make a clean break. Let’s see them gamble on untainted do-ers within each party — candidates who, when they become MPs in the first new national Parliament under the federal democratic Constitution, will make fair and reformist laws that will transform this land.

Political parties may actually find it cheaper to field popular candidates kknown for integrity, since they do not have to bribe voters and woo vote banks with expensive favours. Every party has thousands of cadre who are honest, accountable and passionate about building the nation: let us see them take the courageous step of lifting their parties out of the cesspools they have sunk into. That is the least they can do to atone for their neglect of the nation and the needs of the people for the past 25 years of ‘democracy’.



## FLASHBACK EDITORIAL

Excerpt from Editorial in  
*Nepali Times* #64 of 12-19 October 2001

Despite the havoc the Maoists have created, the revolt has exposed the hollowness of Nepal’s political leaders, who have discredited and squandered our hard-won democracy. It has also shown the depth of frustration of a neglected people whose basic needs have been ignored for too long.

More than a decade after the promulgation of a Constitution that made the people sovereign, rural Nepal is still waiting to see what it actually means to be the true rulers of this country. Call them ignorant or illiterate, but they have yet to see and feel the supposed advantages of democracy. And, mark this, they know exactly who the crooks are.

The Maoists had felt the pulse of the people and they knew the anger, frustration and hopelessness in the hinterland. They let the people down by fighting a futile, wasteful war in their name, that is another matter. They lived with the people — in many cases they were the people. Like Mao said, they were like fish in water. After the rebels lay down their guns, that is the kind of intimacy that political parties and their activists should be aiming for. Much of this is happening in many parts of

Nepal as local self-governance takes root. Such successful examples of grassroots democracy in action must be replicated nationwide if we are to prevent an even more desperate insurgency replacing the present one.

The people themselves would be quite happy even if the process of building a more just and tolerant society were to begin — if there were a glint of hope at the end of the long dark tunnel. Despite the utopia that the Maoists have promised, all the people really want is to be left to live in peace. The government therefore has to re-establish the rule of law. The dignity of every individual in a larger collective is what democracy is all about. Every person needs to be respected: caste, community, class and gender differences should not be obstacles to an individual’s progress. That is the government’s role beyond the peace talks. To do what it was supposed to be doing

all along, but now with added commitment and urgency to make up for lost time. Otherwise just peace will be just a mirage.



## ONLINE PACKAGES



ON THE ROAD  
Join us on a road trip from the lowest point in Nepal in Jhapa to Taplejung near the world’s third highest peak, Kangchenjunga. We’ll travel through Tarai forests, tea gardens, cardamom fields and enchanting scenery of post-monsoon Eastern Nepal.

### MAGICAL DOLPO

Truly a very special land, and one of the last pristine places left (‘Stairway to heaven’, Kunda Dixit, #879). If there is a push to promote trekking in Dolpo I hope there is a long-term comprehensive plan in place to protect it from the ravages of tourists, looters and governmental opportunists. How can there be economic development that improves the quality of life, respects tradition, and preserves integrity of the environment and autonomy of the people?

Billie Kunzang

### INTERNET TOURISM

We must work together for the betterment of Nepal (‘Selling Nepal on the Net’, Shreejana Shrestha, #879). The focus should be on the improvement of road connectivity. The road between Mugling-Narayanghat is in bad condition, tourists wanting to visit the birth place of Gautam Buddha in Lumbini by road don’t want to get stuck in traffic.

Kashif

### PLUS AND MINUS

Coming from Nilambar Acharya, otherwise a respected constitutionalist and political analyst, that the recent UML-Maoist Centre alliance has the potential for deepening democracy is deeply disturbing (‘Plus and minus’, Nilamber Acharya, #879). The writer has witnessed every political transition for the last 27 years. The Westminster model will never be successful in Nepal unless it is restructured to suit Nepal’s social order that is persistently feudalistic.

Bihari K Shrestha

■ Pity, Nilamber Acharya also seems to be unable to see the difference between democracy as found in books and so-called ‘democracy’ as practiced in Nepal. He is also unable to distinguish between communism in books and that found in Nepal. He needs a reality check.

K K Sharma

### SONS OF BITCHES

The most hilarious piece in recent weeks; not just funny but speaks of truths the newly elected mayors will have to cope with (‘Sons of bitches’, Ass, #879).

Bharat Koirala

### THREESOME

Diwakar Cheetri’s front page cartoon is worth a million rupees (‘Bedfellows’, Om Astha Rai, #879). This Communist alliance is doomed from the start. India will do everything in its power to destroy it. The egos of Oli, Bhattarai and Dahal will make it self-destruct. The corrupted Koirala family and even more corrupted Deuba are directly responsible. A new generation, a new force of young Nepalis will one day replace the corrupt Communists and Congress. But for the time being, we are stuck and Nepali will have to suffer more pain.

Ashok Sharma

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Stairway to heaven

by Kunda Dixit  
The video ‘Holy Hike’ with its stunning scenery had phenomenal shares online. You can still catch the out-of-this-world scenery of Phoksundo Lake online if you missed it last week. Also, read the digital package about Dolpo’s tourism prospects.

Most reached and shared on Facebook  
(75,000 reached and 341 shares)

### Selling Nepal on the Net

by Shreejana Shrestha  
Our exclusive story on how the digital marketing of Nepal’s tourism is replacing traditional advertising was the most popular piece online last week. Check out www.nepalitimes.com to see how Nepal is preparing for highest-ever visitor numbers in 2017.

Most popular on Twitter

Most visited online page

Most commented

## QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
Even if it runs at a loss, good #urban #transport makes a #metropolis efficient and dynamic, writes @KanakManiDixit

Airline Guy @GuyAirline  
A dedicated track going around Ring Road. No traffic stop, electric so no pollution. Very do able. vs Present nightmare. #Kathmandu

Puspa Raj Pant @Puspa\_RPant  
True! If quantified \$\$ the harmful effects (air, noise, light pollution) of currently profit-taking transport systems. We’re already in loss

nepalikhali @gurutashishenga  
Public utility service is never judged in financial terms but is judged on service quality

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
All the political promiscuity is the result of a phobia about losing in the November-December #elections http://bit.ly/2ykFmy #Nepal 1:14 PM - 15 Oct 2017

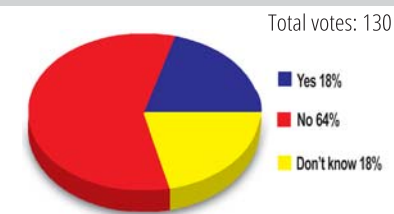
Lhamo Y Sherpa @Lhamo\_Y  
To dislike a certain politician/political party is a personal choice but portraying such images is against moral maturity & civic journalism

Samridha Rana @SamridhaR  
Love the picture @kundadixit @nepalitimes Lets hope the ‘love’ lasts and brings forth political stability in Nepal #Nepal



Weekly Internet Poll #880

Q. Are you confident that the killers of Saurav Kumar Gauchan will be brought to justice?



Weekly Internet Poll #881  
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Thamel will “restrict some unwanted vehicles” from Sunday. Should the tourist area become fully vehicle-free?



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER  



# Making Nepal future-ready

Without strategic intervention in education, Nepal will lose another generation to the brinkmanship of selfish leaders

Nepal may be South Asia's oldest nation state, but it is a young democracy with a youthful population. The share of population in the 15-49 age group is projected to increase to 55.5% by 2031 while that below 24 years will peak at 51.5% in 2018.



**CONNECTING DOTS**

Dinkar Nepal

Nepal's youth bulge (16-40 years) stood at 40.3% of the total in the 2011 census and is expected to expand to 43.3% in 2031 before the proportion of elderly will start growing. Countries like Japan, Greece and Finland are also ageing, which is causing an immediate economic imbalance.

Never before have there been so many young people in Nepal. And never before has there been such an easy flow of knowledge, skills and people across the world. These two facts put together produce immense potential for economic and social progress.

This demographic window of opportunity will only last a few more decades. And if something is not done urgently to take advantage of this, our one-time opportunity will be lost forever. For example, the GDP of many Southeast Asian countries increased seven-fold in the late 20th century, causing an economic boom described as the 'Asian economic miracle'.

But in Latin America, education and health were neglected and a similar window was lost forever. The key to harnessing this dividend lies in education. Providing opportunities to the burgeoning young population to grow to its best potential should be the focus of all government policies, including local ones.

Our education system needs to be quickly steered towards providing interdisciplinary,



BIKRAM RAI

analytical and creative skills to our children. Without this holistic transformation, we will continue to be the unskilled labour suppliers of the world. And that would be the greatest injustice to the future generation that present leaders could do.

A report, Education Redefined: The future is Now, published by The Economist Intelligence Unit, recently assessed the effectiveness of education systems in preparing

students for the demands of work and life in a rapidly changing landscape. An ideal 21st-century education system is designed to impart interdisciplinary skills, creative and analytical talent, skills in entrepreneurship and leadership, in digital and technical areas, as well as global awareness and civic education. New Zealand, among the countries studied, scored highest in the report.

Nepal, of course, is not included in the study but its recommendations apply to us too and can help us to focus on education. This means reforming the curriculum for future skills, ensuring the effectiveness of the policy implementation system, teacher education, government education expenditure, career counselling in schools and collaboration between education and industry. Most importantly,

the study concludes that a holistic and future-ready education system is inextricably linked with societal openness, cultural diversity and tolerance.

It has been recognised for decades that improving the relevance and quality of education is necessary to prepare Nepal for the future. But for the politicians at the centre, it remains a matter of least priority. A septuagenarian with no interest or experience in reforming education is at the helm of Nepal's affairs. And the situation doesn't seem to be changing any time soon, even with new elections.

The only hope lies in improving the quality of education from the grassroots up. Under the new Constitution, much of the responsibility for education and health has been given to local governments. But even a newly-elected mayor's hands may be tied because even under the federal system, it is likely that local governments will not have any real say in teacher management and curriculum re-design.

"Hopefully, local governments will band together to ask for alternative methods to credential schools and gain more curricular freedom," says Saakar Pudasainee, an educational entrepreneur and activist with Karkhana, which works in STEM education in schools.

A likely solution can be local governments joining forces to collaborate with individuals, think tanks and private organisations to design and implement model solutions. Such initiatives from the local level will ensure that low-cost, organic innovation at private educational institutions can be replicated widely.

As in every sector, the ultimate hope in Nepal now is that local governments will take the initiative and wrest progress out of the clutches of politicians at the centre, who seem hell bent on sending the country into a downward spiral. 🇳🇵

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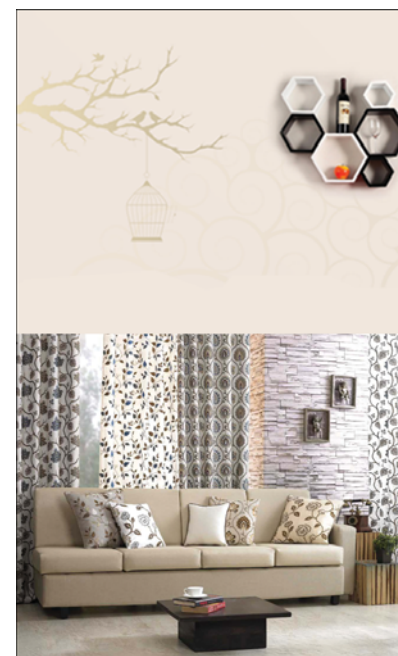
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# Responsibilities at home and abroad

Nepal's record on conflict-era cases does not inspire confidence in its role as a new member of the UN Human Rights Council



On October 16, Nepal became a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) for a two-year period beginning January. The Government, reeling from accusations that it had stalled on human rights commitments, welcomed this development as signaling 'the international community's acknowledgment of Nepal's passionate efforts and accomplishments in the field of promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms'.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
Tejshree Thapa

The HRC, established in 2006, has become an important institution for holding countries to account on human rights issues. During what are known as Universal Periodic Reviews, all UN member states submit reports and updates, respond to criticism, and make commitments to reform. The council also has the capacity to appoint special rapporteurs and other independent experts to ensure effective investigation into alleged abuses in specific countries, even when the country concerned refuses to cooperate.

Perhaps the Council's most significant contribution has been in its capacity to appoint commissions of inquiry specific to particular countries – and these have included North Korea, Syria, Burundi and Sri Lanka. While the establishment of such commissions requires strong political will within the larger international community, the voting members of the HRC decide whether a specific commission of inquiry will be established, and what its contours will be.

Thus, Nepal's membership in the HRC will mean that it can meaningfully shape the human rights discourse over the coming

two years. The question is: how well will it exercise that responsibility? How will the Government of Nepal vote when faced with serious human rights crises around the world?

It is important to remember that it was not that long ago that Nepal itself was the object of scrutiny, both before the Council and its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights. There were well-documented allegations of serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations by both government forces and those of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M). The war between 1996-2006 raised international alarm. More than 13,000 people were killed and thousands were forcibly disappeared, sexual violence and torture were used by both sides.

Even as the conflict escalated, the Nepal Government, confronted time and again in Geneva over the allegations, continued simply denying and obfuscating, and telling the international community that its internal affairs were none of its business. However, international persistence paid off.

In 2005, the government agreed to a dedicated UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR) for Nepal, with a broad mandate that included monitoring violations countrywide. The Nepal government continued to resist full cooperation with the OHCHR office, however, and in 2012 refused to extend its mandate. But the office produced an important mapping account of wartime allegations that serves as a blueprint for Nepal's transitional justice promises to this day. This mapping exercise is also important for Nepal's ultimate return to peace with accountability.

The history of the Nepal government's engagement in Geneva, plus subsequent and ongoing intransigence in implementing peace-talk promises of transitional justice, raises grave concerns about how it will vote

as a member of the HRC.

Nepal has yet to carry out several Supreme Court directives to bring its Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) law in line with international standards. The UN itself expressed concern over this issue in 2014, calling on the Government to revise the law in order to meet its international legal obligations.

Not only did the government not heed its own Supreme Court and the United Nations, disturbingly it also opposed the call to carry out any reform. In May 2016, the four main political parties agreed to withdraw all conflict-era cases before the courts and to provide amnesty to all individuals allegedly responsible.

A government that does not care about protecting human rights and ensuring justice for its own citizens cannot pretend to care about protecting the human rights of others. One can take the example of the increasing disregard for the rights of Tibetan refugees by successive Nepal Governments as a signal that the government will cave in when matters relate to powerful countries such as China rolling back rights. This is not a good omen for Nepal's HRC membership.

All of these tendencies should give pause to anyone who thinks Nepal's membership on the HRC *ipso facto* reflects a renewed commitment to human rights at home or abroad. Nepal should not only address its failures internally but also be a positive actor for oppressed and suffering people all over the world. 🇳🇵

*Tejshree Thapa is a senior Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch.*

## Redesigning reads

Oryx, Qatar Airways' in-flight magazine, has won the Custom Redesign of the Year at Folio's Eddie & Ozzie Awards, one of



the most comprehensive media award programs. The magazine redesign was launched in January 2017.

## Bigger and better



Samsung has launched its flagship Galaxy Note8 in Nepal. The smartphone comes with infinity display, enhanced S Pen, dual camera with dual optical image stabilisation and the company's defence-grade security platform Samsung Knox.

The Note8 is priced at Rs 102,990 and is available in midnight black and maple golden colours. Consumers will also get breakage insurance for 8 months and 16GB data from NCell.

## Turkish turns four

To commemorate its four-year anniversary in Nepal, Turkish Airlines hosted a celebration at Gokarna Forest Resort last



week. The fun-filled event with games and food was attended by dignitaries, expats, corporate houses and media.

## We the champions

Ang Tshiring Sherpa won the second edition of the Carlsberg Golf Series at the Gokarna Golf Club on 14 October. The seven-



handicap player won the title after being tied with three other golfers at 36 points on count

## Etihad connection



capital of Azerbaijan from 2 March 2018 on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.





# Aching for the Arctic



Sweltering in the September humidity of a Kathmandu traffic jam, I ache for the crack of calving glaciers

Keeling on the tarmac at the foot of the aircraft steps, the immigration officer stamps our passports. “Welcome to Greenland!” he beams.

When his back tires, he transfers his official activity to the mudguard of a yellow school bus that will drive us the short distance to the dock where the ship awaits at the head of the world’s longest fjord, Sondre Stromfjord. A tractor delivers our bags in a red Royal Arctic shipping container.



**SO FAR SO GOOD**  
Lisa Choegyal

A row of bulky figures are silhouetted against a blue sky on the ridge behind us — local Inuit people being entertained as the zodiac boat shuttles 77 of us from the floating jetty to the chunky research vessel anchored in the bay. And some of us are pretty entertaining, incongruously dressed in navy blazers, tweed caps and corduroys of our British shores — soon to be replaced by down jackets, woolly hats and long underwear.

This is the start of a two-week journey through the towering scenery, desolate islands and floating ice of the fabled North West Passage in the high Canadian

Arctic. Aboard the ice-strengthened 100m Russian ship Akademik Ioffe, escorted by my balding brother Nick and his cheerful wife Iris, our select Ultimate Travel passengers have the benefit of attentive staff from Kalingrad and the limitless knowledge of teams of expert guides and photographers from the US, UK and Canada — specialists in whales, seals, birds, polar bears, Arctic explorers and Inuit history.

The first three days in west Greenland are as fresh to our guides as to us: visits to remote harbours of multi-coloured houses and unpronounceable names — Kangerlussuaq, Sisimiut and Iluissat, where the world heritage site Jacobshavn Icefjord disgorges massive blue green icebergs into the Disko Bay. A burly paddler demonstrates local survival skills in this toughest of environments with ‘eskimo rolls’ in a slender canoe. Local fishermen in tracksuits pile dead seals on their gunwales and heap spotted wolf fish into buckets. Chained sled dogs lie comatose in the sun, enjoying the summer respite from their indispensable winter work on the snow.

Having crossed the Davis Strait, at the settlement of Pond Inlet we enter Nunavut Canada, amidst barren black mountains streaked with old snow and hanging glaciers. A traditional welcome includes throat singing, blubber lamps and a demonstration of hunting



techniques by our Inuit hosts, dressed in sealskin and natty white polar bear skin trousers in a smart new school insulated from the cold. “What do you do during the winter dark?” someone asked a shy teenager. “Go to Ottawa!” she smiled wryly.

The landscape is huge and harsh, and we sail on deeper within the Arctic Circle, past the largest uninhabited island in the world, soaring sea cliffs jostling with nesting gulls, and the northernmost tip of the North American continent in Bellot Strait. During the brief summer months the sun never sets, and a bright white arctic hare is starkly conspicuous on the snowless hillside.

The ship glides silently through the ice, stalking polar bears: a yellow head swimming or a creamy heap resting on the ice, separating out into a family of mother with cubs. As adept in the water as on land, one lone maritime male carries a full coatful as he bolts in alarm straight uphill from the gravel beach, leaving a dark wet trail in his wake. One evening, vodka tonic in hand, I watched from the bar as a bear on ice floated past, unconcerned, just a few feet from the ship.

Several times a day we don layers of warm clothes culminating in clumsy colourful outer gear, and pile into the rubber zodiacs for excursions on land, ice and

sea: hikes through the untrodden tundra, ancient Thule rock mounds and crumbling historic huts. We salute the weather-worn graves of Franklin’s tragic expedition on the bleak gravel of Beechy Island with tots of rum and misty eyes, before being hurried back to the boats by our rifle-toting guides in a frisson of fear at an advancing polar bear. Through binoculars on deck we spot grazing muskox “dots”, and several species of seals and whales. One morning, pale Belugas circle right beneath our boats, blowing with curiosity, ghostlike just under the surface. A startlingly white gyrfalcon guards her nest on a naked rock tower, loons wait on glassy seasonal lakes, rasping black ravens rule the beaches, and myriads of guillemots, skuas and eiders skid through the grey waves.

It is a heavy ice year within the North West Passage, despite the ice cap generally falling to well below average, and the Canadian coastguard will not risk us proceeding to Cambridge Bay. The aloof Russian captain with a large aquiline nose changes course, and we leave the ship to fly out of Resolute, another name that resonates with history. The US president’s Oval Office desk is made from the timbers of the trapped British ship HMS Resolute. Chartered flights from Resolute’s edge-of-the-world airstrip pick up North Pole expeditioners, for a price, but we fly south four hours to the closest Canadian city of Edmonton.

“More people climb Everest than visit the Northwest Passage every year – less than 400,” we are told, rather inaccurately, by the terse Australian tour director. This may change with the impending arrival of a serious cruise ship, the Crystal Serendipity, which carries 1,700 captive passengers escorted by her own personal icebreaker. Along with a few hardy sailing yachts waiting in vain for the ice to retreat, this red icebreaker was one of the very few other vessels we saw on our entire trip.

Sweltering in the September humidity of a Kathmandu traffic jam, I ache for the haunting sound of ice floes against the hull, the hiss of a whale’s blow, the crack of calving glaciers, and the forlorn cries of gulls. But the high Arctic is not another galaxy or distant dream, but intrinsic to the third pole in whose shadow we live, part of our daily Himalayan reality of changing climates, receding glaciers and man-made threats to the natural order. 🇳🇵

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

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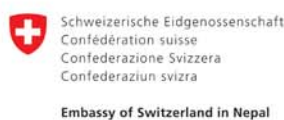
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**See you in Jazzmandu 2018, November 1 - 6**



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## EVENT PARTNERS







A tropical depression in the Bay has been undecided about which way to go after making landfall in Odisha on Wednesday. It is veering east towards Burma, but there is a high chance of its peripheral clouds grazing central and eastern Nepal over the weekend. This system also changed the wind direction, which is why there has been crystal clear air over Nepal compared to the Indo-Gangetic smog early in the week. Expect some isolated precipitation late Sunday and early next week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
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### RUBEENA SHRESTHA

As the curtains closed on the 15th annual Jazzmandu, the audience and organisers were taking stock of the performances at this unique festival.

The showcase event has always been the Jazzbazaar at Gokarna Resort. With its lush greenery, Gokarna provides the perfect, magical backdrop for this multi-act event. Although as one avid concert goer put it: “You have to be truly committed to jazz to take on this road,” referring to the tortuous Chabahil- Boudha-Gokarna stretch, which has been under perpetual construction for more than a decade. Yanik Shrestha, an RJ with Radio Nagarik 96.5, hasn’t missed a single Jazzmandu since the festival’s inception 15 years ago. Jazzmandu has taken fans like him on a dynamic journey to explore a masala of culture, music and spirituality.

“Jazz is one of the most important arts of this century: it has this ability to be fluid and absorb all kinds of music. People are beginning to understand that it’s not this stodgy, closed-in music: it has a big heart,” he adds.

The Palouse Jazz Project, which performed at Gokarna, is made up of faculty members from the Lionel Hampton School of Music at the University of Idaho. It plays traditional jazz standards along with its own compositions. Pianist and vocalist Kate Skinner’s rendition of ‘A Beautiful Friendship’ was lilting

and lovely.

Filtron M brought together artists from New York, Mali, Switzerland and Nepal to create NepaMali, which had its debut at Jazzmandu this year. Manu Koch of Filtron M relates how he and Navin Chettri had been talking for years about bringing a kora player to Nepal: this year they introduced Balla Tounkara, who plays the

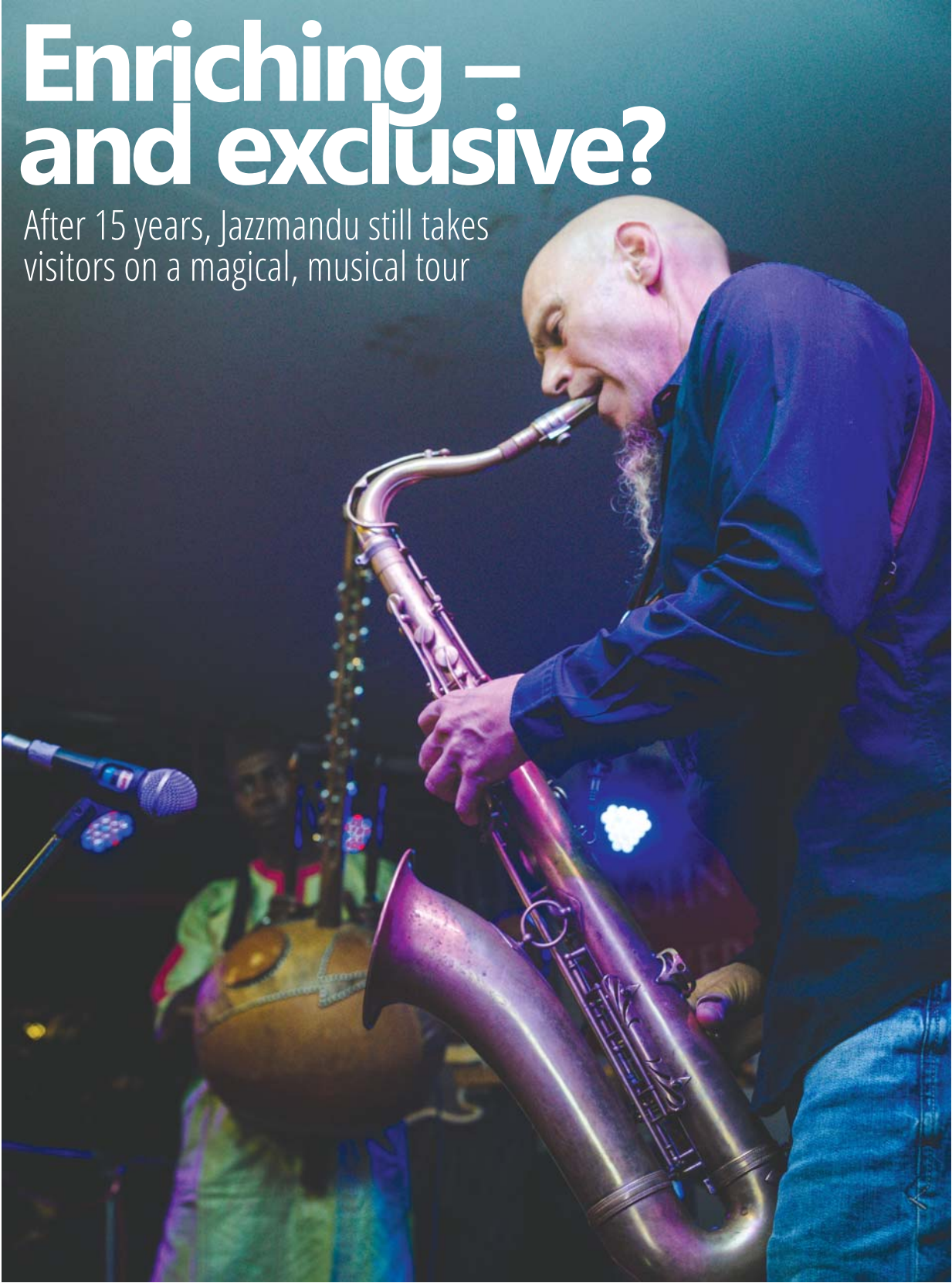


21-stringed, lute-harp instrument. The sound is evocative of long narratives told under open skies and melds exquisitely with the bass of the saxophone and guitar.

Improvisational, experimental, young and vibrant, the music of Samuel Wootton Toy Story defies categorisation: every once in a while, like a conjuror, the title artist would extract another item from his eclectic collection of global percussion instruments and add another layer of sound to the music.

“Jazz is exciting and special because it is an art form which enables the thrill of creating spontaneously, in direct response to impressions, circumstances and locations,” says Wootton.

Priti Rai has come to Jazzmandu at Gokarna every year. “It is one place during the week-long jazz fest



that allows me to listen to all the performances on one stage. And also meet people.”

Rakesh Khadgi, a regular concert goer, has a different take. He laments the fact that the festival is a great cultural event for Kathmandu, but not a musical one.

He expalins: “These events have become about seeing and being seen rather than the music, and I find that to be in conflict with the objectives of Jazzmandu, which is to bring international music to Nepal and showcase Nepali music to international artists.”

Indeed, Jazzmandu has brought new voices and acts, providing Nepali audiences exposure to international music. This year the Julia Sarr Collective, with its West African rhythms and jazz melodies, was a good example of the festival’s broad scope.

But Khadgi shakes his head: “Looking at the audience, it doesn’t look like the organisers are bringing international music to a Nepali audience, it looks like they are bringing international music to audiences that have already had exposure to such kinds of music:

expats and well-heeled Nepalis.”

Another festival-goer, Pooja Rana, agrees that Jazzmandu could try to be more inclusive. “True, they conduct master classes for select students, but the other events are prohibitively expensive.”

Kathmandu needs events like Jazzmandu, and many people will continue to flock to them in droves. But reducing the entrance fees, and broadening the appeal to a larger audience (perhaps even outside Kathmandu) would expand the reach and impact of the festival in its next 15 years. 🇳🇵

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# Repairing rural ro



Trails destroyed by the earthquake are being fixed, reviving trade

**RIWAJ RAI**  
in DHADING

While the residents of Kathmandu complain about potholed roads and dusty sidewalks, here in remote northern Dhading district people are happy that the trail system destroyed by the 2015 earthquakes is being restored for local trade and trekking.

Trails are the only access to the northern regions of this district, which feel as remote as Humla even though it is only 90km from Kathmandu. The lack of road access has meant that villages like Rigaun and Lapa always suffered chronic food shortages. The earthquakes

made them even more remote. But today, residents once more have easy access to neighbouring villages as well as Galsang, the nearest jeep station from where there is motor transport to the district headquarters of Dhading Besi and the Prithvi Highway to Kathmandu.

Dhading is the only district in Nepal that has terrain rising from the Chure hills bordering Makwanpur to the south, and from the Ganesh Himal range to the north. It borders Kathmandu to the east, Gorkha in the west and Rasuwa to the north.

The first section of the repaired

trail system starts at the settlement of Richet in the village of Rigaun, linking Karang and Kichet before finally descending to Lapa. The serpentine trail with stone steps runs about 27km and was cut off by the quakes.

“Walking the trail was extremely difficult and during monsoon it was hardly possible. It is very steep and Lapa is at least half a day’s walk from here,” said Ram Bahadur Tamang, 35, a porter from Richet. “Now that the trail has been repaired, it is much safer.”

Richet is made up of 170 households, a village of mostly

Tamang families. Illiterate and poor, most youths in the village do multiple jobs to make ends meet: carrying loads, farming potatoes and making bamboo baskets.

The restored trail makes it easier to transport those products to Galsang and on to Dhading Besi for sale. In turn, heavily-laden mule trains carry sacks of rice, salt, oil and other grocery items from the jeep station at Galsang to villages on the trail.

Repairs to the trail system in Dhading and Gorkha have been funded by donors led by the United Kingdom Department for





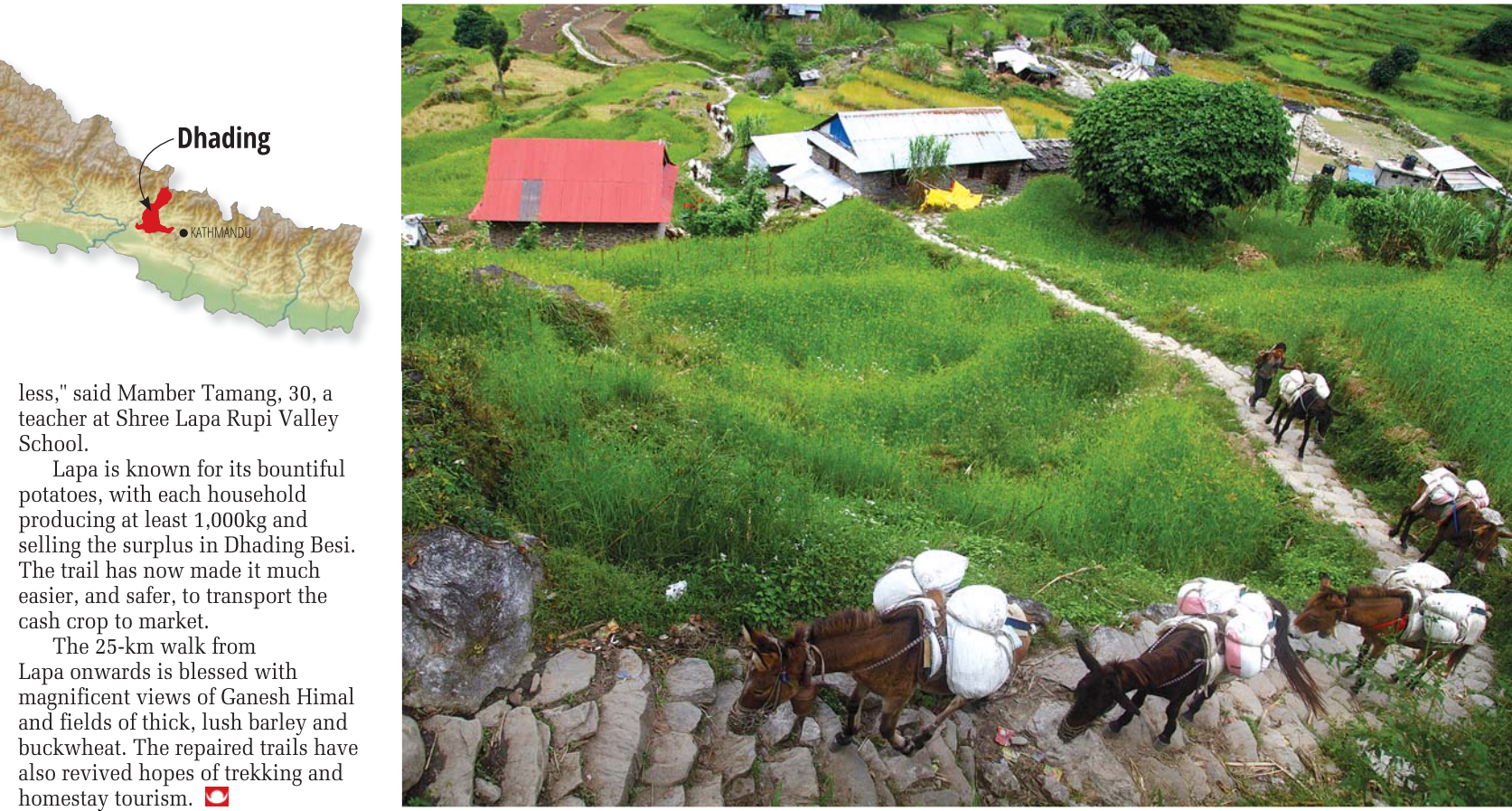
ALL PHOTOS: RIWAJ RAI



International Development (DFID) and the World Food Program (WFP), which has repaired up to 100km of trails under its Quick Win Trail Project: another 45km is left to be restored.

From Richet it takes five or six hours of a steep uphill climb on foot to reach Karang, then another four hours to descend to Lapa. Although a long and tiring journey, the faint music of the rushing Akhu River below helps ease the monotony.

“Going to school for children has become much easier. It used to take almost three hours to reach school from Kachet: now it takes them a lot



less," said Mamber Tamang, 30, a teacher at Shree Lapa Rup Valley School.

Lapa is known for its bountiful potatoes, with each household producing at least 1,000kg and selling the surplus in Dhading Besi. The trail has now made it much easier, and safer, to transport the cash crop to market.

The 25-km walk from Lapa onwards is blessed with magnificent views of Ganesh Himal and fields of thick, lush barley and buckwheat. The repaired trails have also revived hopes of trekking and homestay tourism. 🇳🇵



# EVENTS



## Film Southasia,

Save the date to watch your favourite films from the list of 63. The films from SAARC countries include 12 documentaries of dissent and six student entries.  
2-5 November, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, For schedule: <http://www.filmsouthasia.org>, (01) 5552141, 9841908528

## Rock climbing,

Gauge your own strength by trying your hand (and feet) at rock climbing on the Astrek Climbing Wall. The package includes lunch, bottled water and climbing and safety gear. No previous experience required.  
Every Saturday, 8am-5pm, Rs5,500 per person, (01) 4419265, 9841313561, [www.facebook.com/astrek.climbing](http://www.facebook.com/astrek.climbing)

## Girl Child Day,

Take part in a discussion on Chaupadi to mark the 6th International Girl Child Day.  
16 October, 8-11am, Yak Palace, Pulchowk, 9841760944, 9808370983



## Bodhi Chhaya,

Experience this artistic and cultural extravaganza that combines theatre, dance and music. Written and directed by Kavita Srinivasan.

## The True Stories Mural,

An art exhibition that seeks to highlight the stories of women and child victims whose lives have been uprooted. The event will exhibit murals on the themes of objectification, mythology, exploitation and the empowerment of women.  
23-29 October, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Entry: Free, 9818239744, [sgamarya@gmail.com](mailto:sgamarya@gmail.com)



## Saxophone workshop,

Learn to play saxophone with talented teacher Mathias Hagen from Norway.  
27 October, 5:30-6:30pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, (01) 5013554, 9813556945, [info@kajazz.com.np](mailto:info@kajazz.com.np)



An exhibition that explores self-identity and gender identification, while engaging viewers in a dialogue about urbanisation and ecology, by artists Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dangol.  
13 October-3 December, 11am-10:30pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690,

## Photo contest,

Submit your three best tourism-related pictures in this contest organised by the Nepal Tourism Board, SMARTH and DFID to mark World Tourism Day (27 September).  
Send your pictures to: [dfidnepal@gmail.com](mailto:dfidnepal@gmail.com)  
Deadline: 31 October, (01) 5542980, [www.facebook.com/NepalDFID](http://www.facebook.com/NepalDFID)



## MISS MOTI-VATION

**KRIPA JOSHI**



# MUSIC



## Concert for students,

A classical concert featuring selected international artists, and part of the Gharana Musical Festival 2017, which runs until 4 November in selected venues.  
27 October, 5:30-8:30pm, Around the corner, Bansbari, Rs100, 9861631197

## Tattwa live,

Make your weekend memorable at Shambala Garden with a taste of barbeque and live performances by Tattwa Band, just Rs2,000 per person (net).  
Every Friday, Shambala Garden, Hotel Shangri-La, (01) 4412999



## Diwas Gurung,

Book your seats for a musical evening with your very own Diwas Gurung, featuring Suncha, Avaya and Kismat from Albatross. Seats are limited.  
27 October, RS MOTO, Gairidhara, Rs 500, 9865135937

## Sine Valley,

The third event of the Sine Valley festival 2017 is bringing together artists like Marta Del Grandi, Foeseal and Phatcowlee. Save the date.  
23 October, 7-10pm, Evoke Café and Bistro, Jhamsikhel, 9851111051

## OUR PICK



## RANI

Opens in Kathmandu on 19 October

In this intense drama, buckle up for the tale of two close friends (Saruk Tamrakar and Manish Sundar Shrestha) who fall for the film's title character, Rani (Malina Joshi). Their quest for her love is interrupted by a third competitor, and a physical, emotional, and social conflict disrupts their lives as they seek to win Rani's heart. A tale that weaves through a range of emotions and ups and downs, Rani tells the story of the tension between and limits of friendship when a love interest is part of the mix.

# DINING



## Lhakpa's Chulo,

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry – take your pick.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

## Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar,

Enjoy garlic cheese momos at this friendly restaurant.  
Darbar Marg, (01) 1430890



## Bubbly brunch,

Book your seats and enjoy Saturday brunch with friends and family for only Rs 1500 per person (net). The amazing shawarma and pasta won't let you down.  
Every Saturday, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Shangri-La Hotel

## Embassy,

Away from the hustle-bustle of the streets, enjoy a variety of multi-cuisine dishes at a place ideal for business meets and casual rendezvous.  
Panipokhari, (01) 4424040



## Creole cuisine ,

For exotic and tantalizing dishes from New Orleans, Italy, Spain, Africa, Germany, the Caribbean and Portugal at Rs2,000 per person.  
27 October-5 November, 6:30-10pm, The Cafe, Hyatt Hotel, (01) 5171234

## The Vesper House,

Stop by for the best in Italian and all local favourites, in breezy outdoor seating. Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5548179, [www.vespercafe.com](http://www.vespercafe.com)



## Lete Thakali Kitchen,

The best place in the Valley to dine on a thakali khana set with friends and families.  
Tangal, Naxal, (01) 4416866

# GETAWAY



## Temple Tree Resort and Spa,

For a majestic view of the Annapurna Mountain Range and Fewa Lake.  
Gaunghat, Lakeside 6, Pokhara, (061) 465819, [@templetreepokhara](mailto:@templetreepokhara)

## Gokarna Forest Resort,

A forest sanctuary to help you relax, breathe and meditate. Just a 20-minute drive from Kathmandu.  
Gokarna, (01) 4451212, [info@gokarna.net](mailto:info@gokarna.net)

## Park Village Resort,

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu.  
Himalayan Peace and Wellness Centre, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286, [peace@wellness.com.np](mailto:peace@wellness.com.np)

## Kantipur Temple House,

Located in the heart of the city, this eco-friendly boutique hotel is an epitome of cultural heritage in itself. Don't forget to try the organic food.  
Thamel, (01) 4250131



## The Famous Farmhouse,

Its converted old buildings are family friendly, the gardens and bougainvillea intertwine, the furniture and fittings are an antique collector's delight.  
Nuwakot, (01) 4422617

## Hotel Mystic Mountain,

Plan a weekend trip to this newly-opened exquisite resort located in the forest of Nagarkot hill.  
Nagarkot, (01) 4426646



## Meghauli Serai,

Enjoy the relaxing fine dining, then venture out for monsoon wildlife safaris in Chitwan, via the Monsoon offer at Taj Safari's Meghauli Serai.  
Chitwan National Park, 9801301969, 9851001548

## Jhule Mountain Resort,

Resting 2,050m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic homestay experience.  
Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Lapsipedi-3, Jhule, (01) 6212399



**WAR CORRESPONDENTS:**

*Kantipur* Editor Yubaraj Ghimire (*standing*) and reporters Narayan Wagle and Suman Pradhan flew into Dunai a day after the Maoist attack on 26 September 2000 to interview survivors of a battle that was a turning point in the war.

Seventeen years later, the war is a distant memory in the first district headquarters to be attacked

**KUNDA DIXIT**  
in DUNAI

Nepal's conflict had been going on for four years, the violence was spreading out from the Maoist 'base areas' of the mid-western mountains to other parts of the country. Teachers, farmers, students and traders were being extorted, tortured or killed. In Kathmandu, fractious and feckless parliamentary parties were incapable of showing statesmanship, or the ability to govern.

Till then, it was still the demoralised, underfunded Nepal Police that was fighting motivated Maoist guerrillas and hundreds had already been killed. Police outposts were being abandoned. Brutal crackdowns by the Police in offensives like Operation Romeo and Kilo Sierra 2 had alienated civilians, making recruitment easier for the Maoists.

Girija Prasad Koirala was Prime Minister, and Sher Bahadur Deuba had split from the NC only to rejoin and become the Chairman of the Peace Committee, entrusted with secretly negotiating with the Maoists. And yet, it was Deuba himself as prime minister in February 1996 who had ignored the Maoist ultimatum that led to the insurgency.

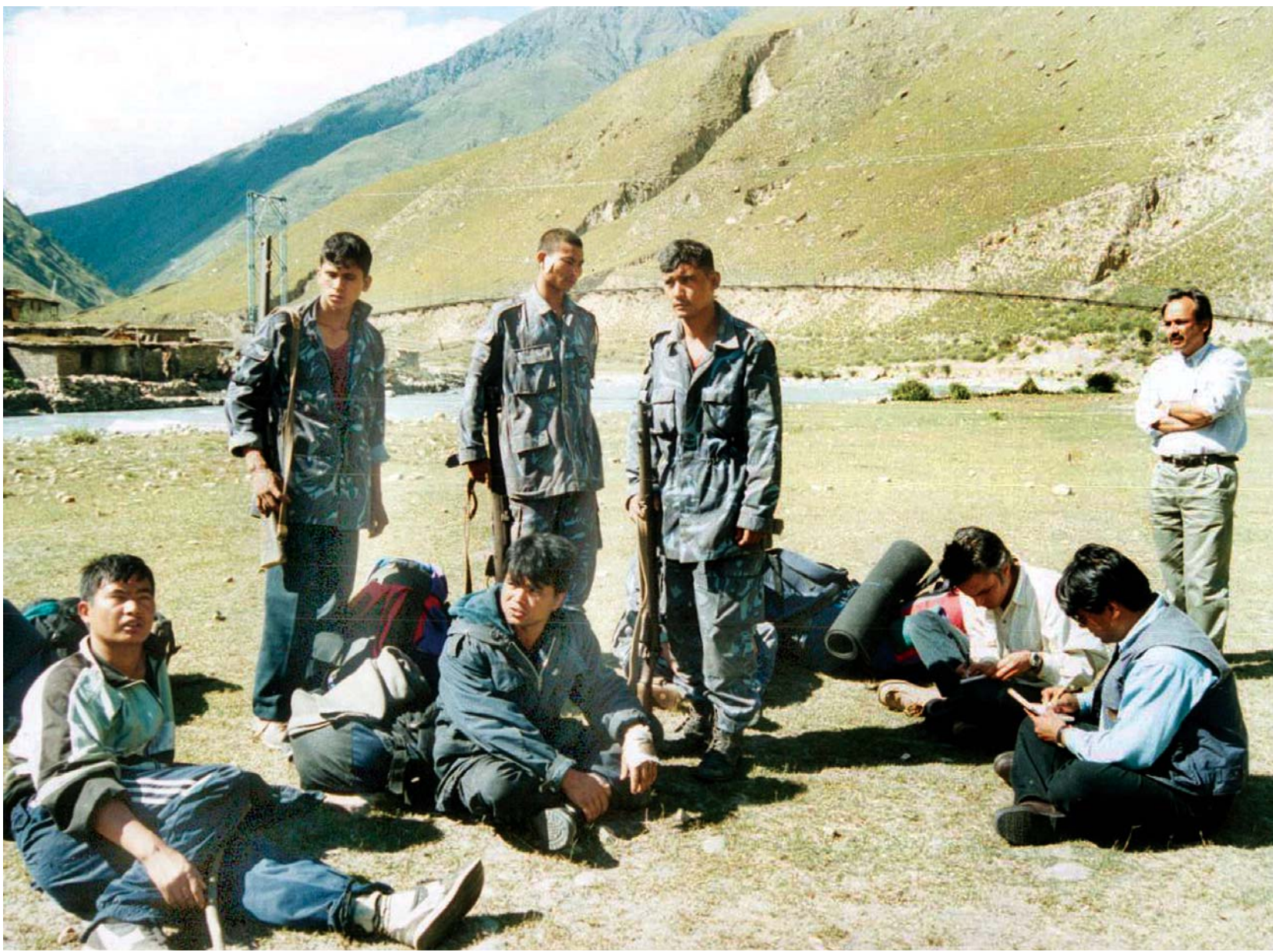
Then, in the most-audacious attack till then, a 1,000-strong Maoist guerrilla force attacked a district headquarter for the first time, here in Dunai. They chose Dolpo district because its remoteness would delay the state response, and the mountains offered many escape routes back to Rukum and Jajarkot.

The strike was planned and led by Barsha Man Pun, who went on to become Finance Minister and is the husband of Parliament Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar. Hundreds of guerrillas stormed Dunai from all sides on the night of 25 September 2001, freeing prisoners, looting Rs50 million from the Nepal Bank branch and abducting 12 officials. Dozens of Maoists were killed, as were 14 policemen.

The battle raged all night, while soldiers at the Suligad Army Base nearby looked on, saying later they had no orders to intervene. Seventeen years later, looking out from the sentry post at the confluence of the Suligad and Thuli Bheri, up river towards Dunai, one can almost hear the sound of bombs and fierce gunfire reverberating among the surrounding mountains.

There is now a motorable road from the airfield at Jufal to Dunai: the jeeps that ply it had to be helicoptered in and the diesel is ferried by mules. Bridges were booby-trapped or destroyed by the Maoists to prevent the soldiers from coming out.

The raid began at midnight with



NARENDRA SHRESTHA / A PEOPLE WAR

# The turning point



huge explosions at the jail and the police station followed by a fierce gun battle. The police fought till they ran out of ammunition, hoping that the Royal Nepal Army soldiers would save them. The Army finally did help, but only to airlift the dead and wounded. Witnesses at the time said bodies of guerrillas washed down the river and were found along the banks next morning.

*Kantipur* editor Yuabraj Ghimire, reporter Narayan Wagle and *Kathmandu Post* reporter Suman Pradhan flew into Dunai from Pokhara that afternoon and interviewed surviving police. One told them: "We fought till dawn and they (the soldiers) came only in the morning to pick up the corpses."

The Maoists knew the Nepal Bank branch was receiving Rs35 million in cash, and delayed the raid until the money finally arrived from Nepalganj on that morning's flight. The army had intelligence of unusual Maoist activity, and warned the administration of an imminent attack. CDO Purshottam Aryal asked Kathmandu for

reinforcements, and a unit was flown in by helicopter – within a few hours they were in action, and some of them were among those killed.

Today, the town has grown dramatically and even has a Citizen's Bank branch with flashy neon lights. Families from Upper Dolpo have bought winter homes here. The sound of mule bells is being replaced by jeeps honking incessantly. A larger prison complex has been built next to the one destroyed in the attack, and a new steel bridge links the two banks.

The Nepal Army is no longer fighting a war, but guarding Shey-Phoksundo National Park and blasting a highway that will connect Dunai to the rest of Nepal within two years. New shops and hotels are coming up in anticipation of the road, and land prices have shot up.

The battle for Dunai was a turning point in the war. The main fallout was criticism of the Royal Nepal Army for not helping the government, which



KUNDA DIXIT

exposed confusion about the chain of command in the Army. Who was giving orders: the supreme commander of the Army, who was a constitutional monarch, or an elected civilian government?

After Dunai, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala put pressure on the Palace to order the Army to cordon off the escape routes of the Maoist attackers. He also sped up the plan to get the Army to arm and train the paramilitary Armed Police Force in counter-insurgency.

Commentator C K Lal wrote in a column in this paper a week after the strike: 'The issue of who the army should be answerable to is now a matter of public debate thanks to vibrant media coverage ... the Army (even if reluctantly) submitting to the government's command has averted a near-constitutional crisis.'


Maoist leader Prachanda declared the Dunai attack a glorious victory and blamed the government for not agreeing to peace talks. It was a familiar Maoist tactic: conduct a high-profile raid just

The newly-built prison in Dunai today is adjacent to the jail that was raided by the Maoists 17 years ago (*left*), freeing prisoners and killing 14 policemen.

The view from near the Nepal Army base at Suligad looking upstream towards Dunai (*right*).

before ceasefire talks to improve their bargaining position. They knew they would have to fight the Army one day, but were going to do it on their own terms when the guerrillas were battle-hardened and had amassed enough weapons captured from the Police.

They did not have to wait long: on 1 June 2001 Nepal's monarchy self-destructed, and the Maoists decided the time was ripe to take on the demoralised Army with devastating attacks on Ghorahi, Mangalsen and other bases in November 2001.

The war became much fiercer with both sides using automatic weapons, grenades and mortars. It would drag on for six more years, and kill another 15,000 people. 





# Chhakka Panja 2

**D**eepa Shree Niraula's second venture as a director, like the first one, takes up the issue of the brain drain caused by Nepali youth migrating abroad. While the characters in the first movie strived to go to the Middle East to earn a living, the youngsters in the second one are looking for a stable life in Australia.

Although the filmmakers say the storyline of the sequel has nothing to do with the first, one can't help but draw parallels because of the overlapping theme and trajectories of the two movies. The main cast remains mostly unchanged with just a few new faces added to the sequel.

*Chhakka Panja 2* introduces viewers to three friends in an unidentified village: Prajwol (Swaroop Dhakal), Saraswati (Jitu Nepal) and Gaurav (Gaurav Pahari), each with their own dreams and aspirations. Gaurav has returned to the village from the US to get married, Prajwol dreams of going to Australia to earn money

and Saraswati wants to become a government officer so he can get married to the girl he likes. While Gaurav returns to the States after overhearing a conversation between his soon-to-be wife and her lover, the two other friends make their way to Kathmandu to fulfil their dreams.

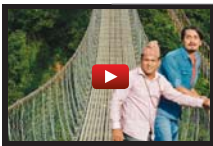
In the capital, Prajwol and Saraswati meet a pair of friends: Akansha (Swastima Khadka) and Brinda (Barsha Raut). Akansha wants to go to Australia to study but is held back after getting low scores in the IELTS. With the help of Consultancy Mama (Kedar Ghimire) Akansha and Prajwol enter into a paper marriage. What follows is a dragging plot and lukewarm acting.

The first half of the movie survives on over-the-top one liners that keep the audience sufficiently entertained, but the film loses its way in the second half. Watching Priyanka Karki play the mother of a 20-year-old is a whole lot of cringe. Her character often comes off as preachy, embarking on long

rant about why youngsters should opt out of going abroad. But throughout the entire movie, the producers fail to establish why she is so against the idea. Neither the long recap of her life before she got married nor confrontations with her daughter give the audience any clue.

Watching the movie, one can't help but think that the filmmakers have bitten off more than they can chew with this one. A tighter script and some more work on character development would have assured a better watch. The only saving grace for *Chhakka Panja 2* is its cinematography.

All in all, much like *1*, *2* is a collection of old, tried and tested jokes that are no longer funny. **🇳🇵** *Sahina Shrestha*



Watch trailer online

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

## HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

**PARTING SHOT:** Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba poses for a group picture with MPs before the last session of Parliament on Saturday in Kathmandu. Elected as the second Constituent Assembly in November 2013, Parliament was dissolved 14 October.



RSS

**NEW PREZ:** Newly elected President of the Non-Resident Nepali Association Bhaban Bhatta (2nd from left) with the past Presidents in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



KUNDA DIXIT

**IN MEMORY:** Visitors pay respects on Tuesday to a memorial for conservation heroes in Taplejung who were among 24 killed in a helicopter crash in Ghunsa in September 2006.



BIKRAM RAI

**GOOD BOY:** A policeman decorates a police sniffer dog with flowers during Kukur Tihar at the police Kennel Division, Maharajgunj on Wednesday.



TURKISH AIRLINES

**TURNING FOUR:** The Turkish Airlines team during an event to mark the airline's fourth anniversary of flying to Kathmandu at Gokarna Forest Resort on Saturday.

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# Of monks and Maoists

Basanta Maharjan in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-28 October

हिमाल  
खबरपत्रिका

Everyone has an alter ego, and is subconsciously guided by his/her imaginary self. It seems that Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal is living with a persona who is sharp and dynamic. For him, other seasoned communist leaders like Mohan Bikram Singh, Mohan Baidya and Narayan Man Bijukechhe are not as smart.

To articulate what his alter ego thinks, Dahal recently compared these veteran communists with Buddhist monks. “They lack the urge to change society, and are just ringing bells like Buddhist monks,” he said. “I am different. I never thought that change would take place gradually.”

That analogy exposed Dahal’s lack of knowledge about Buddhism. At the same time, Dahal’s career is a blot on the Buddhist philosophy of non-violence: he took up arms as a short cut to get ahead in politics.

During his first tenure as Prime Minister, Dahal inked a deal with a little-known Chinese NGO to develop Lumbini, the Buddha’s birthplace. Dahal’s acolytes hailed him as the Buddhists’ new messiah, comparing him with Maurya emperor Ashoka, who renounced violence to become a monk. Like Ashoka, Dahal fought a brutal war. But unlike Ashoka, Dahal never did understand Buddhism.

Dahal thinks Nepal’s veteran communist leaders are good for nothing, like Buddhist monks. By his logic, those who have renounced worldly life to practice



the teachings of Buddhism are ‘useless’. Yet, not everyone can live an ascetic life: it takes a lot of courage and conviction.

Buddhist monks do not leave their families just to escape worldly affairs. They become monks to transform their lives. They are fed up with the killing of helpless creatures, and are trying to understand the meaning of life. This is a revolutionary approach, and a politician who is responsible for the killing of thousands cannot be a monk.

Dahal has met many Buddhist leaders on various occasions, but it seems his understanding of the faith is still very limited. He thinks he is Mr Know-It-All, but he has revealed how little he actually knows. Needless to say, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

# Wheeler-dealers

Kul Chandra Neupane in *Kantipur*, 19 October

कान्तिपुर

A real estate dealer in Kaski has knocked on the door of every NC leader to try to get a ticket to run in provincial elections next month. Still, he is not sure of success so now he’s relying on a political fixer. The middleman is demanding a stash of cash to get him a ticket, and the man is ready to pay the lobbyist any amount for the chance to run in elections. Also in Kaski is a labour recruiter who is similarly willing to pay any amount to convince party leaders to make him a candidate. The process of criminalising politics and politicizing crime is rife as elections near.

This must be why NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel said money politics was destroying Nepal’s democracy. “We must be able to hold elections for a minimum cost, otherwise cash will finish off not just leaders and cadre with integrity and principles, but democracy itself.”

These days all parties, big and small — including the Maoist-Centre, NC and UML — are busy distributing tickets. There is pressure to change the list of candidates before Sunday’s deadline. An NC leader told *Kantipur*: “It is the well-heeled who have access to the leaders: honest cadre who have sacrificed for the party are not getting the attention they deserve. If tickets are sold for money the party’s ideology will slowly vanish.”

NC supporters say proof of the criminalization of politics is their own party appointing Khum Bahadur Khadga, who was jailed for corruption, to lead a parliamentary committee, and the UML giving known gang leader Diupak Manange a ticket.

More than 800 candidates will be running for provincial and parliamentary elections. There will be another 59 MPs in the Upper House. The trend towards buying nomination tickets is greater now than in the last polls. Earlier, it was PR seats that were up for sale. This time, because there are fewer PR seats and a 33% female quota, money politics has infected directly-elected candidates as well.

Janakpur intellectual Bhogendra Jha says “money, muscle and caste” is driving the nomination process.



NARAYAN MAHARJAN

# Kumari in class

Shanti Tamang in *setopati.com*, 15 October

सेतोपाटी

Dressed in her school uniform, Matina Shakya stands at the doorway of her home as her parents and elder sister help her get ready for school. In fact, ever since the former living goddess returned home, her family has been helping her adjust to life outside of the Kumari Ghar where she spent almost a decade, worshipped by the entire nation and under the protection of a caretaker family.

After returning home to Itumbahal, she has started attending Greenpeace Co-ed School. Every morning her mother and sister help her prepare, then her father drops her off on his scooter. Her sister Nijala picks her up from school.

As most such daily activities are new to Matina, her curiosity is never-ending, says her family. “Matina does not talk much but is very curious,” says the girl’s mother, Sunita. “She asks many questions till she is fully satisfied with the answers.”

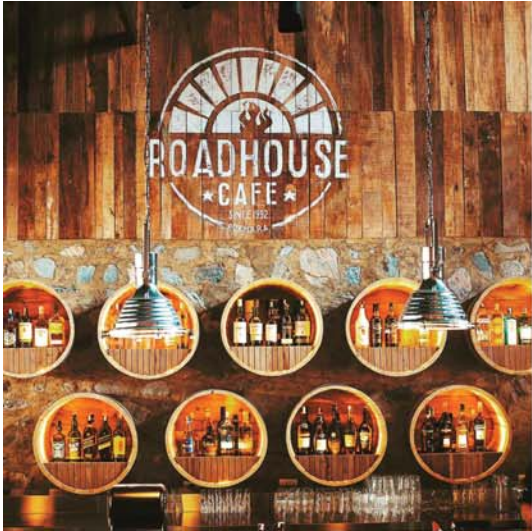
Matina prefers playing with her sisters and spending time with the family. Every time someone leaves the house, she insists on going along. Her father, Pratap Man Shakya, says she’s like any other child her age.

At school too, she is slowly getting accustomed to her friends and teachers. One week after she started, her teachers have noticed positive change in her studies. Matina has also developed an interest in dancing and playing the guitar.

“The entire school faculty is working hard to make the transition easier for Matina,” says her class teacher Sarina Manandhar. To get her accustomed to her peers, the school took her classmates to visit her when she was still the Kumari.

When we reached Matina at school, she was in computer class, busy learning MS Excel with her classmates. “Initially we thought it might be difficult for her to adjust but she is doing just fine,” says Manandhar. “On her first day, she didn’t really speak to anyone but now she gets along with her classmates and asks questions during classes.

Her bench mates, Abhigya Tuladhar and Prasadhi Shilakar, say they have seen a noticeable change in Matina after one week. “She didn’t really talk to us much on the first day. But she has started to open up more and we even have lunch together,” says Abhigya.



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# Reservoirs of suspicion

Nepal is blessed with water resources, but cursed by geopolitics



## Dam them

The map shows 53 river reservoirs (*grey*) identified by the Department of Electricity Development as suitable for hydroelectric dams. But only a few of them are in early phases of development (*green*). It does not show run-of-the-river schemes.

OM ASTHA RAI

In May, when the last cabinet meeting of the Maoist government awarded a \$2.5 billion contract for the 1,200MW Budi Gandaki hydroelectric project to a Chinese company without competitive bidding, it was seen by many as an act of appeasement to Beijing, and a move that could ruffle feathers in New Delhi. The fact that ex-Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, viewed by many as pro-India, demanded the contract be scrapped fuelled speculation that New Delhi indeed did not want the Chinese involved in such a large reservoir project upstream. There is a deep-rooted suspicion that India

covets Nepal’s vast water resources, and will do anything to prevent China from being involved. This is not a false perception, but some analysts argue it is not necessarily completely right either. “It is not true that India objects to Nepal implementing storage projects, in fact India is gleefully waiting for Nepal to commit blunders like Budi Gandaki,” says hydropower expert Ratna Sansar Shrestha. Other experts are in favour of Budi Gandaki because it will generate not just electricity during peak periods, but also control floods and irrigate the Tarai. They also saw other benefits in developing fisheries, inland navigation and tourism. But Nepal contracted China

Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) only to provide electricity generation from Budi Gandaki without factoring in these benefits. The design includes a 263m high dam to generate 1,200MW of electricity creating a 63 sq km reservoir the size of 15 Phewa Lakes, 80km west of Kathmandu. The dam will displace 3,560 families from 27 villages in Dhading and Gorkha, but it will also augment lean season water flow downstream in Uttar Pradesh, which will benefit from its flood control and regulated flow without India putting in a single paisa. “India will receive lean season augmented flow without having to compensate for the negative impact of the dam in Nepal,” Shrestha explains. “So why would India

sabotage Budi Gandaki or any storage project in Nepal as long as it receives fresh water in the winter without having to pay for it?” Just like Budi Gandaki, the 750MW West Seti project is being built by China’s Three Gorges Company (CTGC) also only to generate electricity. But in this case, India is apparently not happy – not because a Chinese contractor is involved but because a parliamentary committee directed that Nepal maximise irrigation benefits from West Seti’s stored water for the downstream Tarai. CTGC itself now has its own doubts about the project since the electricity will not be exported to India as originally planned, and this has delayed construction. Last week, Energy Minister Mahendra

Bahadur Shahi from the Maoist Centre threatened to terminate CTGC’s contract, but this week Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba stripped Shahi of his responsibility in a reshuffle. Analysts say India has never really been interested in buying Nepal’s hydroelectricity because it has multiple alternatives to meet its energy needs. In a candid interview with BBC Nepali in 2008, Indian Water Resources Minister Saif Uddin Soz admitted his country was interested in Nepal’s rivers only for flood control and irrigation: electricity would be just a “by-product”. Nepal’s former Water Resources Minister Dipak Gyawali confirms this: “India wants storage projects to be built in Nepal in a







SURAJ KUMAR BHUJEL

# Pancheswar pending

To be able to irrigate food crops for its densely populated states downstream, India has for years been trying to push projects on Nepal’s rivers. But the legacy of historical mistrust from border barrages on the Kosi and Gandaki, which most Nepalis see as unfairly favouring India, has delayed the construction of large reservoir schemes even though they would benefit both countries.

The much-delayed Pancheswar Multipurpose Project is a text-book example of how this mistrust has delayed an initiative. During his visit to New Delhi in August, PM Deuba agreed to complete the Detailed Project Report for Pancheswar within a month. But two months have passed and the project is still stuck because of India’s claim to water flowing through the Lower Sarada Canal. The canal is the biggest irrigation project in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, receiving 151.88 cubic metres

per second of water on average in the wet season from the Mahakali, the river that forms Nepal’s western border with India and on which the Pancheshwar project will be built. India wants the same volume of water retained in the canal even after Pancheswar is finished.

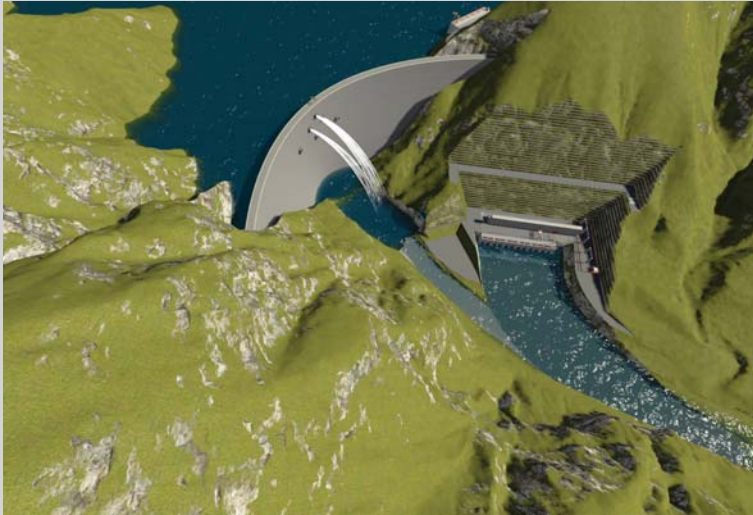
Madhav Belbase, a joint secretary at the Ministry of Energy, has strongly opposed the proposal, arguing that it violates the 1995 Mahakali Treaty and, if agreed to by Nepal, will set a precedent for other rivers. But Belbase is a lone fighter in Nepal’s hydro-cracry, and it is not known how long he can keep his job.

Meanwhile, the clock is ticking. Deuba signed the Mahakali Treaty during his first tenure two decades ago, and it is still in limbo. The Australian company, SMEC, pulled out of West Seti after 15 years of it going nowhere. The Kosi High Dam project is on India’s priority list again, but has been stuck for decades.

way that meets its needs for fresh water. That was why Pancheswar was delayed.” (See box, above.) Most experts agree that Nepal needs large Himalayan reservoirs not just to meet its current peak demand for electricity, but also for flood control and dry season irrigation. (See adjoining Analysis by Bishal Thapa). Run-of-the-river projects meet current demand for now in the wet season, but Nepal will need to build reservoirs to meet its seasonal and daily peak

demands. Current supply is only 1,000MW and the present shortfall of nearly 500MW in winter is covered by the import of dirty energy from Indian thermal plants. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has forecast peak demand will exceed 4,000MW by 2030. But this projection is based on present growth, and the need could actually cross 5,000MW even today if suppressed demand is factored in. As long as mega-storage projects are delayed, therefore, Nepalis

will not have access to enough domestically-generated hydropower to meet actual energy demand. The dams would also store monsoon runoff for dry season use. But the building of high dams is complicated by the India-China rivalry, as well as New Delhi’s security concerns about high dams in Nepal and its urgent need for flood control and meeting the rising demand for irrigation and household water consumption in the world’s most-densely populated region. 🇳🇵



HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA

# Storing water

Nepal’s need for large reservoir projects has opened the country to significant geo-political influence

The great breakthrough in hydroelectricity over the last century wasn’t the use of flowing water to generate electricity – it was the realisation that it was possible to store water to produce electricity exactly when you wanted it.

In the absence of sufficient storage capacity and lacking a meaningful vision on reservoir-based hydro plants, Nepal’s famed potential of abundant water resources for electricity generation risks remaining just that: a great potential.

Of Nepal’s total capacity of 950MW, the 92MW Kulekhani dam (pictured left) is the only

one with storage. A few plants like Chilime and Kali Gandaki A, can operate as peaking run-of-river but this capacity is limited to a few hours.

Some reservoir-based plants are being considered. The 127MW Upper Seti Tanahu project has started construction. Last year, Nepal and Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding to develop 1,600MW of pump storage hydro power plants in the Sunkosi under the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative.

Despite these prospects, Nepal’s storage-based hydro plant capacity is severely limited. As a result, Nepal faces two resulting challenges on electricity supply reliability. First, generation capacity is reduced in the dry months, making it difficult to meet demand in that season. One way to address this is through seasonal storage of monsoon water for use later.

Second, electricity demand peaks in the evening and morning and there often isn’t enough capacity to meet demand during these peak hours. One way to address this is through diurnal storage, where water is stored during the day and used for peak hours.

In the absence of storage, Nepal’s current approach has been to use Indian imports to manage both the seasonal variation and diurnal peaks. The net result: Rs15 billion of electricity imports last year.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), the country’s monopoly electric utility, has created differentiated power purchase prices for storage and peaking plants. It currently offers storage plants Rs12.4/kWh and Rs7.1/kWh for dry and wet months respectively. Similarly, for intra-day peaking plants it currently offers Rs8.5-10.55/kWh depending on when the plant can store water and generate.

Differentiated pricing are a good start, but insufficient. Nepal must separate its strategy for intra-day peaking and seasonal storage. These require very different policy approaches and instruments.

On intra-day peaking, one way would be to undertake a renovation and modernisation program for existing hydro plants that would retrofit all plants with an intra-day peaking capacity. This isn’t a new approach. India, for instance, is currently examining how it can integrate at least four hours of peaking within all its existing run-of-river hydro plants.

Distributed renewable energy, storage, demand-side management and remote management technologies have also created many new opportunities. These solutions, already in use elsewhere in the world, can help to immediately solve Nepal’s intra-day peaking problem.

The challenge on seasonal storage is different and stems largely from our unitary reliance on hydro. One way to address this is by diversification: include other sources of generation (gas power plant) by leveraging opportunities in the Indian power market.

Building large seasonal storage is expensive, involving a large socio-economic-environmental footprint, and Nepal currently lacks the financial and technical resources to undertake such projects. It is dependent on international partners, most notably India and China, for such projects. This has in turn opened Nepal’s hydro sector to significant geo-political influence.

Development of large storage capacity will also have a large bearing on downstream water flow, particularly India. Hydro power generation and water management, in this case, cannot be separated, and such an integrated water-electricity approach must be the centre-piece of Nepal’s strategy.

Indian Prime Minister Modi is leading a \$87-billion river interlinking project that would connect 60 rivers in India with the promise of improved flood control, water management, irrigation, equitable water distribution, transport and, of course, electricity generation.

Beyond the rhetoric, beyond the weight of geo-politics, the onus is on Nepal to act. We must devise our own course – for that, we first need to know what we want to do with all the resources we have. 🇳🇵

**Bishal Thapa** is Managing Director of Saral Urja Nepal, an energy services company



**COMMENT**  
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# Not Really Needed

As an Ass permanently domiciled in Nepal, this animule was invited to the recent Non-Resident Nepali bash in which its newly-elected Politburo members swore in pithy expletives as they took their oaths of office.

With its new dynamic leadership, non-residual Nepalism can at last make progress on some of their long-standing list of 35 demands. The issued an ultimatum to the government that they will keep visiting Kathmandu as frequently as possible until their demands are met – and that was meant as a threat.

One main demand is to change Nepal's official name to the People's Federal Democratic National Republic of Nepal (PFDNRN) so that the new acronym contains the letters 'NRN'. They also want dual citizenship so that non-Nepali Nepalism don't have to pay expat fares for flights during their annual holidays in Jomsom. The other demand is the right to own property to indulge in a little real estate hankypanky on the side. To grant this wish, the Permanent Three Party High-Level Political Mechanism has been offered its cut roughly in proportion to the strength of each of the parties in the new Parliament.

The Ass' rough guesstimate is that 30% of government delegations to international conferences never come back. Nepal's martial arts teams often remain in Japan and Korea after tournaments. At this rate, there will only be two types of Nepalism left:

- Non-resident Nepalism who want to permanently reside in Nepal.
- And, Nepalism who want to permanently reside in a non-Nepali country.

After watching this week's elections to the Not Really Needed (NRN) Central Committee during which there were no fist-fights and no allegations of voter fraud, it is clear that we would do much better if we let overseas Nepalism run Nepal on a Build Own Operate Transfer (BOOT) scheme for 25 years. (Which means we can boot them out after 25 years.) The World Headquarters of NRN, Inc would then be located in Kathmandu itself and Nepal could be subcontracted to Nepalism of alien descent.

The idea is to leapfrog the current generation of Nepalism leaders who have messed things up, turn this country around in the forthcoming two decades and hand it back to the next generation of Nepalism in an as-where-is condition. Fine print: Conditions apply, Overseas relatives of current rulers not eligible, Ill-gotten wealth welcome.

The Nepal Gobblement has also decided to allow non-resistant Nepalism to invest in Nepal, except in sensitive sectors like Defence, Aerospace and Breweries. Other strategic industries out-of-bounds for NRN investment are instant noodles, medical colleges, cabin restaurants, crusher companies, extortion rackets, and Ponzi Schemes. These sectors are reserved for local crooks. Alienated Nepalism have already set up the following FDIs in their beloved motherland:

- White Elephant Study Abroad Consultancy
- 4-Horse Power Manpower Agency
- Fly By Night Airlines, Pvt. Ltd.
- Monkey Business Rhesus Export-Import, Inc.

The Ass

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