WATER WEEK? A long wait at the communal taps in Nakabahil, Patan, Thursday.
O nly, global events have resonated strongly in Nepal. The uprisings in the Middle East reminded some of our recent past, the earthquake in Japan would have reminded others of a possible future. Both kinds of upheavals, human and natural, also had a more direct bearing on members of the Nepali diaspora who live and work in these places, and their worried families.

There are plenty of Nepalis still stranded in Libya and Japan, but our government has done little to assure their anxiety. Granted, Japan’s Nepalis may still be better off where they are. But hundreds live in fear of their lives in Libya. Despite a cabinet decision to repatriate them at the earliest, Libya’s Nepalis are largely dependent on the goodwill of others to get home before they are caught in the crossfire.

Instead, the government appears to be focused on implementing measures that attract a lot of attention but mostly inconvenience the public that does live here. The decisions to outlaw digitally printed number plates and banknotes with illegal tender, conduct transactions in the meantime? and neighbourhood bank to exchange what has been deemed taken, their implementation is bungled. Allowing both digital plates and kingly notes to be printed, there is no, so why let businesses cheat you anyway?, Marit Bakke, #544). I had no idea that the means plugs that they can pull based on what the issue is. If we were concerned with, I would have such policy tools to hand. So let’s see how India’s presence unfolds here. Saroj

### HIGHWAY TO HOPE

Very inspiring as well as enlightening (‘Road to prosperity’, Kunda Dixit, #544). I had no idea that the means by which roads are constructed can result in such different economics. Indeed, a road is not just a road if built correctly. It can result in such different economics. Indeed, a road is not just a road if built correctly.

- As a Bhojpure I think I have a right to ask a few questions – why was Bhojpur completely neglected by successive Panchayati governments and subsequently by Congress/ULML governments for so long? Why didn’t they deserve to be connected to rest of the country? Why this prejudice against the district of Ganeshs Rasik, who has probably written more books, but mostly inconvenience the public that does live here.
- Would a business take a candy if you were short a rupee? I think the answer is no, so why let businesses cheat you anyway?, Marit Bakke, #544).
- We do not know the value of money. Last time I was in Nepal, I made a point to ask for change from taxi drivers. When they would reluctantly hand me the change, I would hand it back, which surprised most of them. It was not because I did not want to tip them that I asked for change but to make them realise that it is their duty and my right to get the change back. I also made a point to carry change around. All of this is to say that as we customers need to be smart about our money. It all starts with us, because they are doing business and if they can squeeze the extra paisa out of the customers why wouldn’t they?

### CONSUMER RIGHTS

Loved the new article. Unaccounted for change may seem trivial but on an aggregate level it is substantial so a great job pointing it out (‘Don’t keep the change’, Paivani Mathema, #544). Also, we need to discuss what the next steps are to rectify the situation such as: a stronger enforcement of rule of law with retailers, a public feedback forum/platform (say a phone number that collects and publishes information from the public on which businesses engage in such practices).

- A business trade a candy if you were short a rupee? I think the answer is no, so why let businesses cheat you anyway?, Marit Bakke, #544).
- We do not know the value of money. Last time I was in Nepal, I made a point to ask for change from taxi drivers. When they would reluctantly hand me the change, I would hand it back, which surprised most of them. It was not because I did not want to tip them that I asked for change but to make them realise that it is their duty and my right to get the change back. I also made a point to carry change around. All of this is to say that as we customers need to be smart about our money. It all starts with us, because they are doing business and if they can squeeze the extra paisa out of the customers why wouldn’t they?

### CHANGE IN COURSE?

I think the article was interesting, but I seriously doubt Prashant’s assumption that Indian intelligence had not thought of such scenarios unfolding in Nepal (‘Re-engagement’, Prashant Jha, #544). The changes in leadership in Lainchaur which are soon to come and the invitation of Bhutan to India were all preliminary steps to set up how things can be influenced in Nepal again. A country such as India with its diplomatic and military leverage in Nepal cannot be influenced about the current situation. I am sure there was a contingency plan in place, I think by now India must have a set of plugs that they can pull based on what the issue is. If we were concerned with, I would have such policy tools to hand. So let’s see how India’s presence unfolds here.

### PROPPING UP CULTURE

Interesting piece. As usual for articles of this sort the most interesting questions are left in the air (‘Whose heritage is it anyway’, Mani Bakke, #544).

- How is it that our ancestors, who were less numerous, had less technology and were generally less well off than we are, were able to create these things but that we are not?
- We are already abandoning the cultural basis and philosophy that produces such things. Is it worthwhile to preserve these artifacts when we have abandoned the roots that produced them? No problems with preserving them as historical and artistic curiosities. But then why not simply build a museum to house them? Better and cheaper, and more honest.
- You cannot preserve culture. Culture is either dynamic and alive or dead. Only artifacts can be preserved. Therefore it is only natural that people who have loads of money should be the ones interested to keep them in good condition. This is much the same as the family which has fallen into hard times and wishes to sell some antiques that have been left rotting in the attic in order to buy the new car/buxhi/holiday/trains shoes or whatever.
- Indigenous culture?? This is just something for the tourist sales talk.

Glad you have fallen for it.

R Rai

### ON THE WEB

ON THE WEB

ON THE WEB

### WEEKLY INTERNET POLL #545

**Weekly Internet Poll #545**

Q. What does Nepal need most now?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Options</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>Healthcare</td>
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Total votes: 1,200

Q. Should ‘loosely notes’ have been ousted?

<table>
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<th>Options</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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Weekly Internet Poll #545. To vote go to www.timesnepal.com
A mong the multiple battles that play out every day in Nepali politics – between individuals, parties, identities, ideologies – few are as critical to our future as the relationship between state and capital, and capital and labour. Several incidents in the past few weeks reflect how Nepali capitalism, and capital and labour, coexist in an economy which it operates are struggling to find the right equilibrium.

Bankers are unhappy with central bank regulations. Lawmakers are unhappy with how banks are owned and run, and would like to redirect the economy, both in terms of nomenclature and policies. Businesses complain that the state does not deliver on its part of the bargain by providing infrastructure, electricity, security and stability, yet expects productive investment. Government complains that most businesses cheat on tax returns, engage in illegal practices, and undermine rules, making tighter control necessary.

Ministries point out how foreign investors use external influence to bend rules. Investors say government agencies and parties make life miserable for them by using draconian laws despite inviting them to invest in the first place, and seek to extract benefits relentlessly. Labour is unhappy with pay in times of soaring inflation, and periodic outbreaks through strikes and lockouts are fueled by unions. Capitalists say it is precisely these tactics that affects their bottom line even more adversely, diluting their capacity to create and spread wealth.

Add it up and it is indeed a mess, with direct negative consequences on revenue, employment, growth, social harmony, and political stability. How does such a dysfunctional system – laced with all the ingredients of conflict – manage to sustain itself at all?

Counter intuitive as it may sound, it endures because of politicians and corruption. Political leaders are the only ones who have a stake in and influence over the three elements that constitute our economic structure – the state, businesses, and unions. They encourage conflict at times, for instance by encouraging unions to push aggressively for pay hikes, or when government tries to squeeze particular businesses. But they step in to prevent these battles from crossing a certain threshold because their interests are also tied to the private sector.

Capitalists fund their election campaigns, pay jarobaees, and personal expenses. There is a relentless stream of requests from politicians to big companies to provide jobs to their constituents. Key business leaders have links spreading across party lines, and play an active behind-the-scenes role in stitching alliances together. Many political leaders, including Maoists and UML stalwarts who are pushing for greater control of private capital, have invested their unaccounted for wealth in industries and the service sector, using other businessmen as frontmen.

Corruption undermines rules, but also mitigates conflict. Businessmen buy over key labour leaders in exchange for stopping protests. Ministers strike deals with new investors and go easy on rules or non-payment of loans by businesses to state institutions. In the districts, government budgets drive local economic activity across sectors, and politicians distribute funds to their favoured contractors in return for a cut – as we will witness in the coming months as money trickles down from the centre and the pressure to spend increases before the fiscal year runs out.

This deeply distorted, ad hoc, and corrupt political-economic system has become normalised. It is these distortions and illicit networks that make it so pernicious that it would be greater anarchy. Imagine if politicians and businesses were not collaborating in myriad ways; imagine if the rule of law was indeed strictly implemented – which politician or private company would escape unscathed and what would the implications on the national economy be; imagine if there weren’t informal mechanisms and mediators to resolve capital labour disputes outside of tribunals.

This is no justification of how things are, merely an attempt to show how the system hasn’t broken down despite the weak fundamentals. If lawmakers try to alter the balance too drastically in favour of the state, there is a danger that business confidence will be further shaken and we will inherit the worst features of the license permit raj killing the entrepreneurial energy that Nepal witnessed post-1990. But the private sector, which remains dependent on government in multiple ways, would do well to recognize the new political realities, wherein a large section of the political class is uneasy about ‘neoliberalism’, and prepare accordingly.

For now though, the balance of power indicates that neither the state or the capital is powerful or developed enough to dominate the other. The uneasy accommodation will continue, till a systemic crisis breaks the compact.
To plot the trajectory of the downfall of Nepal Airlines, you have to go back to the 1995 pro-democracy movement. People power may have been good for the country, but it spelled disaster for the airline. The two main political parties of the time competed to milk the cash cow until it ran dry. Nepali Congress was in power for longer, so it had more time for mischief. Corruption, mismanagement and interference destroyed a once proud airline that was known for its viable international service that subsidised domestic air travel.

The list of scandals is long, but three stand out. The Lauda Air flying in South Africa. UML learnt from NC and tried to get kickbacks on later aircraft deals. Obsolete aircraft like 737-100s were leased just at the over-invoiced hourly lease rate of jets. Obsolete aircraft like 737-100s were leased just because the payoffs to politicians were higher. Today, the pickings have been thinner. It got to a point where good fully depreciated 727s that we heard are still flying in South Africa. UML learnt from NC and tried to catch even on engine maintenance contracts and other purchases. Just how much more we have to go back to the 1990s, when the airline was never allowed to grow and respond to that demand, Nepali passengers have to pay premium tariffs to foreign airlines. Most of the money our workers save through their blood and sweat doesn't even stay here with a Nepali airline. What could be more tragic than that?

Every time the airline has tried to add aircraft to respond to passenger demand, vultures have moved in to scuttle the deal. The current debate over the Airbus purchase is a case in point. The Europeans removed middlemen, and offered a package deal on a 330 and 320 for 16 per cent off the rack price. What did we do? We hauled the CEO off to jail for transferring Airbus Industrie. Cheating even on engine maintenance contracts and other purchases. Just how much more we have to go back to the 1990s, when the airline was never allowed to grow and respond to that demand, Nepali passengers have to pay premium tariffs to foreign airlines. Most of the money our workers save through their blood and sweat doesn't even stay here with a Nepali airline. What could be more tragic than that?

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Business talk
Pradeep Kumar Shrestha, Ex-President of FNCCI, led an 11-member business delegation to the 25th Confederation of Asia Pacific Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. The conference was attended by more than 400 delegates from 27 Asia-Pacific countries. Shrestha was nominated as one of the three executive committee members.

Milky deal
Bank of Kathmandu (BOK) and Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) have signed an agreement whereby BOK will grant loans to cooperatives recommended by DDC. Three-year loans will be granted for the purchase of livestock, dairy equipment and the establishment of dairy chilling plants.

All new
Nabil has launched China Union Pay (CUP), a bank card association similar to VISA. The card will be accepted by Nabil ATMs and POS network. Nabil has also opened its 47th branch in Gorkha.

Hi-tech
Telesat, distributor of Spice Mobile phone, has launched the Android 2.2 based touch phone, Mi-310. The phone is equipped with wifi, AGPS and GPS. The screen has a resolution of 320 x 480 pixels and comes with a 2MP camera.

Keeping time
Him Electronics has opened the first exclusive Timex outlet, The Time Factory, in Civil Mall, Sundhara. The store showcases international watch brands under the Timex Group. Timex was launched in Nepal a year ago.

New ride
CG Automobile, the sole authorised distributor of TVS motorbikes, has introduced Wego, a two-wheeler scooter. The 4-stroke 110cc scooter has wide tires to enhance balance. Available in black, white, brown and gold, Wego is priced at Rs 149,838.

Healing hands
Hotel Shangri-La, Kathmandu, has opened Spa By Healing Hands on its premises in Lazimpal. Operated by Malaysian spa professional Donald Cha, the spa offers traditional therapies. It also provides parlour services, nail art, yoga, meditation, massage therapy, body treatments, shirodhara, facial treatments and hand/foot treatments.

HIMAL
KHABARPATRIKA 15-29 March 2011

COVER
Economic Transition
Liquidity tensions
Transcript of Himalmedia interaction with bankers and Nepal Rastra Bank Governor Yubaraj Khatiwada

EDITORIAL
Government should inspire economic confidence

PROFILE
Tributes to KP Bhattarai
Purshottam Dahal: The road ahead for Nepali Congress
Dipakumar Upadhay: Memorable Kishunji NAMU, A radical Nepali Congress

REPORTS
Lessons from Japan for Nepal
The politics of media in the Madhes

www.himalkhabar.com
Student discount, please!

A student identity card is a highly valued asset in Nepal. So much so that even those who haven’t stepped into a classroom for years bribe the local photocopy guy into attesting one for them. Flash your student ID and the microbus conductor is compelled to charge you less, you get to see the zoo animals for cheap, and get discounted entry at many shows and exhibitions.

Things are set to get even better for students here. With the introduction of the International Student Identity Card (ISIC), held by over 4.5 million in 120 countries, Nepali students will now be able to extend discounts received to participating restaurants, clothing outlets, and bookstores.

Zen Nepal Tours and Travels, which introduced ISIC to Nepal, is upbeat about its prospects. “We thought it was a great opportunity to help students access more services,” says Mitali Ghosh, manager of Zen Nepal. The card is issued only to full-time students, aged above 12, at a cost of US$22. It is valid for a year and can be reissued at any ISIC provider around the world. In operation since January, Zen Nepal has already issued 125 ISICs.

A majority of the clients that visit Zen Nepal’s office for the new card are those who have been accepted into foreign universities. “Most issue this card for the discounts it provides on airfares,” explains Ghosh. “But there are even more benefits once they arrive at their destination.” Worldwide, 41,000 merchants accept ISIC.

Bhumi Puri, who has been marketing the ISIC card in Nepal, asserts that the card is not just for those about to leave the country. Zen Nepal has involved 150 local merchants in the ISIC discount program, and expects the number to reach 200 by the end of the month. “Students living here can avail themselves of 7-25 per cent discounts at participating stores,” says Puri. “And we have carefully selected businesses that are appropriate for students.”

It’s a win-win situation for the businesses too because it opens them to a pool of Nepalis who otherwise might not be able to afford their products as well as foreign students with ISIC cards who may visit Nepal.

For the same price, non-students can apply for a youth card for similar benefits, and teachers can also sign up for a special International Teacher Identity Card.

zennepal.com
Sadhu Friendship, 2002

Mundane motives often mix with spiritual aspirations when a person decides to join the brotherhood of sadhus. These young sadhus may have done so to be adventurous, or simply to be practical, with few other options if they were orphaned or impoverished.

While some sadhus value a more energetic and impressionistic approach to tilaka, others value precision and complexity in their body art, such as this Vaisnavite ascetic, who has written sacred text across his face.

Sadhvi, 2000

Though the vast majority of sadhus are men, women too renounce the worldly life for spiritual practice. Sadhvis, like the Vishnu devotee in this portrait, typically enter the ascetic life when they are older, usually widowed or still unmarried. Not all sects accept women, while a few are composed entirely of sadhvis.

Aghori, 2000

The Aghori sub-sect of Shaivas most closely resembles one of the earliest organised groups of Hindu ascetics, the Kapalkas or ‘bearers of skulls’. Like the modern-day Aghori, Kapalkas worshipped the terrifying manifestation of Shiva, Bhairab, and were known to perform human sacrifice. Though these extreme practices have evolved into symbolic acts today, the Aghori still use human skulls, as seen here. By drinking out of a skullcup (kapala) the sadhu partakes of the deceased’s life-force.

Volatile and unpredictable as they are, spontaneous photography of sadhus can be dangerous. You can easily be trampled or attacked if you immerse yourself in a naga baba procession after a mass Kumbha Mela bathing. There’s no such thing as achieving photographic acceptance within the Sadhu mandala. For me, photographing at ritual time is always the most dynamic and fluid. Once rapport has been established, a camera is tolerated, often with a sense of lila or maya, play and illusion.

My initial inexplicable attraction to the Sadhu world was mostly visual. As a photographer, I loved how they allowed their bodies to become symbols of the sacred from walking around naked to remind us of our naked selves, to wearing ash to remind us what our bodies become, to dreadlocks to remind us of our natural wild natures devoid of social convention. Their bodies are texts that speak volumes. A sadhu’s body is a map of the Hindu universe, for the body is a microcosm of the cosmos.

THOMAS L. KELLY

Sadhus are an enigma to me, living the mystery of ancient questions that have no answers. Tricksters, derelicts, madmen, charlatans, wanderers, mystics and yogis, their boldly painted bodies confront us with the essential questions at the heart of existence. Like walking mysteries of the human soul, for me, sadhus provoke the question, who am I?

In my adopted home of Kathmandu, some sadhus survive primarily off alms from tourists allowed to photograph them, considered a form of darshan. They are a spectacle and love to play their assigned role in the illusion or drama of society. Sadhus have formally abandoned conventional time; their world is dense with its own complex politics, social hierarchy, taboos and customs, often making access challenging.

While some sadhus value a more energetic and impressionistic approach to tilaka, others value precision and complexity in their body art, such as the Vaishnave ascetic, who has written sacred text across his face.

Thomas Kelly came to Nepal as Peace Corps Volunteer in 1978 and has lived here ever since. These photos are part of the exhibition ‘Body Language: The Yogis of India and Nepal’, currently showing at the Rubin Museum of Art, New York.

www.rmanyc.org
www.ThomasKellyPhotos.com
Call for entries for Film Southasia, Charoenkrung Road, Bangkok, 02 Garden, Soi Charoenkrung 36, 1 May Hemlata Pradhan. Watercolour paintings of unique students, Rs 20 for others birkha.aid@gmail.com, Rs 10 for Ravi Bhawan, 984172009, the fi (based on the Maoist con Film Show Rato Ghar Documentaries and 9808580436, 5528258 Chai Gallery and Cafe, Pulchok, Pratap Singh. Till 24 March, Chai selected works by Birendra of works showcased at the Chobi October, early submission deadline: (theatre, art exhibition, documen- 19 March to 17 April, 4pm, Radison Hotel, Lazimpat, 4411816, Rs 1,500 nett per person, includes BBQ platter, snacks and a bottle of San Miguel

**Getaways**

Charikot Panorama Resort, enjoy mountain views and local culture at the historic town of Charikot. Special packages on offer. Charikot, Dolakha, 5522093.

Overnight Package at The Dwarka’s Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, for local residents, package includes accommodation in Himalayan room, dinner and breakfast. Dhubikel, Rs 4,000 (Single), Rs 5,700 (Double). The package rates are subject to a 10% Service charge. For more information/ reservations call 4479458 Dwarka’s Hotel, Sales & Marketing Depart- ment.

Happy Holi at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Holi celebration, delicious Nepali and western food and a spectacular full moon view. 19 March, at the edge of Shivapuri National Park, Rs 1,800 per person, half price for children and overnight package for Rs 2,500 and Rs 3,500. 9851012455, info@shivapuricottage.com

**Dining**

**Milk Coffee & cocktail Durbar Margar**

Friday ladies Night Buy one get one free for ladies 98511 29 306

**Music**

Absolute Live Music, by Rashmi & Kichha Band every Friday and performances by Shabam & Cannabis Band every Wednesday.

Sunday Jazz Brunch, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu with live jazz music and vocals. Every Saturday, 7pm onwards, New Orleans Coffee Shop Garden, 5522708 for reservations.

Screening of Once, directed by John Carney. 19 March, 4pm. Docskool, Kathmandu Academy, Subash Chandra Bhawan premises, Narayani, 4411110.


Rata Ghar Documentaries and Film Show, screening of Astrakant (based on the Maoist conflict in Nepal) followed by a brief talk on the film. 20 March, 4pm, Rati Ghar, Ravi Bhawan, 984172009, birkha.aid@gmail.com, Rs 10 for students, Rs 20 for others.

**Events**

Chobi Mela VI: International Festival of Photography. selection of works showcased at the Chobi festival in Dhaka this year. 18 to 19 March, 6pm to 7.30pm. Bakery Cafe, Sundhara.

Lives and Faces, pictures from the Maccial insurgency in India by Mustafa Quraishi. 17 March to 17 April, 11am to 4pm, closed on Tuesdays, Sharad Sindhihata, Manas Puraskar Putalekhaya, Patan Dhaka, 5549948.

Mithila Cosmos: New Narratives, an exhibition of Mithila paintings by SC Bumen. Till 5 April, Siddhartha Art gallery, Babar Mahal Revisted, 4214048.

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Nepali films in...Toronto

SURENDRA LAWOTI

The Second Toronto Nepali Film Festival took place on 12 March this year, and drew over 300 film lovers from the Greater Toronto Area. Nine Nepali films were screened, comprising documentaries, shorts and experimental films. Jimmy Chintre, a Nepali realtor based in the Toronto suburb of Missisauga, said, “The program had a good mix; some films were funny, some intense, and some made you think.” The festival kicked off with The Last Race, a short fiction feature filmed in the Manang Valley. As Anjan Chettry, a TNFF director put it, “The film was so beautiful, just like a postcard.”

David Dunne, a Professor of Marketing at the University of Toronto, commented on the films: “There was plenty of praise for Forgive! Forget Not! as well, an experimental documentary by Pranay Limbu, based on a Nepali journalist’s 15-month detention in Kathmandu’s Bhaninasht barracks. It was awarded the Jurors’ Choice Award. Krishna Gaudel, an accountant who lives in downtown Toronto, said of Kesang Tseten’s In Search of the Rial: “In many ways I felt the story paralleled my own migratory experience.”

The film documents the exploited lives of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar and won one of the Audience Choice Awards. Sherpas: The True Heroes of Mount Everest won the other audience award. Boyan Mihaykov, a Bulgarian student, wondered why it was that “the western climbers pay $60,000 but the Sherpas only get $5,000?”

The festival was also a world premiere for Vancouver-based Pradeep Kumar Shrama’s The Rat Hunters. After a day of intense viewing, then, the festival closed with a story-telling dance performance by Kalimpong-born Deepali Lindbloom, and an energetic dance performance by Toronto’s very own Swechchha Pokharel. The author is the curator of the Toronto Nepali Film Festival.

For me, Jhamel arrived not when St. Mary’s Lane was overwhelmed by the attack of the restobar clones. It happened when trendy Black Pepper Cafe & Pub opened shop just around the corner from my phuphu’s junction, and Black Pepper is hitherto dominated by dowdy residence, joining the trendy Black Pepper Cafe &

Black Pepper

The Charcoal Jalkapur Fish with lemongrass sauce was generously presented, and the white flesh was firm, tasty, and offset perfectly by the browned crunch of the exterior. The battery of sauced veggies weren’t just an afterthought either, and my only complaint would be that the luridly yellow sauce, while an interesting variation, was a bit too much on the lemony side – less would have been more.

The Grilled Pork Chops (with mash and mixed salad) didn’t disappoint either, with a creamy apple sauce that lent the juicy, savoury meat a sweetish tinge. The visually stunning portion of the Tom Yum soup, on the other hand, was tasty but had little in common with the fiery original. The overly sweet and messy looking Flambe Crepe Suzette de Orange, too, didn’t quite come together.

Black Pepper, like many of its compatriots, has a solid line in thalis, momos, fried rice and the like. Now all they need to do is match the music with the consciously cool posters on the walls – a three-hour wifi session with Chris de Burgh, Cliff Richards and The Carpenters on loop just about did my head in.

Head south from the Summit Hotel, pass Greenwich, then a junction, and Black Pepper is on your right.

Space ★★★★★
Bread ‘n water ★★★★★
Service ★★★★★
Deal-icious ★★★★
Repeat? ★★★☆☆
Free cancer treatment?

In 2001, Dr. Mark Zimmerman, then director of Patan Hospital, was left flabbergasted when a patient of his insisted that free treatment for his cancer was readily available. Fortuitously, Krishna Prasad had discovered Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML), a form of blood cancer. Zimmerman was puzzled because he knew the revolutionary drug Glivec, named, Glivec (Imatinib), easily cost $30,000-40,000 per annum, and it needed to be taken year after year. And here Krishna was saying he was getting it for free.

Incredibly, what Krishna had discovered through the internet was true. Novartis, a Swiss drug company working with the Max Foundation, was providing this drug pro bono to poor patients with CML in the developing world. In Nepal today, there are over 500 patients with CML being treated with free Glivec. In Kathmandu, Dr. Gyan Kasyathya helps run the programme from Patan Hospital and Bhaktapur also has a similar set up. For the oncologist (cancer doctor), Glivec has become a poster boy in the treatment of cancer. Unlike other cancer drugs that kill cells indiscriminately in the human body, Glivec targets specific cells and genes. The target in this case is the Philadelphia chromosome, which characterises and helps diagnose CML. The tremendous expense of developing cancer drugs would be worthwhile if the drugs cured or even promised a lasting remission. However, the vast majority of new cancer drugs achieve very modest results. Hence the excitement when an anti-cancer drug like Glivec is found to be so exceptionally effective. Unfortunately, as often happens with drug therapy, resistance to this wonder drug has developed, but thankfully new drugs to overcome this resistance are available.

The good news is that the generous people of Patan Hospital and Bhaktapur have been able to help many poor patients cured of CML. The bad news is that there are still many who have not received the medical treatment they need. As Dr. Zimmerman says, they cannot help the many who are still in need of the same treatment. The programme is also very much in need of financial support.
When I purchased a mountain bike a year ago, I didn’t really see myself hurtling down hills and through forests, threading narrow paths demarcating fields, and protesting the calls of ‘Kuire! Kuire! Kuire!’ flung our way by irrepressible village brats. I didn’t see myself somersaulting through the air to land in a jumble of bruises, cuts and snapped bike chains either. Yet all of the above eventuated last weekend on a trip to Nirakar Yakhumba’s cycling resort across the Rapti from Hetauda.

I’m an inveterate walker, and love nothing so much as a wander in the hills of this country nature has blessed and cursed in equal measure. Walking clears the mind: not so much to work through one’s issues as to simply clear the mind of mental furniture, and luxuriate in the sensation of being, in an environment. I bought the bike to commute, thinking I might venture out on longer trips when the occasion presented itself. But apart from one flying downhill ride from Dhulikhel, I was pretty much just shuttling from home to work, braving the mad micros and bastard buses, smug in the fact that I was only ingesting and not producing smoke, and smugger in the face of petrol queues.

Then the occasion presented itself, and I loaded my bike onto one of two pickups heading to Hetauda, not knowing quite what to expect. It was only when my travelling companions began pointing out what to me were the ubiquitous cattle and walking trails with cries of “Check out that single track!”, and trading stories studded with a jargon wholly alien to me (pump track, free ride, bunny hop) that I realised I wasn’t just going to be easing along country roads, stopping to admire the scenery every now and again. Off-road cycling is not for the faint-hearted. Connoisseurs of the sport will take almost any trajectory to get where they want to go, and whether there is a track to follow or not is immaterial (though it might be quite material if you ‘biff’ or do a ‘superman’, also known as an ‘involuntary dismount’). Of course, if you do feel faint-hearted, you simply walk or lug your bike up and down the impossible bits (to the amusement of village boys turned out to see you do stunts). But once you feel confident enough to look up and away from the ground beneath your feet, you can’t help but begin to see the villages, their inhabitants, and their surroundings. In the relative ease of the Chure, mountain and Tarai come together most perfectly.

In the mornings, we beheld the glassy flats of watered fields dotted with farmerfolk looking up with a smile and a remark, as the morning mist cleared across the river. In the evening, as the huge orange disc of the sun sank below the treeline, we wound weary and sated through quiet sal forests. And in the heat of the day? We put the ‘resort’ into the owner’s vision, and resorted to cold beer by the pool.

Nirakar Yakhumba has a vision beyond the celebrity afforded him by 1974AD, one of Nepal’s most loved and durable rock bands. It involves transforming a few bighas of land into a resort, complete with rooms, tented camps, a fish farm, piggery and yes, a ‘pump track’, to attract cyclists keen to explore the countryside around Hetauda. “I just want people to cycle, to get out of the city, to exercise, to have fun,” he says. “I want Nepalis to come here for the weekend, with their families.” For now, it may well be ‘kuires’ who will heed his call. But soon, one hopes, the village boys will be compelled to change their tune.

Nirakar Yakhumba’s cycling resort outside Hetauda is a call to arms for all those Nepalis with bikes that don’t see the mountains.
In 2001, Bamyan made the news when the Taliban destroyed huge 6th century statues of the Buddha. The province, home of the Hazara people, is now slowly rebuilding itself and is trying to re-open its doors to tourism. Bamyan is a UNESCO world heritage site.

Bamyan visited Nepal this week to learn from Nepal’s tourism experience and understand tourism models that involve the private sector and the community. The group visited Bandipur, Pokhara and Kathmandu. “Nepal serves as a positive example for us,” says Amir Foladi of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Afghanistan, who is leading the study tour. In 2009, he led a group of Afghan officials to Nepal to introduce them to tourism.

Foladi says that the tour has allowed the group to understand that development of tourism with the involvement of the private sector and the community can be highly beneficial. “We saw that the local people were very involved in tourism and that this helps the tourists to get acquainted with the area’s culture firsthand,” says Foladi. “We also saw that local traditions have been incorporated into the hotels and tourist centres, allowing tourists to experience something different and at the same time be comfortable.”

In Kathmandu, the group studied the workings of the Nepal Tourism Board so that a similar institution can be established in Bamyan to market its potential. Says Foladi: “Our group is taking a pool of ideas from Nepal, and we hope to implement those ideas back home to develop Bamyan’s tourism.”

I
Quakes and nukes

JEMIMA SHERPA in HACHINOHE, JAPAN

When the magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck in Hachinohe in northern Honshu Friday afternoon, the shake seemed to go on for an eternity. Despite the panic, I thought, “I’m so glad this is happening in Japan and not back home.” In my eight months in Japan, earthquakes have been frequent and often strong. During a 7.2 the previous Wednesday, my Japanese co-workers seemed unfazed, more so than on the alert rather than ducking for cover.

The power outage was the first indicator of the seriousness of Friday’s quake. Here in Aomori prefecture, damage seemed minimal – my telephone fell off its perch and danced across the floor, and spice boxes tumbled in the countertop. While dire predictions of what will happen when even a modest event strikes this haphazard, overcrowded Kathmandu have been around for decades, Japan is lauded for its meticulous disaster planning and strict building codes. Even my second-floor apartment is constructed to sway accommodatingly during seismic activity, and every neighborhood is close to at least one school or public building that doubles as an emergency contact centre and refuge.

As an island nation, tremors are only the beginning of the crisis in Japan. Feeding a tsunami warning, a friend and I evacuated to the school I work for to spend the night. Despite strong aftershocks, the atmosphere was surreally calm. We cruised through the city towards the hills, the legendarily courteous Japanese nodding and bowing their way through intersections with deft traffic lights. Stopping at convenience store, we grabbed junk food off emptying shelves before joining a snaking but orderly queue to pay. “Anywhere else we could have just been looking by now,” we joked feebly.

The school was stocked with emergency lights, battery-powered radios, kerosene heaters, and a varied selection of instant ramen and energy drinks. Other evacuees arrived with well-packed emergency bags, putting our hastily assembled jumble to shame, and were duly documented. Teachers even had hand-powered dynamos to recharge their mobile phones, which are built to pick up television signals – we watched news being broadcast by presenters in hard hats under lights swaying from aftershocks. The electricity and high-speed internet services were off for less than 36 hours in some neighbourhoods, and water supplies unaffected. Cell phone reception was patchy but often still serviceable. Even amidst reports that this was Japan’s biggest earthquake on record, for many people in Hachinohe the conditions were arguably an improvement on your average winter Friday evening in Kathmandu.

Only when driving through the devastated port areas the next day did the extent of the damage become apparent. Fishermen were surveying beached shrimping boats and smashed trawlers. Cars were tipped over and lodged almost comically against buildings, and the streets were full of debris and a thick sludge. When power was gradually restored from Saturday evening on, news footage showed that Aomori had been extremely fortunate in comparison to neighbouring prefectures to the south.

Worse, the initial explosion at the Fukushima reactor was dominating coverage even as rescue and recovery workers scrambled to find survivors. Further explosions, venting of radioactive material and fires plagued the plant, until Tuesday the government announced radiation in the area had reached levels dangerous to human life. Japan began producing nuclear power in the 1960s, and the country’s enviable infrastructure and status as the world’s third largest economy depends on its thermonuclear power program. Speculation is rife that officials may be downplaying the risk, involved as the over 50 other plants must continue to function for the Japanese economy to recover.

In Japan, the national propensity for pragmatism, preparedness and social order greatly reduced the impact of the actual earthquake and the aftershocks, and precluded mass hysteria, looting and price gouging. However, the geographic realities of living in islands with volatile tectonic plates along the eastern coast make the tsunami risk something essentially impossible to guard against. It is hard to say if the combined earthquake-tsunami-nuclear trifecta of threats will prove more deadly than the poverty, poor construction and lack of disaster preparation that marked the Haiti quake in 2010. Certainly, when a major quake hits Kathmandu, the aftermath will have more in common with the latter than with Japan or the recent Christchurch earthquake.

Most worrying of all, the Nepali public is woefully unaware of how best to prepare for and react to an emergency situation. Japan’s devastation would undoubtedly have been much, much worse without the years of earthquake preparation and drills that preceded it. Still, the steam and smoke belowing from the reactors have something in common with the deadly rubble of massive ‘tall’ buildings in China’s Sichuan and even the horror of the BP oil spill.

As the world continues to move towards high-density urban living with ever-increasing energy demands, avarice and hubris prompts us to build systems and structures that ultimately prove as destructive as nature’s worst. In Nepal’s desperation to join the charmed clique of developed countries, too often we unsuccessfully chase their dreams without learning from their mistakes. Japan teaches us that it’s always worth preparing for the worst, and that includes keeping our consumption in check.
Madhes media politics

Navin Jha in Himal Khabarpatra, 15-29 March

Rajendra Mahato, president of Sadbhavana Party, has built a small media empire in the Madhes. He publishes the daily Madhes Post from Malangawa and Janakpur. Now he is set to launch FM radios in these districts. The Mahato-run Radio Madhes will also be aired from Rautahat.

However, Mahato is not the only Madhesi leader running media outlets for politics. TMLP Vice President Brisheshchandra Lal runs Janaki FM in Janakpur. TMLP leader Bijay Kumar Singh owns Janakpur FM. Maoist leader Subhash Yadav runs Radio Jaleshwarnath. MP(D) leader Ram Aadhar Kapadi is the promoter of Appan Mihila. Unity Centre (Mashal) leader Chakradev Kamati runs Salahesah FM in Siraha. UML leaders run Samagra FM in Siraha.

Analysts say the involvement of the Madhesi leaders in FM radio will prove disastrous as they are primed to promote their own political interests. Bijay Mishra, who did his PhD on the Madhes movement, believes that conflict is imminent. “Initially, they invested in the media at the local level as they felt excluded by the Kathmandu-centric media. But unhealthy competition has cropped up that will lead to a conflict,” he says.

TMLP president Mahendra Yadav, for instance, was transferred to Local Administration from the Ministry of Commerce and Industries when the previous government reshuffled its cabinet. Radio Madhes of Sadbhavana Party subsequently aired the news that Yadav had been demoted. Mishra says this kind of propaganda will instigate conflict among leaders and critics of their opponents.”

Navin Jha

Dr Shanti

Despite living in the jungles of Sirsha-6, Rajayakata, the Raute rush their sick directly to health centres, pregnant Raute women get pre- and post-natal care, and they are all aware of family planning methods. At the forefront of this positive development is Shanti Shahi, the village’s only Raute female health volunteer.

Although illiterate, Shahi has been actively contributing to health awareness for 13 years. Everyone in the community calls her “doctor”. “When I was 30 years old, my first baby died because he could not get medical treatment,” says Shahi. “We didn’t know about hospitals or health centres then. I work like this so that there is awareness and everyone has access to health care.”

Earlier, many female health volunteers from outside the community had attempted to serve the Rautes but with little success. “It was important to involve a Raute to provide access to health services to the community,” says Bir Bahadur Chami, a health worker. “Shahi has helped minimise health problems in the Raute community.”

Shahi was recently recognised for her contribution by the Dadeldhura Trade and Commerce Association. Says Shahi: “I am happy that I have been able to do something for my community and will continue to serve them.”

Barun Paneru

Kids launch book

Bambai Krishna Shrestha in Himal Khabarpatra, 15-29 March


Jauwa walked for two days from Rama Roshan-4 to Mangalsen to take part in a two-day workshop conducted by the NGO Coordination Committee for UNICEF, on the problems faced by and opportunities for adolescents. There were 28 participants, she jointly released the report and concluded the launch. Participants also staged plays followed by a cultural show.

The report examines the condition of 70 million children across the globe. Saying that children’s issues should be taken seriously, Brittain said, “Providing education and health facilities is not enough for adolescents. We should listen to them and consider what physical and psychological discomforts they may be suffering from.”

Third grader Jauwa tops her class even while helping out her mother at home, and has seven siblings. Her father rears goats. At the start of the workshop, she was understandably shy. But two days wrought a transformation. By the end of the program, she was addressing a public gathering.

Barun Paneru

FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
Mustafa Quraishi is a noted Indian photojournalist and his images have been published widely around the world. After being assigned to Hyderabad, he started documenting the Indian Maoist insurgency by travelling frequently into the hinterland. In doing so he delved into the other side of India: not the gleaming glass blocks of multinationals and the call centres of ‘Cyberabad’, but the tribal areas where state neglect has fed a violent uprising.

Images of the other Maoist war

Quraishi’s photographs will go on display for a month on 17 March, alongside an exhibition of images from Nepal’s own Maoist war at the Shanti Sangralaya in Patan Dihoka. The pictures depict the reality of everyday life for Naxalite guerrillas: women fighters lay down their guns to cook, read, hold babies; guerrillas stand on patrol as villagers look on; a police officer in the city exhibits criminals posing as Maoists wearing black hoods to the media. For Nepalis, these pictures are particularly striking because they could have been taken during our own 1996-2006 insurgency. Andhra Pradesh could very well be Dang.

India’s Maoist conflict has been described by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as the country’s “biggest internal security threat”. Spread over 200 districts in 20 of India’s 28 states, covering 40 per cent of the country’s area, the Maoists now control 92,000 sq km of territory, mostly forests. About 10,000 people have been killed in the last 30 years of low-intensity conflict.

“This is a social movement that has acquired terror ramifications and the only way to deal with it is to understand the socio-economic roots, which is what I have tried to portray in my work,” says Quraishi, who was in Kathmandu for the launch of his exhibition.
All this week, Speaker Name Bang must have felt like a school principal. Out of the 597 members in his august house, a head count showed that attendance of CA members was an average of 62, like 10%. Where are all the others? One CA member was traveling to Australia on some other CA member’s passport (Only in Nepal: “In an emergency the passport of one legislator is endorsable to another legislator provided the two bear a photographic resemblance.”). Others came to BICC just to collect their allowances and slipped out to do some moonlighting on secondary jobs.

Will someone explain this to me? Maoists and the Eh-Maleys are both in the coalition, right? Both have affiliated trade unions and student unions that they use to spread mayhem when necessary. So far, so good. But even though both parties are in government, their student unions have taken turns in shutting down Kathmandu University for more than two weeks now because of an election wrangle. No sooner had the Cranticurry withdrawn its strike than the Eh-Maley union shut down the college. Bravo! Yay!

Then down in Hetauda, the FNCCI was negotiating a salary increase with the unions of all the three big parties. Agreement had been reached with one wing of a government-affiliated party when another wing of another govt-affiliated party decided to continue with the strike. A baddie is the labour minister but his union strikes against his own party? Bravissimo!

Just to make things more exciting, the Cranticurry trade union is now split three ways, which means extortion has increased three-fold and negotiations with the Jamcuttle factions is not acceptable to the Budgegain faction, and both are not valid for the Limbo-led union. Extortion has increased three-fold and negotiations with the Jamcuttle factions is not acceptable to the Budgegain faction, and both are not valid for the Limbo-led union. Extortion has increased three-fold and negotiations with the Jamcuttle factions is not acceptable to the Budgegain faction, and both are not valid for the Limbo-led union.

The Mau Mau have finally responded to the universal demand to dismantle the YCL by creating a Super YCL that they have inventively called the ‘People’s Volunteer Bureau’. It will include guerrillas in cantonments, disqualified fighters, baddie students and workers. Just proves what the Ass has been braying about for three years now, that whatever name they go by (PLA, YCL, ANASFU-R, UNCPM, Khaobuddies, SNAFU-R) they are all baddies at heart. The new vanguard Bureau is being led by none other than Comrade Netra, an acolyte of Com Kiran himself. The Bureaucats will be deployed if all hell breaks loose on 28 May and the Baddies need to unleash a Red Oktober kranti. That is the plan, anyway.

‘Tis the season to be restless, Here today, GON tomorrow and with the coming of spring everyone is on the warpath. Jumla airport has been closed for two weeks by women protesting air fare hikes, and the party front organisations are all coming out of hibernation to compete with each other to declare rival bunds next month.

This is also the season to travel and see the world. A delegation of Madhesi parties is in Delhi to meet mentors about forming a united centre-right front. Almost-PM Dahal has been invited once more by the non-existent Asia-Pacific Foundation to Singapore but the bet is he is meeting his uncooked handlers again, and stopping by at the bank as long as he is there. But soon after he returns, Fierceness is preparing to visit India, even ahead of Jhola Nath who can’t seem to wangle an invite.