Those who think there is no hope for Nepal should just look at Bihar. Until a decade ago, it was India’s poorest, most corrupt, violence prone state. Today, twice-elected Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is busy transforming his state, turning ‘Bihar’ from a pejorative word into one that evokes praise. To be sure, Bihar has a lot of catching up to do. But it is on the right track: for the past five years, the state has posted an 11 per cent growth rate even though its mineral-rich south had broken away. Bihar is an example of how elections can throw up enlightened and accountable rulers who can deliver. If Bihar can do it so can we.

**SKA and PUNK**

Kathmandu’s punk underground stages a semi-secret concert where it holds forth with rage lyrics.

**BIHAR FOCUS**

**Editorial**

Going the Bihar way

**By the Way**

Glimpses of Bihar by Anurag Acharya

**Interview with Nitish Kumar**

“We want to see Nepal develop.”

**Winds of change south of the border**

**Trash into cash**

Garbage brought down from Mt Everest are being recycled into souvenir trinkets to fund future cleanup operations.
A new article in this newspaper in 2000 (6b) reminded the fact that Nepal bordered India's poorest state and asked: "Is Nepal going the Bihar way?" Bihar used to be a pejorative word, a collective noun that encapsulated everything that was wrong with India: inequality, injustice, insurgency and indigence. It was synonymous with crime, corruption and caste. Nepal was in the same boat, but somewhere deep inside we felt superior because we thought there was a place worse off than us. This was proven by the numbers of beggars on Thamel sidewalks, the scavengers on our dustpans, the barbers from Darbhanga, vegetable vendors from Motihari and plumbers from Muzzafarpur.

How tables have turned. Unbeknownst to most Nepalis, Bihar is being rapidly transformed after the election of Nitish Kumar in 2005. One indication of this is that the barbers, traders and plumbers have gone back to Bihar, not just from Kathmandu but from other parts of India as well. Haryana farmers now line up at railway stations in the harvest season with sacks of cash to grab Bihar farmlands as they get off trains. After hitting bottom, Bihar had nowhere to go but up. For the past five years, the state has posted an annual 11 per cent growth even though its mineral-rich south had broken away, Nitish Kumar; a chela of great Indian socialist Jaya Prakash Narayan, had taken a four-fold path to uplift its state: crime, education, healthcare and roads. Massive investment in infrastructure has created jobs, and also improved connectivity to remote villages so that farm produce now has access to markets. Because the best rate of return on investment is in educating girls, he is heavily subsidising female enrollment. He has ensured basic health services even in remote areas and is now working on a state-wide health insurance scheme. And he has taken crime and impunity head-on with a carrot-and-stick approach of cleaning up the judiciary and police. When our reporters Anurag Acharya and Navin Jha interviewed Nitish Kumar earlier this week in Patna, the chief minister had just returned from a visit to China to woo investors. He admits there are huge challenges ahead. Like in Nepal, there is a backdrop of neglect and social injustice to be addressed. But, as he says in our interview, "The task was enormous, but one had to start somewhere, and I stuck to basics."

With India's huge corruption scandals, there are those here who call India's democracy dysfunctional and warn the democrats of our new constitution not to use its blueprint. Bihar is an example of how elections can throw up enlightened and accountable rulers. Nitish Kumar was re-elected last year on performance in elections that were the freest, completely peaceful and had the highest-ever turnout of women voters. Bihar is proof that democracy is necessary for development, to ensure service delivery. But, as Nitish Kumar has shown, you have to also simultaneously tackle crime and corruption which can undermine gains.

For all those who despair about Nepal ever turning around, we can only say: if Bihar can do it so can we. Our leaders should stop promising Nepalis that they will turn this country into Switzerland or Singapore. Is Nepal becoming another Bihar? Let's hope so.
Glimpses of Bihar

When there is so much to do to catch up, progress can be slow

Anurag Acharya

The 5:30 am Hajipur Express from Raxaul was uncannily familiar. I had travelled through Bihar many times in the last three years on my way to university in Delhi and back. But Bihar then was just a moving picture from the train window. This time, me and my colleague Navin Jha explored the state which was less known for its glorious history and more for notorious politics and crime.

We reached Hajipur at noon and from there shared an auto rickshaw with 12 people. It was 40 degrees but I instantly felt at home. For the next two days we wandered around the streets of Patna till late at night. Navin had been there before and told me how much Patna had changed. We ate dinner at a local dhaba and were surprised to see families up and about at midnight. A woman with her sister-in-law and four year-old-son had come out to eat panipuri on Boring Road. “I still remember the days when women were attacked on the streets of Patna in the broad daylight,” she said, but things have improved now and we feel safe going on our own even at night.”

On the third day of our visit, we went to the Department of Information. The walls were plastered with portraits of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s with enthusiastic quotes about his vision of a poverty-free and corruption-free Bihar. But when there is so much to do to catch up, progress can be slow. Outside, we came across a slum in the middle of the VIP zone. Around 10 small tents made out of patched plastic bags were scattered under the sign board that read Netaji Marg. Obviously, the Netas including ‘Susasan Babu’ Nitish Kumar had not yet noticed these half-clad men and women outside their gate wallowing in the filthy water that had overflowed from a nearby drain. An eight-year-old boy paralysed by polio and visibly malnourished was lying in the pavement staring blankly at the sky while flies swarmed around his face. Few meters ahead, the mother who was peeling at half dried potatoes looked up for a second and then went about her work.

In Mahnar we tracked down Professor Prafull Kumar Singh, a social critic. We had run out of our mobile batteries, and as I reached for my charger the professor waved his hand and said, laughing; “You are not in Patna my dear. This is Bihar.” Power demand soars in the hot season and electricity is rationed, just like back home.

He took us to the nearby block office where the newly elected gram panchayat members were being sworn-in. Women in Bihar have been given 50 per cent reservation in local bodies while the Laalus and Mulayams continue to block women’s bill from being tabled in the parliament. Women in Bihar have been given 50 per cent reservation in local bodies while the Laalus and Mulayams continue to block women’s bill from being tabled in the parliament.

Yeti Airlines

Yeti Airlines (Nepal) Ltd.

We at Yeti Airlines share your concerns about climate change and are doing our little bit to help the world grow into a greener place. So, in partnership with the Global Green Business Centre of the ICCR, we have launched the “Green Yeti” campaign.

For every passenger flying on the Kathmandu-Kumbhakarna-Bilaspur route, we will plant a sapling in the famous green belt, which will serve as a protective barrier against the floods in the area.

“Flying is not the only thing we do”

As part of our social responsibility, Yeti Airlines donates 10% of its profits to the following social organisations, involved in various social activities.

1. Green Yeti
2. Nepal Trust Fund
3. The United Mission to Nepal (UMN) for the benefit of all Nepalese, and works towards the upliftment of the people of Nepal and the Nangi people.
4. CMCF (a non-governmental organisation that rehabilitates victims of torture and trauma affected violence, through related violence, etc.); it is involved in the related activities.
5. Human rights in Nepal.

“Yeti Airlines is the only airline in the world that has been awarded the Certificate of Recognition for its efforts in the global fight against climate change.”

The certificate was presented to Yeti Airways for its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint by 1% in the year 2010.

The certificate is a reflection of the airline’s commitment to environmental responsibility and sustainability, and is a testament to the airline’s ongoing efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and minimize its impact on the environment.

Yeti Airlines is dedicated to sustainable practices and strives to reduce its carbon footprint through various initiatives, including the use of fuel-efficient aircraft, the implementation of energy-saving measures at its facilities, and the use of renewable energy sources.

Yeti Airlines is committed to being a responsible member of the global community and is dedicated to making a positive impact on the environment through its operations and initiatives.

Yeti Airlines also supports various community and charitable organizations, and is committed to giving back to the communities in which it operates.

Yeti Airlines is proud to be recognized for its efforts in reducing carbon emissions and is committed to continuing its efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainability.

Yeti Airlines is a socially responsible airline that is dedicated to reducing its carbon footprint and minimizing its impact on the environment.

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**“Let’s not be the laughing stock”**

Ramesh Singh Malla worked for many years in Nepal before joining ActionAid International as CEO. He was visiting fellow to the Hauser Centre for Nonprofit Organisations at Harvard University and will soon be joining the Open Society Institute in New York.

Nepali Times: How is Nepal’s development record viewed by the international community?

Ramesh Singh Malla: My impression is that the international donor and development community generally likes Nepal for a positive and welcoming attitude of Nepali government and institutions for anything donors bring to or do in Nepal, the ability to do more for less money and for hard work frontline communities and institutions put in. However, I doubt that we command respect of donors and international communities. Our institutions are weak, even corrupt, and we lack the vision, determination and strength to negotiate international assistance on our own terms. If we are able to do that not only would we command their respect but also would have made much better out of all international assistance that comes to the country.

What have been Nepal’s greatest achievements so far?

A lot of progress has been made in physical infrastructure like roads and telecommunications. All physical quality of life indices such as life expectancy, child mortality, maternal mortality, school enrolment etc show great progress. The UN HDR 2010 congratulated Nepal for making the third fastest progress in HDR over the period between 1970-2010. And of course, the restoration of democracy is worth being proud of, even though the present political chaos and utter failure to bring out our new constitution makes us a bit of a laughing stock.

What else have we failed in?

Nepal continues to be one of the poorest countries in the world and all international reports and rankings put Nepal near the bottom. The basic feudal and patriarchal structure of the society and our institutions continues to remain violent, exploitative, discriminatory and corrupt with impunity. Our institutions and politics are still dominated by leaders who have failed us over and over again and continue to divide society.

Are you going to return to Nepal to try to set things right?

During my two decades of work in Nepal, it has never failed to amaze me how our community-led efforts have done wonders even in the bleakest times. These are the things Nepal can be proud of and teach other countries too. There is a lot of hope for this country, especially with the younger generation taking charge. I wish to work with them.
T
the last time a Nepali voter elected a local representative was in 1997 – 14 years ago. Since then, she has not had a chance to freely choose her own representative on a periodic basis at the village, district or city level. As a result, for the last 10 years, 3,915 VDCs and 58 small towns have not had a fresh supply of competitively elected public officials, village chairpersons, mayors and so on.

Nothing is more damning about our Democracy (the one with a capital ‘D’, and the one that is about to become synonymous with the heads of major political parties in Kathmandu) than the fact that it has completely smothered democracy (the one with a lowercase ‘d’, and the one that is about how ordinary people in all corners of Nepal choose local representatives to provide local public services without always obsessively having to worry about what party heads think and do to one another in the capital).

How did we come to this stage? In 2002, six years after the start of the Maoist insurgency and at the end of the five-year electoral cycle, the then-Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba could have called for local elections. But amidst the drumbeat of Maoists’ threats to incite more violence, worries about safety and possible victories of Maoist sympathizers led Deuba to dilly-dally and ultimately decide otherwise. His decision ultimately led to him being sacked for ‘incompetence’ by the then-king.

Deuba replaced locally elected officials with government bureaucrats. Thinking that this was a temporarily necessary measure put in place until the insurgency could be quashed, the mainstream pundits and the press did not challenge Deuba’s decision at the time.

Looking back, it’s fair to say that Deuba’s decision and the further decision by all political parties to keep the issue of local elections on the backburner seem to have sucked the life out of our Democracy. What’s more, they have contributed to the state of affairs that we are seeing today, whereby Nepal’s Democracy has not risen above Kathmandu’s ‘party heads’ personality-based politics.

To no one’s surprise, the vacuum created by the absence of locally elected bodies was occupied by politically appointed bureaucrats and local outfits of all major political parties.

These outfits constantly quarrel with one another, engage in corruption, and derive their power not by winning the elections on the backburner seem to have sucked the life out of our Democracy. What’s more, they have contributed to the state of affairs that we are seeing today, whereby Nepal’s Democracy has not risen above Kathmandu’s ‘party heads’ personality-based politics.

Democratic has to be locally responsive to deliver development

After taking over from Deuba in 2005, the king held local elections. Those were boycotted by most political parties. Since the king’s absolute rule did not command legitimacy in the eyes of the many, whatever the elections concluded, it did not last long.

In Dadeldhura, CA members went on a rampage and beat up school headmasters in front of students and parents, forcing them to resign. There was no local recourse because everyone knew that the fist-wielding politicians enjoyed their Kathmandu-based party heads’ blessings.

Early this year, Chitwan was proud that all its residents were about to have access to improved sanitation services. Its residents looked forward to declaring Chitwan Nepal’s first open-defecation free district. But long-running local party-political quarrels over who gets how much over what contracts put a damper on the residents’ enthusiasm.

Locally responsive democracy is the heart and soul of Democracy. Unless we achieve it in a competitively electoral manner, the hollow smugness of Democracy would only add to bad governance on all levels.
After a series of exposes on VAT bill fakers was uploaded to mysansar.com in April, the Press Council sought clarification from the popular blog site, acting on a complaint. The blog named an industrialist and also listed other tax defaulters. The personal assistant of the businessman filed a complaint, which led the Council, as is the practice, to demand a clarification. However, this time the answer was sought not from a mainstream newspaper but a blog site which does not fall under the Council’s jurisdiction.

The Press Council Act of 1992 is silent on blogs and its code of conduct is not binding for bloggers. My Sansar, nevertheless, responded to the call and defended itself saying it had investigated a relevant story that the mainstream media dared not cover.

The case jumpstarted a discussion among bloggers about whether the Press Council can, or should, add blogs to its existing mandate. Blogger Ujjwal Acharya says that the Council’s terms of reference can include blogs.

“Compulsory registration for blogs is against the standard norm. But the choice of registration with the Press Council should be left to bloggers, and this would also make them eligible to receive government ads,” says Acharya.

Across the world, privacy and defamation issues are clashing with the free-for-all on internet sites, leading to calls for regulation. This is being fiercely resisted by bloggers and citizen journalists who say the mainstream press is seriously compromised by commercial bias and advertising pressure.

If Nepali blogging sites start accepting revenue from government ads, would they have dared to carry the fake VAT item? The national broadsheets did not touch the story, and bloggers may not either in future if they are beholden to government regulators or to corporate interests.

Mainstream journalists are prone to question the credibility of blogs, while ignoring the limitations to their own ability to cover certain stories. For example, the fake VAT bill story was largely ignored by the mainstream press, probably

Since Edmund Hillary’s ascent of Mt Everest in 1953, approximately 35,000 trekkers and 80,000 porters have visited the region each year leaving behind a total of 50 tons of waste. If it was all piled up on top of Mt Everest, the mountain could very well be higher than 9,000 m.

The garbage ranges from plastic food wrappers and beer bottles up to base camp, and climbing rope, aluminium ladders, oxygen cylinders higher up. There are even crushed remains of an Italian helicopter that crashed at Camp 2 in the Western Cwm in 1972, which is only now emerging from the Khumbu Ice Fall. Most of the waste is at Base Camp or the South Col, but even the summit is littered with trash.

“Up until 2008, there was no organised cleanup of the mountain,” says Dawa Steven Sherpa, who for the last four years has led Eco Everest Expedition initiative, a privately funded cleanup campaign. In its first year, the team brought back 975 kg of waste, and this year 1,068 kg. The garbage is brought...
trash

The tail rotor of a helicopter, whiskey bottles, rusted cans, oxygen cylinders and aluminium ladders

to Namche, where it is separated into biodegradable and non-biodegradable items. Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, a local group responsible for waste management in Khumbu, turns the biodegradable waste into compost. But the cans, cylinders and mountaineering equipment are stored in a warehouse in Khumjung and are air-lifted to Kathmandu every time there is cargo space on a helicopter or plane flying out.

in order not to offend powerful advertisers, and the story was diverted to the resignation of Finance Secretary Rameshore Khanal.

Few dared to point out the names of people and business houses involved, which included a CA member and a telecommunication giant. The discourse veered so much towards Khanal’s honesty that the dishonesty of the businessmen involved was not discussed.

Nepal has no dearth of well connected business reporters, many of whom have gone on to become editors in national dailies and weeklies. But it is rare to see stories of corruption in high places in their papers in which the Big Boys are involved.

Blogs like My Sansar were able to speak out only because they are not constrained by the market economy of media. Blogger and owner of My Sansar, Salokya says: “How this story is covered in my blog and the newspaper I work for are different. This alone proves the independence we enjoy in blogs.”

The problem with blogs, however, is of a different kind. A CNN iReport on the VAT scam following the exposes by My Sansar provoked angry reactions by My Sansar provoked angry reactions from people for its racist undertones. Salokya’s report on My Sansar was bashed for singling out a particular community and engaging in vindictive journalism. When personal biases seep in, they are no less insidious than slants planted by the corporate media. The only consolation with blogs is that the bias is too on the face for readers not to feel manipulated.

It may be tempting for bloggers to demand the privileges of a mainstream reporter: a press card, Information Department ads, membership to an umbrella organisation clearly divided along political lines (FNJ). But there is no free lunch, and the independence bloggers boast of could be compromised.

What would be the difference between the content in a blog and in a national newspaper if they operate under the same restrictive framework of the state?

Many bloggers are already doing better journalism than journalists, even without a press pass. Many don’t like being identified as regular journalists, or with the kind of work the mainstream does. Bloggers say they respond to a higher calling and adhere to values of independence, free expression and citizen vigilance. Blurring the line between citizen and mainstream journalism may obliterate independent voices that may sometimes overstep the bounds, but are more likely to strengthen democracy by protecting the public’s right to know.
A ray of anger

In his critical essays Morning Yet on Creation Day, Chinua Achebe calls ‘art for art sake’ “just another piece of deodorised dog shit.” The Nigerian writer believes in the didactic purpose of art, that art must produce and in turn be produced within a moral framework.

True to didactic purposes, Nepal’s punk scene holds fast to a socio-political agenda, quickly gaining ground in a more or less subversive and unconventional manner.

Like with most good things, no publicity was necessary; word of mouth was the band’s vital promoter. According to its ‘herstory’, the self-styled anarchic punk group was launched in 2000 and has since anarcho punk to its ‘herstory’, the self-styled anarchic punk group was launched in 2000 and has since been maintained by the front rows to refrain from stomping, for fear that the music is upbeat and captivating or as a fan described it, “kickass.”

During the show spectators were so entranced that at one point the lead vocalist’s mouth was the band’s vital promoter. According to its ‘herstory’, the self-styled anarchic punk group was launched in 2000 and has since maintained by the front rows to refrain from stomping, for fear that the music is upbeat and captivating or as a fan described it, “kickass.”

Following the set was over, the lead vocalist’s blunt response upheld the unconventional manner.

An angry band requested the front rows to refrain from stomping, for fear that the music is upbeat and captivating or as a fan described it, “kickass.”

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For bookings call 4491234.
Daring excursions into Thamel likely begin and end at OR2K, a waterhole for witty wanderers constantly pondering the ultimate question, ‘What to do in Kathmandu?’ As a figurative trading post on the trekker’s trail and a Lonely Planet top pick, OR2K attracts travelers of all shapes and sizes from flashpackers, stoked hippy folk and WiFi mongerers. But down to the milk and honey, OR2K (an acronym half in Hebrew that translates into ‘light to Kathmandu’) is a Zion for vegetarians serving only a wide selection of veggie dishes as diverse as its clientele and specialties in Middle Eastern and Israeli flavors.

Unless you’re looking to stare at your meal and take in a beautiful presentation void of flavor, avoid the stuffed vegetable combination (Rs 395) that promises stuffed capsicum, mushrooms and tomatoes topped with goat cheese, yellow cheese and paneer. It’s an aesthetic, bland mess.

Instead break bread with warm focaccia and naan and dip into the OR2K combination platter (Rs 395), an all-around genuine degustation of the Middle East in bowls of hummus, thaini, labane, babaganesh, matbucha, falafel and Israeli salad. If you’re flying solo, don’t fret, there’s a small combo platter at Rs 230. Alternatives like the 2K pizza, the pumpkin soup and the OR2K health salad are equally generous and satiating. Wash it all down with fresh mint lemonade, a perfect refresher, and end with a Kiss from Zuri, a delectable cheesecake-chocolate confection.

Seating is plenty (but often packed) and shoes-off and on the floor, redolent of a Yemeni mafraj or rooftop lounge. Described as the insides of a hippy’s knapsack or a child’s fantasy tree house, the interior is decked from floor to ceiling with glowing (for a literal light fest come for dinner) illustrations that make magic realism a stitch too real.

Fittingly enough, OR2K has a second branch on Kao San Road, the hippy haven and tourist hub of Bangkok—a fact that speaks volumes.

Marco Pollo

OR2K

Arabian Nights, taste the culinary delights from the Middle-East every Friday at The Cafe from 6.30pm to 10.30pm. For bookings call Hyatt Regency Kathmandu at 4491234.

Degas Resto Lounge, for mouth watering Newari cuisines. Kumaripati (Old Campion Building), 9849136479

BBQ Station, a place for those of you who simply can’t do without meat. BBQ Station offers a chance to make your own Barbeque on coal.

Irish Pub, for the simple reason that the place actually feels like a bar. Don’t miss out on their Irish coffee. Lazimpat, Ananda Bhawan, 4416027

Tapas Night with Sangria, for the true flavours of Spain indulge in Tapas buffet snacks with a glass of Sangria @Rs499. 17 June onwards, every Friday, 5pm onwards. Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat

Adventures De’ Monsoon Mania, a two day fun trip that includes beach games, typical Nepali games Guchha, Chungi, Kabbadi, drinking competition and live performance by the Saayus band organised by Country Road 4 Hamro Saoch in association with Himalayan Enチャー Treks & Expedition. 8 to 9 July. Departure time 6.30am, 9am (rafters), 2pm (non-rafters), Royal Beach Camp

OR2K
Rash of rashes

Herpes zoster, which is commonly known as shingles in English, has a more descriptive and apt Nepali name, ‘janai khatira’ because the skin rashes often follow the distribution of the thread around the chest and back (pictured). With the janai in mind, it should be easy for Nepali medical students to make this diagnosis when they see this kind of skin lesion in their patient.

These skin lesions caused by the herpes zoster virus are painful, and it is the same virus that causes chickenpox. A person who has had chickenpox is at risk because the virus, which lies dormant in the nerve can reactivate later in life. Although herpes zoster can occur at any age, this problem is more common among people 50 years of age or older. Usually, it starts with a painful itchy rash with blisters. It can appear on the trunk or the face and is usually on one side of the body and lasts for 2-4 weeks.

The main complication of herpes zoster is the pain that follows after the rash has subsided, called post-herpetic neuralgia. There is severe skin sensitivity described as burning and sharp pain or itchiness in the area where the rash appeared. Importantly, the pain can be so severe that it can disrupt sleep and make everyday activities difficult to perform. Sometimes shingles may also cause ear pain and vision loss.

There are oral antiviral drugs locally available in Nepal like acyclovir, which may reduce the duration of pain and accelerate the healing of the rash. Early treatment may also help avoid complications. But can this painful, common problem be prevented? Yes, but not in South Asia because of the unavailability of this expensive vaccine. In an ideal world everyone above 60 is recommended this vaccine. In Nepal we try to make a proper diagnosis and administer the effective drugs. When what is ideal is not practical, what is practical has to be adequate.

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Oh Kathmandu’s a wonderful place, come steaming heat or drenching rain, there’s no doubt about that. Despite the socio-political turbulence with all the dynamism of a quagmire, it’s comforting to live in the heart of the beast, jostling for space with family, friends, and all manner of strangers.

Lately, though, the Valley’s horizons have seemed confining. Meeting people coming and going beyond these green ramparts, as they seem to be doing all the time, I can’t help but feel sometimes that I’m running around in circles, chasing my own tail. Surely interactions with the outside world cannot be sated with cursory headlines and electronic correspondence.

This desire for new experiences is not something that can be quelled for long by a walk through the mountains, or a pilgrimage to western climes to punctuate what is essentially more of the same afterwards. Travel is therapeutic most of the time, but can be oddly akin to what it negates. Being in no place can be as unsatisfying as being in one place.

In Nepal, I’ve lived at length in Nayabajar, Maitidevi, Gyaneshwor, Maharajgunj, Budhanilkantha, Dhapasi, Mangal Bajar, Sanepa and Kupondole. These are vastly contrasting neighbourhoods, each with their own constellations of society and commerce to provide one with different perspectives on this ancient place. But they are all facets of the Kathmandu Valley. One is still yoked to the same larger polity, that of the capital of Nepal, meaning one is necessarily beholden to certain provincialisms that are unique to Nepal’s metropolitans. Travel cleaves through some of these certainties, but for how long and to what degree?

Kathmandu, for all its distortions, offers a combination of amenities that is not available elsewhere in the country. It’s no wonder so many Phoemenes, Netas, and Government Employees have made their home here. But many of the Kathmandu Valley’s modern-day attractions exist only because of these species of Sapiens. If a thousand Phoemenes or Netas fanned across the towns of the Tarai, would not their residents respond by furnishing them with the lifestyles that they have become accustomed to?

Three years ago, I moved out of the comfort zone of home sweet home by crossing the river and taking up residence in a series of flats. The idea of moving away from a larger comfort zone and settling in another community within the country is intriguing, but also unsettling. Dharan, Pokhara, Janakpur, or the Limi Valley? I lament the dearth of out-of-Valley narratives I’ve come across to fuel this imagining, but recommendations are welcome.

The monsoon is conducive to staying home, but what’s behind those thunderclouds?

Cabin fever

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What are you celebrating today?
In an exclusive interview with Nepali Times and Himal Khabarpatrika, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar speaks about how his government transformed India’s poorest and most corrupt state into its fastest-growing one. He talks about the challenges ahead and Bihar’s unique relationship with Nepal.

Nepali Times: What were the key interventions you made to bring about Bihar’s transformation?
Nitish Kumar: When I assumed office in 2005, I was concerned about poverty, growing inequality and crime in Bihar. The task was tedious, but one has to start somewhere, and I stuck to the basics. If I could address fundamental problems, most of the secondary problems would be taken care of.

Poverty in Bihar has its roots in lack of access to state distribution of basic services like education and health. We realized that large number of children, especially the girls, stopped going to school after class four or nine. Either, there was no secondary education facility and they could not travel, or the parents married off their daughters early. So, students from class three onwards are provided with cash every year for school uniforms. The class nine students are given bicycles as an incentive to continue their education. But the biggest decision we took was to open a fixed deposit of Rs 2000 in the name of a girl child from a family living under the poverty line, which is paid to the child when she turns 18. This provides an incentive to the parents to educate their daughter and not worry about their marriage.

We launched a program under which children up to 14 years and adolescent girls are provided a health card for medical check-ups and treatment free of cost at government hospitals. Our aim is to provide health insurance to every citizen for which we are studying various health insurance models adopted by other nations.

From the least developed state in India, Bihar now ranks among fastest growing states in India, second only to Gujarat. But it is funded by massive central government spending, and your critics call it “denting and painting”. How do you respond to that?
Firstly, I disagree with us being compared to Gujarat. Our experience is completely different, they already have a healthy infrastructure in place and their growth is mostly fuelled by multinational investments, especially in the industrial manufacturing sector. We started from the scratch. The entire state was in ruins when I took over and the economy had slumped to negative growth in 2003-2004. I agree that Central government’s budgetary allocation has been crucial to us, but it is also a fact that this huge investment has led to creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs. The planned expenditure of Bihar, which was Rs 32 billion in...
The Nitish Kumar government has indeed transformed Bihar in the last five years. But we have to deconstruct this success story.

PRAFFUL KUMAR SINGH

The chief minister certainly has a vision for a prosperous Bihar but he is surrounded by the same people that were there when Lalu and Rabri were in office. After all, no matter how good your policies are, it is up to the authorities at the local level to execute them.

For instance, his incentive-based education policy has led to surge in the enrollment rate but the quality of education in public schools is still very poor. Whenever I pass by a public school in Mahnar and elsewhere in remote Bihar, I see children mostly playing in the field rather than studying.

Once I stopped by and asked the teacher why the children were not in class and guess what she says, “Aam ki kahani padhebei? Hamra apne nai kuchho abai.” (What will I teach? I don’t tell you)

When I completed my post-graduation from Bihar University in Muzaffarpur, I could not get a job because I did not have any political connections. Five decades down the line, things have not changed much for young graduates here who are all going outside Bihar for opportunities. In 1983, I applied for a job in Nepal and was sent appointment letter by telegram to teach in Mahendra Morang Campus. I was overwhemed and shocked that they offered me a job without personally knowing me.

Nitin might be a good man but he is surrounded by crooks. The government is building bridges and constructing six-lane roads which will be useful to fuel industrial growth, but now is that possible when we have chronic power shortage?”

Nitin has worked hard but it is necessary to take care of the state’s economy. Without economic development, we cannot talk about good governance.

Prafful Singh is a Professor at RPS College in Mithaur and has a social concern. He was recently felicitated by the Nepal government for his outstanding contribution to Mahakali Literature.

What they don’t tell you
The energy minister announced army deployment to the Upper Karnali hydropower project in Dailekh recently. The radical move comes after activists vandalised and set fire to the office, despite an international convention guaranteeing local rights over water. Actions by both the government and the protestors are unjustified.

The project licence limits generation of 900MW when the potential capacity is 4,180MW, where if full capacity is reached, 11 billion units of electricity can be generated and irrigate 1.5 millions hectares of land. Project proposals will yield only low quality 3.15 billion units. And in terms of revenue, full capacity generation would earn Rs 4.28 billion while the 900MW generation would deliver only Rs 832 million. So, local frustrations over the projects are understandable, but vandalism and violence are unacceptable and condemnable.

Unconfirmed news of Maoist and political involvement in the Upper Karnali raid is unfortunate. It is not in the interest of the country to be biased against Indian investment. Nepali investors should get first priority, but generating 4,000MW requires a huge investment for which Nepal’s internal resources are insufficient. In the name of power generation, Nepal’s sovereignty should not be bargained like Bhutan’s.

To reign in local support, a probable solution is to give locals a sense of ownership and involvement in the projects. Deploying the national army, which by law is mandated only in times of war, isn’t the answer.

Anti-corruption mission

Rahi Dhami in Annapurna Post, 28 June

Clandestine plans by the Home Ministry to investigate police involved in corruption and bribery were thwarted after the police at headquarters alerted their subordinates.

According to the plan prepared by Home Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Home Secretary Lila Mani Poudyal and Police Superintendent Rabindra Pratap Shah cross examinations were to start on Monday. But after the headquarters issued the order, police sent circulars to all the officers under the five regional offices.

Following the warning, a dozen highway check posts notorious for collecting bribes including Prithivi, Kodari and Arniko were removed, claims a source.

Spokesperson of the Home Ministry Sudhir Kumar Shah said that he had no knowledge of the secret mission, but expressed grave concern over the leakage from the headquarters.
Nepalis targeted in Britain

Nabin Phokhreli in London, Kantipur, 29 June

Local authorities in Greater Rushmoor, UK, are investigating motives in a string of attacks against Nepali residents recently. “It has become hard to walk alone at night,” says a local Nepali, who wishes to remain anonymous.

Clashes between Nepali and British youth in Farnborough, Aldershot and surrounding areas have been on the rise. “A few months ago, local MP Gerald Howarth had expressed dissatisfaction on the increasing Nepali population in the area and now there is a growth in such attacks,” says Tekendra Dal Dewan, president of Greater Rushmoor Nepali Community.

Dewan took the matter to the Rushmoor Borough Council and the Rushmoor Safer Neighbourhood inspector to discuss the issue and discovered that gangs of British boys, involved in the attacks, had been detained in the past but were then released without proper investigation.

But the Rushmoor Safer Neighbourhood inspector Justin Brown insists that authorities are taking the incidents seriously: “We are conducting in-depth investigations on these cases to ascertain whether they are racial or not.”
Some people say we need a Lee Kuan You to fix things in Nepal. I think things have gone beyond even the Minister Mentor. For example, when the Homeward Minister gave the order last week that there would be undercover spot checks at police stations to curb petty corruption, an alert went out on the police walkie-talkie system: “Spot checks tomorrow. Look smart, keep your hands clean.”

The Boxer rebellion within the Baddies is getting badder. After Janadisha got shut down, the feud between the PKD and BRB factions has spilled into Mirmire FM and the national airline. The new Tourism Minister sacked both rival Baddie and UML-backed CEOs and installed his Kalikot left-hand man and revolutionary poet, Comrade Neptune (that is his real name) at the helm. The story is that Khadga Budder kamred wanted Com Yummy’s crony out of NAC, and his crony in.

As far as we can make out, Chairman Fearsomeness’s game plan is to fill up the entire state machinery with his relatives and cronies. He has already padded the Baddie ethnic state councils with sons, dotters, sons-in-law, nephews, and bros-in-law. His own ABC channel is serialising the life and times of First Lady Sita kamred. CDOs have been replaced, DSPs and SPs have been transferred to ensure a two-thirds majority in elections next spring. The strategy is to stymie any effort to draft a new constitution before the election by backtracking on integration numbers, being absent from Special Committee meetings, and wasting time meeting American businessmen.

You must have heard that the census enumerators when along to Nirmal Niwas to count the ex-king. They wished Kingji happy birthday and asked him his ethnic group. His reply: “Nepali.” After KingG refused to be more specific, the enumerators themselves ticked ‘Thakuri’ and left.

FG