Pressing concerns

B

ald statements of fact are sometimes the only way to get the message across, whether it is to raise awareness about appropriate outlets for physical necessities or for that matter, political necessities. The difficulty lies in distinguishing fact from fiction, and commitment from lies. When all the parties were cajoled into signing a pledge to desist from activities likely to harm tourism during Nepal Tourism Year 2011, probably no one really believed we would enjoy a strike-free year.

But few might have anticipated the haste with which the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Tourism Workers Union (ANTWU) subsequently delivered an ultimatum to trekking agencies right in the middle of tourist season. In ordering trekking agencies to stop sending out trekking staff affiliated to the union, ANTWU claims it is merely pressing for implementation of the Travel and Trekking Regulations. But the methods and timing are awry, and risk a backlash not just from tourists but also union members.

The trouble with inbound tourism, however, has in recent times been mirrored by a surge in outbound tourism. Nepalis are travelling more than ever, and not just for a degree or a job.

For NEPALI EYES ONLY: Poster campaign to end open defecation, practiced by 14 million Nepalis across the country daily, Tundikhel
The peace process won’t be complete without putting the finishing touches to the new constitution. The constitution can’t be written until the Maoists are demobilised and the camps dismantled. That won’t happen until there is an agreement on integration numbers.

That is what has boiled down to: a numbers game. The Maoist leadership would want nothing better than to have their cadre in the camps go their separate ways because we all know (and they know we know) the real guerrillas are the VGCs.

But they have promised all 19,000 (12,000 if you want to believe the government’s estimate) a place in the national army. There is no way the Nepali Army is going to accept all of them, and what is holding things up is that the Army is saying ‘zero’ and the Maoists are saying ‘19,000’. This is like bargaining over the price of potatoes in the market. Ultimately both the vendor and the buyer will have to come to a figure agreeable to both. It is called compromise, and it is in very short supply in these polarised times.

However, there is hope of breaking the deadlock. Speaking in Nepalgunj on Tuesday Chairman Dahal said it was up to his cadres to decide whether they wanted to go back to their villages with a compensation package or join the national army. Surprisingly, that is exactly what the Army Chief himself said last week. Of course, the military says the ex-guerrillas have to meet its ‘recruitment criteria’ but that shouldn’t be such a big deal. If we were to leave it up to the fighters, there is a strong possibility that a whole lot of them would find a golden handshake much more attractive than an uncertain placement in the national army. The Maoists might be in a hurry, but they are not in a rush.

Why is the prime minister dreaming up a tower in Ratna Park?

P rime MinisterMadhav Kumar Nepal’s plans to erect a Gantantra Stambha, or Republic Tower, appear to be set in the foundation stone be placed on the site recently. I have nothing against commemorating the republic. But it seems the location and dimensions of the proposed monument—meant to symbolise national dignity—are at complete odds with the needs of the public.

Take the location. The erection is going up in the Ratna Park area of Tundikhel. To make the matter even more bizarre, it seems the prime minister is pushing for a tower even taller than Dharahara, with a winged horse on top. Even Don Quixote wouldn’t dare dream of such folly.

I do not question the noble intentions of the prime minister and his right to have a personal vision. The problem lies in his prescriptions for a project that is clearly beyond his terms of reference.

It must be very difficult for the legion of Nepali fine artists and architects to swallow the idea that the prime minister is going ahead with his own design concept. This despite the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction’s proposal for a design competition. As a professional body and the apex institute in this sector, it should take the appropriate steps, lest it be accused of neglecting its own terms of reference.

But aesthetics aside, it is the site of the proposed monument that is most questionable. For almost four decades now, the open public space of Tundikhel has been abused in the most callous manner. The public has been looking on silently.

We should remember that the whole stretch of Tundikhel, right from Ranipokhari to Dasharath Rangasala (including Army HQ) was conceived as a single physical entity by our visionary ancestors. It was found as a public domain and a natural endowment as far back as the Malla period, and the state’s latest encroachment reveals it to be bereft of ideas. In fact, the prime minister’s actions are as bad as the proposed building of a republic monument complex within the Naryanhiti precinct during the tenure of Pushpam Kamal Dahal.

So-called democratic prime ministers appear oblivious to public concerns, which puts me in mind of a conversation I had over two decades ago. Back then, the late king Bir Bikram had asked me to prepare a master plan for the area around Ranipokhari. I politely but firmly told him that if we really wanted to revitalise the area with its heritage in mind, then it would be necessary to pull down all unsuitable structures of Kathmandu’s later development, including the Anchalakshish Karyalaya, because they were straining Ranipokhari and environmentally bifurcating the total entity of Tundikhel. Cosmetic treatment was not enough, I said.

Point blank the king asked me: did I want to bulldoze all such structures, right from Ranipokhari to Dasharath Rangasala? I replied it was not merely my desire but the right thing to do. To my utter amazement, he took my argument in good spirit and asked me to produce a comprehensive master plan to protect the whole stretch of the public domain of Tundikhel as a single entity. Political changes, however, came and went and the concept was not implemented. Tundikhel is an open space of tremendous public value. It sets off the manic urban sprawl of the city of Kathmandu. It is the hub of our sociocultural activities.

After the 1934 earthquake this is where people sought refuge, and you will understand how significant this open space is. For quite sometime now, open spaces such as Tundikhel have come under tremendous pressure in all our cities. They are not just shrinking, but disappearing.

We may be poor in Nepal, but let us not be poor in vision. It is time for us to consider our real needs before we embark on costly mistakes that we may regret later.

“Skirting Tundikhel”, #107

Q. What is the significance of International Women’s Day?

There has been a huge upsurge of interest in books, magazines, and videos in Nepal for the under-10 age cohort. Come on Nepali entrepreneurs, get copying! Neeti Pokharel

NEPALI LAG

A tremendous disadvantage that Nepal has is the interest of the young and well educated is almost completely lack of interesting books for young readers (‘Not so hip’, #493). I’ve searched every bookshop in Kathmandu for the Nepali equivalent of engaging English books for kids. There is a huge unmet need for books, magazines, and videos in Nepal for the under-10 age cohort. Come on Nepali entrepreneurs, get copying!

Kenji

JUMP OR JUNKET JOURNALISM?

I share Mr. Mishra’s disdain for ‘controversial’ politicians and ‘politically biased commentators’ (‘Junk journalism’, #493). Politically biased commentary twists facts and is a form of spin-doctoring.

Philanthropy is good and must be praised. But in the name of praising philanthropy, when a journalist promotes philanthropy, it stops being objective journalism. When the rich are highlighted more than their causes of philanthropy, the praise becomes depreciation of personality.

Personally I am more inspired by individuals with little means but who raise funds in inventive ways, in order to do good deeds, than rich people who can afford to give large donations.

Thurupshch

• Though it is not a new issue, Mr. Mishra has presented it admirably. Media should play a very constructive role towards the nation and people. It should encourage figures and facts rather than only highlighting negative aspects like violence, political games and inaugurations.

Neeti Pokharel

NEPALI LAG

Towering folly
Crumbling state

BRATNAGAR – Over an afternoon chat in his office last week, the Morang CDO mentioned how his district was calm and stable. Same night, the Youth Force chief was shot in Biratnagar.

The UML shut the bajar to protest the assassination attempt. A day earlier, a bus driver in Itahara was lynched by a wedding party after he requested them not to climb onto the top of the bus. The transport unions of Morang, Sunsari and Itahara halted public transport to protest the killing of their colleague.

This is relative stability, for the further west you move, the more turbulent things get. Lahan was abuzz with the killing of two guests at a wedding. The same week, a villager was kidnapped by an unknown group. Police negotiated ransom without disclosing their identity, but when they got to the designated spot, the kidnappers ran off. The next day, the abductee was killed. The transport unions of Morang, Sunsari and Jhapa halted public transport to protest the killing of their colleague.

The locals told us. “It is the fault of the politicians. The state has not failed yet, but the institutional and political relationships that constitute the state are crumbling, and everyone blames the other.”

Take what a Janakpur MP told us. “It is the fault of the politicians. They are all in the loop.”

Who’s to blame for lawlessness in the Tarai? Everyone, if you listen to everyone.

and crime, and the emergence of a generation with high aspirations and no opportunities that has learnt how to make a quick buck through loot and extortion.

The state has not failed yet, but the institutional and political relationships that constitute the state are crumbling, and everyone blames the other.

The local administration employs precisely the opposite argument. A senior official in Dhamasa pointed fingers at the local parties. “There are so many outfits; two factions of UML, two Forums, TOMP, NC, Maoist, and Matrixa. And all of them exert pressure on the police to release whoever is arrested, claiming he is their cadre.” Local officials blame the central Home Ministry for not deploying more personnel or resources. Nepal Police faces huge government intelligence as utterly useless. And the CDO and the SP are sometimes operating at cross purposes.

The only way to prevent further institutional breakdown is to have a stable, strong and inclusive political authority that completes the political transition. Simultaneously, it has to initiate reform of NP, APF and NIBP so that it has deeper penetration in society, re-engineer the politician-bureaucrat relationship; deal with longer term issues like political accommodation and putting in place federal structures and push agrarian and land reform, industrialisation, education and employment generation. All of this will be messy, prolonged and difficult process, but the alternative is a lot worse.

Sadly, the country is saddled with a dysfunctional, corrupt and weak government whose sole purpose is to stay on in power. Madhav Nepal’s biggest legacy may well be the further erosion of the state’s credibility in the Tarai.
The way we give

Nepalis are donating big bucks, but not in the way social charities want them to

Sudeep Risal is the kind of guy who works hard six months of the year and lives one day at a time. Originally from Sindhupalchok, Risal has been a trekking guide for 13 years. Originally from Sindhupalchok, Risal has been a trekking guide for 13 years.

During the peak trekking seasons of March-May and September-November, Risal makes between Rs 550-700 a day leading groups through trails around the country, excluding tips and gifts. Risal feels that the basic pay is satisfactory. He concurs. “Times have changed. Thirty years ago, we only received 30 rupees a day,” he says.

Stories like Risal’s are in danger of becoming tales of the past, given the labour movement in Nepal this will not change.”

For a country that depends heavily on tourism, which accounts for 25 billion rupees last year, things like this happen far too frequently, especially given the industry’s recent recovery from the decade-long civil war. The Nepal Tourism Year 2011 initiative aims to bring in a million tourists, but that appears a little far-fetched at the moment. The Nepal Tourism Year 2011 initiative aims to bring in a million tourists, but that appears a little far-fetched at the moment.

What was most impressive was not the amount raised (twice what the organisers expected), but the number of people who donated. Over 10,000 visited the yagya site every day, and most donated Rs 5001, which earned them a shawl as a token of appreciation. “We handed out a lot of shawls,” says Mani Bansjota, co-secretary at the hospital.

The unprecedented amount of money raised by the hospital indicated that people are willing to dig deep for charity, but they do want to know what’s in it for them. When it comes to parting with cold hard cash, two types of interests seem to be pervasive—recognition by God and society.

When Siddhurana Rana donated Re 10 million to Help Nepal Network, the charity noted that it was rare for someone to donate to a cause not directly linked to his family. Rana concedes he gave the matter some thought then decided to scrap his own charity, Tara Foundation, so as not to overlap with the activities of Help Nepal. “If in the US, Bill Gates’ foundation is trusted by Warren Buffet for his philanthropic activities, why can’t we do the same in Nepal?” he says.

In fact, this is how organisations that run philanthropic donations want people to give—for social causes rather than to boost family prestige or to placate adversarial planets.

“We need to inspire people to give for social justice,” says Ritu Thapa, founder of Teva, an organisation that funds women’s projects by raising donations from individual Nepalis. “Religious and cultural altruism has held the fabric of our society together. But it is important that people donate for social transformation rather than political gain.”

Teva’s approach to philanthropy was groundbreaking when it was set up in 1990. Teva trained volunteers to engage in local fundraising to support their programs. Over the years, it has mobilised almost 500 volunteers, who approach family, friends, and neighbours for donations. Getting people to recognise good causes is difficult. “In the early days we approached scores of corporate houses for a gift of Re 50,000. Only one of them gave modishly,” Thapa says. “Corporate giving is tied with business interests rather than the practice of social responsibility.”

Compared to Mann Mohan Memorial Community Hospital’s Rs 51 million through muthidan, that for Help Nepal Network’s two schools that raised Rs 51 million through muthidan, that for Help Nepal Network’s two schools that raised

But ANTWU is also betting on the unwillingness of tourism business owners to hold out for too long before losses start to eat away at their bottom line. In their push to gain more political clout, what the unions are forgetting, are the very people they represent. They might be able to get away with playing their members like chips they represent. They might be able to get away with playing their members like chips they represent. They might be able to get away with playing their members like chips.

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Camouflage fatigue

FOURTH ESTATE

M adan Bhandari’s meteoric rise and equally sudden demise in the early 1990s left his widow Biddiya to ride the sympathy wave that followed his death. She has grown in stature since, but is not known particularly for her political convictions, even by the flexible standards of the UML...
Businesses and entrepreneurs need to look beyond the bottom line to speed up the development of the communities they cater to

Likewise, an estimated 680,000 Nepali women still suffer in silence from uterine prolapse, a preventable reproductive disease, which significantly diminishes their quality of life.

It’s fair to wonder why this information is in this space. The answer is straightforward.

Since 1951, such social concerns and others have been addressed in piecemeal fashion by various government bodies, donor agencies, NGOs and community organisations. Though much progress has been made, these and other problems are still with us, sixty years later. The longer they stay with us, the more they slow down our progress – say, providing complete and sustainable access to toilets in a particular set of VDCs or sustainable access to toilets in a specific development region by a certain date. Such a focus may be the best way to eradicate the social problems that continue to hamstring Nepal’s progress – rather than the usual NGO mode of nibbling away at lofty, vague goals.

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal awarded Thomas Roetter, managing director of KREIGER GmbH, which ships Nepal carpets to Germany, with the Export Excellence Award on 23 February. PM Nepal said the government was committed to restoring carpet exports to its previous levels. He added that for this purpose a high level task force has been formed which will study the scenario and make recommendations to be implemented this year.

Ashutosh Tiwari

Ashutosh Tiwari

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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It all started during the war, when Nepal was perceived to be unsafe for inbound tourists. So Nepalis who could afford it started going out of the country, especially in winter.

In the past decade, the number of Nepalis going to Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore or India for leisure and shopping has increased tenfold, according to travel agents. Nepal is now sending more tourists to Thailand and Malaysia than it receives from these countries.

"Liberalisation in the foreign exchange regime, simplified visa procedures and easy availability of tour packages have boosted foreign travel," says Subodh Rana of Malla Travels and Treks.

Bhola Bikram Thapa of President Group sends more than 1000 Nepali tourists out every month. He offers package tours to Asian as well as European countries to meet the diversified choices of Nepali tourists. "The dramatic increase of outbound tourism is affordable price. A Bangkok tour is cheaper than India," he says. Thapa is now eyeing Mauritius as the next big destination for Nepalis.

Supriya Shakya, tour manager of Marco Polo Travels, says Nepalis are travelling at all times of the year. There is no season, although winter sees heavier bookings. "Shopping, beaches, night life and parks, you name it and Nepalis are interested," she says.

Outgoing tourists

Nepal is not just a tourist destination, it is also a source of tourism.

Sensing the outbound tourism potential in Nepal, several countries are trying to tap the market by offering budget tour packages and seasonal discounts. Surprisingly, even faraway Egypt is trying woo Nepalis. "Cairo is an open museum of history," says Shakya, who is selling an eight-night package including a Nile cruise.

Nepalis from diverse walks of life have taken to tourism as the opportunities have expanded. Ravi Man Bajracharya, chief operating officer at Lalit Mandap, says his company started out with pilgrim tourism to Thailand. Starting with just 40 pilgrims a year, Lalit Mandap now takes more than 1000 Nepali pilgrims and tourists to Thailand every year. "Our role is to make it easier for people to travel to places they have never been to," he explains.

Honeymooners and conference tourists are also important segments of Nepal’s outbound tourism, but Bishnu Prasai of Natraj Travels and Tours says one should not discount government officials, who often take a few days off when they go abroad for professional reasons. Of late, however, greater public scrutiny of the misuse of state money has put a damper on this form of tourism.

Milhika Dhakhwa of Zenith Experiences Travel Services is clear about why outbound tourism has emerged to complement inbound tourism. When the latter dried up during the conflict, the former bloomed. "We thought, if they’re not coming here, we’ll go there," she recalls. Such a transition, of course, may not be enough to make up the numbers. Deepak Tuladhar of Yeti Travels used to bring in 43,000 tourists in 1996, now it has gone down to 6000. "India and China have fast expanded overseas tourism but we have not been able to cash in this opportunity," says Tuladhar.

Perhaps Nepal Tourism Year 2011 will help redress the balance. Bhola Thapa of President Group is on the National Executive Committee, and is optimistic Nepal will be able to attract a million tourists. But it won’t be easy. "Things will streamline in five to ten years," he says, "but we will have to do it the hard way. We don’t have much time."
True Blood

Vampires are cool again, and nowhere more so than in BonTemps, a Louisiana town equally enraptured and repulsed by the latter-day incarnations of the undead. For telepathic waitress Sookie (Anna Paquin), meeting someone whose mysterious killings begin, but for Sookie, who is as drawn to Bill's magic as she is appalled by the company he keeps, it's more than simply a matter of life and death.

Alan Ball's True Blood, the latest in a line of 'fangtastic' TV series, has delighted American audiences with its funny, gory, sexy take on the uneasy coexistence of humans and vampires. Try the stores in Mahaboudha. 3.5/5

Julie & Julia

Nin Ephron's Julie & Julia is a true story about two women who live three decades apart but share an interest in French cuisine. The now deceased Julia Child (Meryl Streep) was a TV personality who first won renown for authoring a cookbook that introduced the American middle class to French cooking. Julie Powell (Amy Adams) started a blog called the Julie & Julia project, in which she chronicled her quest to cook all 524 recipes in Child's cookbook in the course of one year, and captured the hearts of thousands of culinary enthusiasts. The film depicts the highs and lows of the two women's journeys from anonymity to celebrity. Some things about human nature just don't change with the passage of time, the movie seems to say. Meryl Streep and Amy Adams, who were last paired together in Doubt, are a winning duo. 4/5

An Education

Lone Scherfig's An Education is a grown-up coming-of-age movie. Jenny Mellor (Carey Mulligan) is a bright 16-year-old in 1961 London who has her sights on Oxford University. An older suitor (David, played by Peter Sarsgaard) seduces her with excursions to jazz clubs, fancy restaurants and shopping. This is a welcome change for Jenny, who professes a desire to "smoke as many cigarettes I want" at university. "Will David be the making of Jenny or her undoing?" the DVD cover asks mysteriously, but there is no doubt where Jenny is headed in this film, based as it is on an autobiographical essay by famed British journalist Lynn Barber. The best part of the movie is how David's charming persuasiveness sets off Jenny's acid wit. 3.5/5

A perhaps the best known Oscar Wilde play, The Importance of Being Earnest is a classic romantic comedy that hits hard – albeit with the subtle wit characteristic of Wilde—at the snobbish Victorian upper class. Celebrated as much as it was hated at the time, the play landed Wilde in hot water, and the legal fracas that ensued led to destitution and his death. More than a century on, the timeless classic is being revied by Greta Rana, the celebrated author and poet who directs the theatre group, the New Shakespeare Wallahs.

The cast for this production is comprised of amateur volunteers with unconventional demographics to say the least—a young student, aBritish journalist, and an elderly man (playing a lady) for starters. Expect surprises as the plot unfolds in dramatic fashion.

18-19 March (6pm), 21 March, 2.30pm, Sterling Club, British Embassy, Lazimpat. Tickets at Rs1500, drinks and dinner included. All proceeds to charity. 4410560.

Tavern Tales@Quixote's Cove, Pulitzer Prize winner Kai Bird discusses Hanna Hajuruma: Our Grandmothers with writers and photographers, 6pm, 21 March, Quixote's Cove, Jhamsekhel, www.qbookshop.com, 5538874

Spring Camp 2010, organised by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, invites children aged 3 to 12 years old to discover the joy of dance, music and theatre. 29 March to 9 April. Reservations at 5013554 or info@katjazz.com.np

Remenances, ‘Worlds in essence’, video installations by Emma Ponsart, 14-20 March, Sun-Fri, 11am-6pm, Kathmandu Contemorary Arts Centre, Jhamsekhel, Lalitpur, 5521120.

Infiltration of Darkness, exhibition of paintings by Sunil Sigdel, 26 March-18th April, Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre, Jhamsekhel

Anapurna Ultra Trail Race, 35 km and 71 km routes (mostly trails), starts 27 March, details at aponarch.com/hhhh/

Poets Corner, send in and vote for your favourite piece of poetry at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. Open entry until 21 March. Movie screening of An Education (read review above) at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, 23 March, 6pm. Timing may change due to load-shedding. 4428549

Himalayan hash house runners, a running club with a drinking problem, meet every Saturday to run a course around the Kathmandu Valley, 5.30pm-7pm daily, Pathibara Art Gallery, Thamel. 4256004.

Ashad Dinseed, feature film about malecismal mortality, 5.30pm to 7pm, 19 March, The Kamalimal Theater, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoke, Lalitpur. 4256004

Exhibition of Tibetan Authentic Traditional Thangka, traditional art created by renowned artists following the true traditional teachings, 9.30am-7pm daily, Pathibara Art Gallery, Thamel. 4256004.

Poet's Corner, send in and vote for your favourite piece of poetry at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. Open entry until 21 March. Movie screening of An Education (read review above) at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, 23 March, 6pm. Timing may change due to load-shedding. 4428549

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Anapurna Ultra Trail Race, start training for the 4th Anapurna Ultra Trail Race, 35 km and 71 km routes (mostly trails), starts 27 March, Barahi Hotel, Pokhara.

Painting for peace and harmony, mural painting on the south perimeter wall of Hyatt Regency Hotel, presented by The Himalayan Children's Foundation of Kathmandu, 7-7 April

People After War, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoke, for bulk school bookings call 5521393

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre: Yoga 8.30-9.30 am Meditation 5-6pm Mon- Fri, Rekli, Ta Ch. Jatalla, Thamel. 4522251

EVENTS
MUSIC

Music with Ramshackle Blues, electric and acoustic guitar, slide guitar and harmonica. Featuring classics and new original compositions played on electric and acoustic guitar, slide guitar and harmonica, 6pm, 22 March, Lazimpat Gallery Café.

Chevrolet Concert Series, presented by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, 2:30pm, 27 March. Free entrance. 5013554 or www.musicfestival.com

Inner Groove, Hyatt Regency Hotel, relax with jazz music on Sundays, 12-3.30pm, 4491234/4489362.

Live music, drop by at Jazzabell Café every Wednesday and Friday, from 6pm onwards, Jhamshikhel, Patan, 2114075.

Fusion and classic music by Anil Shahi, Wednesdays, Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, Pulchowk, 6pm onwards, 5521408.

Rudra, immerse yourself in a soothing Nepali music every Tuesday and Sunday, 7-11pm, Comfort Zone (roof top of Bank of Kathmandu), Thamel.

JSC Jazz Quartet, every Saturday 8pm on at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Laxmipati, 9803160719

Chillout Lounge with DJ Miriam, every Friday at the Bamboo Club, Thamel, 4701547.

Saturday African Nite, with African food and music from 8pm at Jazzabell Café, Jhamshikhel, 2114075

Robin and the New Revolution, every Tuesday 7pm on at the Bamboo Club, Thamel, 4701547.

Nepali Ghajals at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589.

Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepal every Friday, 7pm at Gokama Forest Resort, 4451212.

DINING

Casa Toscana, for all things Italian, from pasta to confectionery delicacies. Pulchowk, 5537775.

Ghaneri Café, for their signature open su mai momos and Special Fried Rice, Pulchowk.

Hankook Sarang, to whet your appetite with delicious Korean food, Thamel.

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café, for wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi Internet, 01230681.

Famous stews of the world, enjoy famous stews of the world at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00pm onwards, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362.

Vegetarian Buffet, every Monday, Oriental Nights, flavours and specialities of China every Wednesday. Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialties every Friday, 6.30pm at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362.

Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4260706.

Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, 6.30-10.30pm everyday.

GETAWAYS

NexGEN Adventure Programme, rock climbing, daily departure, 016914541, 9841238385, www.canyoninginpeal.com

Dwarika’s Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Drukhiel, 4478488, Overnight Package and Great Escape Package (locals).

Chiso Chiso Hawa Ma Special Package, Club Himalaya, Nagarkot, 4410432/4414432, locals and expats.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, food, yoga, massage, meditation, walks, pool and more. 01 4361500 reservations@tigermountain.com


Godavari Village Resort, 5560675, 5560775, special packages for locals and expats at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, 4435741-44, Kids Break Package, couple with two children below 12 years sharing parents room complimentary.

Kathmandu, Thamel, 4250440/41.

Jazzabell Café, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8pm, Jhamshikhel, 2114075.

Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden every Friday 7pm, Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Laxmipati, Rs 600, 4412999.

Experience the Gyakok (hotpot with T-momos, meats and more) for lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, 4412999 or at Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar, Darbar Marg, 4230890, 4239077.

Surya Nepal presents Beyond Radha by Sukh

Among the most sought after artists of Bengal’s modernism, Sukh has enjoyed a long and illustrious career as an artist and teacher in Santiniketan and Kolkata, India. A painter of great talent and also a graphic artist who spent many long years in France practicing point marking. Sukh in his early years painted landscapes which were followed by series of portraits that eventually culminated into the famed Radha series, the portrait of the ideal woman.

March 25th to April 2nd, 2010 at Siddhanta Art Gallery Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu.

Brought to you by:
A jockey rides his horse over a fence in Tundikhel during a parade by the Nepal Army on Ghodejatra, the festival of horses.

The westerly front that caused terrific winds and lightning earlier this week doesn’t promise much rainfall this weekend. While it has generated significant cloud cover in the north, it has caused only dry smog in much of the country up to 1500m in altitude, which accounts for the hazy conditions in Kathmandu. However, there is a strong chance of short, sharp evening showers with lightning this weekend. Expect warmer nights too.

A noticeable decline in the water level at Kulekhani Reservoir last week accounts for the rise in loadshedding hours in the Kathmandu Valley.

Hailstones lie scattered on a street in Thamel after a brief storm on Tuesday.
just as Pushpa Kamal Dahal returned to Kathmandu from Chatara Sundari, having worshipped a buffalo and performed rituals for good luck, an armed group in Rautahat killed Shambu Ram Yadav, a member of the Bhujour Sub-State Council. The following day, Rautahat district-in-charge Ashok Jaisawal approached the local administration, seeking security.

Jaisawal goes to the police office every day. “They say we need not worry as there is no threat to our lives. Security should be given before an incident takes place. What is the use after someone gets killed?”

His case is representative of the Maoists across the Tarai, where armed groups have been targeting their leaders and cadres. Rautahat’s co-in-charge Upen Shah says they don’t feel secure. “It’s natural to be terrified when the leaders are being killed one after another. Who wants to die for nothing?”

In the last one and a half months, 5 Maoist cadres have been killed in Rautahat, Bara and Parsa. But 36 Maoists have been killed since the peace process began; this figure excludes those killed in clashes with political parties and security forces in Rautahat and Dang. According to the Informal Sector Service Centre, 6 of these 36 were killed by the public and Tarai armed groups took responsibility for 14 killings.

While the killing of Maoist cadres is on the rise nationwide, they are particularly vulnerable in the Tarai. District level leaders have been asking local administration for personal security officers (PSOs). Chief District Officer of Bara district Tara Nath Gautam says leaders are provided with PSOs according to the degree of their vulnerability. Maoist CA members Shiva Chandra Kushwaha and Jayaram Dahal are among those assigned PSOs in Bara.

Police have also arranged special security for Maoist leaders in Rautahat. District Police In-charge SP Pitambar Adhikari says they escort CA members and also provide them with security officers.

Despite these arrangements, the Maoists remain uncertain about their security and say the state is merely fulfilling formalities. But Rautahat CoDO Kamalesh Kumar Sinha says he cannot provide a PSO to everyone. “The district security committee decides whom to give a security officer,” he says. Maoist CA members Prabhu Sah Teli and Debandra Patel have been given PSOs.

Why are the Maoists being targeted in this way? Sunil Jaisawal, commander of the Tarai Liberation Front, has claimed that three Maoist cadres were killed in Ganjabhawanipur, Bara and Rautahat as acts of revenge. For many, joining or recruiting the services of armed groups is a way of getting back at the Maoists for their actions during the decade-long insurgency. For the armed groups in the Tarai, claiming responsibility for any violent incidents is a way to generate publicity.

The state seems to be absent in the Tarai. Despite the Special Security Plan, there is no decline in the number of murders, kidnapping cases, bomb explosions, threats and extortion. The easy availability of weapons from across the border is a key cause, and cannot be controlled without support from Indian security. But the political parties, the Maoists in particular, need to take the initiative. As important as controlling arms is the need to push for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Maoists have no other choice but to support it if they are to improve security for their own.
A crippling power shortage that is here to stay, ease of installation and affordability are making experts take a fresh look at windpower in Nepal.

There was optimism in abundance at a recent National Workshop on Wind Energy, organised by the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) and Tribhuvan University.

“This is the first time I have seen so many people keen on windpower,” commented Rakesh Sinha, a researcher at a windpower company.

A mix of public and private stakeholders were invited, after a nine-year lull, to exchange experiences and review the draft national wind policy, recently prepared by the National Wind Task Force (NWTF). The paper intends to draw foreign investment for utility-scale wind turbines, particularly through the construction of a model project generating more than 500KW. It also means to protect the interests of local manufacturers of small wind turbines no larger than 10KW.

“We should hand over the draft policy to the ministry in the next three months. Parliament should pass it within six months, after which we hope to pilot a commercial wind farm in a year,” says NWTF member Manoj Kumar Mishra.

Government, private sector and non-governmental organisations have invested intermittently in windpower over the past three decades. In 1989, two wind generators of 10KW capacity each were built in Kagbeni, Mustang, but both were blown down by high winds. This deterred further interest in windpower.

With power cuts, windpower has gradually regained credibility as a viable, quick, and possibly cheap solution. “In the past when one brought up wind energy, government officials would respond with hawa ma kura garne (talking in the wind). This is no longer the case,” said Govind Pokharel, formerly of AEPC. Windpower is quick to install and offsets carbon emissions by reducing deforestation and consumption of imported petroleum-based products.

Nepal presently has some small-scale, stand-alone wind turbines. AEPC has built six wind-solar hybrids – 400W wind and 150W solar – each capable of supplying a community of about 10 residences with enough energy to run one radio and a CFL bulb. Practical Action has invested in 18 small wind turbines of 200W capacity each since 2001. The army has constructed 10 larger turbines of 3KW in Nagarkot and students at Kathmandu University have designed and set up two 1.5KW turbines, using local material such as sal wood. Small wind turbines and wind mills have been installed by private companies and investors. AEPC also subsidises projects generating electricity to benefit remote areas that can’t access the national grid.

All this is falls far short of Nepal’s 3000MW potential, as identified by a study on only 10 per cent of the total feasible area. Mustang alone could generate 500GWh a year.

“To make windpower commercially viable on a large scale, one needs to prepare a national wind map with five years of consistent data,” says Tri Ratna Bajracharya, Director of the Center for Energy Studies at Tribhuvan University. But no measurements have been taken of elevations above 30 metres, the baseline for commercial production of wind.

Lack of data has also delayed reliable estimates of the Cost of Energy (CoE), and the lack of transportation and grid infrastructure in potential sites is a barrier to developing utility-scale wind farms. Tax regulation, purchasing power agreements, license distribution, land ownership and subsidies need to be agreed on before the draft national wind policy is finalised.

With political will and private sector interest as much as sheer necessity, however, windpower seems poised to take off.
I n the 23 years I have been a pilot, I have crisscrossed much of this beautiful land of ours. From the air you see the incredible geographic diversity of this country, how it is laid out like a staircase to the heavens. From the hazy plains, through the rippled blue-green mistsills to the dazzling saw-tooth of the northern horizon.

And wherever I land, in Simikot or Dhangadi, Thanapat or Bhairupur, I meet Nepali men and women who are living proof of how our varied topography is reflected in Nepal’s ethnic mosaic.

During the war, the people I met had just one concern: peace. Because I wore a smart uniform and like many of you reading this, I have grown more and more disenchanted with the so-called New Nepal. All I see around me is cynicism, negativism and despair. So when I got an invitation to attend the Chainpur Festival recently, I jumped at the chance to get away from it all. I really glad I did, it restored my hope in Nepal’s future.

We travelled by road from Dhangadi to Hill, along the spectacular forested ridge road to Basantapur and then down to Chainpur. High above, the pyramid of Makalu kept us company like an old friend. Chainpur was alive with the anticipation of the festival the following day, and despite the chilly night people from all classes and ethnicities mingled. The war and the memory of the fierce battle here six-years ago had begun to fade. People from different political parties were working together putting up welcome banners.

That evening Had dal bhat, scented with pure Chainpur ghi. Our host told us the aroma came from the herbs that the cows ate in the high altitude pastures of eastern Nepal. The old world hospitality and spontaneity towards total strangers touched me deeply. It reminded me of the sense of belonging that comes to me when I fly passengers wearing a garb of the Tamang, Magar, Rai and Limbu. Whatever they were wearing, they were all speaking Nepali with a distinctive Chainpur lilt. That morning in Sukhanyaswabra, Helicopter sounded more than ever before that it is our diversity that unites us, and it is the Nepali language that is the mortar binding the bricks of our nationhood. Chainpur that day looked like a garden, and the voices sounded like a symphony.

The procession ended at the Tundikhel. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal landed his formerly-royal Super Puma in a cloud of dust. People clapped. But a group of Maoist youngsters started waving black banners and shouting “murdabad”. The entire atmosphere changed, people became tense, and started running, heller-skeeter. The riot police charged the protesters. When the ceremonies resumed, the carefree feeling had evaporated. The next morning, Chainpur’s square cobblestone lanes were filled with people dressed in daura suruwal, haku phatuk, and like many of you reading this, I have grown more and more disenchanted with the so-called New Nepal. All I see around me is cynicism, negativism and despair. So when I got an invitation to attend the Chainpur Festival recently, I jumped at the chance to get away from it all. I really glad I did, it restored my hope in Nepal’s future.

The centre is getting results. It helped one woman overcome a fear of men that she had had ever since being molested by her father at a young age. She is now happily married and has a child. LTS also helped a man come to grips with his homosexuality, which he worked extensively with young people (including a fact which led to frustration and caused him to behave violently.

Yet the challenges are steep. “We really expect a lot a trust,” says Brooks. It’s an approach that has served him well in the last 45 years, during political and economic changes, are increasingly frustrated, and are more violent, ordinary people, having despaired of genuine political and economic changes, are increasingly frustrated, and in the rush to claim new rights, matters of identity like sexuality are challenging the status quo.

“We want to help people deal with the emotional problems Nepal’s political and social changes have thrown up,” says Brooks. The problems are evident everywhere, they explain. Youth are more violent, ordinary people, having despaired of genuine political and economic changes, are increasingly frustrated, and in the rush to claim new rights, matters of identity like sexuality are challenging the status quo. LTS believes such problems could be dealt with better if people learned to communicate with each other.

“So often, people don’t really acknowledge one another’s pain. They simply tell each other not to worry about their problems, without really making the effort to understand how they are feeling,” says Singh.

LTS offers training in civic and moral education, counselling and leadership at its centre in Golphutar. It also works with NGO’s and other organisations to train their staff. The training is more facilitated discussion than spoon-fed instruction, with participants put into groups and encouraged to open up to one another. Unlike other counselling services, LTS seeks to help people by empowering them to help themselves and those around them. But a group of Maoist youngsters started waving black banners and shouting “murdabad”. The entire atmosphere changed, people became tense, and started running, heller-skeeter. The riot police charged the protesters. When the ceremonies resumed, the carefree feeling had evaporated. Till the politicians arrived on the scene, Chainpur was Nepal in a microcosm. No one saw each other as belonging to this or that party, or ethnicity. We were all Nepalis. We shared what we had with strangers without expecting anything in return.

“We don’t begin by telling people they are sick and then diagnose illnesses. We give them the skills necessary to help themselves and live life more fully,” explains Brooks. It’s an approach that has served him well in the last 45 years, during which he worked extensively with young people (including LTS). Brooks is currently working on a book about LTS and counselling, and plans to continue working in Nepal for many years to come. Here’s hoping they make Nepal a happier place in the process.
Self-flagellation
Editorial in Rajbhasha, 16 March

At first glance, the cabinet’s reaction to UN Undersecretary-General B. Lynn Pascoe’s comments seems like a commitment to independence and sovereignty. Pascoe behaved in a colonial manner, threatening to withdraw UNMIN and raising questions about the competence of a sovereign government. So the cabinet’s reaction is better late than never. In the past four years various embassies and missions in Kathmandu have been violating the Vienna Convention. The Indian and Chinese envoys go around giving statements even before they present their credentials. The Maoists, UML and NCP have all been brute. The Madhav Nepal government has been silent on UNMIN and OHCHR overstepping their bounds to make comments. So what is the cabinet trying to do by suddenly unleashing a thunderbolt against Pascoe? Why wasn’t the UN’s resident representative summoned by the Foreign Ministry, as would have been the norm, to be told about the government’s displeasure? The prime minister himself is obliged to do more than just protest, so the cabinet’s statement doesn’t carry much credibility. The cabinet’s reaction to Pascoe’s statement is an objectionable mudsling of Pascoe’s own statement.

Lighting the fire
Editorial in Punarajгран, 16 March

What happens if a referee who is supposed to be neutral starts dribbling and scoring goals? That is what UNMIN is doing in Nepal with its controversial, dangerous and objectionable meddling. It started with Ian Martin and now his successor Karin Landgren is carrying on the tradition of protecting the Maoists. Her activities are endangering not just Nepal but also India, which is grappling with its own Maoist war. Landgren’s controversial role has been exacerbated by the uniplomatic and offensive tone of the remarks by UN Undersecretary-General Pascoe. The government had asked UNMIN to verify the numbers of guerrillas in its cantonments after receiving reports that there were down by 40 per cent. But UNMIN said it couldn’t breach secrecy, raising doubts about its role. UNMIN is itself responsible for creating the conditions for it not being possible to extend its mandate beyond 15 May. It is not serious about the peace process and is relentlessly pro-Maoist. The whole country and the national forces are on the side of peace, it’s only the Maoists and UNMIN who are against it. The only solution is not to extend UNMIN’s mandate and ask it to leave.

“Sky won’t fall if UNMIN leaves”
Interview with former ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa in Drishti, 16 March

Drishti: What is your opinion on the debate over UNMIN?
Thapa: I blame both sides. The UN was in a hurry to come, and the Nepal side did also in a hurry to bring it in. There are very few instances of the UN actually restoring peace in any country. But the expectation was that the UN would be neutral.

But Pascoe said UNMIN would leave. That’s all he could say. I never expected the kind of uniplomatic words he used while here. He talked down to Nepal. Why did our leaders and the government tolerate it? I am surprised. He said the government was trying to gloss over its own shortcomings and blame UNMIN. He shouldn’t have said that. It shows how tarnished our international reputation is. I have never seen an international civil servant behave like that with the government of an independent country. And when he accused the political forces of incompetence, the Maoists were included. It did not suit him to address the leaders of a sovereign nation in such an unvilified way.

What will happen if UNMIN quits? The sky won’t fall. The parties must agree on a minimum program to protect the peace process. Mediation can be done by parties, civil society and human rights organisations. If there is no basic agreement then there is a danger of a return to conflict.

Light weights
Sikshyak, March-April 2010

The people of Finland have come up with a unique scheme to help teacher training in Nepal and stay healthy at the same time. They don’t have to raise money any more; all they need to do is lose weight. And an anonymous donor will donate 15 euros for every kilo shed. The project, announced in January, will continue until it raises 10 million euros. Finns wishing to take part have to designate a weight loss centre and once the kilos lost are certified, the donor will donate money to Nepal. The project is being managed by the group TLL and the collected money will be handed over to Nepal by the Finnish Foreign Ministry. The scheme was kicked off in January by none other than Finland’s Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Paavo Väyrynen. But we won’t know how much weight he has lost until May.

The real reason
Editorial in Kantipur, 17 March

The spat between the government and UNMIN has reached New York. American citizen and UN Undersecretary-General Pascoe blamed the political parties for stalling the peace process and this can be considered to be the opinion of UN headquarters. How could UNMIN have violated the Agreement on Arms and Armies Clause 2, which requires it to keep details of the strengths of the two armies secret, by giving numbers of Maoist guerrillas in the camps to the government? What if the Maoists ask UNMIN to provide details of the Nepali Army? If the government really wanted to know how many fighters there are in the cantonments, it could have used the JMCC, which has representatives of both the Maoists and the Nepali Army. In fact the JMCC was set up precisely for such complications. UNMIN’s role, after all, is not that of a mediator but of monitor. The ownership of the peace process is with the government and the Maoists, UNMIN is just there to help. The government and the Maoists have few options: either extend and extend UNMIN’s mandate or ask it to leave. But by embarrasing an international organisation which it invited, the government is putting a serious dent in Nepal’s standing. UNMIN was sent here by the decision of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Of them, the US, UK and China are not happy with the government’s handling of this issue. By trying to sideline the UN at a time when the peace process is stalled is to initiate a large segment of the international community just to please a regional power.

End weights

Poster: 10th Women’s Day “How time flies! When I first got here they were celebrating 78th Women’s Day. Now they’ve got 100.”

Batsayan in Kantipur, 13 March

UNMIN meaning

3. Prevent integration of the armies, use UNMIN as a monitor.
2. Allow new recruitment into the army and prepare for war.
1. The cabinet’s reaction to Pascoe’s statement on the monitoring of arms and armaments. UNMIN shouldn’t give in to such stance on the monitoring of arms and armaments. UNMIN is also unhappy with UNMIN’s neutral stance.

end
Joining janjati issues

WASIBRA DURA

T he focus of the nation is on two questions: will the new constitution be written on time and will it be pro-people? Nepal has had six constitutions, all written according to the king’s wishes except for the country’s First Statute 1947 and the existing Interim Constitution. Nepal has been declared a democratic republic country. However, it is yet to be seen if this declaration will eliminate ethnic, regional, gender and class discrimination. The identity, access to and representation of the marginalised in the state apparatus are the real issues, and this should be guaranteed in the new constitution.

The real conflict is between the status quoists and progressive forces. The country has already decided to be a secular federal democratic republic country. The formal process of bringing the new constitution has started. Interim Constitution’s Draft is ready, but there isn’t yet consensus on the form of governance and election system. The draft is ready, but there isn’t yet consensus on the form of governance and election system. The draft is ready, but there isn’t yet consensus on the form of governance and election system.

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The Janjati Caucus works together, the Janjati Caucus is characterized by three types of CA members.

First, the status quoists who oppose the idea of the right to self-determination, ethnic autonomy and political prerogatives. The members feel responsibility towards the party they are affiliated with. At this historic moment, we should forget everything else and work in unison for a common cause. This is a golden opportunity for us, and one which might not come again.

Ethnic provinces, political prerogatives, right to self-determination and autonomy are the common demands of janjatis. We want ethnic provinces, not a province of a particular caste. Brahmins and Chhetris have their identity as well as representation in the state mechanism. We want identity and representation of the marginalized communities. To argue that ethnic, regional and gender equality is anti-democratic is conservative thinking.

There can be competition only among equally competent competitors. It is not undemocratic to give prerogatives to marginalized communities for a certain time. If they were as democratic as they claim, they would have given all an opportunity to flourish. It did not happen as certain communities ruled over other communities.

Natural resources were sold for personal benefit and registered in the name of influential individuals in the past. But when Janjatis claim their rights over natural resources as per ILO convention 169, how is it undemocratic?

We should jointly raise the common issues of janjatis and get them passed in the CA. If we unite, we can win.

Dura is a Maoist CA member.
new there was a catch to the Baddies signing the multi-partisan pledge not to disrupt Visit Nepal Year with bunneds and hurt-alls. We forgot to read the fine print in the agreement:

’However, the party deserves the right to close down any hotel at any time on any pretext just to that, while hiding behind the banner of our revolutionary trade union, we can continue to extort the hell out of any tourism investor who has not yet left this country in total disgust. The party will also stop all trekking from Saturday onwards by placing goons at strategic locations on the trails unless the trekking agencies triple the daily wages of porters, and pay us a donation. We will beat to pulp any Nepali porter we find on the trekking trails, disobeying our diktat. But we will leave the foreigners alone because we don’t intend to disrupt Visit Nepal Year. Because, although we may be atheists, we firmly believe that paryataks are debo bhava.’

I’m glad to see it’s not just the Weekly Donkey who is confused about Nepali political shenanigans. Indian state minister Dig Vijay, after an hour-long chat with fellow-Vijay (the Gachhedar) last week asked the MJF deputy PM: “So how is your UML party doing?” It’s all getting so baffling that Nirupama Behen didn’t want to get even more bewildered by meeting Herr Pascoe and his entourage, who had to be content with shaking hands with South Bloc’s Nepal desk handler.

Which is probably why Pascoe was telling every bigwig he met in Kathmandu last week that if UNMIN departed, India would gobble Nepal up. Borrrring!

The YCL Don telling this paper last week that henceforth his paramilitary organisation would devote itself solely to controlling criminality is like letting Comrade Fox guard the Chicken Cantonment. The announcement coincided with a spurt in extortion terrorism in Gorkha, Tanahu and Kaski where the YCL has banned any DDC contract being awarded to anyone but them: on pain of death. The irony of it all, of course, is that the contracts are for re-building the health posts, VDC buildings, bridges that the Baddies themselves *bombed to smithereens* during the war.

Organisers of future sports meets in Nepal should have got the message by now. We proud Nepalis (who, need we remind you, have never been colonised) will never take any defeat lying down. If the American cricket team beats us, we will beat them up. And if Big Vito seems to be getting the upper hand (as it were) over Himalayan Tiger at the unfortunately-named World Trade Centre, then we will break a few chairs over the American wrestler’s head. Get that? Take that, you imperialists. And that.

By far the most momentous decision taken by the non-government organisation that is the present coalition was to declare Ghoday Jatra a national holiday. The government meets on Sunday to declare Monday a happy holiday. A gotr bunned. Not that it mattered, because the entire Tarai was shut down anyway by the Tharus, Biratnagar was closed by cadres of the ruling UML and Jhapa’s highways were closed by bus drivers.

The Ass, as you have probably guessed by now, is not all that fond of horses. Why the country needs a holiday just so these haughty high-caste mules can prance around in Tundikhel in front of a visibly bored President, a Prime Minister who looked like he’d rather be taking a nap and a CA Chairman who gave the distinct impression he had more urgent matters to attend to, is beyond me. With all this horsing around, no wonder the *New Constipation* is stuck amidst all the heavy load-shedding.

Which brings us to the **Only in Nepal Quote of the Week**. Energised Minister Prakash Mahat (whose first name means ‘light’, hahahaha) told the press: “I am happy to announce that the government has successfully ensured that loadshedding this year is not going to exceed 12 hours a day.”