International airlines flying into landlocked Nepal intersect with the two most important aspects of Nepal’s economy: tourism and migrant labour. Yet, there is little strategic planning to encourage international airlines and support the national carrier. At the ‘Nepal By Air’ roundtable organised by Nepali Times, international airlines operating to Kathmandu say they see great potential for the growth in traffic. But they also want the government to address concerns like high landing and navigation charges, shoddy ground handling and infrastructure bottlenecks at the airport.

Bored with dal, bhat, and masu? Fed up with relatives? Can’t take Kathmandu’s power cuts, water shortage, pollution, and traffic jams anymore? Hop on a plane. Nepali Times brings you a roundup of great holiday getaways this Dashain-Thaap.

**Destinations**

Prime Minister Bhattarai may be personally honest, but he is presiding over the plunder of the state.

**How to ransack the treasury**

BY THE WAY by Anurag Acharya

Leaders to come out of caterer politics and seek broader support
We have been arguing here against replacing Baburam Bhattarai as prime minister mainly because he seems the least incompetent of the politicians on offer. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a track record for being super-ambitious and highly unpredictable. The UML and NC have both fragmented on the basis of democratic-minority candidates, but they have been tried and tested, and found wanting.

In the public perception, Bhattarai still has the aura of being someone with intellect and integrity despite the thoroughly kleptocratic coalition he leads. None of the sleaze seems to rub off on the Teflon Man, though. None of the politicians on offer. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a track record for being super-ambitious and highly unpredictable. The UML and NC have both fragmented on the basis of democratic-minority candidates, but they have been tried and tested, and found wanting.

But it now has to be said that by clinging on to power Comrade Bhattarai is becoming a liability to himself, his party, and the country. He was someone we trusted to take the consensus government to take us into elections, but he is now an obstacle to that goal. In fact, all his past party, and the country. He was someone we trusted to take the consensus government to take us into elections, but he is now an obstacle to that goal. In fact, all his past dealings have failed us.

None of the sleaze seems to rub off on the Teflon Man, though. None of the politicians on offer. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a track record for being super-ambitious and highly unpredictable. The UML and NC have both fragmented on the basis of democratic-minority candidates, but they have been tried and tested, and found wanting.

The demolition of half of Kathmandu has raised questions about the politicians on offer. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a track record for being super-ambitious and highly unpredictable. The UML and NC have both fragmented on the basis of democratic-minority candidates, but they have been tried and tested, and found wanting.

Opposition leader Baburam Bhattarai has been anything but keen to atone for his actions in the past. In his opinion, Bhattarai is becoming a liability to himself, his party, and the country. He was someone we trusted to take the consensus government to take us into elections, but he is now an obstacle to that goal. In fact, all his past party, and the country. He was someone we trusted to take the consensus government to take us into elections, but he is now an obstacle to that goal. In fact, all his past dealings have failed us.

Him. That is not a national statesman. By simply repenting will not suffice, simply repenting will not suffice. Why will he need the basket when he asks why, the boy tells him that he will need the basket when the father gets old. I think there is an important lesson to be learnt here. When our children see us mistreating our elderly parents, who is it that they won’t treat us in the same way when we become old? We have to pass on good values to the next generation and we should ensure our social fabric will completely disintegrate.

Prime Minister Bhattarai may be personally honest, but he is presiding over the plunder of the state.

Bhattarai is exhibiting the same traits all his predecessors in Singhha Darbar did: behaving as if he is another little party boss, and not a national statesman. By going back on the five-point deal, the Maoist party once more shifted the goalpost to ensure electoral incumbency and perpetuate what little trust the other parties had in them.

Despite Prime Minister Bhattarai’s repeated prodding, the latest fi is that this four main political forces unable or unwilling to come to an agreement.

The other more serious reason that we need a new consensus government is because this coalition has broken all past national records for corruption. In fact, calling it corruption is a gross understatement. The government has been acting like a political force that has no opposition. The Teflon Man, though.

The Maoist-controlled Finance Ministry is transferring Rs 10 million here, Rs 180 million there to party cadres to pay retroactively for roads built during the war. An investigative report last week lists proof that the Local Government and Community Development Program (LGCDP) should be setting off alarm bells in offices. The evidence points to a complete breakdown of accountability in the absence of elected officials at the local level.

The Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) which should be probing this mountain of malfeasance is headless, and seems to have been co-opted by the Maoist party. Its secretary (recipient of the government’s Rs.200,000 Best Civil Servant Award) has refused to act on a petition to probe the misappropriation of Rs44 billion that was supposed to have gone for the upkeep of ex-guerrillas in the cantonments since 2006. It especially is to distribute IDs to the poor, the Good Governance Project, the Youth and Small Business Self-Employment Scheme all have such weak oversight that they have often been used to perpetrate corruption at election time by throwing fistsfuls of cash at them. By the way, the government seems to be in no hurry to appoint a new Election Commissioner, either.

Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai, PhD, is obviously a genius. But we wish he had used his considerable intellect to control this hammering of the treasury, and invest the funds in cost-effective social welfare. Instead, he is presiding over the plunder of the state.

NO HYDRO NO POWER

We need a strong renewable energy cooperative that works on large scale projects based on the diverse natural resources such as hydropower installations, solar panels, and biogas and geo-thermal plants in partnership with local communities. With the pace of change in energy sector, we can live without electricity, for giving us a fresh perspective on how to go about it. It can help eradicate poverty in areas of this art.

Hair for food

Nepalis should emulate Cambodia’s example and start selling their hair for money (Hair for food: Born Nauru, #624). It can help eradicate poverty to a certain extent in poor areas. Even party cadres should resort to this practice instead of extorting ordinary Nepalis. Chakri

This article was written by Kunda Dixit, about the Bhattarai-led government through street protests? Chakri

Kunda Dixit
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Truth and memory

The victims of conflict have moved beyond revenge to remembrance, politicians could learn from them

The state’s refusal to accept an OHCHR report detailing war crimes will hurt the peace and reconciliation process

A dangerous precedent

The state’s refusal to accept an OHCHR report detailing war crimes will hurt the peace and reconciliation process

The victim's mandate

OHCHR’s mandate

The report has been due at least a year now, and the government has been trying to suppress it. The state refused to extend the OHCHR’s mandate beyond June this year. In a meeting last week, OHCHR made it clear that if the government failed to own the report, it would unilaterally publish it. This has prompted the government to question report’s validity and blame OHCHR for overstepping its mandate.

Human rights activist and lawyer Govinda Prasad Sharma, Bandi, said: “The Nepal government signed on March 2005 allowing it to implement the interim constitution on the need to implement international treaties and agreements while investigating them, the government is now citing technicalities to avoid addressing the issues.”

All the perpetrators, including those from the Nepal Army and Maoists, as parties to the conflict have aligned themselves against free and fair investigation and are looking to sweep the dirt under the carpet by providing blanket amnesty in serious cases.”

Rights activist Mandira Sharma of Advocacy Forum. When the CPA was signed in 2006, the parties had agreed to form an independent commission to investigate into cases of war crimes within six months, but six years on, the commission has not been formed and the government has refused to own the only field report which has systematically compiled the reported cases.

There is an underlying fear that if there is a trial based on the reports, every party in the conflict, whether directly involved in the war or in the government leadership, will be dragged to court and possibly the international tribunal under the principle of command responsibility, an international law instrument that has been used to prosecute many war criminals. This could further politicise army chiefs for cases like Bhandara Nath massacre and Doramba killings, or bring Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to trial for the Massacre bombing that killed 36 bus passengers in 2005.

During the early hours of 14 June 2005, six civilians were abducted from a village five-kilometre away from Armed Police Force base in Baneshwor, near the capital of Kathmandu. The victims were taken to a nearby forest, tortured and murdered. Four of the victims, including three women and a child, were family members of APF personnel, the other two were aspiring recruits. There is no record of any investigation by the UN’s Geneva-based Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported abuse and lack of respect for human life and dignity by the perpetrators. There is no claim of responsibility for the incident, and allegations of CPN (Maoist) involvement were denied by the party in a press statement.

Last week, a visiting OHCHR team provided the government a copy of its conflict mapping report which summarises 2,800 cases of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law during the decade-long conflict and later. The report has been due at least a year now, and the government has been trying to suppress it. The state refused to extend the OHCHR’s mandate beyond June this year. In a meeting last week, OHCHR made it clear that if the government failed to own the report, it would unilaterally publish it. This has prompted the government to question report’s validity and blame OHCHR for overstepping its mandate.

Human rights activist and lawyer Govinda Prasad Sharma Bandi said: “The Nepal government signed a broad agreement with OHCHR in March 2005 allowing it to investigate incidences of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. There is no ambiguity about the mandate.”

Between 2007-2010, the Supreme Court has upheld OHCHR’s mandate in Nepal, which the court turned down. There are international laws and treaties including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN General Assembly resolution 48/141 which provides a global mandate to the UN body to investigate cases of human rights violation in any part of the world.

In spite of acknowledging widespread abuse of human rights during the years of conflict in Article 33 of the interim constitution on the need to implement international treaties and agreements while investigating them, the government is now citing technicalities to avoid addressing the issues. All the perpetrators, including those from the Nepal Army and Maoists, as parties to the conflict have aligned themselves against free and fair investigation and are looking to sweep the dirt under the carpet by providing blanket amnesty in serious cases.”

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LEADING THE WAY: Like many African countries, 66 per cent of Nepal’s population is involved in agriculture. Supporting smallholder farmers with knowhow will not only increase production, but boost the nation’s economy.

Small farm’s large benefits
Smallholder farmers can boost sustainable agriculture and economic growth

KANAYO F NWANZE

As drought becomes increasingly common, farmers worldwide are struggling to maintain crop yields. In the United States, farmers are experiencing the most severe drought in more than a half-century. As a result, global corn, wheat, and soybean prices rose in July and August, than a half-century. As a result, farmers are experiencing the struggle to maintain crop growth.

In Africa’s Sahel region, millions of people are facing hunger for the third time since 2005. Lack of rain in the region and volatile global food prices have made a bad situation worse. Indeed, it is the world’s poor – particularly those in rural areas – that suffer the most from these combined factors. This does not bode well for our future. By 2050, global food production will have to increase by 60 per cent to meet demand from a growing population. To ensure food security for all, we will have to increase not just food production, but also availability, especially for those living in developing countries. That means breaking down barriers and inequalities, including by building capacity, and disseminating knowledge. In Africa, smallholder farmers, who provide 80 per cent of the sub-Saharan region’s food, need infrastructure for agricultural development, including irrigation and roads, as well as better market organisation and access to technology.

Agricultural Development sees enormous potential in Africa’s agricultural sector, which experienced 4.8 per cent growth in 2009, compared to 3.8 per cent in the Asia-Pacific region and only 1.4 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Given that agriculture amounts to roughly 30 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP, and accounts for more than 60 per cent of employment in most African countries, the sector’s development could reduce poverty in the region substantially. Not only in Africa – in countries like Burkina Faso and Ethiopia – but also in emerging countries like China, India, and Vietnam, experience has repeatedly shown that smallholder farmers can lead agricultural growth while stimulating broader economic development. Small farmers, both women and men, are Africa’s biggest agricultural investors. And agriculture-driven GDP growth is more than twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors.

But African farmers encounter significant barriers to achieving their potential. On average, they apply less than 10kg of fertiliser per hectare, compared to 140kg in India. Furthermore, less than five per cent of agricultural land is irrigated, and improved crop varieties are rarely used.

Agricultural development efforts should, therefore, focus on promoting the growth and sustainability of smallholder farmers and small rural businesses. This requires a more supportive regulatory environment, technical assistance, as well as connections to suppliers, distributors, and finance providers.

Countries that are experiencing significant agricultural growth, such as Brazil and Thailand, have benefited from public-sector investment in research and infrastructure development. We should consider not only how to improve the ability of smallholder farmers to grow food; we also must strengthen how to improve the ability of smallholder farmers to grow food; we also must strengthen smallholder-inclusive private sector development. Small farmers, both women and men, are Africa’s biggest agricultural investors. And agriculture-driven GDP growth is more than twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors.

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A vibrant rural sector can contribute to global food security, and catalyse economic growth worldwide.

www.project-syndicate.org

Kanayo F. Nwanze is the president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), an international financial institution and a specialised agency of the United Nations.
EVENTS

EKADESHMA, the Nepali edition of the Manhattan Short Film festival will feature international as well as local films, and there will be discussions on filmmaking. 6 to 7 October, 12.30 pm to 7 pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap.

WCN nature and wildlife photography competition, take photos of flora, fauna, landscape, macro, and human interaction with nature to promote awareness and interest in conservation. Deadline 31 October. forms available at www.wcn.org.np

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP BAZAR 2012, sample the products, services, and ideas of social entrepreneurs from across Nepal and enjoy culinary delights and arts and music from across Asia. 4 to 6 October, 11 am to 7 pm, Blue Bird Newari Food Festival, 5 to 6 October, 11 am to 7 pm, Blue Bird Newari Food Festival.

Corporate five-a-side futsal tournament, take your business rivals to the pitch. Rs 4500, 12 to 14 October, Futsal Arena, GAA Hall, Thamel, 9849718360, 9841817296.

Saturday is workday, for those who fancy backyard landscaping and want to help out. 6 October, 10 am to 6 pm, Hanjya Chowk, Laganekhel, 9841442296.

Dhulikel Kite Festival, head to the hills and battle it out with the best kite flyers from Dhulikel. 12 to 13 October, Tala, Danda, Dhulikel

Nepal music education festival, an eight-day workshop conducted by Gine Adiko and Mariano Abalo culminating in a two-day celebration. Rs 10,000 for non-members. 4 to 13 October, 2 pm, Moksh, Jamshorikhu, 5013554

Meet Pushpa Basnet, the social worker intends to make sure no child grows up in prison and you can meet her with children from her home. 6 October, 4 to 6 pm, Basantapur

Voices of hope, an exhibition of Sumeet Shakya’s photo-essay on the lives of 24 underprivileged children living at a children’s home. 28 September to 11 October, 10 am to 6 pm, Galera CUC, 9841240341, 9841497639

Inheriting statelessness, exhibition and sale of paintings by Saroj Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 5013554.

AN EVENING WITH MARK ATKINS, the Australian musician, performer, story teller, composer, percussionist, visual artist, and instrument maker Mark Atkins will summon the sounds of the Australian outback on his didgeridoo. 6 October, 6.30 pm, Siddhi Art Gallery, 4371687, 4218048

All Nepal battle of the bands, see if you can hit the right notes at this nationwide music competition. Rs 5000, auditions on 6 October, 9841779176, 9803750550.

Lhassa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. Thamel, 9851019043.

Silence Festival III, five bands from Australia, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden as well as artists from Nepal will be rocking it out at this year’s annual music festival. Rs 500, 11 October, 12 pm, bahalkhel Football Ground

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Chopstix, savour Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven, Kunamati, 5551718

Boomerang Restaurant & German Bakery, offers a large selection of cuisine for those who want to enjoy a full meal and desserts. Lakeside, Pokhara, 861-401412

Ignite, special one night-two days package for Nepalis, including accommodation, breakfast, lunch, dinner and cocktail, as well as elephant back safaris, cultural dances and sightseeing, two-way tickets from Kathmandu and Pokhara. Rs 666, Jungle Sunset Camp, Saugaha, 734-056, 5013132, 9851370300.

GETAWAYS

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Let there be sight

While strolling down Pokhara’s Lakeside avenue, I chanced upon a little joint serving authentic Chinese cuisine. There are abundant dining options along this lane, but most of them offer the usual, a little bit of everything with an emphasis on ‘continental’ cuisine. Even so, we were attracted by the bright red lamps and the de rigueur reddish décor at Dragon because its flamboyance and luridness stood out from the rest.

The place is very new and opened its doors less than two months ago. The good thing is that the staff was welcoming and eager to please. But the novelty wore off soon and it became apparent that staff here was still rusty in coordinating between the kitchen and dinner table. Although in retrospect, the misunderstanding must have come about due to communication breakdown between the Chinese chef and Nepali servers.

So why this full-blown Chinese restaurant in the middle of Lakeside? Like other restaurant owners, Ram Sharan Karki also assumed that Chinese food amounted to chow mein and Manchurian curries. However, after travelling to China and getting a taste of authentic Chinese flavours, he came to know his assumptions were ill-founded.

The unique flavours, the quality of cooking, and the variety of dishes coupled with the steady increase of Chinese tourists in Nepal convinced Karki and his business partner Pushkar Pathak to strike Chinese while the iron was hot. They took a local chef back home and thus Dragon Chinese Restaurant was born.

As a result of this conversation, carried out while waiting for the arrival of our first delicacy, our expectations were very high. The Kung Pao Pork (Rs 380), a spicy dish of stir-fried pork with chili and peanuts, is sharp and piquant, and was a tasty start to our meal. We decided to forego other starters and jumped straight into the Mao Cai – the Sichuan style hot pot (whose price is decided by the amount of extras you want to include).

The larger tables at Dragon have a big round hole at the centre in order to set the big Mao Cai bowl with two compartments on the stove below. One part of our bowl had a red broth bubbling away, while the other side contained a light cream filled with vegetables. Platters of meat, tofu, mushrooms, fish and vegetables were then placed around the bowl. Dunking these tidbits into the flavoured broth, waiting for them to be cooked, and then pouring out ladelfuls of steaming soup on warm rice made for a most enjoyable meal, best had leisurely in large company.

We didn’t know how fulfilling Mao Cai would be, and had also ordered the deep fried cat fish (Rs 480) just in case. Crispy on the outside and dipped in a tangy sauce, the fish was delectable and worth returning to Pokhara for second helpings. Later, they served us complimentary jasmine tea like at a true Chinese diner.

So if you happen to be in Pokhara, do enter the Dragon.

Ruby Tuesday
Forty-four and counting

Even after four decades and countless competitors, Kathmandu Guest House is a favourite among budget and high-end travellers alike. You couldn’t miss Kathmandu Guest House (KGH) even if you wanted to. Located at the heart of Thamel, KGH has seen hundreds of hotels, shops, and restaurants come and go. But the hotel has stood the test of time and more than four decades after it first opened it gates KGH is still one of the most well-known landmarks in the area.

Karna Sakya, founder of the KGH chain, welcomed his first guests in 1968 into an old Rana mansion which had been converted to accommodate 13 rooms. In April, the guesthouse opened its newest wing, Siddhi Anex which was named after Sakya’s parents.

Today the 141 rooms cater to a range of guests from those on shoe-string budgets to those who like to be pampered in luxury all under one roof. Starting at $2 per night, the lower end rooms are very basic and guests have to share bathrooms. Standard rooms offer more facilities, and some have air conditioning. Special rates are available for week or month long stays. Pay a few extra bucks and get the garden facing rooms for the spectacular view and quiet surroundings. Deluxe rooms have more space and amenities while the super deluxe have fine rugs, air conditioning, and services that are at par with five star hotels. Like all other businesses in Kathmandu, KGH is not immune to Nepal’s chronic energy crisis, but solar power keeps all rooms brightly-lit during power cuts.

KGH’s greatest asset is its garden. Tucked away from the dusty lanes, it’s a perfect spot to unwind on a swing seat or sip Nepali tea under the palm trees while admiring the roses and dahlias. Despite being a few hundred meters from Thamel’s main thoroughfare it’s unbelievable just how quiet and peaceful the place is.

The hotel boasts of three restaurants, the Bahal Café which serves international cuisine, Laskus with its traditional Newari dishes and the Clay Pot Oven which is renowned for its chicken tandoori and pizzas. But it’s advisable to avoid peak hours.

“There is nowhere else in Kathmandu we would rather stay. The staff are very attentive to our needs and make sure we are well looked after and each year we are back, we have seen the hotel improve,” say the Contis who have been regular guests at KGH for more than 20 years.

www.ktmgh.com 4700632 4700800
International airlines see big potential for growth in Kathmandu traffic

**NEPAL BY AIR**

International airlines see big potential for growth in Kathmandu traffic

International airlines flying into landlocked Nepal intersect with the two most important aspects of Nepal’s economy: tourism and migrant labour. Yet, prolonged political instability has resulted in a lack of strategic planning to encourage international airlines and support the nation’s tourism

Tourist arrival by air between January to June was up by 20 per cent from 2011, and is expected to total 400,000 this year. The number of overseas workers will hit 450,000 this year, with more than 200,000 going to Qatar and Malaysia alone. Tourism contributed four per cent of total GDP in 2011, and this is forecast to rise to 4.7 per cent in 2012, mainly because of the growth in Nepal’s aviation sector.

Since Nepal has only one international air gateway, streamlined procedures at the airport, making it attractive for new international airlines to fly to Nepal, as well as removing infrastructure bottlenecks should be government priorities. But it doesn’t seem to fly.

Landing and navigation charges in Kathmandu are 30 per cent higher than other airports in the region, but the facilities are in a state of neglect.

Ground handling is largely a monopoly of Nepal Airlines, and international operators say they are forced to use its expensive and shoddy service.

The international airport is a national disgrace, with mismanagement, rude staff and a huge queue. Recent media exposés have made the airport synonymous with corruption.

International airlines which have seen their profit margins erode with heavy fuel charges, bear the added burden of their planes being put on long holds due to traffic congestion or poor visibility at Kathmandu. The litany of woes is long, and many of them are a state of national and international Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) in coordination with the Airbus Industry subsidiary, Que vadis, and Qatar Airways.

Chandan Sinha, the manager of Thai International, which has been operating continuously to Kathmandu for 45 years, sees potential for even more growth in tourism to Nepal. “We would like to share our experiences to promote Nepal through roadshows and travel marts to increase tourism traffic,” Sinha said at the ‘Nepal By Air’ roundtable on the airline industry on Tuesday organised by Nepali Times.

There are now 28 international airlines operating in Kathmandu, connecting Kathmandu to rest of the world, and two new airlines, including Turkish, are expected to start operations soon. However, Kathmandu is running out of landing slots especially in winter when the airport is open only from midday, as the runway has no taxiways.

CAAN has informed airlines that Kathmandu will be open for 24-hour operations from 1 October, but there is skepticism about whether this will really happen. Noise issues at night can be addressed if current departure procedures can be changed to take planes away from built-up areas. The airport also has a parking problem, with only nine bays. The interval between international arrivals at present is 10 minutes because the taxiways do not reach the ends of the runway, and there are still two years to go for runway upgrading.

Senth Chanda, the representative of Jet Airways which picked up the second highest number of passengers to and from Kathmandu last year, agrees that there are bottlenecks for expansion. “There are 28 airlines already here, so obviously there are huge opportunities for growth,” Chanda says, “but if the infrastructure, costs, and pricing issues can be resolved we can see even more flights.”

Renji Thomas of Gulf Air agrees, and says his airline would add to the 14 flights a week it operates if the charges and taxes were reduced. “Even though hostilities have grown, the bottom line is in the red because of costs,” Thomas explained.

Indeed, current government policy seems to be to squeeze every cent out of passengers and airlines in taxes and charges, whereas the strategy should be to encourage tourists so that they spend more and there is a multiplier in the economy.

For this there has to be a paradigm shift in aviation policy, and a strategy to boost passengers, says Dewan of Zenith Travels, which handles Spicejet and Bahrain Air in Kathmandu. “We have no flight to Dubai, so it is a major concern for the government should be to how to attract more carriers and flights.”

A major concern for the government should be how to attract more carriers and flights, as the existing ones with consistent policies and rational pricing, he says. Airlines have been paying taxes even on the total of their sales, and are lobbying to make it fare-based. “The airlines need to justify their operations in Nepal, we should not be pricing ourselves out of the market,” Dewan told the ‘Nepal By Air’ roundtable.

Airlines are not satisfied with the price and quality of ground handling (which includes check-in, baggage delivery, bus ferry from terminal to planes) that Nepal Airlines provides. Each operator says the carrier is reluctant to let go because ground handling charges alone make up 18 per cent of the annual revenue of Nepal Airlines. There is a push to deregulate ground handling, allow competition, bring down costs, and improve service.

However, an initiative to hand over the management of Kathmandu airport to an Indian company was put off because of a nationalist hue and cry.

“Cost is a factor, but for as it is not as important as the quality of ground handling, the service level has to go up,” says Pawan Shrestha of Etihad Airways.

Thai, which has always done its own ground services, is facing a KFC-type union issue, and says the government should revisit the labour act and implement it strictly. Most airline operators say that the authorities tend to see airlines as a cash cow, and don’t realise that they have to work on very slim margins.

From the outside it looks like a really glamorous business, but we are in a very drastic situation, fuel costs and handling charges means the yield is down,” says Bhola Thapa of President Travels, which handles Malaysia Airlines and Indigo.

Nepal’s national airline is plagued by the same problems the airport is. Its share of international traffic has now gone down to five per cent because of government interference in its plans to increase and modernise its fleet. “The country’s economy, growth is tied up with the state of its national airline,” admits Nepal Airlines’ Commercial Director, Madan Khatre, “we have to regain the position of being the main carrier of tourists and Nepali workers.”

Travel trade executives say improving the management of the stupendous airport and airline, and making them more efficient would be a big boost to Nepal’s economic by making air travel and to from Nepal easier.

BK Singh of Everest Express which handles Silk Air recounts what passengers often say when they arrive here: “I know I have landed in Kathmandu airport, I can smell it.”

**WHAT’S WRONG**

- No more landing slots
- Allow 24-hour operation
- Traffic congestion
- Upgrade taxiways and apron
- Weather delays
- Improve navigation system
- Expensive ground handling
- Allow private providers
- Expensive landing charges
- Reduce to international norms
- Poor condition of terminal
- Improve, privatise, management
- Immigration and security lines
- Train and streamliner

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**Times**

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"The market is not growing very fast and we have to do more than that," says Dhuntra of Flydubai, which started operations in 2009, and Shutts of Jet Airways, which has been operating continuously to Kathmandu for 45 years. Indeed, current government policy seems to be to squeeze every cent out of passengers and airlines in taxes and charges, whereas the strategy should be to encourage tourists so that they spend more and there is a multiplier in the economy.

For this there has to be a paradigm shift in aviation policy, and a strategy to boost passengers, says Dewan of Zenith Travels, which handles Spicejet and Bahrain Air in Kathmandu. “We have no flight to Dubai, so it is a major concern for the government should be how to attract more carriers and flights.”

A major concern for the government should be how to attract more carriers and flights, as the existing ones with consistent policies and rational pricing, he says. Airlines have been paying taxes even on the total of their sales, and are lobbying to make it fare-based. “The airlines need to justify their operations in Nepal, we should not be pricing ourselves out of the market,” Dewan told the ‘Nepal By Air’ roundtable.

Airlines are not satisfied with the price and quality of ground handling (which includes check-in, baggage delivery, bus ferry from terminal to planes) that Nepal Airlines provides. Each operator says the carrier is reluctant to let go because ground handling charges alone make up 18 per cent of the annual revenue of Nepal Airlines. There is a push to deregulate ground handling, allow competition, bring down costs, and improve service.

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She likes to dream big.
In our award-winning 6’1” fully flat bed.

You’ll find everything you ever dreamed of in the World’s Best Business Class: Your very own Food & Beverage Manager at your beck and call. The finest of fine dining. Over 600 hours of entertainment on demand on your personal movie screen. And all the room in the world to stretch out and be yourself. Sweet dreams indeed.

How would you like to fly with the best?

*2009 Skytrax Awards.

ETIHAD AIRWAYS
FROM ABU DHABI TO THE WORLD
**THAILAND**

With an abundance of beaches, parks, forests, and fantastic diving and nightlife, Thailand is the perfect choice for luxury travelers and backpackers alike. Teeming with locals and foreigners Chiangmai weekend market in Bangkok is an ideal place to hunt for best bargains. If shopping is not your cup of tea, then jet set to one of the islands in the south like Phuket, Phi Phi and Krabi and explore water sports like snorkeling, parasailing or scuba diving. Or simply surround yourself in the lush greenery and soak up the sun at the white sand beaches.

Round trips start from Rs 45,000

**HONG KONG**

Hong Kong is known for its expansive skyline and deep natural harbor. Victoria Peak, the highest mountain in the island, provides spectacular views of the city dating back to the 11th century. And also indulge in Shanghai's culinary joys from the famous soup dumpling shanghaibo to grilled oysters and caramel strawberry kebabs.

Round trips start from Rs 67,000

**SINGAPORE**

The multicultural city state packs a punch for its small size. For an authentic slice of Singapore’s history, visit Chinatown Heritage Centre where Singapore of the late 19th century and early 20th century has been recreated. Visit Gardens by the Bay, the 101 hectare the iconic garden dedicated to horticultural artistry in the midst of the city. Relish in the culinary delights that await you at every street in Singapore. To get away from the bustling city life, saunter through the Mac Ritchie Reservoir Park which is a short trip from the city centre.

Round trips start from Rs 67,000

**CAMBODIA**

As the cradle of civilization in South East Asia, and home to the largest Hindu temple complex in the world. Cambodia has diverse attractions for the willing wanderer. The capital city of Phnom Penh, lying on the confluence of three rivers and founded 700 years ago, is the cultural and economic home to an entire civilization. The resort town of Sihanouk and Kirirom are perfect holiday getaways, while the town of Kampot is renowned for its seafood.

Round trips start from Rs 73,000

**THAILAND**

With 28 international airlines operating in Nepal, exploring sun kissed white sand beaches of Thailand, scuba diving in Malaysia, and desert safaris in the Middle East is just a hop, skip and jump away. Give yourself a break from the mundane dal, bhat, and masu this Dasain and make the best of the longest holiday at an exotic destination.

Pick and choose from these international getaways across Asia without burning a big hole in your pocket.

Foodies. Adventure seekers can trek through dense tropical rainforests, scale challenging rock faces, and explore caves in Sarawak in eastern Malaysia. And the fun doesn’t end there. Explore gorganian sea fans, barrel sponges, and stunning seascapes at renowned diving paradise at Sipadan Island or unwind at the idyllic beaches in Langkawi.

Round trips start from Rs 53,000

**MALAYSIA**

Pristine blue waters, tropical rainforest, rich heritage, and friendly locals make Malaysia a kingdom of leisure. The capital, Kuala Lumpur, ranks high on diversity, is easy on your wallet and a paradise for foodies. Adventure seekers can trek through dense tropical rainforests, scale challenging rock faces, and explore caves in Sarawak in eastern Malaysia. And the fun doesn’t end there. Explore gorganian sea fans, barrel sponges, and stunning seascapes at renowned diving paradise at Sipadan Island or unwind at the idyllic beaches in Langkawi.

Round trips start from Rs 53,000

**V U N T E I N**

Keen to be known for its splendid natural beauty and ancient traditions, Vietnam has transformed itself into a vibrant tourist destination from a war torn hinterland. Places of interest include the majestic Bay of the Descending Dragons – the Ha Long, Nha Trang the most popular resort town, the Hoi An fishing village, the rice terraces of Sia Pa, the sand dunes of Mui Ne that attract kite-flyers and sand-bikers, and the rich and fertile Mekong River delta. Phu Quoc is the largest island in Vietnam, which has reserves of pristine tropical forest and coral reefs.

Round trips start from Rs 67,000

**NEW ZEALAND**

Round trips start from Rs 44,000

**INDIA**

If you would like to see a slightly different side of India – one that Bollywood usually skips out on – then head down south to Kerala. From the gorgeous backwaters of India – one that Bollywood usually skips out on – head down south to Kerala. From the gorgeous backwaters near Ponda. Round trips start from Rs 44,000

**CHINA**

Beyond Shanghai’s towering structures there is a lot that the city offers. The Bund is a waterfront area in central Shanghai and is regarded as the symbol of the city for hundreds of years. A visit to the Old City gives glimpses of Shanghai’s past. It still has original sections of the defensive wall that surrounded the city dating back to the 11th century. And also indulge in Shanghai’s culinary joys from the famous soup dumpling shanghaibo to grilled oysters and caramel strawberry kebabs.

Round trips start from Rs 67,000

**ABU DHABI**

Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE, has developed as a destination for adventure seekers and shoppers alike. The city hosts Formula 1 Grand Prix every year during November-December, a testimony of its growing influence. You could visit the largest mosque in UAE, Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque which has 24 carat gold gilded chandeliers and the world’s largest hand knotted carpet. For the adventure enthusiasts a safari in the desert of Abu Dhabi is worth trying and so is sky diving at the Abu Dhabi Country Club’s Spacewalk facility.

Round trips start from Rs 59,000

**LAHSA**

Situated at an altitude of 3,4090 metres, Lhasa is one of the highest cities in the world. Lhasa literally means ‘place of gods’ and the city’s rich cultural heritage offers plenty to explore. Yamdrok Yumtso Lake is one of three holy lakes in Tibet and is said to be the female guardian of Buddhism in Tibet. Potola Palace is another landmark in Lhasa symbolising Tibetan Buddhism while Jokhang Monastery in Barkhor square has been a key centre of Buddhist pilgrimage for centuries.

Round trips start from Rs 67,000
Hitting the right notes

The Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory aims to inculcate a culture of learning music theory among Nepalis

JUANITA MALAGON

When Mariano Abello (pic, right) came to Nepal from the United States seven years ago, he started off by helping his brother in the clothing business. But the Argentine-born Spaniard just couldn’t keep himself from his passion for music, and started playing and giving private lessons. When Chhedup Bomzan of the Jazz Upstairs Bar and Navin Chettri, drummer and vocalist of Cadenza, invited him to be a part of the Jazzmandu festival, he jumped at the offer and agreed immediately.

Before long, Abello quit his job and started teaching music full-time. He was playing almost every night at hotels, parties, bars, and embassy functions. One night he told Nirakar Yakthumba, the bass player of 1974AD, about his interest in whether it's lok-dohari blaring through a microbus, a catchy Kollywood tune on radio or the sounds of the saxophone permeating through the alleys of Jhamsikhel, Nepalis love their music. And with Dasain around the corner music is bound to get louder and merrier. Add two jazz festivals to the mix and the party just got started.

While jazz is not native to the subcontinent, it enjoys immense popularity in Nepal. Jazzmandu festival, which turns ten this year, and Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC) which is celebrating its fifth anniversary in October attest to the popularity of the genre.

To celebrate its fifth birthday, KJC is organising a music festival from 4 to 13 October. The festival features certified workshops from Gene Aitken, a renowned music educator and Mariano Abello, director of KJC.

The Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory aims to inculcate a culture of learning music theory among Nepalis starting a musical school. “I was telling Nirakar how unfortunate it was that so many talented Nepalis lacked formal music education. He looked at me and said, ‘let’s do it’.” One thing led to another and they found a place in Lalitpur next to Moksh restaurant and Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC) was born in 2007.

Initially, there was very little interest because people got the impression that KJC taught only jazz. But through word of mouth, music enthusiasts flocked to the conservatory after finding out that it also offered classical music, rock, pop, Indian, and jazz classes. “We thought maybe 50 students would show up, but 115 ended up enrolling. We even got emails from international musicians about their interest in teaching at KJC,” reveals Abello.

Although KJC is not the only music school in Nepal, it is one of the few that have professionalised the field. It has proper sound proof classrooms and an actual curriculum. “In Nepal, music is taught orally and many of our students also thought they could learn by just touching the instruments,” admits Abello. “So it was a little difficult at first to change this attitude and make them understand the importance of theory.” Five years later, the enthusiasts are warming up to the academic aspect of music and work just as hard here as they would at school.

Abello and Yakthumba started KJC with the aim of making music more accessible to Nepalis of all ages and backgrounds. And 64-year-old Deepak Man Sherchan was a perfect fit. An architect by profession, Shertha has been learning how to read and write music, and play the saxophone since the past ten months. He says, “At my age I need to work harder than all my younger classmates, but this does not discourage me.” He wants to master the saxophone in four years and plans on teaching music at schools.

“With KJC, we have shown it is possible to run a professional music school,” says Abello. “Now we would love to see schools introduce proper music programs into their curriculum because music not only teaches discipline, but also improves children’s language, listening, and mathematics skills.”

The Jazzers in ‘Mandu, #575

Jazzing up Dasain

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www.katjazz.com.np

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www.katjazz.com.np
Conquering heights

**Dilavamati**

Buddha Basnyat, MD

You have made it to 4,500 metres with only a few hundred metres before Everest Base Camp. Suddenly you feel a severe headache and nausea. Like countless other mountaineers and trekkers, you feel a severe headache and nausea. Like countless others, you may experience periodic breathing, or Cheyne-Stokes breathing, and may need to go up rapidly to high altitudes or owing to a lack of ramp site, it may not be possible for trekkers to spend the night at an optimal altitude.

Furthermore, airports in places like Lhasa, Tibet (3,490m) and La Paz, Bolivia (4,098m) may cause travellers to arrive at high altitude without the opportunity to acclimatise en route. Many trekkers specially at high altitude without the use of drugs, including diatoms, can be encouraged to go up gradually without the use of drugs, including diatoms, to enhance acclimatisation. In a publication in the British Medical Journal in 2000, Dumont and colleagues had arbitrarily shown that only 750 mg/day of diamox (acetazolamide) would prevent AMS.

Recent review articles, which now include studies post 2000 (many of which were conducted by us in the Himalayas), have clearly shown that a much lower dose (250 mg/day) of diamox is adequate for prevention. Other drugs including ginko biloba and ibuprofen have been tested in the prevention of AMS. But diamox continues to be the superior drug due to its proven efficacy over the years in a large number of trials with an acceptable side-effect profile.

Another important use of diatoms in the mountains is in the prevention of periodic breathing (literally, trying to ‘catch your breath’ while sleeping) at high altitudes. This is a very common problem which sometimes triggers anxiety attacks. Diamox decreases the hypoxemic (low oxygen) spells during sleep and successfully treats this problem in most instances.

As Hypatia mediates, her former students, Orestes, who loves her, and who is now the appointed Prefect of Alexandria, and Synesius, now a powerful Bishop, struggle to protect her from Cyril’s intimations that she is a witch, and that as a woman, according to the Bible, she may not be above a man (she may also not wear tracts, jewelry, or Reveling clothes).

It’s impossible to sum up what follows and the austere beauty of Hypatia’s decisions which leave the viewer filled with horror at the ugliness of religious strife and a profound sense of wonder at one woman’s decision to live by her principles. So watch the film. □

**MUDNY WEEs**: Heavy rainfall on Saturday caused a major landslide along the Mechi Highway in Kolbung VDC of Ilam district on Sunday. Six people were killed and eight are still missing.

**RECORD PATROL**: A policeman glances through a book while on duty at the National Book Exhibition. The fair will be held until 13 October.

**WEEKEND WEATHER**

The monsoon officially declared over the hills last week, and just prior to this, said to be the monsoon made a revival and expanded over 1200 km in 50 hours in parts of eastern Nepal on Monday triggering landslides and loss of life. These latest news were a result of low pressure circulation over the Bay that let ground central and eastern Nepal, but there was enough moisture here to activate storms and showers. There is also extended and prolonged cold cover over western Nepal, which is expected to continue for the next 5 days, arising dozens of thousands of law enforcement. This thunderstorm on Friday, but the weekend will be hot and sunny with cloudy intervals in the afternoon.
Hope is fading for a concrete political settlement on elections and the electoral government before the festive season starts next week. But the good news is that no matter how strong the rhetoric, the parties will keep coming back to the table.

When the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006 was signed, it was agreed by all political parties that the basic characteristics of Nepali politics until the new constitution is written would not be the same in coming days as institutions become stronger than individuals. Before its dissolution, the debates in the CA and interim legislature had helped a Kathmandu-centred leadership to gauge the political mood outside their limited coterie. But since then they have become a disoriented lot who find it difficult to connect to the masses, and are jeered when they go out to the districts.

The meeting called by top leaders this week with ex-lawmakers and other party leaders at the dissolved CA building in New Baneswor was another indication that they are not sure about what they negotiate behind closed doors anymore. This is actually good news for Nepali politics, and the media has an important role to play in pressurising the leaders to make future negotiations more inclusive and transparent.

As the nation gets into festive mood this month, Sushil Koirala, Jhalanath Khanal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal have a lot to think about as they take time off. The political constellation has changed in the last six months with various Dalit, Janajati, and Madhesi groups asserting themselves in a more organised political alliance. They must not ignore these changes, and use the opportunity to engage more with diverse political constituencies before returning to the table next month.

It is not unusual for leaders to seek power or passionately stand for their vision of what is in the best interest of the country and the people. But they should learn from the disastrous brinkmanship of the past and acknowledge that without engaging with the larger constituency in a spirit of compromise and flexibility future negotiations will fail. The opposition must understand that even if the Maoists agree, the new government cannot be formed unless there is a pre-agreement on outstanding issues of the constitution with other stakeholders. If the next government is given a mandate to hold elections, there must first be an agreement about its purpose. Similarly, the Maoists must also engage with the Badiya-led splinter of the Maoists and the Madhesi Front with the newly-formed alliance led by Upendra Yadav. As a party in the government it is also their duty to play a facilitating role among the parties while holding talks with the Dalit, Janajati, and the Madhesi groups.

The leaders tried talking at each other and failed miserably, may be now they will talk with each other to look for a settlement.
Disastrous disaster

Post-accident crisis management is almost non-existent in Nepal

ANDY JOSHY

The Sita Air crash near the airport on 28 September happened exactly one year after the Buddha Air crash at Kot Danda, and barely six months after an Agni Air plane hit a mountainside in Jomsom.

In the past six years alone, 114 people have been killed in airline accidents in Nepal, making our aviation safety record as bad as countries that are notoriously dangerous for flying like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. The reasons are ineffective regulation, lack of a maintenance culture, poor crew training, and lax enforcement of procedures for bad weather flying.

Nepal’s rugged terrain makes it one of the most challenging places to fly in the world, but monsoon clouds, inadequate navigation facilities, and the poor condition of airports make it even more treacherous. In addition, aviation in Nepal is governed by the same culture of carelessness, fatalism, and poor discipline that we see exhibited on the roads and highways every day.

We never learnt our lessons from past accidents and the recommendations of the inquiry reports after previous disasters were never implemented, so it is likely that the tragic deaths of those who perished last Friday on the soggy banks of the Manohara River will also have been in vain.

More than 90 per cent of the crashes in Nepal have been caused by pilot error, usually by flying into a mountain in poor visibility. However, the Sita Air crash seems to have been the first known fatal crash caused by a bird strike in Nepal.

Post-accident crisis management has been almost non-existent in Nepal. After the Buddha Air crash last year, thousands of gawkers flocked to the impact site trampling on evidence, picking up souvenirs, and obstructing rescue and police vehicles. Eye-witnesses saw police themselves pocketing valuables from the bodies and the wreckage.

To be sure, Kot Danda villagers who were first on the scene helped pull out a wounded passenger from the plane and rushed him to hospital, where he died. But the lack of crowd control after an accident hampered rescue. People were at the scene of the Sita Air crash last week within minutes, and had they tried to get the passengers out they could have been killed as well because the plane caught fire and exploded.

However, thousands of people had gathered to look at the plane on fire, some wading across the river to get closer. The sheer mass of onlookers obstructed fire and rescue vehicles, and the first police on the scene did not cordon off the area with the standard 50-m no-go radius. Traffic police should have been keeping the road clear for rescue vehicles, but became onlookers themselves.

Fire trucks had to project foam on the burning plane from 50m away. The head of the Civil Aviation Authority was busy giving live TV interviews, with the burning wreckage serving as backdrop, instead of coordinating rescue and protecting the integrity of the crash site for investigators.

The disaster of the plane crash was followed by the disaster of ineffective crisis management. This calls for a serious review of police, fire and rescue training, and putting a clear chain of command in place. During the Buddha Air crash, the army had a ground team that coordinated effectively with rescue helicopters to clear a helipad at the edge of the forest. Body bags, gloves, and stretchers were all ready. If someone has to take charge of rescue, the army seems to be best equipped to do so.

The Sita Air crash also brings up the problem of bird activity on and above the runway. Kathmandu airport is...
An airline captain suggests immediate steps to minimise the dangers of flying in Nepal

A safer sky

Air crashes have been happening with frightening regularity, and with tragic consequences. Last week’s disaster of a Sita Air Dornier 228 that crashed and burned on takeoff from Kathmandu on a flight to Lukla, killing all 19 on board, proved once more that we have learnt none of the lessons from past crashes.

Nepal’s horrendous air safety record has done incalculable damage to the reputation of a country whose economy depends on tourism. It is time to go to the root of the malaise, find out the underlying reasons for this poor safety record, and take urgent steps to ensure a safer sky. All we have been doing is talking, blaming, and speculating. How many more people need to die before we act?

As always, there has been a flurry of speculation about what happened to the Dornier on Friday morning. We won’t know for sure until the report of the investigation team comes out, and this time there are two British air crash investigators also helping.

From preliminary evidence it seems a bird hit the plane on takeoff, and parts of the propeller or wing ricocheted off to hit the control surfaces of the plane. The Dornier 228 is a sturdy German-made turboprop designed to fly on one engine, but something happened to prevent the pilot from turning back to make an emergency landing.

Another aspect that the investigators must turn their attention to is the practice of aircraft overloading on flights to remote airstrips in Nepal. Most flights to Lukla are on the heavier side either because of deliberate overloading, or under-calculating. Airlines use a 75kg average to calculate the weight of male foreigners, but in reality most are above 80kg. Baggage allowance is 15kg, but up to 20kg is allowed. Passengers also have carry-on bags with heavy trekking gear. In addition, airlines also make money on cargo and there is a tendency to pack it in. Most STOL aircraft in Nepal are overweight, but the extra weight never shows in the load sheets given to pilots.

In the days after the Sita Air crash, civil aviation inspectors conducted spot ramp checks to examine for overloading and found several instances of extra weight on planes.

As with most accidents, last week’s crash was also followed by grisly live TV coverage of the accident scene with unedited footage of half-burnt corpses. If mainstream television channels were bad, the pictures on Facebook and blogs were much worse. The media needs to strictly implement guidelines on visuals, respect the dignity of the dead and recognise the sensitivity of what they are broadcasting. People also need to speak out in social media and ostracise those posting gruesome images.

We know that the real reasons for frequent air crashes in Nepal are lax enforcement of flight rules, regulatory failures, lack of internal checks and balances within airlines. We can eliminate up to 90 per cent of crashes in the future if we just act now to:

1. Stop political interference in pilot selection, licencing, and other aviation matters. Politicians, keep your hands off a profession of which you know nothing about.
2. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) must take its regulatory role more seriously and deploy tough, independent inspectors to conduct regular checks of operators and blacklist those who overlook safety issues.
3. Stop the practice of new airlines inducting old planes.
4. Follow strict international guidelines on pilot discipline and confidential reporting of detrimental crew behaviour.
5. Regulate the cut-throat competition among airlines that forces them to fly in bad weather or with technical snags, and cut corners on safety.
6. Avoid conflict of interest and ban airline owners and promoters from serving in the CAAN board.
7. Stop political interference in pilot selection, licencing, and other aviation matters. Politicians, keep your hands off a profession of which you know nothing about.

These checks happen after every crash, and slowly they are forgotten. Spot checks and inspections should have continuity.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) must take its regulatory role more seriously and deploy tough, independent inspectors to conduct regular checks of operators and blacklist those who ignore safety issues.

Follow strict international guidelines on pilot discipline and confidential reporting of detrimental crew behaviour.

Regulate the cut-throat competition among airlines that forces them to fly in bad weather or with technical snags, and cut corners on safety.

Avoid conflict of interest and ban airline owners and promoters from serving in the CAAN board.
Hollow nationalism

Leaders of the CPN-M have made fools of themselves by prohibiting the entry of cars with Indian number plates and Hindi films that ‘insult’ Nepal. There is no doubt that Nepal’s sovereignty is under serious threat and our nationalism is facing a crisis. Events in the past year have shown how foreign intervention is on the rise and the head of the caretaker government even admitted that ‘the keys lie elsewhere’. But at a time when the peace process has taken a positive turn and when all parties should be looking to resolve the deadlock together, coming out on the streets to protest against neighbours in the name of protecting nationalism is ill-conceived.

This is not to say that political parties remain silent when nationalism is really in crisis. However, they must find better ways to express their concerns about bilateral and domestic issues, while also maintaining cordial diplomatic relations. They must not resort to populist slogans when dealing with the complexities of contemporary geopolitics.

All Nepal-India related issues need to be handled delicately and with great foresight because the countries have close socio-economic-political ties and our citizens interact with each other through the open border. Campaigns to stop Indian vehicles or films affect relations right down to the local level. No one can deny the legal protection offered by both states to each other’s vehicles or the pragmatism that demands their entry. Besides, India is Nepal’s only supplier of petroleum, and many of our daily necessaries also come from across the border. Nepal will only suffer if India decides to cut supplies.

Moreover, there are other crucial issues between the two countries that need attention and vehicle entry or films don’t fall in this category. Vehicles and movies are already covered by the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty. A better move would be to call for the treaty to be revised.

During the ‘sideine’ talks held between Minister of Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha and his Indian counterpart SM Krishna at New York, Krishna made his country’s displeasure clear. Shrestha ensured that vehicles and films affect nationals and that the correct channel for that is through the government. Targeting vehicles and films will take us nowhere and such foolish ultra-nationalism will only stifle the growth of progressive nationalism.

EXPENSIVE INTEGRATION

Spent till date: from November 2006 to July 2012 Rs 14 billion has been sanctioned by the ‘Ministry of Peace and the Special Committee’ still remaining: 13,000 ex-combatants who chose rehabilitation need to paid the second installment of Rs 3.63 billion. Preparations are underway to complete the payment by 10 November.

Faking it

The District Education Office (DEO) in Siraha has decided to cancel the licences of 69 primary schools in the district after a monitoring team found that the schools were receiving state funding and resources in the name of 40,080 fake students. Out of the schools that were investigated, 52 couldn’t be located, eight had no students or property, another school was found without essential infrastructure and six other schools also didn’t have any students. All the schools have been given 15 days to present evidence to save their licences. Lack of regular inspection and rampant corruption have led to a proliferation of such fraud cases.

CPN-M versus India

Interview with vice-chairman of CPN-M CP Gajurel, BBC Nepal Service, 4 October

What is your party’s motive behind banning the entry of vehicles with Indian number plates and Bollywood films?

We feel that some of the demands of Nepalis can be easily met by Nepali goods so it is not necessary to import these.

But your shirt is not made in Nepal. Why aren’t you wearing clothes produced domestically?

Because there aren’t enough clothes produced in Nepal and when there is a shortage of supply we must bring goods from outside. For example, the local market cannot meet the demand for medicines, so we must import them.

How come these demands are resurfacing only after your party split with the establishment? Why were you silent all these years?

We had tried time and again to raise these issues, but our party wouldn’t listen to us. Some of our leaders have forgotten communist ideology and sold out. So after we split, these things came naturally to us because they are related to national sovereignty.

What happened to national sovereignty when you spent eight out of ten years of the armed conflict in India?

Yes, we can’t deny that we used Indian territory during the conflict, but out of the four million Nepalans in India, half of them supported us.

What will happen to those four million Nepalans if the Indian government decides to return the favour and ban Nepalis or Nepal vehicles from entering their territory?

First of all the move has to be justified.

Do you think Nepal’s sovereignty and nationality will be saved by being India on?

We are only claiming our rights and not looking for a fight. They must not think of it as a fight, but as a fight for our rights.

The support of these countries. But even then, Nepal has certain interests and those must not be misunderstood as an affront.

How long will this ‘nationalism’ campaign go on?

Let’s see. We will make sure that our actions don’t negatively affect the lives of ordinary Nepalis. There have been false reports that we stopped the supply of LPG and medicines. But these claims are baseless.

But hall owners and distributors are suffering huge losses due to the ban and many Nepalans don’t support the move. What do you have to say?

You are right, but many people have invested a lot in Nepali films and the industry must be nurtured and developed. But as in the case with vehicles, there are some capitalists here who are acting as agents of India capitalists and we are against them.

But why blame Indian vehicles for the current political crisis? Aren’t we in this situation because political stalwarts like you failed to steer the country to prosperity?

There is no doubt that politicians ruined the country, because politics decides all. Also in addition to the ban on Indian cars and films, we have 28 other demands related to national sovereignty that we will look to enforce. After having fought the people’s war, I think we have the right to address these demands. Baburam Bhaitari said his government will take strong actions against us for the vehicle clamp down, but he has done nothing so far and won’t be able to do anything because we are functioning within our rights.

After 50 years in politics, don’t you think all your efforts have gone to waste?

No, I don’t agree because in politics you have to take a stand. Maybe we made some mistakes, and have not achieved all that we set out to do, but I’m sure we’ve done some things right.

HEADMEN (from l-r): CP Gajurel, Ram Bahadur Thapa, Mohan Baidya, Neta Bikram Chand, and Narayan Sharma of CPN-M during a meeting at the party’s headquarters.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“There will be objective conditions for armed struggle in Nepal for another two decades.”

CPN-M leader Netra Bikram Chand quoted in Kantipur, 2 October

FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

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CPN-M leader Netra Bikram Chand quoted in Kantipur, 2 October
Pedalling to prosperity

SARALA GAUTAM

Shortly after her husband’s death, Nandakini Aryal learnt to ride a cycle. The two-wheeler not only helped her become more independent, but also boosted her dairy business. She would hang 17 jugs on her bicycle handles and travel to the market everyday selling 100 litres of milk and yoghurt. With a daily income of 1,500, she was able to save enough to buy back her house and invest in a few acres of land. Aryal, who is lovingly called Cycle Aama by locals says that if it wasn’t for her cycle she wouldn’t have been able to look after her family.

Nepalis have been using cycles long before cars made their way into the country. Seen as status symbols at one time, cycles may not carry the same prestige these days, but they are intrinsically linked to the livelihood and prosperity of many. The self-employed and small business owners like Aryal particularly reliant on pedal power.

In the Tarai, most households have at least one cycle. Apart from being a means of transport, the two-wheelers even serve as ambulances in the region and make it possible for activists, health care volunteers, and midwives to travel to remote areas where there are no roads or public transport. Access to cycles has also increased the attendance rate of female students and kept them from dropping out.

“Cycles have made a big difference in the lives of Tarai women,” says Birganj-based journalist Chandra Kishor Jha. “It has helped them come out of the confines of their house, made them more confident, encouraged them to take up jobs and made them economically independent.”

There is a popular saying in Chitwan that women who can’t ride bicycles won’t get married and the dairy industry here is a stellar example of women on wheels pedalling to prosperity.

Bishnu Rimal of GEFONT, a labour union close to the UML, says he still remembers how the road in Jhapa would turn into a sea of red when 2,500 sari-clad women rode home after finishing their shifts at the garment factories fifteen years ago.

Although not as popular as in the Tarai, 50,000 cycles ply on the roads of the capital. 20 years ago, 6.6 per cent of residents rode bikes. In the absence of public transport, cycles were the lifeline which connected the villages on the outskirts of the Valley to the centre. As the living standard of the Kathmandu’s middle class rises so has their demand motorbikes and cars. That coupled with unsafe roads has meant that cycle use in the Valley has dropped to 1.6 per cent.

However, cycles are still essential for business. Each day, almost 1,000 cycles ferry vegetables and fruits from the Kalimati market through the narrow alleys and deliver it to wholesalers throughout Kathmandu.

According to Bidur Acharya of the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market Development Committee, almost 40 per cent of the total stock is cleared by cycles. Similarly, almost 50 per cent of LPG gas cylinders are ferried from depots to homes.

“For 41 years till I retired in 2008, I pedalled to work every day and took my bike all around the city. My colleagues in Singha Darbar used to respect me a lot because back then owning a cycle was a status symbol much like owning a car is today,” reminisces Hari Prasad Dahal.

With the crippling fuel crisis and an inefficient public transportation system, cycles have become an environmentally friendly alternative for urban Nepalis. More and more are hopping onto their two wheelers to commute to work and groups like Kathmandu Cycle City are lobbying with the government to build bicycle lanes and make the capital a cycle-friendly city by 2020. Cycling as a hobby has also caught up as Valley residents look to escape the concrete jungle and explore the countryside.

Despite its evolving roles, many still trill their progress back to the two-wheelers.
Vertically challenged in Nepal

By now, it is pretty clear that the current deadlock is not over anything to do with the constitution but about who gets to be in power at election time. So far so good. Nothing unusual there. It’s part of a politician’s job description that he wants to be Top Dog. The problem arises when one of them wants to be Only Dog.

 Democracy, as they say, is all about everyone having equal rights to screw things up. The disagreement at all-party meetings about who gets to sit on the high chair shows that everyone takes democracy seriously in this country. After the splits in the Baddies and Maddies, there are now so many top leaders during party pow-wows that there aren’t enough executive chairs to go around the conference table. So the admin staff brings in extra stools from other offices. Trouble is, not all of them are the same height which makes some leaders look shorter than others. After Prime Minister BRB noticed on the evening TV news how he was dwarfed by Chairman PKD, he got the meeting until the cushions were removed from under the Prime Minister. Our leaders are always making asses (ahem) of themselves, and don’t seem to mind if people find out that they are intellectually-challenged. But they take umbrage at being seen as vertically-challenged.

 Cinemas across Nepal have had to close as the Badder Baddie campaign against Hindi films gathers momentum. Rumour has it this is Comrade CP’s ploy to bring Tamil movies with their dance sequences of gyrating pelvises that he got addicted to watching while serving time in Chennai for travelling on a forged passport. The Ace’ prediction is that Hindi will be unbanned and the cinemas will open for the festival as soon as the Hyphen Party’s coffers are topped up. The ban on Indian vehicles also hit a snag after aっぱ that he got addicted to watching while serving time in Chennai for travelling on a forged passport. The Ace’ prediction is that Hindi will be unbanned and the cinemas will open for the festival as soon as the Hyphen Party’s coffers are topped up. The ban on Indian vehicles also hit a snag after a

Comrade Big Flop telling reporters the other day at The Club: “The ban on Indian cars will improve bilateral relations between India and Nepal.”

Quote of the Week

What’s this we hear about the road-widening project grinding to a halt at Bili Bari because the First Lady’s suit lodged a complaint? Does this mean Comrade Hasiya is working at cross purposes with Comrade Hatauda, the hubby first gentleman? And another erstwhile Also-First Lady has raised objections as well about the road-widening project at Ekantakuna and has pulled strings to limit the demolition so it doesn’t encroach into ancestral property. Meanwhile, one embassy still refuses to budge, leaving Comrades Shapati with no recourse but to send his bulldozers to work around the Great Wall of China.

Nepal has adopted a laissez-faire policy when it comes to granting drivers’ and pilots’ licences. A visually impaired man actually managed to buy a heavy vehicle licence some time ago, and from what we hear the going rate for getting through the written exam now is five grand, and they’ll even give you a receipt. Turning to civil aviation, there is a similar state of affairs at CAAN for the written exam to get one’s pilot’s licence endorsed. The results of a recent written test were scrapped after the nephew of the Great Helmsman himself and a relative of a disgruntled UML leader, both flunked the test. The two however passed the re-exam after being fed the questions beforehand, and now have jobs flying for a domestic airline that shall remain nameless because they advertise with us. The others who passed the first time don’t have jobs yet.

When money collected from those who failed breathalyzer tests started disappearing, Traffic Police came up with an ingenious incentive scheme. Cops testing drivers for alcohol now get to take home 15% of all fines, and the money has to be paid at Global Bank. Drivers have to produce the receipt the next day to sit for a self-improvement class and get their licences back. Smart move. Maybe we can also go high-tech with kickbacks and bribe payments now, and make all under-the-table transactions electronic.