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hatever the outcome of the Supreme Court verdict on the writ petition challenging the legality of the UCPN (M) proposal to make Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi the head of an election government, the question is not ‘if’ there will be elections, but ‘when’. June is out of the question, even November is looking iffy given the hemming and hawing from party leaders, so May 2014 may be a safe bet. Whenever they decide to face voters, all parties will be desperate for a win, which makes it all the more important to have the mechanisms in place, the rules laid out and agreed, and the laws passed. This is a formidable task and renewing voter lists, demarcating constituencies that reflect new population densities, and requiring photo IDs for voters are questions with deep political ramifications. There is also a strong case to have local elections in June or November, preceding general elections. The next general elections is up for grabs to anyone who can guarantee integrity, vision, and good governance.

Fishing in muddy waters

So you want to be a Nepali?

In Nepal’s gender apartheid, the very existence of women can be only certified by men: father, brother, husband, father-in-law, brother-in-law, uncles. The real day for women is still a long way in Nepal. Deepali Gurung

Lumbini special: DESTINATION PEACE

Spread across 777 hectares with the Maya Devi Temple on the southern end and the Peace Pagoda on the northern and dozens of international monasteries on either side, Lumbini today is an international hub that brings together people of different beliefs, colour, ethnicity, and nationality under one garden. Trishna Rana
A last looks like the top leaders of the main parties have agreed to agree. In public, they have said that they will agree to the reconciliation, but who knows what they really want? All this while, a task force was meeting in Kathmandu to iron out the details of the constitutional and legal provisions for elections, the top leaders fanned out across the country addressing supporters and assuring each other of the success of elections. In a sense, the speeches were campaign-style tirades. The parties are already in campaign mode.

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But none of the parties want Regmi to be at the helm for too long. The Maoist-Madhesi coalition led the most corrupt government in Nepal’s democratic history and it has amassed a commendable war-chest to finance an election win, but this ill-gotten hoard will deplete the longer it is out of power. The history and it has amassed a commendable war-chest for too long. The Maoist-Madhesi coalition led the most corrupt government in Nepal’s democratic history and it has amassed a commendable war-chest for too long.

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Nepal’s gender apartheid

The real day for women is still a long way away in Nepal

I have lost count of the number of times I have visited the CDO and the PM’s office to try to register the birth of my daughters so they can become citizens of Nepal. Men sitting behind desks have reminded me that my husband’s identity is a must if my children are to be citizens of my country.

Out of sheer desperation, last week I wrote to Prime Minister Bhattarai about the gross violation of the human right of my children to citizenship. I told him about Nepali children being prisoners in their own motherland. I wrote about my own case: a woman gets married at a young age, a child is born, and the man abandons the family. The mother works hard to bring up her children, but they are deemed stateless and forced to grow up in a land that doesn’t even accept their existence.

I couldn’t believe my eyes when I opened my email the next day. There was a message from the PM’s personal assistant: “The prime minister wishes to meet you and your family regarding your citizenship issue and he has taken it with priority.” I was speechless with anticipation. A new horizon of hope had opened up.

Next morning, I went with my family to meet the prime minister in Singha Darbar (pic, above). Below an imposing picture of Mt Everest, Prime Minister Bhattarai greeted us with a smile and heard us out. He had summoned the chief secretary and men from the ministries. The PM agreed that citizenship must be granted in the name of the mother, and asked the officials: “If we have endorsed laws on gender equality, why does this problem persist?” He directed the officials to ‘use common sense’ and look into our case.

Things moved fast, the very next day we were summoned to the Home Ministry. The CDO was also there and we told our story all over again: that my daughters are born from a Nepali father who left us 15 years ago and doesn’t want to have anything to do with us.

The CDO looked sceptical. He agreed that we live in a patriarchal society, but he said emotions had no place in law. My children could get citizenship if the father is alive or a DNA test could resolve it. But if the children’s father is not Nepali they can’t be given citizenship because otherwise “bhanja bhanji” (his words, meaning nieces and nephews) from across the border may swamp us and threaten our national security. So unless there is an amendment to the constitutional provisions for citizens he can’t do anything.

Prime Minister Bhattarai’s intention of creating a just and egalitarian Nepal is noble, but he has no chance if these are the officials who have to implement his policies. I have come to the sad conclusion that if a revolutionary can’t change the laws to make them more just, then no one can. It seems laws are only made to force citizens to pay their way out of the problem.

Nepali women are discriminated against at all levels, but they face a further ostracisation on the issue of citizenship. The most inclusive elected national assembly in our nation’s history, before it was dissolved last year, had a draft provision on citizenship that was even more regressive than the interim constitution. Under it, only children of Nepali mothers and a Nepali fathers will be eligible to citizenship which means a Nepali mother who can’t prove the father is Nepali (because he is not, because he left her, because she doesn’t have one, because she was raped) can’t have children who are Nepali.

The CDO said the following documents are needed for children to get citizenship in the name of the mother:

1 Father’s citizenship
2 Father and mother’s marriage certificate
3 Recommendation from District Development Officer or Village Development Officer (confirming the child has been conceived by the parents).

Nepal’s citizenship act says that any unclaimed children found within the country’s territorial boundary will be considered Nepali until the time their biological parents are identified. So if I deliberately abandon my children on the streets they will get citizenship, but not if I follow procedures and go to the CDO office?

Nepal has one of the most progressive gay, lesbian, and transgender rights in the region. Theoretically, if I went to Thailand and got a sex change operation and came back as the father of my daughters, I could get them citizenship over the counter.

The Supreme Court made a very important decision on the Sahina Damai case and ruled that children could get citizenship in the name of the mother if the child is conceived because of multiple physical relationships by the mother and the mother cannot pinpoint the real father. But what if the childrens are born from the mother’s relationship with a husband who has abandoned her? We punish the offspring who are already punished.

When I started a Facebook page ‘Citizenship in the Name of Mother’ I realised there are tens of thousands of Nepali mothers like me. In Nepal’s gender apartheid, the very existence of women can be only certified by men: father, brother, husband, father-in-law, brother-in-law, uncles.

Children without citizenship can’t give SLC exams, can’t apply for a driving licence, they have no bank account, no right to vote, no passport. The fear of Indians swarming across the border to become Nepalis is misplaced: why would a Bihari want to be a citizen of Nepal when there are no jobs and we have such primitive laws on citizenship? Is our national sovereignty so fickle that it sees its own women as a security threat?

Gender activists and lawyers have been fighting a lonely battle against a political, bureaucratic and legal system that is weighted against women. My suggestion is that if a husband and wife are living separately and the child has been brought up solely by the mother without any financial help from the father, the law must give the mother the right to pass on her name to her child and grant her citizenship.

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Nepal’s gender apartheid

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“Make the rules and stick to them”

Russian ambassador to Nepal Sergey Vasilievich Velichkin has been in the country since 2010, holds a PhD in Indology, and speaks Urdu and Bengali. He spoke to Nepal Times this week about the history of Russia-Nepal relations, the current political deadlock, and even about how road-widening will affect his embassy.

Nepal Times: Do Russians know enough about Nepal? SV Velichkin: Basically, there’s the universal understanding that Nepal is a friendly country and that we should get to know it better. But Nepal is far away and we need to resume direct flights between Kathmandu and Moscow. The number of Russian tourists is growing, but is still only about 8,000 annually. There are also many more opportunities for trade and investment that haven’t been explored yet.

Most Nepalis who studied in the Soviet Union returned to Nepal, what is your impression of them? Whenever I meet those people who graduated in the 70s and 80s from Soviet universities I’m quite impressed. They’re extremely motivated. They see personal fulfilment incomplete unless they have some idea of changing their own country, not necessarily ideological ideas. Many of them are at the top in their chosen professions: medicine, engineering, journalism. This is what Nepal needs, more people coming back to serve their country.

What’s your opinion of the current situation in Nepal? Are you optimistic about the future? Not all the solutions and scenarios are necessarily brought from outside. There is enough imagination among Nepal’s politicians to find their own solutions. I am not pessimistic, there is a remarkable spirit among leaders here. Even if they criticise each other, they are ready to sit down and talk. Some people underestimate the importance of that. I believe Nepal is on the path of gradual reconciliation, the peace process is not just words, and I would not dismiss the achievements so far. It’s going to be difficult, but you have to be patient.

The Russia returns

Nepali alumni of Russian universities are high-achievers in their chosen professions

SUNIR PANDEY

I was the Cold War and Nepal was trying to steer an equidistance path between the superpowers. So when the Soviet Union offered free technical education for Nepali students, King Mahendra harboured misgivings about Nepalis returning from Russia brainwashed into communism, it doesn’t seem to have deterred him. Hundreds of Nepal students who studied engineering, medicine or journalism in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev or Odessa did not come back as communist zealots. In fact, the opposite happened: many went on to become successful businessmen and cut their teeth trading in jeans and chewing gum between Finland and the Soviet Union.

But more importantly, most Soviet-educated students came home to work in Nepal. “The USSR did not have a policy of bringing in highly-skilled migrants and rightly so because their economy could not support it,” recalls Hemant Dabadi, Director General of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce, who studied in Russia in the 1970s. “A lot of us saw through the ideology and there was no charm for Nepali students to stay back and live there.”

Back home, despite graduates from the West getting preferential treatment, the Russia returns worked hard and rose to prominence in many fields. Among the more notable ones are ex-ministers Ganesh Shah and Dipak Gyawali, cardiologist Aarunsharan Upadhyaya, psychiatrist Bishwa Bandhu Sharma, journalist trainer Marju Mishra, solar-energy pioneer Jagannath Shrestha, and engineer Bijaya Man Shrechan.

“Most Nepali graduates from Russia have returned to work in their country. I have been impressed with their passion and patriotism, they are extremely motivated and are at the top of their professions today,” says Russian ambassador, Sergey Vasilievich Velichkin (see Interview). Russian-trained doctors were generally more willing to work with the rural poor, civil engineers went to remote areas to build highways, and geologists explored the country for minerals.

There was a time when you could go to any of the 75 districts in Nepal and probably find at least a doctor or an engineer who studied in the USSR,” says Dipak Gyawali, former Minister for Water Resources. “None of us knew much about communism when we went there as 18-year olds. It was just another strange land with its own rules. But living together with our Russian batch mates, studying obligatory Marxism while participating in the ubiquitous black market, we did see two sides of the coin. We developed a critical eye towards capitalist consumerism, but also saw the corruption of that ideology which was no different from our Panchayat classes in Nepal.”

There is a popular Russian joke about education in Russia. Two Third World leaders met in the lobby of the UN. One complained that it was getting impossible to govern his country with the communists calling strikes and bandas all the time. The other said he had the same problem but he solved it. How? He sent all the ring leaders off to Moscow to study and they came back total free marketers, that is black marketeers.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, many universities were privatised and the scholarships for Nepali students were dropped. Nepalis still go to study in Russia, but most pay their own way now. The numbers are not as many as before, says Dr Ratna Shalaya of the Russian Cultural Centre, but strong technical education and news of Nepali billionaires in Russia still lure Nepalis to Russia.

The most successful and best-known, Nepali who studied in the former Soviet Union is Upendra Mahato who made his fortune because as a Nepali he adapted better and faster to capitalism and the free market when communism collapsed. Today, Mahato commands a multinational business empire that straddles Belarus, Russia, and Nepal. Among the Nepalis who studied in Russia and didn’t come back to Nepal, many like Mahato, invested in their homeland in hydropower, banking, media, and tourism.

Russia returns have their own organisation called Mitra Kunj to keep track of the more than 5,000 alumni of Russian universities even hosting a meeting of graduates last year in Moscow. But as the Soviet-era graduates now reach retirement age, it is becoming less and less likely that today’s Nepalis who go abroad to study will want to come back.

nepaltimes.com

Nepal’s ‘Russian mafia’, #000 From Russia with love, #225
In patience one of the things we can learn from Russia's own transition after the collapse of communism? We went through a tremendous change, the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century: the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The destabilising potential of the largest country in the world with a nuclear arsenal disintegrating was huge. It could have been disastrous, but we managed to prevent it. There was some bloodshed, the country broke apart, there was a tremendous down slide in the economy. Few countries in the world have gone through wrenching change like that.

Nepal doesn’t face anything like that, it is one single nation and I’m sure it will remain so. We have some experience of transition which could be useful to share. One of them is to prioritise political dialogue and try to stick to some rules. Our transition was highly controversial and was adopted through a referendum in 1993, but it has worked well through all further upheavals.

But now we all stick to the rules despite the controversy in what we are doing. This is the lesson: make the rules and stick to them. In our case it took several years to adopt the constitution, it didn’t happen at one go. In Nepal’s case the priority is to find a proper way to conduct national elections so that an elected Constituent Assembly can write a constitution to set the rules of democratic governance.

How about the controversy about the chief justice being named chief executive? You’re building democracy. You’re in the process of construction and you need to move some blocks around. Sometimes what is going to be at the top is lying in some corner at the construction site. For example, out of the three pillars a particular pillar is so important that you might want to temporarily sacrifice another one. Let’s not dismiss this matter of elections. Elections are essential. An elected legislature is as important for the completeness of democracy as an independent judiciary.

Russia has helped build factories and highways in Nepal in the past, but there isn’t much aid now. Those projects were the backbone of our cooperation in the 60s. At that time the most important thing was to lay down the basis for industrial development of the country.

The current situation is different. The main thing now is to address the contemporary challenges of Nepal, including the economy. The agenda has changed. Today, it’s about meeting the requirements of a 30 million strong country of which three million work abroad. Nepal is a very young mobile country with a young population with enormous spread of education, a country which wants to develop itself.

Are there possibilities for Russian investment? We recently managed to get the Nepali and Russian energy ministries to form a joint working group, they will be meeting in Kathmandu soon and this will be just the beginning. I expect the Nepali side to make a strong pitch for investment and offer opportunities. If the conditions offered are attractive, there are possibilities for investment. In recent years, Russia has invested in hydropower in several countries, including India.

What’s your position about the road widening project in Kathmandu? Kathmandu needs road widening. It will be odd if someone would oppose this process. But in the process not only me, but authorities and the general public have come to know about the difficulties involved. It seems that much of the problems which we face are due to a lack of coordination between different departments. As a result we have troubles with the embassy premises. There were some suggestions about moving our wall from the External Affairs ministry. There’s not much we can offer by way of helping in that regard. This happens to be our property, we have not encroached an inch of municipal territory.
Rabia Flower is an apartment block in the Abbas Town neighbourhood of Karachi, on the road named Isphahani after an associate of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The twin-blasts on 3 March, just as the evening prayers were coming to a close in this Shia residential locality, was the result of a ‘triggered IED’.

More than 150 kg of high explosives were detonated as shoppers filled the market below and families took in the evening sea breeze in the upper storey balconies. Fifty died and many times that were maimed. Water from broken mains mixed with the blood of innocents.

Local youth and ambulances swung to the rescue, while security personnel took their time to arrive, probably late because the mass-murderers have taken to setting off explosions in sequence, killing those who respond to the emergency – local youth, journalists, firefighters, police, and rangers. Or they were late because they had to provide security to a VIP wedding in the city that day.

Karachi has become a microcosm of Pakistan’s politico-ethnic rivalries which have transmogrified into deeper cross-cutting complexities. The city today harbours a frightening brew of militancy, involving drug, arms, and real estate mafiosi placed on top of additional layers of communal polarisations. Class-based secular politics, for which Sindh and its capital were celebrated, has its back to the wall.

Beyond the tension between the political parties representing the Urdu-speaking Mohajir and the Sindhi indigenes, there are now those claiming to represent Punjabi, Baloch, and Pashto interests. In terms of sectarian targeting, the sense of vulnerability now goes beyond the Christians, Hindu or Ahmadiya.

What has taken Pakistan by deathly storm is the attacks on the Shia, a somewhat larger minority. There has been Shia-targetting in all parts of the country, from Gilgit-Baltistan, Lahore to Quetta in the north, east, and west. And now Karachi in the south.

For a while, other issues are forgotten as television brings live reports of the hospital emergency intakes, the family members in shock, and excavators digging into the debris. The nervous wait for the upcoming national and provincial elections slated for May, the fear of how the departure of NATO forces will buffet Pakistan, the threat of US sanctions if Islamabad insists on importating desperately needed natural gas from Iran, the debate over the handling over development of Gwadar port to Chinese contractors – all are forgotten momentarily as all eyes are glued on the upper storey of Rabiya Flower that continues to burn.

Karachi is a massive city of nearly 20 million and regular preoccupations take over as evening turns to night. Other localities, from the violence-prone Lyari township to the humongous ‘informal settlement’ of Orangi, to the posh and secure colonies of Defence and Clifton, go back to their interrupted lives. The wedding reception of up-and-coming Sindh politician Sharmila Farooqi proceeds as planned. Other than in Abbas Town and the nearby Patel and Aga Khan hospitals, the sound of sirens indicates not the arriving ambulance but the ubiquitous signal of ‘VIP movement’.

A well-regarded journalist had told me on Sunday afternoon just before the bomb, “The killings in Karachi are more targeted. Unlike in the past, there are fewer mob killings or random blasts.”

The mass killing of citizens is a continuous exercise and the sense of fatalism is such that instead of demands for accountability and justice, there is simply the sad wait for the next mayhem. Last month it was Quetta, next month it will be someplace else. Says one IT engineer: “Religion should be a warm cloak, but it has become a shining badge of certitude.”

Across the breadth of the subcontinent, in Bangladesh, the perpetrators of 1971 are being brought to book four decades after their crimes. The masterminds of the mayhem at Abbas Town may at least feel threatened if they knew that the sturdy arm of justice will follow them years and decades from now and hold them accountable for drawing the blood of innocents.

This piece first appeared in The Hindu on 5 March

Irrelevance of innocence

Karachi has become a microcosm of Pakistan’s politico-ethnic rivalries which have transmogrified into deeper cross-cutting complexities.

Kanak Mani Dixit in Karachi

EPSON MULTIMEDIA PROJECTORS
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Epson Exceed Your Vision
Aruna Karki

Aruna was 13 when she first stood on stage under the spotlight. 19 years later, her love for acting has only grown stronger. A small town girl from Sarlahi, she says she dreamt of being a theatre actress ever since she was old enough to understand. Aruna started her journey as a student of Nachghar and later entered Gurukul where she was an instrumental part of many performances. She says her undying devotion for the art is what has kept her going for almost two decades and gave her the strength to persevere even in the most trying times. Staying true to her art, she works extremely hard to get into the skin of each character she portrays and her colleagues say she transforms into a totally different person everytime on stage. In her latest role in Chhadke, Aruna does an extremely convincing job as a doting wife.

THE QUEENS OF DRAMA

This women's day we celebrate female trailblazers of Nepali theatre

SUMANA KC

Sumana KC is among the very few Nepali artists who has an international degree in drama. After dabbling in the art for a few years, she left for India to get her diploma because she felt she needed to learn the basic concepts and theories. She says her years in drama school not only helped her get a deeper understanding of acting, but also the economics and marketing behind that happen behind the curtains. Not one to limit herself, Sumana has experimented with direction through plays like Budhamatanah, Dhinchachokha (The Clever She Goat), Purgatory, and Bodhi. She wants to devote the next few years solely to acting and then direct plays, and eventually feature films.

DIYA MASKEY

Diya is perhaps the most well-known face of Nepali theatre today. A trained Kathak dancer, she feels she expresses her ideas and emotions best through acting. Before stepping onto the stage, she was part of the popular television series Dalan. A former student of Anup Baral, Diya joined Actor’s Studio after realising that it was possible to earn a living out of the profession. Now she is an instructor at the very studio where she first found her footing.

She built her success by showing immense patience and putting in long hours even when things were not going her way. So it came as no surprise to those who knew Diya when she won the love of critics and ordinary Nepalis through her stellar performances in Kagbeni and the recently released Swoyagare. She says theatre isn’t for the light-hearted or those looking to become overnight sensations. Her mantra for success to young actresses: a single-minded focus on what they are doing rather than being influenced by what others think and say about them.

SUMAN RAYMAJHI

As winter marched right into summer this past week, the Valley saw warmer days while mornings and evenings were just as chilly. Haze in the mid-hills accounted for a temporary suspension in Kathmandu’s sightseeing activities, and with a fresh westerly brewing in full flow there should be further cloud cover over the weekend. Northwest Nepal will see a few showers and some precipitation could even make it into the Kathmandu valley on Saturday. Nights will remain chilly and it is advisable you sling a jacket if you go out in the late afternoons.

While the big boys of politics hog the headlines left, right, and centre, there is a quiet revolution underway in Nepali theatre. For too long theatre remained the sole dominion of Nepali men. There was a time when there were zero female artists and men enacted all their roles. The ‘boy’s club’ mentality still continues to some extent even today, where female playwrights, producers, directors, actors, set designers face greater difficulties trying establish themselves and are paid pennies compared to their male counterparts. Many simply pass into oblivion within a few years.

Today, however, we celebrate three women power players from the Nepali theatre. Despite immense adversities, these trailblazers have made an unwavering commitment to their art and are inspiring other female artists to break free of cultural shackles through their hard work.

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Sumana KC is among the very few Nepali artists who has an international degree in drama. After dabbling in the art for a few years, she left for India to get her diploma because she felt she needed to learn the basic concepts and theories. She says her years in drama school not only helped her get a deeper understanding of acting, but also the economics and marketing behind that happen behind the curtains. Not one to limit herself, Sumana has experimented with direction through plays like Budhamatanah, Dhinchachokha (The Clever She Goat), Purgatory, and Bodhi. She wants to devote the next few years solely to acting and then direct plays, and eventually feature films.

SUMAN RAYMAJHI

As winter marched right into summer this past week, the Valley saw warmer days while mornings and evenings were just as chilly. Haze in the mid-hills accounted for a temporary suspension in Kathmandu’s sightseeing activities, and with a fresh westerly brewing in full flow there should be further cloud cover over the weekend. Northwest Nepal will see a few showers and some precipitation could even make it into the Kathmandu valley on Saturday. Nights will remain chilly and it is advisable you sling a jacket if you go out in the late afternoons.

While the big boys of politics hog the headlines left, right, and centre, there is a quiet revolution underway in Nepali theatre.

For too long theatre remained the sole dominion of Nepali men. There was a time when there were zero female artists and men enacted all their roles. The ‘boy’s club’ mentality still continues to some extent even today, where female playwrights, producers, directors, actors, set designers face greater difficulties trying establish themselves and are paid pennies compared to their male counterparts. Many simply pass into oblivion within a few years.

Today, however, we celebrate three women power players from the Nepali theatre. Despite immense adversities, these trailblazers have made an unwavering commitment to their art and are inspiring other female artists to break free of cultural shackles through their hard work.

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**NEPAL INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FILM FESTIVAL,** the seventh edition of the annual NIFF will explore issues related to Nepal’s minority. 24 to 28 April, City Hall, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, (01)4202573, ifa_festivals@yahoo.com, www.tifarepal.org.np

- **PRANAMAYA YOGA,** immerse yourself in a whole day of yoga activities with Nicky at the wonderful Sri Aurobindo Ashram with Nicky and the children. Rs 2,500, 9802045484, info@pranamaya-yoga.com
- **Himalayan Rush,** run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake. 30 March, Pokhara, 9851099697, www.lakewalk.com

**MUSTANG TRAIL RACE 2013** begins a new era of adventure sports in Nepal with a three day journey on foot, horse, or train. 27 April to 28 April, (01)5548968, 7136896, raft@mustangtrailrace.com

**NOYOZ,** this tiny little joint serves food that tastes like your mother’s home-cooking. (Bhaktapur)

**STRAWBERRY DELIGHTS,** pop up at The Pastry Shop for a variety of strawberry delights. Rs 125, Runs till 14 March, Radisson Hotel, Lajimpat, (01)4442828 (ext. 2370)

**FUJI BAKERY,** tucked in Chakupat this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. Chakupat, Lalitpur, 9821337378

**BACKYARD SCREENINGS,** watch great cinema while enjoying delicious food. Rs 100, 2 to 28 March, every Thursday, 6.30pm, Backyard Café, Jhamsikhel

**FIJ BAKERY,** tucked in Chakupat, this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. Chakupat, Lalitpur, 9821337378

**BUDDHA CAROLINE,** exquisite food, glorious sunshine and more. 9am to 2pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01)4244267

- **CHEZ CAROLINE,** exquisite food, glorious sunshine and more. 9am to 2pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01)4244267
- **Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Cafe,** dine your time in the café’s free wi-fi zone as you enjoy wood-fired pizzas, home-made pastas, and the Tibetan gyakok. Boudha, (01)4445355
- **New Tushita Restaurant,** relaxing ambience and good food. Don’t miss out on its serene with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lajimpat, (01)4443957

- **TIAN RUI,** if you’re looking for genuinely good Chinese food this restaurant is the place to go. (Thapathali)
- **Kotetsu,** authentic Japanese dishes that cater to your needs and taste buds. Lajimpat
- **Taal & Taal,** this terrace restaurant with a panoramic waterfront view

**STORMBRINGER COMING,** time to glide down to Tribeswars for an evening with rock legends Deep Purple. 15 March, 3pm, Dasarath Rangasala

**ALICE,** the Swiss duo jams with Kiran Nepali, Hari Maharjan, and Rizu Tuladhar. 22 March, 6.30pm, Maksh, Jhamsikhel

**HUMAN RIGHTS FILM SERIES,** celebrate Women’s Day with a powerful documentary on the nomad superhero Wars Done, with screenings throughout the months.

- **PRANAMAYA YOGA,** immerse yourself in a whole day of yoga activities with Nicky at the wonderful Sri Aurobindo Ashram with Nicky and the children. Rs 2,500, 9802045484, info@pranamaya-yoga.com
- **Himalayan Rush,** run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake. 30 March, Pokhara, 9851099697, www.lakewalk.com

**MUSTANG TRAIL RACE 2013** be a part of a group of athletes and get the experience of a lifetime by running through the roof of the world. 27 April to 28 April, (01)5548968, 7136896, raft@mustangtrailrace.com
**Buddha’s Maya**

It’s been a long tiring day. You’ve spent five hours exploring the almost five km Lumbini garden stretch and are desperate to leave behind the throng of tourists. A 10 minute stroll from the gate at Mahabharat road, past yellow mustard fields you will find your oasis: Buddha Maya Garden Hotel.

Spread lavishly across eight acres, the hotel belongs to the KG4 Group owned by environmentalist, forester, and best-selling author of self-improvement books, Karma Sakyia and has the charm and elegance reminiscent of its sister in Thamel. And its remarkably peaceful surroundings make it ideal for relaxing the body and cleansing the mind.

As one of the top luxury hotels in the area, Buddha Maya regularly hosts heads of state, diplomats, and movie stars. Even the Queen Mother of Bhutan, Tshering Yangdon, made the Garden her home for a night when she visited in February.

Starting at $75 per night, guests staying in the main wing of the hotel in February. The breakfast comes with a 20% discount and includes a big plate of freshly baked breads and a salad bar. The restaurant offers a variety of international and Nepali cuisines and is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The hotel also boasts of a swimming pool, gym, and a spa to help you recharge your batteries, and a bigger restaurant.

As buses after buses of European pilgrims arrive every day, the front desk staff is swamped and they are likely to get busier in the coming months as Buddha Maya expands to 100 rooms. The upgraded hotel will also boast of a swimming pool, badminton court, a spa to help you recharge your batteries, and a bigger restaurant. So pack your bags and begin your quest for inner peace right here at Buddha Maya. 🏡

Tirtha Karna

www.kmgh.com/buddha-maya-garden.html
(01)4700632, (01)4700733, (01)470033

**LUMBNI**

**HAATIBAN RESORT**, tucked away near a jungle at the side of a hill with a bigger restaurant.

Established eight years ago by Sam Voelstra of The Last Resort and Niralkar Yakthumba of Moksh, the Sundance Festival is still the only overnight open-air live music event in Nepal. The festival has been extremely popular with both tourists and locals alike, and given Nepali bands a chance to jive with international groups.

This edition of the festival will feature Albatross, Joint Family, Soul Train, and many other artists. DJ BPM will have the crowd on its feet in the most unique party ever. As buses after buses of buses of buses of buses of European pilgrims arrive every day, the front desk staff is swamped and they are likely to get busier in the coming months as Buddha Maya expands to 100 rooms. The upgraded hotel will also boast of a swimming pool, badminton court, a spa to help you recharge your batteries, and a bigger restaurant.

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Tirtha Karna

www.kmgh.com/buddha-maya-garden.html
(01)4700632, (01)4700733, (01)470033
A busy alley in Khichapokhari, in the heart of Kathmandu’s main business district, is abuzz with shoppers. The one stop solution for retail therapy recently had a kinky addition: Khichapokhari is now home to two registered sex toy shops.

On the third floor of a commercial building alongside clothing stores, is Nice n Naughty where shelves are laden with bright coloured toys and devices that hint at unimaginable pleasure. A full bodied doll occupies the space beside a range of skimpy lingerie that even Victoria’s Secret models would think twice about wearing. Established six months ago by Prabin Dhakal and Suraj Bhattarai, the sex toy store has received phenomenal response: it has a monthly turnover of Rs 300,000.

“Although we were worried in the beginning, we haven’t had any protest or disturbance,” says Dhakal, 28, who first ventured into the sex toy business with Sweet Secret, Nepal’s first registered sex toy store which is now closed. Despite initial hiccups, the registration of ‘Nice n Naughty’ went ahead smoothly and there have been no problems with shipping products.

Just a few minutes walk away from Nice n Naughty, near Sundhara is Nepal Condom House which has come a long way since its establishment in 2009. “The first year was tough,” admits owner Yogesh Neupane, “back then people hesitated about even asking for a condom and fellow store owners had reservations about the shop and even on my character.”

Luckily things have changed for the better now and the store has steady flow of people shopping for items to enhance their sex life. The walk-in shoppers are mostly above 35 and mostly men.

According to both the store owners, women don’t frequent the store as often as men, but they do receive a lot of orders through phone and online. “We are planning to have a separate room with a female attendant just to cater to them,” says Neupane, adding that dildos are popular among women in their twenties.

“The demand for sex toys was huge when we started, so we began selling them along with condoms,” says Neupane. Nepal Condom House now has outlets in Damak, Ilhahi, Dhanar, Birtamod, and Chitwan, where the demand for sex toys is steadily increasing. Nepal Condom House has 49 different types of condoms and also sells items like dildos and vibrators imported from Thailand.

“Many people have changed their attitude towards sex and are warming up to the idea of using toys to improve their sex life,” says Suraj Bhattarai. The trend of gifting wives and girlfriends sex toys is catching on, and more so because of the rise in the number of men going abroad for work. When Nice n Naughty organised a bumper sale last Valentine’s Day, it was an immediate hit with many customers thronging the store and others ordering online.

While many youngsters visit the store and leave giggling without buying anything, there are many who come here seeking genuine help, says Neupane, who runs a sex clinic next door.

Although the store owners have helped many overcome their apprehension regarding sex toys, they still find it difficult to make their own families understand about their career choice. Admits Dhakal: “My father who is very traditional still has problems with the store, but hopefully he will understand that it is just like any other business.”

www.nicennaughty.com.np
www.nepalcondomhouse.com
When Amrit Gurung (pic, right) retired from the Indian Army, he wanted to come home and start a business but his savings were not enough. He found a job in Japan and worked there for nine years. He returned from Japan six years ago with not just cash, but also a passion for rainbow trout. He felt the clear, cool streams of his native Kaski were ideal for starting a fish business. Today, Gurung’s Gandaki Rainbow Trout Farm produces 15 tons of fish a year, and with expansion plans underway he will be raising that to 50 tons a year.

Gurung has also been training other farmers to farm trout, and now there are five big trout farms in Kaski and surrounding districts. Gurung doesn’t see them as competition, he feels there is enough business to go around and fish farming could uplift the livelihoods of Nepalis and convince them to stay home instead of migrating to work.

One of the pioneer trout farmers in Nepal is Purna Bahadur Lama who used to work at the government fishery farm in Trisuli. After retirement in 1997, he started raising Japanese rainbow trout with one pool and 400 fish and with a grant from the National Agriculture and Resource Centre expanded his farm and restaurant.

Ex-Gurkha transforms district’s economy with a trout farm in the shadow of Machhapuchhre

JIVAN PRASAD RAI in POKHARA

GOLD AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW

The trout is a carnivore fish from the salmon family. It is native to lakes and rivers of North America west of the Rockies, but is now farmed across the world.

GRILLED TROUT RECIPE

Ingredients

- 4 rainbow trout
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- ½ tablespoon fresh ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Directions

1. Preheat grill to 400 degrees
2. Coat outside of trout with oil
3. Sprinkle salt and pepper on inside of trout
4. Add lemon juice to trout
5. Place trout on grill, reduce heat
6. Flip when grill side becomes white
7. Serve trout immediately

WEIGHT: 3.6 kg

HABITAT: Cool, clear rivers, streams, and lakes water temperature between 3-20 Celsius

HEALTH BENEFITS

Trout contains fat, but they come from Omega-3 fatty acids which reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, arterial clogging. Trout also:

- Reduces bad cholesterol (LDL) as well as blood pressure
- Protects the body against circulatory problems like thrombosis and gout. Has very little sodium.
- A filet of trout has up to 10 grams of healthy protein.
- Trout has cholesterol, but that is compensated by fat burning properties.
- One filet makes up most of the body’s requirement of Vitamin B12, B6, Niacin.
- Rich in potassium, phosphorous and selenium, minerals essential for good health.
Beasts of the Southern Wild

By Sophie Pandey

Rhys Ifans’s entrancing new film, also his first feature, has the heart and soul of true independent cinema. Shot on 16 millimetre film in the heart of Louisiana, the film was made for a little under $200,000, the majority of actors had never been on camera before, and the main character, the six year old ‘Hushpuppy’ played by the fierce, vulnerable, adorable Quvenzhane Wallis was actually only five years old at the time of her audition.

Beasts of the Southern Wild has rawness, a poetic heart, beautiful imagery, and a little girl as the protagonist. With its hints of magical realism, the film follows in the footsteps of other greats such as The Spirit of the Beehive (1973), a wonderful movie by Victor Erice about a young girl who befriends a Frankenstein type monster lurking on the outskirts of her rural home, and Pan’s Labyrinth (2006), a film by Guillermo del Toro, about another young girl who befriends a behemoth like prehistoric, mythical creatures of the Aurochs, behemoth like monsters, slowly coming towards the end of World War Two.

Beasts follows in this grand tradition of young girls grappling with monsters, slowly coming of age, but without losing their innocence. Hushpuppy too, must deal with the decline of her oft drunk father, the loss of their charmed lives in the ‘Bathtub’ (an area of Louisiana unprotected by the levees and thus extra vulnerable to hurricane like storms), and the approach of the Aurochs, behemoth like prehistoric, mythical creatures that have melted out of the ice that entrapped them and are making their way across America towards Hushpuppy and her beloved home.

While the film has been both lauded and criticised for its episodic, almost fragmented narrative filled with seemingly beautiful scenes, it is far from an arbitrary bunch of images tied together through Hushpuppy’s charming narration. The writers, Zelini and Lucy Alibar, are skilled storytellers who know exactly what they are doing. The beginning of the film, though apparently formless, introduces the carefree lives of the community who choose to reside in the ‘Bathtub’ despite its hardships and their life of relative squalor. The various and colourful characters are all named during this time, each of them standing out in our minds.

When the storm does come, this introduction makes us care for all of the characters, young, old, drunken or not.

The writers also draw the relationship between Hushpuppy and her father ‘Wink’ with pathos and humour. They love each other, but each character, being indomitable in their own ways, resists the other’s overtures fiercely until the storm and Wink’s illness finally create an unspoken understanding between them.

It is Hushpuppy through, that astonishing the most in this wondrous film. Walls’s show no artefact as she explores her world, alternately marvelling at the beauty around her, laughing, scowling, burping, ripping apart lobsters, and punching her father in the chest when appropriate.

Hushpuppy’s journey, her courage, her imagination, and her wide-eyed stare are the reasons behind this film’s resonance. Somehow, Bebh Zelini managed to write a version of “The Great American Story”, but with a heroic little black girl at its heart. Even more astonishingly, he managed to find the one girl who could actually pull it off.

For anyone who loves cinema, this film is a must. It might seem experimental, fragmented, and pretentious to some, but for those whose minds are open, Beasts of the Southern Wild is an adventure for your soul.

For all the women who have not yet gone ‘solo’ because of the long labours of love involved in the ‘pelvic massage’, a little fuzzy friend is here to the rescue.

Diamonds are no longer a girl’s best friend, the rabbit vibrator is. The buzz first started when the rabbit made its debut on silver screen on the popular HBO series Sex and the City. The drama launched the vibrator into superstar status overnight and since then it has been creating ripples in places where only a few men have successfully ventured. The rabbit vibrator originated in Japan, where it is illegal to produce sex toys that resemble male genitalia. And after taking millions of women across continents on the ultimate joyride, the funny bunny has made its way to Nepal.

Available at the handful of sex stores around the Valley, the rabbit vibrator amps up the pleasure power with lots of sexy features to target your g-spots. The seven inch long dildo makes it perfect for deep penetration while the shaft with rows of spinning beads ensures the most pleasant and intense massage down there. The well formed head rotates often, giving untold internal stimulation. Add to that the classic bunny ear shaped tickler that ticks your clitoris setting you off on a new world of sexual bliss.

The rabbit clit stimulator and the shaft operate through different buttons allowing you to adjust the speed and stimulation level individually. Powered by 2AA batteries the delightful rabbit comes in different colours and materials ranging from silicon to latex.

While vibrators from Philips and Trojan are yet to hit the Nepali market, the made in China bunnies from lesser known brands which start at Rs 9, 000 onwards don’t disappoint either. The only odd feature about the ultimate pleasure toy is the fake moaning and groaning sounds that the rabbit vibrator plays. Instead of heightening your excitement, it just interrupts an intense solo session. Luckily, you can turn the volume down. Some rabbit vibrators available here don’t have ears horns instead of bunny ears.

Now who’s have thunk a rabbit could make for an affordable ‘gateway’ pleasure pal? Just to you make the most of your rabbit, the rotating beads at the shaft also do wonders to shoulder and back pain.

Just a suggestion!

Yantrick’s verdict: This perfect fuzzy friend never gets tired, never turns down an advance because of a lousy football match, and makes you explode into joyful million pieces every single time. How many men can beat that?
Witness to History in the Making

Under a blue sky in the summer of the year 1978, Nepal waited the arrival of a celebrity guest from its neighbour to the north. China’s paramount leader Deng Xiaoping had chosen Nepal for one of his rare foreign jaunts, and King Birendra, the enthusiastic host, had ensured that a red carpet was rolled. Vice-Premier Deng’s visit to China’s tiny neighbour in South Asia had evoked immense interest and the world media based in the region had descended to Kathmandu to cover the event.

This is one of the many milestones in Nepal’s recent history that correspondent Madhav Acharya writes about in his book, My Tryst with Writing. The book is a combination of other events and anecdotes which Acharya witnessed firsthand and which he now recounts. As a journalist with RSS and Radio Nepal, and later correspondent for Kyodo News Agency, Acharya lived through a pretty tumultuous period of Nepal history. Acharya has an accurate recall, and an eye for detail that has stood him in good stead as a correspondent. He has a ready turn of phrase when recounting many of the personal, political, and national stories that have held our interest over those years.

The book opens somewhat slowly with the account of how, urged on by his grandfather, he turned away from the family teaching tradition to become a writer and journalist. Perhaps the readers’ attention might have been more easily captured early on by opening with the true story of how, at 10:15pm on 1 June 2001, he got the ‘scoop’ on the tragic story unfolding from the Royal Palace and sent it off to Kyodo. Others followed, but Madhav had the story out accurately, and ahead of the rest.

He also relates his encounters with BP Koirala, Liz Hawley’s Reuters days, Girija Koirala’s ups and downs, the story of Bhutan refugees, the then King Gyanendra’s coup, the Maoist insurgency, India’s influence in Nepal politics, Lumbini developments, and the Japanese involvement, meeting with Baburam Bhattarai north of Gorkha and Sher Bahadur Deuba in Kathmandu. He also has a section on Himalayan mountaineering.

Acharya could be faulted about having perhaps rather too many references that reflect a man who feels that much of the time his cup is half empty rather than half full. There are far too many examples of ‘Nepali English’, that and the book’s a quantity exotic voice. But I am probably biased because Madhav is my golfing buddy. – Robin Manston

3 FOX

The soup was just too sweet, the slices of tomatoes that were thrown in with capiscums and onions were too big and too ripe. To make things worse the fries were completely soggy and lacked the crispiness that makes chips chili such a favourite among Nepalis.

Luckily for us (and a face-saver for 3 Fox) the eight balls of cheese were heavenly. Deep fried and with generous portions of cheese, the fromage frais oozed out; almost generous portions which means a group of three can eat for less than Rs 400 each.

How to get there:
From the Lumbini gate at Mahiluwar road, walk towards the bazaar and after 500 metres make a right turn. Walk another 100 metres and you’ll see 3 Fox on your left hand side.

Sunflower Travellers Lodge and Restaurant

For dinner, we went Chinese at Sunflower Travellers Lodge, which was definitely a better pick than our lunch option. Owned and run by Chinese who speak fluent, endearing Nepali, this place takes its ‘authentic’ tag seriously. The menu is extensive and you have to order your order and pay at the front desk before you seat yourself in the dining room on the second floor or if weather permits at the rooftop terrace on the third floor.

We ordered chicken kothey (Rs 180) for starters, the manager said it was a hit among Nepalis and for the main course we had chicken hot pot (Rs 380) and Kung Pao chicken (Rs 220) accompanied by a bowl of plain rice (Rs 50).

The eight pieces of kothey are definitely some of the best we have tried. They were deep fried but not heavy, no onions and the meat masala was barely traceable. The hot pot, however, was the highlight of our meal.

Meant for two, it is big enough to be shared among three and is a wonderfully light, healthy yet delicious concoction of cauliflower, broccoli, black mushroom, Chinese spinach, and tofu in chicken broth. The broth was bought to us in a pot and a small candle at the bottom kept the soup warm and nice throughout the evening.

When our massive plate of Kung Pao arrived, it was a delight for our eyes and bellies. The diced marinated chicken stir fried with peanuts, onions, carrots, zucchini, crushed green pepper flakes, and peppercorns was the right amount of juicy, tangy, fresh and a perfect way to conclude a pleasing meal.

There are no frills at Sunflower, the dining area is very simple, but the efficient service and excellent food more than make up for the lack of fancies. Our favourite part is definitely the generous portions which means a group of three can eat for less than Rs 400 each.

Trishna Rana

How to get there:
From the Lumbini gate at Mahiluwar road, walk towards Paras chok, after ten minutes you will see Sunflower’s three-storey red brick building on your right.
This past winter has been very harsh on our lungs. The thick inversion layer trapped dust and smog in the air for weeks and Kathmandu recorded dangerously high levels of pollution with the unfinished road expansion project making the city’s air more unbreathable. And if you smoked during this time, you made yourself doubly vulnerable to a host of chronic lung disease such as COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) as proved by studies by doctors like Mark Zimmermann and Paban Sharma from Patan Hospital.

But to better understand air pollution and figure out ways to protect ourselves, we need to understand aerosols. Aerosols are a collection of particles that remain airborne for a substantial period of time. Many pollutants exist in this form and their pattern of deposition in the lung depends on the size. Larger particulate matters above 10 microns (PM 10) are trapped in the nose and upper airways, but the finest and most deadly particles, PM 2.5, find their way into the inner recesses of the lungs.

Most Kathmandu residents don masks or cover their mouths with handkerchiefs when out on the streets. But PM 2.5 which is about 30 times thinner than human hair can easily penetrate these generic masks. While many of us know how harmful air pollution is to our lungs, the relation between pollution and cardiovascular diseases is not talked about too often. Many people are surprised to find out how these small particles lead to an increased susceptibility to heart attacks and strokes.

However, outdoor air pollution is not our only enemy. Thousands of households across Nepal still burn wood and dried cow dung to use as cooking fuel in their kitchens. Inhaling this exhaust is as worse as smoking five packs of cigarette a day and women who are in-charge of the kitchen are at most risk. In a recent study conducted by our Patan Hospital staff and Italian colleagues in Khumbu, a non-invasive ultrasound revealed that the inner lining (endothelium) of the arteries of a large number of inhabitants of this region was impaired. Derangement of endothelial function of the arteries leads to atherosclerotic disease, the hallmark of heart attacks and strokes. Although Khumbu has clean air, most people here still use bio-mass in homes which causes the damage in the endothelium.

The good news is that both outdoor and indoor pollution are reversible, but we need to create awareness and the political will to make a change.
Whose Lumbini is it anyway?

Greed, conflict of interest, and a lack of sustainable long-term vision on the national level have held back Lumbini for far too long

TRISHNA RANA IN RUPANDEHI

Visiting Lumbini is an odd experience. While the historical and spiritual significance of the white box Maha Devi Temple leaves one in awe, if you look underneath its calm veneer, the birthplace of Buddha is contemporary Nepal in a microcosm.

Under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) has been implementing the master plan drawn up by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in 1978 and managing the 1x3 mile zone since 1985. However 35 years on, the larger Lumbini area is still not in the picture and the project is moving at snail’s pace. The state’s inability to support LDT financially is one reason for three decades of foot dragging. Out of its Rs 130 million budget for 2011, the government could only supply Rs 15 million. While international support for the master plan remains strong, none of that has translated into monetary help.

The high-turnover rate at the Trust as well as the ministry has prevented continuity of ongoing projects as such new incumbent brings his own agenda. Since 2008 there have been three vice-chairmen at LDT.

The large chunk of the problem, however, lies in the Trust’s inability to move with the times and its refusal to be flexible on the master plan. Ask officials at LDT about why there aren’t even basic services like information officers and centres, guided tours or guides on hire, the usual response is, “We will start once the master plan is completed.”

Architect and UNESCO consultant Kai Weise says LDT’s should remain true to the spirit of the master plan without necessarily following every single detail. But this would require a major shift in the style of functioning not just of the Trust but the entire ministry.

Like other “big fish” projects in Nepal, greed, conflict of interest, and a lack of sustainable long-term vision on the national level have held back this international heritage for far too long. The government’s lack of foresight was on display during the Nepal-India Tourism Mart organised in Lumbini this January.

The Indians came prepared with books, posters, and other promotional material about the Buddhist pilgrimage circuit in their country whereas ours showed up empty handed. The state was similarly ill-prepared to organise Visit Lumbini 2012, right at the heels of Nepal Tourism Year 2011, and the event came and went without much fanfare.

As the birthplace of Buddha, Lumbini should ideally be the starting point of the pilgrimage circuit. Unfortunately, most foreigners journey through Kushinagar, Sarnath, Bodhgaya in India and finally make a few hours ‘lay-over’ here. Out of the nearly 4,000 tourists that arrive each day only 1,200 or so (30 per cent) stay overnight.

When asked why it’s so difficult to get tourists to spend more time and money on our side of the border, officials get defensive and shift the blame elsewhere. “Our responsibility is to develop and protect the world heritage site and surrounding areas, not to do business,” says a LDT officer, “It’s the job of travel agencies and hotels to sell the place, network with their counterparts in India, attract more tourists, and convince them to stay longer.”

As both vie for the largest share of the Lumbini pie, this turf war between the government and private businesses is not only hurting those who spend thousands to come here but also defeats the spirit of the Buddha.

Instead of working as partners these various parties treat each other as adversaries. The tension between the LDT and hotel owners in particular is palpable. Hotels blame LDT for killing business by allowing monasteries within the Lumbini complex to open hostels and house pilgrims for cheap.

“The number of tourists has soared, but our business has not been able to keep up,” explains the manager of Hotel Peace Land in Lumbini. “LDT’s unfair policies are driving us out.”

The Trust, on the other hand, says hotels in the area haven’t bothered to improve their quality or contributed towards Lumbini’s development in anyway and are only concerned about squeezing every last penny out of visitors.

But all this ping pong politics holds significance for Rickshaw drivers like Krishna, who earns around Rs 600 a day taking tourists around the garden. Families like his are hardly ever included in national and international discussions about Lumbini’s ‘development’. And while the windfall from Buddhism provides employment to some, it has done little in terms of uplifting living standards or improving education in the region.
Three things unite 26 million Nepalis like nothing else: MoMo, Mount Everest, and Lumbini. Some of us take our national symbols so seriously we create Facebook pages declaring that Buddha was born in Nepal. But national symbols aside, Lumbini needs to be on every traveller’s bucket list. Located in Rupandehi district, barely 30 minutes from the Indian border, the city pulls in up to 700,000 pilgrims annually, pumping cash into the local economy.

Before Lumbini was transformed into a spiritual Disneyland, it was the iconic white box flanked by a lone-standing pipal tree on one side and the Asokan pillar on the other that devotees and tourists from around the globe flocked to. Excavated in 1996 and rebuilt in 2002, today visitors can go inside to view the ‘marker stone’ denoting the exact spot of Gautam Buddha’s birth, the Maya Devi statue, and the excavations.

Next to the monument is the emerald green Puskarini or holy pond where Buddha is said to have had his first bath and surrounding it are more excavation sites and the lush sacred garden. Once you are done looking around, take a breather, admire the hundreds of prayer flags fluttering in the breeze, and absorb a moment of inner peace.

The Great Lotus monastery dwarfs in comparison to the Chinese and Korean structures. However, the Germans show that size indeed does not matter. Built by the German Tara Foundation in 1999, this is by far the most elegant and impressive stupa out of the 20 or so in the area. Enclosed by a L-shaped pond, there is a sense of perfect harmony here provided by the seven-feet gigantic prayer wheels at four corners of the monastery. As you circle around the stupa you will see spectacular murals on the walls depicting Buddhist places of worship like Swayambhunath in Kathmandu. If you are lucky to make it here before noon (when the monastery closes for an hour for lunch), find yourself a spot outside the prayer hall, shut off your camera, and soak up the serenity as you listen to resident monks chant in unison.

The gigantic grey Korean structure easily towers above the rest and can be seen from a far distance. Still under construction, the three-storey monastery manages to awe visitors with its sheer size. Step inside the uncluttered prayer hall where you will find portraits and paintings of Korean spiritual leaders, light an oil lamp, and let the empty space help you clear your mind.

Spread across 777 hectares with the Maya Devi Temple on the southern end and the Peace Pagoda on the northern and dozens of international monasteries on either side, Lumbini today is an international hub that brings together people of different beliefs, colour, ethnicity, and nationality under one garden.

On any given day, you will find eager groups of students learning about the history of Buddhism, families from Sri Lanka taking a breather in the sacred garden, and pilgrims from south-east Asia who saved up for years for this trip happily snapping away.

The tour is best done on foot. Make sure you have an entire day (two days are ideal) to explore the nooks and corners of the garden as well as a visit to the museum. Or there are rickshaws on queue at the main bus stop gate and the gate at Mahilwar who will give you a four hour tour for Rs 400. Bikes are also available for rent at Rs 100 an hour.

Maya Devi Temple

Great Lotus Stupa (Germany)

Mahabodhi Society Monastery (South Korea)
Tilaurakot

Perhaps one of the most neglected sites in the Lumbini circuit, Tilaurakot in Kapilvastu district was once the crowning glory of the Shakya dynasty. Today Buddhist devotees and tourists who have more than a night to spend at Lumbini venture out to observe the abandoned remains of the palace’s fortification wall. The former palace ground is in an overgrown forest in the middle of nowhere. A huge pond and a Maya Devi temple guarded by elephants add to the eerie sense of calm you find here and although there is nothing much to do, all it takes is some imagination to transport you to 500 BC Nepal.

Despite being neglected, Tilaurakot’s history is rich. It is believed to be the place where Lord Buddha’s father, King Śuddhodana, was born. The palace was built by King Śuddhodana in honor of his father, King Śrī Nanda. Today, the site is being restored and developed as a tourist destination.

Two-way airfare to Bhairawa:
Starts at Rs 6,300 (Nepalis) and $242 (others)

From Bhairawa airport to Lumbini:
Rs 1,000

Built in 1993 by the Japanese, the pagoda is almost identical in architecture and design to the one in Pokhara. But surrounded by a sea of green, it is definitively more charming. Visit during the late afternoons when the warm orange sunshine falls directly on the gold plated Buddha making him almost come to life. On the periphery of the Lumbini zone, you can either start or end your journey here.

Zhong Hua Buddhist Monastery (China)

You have seen it on TV: the sweeping roof with yellow glazed tiles, loping ridges decorated with a line of statues, and big, beautiful courtyards. But you’ve always wondered what the Forbidden City in Beijing might look like in real life. Here is your opportunity to explore traditional Chinese architecture and art without the visa hassles. Let laughing Buddha welcome you at the gate. Make sure you take your time to allow for a leisurely stroll around the monastery and admire the detailed handiwork of the artisans.

Peace Pagoda

Built in 1993 by the Japanese, the pagoda is almost identical in architecture and design to the one in Pokhara. But surrounded by a sea of green, it is definitively more charming. Visit during the late afternoons when the warm orange sunshine falls directly on the gold plated Buddha making him almost come to life. On the periphery of the Lumbini zone, you can either start or end your journey here.

Boat ride (one-way):
Rs 45 (Nepalis), Rs 50 (others)

Entry to Maya Devi Temple:
Free (Nepalis), Rs 16 (Indians), Rs 200 (others)

Sakura Travels and Super Salina run three buses in the morning (between 7 to 8am) and two at night (between 7:30 and 8:00pm) which leave Kathmandu from Naya Bus Park at Gongabu. Microbuses also have direct routes to Lumbini.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total:</th>
<th>Nepal:</th>
<th>India:</th>
<th>Sri Lanka:</th>
<th>Thailand:</th>
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<td>26,382</td>
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<td>539,210</td>
<td>120,583</td>
<td>52,671</td>
<td>28,480</td>
<td>17,595</td>
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Eriea: LUMBER LA NDO T RUST
Unfinished business

On 6 June 2005, the Maoists ambushed an overcrowded bus in Bandarmade, Chitwan. 38 people died and more than 70 were wounded in the attack. It was by far the worst terrorist attack perpetrated by the Maoists during the conflict.

Almost eight years after the incident, UCPN(M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited Bandarmade and announced that a relief package worth Rs 6,000,000 had been earmarked for the victims. However, the PM’s personal secretary later clarified that the government had made no such decision. It is unfortunate that leaders of a party responsible for the tragedy in Chitwan cannot even come to an agreement on how to help the victims. Dahal has now said that the money the victims are looking for ‘only’ ever got a mention. But the leader expects that the money will be released from the Maoist party’s treasury. But the newly formed rift between party chairman Dahal and PM Bhattarai cannot continue forever for the sake of the victims. Dahal has now said that the government officials had been forced to shut down appeasing the Maoists. The PM is expected to appoint a relief task force to handle the crisis. However, a relief package of Rs 6,000,000 will not be enough to correct past mistakes. Let’s ask ourselves. This ‘banda culture’ is a result of efforts that try to institutionalise change through glorifying violence. Can we be brave enough to correct past mistakes? Let’s ask ourselves.

Himal Khabarpatrika

Better:

Worse:

Lack of Attention:

Won’t say:

Don’t know:

Same:

#PVMEFS$+MFEHPWFSONFOU

Weekly Bazar Poll #3

Himal Khabarpatrika asks 375 respondents in 14 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on contemporary issues. This week’s result:

1. How is your business doing compared to past years?
   - Same: 38.2%
   - Worse: 34.2%
   - Better: 27%
   - Don’t know: 0.3%
   - Won’t say: 0.3%

2. Why is your business not going according to plan?
   - No business environment: 40.2%
   - No customers: 32.3%
   - Lack of security: 36.6%
   - No expansion in business: 6.6%
   - Other: 4.1%
   - Don’t know: 3.3%
   - Lack of Attention: 3%

Abin Sheetsha in Kantipur, 5 March

"Remove your hands"

"It hurts"

"Then, let it be."

"It hurts!"

Boulder: CJ-led government

"We don’t need a constitution. All we need is development."

Central committee member of UCPN(M) and first lady Hilsa Yami speaking at a press meet in Balaju, Kantipur, 5 March
One of the few privileges governments in developing countries enjoy is a free hand in matters of foreign policy. The everyday existential problems mean citizens in these countries couldn’t care less about how their government deals with refugees. When Nepalis are ill-treated by Nepalis, there is little time to find out how we deal with those who have sought refuge in our land. So when a Tibetan man burns himself to death in Kathmandu or Bhutanese refugees are refused entry into their own country, people go about their business as if nothing has happened.

In countries like ours, the common citizen’s interest in foreign affairs is limited to status of demand for manpower in Qatar, Malaysia, and South Korea. The urban middle-class despise it even more. Their international concerns stretch only as far as Raxaul from where our regular supplies of oil enter the country.

When the people of an erstwhile Hindu kingdom celebrate their great festival in a couple of days, thousands of refugees and ‘second-class’ citizens of this country will be denied cultural rights to celebrate the birthday of a spiritual leader. But like the year before and the year before that, Kathmandu’s brightest whose conscience is offended to see the prime minister pictured alongside war criminals, will willingly look in the other direction at the way refugees from Bhutan, Tibet, Somalia, and Iraq are treated here.

When the Vietnam War broke out in the 1960s, thousands of Americans came out on the streets against their own government. Four decades later the same people protested on the streets against American foreign policy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Closer to home, critical sections of the Indian media and civil society have been condemning the UPA government’s tacit support of Sri Lanka’s human rights violations during the war and their government’s mistreatment of the Kashmiri Muslims.

Even a small country like Ecuador stood up to a western superpower and granted asylum to international whistle blowers against possible persecution. The fact that we live in a landlocked state, trying to survive at the mercy of two nuclear giants needn’t stop us from doing the right thing.

On Monday, the Supreme Court issued a show cause notice against Nepal Police for detaining four Tibetans who were on their way to TU Teaching hospital to pay tribute to a 25-year-old self-immolator. The same police later that evening were arresting young men wearing ponytails and earrings. Last time I checked this country’s interim constitution, neither was listed as a criminal offense.

Nepal’s inability to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and blatant violation of customary international laws in the treatment of refugees fly in the face of the Foreign Minister who makes lofty claims about defending national interests.

We don’t just have the right but an obligation to protest against government policies that have turned us into an international pariah.
Now that elections look impossible in June, improbable in November and implausible in the 21st century, the Mao-Baddies seem to be losing interest in their own plan to make the CJ a CEO. To be exact, it is BRB who seems to be in the mood to back down and has been whispering to people that the whole CJ idea was to hold elections in June and if that ain’t happening then he’d rather like to reluctantly continue in office, thank you. The Justice-in-Chief is never going to forgive the Ideologue-in-Chief.

The guy who is most miffed about this, of course, is Chairman Ferocity who staked all and was rubbing his hands with glee ever since he first disclosed the proposal at the Hasiya Conf in Hatauda. As paranoid as only the comrades can be, PKD is said to be more and more suspicious that BRB has pulled another fast one, has no intention of stepping down, and never had. Which is why Kamred Awesome is blowing kisses at Kiran Kaka again.

Where does this leave the middlemen who brokered this deal, Shri Amrace and Shri Shitola, one wonders?

The real reason the Justice-in-Chief ship is floundering is not because the opposition parties don’t want it (the Kangresis in fact have their tails wagging and paws in the air) but because the Task Force has been deadlocked by the Mau Mau proposal to include a ‘package’ that includes a watered down TRC Bill and impossible demands for seniority of integrated gorillas in the Nepal Army. If it hadn’t been for these demands and Comrade Rawal standing firm, Justice Rag-me would have already thrown his suitcase over the wall in Balu Water.

And, speaking of our Praetorian Guards, since when did anyone give the generals the power to write to the censor board to stop a movie?

After all the blood he helped shed during the war with an ideology that sanctioned hacking off hands of teachers and driving nails into the knees of class enemies, Com Red Flag seems to miss all the blood and gore. How else would one explain his extraordinary statement in Okhaldhunga the other day where he said that his party hadn’t abandoned the revolution, but was just shifting the threats of reactionaries ‘halal-style’. At first it seemed like a sloppy way to appease Muslim voters, until we saw that he said this in the presence of the podium of Bal Krishna (“I did Ujjan Shrestha in”) Dhungel.

It’s not just BRB, his First Lady is also afflicted by foot-in-mouth and admitted publicly on Monday that she and she alone sanctioned building a highway bypass through the Garden of 22 Fountains in Balaju. She added: “We don’t want a constitution, we want development.” Ooops. Then Yummy’s hand-picked Attorney Generalissimo Comrade Mukti declared in a speech: “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is out of date and not applicable to Nepal.” These guys aren’t going to be visiting Europe anytime soon, you can be sure of that.

We hear Chairman Lotus Flower is mighty sure that Bizzel Chow-chowwury beat him to the Forbes’ list of the stinking rich. Following Kingji’s example, PKD has refused to pay 15 lacks in water bills for KUK, tankers that brought water to his former Pistachio Palace twice a day. But in order to defuse an embarrassing protest during his visit to Chitwan on the anniversary of the Madi bomb, he promised families of victims 6 million bucks compensation, saying he had just got it sanctioned by the finance minister and prime minister. Only problem was, they hadn’t. Awesome was lying through his teeth as usual. When he got found out, to save face he got flunkies in Paris Danda to issue a cheque ‘from the party’.

In order to ensure that evil compadres of Western Imperialists and Southern Expansionists don’t influence our Dear Leaders, Kamikaze Narayan has got the Farang Ministry to issue guidelines about when and where netas can meet dips:

- Keep the Qazi informed of all dates
- Wear a bracelet with a GPS tracking device all the time
- No more cocktails, especially in the vicinity of Lainchaur and Maharajganj
- Get venue cleared by Ministry so they can plant bugs