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JYALAL SAH

Last lavish lap

By successfully holding the first phase of parliamentary and provincial elections early this week, and gearing up for the last phase next week, Nepal is now on the final lap leading to full promulgation of the new Constitution.

As Election Day draws closer, candidates appear to be growing anxious and are doing — or promising — anything that voters might want to hear. They are trying to outdo each other in wooing swing voters, and win power.

This week, a rightist group advocating for restoration of Nepal as a Hindu nation held separate meetings with NC President and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and UML Chair KP Oli.

Both leaders reportedly promised to address the outfit's concerns, hoping to win its support.

In Parsa district's constituency 3, where people suffered a devastating flood in August caused by Indian embankments, voters asked NC parliamentary candidate Ramesh Rijal if he would be able to raise the issue with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Why not?" he replied, folding his hands and flashing a smile to greet voters (*see pic above*).

Most voters are smart enough to figure out if their candidates are lying. And contenders also know that their empty promises will not really work — so some candidates are even distributing cash, booze and goods.

In the Marchwar area of Rupandehi

district this week, police seized a truckload of booze being smuggled into Nepal probably by a candidate to woo gullible voters. In Bhairahawa, UML supporters accused RPP candidate Dipak Bohara of erecting electricity poles at his own expense to influence voters — a charge refuted by the RPP.

Former Chief Election Commissioner Nilkantha Uprety urges people to choose candidates wisely, as their decisions could be instrumental in shaping the country's future. "Voters should realise that they are also partly responsible for bad governance," he says. "So they have to vote for parties and candidates who can safeguard democracy, bring prosperity and deliver stability."

He adds: "If the voters fail, the country will fail too."



Working women

PAGE 8-9



Voters' vow

Neither bullets nor cynicism will deter people from delivering their political verdict

BY OM ASTHA RAI

PAGE 14-15

PERFORMANCE VS PROMISES
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

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BIKRAM RAI

PERFORMANCE VS PROMISES

A ruinous 10-year war brutalised Nepalis and pushed the country back decades. When that conflict ended in 2006, there was great hope for a peace dividend, but the country was soon mired in an erratic 11-year transition that frayed the country's ethnic fabric, made instability and poor governance the norm and allowed unprecedented geopolitical meddling in our internal affairs.

The end result of these 20 wasted years was that most Nepalis gave up on Nepal, and migrated by the millions. Nearly 15% of the country's population (mostly men) is abroad today. The government has not been able to make even the most basic services affordable and accessible to those who remained behind. Remittances have not been invested in productive sectors to create jobs at home. Corruption has become so endemic that it is treated as a given. There is a criminalisation of politics and the politicisation of crime.

After travelling that long, dark tunnel, we are finally seeing a light at the end with elections to the national Parliament and federal assemblies. This week, 32 mountain and hill districts went to the polls, and the rest will vote on 7 December. That these are historic elections, there is no doubt. It marks the last stage of the peace process that started in 2006, and it will elect the peoples' representatives to a national and seven provincial legislatures – theoretically devolving political power from Kathmandu to the periphery for the first time.

Despite confusion about the division of jurisdictions and the chain of command between the three tiers of government, we will soon have a decentralised political structure that should ideally allow local people decide on local development. One of the reasons Nepal has been held back is that the Kathmandu establishment thought it knew best what was good for people from Humla to Jhapa.

In a democracy, elections are a mechanism to select the most honest and more efficient managers to run the country for a limited time period. If they do a good job, there is a chance they will get re-elected in the next round of voting. Regrettably, the whole electoral process has been subverted in the past 27 years by top men in a cartel of parties that has used polls just to reshuffle the cards.

The first elections under the Constitution give us a chance to change that. It will be a test of how independently Nepalis will vote. Will their disillusionment with the three-party syndicate and their failed leaders

translate into votes for new faces? Are Nepali voters fed-up enough, outraged enough and empowered enough to finally vote for 'performance' rather than 'promises'. Or will vote bank politics, caste, ethnicity and party loyalty still determine who they vote for, despite their disillusionment with the trad-pols (traditional politicians).

Voters not just in Nepal, but elsewhere as well, tend to cast their ballots in favour of those who are sure to win. They do not want to gamble as much on untested candidates. However, the results of the mayoral race in Kathmandu in May saw a 22-year-old student from the Bibeksheel Nepali Party come out of nowhere to finish third. If Bibeksheel and the Sajha Party had joined forces, as they have done for the current polls, we may have had a mayor in Kathmandu from an alternative party by now. The question for us this week is whether popular discontent has reached that critical mass for voters to reject candidates from established parties. Not everything

will change with the first election under the new Constitution. We may have to wait for two or three more for performance to become the main criteria for voting. The new Parliament may also have to push through new laws on electoral reform — from funding, transparency, provisions for absentee voting and more effective voter education to streamlining ballot papers. Cost overruns, profligacy, political interference, and even corruption at the Election Commission have become matters for serious future consideration.

Whatever the outcome of the elections, it looks like Nepal is headed to becoming a two-party state, with most parties coalescing around the centrist Democratic Alliance and the Leftist Alliance. In the past, whenever the NC and the UML have worked together, we have seen better governance and defence of the core values of democracy, rule of law and open society. But we have also seen periods since 1990 when the rivalry between these two parties paralysed government.

After 20 years in the wilderness, Nepal now needs political stability to ensure investment, job creation and more efficient governance. Since there is no real ideological difference between the two alliances any more, what we need for stable politics is a majority government with a strong opposition to keep it in check.

At this moment, that is the best we can hope for.



Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



MAKING OF YOMARI

Yomari Puni, a popular Newari festival observed every year during the December full moon, is upon us. Traditionally, people in Kathmandu Valley kept winter chills away by eating the carb-rich snack on this day. Join Sahina Shrestha in her warm kitchen as she guides us through simple steps to prepare this much sought after dish.



THE ENGLISH SURGEON

In his new book, pioneering neurosurgeon Henry Marsh focuses more on his failures, which still haunt him, than on his much more numerous successes. Watch the BBC documentary *The English Surgeon* about the man and his emotional journey grappling with the moral, ethical and professional issues of fellow surgeons in Ukraine. Read our review of his new memoir *Admissions: Life as a Brain Surgeon* on page 7.

LUCKY ME!

I am grateful every day that I have a decent gorgeous Nepali husband who works outside and is not shy of housework, and a truly equal partnership which makes for a happy life ('Woman who moved mountains', Smriti Basnet, #885). It irks me and breaks my heart to see these women working so hard while their husbands are lazy good-for-nothing useless tools. Bring on change, and fast!

Sandra Parkinson Thapa

CHANGING TIMES

Perhaps there are other reasons for increased ethnic unrest and separatist tendencies other than a few aid agencies and donors funding inclusion programmes ('Leave the politics for us', Kanak Mani Dixit, #885)? How about 200 years of feudalism and conquest, control of the state by a tiny (male) elite from the hills, resurgent rightwing backlash determined to maintain the status quo, absurd gerrymandered provincial boundaries which lump together regions which have nothing in common, (historically, culturally or economically), and makes a joke of the whole concept of federalism? All I can see in articles such as this are denial, and a failure to accept the reality that things have changed, at least at a societal level. As for donors and aid agencies, they are at best a recruiting centre for the educated urban classes, and at worst an irrelevance. In fact, the whole discourse of 'foreign funded INGOs funding ethnic polarisation, etc' is actually too generous to the donor world as it assumes parachute agencies have the kind of nuanced understanding of Nepali society to make these so called interventions.

Cynic

■ If Nepalis could stop being beggars, there would be no donors. The leaders of Nepal were born beggars, are living as beggars and will die as beggars. Donors give with the right hand and take away with the left hand, essentially stealing from the same beggars they gave to in the first place. Until this beggar mentality is replaced with hard work, Nepalis will remain the beggars they are.

Akash Pradhan

WHAT'S TRENDING



Garbage emergency

by Sahina Shrestha
The short film that depicted Kathmandu Valley's impending trash emergency due to the existing Sisdoile landfill site nearing capacity generated wide response and was our most watched video last week. If you missed it, go online and cover your noses as we take you on a tour of the saturated disposal site and garbage-filled streets.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Tangible restoration

by Sahina Shrestha
Patan's Bhaidega Temple, erected in 1678, was rebuilt in the Moghul stucco dome architectural style after the great earthquake in 1934, but is now being restored based on its original three-tiered pagoda design. The report sparked interest among many readers, who shared it on the web.

Most popular on Twitter

Leave the politics to us

by Kanak Mani Dixit
With both India and China expected to more aggressively vie for influence in Kathmandu, it is all the more vital for other countries to support Nepal's developmental efforts rather than be caught in geopolitical nets or the political whirlpool. This column triggered a vigorous online debate. Visit nepalitimes.com to read feedback.

Most commented

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
EDITORIAL Are Nepali voters fed-up enough, outraged enough, and empowered enough to finally vote for 'performance' rather than 'promises'? <http://bit.ly/2hR9Zhd> @kundadixit #NepalElections2017 #NepalVotes2017

david seddon @pigreen Nov 26
How do you vote for performance? and what kind of 'performance' anyway? Major political parties in Nepal are vehicles for personal privilege and power and patronage — they often DO deliver, but mainly for vested interests not public well being

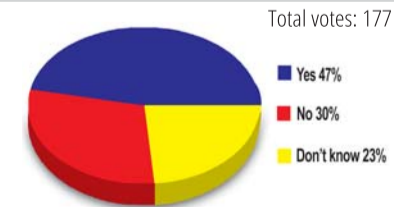
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Electing the Parliament and state assemblies does not necessarily ensure the kind of decentralisation that Nepalis have long needed, reports @omastharai Read more: <http://bit.ly/2A4A2VA> #NepalElection2017 #NepalVotes2017 #Nepal

Adarsha Tuladha @Am49T Nov 27
Unfortunately Nepalese minds cannot be decentralized; it has to come from within. No legislations or no elections can do that.

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #885

Q. Do the federal and provincial elections, which start next week, finally signal a new political era for Nepal?



Weekly Internet Poll #886
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Given recent bomb blasts, do you feel safe voting in next week's elections?





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20
YEARS

Banking on connectivity

Our collective prosperity depends on first turning our hard borders into soft ones

When the Malla rulers and their skillful artists of Bhaktapur were busy supervising the construction of the Nyatapau temple at Taumadi Square, the British were busy setting up the Bank of England and Yale University was being established in the United States.

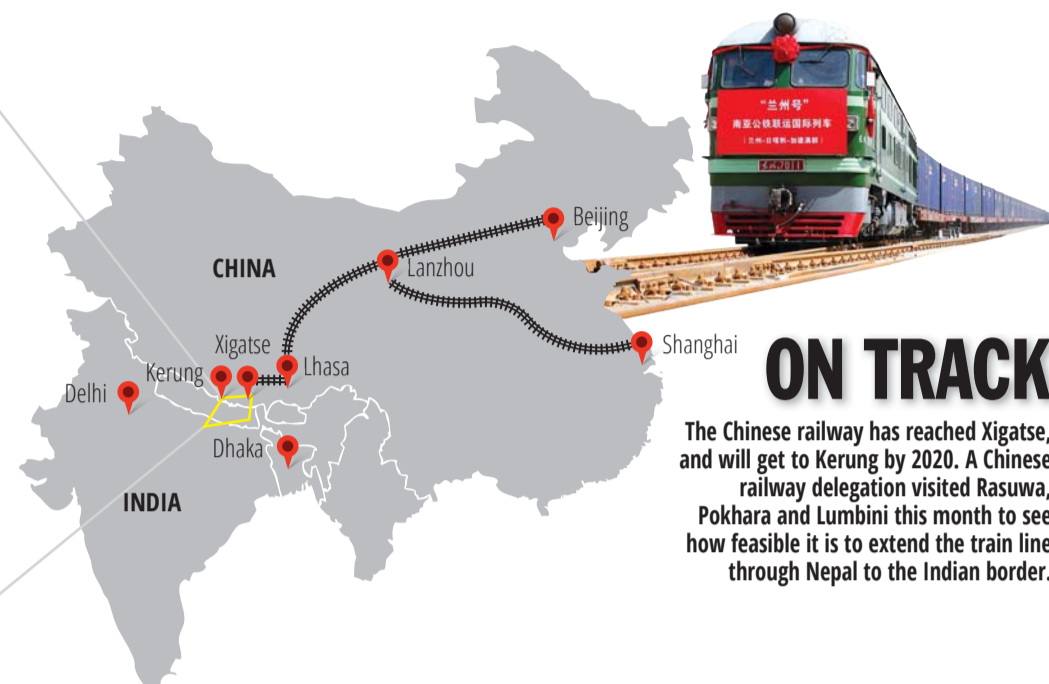


1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

The revenue that Kathmandu Valley, with its traders and merchants, generated from the lucrative trade between Lhasa and the Gangetic plains paid for building seven World Heritage monument zones. These in turn continue to generate tourism revenue for the government and local people to this day.

However, 315 years after the great five-storey temple was built, Bhaktapur still cannot get permission from the government to establish the University of Bhaktapur. The historical city has a very high rate of school attendance, and the Khopa College, attended by students from 66 districts across Nepal, is known for its quality.

Awareness that we have been late in opening universities and financial institutions is one thing, but here in 2017 to miss taking full advantage of Nepal's connectivity to the Indian and Chinese economies is sad, laughable and something we can never forgive ourselves



ON TRACK

The Chinese railway has reached Xigatse, and will get to Kerung by 2020. A Chinese railway delegation visited Rasuwa, Pokhara and Lumbini this month to see how feasible it is to extend the train line through Nepal to the Indian border.

for. While Europe was going through the industrial revolution, we had the Rana oligarchy ruling in Nepal. While Mao and Nehru were laying the base for strong economies in China and India, we had the partyless Panchayat system. When the whole world was taking advantage of information technology and the dot com economy, we were in the middle of an armed conflict. All were missed opportunities, but we cannot miss hitching our wagons to the fast-growing economies of our giant neighbours to the north and south.

The election manifestos of political parties in this week's elections have become a source

of ridicule among voters. The parties have failed spectacularly to win the hearts, minds and pockets of the Nepali people. But if we are to focus on taking advantage of the economic growth in our neighborhood, the promises they have made may actually be attainable.

For this, Nepal must divert its efforts from working our diplomatic charm in Beijing or New Delhi to concentrate on Lhasa or Lucknow. We must focus first on the neighbouring states within our neighbouring countries, build trust so we can trade, and profit once again.

After all, as they say, 'We can

choose our friends, but we cannot choose our neighbours'. Nepal's future prosperity will depend on how well we get along with Tibet, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Sikkim and Uttarakhand.

This cultural landscape did not always consist of hard borders. Ram travelled all the way from Ayodhya to Janakpur to compete for the hand of Janak's daughter Sita. She was later kidnapped and trafficked to Lanka and subsequently rescued with the help of a Monkey Army.

Buddha was born in Lumbini in Nepal and then travelled all over present day north India and passed away (attained Pariniravana) in Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh. Bhrikuti was married to the king of Tibet succeeded in converting him, and Tibet, to Buddhism.

Long before all this, Manjushree from Wu Tai Shan of Maha Chin (China) travelled to and drained the lake to start the first human settlement in Kathmandu Valley. Arniko later went to Manjushree's home village in China and built a great stupa

that stands to this day. We do not know if the Dalai Lama stopped in Lumbini as he escaped from Tibet to seek refuge in India.

All this was long before modern passports, visas and immigration check points. Even in those days borders must have been clear and respected. We need to learn from the past and act for a prosperous future. Trust among neighbors is low and the capitals where decisions are made are far apart. We need to take the lead at ground level, where trade and people-to-people contacts actually take place.

We did not have Superman, Spiderman or Batman but Hanuman flew to the Himalaya to find a life-giving herbal potion for Laxman, Ram's younger brother. He could not find the plant, so instead carried back the whole mountain top. Our collective prosperity depends on connectivity and the first step is to turn our hard borders into soft ones. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharth, and writes this column Half Full in Nepali Times every fortnight.

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Celebs join in

Manisha Koirala, Rajesh Hamal and Sunil Thapa are joining Malcolm McDowell, Michael Imperioli, Scott Glenn, Nuno Bettencourt, Chris Adler, Reinhold Messner, and many more, to drive 10 donated fire engines from Birganj to Kathmandu. The Nepal Fire Truck Expedition will be crowd funded. To learn more visit <https://expedition.koboldwatch.com>.

Turkish cargo

Widening its pharmaceutical transportation service, Turkish Cargo has introduced two new stations, Brussels and Atlanta,



after receiving QEP Accreditation from Envirotainer. Special Envirotainer containers are used to ship pharmaceutical products.

Bigger Kinley

Coca-Cola has launched a 1-litre pack of



its Kinley brand drinking water in Nepal. Manufactured in Nepal, Coke says the water will use an eight-step purification process.

Yeti drill

Yeti Airlines has donated its retired BAE Systems Jetstream 41 aircraft to the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal at Gautam Buddha Airport in Bhairahawa. It will be used for fire rescue and emergency evacuation training drills.

Cakes galore

Hotel Shangri-La engaged guests from various professions in its annual cake mixing program on 26 November. The ingredients will be blended with cake batter on Christmas Eve to produce bakery items.

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Returning to Chitwan

Nature has reclaimed Tiger Tops, once Asia’s best wildlife lodge

Recently I visited what is left of Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge. Although yellow shafts of sunlight dappled the trees deep within the national park, and the sandy road was thick with tiger and rhino tracks, the mood was dark as I stood in the empty clearing, crowds of memories and shades of people jostling around me.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

The thick green forest is patterned with tangled creepers clasp tree trunks, crocodile bark and familiar wild animal scents. On our drive we pause as a rhino wades through a backwater, a startling pink-bottomed macaque faces off a rival, a cheetal barks in alarm, and a marsh mugger slides into the *tal*, hanging like a dream just beneath the cloudy green surface.

The heavy monsoon floods have cleared the forest floor and forged new watercourses — I hardly recognised Dhakri Khola — but many moons ago a big male leopard and I had startled each other as I drove by the gully. Wasn’t this the pond where our small sons, terrified, had hooked a crocodile whilst on an innocent illicit fishing expedition? And down this steep bank a tigress defending her cubs had roared at my brother Nick, giving him and his guide the fright of their lives.

I have not worked in Tiger Tops since 1997, but visited often until 2012, when all the lodges inside the protected area were closed by the government. The organic nature of change is reclaiming the lodge: its roof thatch ragged, bamboo walls peeling, and black tarpaulins failing to fight off the damp and disintegration. Moss has grown on the empty steps where we had so often stood in our jungle green,



greeting elephant safaris, friends and guests. The silent dining room, with ivory tusks still framing the dusty bar, once rang with chatter, laughter and stories of the day’s wildlife encounters. Neglected landrovers, which once took us on thrilling game drives, delivered us to the grass airfield and shuttled players to the elephant polo ground, huddle in their ramshackle sheds.

Entire lives were lived in this crumbling compound — closing my eyes I fleetingly capture the arrival of my 40-years-ago self, spellbound,

enthusiastically embracing life at the Lodge, with all its tangled relationships, company chaos and behind-the-scenes scrambles.

These paths now choked with weeds were once trod by the likes of Hillary Clinton, Robert Redford, Mick Jagger and many more. Prince Philip strode past the British press corps, gathered respectfully on the now-naked stone balcony. “Good morning Sir”, they called cheerfully. The Prince glowered: “It was,” he barked, “until I saw you lot!” before joining King Birendra and Jim Edwards waiting politely

on the lawn.

Princess Anne famously fired her private secretary whilst on a Chitwan elephant safari. Henry Kissinger stood on these decaying wooden stairs, paralysed by vertigo and unable to step down into the howdah — instead I took him on a jungle drive. Zig Breszinsky helped dart an injured tiger that had turned man eater, and Jimmy Carter posed with tiny Timothy Edwards in his arms. We stage-managed Robert Redford’s activities to avoid crossing jungle paths with Goldie Hawn and her husband

Kurt Russell, back early from an Annapurna trek. This peaceful sandbar was swept clean of wild animal tracks for the glitzy marriage of Pamela Bellwood with Nik Wheeler, Jim’s photo-journalist friend: “I have been Best Man at every one of his weddings.”

On this patch of ground, I stood 30 years ago by the elephant-loading platform with first-born Sangjay on my hip, his little head cosy in a blue woollen cap, when he spoke his very first word — not mama or papa but hatti (elephant), pointing a tiny finger at the huge grey bulk, prophesying his life and career associated with pachyderms. Another moment in Surung when we unintentionally cornered a tiger — with a heart-stopping roar it charged my elephant with baby Rinchen sleeping tightly clasped on my knee, swerving at what seemed like the very last moment into the undergrowth. Rinchen didn’t even wake. And here in the dilapidated elephant camp lines where my toddler sons so loved to hang out, Rinchen hands on hips indignantly admonished me: “They may be staff to you, Mum, but they are MY FRIENDS!”

Tiger Tops has come and gone as the best wildlife lodge in Asia. Tourists now walk with elephants rather than ride them, jungle jeeps are specially sprung and tiered, and some fine hotels and lodges are operating on the Park perimeters. The loss of the lease concessions in the Tarai national parks was the end of Nepal’s reign as Asia’s best wildlife destination.

But still the Narayani River flows liquid silver as the red sun sinks behind the hazy horizon, and the ancient rhythm of jungle life endures. A rhino rustles in the long grass, heading for an evening drink and at my feet deep tiger pug marks are engraved into the riverside mud, timelessly imprinted by generations of Chitwan’s big cats. 🐾

National Human Rights Commission on the occasion of upcoming election of the House of Representatives and the provincial Assembly members



Appeal

- To respect and protect all voters' right to ballot and human rights maintaining proper peace and security to ensure the free, fair, impartial and fearless environment.
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 - Not to call general bands (strikes) targeting to affect the election process, not to use children for political purpose or other election campaigns.
 - To follow the election code of conduct as such.
 - To manage for easy access in polling stations especially to persons with disability, senior citizens, child bearing mothers, sick people including all voters.
 - To conduct free and impartial monitoring of election related activities by the election observers.
 - To use right to ballot without being unduely influenced and coerced from anyone by the voters.
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- ➡ Commission appeals all the concerned persons/agencies to support the monitoring teams deployed from the National Human Rights Commission in the act of impartial monitoring of election process.

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NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.





LEARNING BY DOING: Henry Marsh training Nepali surgeons at the Neuro Hospital in Bansbari, Kathmandu.

ESCAPMEDIA

NIRAJ SHRESTHA

Henry Marsh began his 2014 memoir *Do No Harm* with a startling confession: ‘I often have to cut into brains and it is something I hate doing.’

Honest and sparing to a fault, he recounted his failures, which still haunt him, rather than his much more numerous successes. Now retired from the British National Health Service, Marsh’s new work, *Admissions*, looks inwards: pondering the end of his own life, and recounting his post-retirement work in Ukraine and Nepal.

In Kathmandu, he works with his friend Upendra Devkota (‘Dev’), a fellow trainee in London 30 years ago, at the Neuro Hospital in Bansbari. He finds a city still

trying to find its feet a year after the 2015 earthquake.

‘There is a rawness, a directness to life here, with intense and brilliant colors, which was lost in wealthy countries a long time ago,’ he writes.

Nepal ‘is a tragic mess... the politics of the country is largely the politics of patronage and corruption’ and yet ‘as an outsider, it is almost impossible not to fall in love with the land and its people.’

Working in Nepal can be both exhilarating and frustrating. Most patients come with outsized expectations ‘hoping for an instant cure, and with an exaggerated faith in medicines, perhaps connected to their belief in prayer and sacrifice.’

Due to poor primary care, brain tumours are much larger than in the West and treatment is more difficult and dangerous. And yet, the surgeons are under tremendous

pressure to operate even though the patient will end up in a vegetative state or worse.

‘Only in America have I seen so much treatment devoted to so many people with such little chance of making a useful recovery,’ he muses.

Marsh marvels at Upendra Devkota single-handedly establishing and running a world-class hospital, and his relentless pace of work: ‘Dev does almost all the major operating himself. In six weeks working in Kathmandu, I saw more major operations than I would have done in six months in London,’ he adds.

Neuro Hospital’s outpatient clinic is full of doctors, receptionists, relatives and patients and Devkota is like a ‘king surrounded by courtiers and petitioners’.

Marsh also ventures out of Kathmandu to a free health camp

The English Surgeon

In his new book, pioneering British neurosurgeon Henry Marsh ponders the end of his own life and his work in Nepal and Ukraine

in Devkota’s native Gorkha. It is a formidable undertaking, carrying equipment to run operating theatres, laboratories and a pharmacy. Here the atmosphere is a curious mix of a small hospital and a country fair. Some patients, with serious ailments, have walked for days to make it to the clinic.

On the Annapurna Circuit trek with his son, Marsh ruminates about his own life, his complicated first marriage and the lives of his parents, how his unrequited first love led to a failed suicide attempt and his dropping out of Oxford but ultimately to his improbable career as a neurosurgeon.

His father, Norman Marsh, was an eminent lawyer who, with his mother, was involved in the creation of Amnesty International. He fears he too will suffer from dementia like his father, or some other serious ailment. Marsh keeps a ‘suicide kit’ of a few lethal drugs at home but is not sure if he would ever dare to use it. As the Romanian-French writer Emil Cioran said: ‘Without the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself long ago.’ Marsh doesn’t go quite that far but the idea that, if need be, he can end his sufferings provides him some solace.

He takes the obligatory elephant ride in Chitwan. The look a Nepali elephant gave him, with its red-rimmed eyes ‘was of deep and infinitely sad resignation’. That sense of ‘sad resignation’ sometimes also washes into this book, which is always insightful, and often wise. 🇳🇵



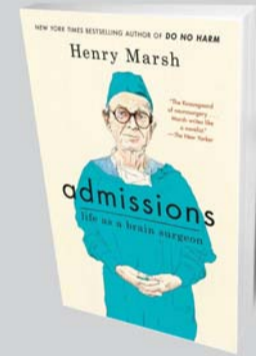
Watch the documentary, *The English Surgeon*, about Henry Marsh as he grapples with Ukrainian surgeons and their moral, ethical and professional issues.

nepalimes.com

Excerpts from Admissions

How he first thought of going to work in Nepal after retirement

While I ran beside the river, I suddenly remembered a young Nepali woman with a cyst in her spine that had been slowly paralysing her legs. I had operated on her two months previously. The cyst turned out to be cysticercosis, a worm infection common in impoverished countries like Nepal but almost unheard of in England. She had returned to the outpatient clinic



Admissions
Life as a Brain Surgeon
by Henry Marsh
Thomas Dunne/St. Martin's. 271 pp. \$26.99

a few days earlier to thank me for her recovery; like so many Nepalis, she had the most perfect, gentle manners. As I ran – it was late summer, the river level was low and the dark-green water of the Thames seemed to be almost motionless – I thought of her and then thought of Dev, Nepal’s first and foremost neurosurgeon, more formally known as Professor Upendra Devkota. We had been friends and surgical trainees together in London thirty years ago. ‘Ah!’ I thought. ‘Perhaps I can go to Nepal and work with Dev. And I will see the Himalayas.’



ROADHOUSE.COM.NP



Sunita Nepali, a single mother in Pokhara, works as a house painter. She is also a filmmaker who has made two

Working women



PORTRAITS
by **SANJOG RAI**

After his father retired from service in Singapore and Sanjog Rai returned to Nepal, he dabbled in journalism. But he found his true calling in photography, especially in mixing travel with portraiture. He set up his own commercial photography company, Abstract Studios, to earn a living. During assignments, he started working on images that really stood out for the stories they told.

It all started with a chance meeting with Jenuka Shrestha in Jiri, who makes lokta paper. The light was fantastic and the portrait came out really well. Rai thought of making the photo part of a series on working women, and wherever he travelled in Nepal thereafter he started working on portraits of women. It was never hard to find them working.

Rai was disenchanted with travel photography he saw in Nepal. "I had seen the crushed blacks and perverse amount of sharpening, and I wanted to set a new challenge to myself, besides there were all these stories just waiting to be told," he says.

Rai wanted to show the

extraordinary lives of ordinary women through pictures. So far he has taken just 12 portraits: his goal is 50, enough for an exhibition.

"I only work on one portrait per day," says the 33-year-old. "I will be happy if even one of the hundreds of pictures I take every day comes out well. If more than one comes out well, I get sceptical."

Rai also wanted to challenge existing perceptions about a workplace. It is not always an office or a cubicle: it can be anywhere and everywhere, under an open sky or across a mustard field.

"Not every photograph has to be a life or death story. Everyone's struggle doesn't have to be a reality show, but I wanted to shoot it

cinematically without fetishising the poverty," Rai adds.

He shoots with basic equipment: DSLR, kit lens, a studio light and a couple of friends to help out. He says: "I try not to hide anything if possible. Often times the only editorial oversight is how much of their story do I want to tell."

Sunita Nepali, for example, is working in construction but was actually once trained as a filmmaker. She spent seven years fighting a court battle against the father of her son so he could get Nepali citizenship.

Rai met Kattu Gurung in Kagbeni while she was taking her mountain goats to high pasture. But he only got a test shot because by the time he got the photo shoot ready she had disappeared up the mountain.

Sanjog Rai's road stretches to the horizon, and he says he will keep taking portraits of working women he meets along the way. 📷

sanjograi@outlook.com

Instagram: [sanjograi](#)

 nepalitimes.com

For more pictures go online.



Phoolo Devi Sada, from Saptari, has worked her entire life as a farmer and bought her first piece of land.



Hira Subedi, originally from Syangja, has been in Pokhara for 17 years, ferrying people across rivers and lakes.



Kattu Gurung Lama has herded mountain goats for over 40 years in Kagbeni, taking them to high pasture every month.



documentaries that have been screened locally and overseas.



a farmhand, just like her ancestors before her. She recently



orning.



Dhanu Gurung is a final year forestry undergraduate working with ACAP, trying to prevent deforestation in Mustang district.



Jenuka Shrestha from Jiri has been making lokta paper for a decade. She had to learn the technique secretly because her senior colleague didn't share the process with her.



Suma Shrestha from Dolakha has spent 20 years in the mountains collecting lokta. A heart ailment has recently forced her to do less demanding work.

EVENTS



15th KIMFF,
Pick your favourite movies from the list of more than 70 films, including 15 in the 'Nepal Panorama' category, at the 15th Kathmandu International Film Festival (KIMFF).
14-18 December, Kumari Hall, Kamanpokhari, (01) 4440635

Khabar Garaun 1145,
Come for the launch of the National Women Commission's Helpline *Khabar Garaun 1145*, a 24-hour, toll free number.
10 December, 11am, National Women Commission, Bhadrakali Plaza, Kathmandu (01) 4256701

Yala Newami,
This exhibition by photographer Bjørn, featuring a series of images of the people of Kathmandu Valley, reflects the ancient and vibrant culture of the Newars.
19 November - 19 December, 5:30-10pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Patan, Entry: Free, (01) 5536690



Piano workshop,
Learn to play piano with Spanish maestro Daahoud Salim. The free course is followed by a four-month certified course.
8 December, 5-6pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, (01) 50135554, 9813556945

Tradition subverted,
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, Patan, (01) 5536690



Beyond Journals,
A one-week exhibition featuring the creative world of Marina Vaptzarova, where the art of journals becomes an art of living.
26 November- 2 December, Marina Vaptzarova Showroom, Baber Mahal Revisited info@marinavaptzarova.com



The laugh club,
Stand up comedians Kunal Kamra and Abhijeet Ganguly from Mumbai are in Kathmandu to rock the stage. Book your seats.
2 December, 5-7:30pm, Army Club, Sundhara, Rs1,500, Rs 1,000, Rs 500, 9801020132, 9802077100, 9801066882

Park Art Fair,
The 11th Park Art Fair is all set to kick off where 53 eminent national and international artists will be showcasing modern, contemporary and abstract arts, sculptures, photographs, botanical art, graphic arts and many more.
1-3 December, 10:30-6pm, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, 9843885152, contact@parkgallery.com.np

MUSIC



Christmas Chorale,
Participate in the 35th anniversary holiday concert organised by The Kathmandu Chorale. Free entry, snacks and drinks.
9 December, 3:30-6pm, KISC School, Dhobighat.

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



Nabin at Trishara,
Listen to your all-time favourite singer, Nabin Kumar Bhattarai, perform live.
2 December, 5pm onwards, Trishara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200



Live with Rohit,
Book your seats to boost your weekend listening to one of the most sought after singers in town, Rohit John Chettri.
8 December, 6-11pm, DOWNTOWN PUB & GRILL, Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, 9840017245

DINING



Gyakok at Ghangri,
Heat up with Ghangri special Gyakok at a special package of Rs 995 (exclusive of taxes). Complimentary drink included. Valid till 31 December.
Boudha, Ghangri Botique Hotel, (01)4482888,

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

Capital Grill Restaurant & Bar,
Tantalise your taste buds with the best thakali khana set, known as Jimbu Thakali, in town.
Tangal, (01) 4437674



Little Italy,
Turn vegetarian at this Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special chocolate bomb.
Kamaladi Road, (01) 4233577, 4233578, 9801195000

Bubbly brunch,
Book your seats and enjoy Saturday brunch with friends and family for only Rs1,500 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, (01) 4412999

Falcha,
Give in to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.
Jhamsikhel, 9851013475



Dunga,
Head down for some delicious continental food and don't forget their signature cocktails, all served with fine hospitality in an excellent space.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 463321

GETAWAY



Gokarna Forest Resort,
A numinous paradise that relaxes you and encourages meditation, just a 20-minute drive away from Kathmandu.
Gokarna, (01)4451212, info@gokarna.net

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

The Last Resort,
Embrace nature and test your limits with canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking and bungee jumping.
Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01) 4700525/1247

Jhule Mountain Resort,
Resting 2,050m above sea level, the eco-resort has 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



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

Balthali Village Resort,
A small, cosy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses.
Balthali, Kavre, 9851075818

Tiger Mountain Lodge,
Situated 1,000ft above Pokhara Valley, this resort offers spectacular views of Machhapuchchre, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu.
Pokhara, (061) 4426427, 9849194874, www.tigermountainpokhara.com

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



Gratitude doesn't change the scenery.

It merely washes clean the glass you look through so you can clearly see the colours.

- Richelle E. Goodrich

OUR PICK



WHITE SUN

Reopens in Kathmandu on 8 December

After being screened at over 70 film festivals around the globe and winning several international accolades, *White Sun (Seto Surya)* is coming back to Nepali theatres. Directed by Deepak Rauniyar, who has been listed as a 'must-watch' director by the *New York Times*, the movie revolves around the story of Maoist soldier Chandra (played by Dayahang Rai) who fought in the 1996-2006 civil war. Returning to his village after a decade, he doesn't see any of the social changes for which he fought.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 24-30 November

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							
	FRIDAY Nov 24	SATURDAY Nov 25	SUNDAY Nov 26	MONDAY Nov 27	TUESDAY Nov 28	WEDNESDAY Nov 29	THURSDAY Nov 30

The pollution level in Kathmandu remained in the "Unhealthy" red level for 98% of the past week. During this period, Nov 24-30 (morning), the levels only dipped into orange ("Unhealthy for sensitive groups") a total of 4 hours (and never went to green). Pollution peaked in the early morning hours. This weekly pollution roundup is a joint initiative of the US Embassy and *Nepali Times*.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

The freedom to be free

In South Africa and Nepal we share a similar sense of dreams shattered

KUNDA DIXIT
in CAPE TOWN

- ‘Political parties have become sites of corruption by those around the centres of power...’
- ‘We need to put the country before party.’
- ‘... the judiciary and Parliament should be put beyond the reach of party hacks.’
- ‘When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offered blanket amnesty to anyone who had committed grave violations of human rights... half the Cabinet was pardoned.’
- ‘The state-owned petroleum company has a habit of wildly shoveling money in the direction of power brokers, so Parliament has to be ultimately responsible for oversight.’

These and other sentences from the opinion pages of newspapers are not from the Nepali press, but from last week’s South African newspapers. They indicate identical political trajectories in the two countries, a similar frittering away of hard-won freedoms and a familiar stench of democratic decay.

President Jacob Zuma spent years in prison with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, but is now neck-deep in allegations of nepotism and corruption. His son, Duduzame, has his hands in the honey pot, and #GuptaLeaks emails prove just how close the Indian Gupta brothers got to state capture. ‘Perhaps the greatest wound that Zuma has inflicted upon our republic is that he has buried decency and accountability under rubbish heaps of sleaze and corruption,’ concludes investigative



KUNDA DIXIT

journalist Jacques Pauw in his explosive new book, *The President’s Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and Out of Prison*. An international conference of investigative journalists in Johannesburg last week denounced the South African government’s attempt to censor Pauw’s book.

An even sharper critic of Zuma is his former intelligence chief, Ronnie Kasrils, whose book *A Simple Man: Kasrils and the Zuma*

Enigma portrays the president as a dangerous demagogue. “He is sly, cunning, deceitful and manipulative. Any opposition or criticism to his looting of the state, he eliminates, no matter the opposition,” Kasrils said at a recent book launch.

All this sounds very familiar to recent exposes in the Nepali press pointing to outright plunder of state coffers by politicians, taking kickbacks on large projects,

POSTER ART: Zimbabwean artist Kudzanai Chiurai’s depiction in the Zeitz-MOCA Gallery in Cape Town of how African male leaders have wasted opportunities in the post-colonial era to address social justice and governance issues.

infiltration of Parliament by vested interest groups, and the activities of the medical education mafia. As in South Africa, these crimes are being committed by former freedom fighters.

The so-called Third Wave of democracy that swept the world 30 years ago saw the fall of the Iron Curtain, beginning of the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa and in Asia, the demise of dictatorships. That global surge of freedom three decades ago, which also brought changes to Nepal in 1990, has given way to disillusionment and cynicism.

There are parallels in both countries of former revolutionaries who squandered the people’s sacrifices to go on to become as venal and ruthless as the rulers they replaced. Both failed to reap the democratic dividend, and continue to bleed their countries dry. Relatives of victims await truth, justice and closure in both countries as apartheid era crimes in South Africa and human rights violations in Nepal are brushed under the carpet.

Nepal’s Ambassador to South Africa, Amrit Rai, told *Nepali Times* that both Nepal and South Africa have seen historical political transformations and can learn from each other’s experiences how they can better serve their peoples. He adds: “We are facing similar challenges in building enduring governance institutions,

making rule of law work effectively and efficiently and bringing the economic dividend to the people. We also face challenges of meeting the high aspirations of our people in the democratic environment.”

Politicians flirt with tribalism and stoke ethnic tensions for political gain in both places. Just as here the white supremacist AfriForum tries to revive Afrikaan nationalism, in Nepal Hindu monarchists are trying to roll back history. The plan to turn Mandela’s residence in Alexandra township into a tourist attraction is just as neglected as the BP Museum in Sundarjal.

“In South Africa today race divisions are transferring into class divisions,” explains journalist Ida Jooste, “but opposition to Zuma is now across the racial divide.” Her list of the state institutions co-opted by the President and his cronies sounds uncannily like Nepal: the prosecuting agencies, judiciary, anti-corruption bureau, state security and intelligence agencies. Watching the overthrow of Robert Mugabe in neighbouring Zimbabwe, analysts here warn that Zuma may suffer the same fate.

And just like in Nepal, the media is one of the few institutions still relatively independent. A recent attempt by the establishment to turn the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation into a platform for government propaganda was resisted by eight courageous journalists called the ‘SABC8’.

An IMF mission visiting South Africa last week painted a gloomy picture for the economy. It said: ‘Despite South Africa’s institutional strength and favourable global conditions, increasing domestic political uncertainty, corruption and stalled reforms point to a challenging economic outlook.’

The sense of having dreams shattered is starkest at the Apartheid Museum here, which has Mandela’s famous quote on its wall: ‘The truth is that we are not yet free, we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed.’ 🇳🇵

Backlash against the backlash

Elected autocrats in democracies threaten press freedom worldwide

SONIA AWALE
in JOHANNESBURG

Across the globe, elected populist leaders increasingly manipulate the media to rise to power and dismantle the institutions of democracy and the free press to consolidate their authority. This new breed of autocrats do not need to jail or kill journalists, they just force the media to self-censor with threats, blackmail and pressure on advertisers.

That was the underlying theme at the 10th Global Investigative Journalism Conference held here last week, while a military coup rocked neighbouring Zimbabwe, deposing Robert Mugabe after 37 years in power. Nearly 1,200 journalists from 130 countries took part, sharing their experiences of investigating issues in countries with elected autocrats.

“We are facing global backlash on the things we hold dear: transparency, free and independent news media, the ability to hold our leaders accountable. Despite this, there is more investigative journalism than ever before. We are the backlash against the backlash,” said David Kaplan, whose Global Investigative Journalism Network organised the conference.

In one of the most impactful sessions, the mood turned sombre when Sheila Coronel (pictured right) of Columbia University



SONIA AWALE

said: “Many of the killings of journalists are ironically taking place in democracies. Mexico is a democracy. In my own country the Philippines, over 100 journalists have been killed, all in an era of democracy.”

Since being elected president in 2016, Rodrigo Duterte of Philippines has ordered a war on drugs that has so far killed 12,000 Filipinos, including teenagers and children. Journalists who report on this are threatened.

Patricia Evangelista of the portal Rappler investigated the story of a slum family in Manila in which a father celebrating his birthday was gunned down in cold blood in front of his 12-year-old daughter. Said Evangelista: “Murder has become a meme in

Manila... it is not that we don’t understand human rights. The trouble is that one day we decided that some people aren’t human.”

Marcela Turati has reported on drugs and crime for the Quinto Elemento Lab in Mexico, one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a journalist today. More than 100 have been killed there in the past 15 years, and Turati says many of her colleagues are resigned to their fate.

“Mexico is where more journalists have been killed, in a country supposedly in peace time. It is really easy to harm journalists, and we have tried many ways to protect them... but we don’t know what to do anymore,” she admitted.

Journalists in India, are also facing a backlash from Hindu nationalists after exposing government corruption and malpractice. Another democracy, the United States, continues to face challenges of fake news and an elected president who, in the words of Joseph Stiglitz (pictured left), winner of a Nobel Prize for economics, is the “money launderer in chief”.

Keith Richburg, director of the Journalism and Media Studies Centre at the University of Hong Kong, said that the voices of countries that used to be champions of democracy are being muted in the face of China’s growing economic power. He added: “The situation for journalists in China is as bad as it could possibly be as China becomes stronger. I only see it getting worse as America retreats from the world.”

Investigative and conflict reporters from Azerbaijan, Ethiopia and Burma listed the problems they faced doing journalism under repressive regimes, and said collaboration was the best way to defeat censorship, protect stories and deliver their messages. The Panama Papers and Paradise Papers were cited as examples of cross-border teamwork between networks of journalists to expose fraud, tax evasion and money laundering by the world’s most powerful individuals and institutions.

Said Stiglitz: “Investigative journalism is a part of our democratic system of checks and balances to build open societies. There are enough investigative stories to keep us busy for the next 50 years. My hope is that they can expose the dangers of Trump-like people to our society, democracy and economy and help us return to a new progressive era.” 🇳🇵



Justice League

The thing that *Justice League* has going for it, at a time when all superhero films are at an almost obligatory 150+ minute mark, is that it is short and rather sweet at just two hours in length. While marked by disasters and somewhat infamous for costing US\$300 million to make, the film, seen in 2D instead of the needlessly ubiquitous 3D, is almost as funny as *Thor: Ragnarok*



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

(reviewed previously in this column and currently in theatres along with *Justice League*), and full of moments that bear re-watching — due to its quite star-spangled ensemble cast.

The DC Comics films, as opposed to the very admired Marvel films, both from wildly successful comic book source material, are

not doing well in terms of public opinion. *Batman v. Superman* (2016) was lamentably bad — though the heavyweights of the title earned the film more than double its also \$300-million budget at the box office.

Justice League is a marked improvement on the former installment, where Superman (Henry Cavill) dies, aided and abetted by Batman's (Ben Affleck) extreme stupidity and banal rivalry. While that terrible film leads to this tolerable one, in between came the incredible, heart-stoppingly good *Wonder Woman* (summer, 2017) starring the phenom Gal Gadot, who was introduced in *Batman v Superman* livening it up somewhat — though no one could quite fathom then just how good she'd prove to be.

This film takes off with so much promise, partly because it already has the talent of the great Gadot, the presence of Amy Adams as Lois Lane, and of Diane Lane as Martha Kent, Superman's two great loves.

We are also lucky to be introduced to the nicely cast Ezra Miller, as Barry Allen, aka The Flash, and to Ray Fisher as Victor Stone or Cyborg. Then there is Jason Momoa as Arthur Curry, or Aquaman — so far a character that is compelling due to his sardonic humour, but not so riveting in terms of his super-powers or actual role aside from swimming around, on land and on sea, trying to simmer with disdain for what Bruce Wayne is trying to form: i.e. the Justice League of our title.

The world of Metropolis and Gotham City are in danger from a very silly, horned foe named Steppenwolf (a completely unrecognisable and wasted Ciarán Hinds) who somewhat redeems himself by originating in Themyscira, the island of the Amazon, where Diana Prince, Wonder Woman, hails from.

That scene gives us another great glimpse of fight sequences (too short, far too short) with her mother Hippolyta (played by the under-rated Connie Nielsen) her aunt General Antiope (the wonderful Robin Wright), and the army of magnificent Amazons who do their very best to subdue this villain, who nevertheless retrieves one of the three "mother boxes" he needs to conquer the earth. With that predictable plot summary, all you really need to know is that things end well, with the finale not as grossly boring as usual, mainly because between our four super heroes and one heroine there are enough quips for all, and more than enough gimmicks, to make up for the dull roar of Steppenwolf.



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RSS

ELECTION CASUALTY: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Thursday visits a victim of a bomb blast in Udaypur district who was brought to Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu for treatment.



RSS

POLL FEVER: Vice General Secretary of UML, Bishnu Prasad Paudel, during the election campaign in Rupandehi on Thursday. Paudel is contesting for the Left Alliance from Rupandehi-2 in the second phase of provincial and parliamentary polls to be held on 7 December.



RSS

ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS: President Bidya Bhandari attends the international conference on Engineering Geology for Geodisaster Management held in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



BED UPRETY

QUEUE UP: Some 30,000 students have visited the new Aviation Museum since its soft launch. The converted Airbus 330 opened to the public on Tuesday.



SOALTEE CROWNE PLAZA

HERALDING CHRISTMAS: Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu hosts its annual cake mixing ceremony at the hotel on Sunday.

NEPAL MANAGEMENT Conclave 2017

Corporate Club Nepal, a sister concern of Growth Sellers, proudly announces first of its kind management conference 'Nepal Management Conclave 2017' in Nepal. This conference aims to provide a platform for top level management to discuss about management issues, new management processes, policies, and international trends and practices. The conference offers invaluable sessions from prominent international and domestic speakers in various management issues. Book your seat now to be the part of the conference to pave the way for redefining management.

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

December 15, 2017, Friday, **Venue:** Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu, **Time:** 8:30 onwards

For Registration : 9801014483/9801014404, managementconclave2017@gmail.com

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Who is funding the campaigning?

Himal Lamsal in *Nagarik*, 27 November

नागरिक

Subuna Basnet had an unusual proposal for her friends and family. Gathering them together, she asked each of them to give her the money they would have spent if she was getting married.

Basnet is running in the parliamentary election for the newly formed Bibeksheel Sajha Party and planned to use the cash for campaigning. Most of her friends and family took the unusual request positively and paid up, as did many well-wishers. Basnet has been using the money to finance her campaign.



Some of the older political parties have provided funds to their candidates. But as the cost for campaigning has gone up, other aspirants contesting in the provincial and parliamentary elections, like Basnet, have been using different methods to collect funds.

Many contenders have made their bank account numbers public, many others have written to businessmen and friends and family abroad. “The expenditure is a lot more than what the Election Commission (EC) has specified,” says Ganesh Prasad Dulal, a candidate from the Left alliance competing from Kathmandu-1 (Kha). “It is impossible to win the

elections without spending money,” he adds.

Dulal insists that he isn’t spending beyond the EC maximum. “I don’t have to spend so much because this area is my party’s stronghold, so the party cadres come on their own to campaign,” he says.

But another candidate vying for a provincial seat admits to violating the EC’s ceiling. “You have to feed the hundreds of cadres that campaign with you every meal. Gone are the days when ethical politics won you elections: these days those who have money win the votes,” he says.

According to insiders, parties in Kathmandu have been spending anywhere from Rs5 million to Rs30 million per candidate. The maximum amount specified by the EC for parliamentary contenders is Rs2.5 million, for provincial seats it’s Rs1.5 million.

“It is difficult for candidates who are not involved in business to cover the campaign fees for the elections,” says Nhucche Narayan Manandhar of the Democratic alliance, who is contesting

in the provincial election from Kathmandu-6. “It is not like before, when party cadres voluntarily campaigned for us,” he adds. But Manandhar insists he is keeping his costs to a minimum by raising funds from businesses sympathetic to the party.

Hari Krishna Shrestha of the Bibeksheel Sajha Party, who’s running for a provincial seat in Kathmandu-5 (Kha), says his campaign fund is Rs150,000, which he raised from well-wishers, friends and family abroad. Says Shrestha: “We don’t have enough funds to spend excessively. We are moving around in smaller groups and making use of social media platforms.”

An advice to the EU

Krishna Pahadi in *Kantipur*, 30 November 2017

कान्तिपुर

Europe has always supported Nepal’s development and democracy, so Nepalis respect European people. But some European diplomats misconstrue Nepalis’ friendliness, and behave like viceroys.

Last week, the Election Commission (EC) barred two European Union (EU) observers from poll monitoring after they were found to have ‘shown unnecessary concerns’ about our internal affairs. The EC would have probably not reacted if some EU representatives had not crossed their line in the past.

There is a deep-rooted perception in Kathmandu that some EU countries clandestinely backed the Maoist agenda of ethnic identity-based provinces. In 2015, EU ambassador Rensje Teerink breached diplomatic norms by meeting a separatist. What Teerink did was an infringement on Nepal’s sovereignty, but Kathmandu did not dare to declare her *persona non grata*.

When India imposed a crippling blockade against Nepal to show its displeasure at our new Constitution in 2015, the EU was expected to stand up for us. But it did not utter a word against New Delhi. Some EU members were afraid of straining their ties with India, and toed the Indian line.

It is no longer a secret that some EU members or diplomats want to fuel a separatist movement in the Tarai. The EU was probably not unaware of the conduct of its representatives to Nepal. But it did not try to discourage them, pushing Kathmandu closer to Beijing. Today, the age-old ties between Nepal and Europe are at risk, and the EU needs to salvage them by clearly reiterating that it is for Nepal and Nepalis and against hate speech and separatism.



RAJKARAN MAHATO

No citizenship to vote

Rajkaran Mahato in *Annapurna Post*, 27 November

अन्नपूर्ण

60-year-old Jagodevi Chamar, of Harinmaya in Mahottari district, hasn’t voted in her life. She doesn’t have a citizenship card, hence no voter ID.

For the last 10 years, Chamar has been trying to get a citizenship card. When leaders visit during elections seeking votes, she always asks them to help but she has yet to find a candidate who understands her dilemma.

“I don’t have a citizenship so I have never cast a vote,” says Chamar, who comes from a Dalit community.

Since the death of her mentally challenged husband, the woman has faced more obstacles to acquiring her identity card. “My husband didn’t have a citizenship, so mine can’t be made either. How am I supposed to produce documents now that he is gone?”

Because she doesn’t have citizenship, Chamar is deprived of the single woman’s allowance that she is entitled to and a birth certificate for her 19-year-old disabled daughter. While having a citizenship will make her eligible for social security allowance, Chamar says it will also fulfil her wish to vote for a candidate who will work for the poor.

Chamar’s neighbour, Aaghanidevi Sada, is suffering the same fate. At 62, she doesn’t have a citizenship, which makes

her ineligible to vote and receive social security allowance, despite being a single woman. Her children don’t have IDs either. “I want to see my citizenship before I die: I wish to cast a vote and elect a candidate,” she says.

Reshma Sada has lived in Harinmaya for four decades. Her husband, who passed away several years ago, didn’t have a citizenship, nor does she. “Politicians come to our village all the time asking for votes, promising to get us our citizenships, but once elected they never come back.”

With no identity papers, locals are finding that they can’t have a passport made to apply for labour migration either. Subadi Sada Musahar sums it up: “Because we don’t have citizenship, we can’t access government services. But who will listen to our pain?”

These four women are just a few members of this poor Dalit community who have been deprived of the right to vote all their life for lack of citizenship. Ahead of the provincial and parliamentary elections on 7 December they will again be looking for candidates who understand — and will act upon — their situation.

Harinmaya lies in Province 1, where 12 leaders are contesting the election. Mahottari has four electoral constituencies and has already elected local level officials for 10 municipalities and 5 village councils.

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Voters' vow

Neither bullets nor cynicism will deter people from delivering their political verdict

OM ASTHA RAI

in RUPANDEHI

Nandini Pandey, 50, was killed by police in September 2015, days before Nepal's new Constitution was promulgated amidst violence in the Tarai.

She was inside her own roadside house when police opened fire on protesters obstructing a supply convoy. A stray bullet hit her in the hip, and she died four days later.

Four other people in Bethari, a village 17 km east of Lumbini – including two children – were shot dead by police on the same day. Their funeral pyres were burning on the banks of the Tinau River when people were celebrating the new Constitution in Kathmandu.

Two weeks after the Bethari shooting, a government official called Nandini's husband, Shashi Dhar Pandey, to ask if he would like to meet and share his grievances with PM Sushil Koirala, who was in Bhairahawa for a day.

"No", he said, before angrily hanging up the phone.

Two years later, even as Nepal is poised to fully implement the Constitution after successfully holding local, provincial and federal elections in 2017, Shashi Dhar is still seething with anger at

politicians whose quarrel over the Constitution left his wife dead.

But he is not boycotting elections. Pandey voted in local polls in June and is casting his vote again in parliamentary and provincial elections on 7 December. "You may be angry with politicians, but you should not abstain from voting in a democracy," he says.

Most voters share that sentiment: politicians are liars, self-centred and indifferent to people's sufferings – but that won't stop them from voting. They know they might not be able to change anything if they vote, but they are certain they won't be able to improve things if they do not.

This is why over 65% of voters turned out in the first phase of parliamentary and provincial elections in 35 districts early this week, despite a series of bomb blasts and adverse weather in high mountain constituencies. Voter turnout is likely to increase in the second phase in 45 districts early next week.

More bombs have exploded since the first phase, killing a temporary policeman and injuring many candidates and their supporters. This week, when Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba flew to Rupandehi to campaign, he was greeted with an explosion. All these blasts are believed to be the work of a group of Maoist dissenters who want to thwart elections, led by



ON THE MARCH: A rally of the Left Alliance in Bhairahawa on 26 November.

Netra Bikram Chand.

Even in 2013, when Nepal elected the second Constituent Assembly, many areas were rocked by blasts carried out by a larger Maoist faction led by Mohan Baidya. But voters turned out in

large numbers to exercise their democratic rights, eventually forcing Baidya to rethink his strategy and take part in the polls.

"Our democracy is very strong, and electoral violence cannot weaken it," says Naresh KC, editor

of *Lumbini Khabar*, a biweekly newspaper in Bhairahawa. "Blasts can scare away a few voters, but they cannot sabotage elections."

There are other threats to democracy: corrupt candidates and gullible voters. Wealthy and

Ongoing elections mark the dawn of federalism but candidates believe power will rest in Kathmandu

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

As Gagan Thapa walks into houses in ward number 30 in Maitidevi of Kathmandu (constituency number 4), everyone greets him like a celebrity. In return he says simply: "*Hajurko suvekshya rahos ashirbad rahos*" (Let me be blessed with your best wishes.)

Clad in a red and black chequered shirt, black pants and sports shoes (imported from London for the election campaign), Thapa knows how to connect emotionally with the locals. His shoes are almost torn from excessive walking for 19 continuous days, but his face is full of confidence.

During his campaigning for the upcoming second phase of parliamentary and federal elections on 7 December, Thapa seldom urges people to vote for him. He won this same

constituency in the 2013 constituent assembly election with 13,000 more votes than his closest rival from the CPN (UML).

A Central Committee member of the Nepali Congress (NC) and a former health minister, Thapa was projected as chief minister of province 3 but is just one of the senior leaders who believes that Kathmandu will remain the power centre after the elections, which are the final step in creating a federal Nepal.

"I was ready to contest for the parliament of province 3 but my party didn't finalise the name of the chief minister before the election and I opted to fight from constituency number 4 for the central Parliament," Thapa told *Nepali Times* in Maitidevi.

He agrees that coming years will be difficult in terms of decentralising power to the provinces. "The next five years will be difficult for us as the central government will try to retain its power, but the fight will go on."

Thapa is pitted against Rajan Bhattarai of the CPN (UML), who is projected as the foreign minister if the left alliance leads the next government. His major promises are improving public transportation, developing tourism areas and open spaces and replacing existing vehicles with electric ones.

Bhattarai is sure that the new system



Political theory



PHOTOS: OM ASTHARA

influential candidates can buy votes, and the money they splurge on winning elections is actually an investment for them. If they are elected, they will abuse their power to get a return on those investments.

Says Rajendra Kandel, a newly elected ward council chair in Bhairahawa: “Distributing cash and organising feasts to influence voters has become the new normal, which is the real threat to our democracy.”



Federal fabric

Vilified as an anti-Madhesi force, the UML seems to be aware of the price it might have to pay for this ill repute and is consciously ensuring that there are Madhesi faces in its election rallies.

The RJPN and the FSN are not bothered about being labelled ‘Madhesi parties’, but their candidates say they have support from hill people as well. “People from not just Madhesi but also hill communities love and respect me,” says Rajesh Ranjan Barma, an RJPN provincial candidate in Rupandehi-3.

Both sides want to avoid the uncomfortable truth that the rise of parochialism during Nepal’s painful transition to a federal republic has ruffled the social fabric, and the coming together of the two communities during elections might not be enough for reconciliation.

Early this year, in a bid to persuade Madhesi parties to participate in polls, the NC-Maoist coalition proposed to divide province 5 so that western hill districts like Gulmi and Arghakhanchi would be grafted onto other hill provinces. But that proposal was rejected outright by the UML, which

spearheaded a Butwal-centric campaign to foil the ruling coalition’s efforts to amend the Constitution.

As a result, the UML has won the hearts of hill people living in the plains of province 5. It did extremely well in local elections, winning not just mayor and deputy mayor but all 19 ward councils in Butwal. The NC’s Bal Krishna Khand had won both Constituent Assembly elections from Rupandehi, but he did not dare contesting elections this time. He was probably alarmed by the shock defeat of his brother Ram Krishna Khand in the mayoral race of Tilotama municipality.

The UML might have been a favourite of the hill dwellers along the highway, but it has antagonised the Madhesi community in the southern belt of province 2, as in other Tarai constituencies. A Madhesi auto rickshaw driver in Bhairahawa said: “I would rather die than voting for UML.”

Zakir Hussain, a farmer in Lumbini, says he prefers to vote for a Madhesi candidate. “If the Madhesi candidate is not promising, I will go for the NC,” he says. “The UML does not deserve our votes.”

versus reality



PHOTOS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

won’t be Kathmandu-centric and provincial governments will be given their full rights. “The Constitution has ensured separate rights to the central and federal governments, how can we retain power here?”

Bhattarai is taking a different approach than Thapa here. Many voters still don’t know him, so as he introduces himself he urges people to vote for his party. “This is not a personal competition between Gagan and me. We are our parties’ representatives and people will cast their votes on the basis of the agendas put forward by the parties,” he said.

Drinking water and road management are Bhattarai’s priorities for the constituency where the UML won all wards but two in the recent local elections.

While Thapa says he was prepared to run for a provincial seat, many other senior leaders are more reluctant, doubtful that the current system will be decentralised once federalism is in place. Sitting in a provincial parliament could put their political careers in the shadows, they believe.

Former NC lawmaker Radheshyam Adhikari remarks: “It is obvious for leaders to be attracted to the central government because nobody knows what kind of provincial

governments are going to be set up after the election.” He adds: “The leaders know the power centre will be Singha Darbar and it will take time to decentralise power.”

The NC’s Bishwo Prakash Sharma, whose political base is Jhapa, was rumoured to be in line for the chief minister post for province 1, but is instead vying for a central government seat. Likewise, Mahanta Thakur of the Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN) also filed his candidacy for Parliament from Mahottari instead of competing for a seat from province 2.

Madhav Kumar Nepal who earlier contested from Rautahat, has registered his candidacy for the central government from Kathmandu 2 while his colleague, UML leader Yogesh Bhattarai, is contending for the central government from Taplejung. However, analyst Pitambar Sharma doesn’t agree with leaders’ thinking. He says there is no alternative to decentralising power after the elections.

“The centre can’t come up with local development agendas once federalism is implemented. But looking at the ongoing campaign of leaders, it feels like the centre will do everything for the federal states.”

Sharma adds: “If leaders haven’t yet understood how the power centre will drift to the states, how will the people understand?”





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Upwardly mobile

Whatever you do in Saudi Arabia, don't use your mobile phone on a domestic flight. The poor chap was sentenced to receive 20 lashes with a wet camel-hide whip on each hind cheek.

It is pretty much a free-for-all out there when it comes to the websites you surf to watch x-rated videos, but they draw the line on WHERE you watch them. In Nepal, too, the #MeToo generation is exposing predators in the workplace and there may soon be a law that requires contracts for foreign direct investment henceforth to include a clause stipulating that joint venture enterprises can only have CEOs who are eunuchs.

But the Saudi mobile incident should be a wake-up call to Nepal's newly-elected legislators to update our own laws regarding the use of hand phones in restricted areas. There was a famous widely-reported case of a Minister of Telepathy and Mis-communication (who cannot be identified because of privacy laws) who took a call on his mobile phone when it chimed loudly while he was at the podium delivering a keynote address in the Hotel Yaketyiak on the theme 'Nepal's Strategy to Advance from Potato Chips to Micro Chips'. It was a sure sign that Nepal has finally made the transition from a Maoist Revolution to a Mobile Revolution. The question is: how do we regulate it?

We should not be that worried about investors in the teleco sector absconding without paying billions in capital gains tax by using legal loopholes. Such things happen in the age of globalisation. We should be much more vigilant about our public officials attending to calls on their mobiles while attending to

calls from nature. This is especially problematic if they are wearing the two-tier national dress while taking a leak.

Having once had the opportunity of using the facilities at Singha Darbar, I noticed that it is invariably just as the Honourable Minister steps up to the podium for the anointment ceremony that his cellphone will emit a cheerful warble.

What follows is a series of intricately sequenced manoeuvres that involve a) untying two sets of surwal knots, b) clasping the hem of the daura under the chin, even as c) the mobile is held in position by one uplifted shoulder to the right ear, while d) hopping around on one leg as the hydraulic pressure builds up to intolerable levels. All members of the male species will readily attest that such emergencies wreak havoc on aim.

As we all know, Nepal has some splendid laws, the world's best, in fact. But we have a slight problem implementing them. There is no point just banning mobile use in restricted areas, it has to be accompanied by a serious deterrent. And here we have a lot to learn from the Saudis, who have no problems at all with implementation because they are world leaders in the highly specialised field of amputation jurisprudence. Being liberal minded I would never support capital punishment by decapitation, but there is something to be said about chopping off an offending urinary appendage.

We greet the Ministry of Immobility for having finally decided to turn the humble handphone into a handy multi-purpose tool for national development.



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