Two and half months ago when Khil Raj Regmi was installed in Singha Darbar at the behest of the four parties he was given a one point agenda: hold elections.

But it is now increasingly difficult to tell whether Regmi is supposed to work independently, or just follow the orders of the four-party cartel that put him in office. After writs were filed demanding Regmi’s resignation from the post of chief justice, the Supreme Court has asked political parties to explain why he was made PM.

Differences between Regmi and the politicians are coming out in the open and leaders within the NC and UML are openly divided about the former CJ’s dual role. The parties are bickering among themselves over election technicalities and the High Level Political Committee meeting this week did not make any headway. After initially agreeing that the new parliament should have 491 members, the Maoists are now backtracking and the NC and UML don’t want parties who don’t win even one per cent of the votes in their constituencies getting seats in the parliament. The Maoists and Madhesis also want cadre who have criminal charges to be able to stand in elections.

Despite the foot-dragging, there have been some signs of progress: 139 parties have already registered at the Election Commission. Although there is no reason why polls can’t be held in November, there is a visible lack of political will to iron out the legal and logistical issues.

Sunir Pandey

QUALITY CONTROL IN TOURISM

PAGE 16-17
World Environment Day this week was marked by various officials giving officious speeches, there was lots of energy expended to declare that we should use less energy. Every year on 5 June, we are told that this day is crucial and this year will be no different.

This year’s environment day came and went with the continued plunder of the Chure Hills, the boulder of stately jacarandas on the Ring Road, the mining of sand and boulders from the Indrawati and Trisuli rivers to feed Kathmandu’s voracious appetite for construction material, and far away from the media spotlight poor border villagers from Taplejung, Rasuwa to Gorkha continued to axe forests to take timber to Tibet and barter it for liquor.

The poor who are given no other choice pose a danger to the global environment, but a much greater threat comes from the wasteful extravagance of the rich. The shifting cultivator in Olangchungola burns forests and sells timber across the border to survive. But it is the unsustainable lifestyle of urbanites that has a greater impact on the environment.

As we have said on previous environment days in this section, ecology downplays with economy which in turn is determined by politics. The mismanagement of hydropower in this country, the growing addiction to fossil fuels, the plunder of our natural resources by the rich and powerful are all indications of rotting politics. The air, water, and soil are ravaged when politics losses its way, governance fails, and there is neither rule of law nor accountability.

It is not surprising that Nepal lost most of its forest cover under dictatorship. The hardwood jungles of the Tarai were decimated to finance a referendum in 1980, the results of which were used to smother democracy and perpetuate an authoritarian monarchical system. It was under decentralised local self-governance post-1990 that Nepal’s community forests thrived. It is perhaps something to do with the election system of the Nepali Congress being a tree that successive authoritarianists have been so intolerant of greenery?

Kathmandu’s street eucalyptuses were moved down in 2006 for security reasons, but that didn’t save king Gyennendra. After the strict censorship that followed the royal-military coup d’état on 1 February 2005, we wrote a metaphorical editorial lamenting the chopping down of trees in the capital, linking it to authoritarianism and lack of democracy and open society.

And it is now, under an unextracted “democratic” government, that its own admission is “answerable to no one but the people who installed it in office”, that the trees along the Ring Road are being needlessly cut in the name of road-widening.

But what happens in Kathmandu is just the visible tip of the proverbial iceberg. With no local elections and grassroots democracy and no obligation to the public interest, many forest user groups have been infiltrated by criminalised politicians. In the Tarai and Churia increasingly in the hills, forests that took communities a generation to protect and nurture are being mercilessly cut.

The Tarai forests are nearly all gone except for what remains within national parks and the rot is spreading to the Chure hills along the Himalayan arc: from Jhapa to Kanchanpur. The Chure is different from the Mahabharat range, it is the first wrinkle of the Himalaya and is made up of sand and boulders with very little top soil. Once its Sherpa robusta forest cover is gone, the Chure gradually dissolves during the monsoon. This has enormous implications for sedimentation, floods, and water supply in the plains directly below.

Reforestation on World Environment Day will help, replanting jacarandas on the Ring Road will restore a ravaged urban landscape. But ultimately, for green growth and long-term equitable prosperity, the only path is accountable, democratic governance.
Establishing a date for elections has been delayed because of disagreements over a bill to delineate electoral constituencies and set a threshold for proportional representation. At the heart of the disagreement is the desire of the main political players to keep monopolising power. After the Madhes Movement of 2007, the first amendment to the Interim Constitution in April that year provided for delineation of electoral constituencies through changes in Article 154, according to which constituencies were to be determined taking into account the structure of population and its density, geographical uniqueness, and accessibility as well as cultural identity of those who reside there.

But the delineating committee already had its work cut out. The amendment to Article 63, among other things prohibited changes to existing administrative boundaries and mandated that existing number of electoral seats in each district may not be reduced. So the committee only had the jurisdiction of delineating constituencies in 20 districts of Madhes and five mountain districts where population had increased. The committee set a threshold of 94,000 voters per electoral representative in these districts which resulted in increased seats of 240 from the existing 205.

“In the last CA, out of 601 members, 335 were chosen from proportional representation from marginalised communities that have a distinct geographical presence, but are separated by arbitrarily drawn administrative boundaries. But as long as Article 63 is in effect, such exercise will only benefit metropolis districts like Kathmandu and Lalitpur with high population density without serving the interests of under-represented and sparsely populated mountain districts, or marginalised communities that have a distinct geographical presence,” anthropologist Dambar Chemjong says population alone must not be the basis for delineating constituencies in a country with varied demographic structure as well as geographic and cultural diversity.

If that is the case, there is a need to redefine Nepal’s administrative boundaries consistent with our search for an inclusive representative body. Last month, responding to a writ petition filed by JP Gupta, the Supreme Court directed the government to form another delineation committee to recommend changes in the number of constituencies based on data from the 2011 census.

“But the controversy over the one per cent threshold required for smaller parties to gain PR seats in the CA has also contributed to the delay in passing the electoral bill. While it is a globally accepted practice to have a threshold in a PR system, out of the 56 political parties that competed in the last CA elections, 47 obtained less than one per cent of the popular votes. They won only one direct seat in the Assembly, but received 33 PR seats and two through nominations. Most of the parties in this category had ethnic, regional, and cultural background with a stated agenda of representation. This reflected the failure of bigger political parties to incorporate marginalised voices in their ranks and that reluctance to include the excluded persists.”

Nepal has been in transition for seven years now. The only way to justify this painfully long exercise is to come up with a political document that is owned by groups across political, cultural, and regional boundaries. But for that to happen, we need to ensure an inclusive body that can empathise with the most repressed and muted aspirations.
Silly season on Sagarmatha

Having buzzed with mountaineers coming down from various Himalayan peaks, Kathmandu is slowly getting back to normal. Hotel lobbies are no longer crowded with blue barrels filled with climbing gear and emaciated climbers with sunburnt faces have disappeared from the streets of Thamel.

Mt Everest got all the attention this year because of the 60th anniversary of the first climb and few climbers were doing new routes or attempting an unclimbed peak this season. “Most people are going up and down the fixed ropes on Everest,” says Himalayan archivist Elizabeth Hawley, “what would really impress me is if somebody finally climbed the difficult East Ridge with its overhangs and knife-edge ridges.”

Out of the 900 or so climbers and Sherpas attempting Mt Everest from the Nepal side this year, two small expeditions were not doing the South Col route. Both were on the treacherous South West Face, but abandoned the climbs early in the season.

Italian climber Simone Moro, Switzerland’s Ueli Steck, and British Jonathan Griffith got into a fight with a group of Sherpas over rope fixing and left the mountain. Russian climber Alexei Boliatov, who was attempting a new route on the South West Face with the Kazakh Denis Urubko, died in a fall during a practice climb.

But Everest had numerous ‘firsts’ this season: the highest basejump, climbing Everest from Nepal and China within a few days, climbing without arms, the first female amputee on the summit, equaling the world record for most ascents, the oldest person on top, the first Saudi and Pakistani woman.

“I am not sure whether people are climbing for themselves or whether they want to become some sort of hero,” said New Zealander Russell Brice, who has led commercial expeditions for 18 years. When asked about some of the new records Hawley, 89, answers back: “So what?”

However, one remarkable ‘first’ was that of Nepali/Canadian Sudarshan Gautam, who became the first double amputee to climb Everest without prosthetic arms.

Gautam injured himself after falling on the Yellow Band, which quickly led to another record: the highest helicopter rescue in the world. Italian pilot Maurizio Folini dropped a ‘long line’ from 7,900m to pull the 30-year-old off the mountain just below the South Col, the last camp before the summit (pic, above).

One of the more modest records is probably Phurba Tashi Sherpa’s 21st ascent of Mount Everest. With his two consecutive summits, the 42-year-old from Khumjung broke even with Apa Sherpa, the

The world’s highest peak gets record numbers of climbers, and some bad press

BILLY BIERLING

from EVEREST BASE CAMP

Getting crowded

Number of people who have climbed Mt Everest:

674
From 1953-1996

3,157
From 1997-2012

522
In Spring 2013 alone

Still dangerous

Numbers killed in Spring 2013

9 on Mt Everest
(3 in China, 6 in Nepal)

2 on Dhaulagiri

5 on Kangchenjunga

1 on Makalu

From 1953-1996

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Eight years after the first Muslim women scaled the highest mountain in the world, Raha Moharrak from Saudi Arabia and Samina Baig (pic, above) from Pakistan followed in their footsteps. “My climb was a mission to tell all the women in Pakistan that they can scale mountains – no matter whether it is a real or a symbolic one,” said the 22-year-old from Gilgit-Baltistan.

“Even though it was very exhausting, it was one of the happiest moments in my life. I must not forget that it was not an individual success, but a historical achievement.” By becoming the first female amputee to reach the top, Arunima Sinha from India was another female role model on the mountain this year.

current holder of this record. “Everest is work for me, but I am very happy that I have managed to climb so often always coming back down healthy,” he said during the 60th anniversary ceremony in Kathmandu last month.

If Phurba Tashi wanted, he could probably break the record of the fastest ascent, a feat that US-citizen Chad Kellogg tried without supplementary oxygen for the third time this year but had to turn back 550m from the summit because of wind chill. He was trying to beat the record of Frenchman Marc Batard, who climbed Everest without supplementary oxygen in 22 hours, 29 minutes in 1988.

Wind chill did not seem to bother Valery Rozov from Russia when he jumped off the North Face in Tibet, recording the world’s highest ever base jump from 7,220 metres. “Only when I got back home did I see how hard it was for me both physically and psychologically,” Rozov said after the jump, reaching speeds of more than 220km/h. For this reason, some have suggested that Sagarmatha should get a rest and remain ‘closed’ for one year. Hawley thinks this is an absurd idea.

“Everest is much cleaner than it was in the 1990s and it still has many challenges.”

www.billibierling.com

Billi Bierling is a journalist covering mountaineering in Nepal. She has climbed Everest, Lhotse, and Manaslu and this year was on Nuptse.
The Nepal Armed Violence Assessment released recently shows that although the conflict may be over, the prevalence of small arms and a legacy of violence have promoted gun culture in society. The two-year study by the Small Arms Survey group showed a persistence of serious gun crimes all over the country. The worst affected regions are the eastern Tarai with more than seven per cent of citizens in Sunsari, Morang, and Dhanusha saying they had been personally victimised by gun crimes between 2007-2011 (see map).

The findings include a record of 440,000 privately held firearms (mostly locally made ‘katuwa’ pistols) currently in Nepal and that the entry points for the illegal trafficking of arms have moved from the western region to areas around the Kathmandu Valley as well.

The prevalence of guns, criminalisation of politics, joblessness, and poverty are factors keeping violence levels high in Nepal, according to the assessment. Although the security situation has shown signs of improvement, the survey notes that urban areas in the Tarai, and now even the capital, have become ‘hotbeds of criminal activities’. It recommends lessening political interference in police work and the courts and more training to security personnel.

“Nepal has been suffering from armed violence since the last decade, particularly in the Tarai and urban centres,” said Finance Minister Shankar Prasad Koirala, who used to be joint secretary in the Home Ministry when the survey was released. “We will share information with the other countries to better control the flow of arms.”

An investigative report in Himal Khabarpatrika last year showed that small arms were readily available across the border in Indian towns and could be bought for as little as INR 2,000. Experts say more information is also needed on residual small arms from the conflict, obsolete or surplus stocks of state arms, as well as storage and inventory conditions.

The Nepal Armed Violence Assessment is a project of the Small Arms Survey, a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva and is supported by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development and AusAid.

“Following the UN Conference on small arms in 2000, Switzerland decided to focus on practical, small-scale programs,” explains Swiss ambassador Thomas Gass, “the culture of violence still persists in Nepal and violence is still committed with impunity. Implementing the Geneva Declaration, which Nepal became a signatory of in 2008, requires teamwork and not blame.”

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development is a diplomatic initiative aimed at addressing the link between armed conflict and development. First adopted in 2006, the Declaration calls for the support of programs, both practical and academic, aimed at reducing violence so as to promote development.

Mihaela Racovita, an associate researcher of the Nepal survey, said it was based on primary research, including household surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews with key informants. www.smallarmssurvey.org

Percentage of respondents who reported having been victimised between 2007 and 2011, by district

SEE INSIDE: page 15

The conflict may be over, but a new survey shows high levels of violence because there are so many guns around 2000, Switzerland decided to focus on practical, small-scale programs,” explains Swiss ambassador Thomas Gass, “the culture of violence still persists in Nepal and violence is still committed with impunity. Implementing the Geneva Declaration, which Nepal became a signatory of in 2008, requires teamwork and not blame.”

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SEE INSIDE: page 15

The conflict may be over, but a new survey shows high levels of violence because there are so many guns around
JALPA GOLD ORGANIC COFFEE

Jalpa Gold Organic Coffee is one of the most popular coffee brands manufactured in Nepal. Grown at an altitude of above 600m in Nawakot district, the Arabica coffee is wet processed unlike others which are dry processed. USDA certified, Jalpa Gold is exported to several countries including Germany, Japan, Russia, and Korea. The company also recently launched its instant coffee which you can purchase at the EcoFair.

HIMALAYAN NATURALS

For the past four years, Himalayan Naturals has been involved in facilitating the production of agro-based, natural hand made goods like briquettes, quilts, and organic ginger in rural villages of Dolakha and Sindhupalchok. The organisation also helps market these products both within Nepal and internationally.

NATIONAL COLLEGE-CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

National College-Centre for Development Studies was established in 1999 with the aim of promoting sustainable development through rigorous academics. The college offers two multidisciplinary academic programs: Bachelor’s in Development Studies and Bachelor’s in Development Finance in affiliation with Kathmandu University. Under the Nepal-Japan exchange program, students and faculty members of the two countries have the opportunity to collaborate with each other on research and social work in sustainable development.

BIRTHDAY FOREST

As Nepal’s once dense forests gradually dwindle, one company is determined to give them a chance to grow back. Winner of Pivot Nepal 2013 ‘social’ award, the recently launched Birthday Forest encourages Nepalis to plant trees on their birthdays. For just Rs 980, you can not only plant a tree in one of the 17,000 community forests across Nepal, but also have it named after you and you don’t even have to worry about taking care of your plant because the company will look after it for three years. So give yourself the greenest gift this year.

SEEING GREEN

Nepali Times kicked off its second edition of EcoFair on world environment day. The exhibition which runs until 7 June will showcase environment friendly technologies and solutions. Everything you need to know about solar technologies, waste management, rain water harvesting, organic farming, electric vehicles, and other eco-friendly products will be available under one roof. Find out more innovative ways to be planet friendly from our exhibitors.

ONE PLANET SOLUTION

Since 2011 One Planet Solution has been providing eco-friendly and economical solutions to the capital’s water, energy, and waste crisis. The company’s SmartPaani systems include rainwater harvesting, water recycling, wastewater treatment, water filtration and consultancy. SmartPaani goes one step beyond to not only store and recharge rainwater, but also make rainwater safe for drinking. Its energy branch, SmartUrja, was recently awarded the first prize at Nepal Renewable Energy-Waste to Energy Bazar organised by APC and the World Bank.

BIRD CONSERVATION NEPAL

Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) seeks to promote interest in birds among the Nepali public, encourage research, and identify major threats to their habitats and survival. The foremost scientific authority providing accurate data and information on birds and their habitats throughout Nepal, BCN is also part of the BirdLife International Partnership, a network of more than 177 organisations around the world, working on a global agenda to conserve birds and their habitats.

INNOVATIVE ENERGY

Established in 2009, Innovative Energy (iEnergy) has been working in the field of energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy. The company promotes intelligent energy efficiency solutions from the UK. Its products include Realtime Energy Management System, Intelligent motor controller (iMEC), air conditioner energy saver, chiller unit energy saver, high efficiency LED lights, and solar street lights. iEnergy products help save up to 50 per cent of energy.
DINING

Uttsan, an exhibition of paintings by Sagar Manandhar. 5 to 30 June, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal, Revisted, (01)4218898/8449872.

Photography workshop by beginners and keen learners take out your cameras and learn the basics of photography. Rs 3000, 1 to 9 June, 7 to 9 am, Register at (01)2412092, g8532b06d8@yjkl21228020, www.artudio.org/event.php?event_id=47.

UNI, SHE, celebrate the beauty of womanhood, a photo exhibition by Uma Bista. 2 June to 2 July, 220am to 5pm, Image Art Gallery, Kulimha Tole, Patan, (01)5006665, www.image-ark.com.

Shopping carnival, purchase products worth Rs 3,000 and above from Civil Mall outlets and get a chance to win Samsung mobiles, from Civil Mall outlets and get a chance to win Samsung mobiles.

Dance marathon, race away for 8 hours 8 minutes and 8 seconds to show your support for gender equality and equity, Rs 500 for participants, Rs 100 to 200 for audience, 14 June, 220am to 9pm, T.T. Hall, Larken, www.facebook.com/events/126561833952916/?ref=62, register at bit.ly/dmnenepal.

Man of Steel, watch the premiere of Man of Steel and contribute to the Music Museum of Nepal. 21 July, 6pm, QFX Cinemas Civil Mall, book your tickets at 9843009750.

Into the flashlight, a 24 day workshop on how to use flash technique for ultimate output with limited flash equipment. Rs 3,000, 15 June, 7 to 9am, School of Creative Communications, Kupordol, 984324797.

Kamalpokhari, Russian Centre of Science and Culture, Kamalpokhari, (01)5260110.

THE HERITAGE, escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta. Thamel.

Capital Grill, this American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone’s tastes. Bhatbhateni.

Oxygen Lounge Bar, for a relaxed ambiance and acoustic music. Rosemary chicken with mashed potatoes is a hit among patrons.

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

Tamas-laya, promises a refined dining experience, try the prawn tempura, fisherman’s fish, and Balinese chicken satay. Naval, Kathamandu.

NEW DISH, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop suey with excellent value for money. Khecho Park.

COSMOPOLITAN CAFE, located in the heart of Basantapur, this cozy cafe offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Basantapur, (01)225246.


Utsav, a 14 day shopping carnival, purchase products worth Rs 1,000 and above and get a chance to win cash prizes.

Dance marathon, dance away for 8 hours 8 minutes and 8 seconds to show your support for gender equality and equity.

EVENTS


THE RADIANT CHILD, a documentary on Jean Michel Basquiat, an artist who was constantly confronted by racism and misconceptions. 7 June, 1 to 6pm, Gallery Mode, Chakupat, Lalitpur, (01)260210.

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MUSIC

RAP, ROCK, REGGAE, one evening, three different bands three different styles of music. Rs 400, 8 June, 6pm, House of Music, Thamel.

Summer Fest, enjoy 12 hours of live music with bands like Cob Web, Lakhey and others, bike stunts, food stalls and gaming zones.

Jazz divas, enjoy a laid back evening with brilliant performances by three talented women performers. Rs 200, 7 June, 7.15pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel.

What the funk, we r soul’d out, dance to the beats of this reggae band. Every Tuesday, 7.30 pm onwards, Rs 250, Moksh, Jhamsikhel.

Live at Cafe 32, live music and delicious food every Friday. 6pm onwards, Cafe 32, Battisputali, (01)4244231.

BAUL MASTERS OF BENGAL

Rabindranath Tagore was inspired by them, calling himself one of their kind. Baba Allauddin Khan went around collecting their melodies before he established the Maihar School. Satyajit Ray included their songs and themes in his early black and white films.

Well, now that Purnal Das Baul and Dibyendu Das Baul have come to Kathmandu from the plains of Bengal, you have a chance to savour the essence of the ‘madcap Baul’, as Tagore called them and see why the geniuses in our part of the world were so transfixed by union with the divine.

Invites only, 7 June, 5.30pm, Nepal Music Centre, Pangaalothan, Daushala, (01)4442715.

GETAWAYS

MANGO TREE LODGE, indulge in culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safaris at the Bardia National Park. Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com

Dhulikhel Mountain Resort, announces summer bonanza offer. Stay at this lovely establishment for a discounted rate. Dhulikhel, (01)4420774/6, reservations@dmrnepal.com

POKHARA GRANDE, a swimming pool to escape from the sweltering heat, a massage parour and spa to loosen up, and a gym to release stress, all in all a great place to unwind. Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)460210

Everest Panorama Resort, if you can’t get enough of the Himalayas in smoggy Kathmandu, a great view from the top of the Mahabharat is just what you’re looking for. Damak, (061)406106, info@everestpanoramaresort.net

Business and pleasure

The scenic backdrop of unbroken mountain ranges, stunning lakes, and serene weather make Pokhara perfect not only for casual travellers and trekkers, but also for hosting seminars, workshops or more relaxed team building activities.

The number of hotels spread across the city offer conference facilities for organisations to choose from according to their budget, purpose, and convenience. Maybe a visit to Pokhara will also freshen the minds of employees.

Start your day with the sunrise in Sarangkot and then head down to Fame for fresh fish with lunch. Later in the afternoon after meetings end, relax in the traditional hot springs of Bhurjung, and then drift Lakeside-wards in the evenings.

Learn the lessons of cooperation and team building in Nepal’s cleanest city.

GO GREEN

The second installment of Nepali Times EcoFair is finally here. The three-day event will feature various stalls displaying eco-friendly products and services. Know more about solar energy, bio energy, and electric vehicles. Learn about sustainable ideas and practices that help you do your bit for the environment, like rain-water harvesting, bio briquettes, and energy saving lights. Look around or purchase traditional crafts, recycled Lokta paper products, or organic coffee. And also enjoy live model presentations and musical performances.

Nepali Times EcoFair Runs till 7 June, 10am to 6pm, Nepal Academy, Kamaladi, (01)4005061.

BREAKFAST & BRUNCH

7AM - 2PM EVERYDAY

The Yellow House - Dine | Shop | Sundown | www.theyellowhouse.com.np

The Yellow House - Dine | Shop | Sundown | www.theyellowhouse.com.np

Playwright and director Andrew Rajan was in Kathmandu recently for a three day radio-writing workshop organised by the British Council to promote budding talents in the Valley. Also speaking at the workshop was 39-year-old Sharmily Rana, winner of last year’s playwriting competition. Nepali Times caught up with the duo to learn about the craft of storytelling and the future of radio play writing.

Nepali Times: How powerful is the medium of radio?
Andrew Rajan: Because radio is non-visual, it’s a very intimate medium. Listeners get to create their own images in their minds.
Sharmily Rana: I think radio is like a friend, wherever people go they can carry a small set.

With news, information, and music available at the click of a button, how do you see the role of radio today?
Andrew Rajan: Radio is an old art, but it doesn’t mean it’s obsolete. Everyone thought the medium was going to die, but even today BBC gets 14 million listeners every day. Radio will always have an audience.
Sharmily Rana: Nepalis of all ages and from across the country still listen to the radio. My mother-in-law is not tech-savvy, so for her the radio is the ultimate source of information and entertainment. My husband listens to the radio while driving.

What are some of the themes that students seem most interested in during the workshop?
Andrew Rajan: Usually there are a lot of stories about trafficking of young Nepali women to brothels in India. But no matter how good the writing is, they can’t be put on air because BBC has rules that make certain topics out of bound. BBC doesn’t want to broadcast a play about violence or rape at 4pm when children are in the kitchen with their mothers. What works really well on radio, though, is humour. It doesn’t matter how serious the subject is you can always infuse it with humour.

What inspires you to write?
Sharmily Rana: After I got married, I had a lot of free time so I just started to write. Day-to-day experiences and events inspire me.

What is your play about?
Sharmily Rana: My story called Life Reflected revolves around the theme of reincarnation: when the main protagonist looks in the mirror she sees someone else in the reflection. I have tried to explore the lives, experiences, and coming of age of two women.

Nepal has a long tradition of storytelling, how do you think Nepalis can preserve this tradition in the era of digital media?
Andrew Rajan: There is a lingering sense of frustration among Nepalis and lot of people want to pour their grievances through stories. Unfortunately, there is very little outlet for these stories. That is why it’s important to have regular writing workshops so that different voices have an opportunity to express themselves. With the influx of digital media, more stories from the West will come here, but Nepal’s stories are just as valid and the more Nepalis stick to stories of their own people, the more the outside world will be interested in hearing them. Storytelling is a great way for Nepalis to introduce their culture to people who are unfamiliar with this place.

Are some societies better at storytelling than others?
Andrew Rajan: I think some of the best stories come from really interesting cultures. This doesn’t mean other cultures are bad at storytelling. It’s just that they haven’t yet grasped the tools with which to tell their stories.
Ever since the first ascent of Mt Everest in 1959, the Himalayas have become a symbol of mankind’s attempt to challenge nature and push the limits of human endurance. Recently, two amputees – Arunima Sinha of India and Sudarshan Gautam of Nepal – made it to the top of the world.

Now a team of bikers, among them three tetraplegics, plan to cycle all the way from Lhasa to Kathmandu (see map), through the roof of the world and to the Chinese side of Everest base camp, crossing 10 high mountain passes in 28 days. This gruelling ride of extremes is part of a campaign led by The Catwalk Spinal Cord Injury Trust to raise one million dollars to fund the research of a possible cure for spinal cord injury.

For the woman behind Catwalk, Catriona Williams (pic, right), the debilitating injury hasn’t kept her away from her passion for horse riding or from leading an independent life. Williams used to be a professional equestrian who represented New Zealand during the World Cup finals in show jumping in Sweden before a tragic accident in 2002, where she fell off her horse, left her incapacitated.

Today she is channeling all her energy to draw attention to the plight of people around the world suffering from spinal cord injury. “Together we can show that we are not afraid to take on a challenge no matter how high or difficult it is,” says Williams.

A team of 15, including Williams and two other tetraplegics, their caretakers, friends, family, and members of the trust will land in Kathmandu on 12 June and fly to Lhasa before pedaling back 1,200km to the Valley. Williams’ team representing Catwalk will also be visiting the Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Dhulikhel, a hospital that owes its existence to spinal cord injury to one of its founders, Kanak Mani Dixit.

With increased funding, Williams hopes research into the field will grow and eventually help patients with spinal cord injury get back on their feet. Her personal dream: to be able to walk and dance again.

Sunir Pandey
www.spinalnetwork.org.au/bigcycle

www.fundraiseonline.co.nz/TheBIGCycle
www.spinalnetwork.org.au/bigcycle

Play to win

Applications for the British Council’s 15 minute Nepali radio play competition are being accepted until 31 July. The winner will get the opportunity to have the play recorded and aired on BBC Nepali Service.

general.enquiry@britishcouncil.org.np
www.britishcouncil.org
(01)4410 798
The Cannes film festival has just ended and in its glowing array of the lofty chosen is a film called Behind the Candelabra about the pianist Liberace and his secret affair with his chauffeur Scott Thorson. Although I have not seen this film, I mention it because it is interesting.

The film called Behind the Candelabra is the third Soderbergh film I have reviewed. This is because when you begin a film by him you know you are about to view the work of an expert, a deeply professional filmmaker who ceaselessly explores his medium, relying on transparent, cool filmmaking techniques while tackling extremely diverse and complex subjects.

Of course Soderbergh has made light fluffy stuff like Out of Sight (1998) and the three Ocean’s films, but Side Effects, though slightly fantastical, is at the opposite end of the spectrum from ‘fluffy’.

Rooney Mara, the wifl like genius who also portrayed Lisbeth Salander in the English adaptation of The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011), plays a young behaving Emily Taylor, whose husband Martin (Channing Tatum) has been jailed for four years for insider trading.

Incandescence with happiness when she goes to receive him at the end of his sentence, it is wholly a surprise when we realise that Emily has actually struggled with depression her entire life. A few days after Martin’s release, Emily drives her car into a wall on purpose. At the hospital, where she is concussed, scratched, and bruised, she meets Jonathan Banks (Jude Law), an experienced psychiatrist who immediately recognises her depression and only agrees to release her on the grounds that she see him regularly.

For the next few months, Emily struggles to adjust to various anti-depressants, most of which do not agree with her, making her vacant, lethargic, and still prone to suicidal tendencies. It is only when she almost jumps off a subway platform that Banks agrees to put her on a new drug called Abilix, which was recommended by Emily’s previous psychologist Victoria Siebert (Catherine Zeta-Jones), who used to treat her when the couple were flush with Wall Street cash.

As Emily becomes normal again with Abilix, burning a few sleepwalking episodes, it comes as a shock when the film suddenly morphs from a sociologically inclined drama to a full-blown murder mystery.

I won’t go further into plot details so that you may enjoy this intricate detective work in this greatly entertaining film. All I will say is, this film, which I really hope will not be Soderbergh’s last, is one of the best written, tightly acted, and riveting mainstream movies I’ve seen in a while.

Side Effects, scripted by Soderbergh’s long time collaborator Scott Z Burns, could have gone horrifically wrong in a more self-indulgent director’s hands, becoming melodramatic and maudlin. Instead, in Soderbergh’s capable hands it wields a cool thrill.

The latest from Colors, a brand known for making reasonably priced smartphones, Xazo Bold 2 is reminiscent of smartphones from 5 series of the Samsung family. With identical designs and matching plastic body it is hard not to compare the two. But the truth is Bold 2 comes at half the price of Samsung phones and caters to those looking to switch to a smartphone rather than upgrade to a newer model. The first thing that you notice about Bold 2 is its sheer size. Bigger than the, the phone is heavier when compared to recent releases from other brands. The 5.3 inch screen easily beats the 5 inch screen of many others in the market and with a resolution of 960 x 540 and digital theatre sound, watching videos becomes a truly pleasurable experience.

Yantrick's Verdict: At Rs 19,995 Bold 2 is definitely a steal and a good upgrade for those who are yet to hop on the smart wagon.
Not many Nepali youngsters know what an Arbaja looks or sounds like. But singer Lochan Rijal is determined to save this unique instrument once played by the Gandharvas from becoming extinct and make Arbaja a familiar sight in Nepali homes. “I felt that it was time for me to devote myself to music that belongs to Nepal,” says the 33-year-old, who spent a month in Kaski last year documenting the production process and strumming techniques as part of his PhD thesis on transmission of music in Nepal.

When he arrived in Kaski, Rijal was shocked to discover Mohan Gandharva, the sole remaining teacher of Arbaja, didn’t possess one. “When I found out just how much this form of music and its history had been neglected, I was saddened. But it also motivated me to learn more,” he explains.

For three weeks Rijal trained under Hari Gandharva of Kaski to make Arbajas which bear a close resemblance to the more well-known Sarangi. He made numerous trips to the jungles in search of Khirra, the wood used to make the instrument. “It was one of the happiest moments of my life. Not only was I learning to play the Arbaja but making them and helping to preserve the culture in a small way,” he admits.

In 2006, Rijal made it big in Nepal’s pop-rock circuit by bagging four awards at the Hits FM Music award for his album Cen. Having left medical college to study music, he has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in ethnomusicology from Kathmandu University and plays the guitar, dhime, table, keyboards, violin, and sarangi equally well. Now a lecturer at KU’s school of music, Rijal spends most of his time writing music with Arbaja.

“You can play different tunes on a guitar, but the sound of Arbaja is very unique. After all you can’t create your identity with a guitar,” he explains. “Arbaja has given a new definition to my music and I now have opportunities that I wouldn’t have if I had limited myself to pop music.”

His latest single Flauarkha is one of the few recorded songs that exclusively feature the Arbaja and Sarangi. And like his other songs this one too carries a social message about youth migration. His other project includes Eriel Dixit’s movie Red Monsoon which has a heavily Arbaja-infused soundtrack.

Says Rijal: “The new generation of Nepali singers are taking the easy way out and forgetting that originality and identity are the most important things. If we don’t save Nepali music and instruments, who will?”

Anuchith

Kathmandu boasts a dizzying array of international cuisine and if you look hard enough, you can find a restaurant offering dishes from nearly every corner of the globe. You can find Japanese cuisine and Western cuisine, but what if you want Japanese-style Western cuisine?

Yen Ryu is a Japanese term referring to Western-inspired Japanese food that originated during the Meiji Restoration of the 1860s, when Westerners opened themselves up to foreign trade. The result was a host of Western dishes, but with unmistakable Japanese influences, often served with sticky rice and miso soup. Yoshoku dishes also tend to be smaller, supposedly to show the Emperor’s declaration that meat was the source of

MARRONNIER

Westerners’ superior physical strength. Although such restaurants can be hard to find outside Japan, there is one yoshoku in Patan. Marronnier is situated in a side-alley off Pulchok. Although well-hidden, the journey is worth it.

Set in the grounds of a large converted bungalow, with a fountain and garden outside, coming to the Marronnier feels like visiting a friend’s country house (a rich friend). The dining room itself is wood-floored and rather small with only about eight tables, but it adds to the cozy atmosphere. If you are bored and happen to read Japanese, there are a number of comic books, magazines, and novels to flip through while you wait for your order.

The Marronnier steak (Rs 450) is an excellent choice for a main course. Although portions are slightly smaller than usual, the meat was grilled to perfection. Eating steak with Japanese sticky rice was a new experience, but it made the meal more filling. The breaded shrimp (Rs 600) was also a good pick, with the fried shrimp bigger than one would normally expect. The saute chicken (Rs 460) was less satisfying as it was a little undercooked. However, the kitchen staff brought us another plate when we complained. All main courses come with salad, clear vegetable soup and either sticky rice or slices of bread, if you pay an extra Rs 120.

For dessert we ordered vanilla ice cream (Rs 170 for two scoops) and a Japanese style ice-cream butter sandwich (Rs 90), which really pleased our sweet tooth. The Marronnier also boasts clean bathrooms and a relaxed, quiet atmosphere away from the chaos of Pulchok. Visit today for a taste of Western cuisine as seen through Japanese eyes.

Says Rijal: “The new generation of Nepali singers are taking the easy way out and forgetting that originality and identity are the most important things. If we don’t save Nepali music and instruments, who will?”

Anuchith
Absolute loss

We were in medical school, life expectancy, standardized mortality ratios etc. were used to assess the general health of a population. In the last decade, however, the World Health Organization has come up with more comprehensive measures to determine the burden of disease in a country. Known as disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), this method takes into account both absolute years of life lost due to disease (premature death) as well as productive years lost because of disability. DALYs reflect the effects of disease within a population more accurately because individuals who fall ill cannot contribute fully to society.

Interestingly when DALYs are used as the main measure to indicate the burden of disease in a community, depression (unipolar depressive disorder) accounts for the greatest burden in high-income countries. Depression by this measure even supersedes ischemic heart disease (heart attacks), cerebrovascular disease (strokes), Alzheimer’s, and disorders related to alcohol abuse.

Although depression is quite common in developed countries, death rate is low and is mainly reflected in suicides. So it creates disability and loss in productivity without any significant impact on years of life lost. Depression often develops at young age and persists or recurs throughout an individual’s lifetime, leading to significant morbidity over time. However, ischemic heart disease still continues to be the main cause of death in the West.

What about low-income countries? What accounts for the highest number of DALYs? These are the four most common choices provided in medical examinations: a) diarrhoeal disease b) human immunodeficiency virus c) ischemic heart disease d) lower respiratory disease and e) malaria. Although, many including healthcare professionals pick diarrhoea, lower respiratory disease is the correct answer. Lower respiratory disease indicates the lungs as opposed to upper respiratory disease which includes sore throat, sinusitis, and pharyngitis.

In fact, lower respiratory tract infections (such as tuberculosis and obstructive lung disease) not only account for the highest number of DALYs in low-income nations, but are also the main cause of death. Though both infections are easily preventable, they kill thousands every year in Nepal and leave hundreds more disabled. Therefore to boost the country’s productivity, the state has to give greater priority to the prevention of these diseases.
The United Nations witnessed a historic moment on 4 June with the signing of the Arms Trade Treaty, the first time the $85 billion international arms trade has been regulated by a global set of standards. Negotiations took place between 193 countries, 63 of which signed on Monday. More countries are expected to sign by the end of the week.

The treaty will regulate all transfers of conventional arms and ban the export of arms if they will be used to commit crimes against humanity. The treaty also calls for greater transparency and for nations to be held more accountable for their weapons trading. States will undergo rigorous assessment before they move arms overseas and have to provide annual reports on international transfers of weapons.

But some of the world’s major arms importers and exporters, whose inclusion is crucial for the treaty’s success, have abstained or declined to give their signatures. Syria, North Korea, and Iran were the only three countries to fully oppose the treaty, while Russia, China, and India abstained.

The United States, the world’s largest arms exporter, did not sign, but is expected to do so by the end of the year. The reason given was technicalities in the language of the treaty were the reason for not signing; while US support for the treaty is “strong and genuine”, there were inconsistencies in comparison between the English-language and translated versions of the treaty, said Daryl G Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association.

“It’s critical that the United States sign the treaty, which has been 10 years in the making,” said Ray Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America. “The most powerful argument for the treaty has always been the call of millions who have suffered armed violence around the world,” said Anna Macdonald, head of Arms Control, Oxfam.

The treaty will go into force after it receives 50 ratifications from states that have signed. This is expected to take up to two years, but some states, including the United Kingdom, have agreed to already start enforcing the rules of the Treaty. The victim of gun violence was at the UN to witness the signing, the first step on the path to the treaty’s ratification.

Alex Gálvez, 36, was 14 years old when he felt a bullet course through his right shoulder, exiting through his left. Gálvez is now executive director of Transitions Foundation of Guatemala, an organisation that helps Guatemalans living with disabilities, many of whom have been injured by small weapons.

“Unfortunately not everyone had the opportunity to get treated in time, to get educated about arms,” Gálvez said. “It’s not just Guatemala that is suffering [from armed violence]; many other countries are suffering too.”
Last year, the safari lodges inside Chitwan National Park were closed after the government decided that it went against conservation ethics for tourists to be staying in a protected area.

The lodges inside the park attracted premium guests who paid more and the closure was a reminder of the old debate between ‘quality’ and ‘quantity’ tourism models. Bhutan imposed a high minimum charge for visitors and went for quality, while Nepal took a democratic approach and opened its doors to all.

In the 1970s, Nepal was the flavour of the month. High profile international visitors, celebrity world travellers, mountaineers, and budget trekkers all flocked to Kathmandu Valley. The capital was an emerald Shangri La then, with little traffic, no pollution, warm welcoming people, and a lively culture.

In Chitwan, Tiger Tops opened in 1965 and pre-dated the establishment of the national park in 1973. With its canopy rooms, jungle ambience, and conservation ethos, Tiger Tops set the standard and in its own right helped establish and market tourism to Nepal. But with the instability after 1990, tourism lost traction and the conflict halved arrivals.

By the time the war ended in 2006, Nepal had lost its shine. Kathmandu became a place to avoid, but a glut of airline seats caused by the Gulf migrant worker traffic led to a steady growth in tourist arrival numbers.

Most of this was for the ‘back packer’ segment and the top end of the tourist market stagnated. If it hadn’t been for the increase in visitors from India, China, and Southeast Asia, tourist arrival figures would be dismal.

Contributing to this erosion of ‘quality’ tourism has been the closing down of six lodges inside Chitwan National Park after their leases ran out last year. Chitwan is the largest and most easily accessible of the protected areas with the star attractions: the Bengal Tiger, the great one-horned rhinoceros, and Gharial and Mugger crocodiles.

The Lodges were tucked away in the jungle, located to ensure the dispersal of impact of visitors, and well regulated by the government. Early morning elephant rides in the mist, jungle walks in the towering sal forests, jeep safaris, bird watching, boat trips down the Rapti or Narayani offered special exposure of the highest quality before clients returned to the comforts of the lodges.

Today, visitors are not dispersed, but concentrated in Sauraha from where government owned elephants are given priority access. Private jeep safaris are allowed for a fee. Wildlife exposure for visitors is limited and with Sauraha now overbuilt, new lodges are coming along right across the
park boundary. For tourists willing to pay more, the safari experience in Chitwan is just not what it used to be. Higher paying clients now go to Bardiya, or even to parks in India and Africa.

One of the advantages of having limited numbers of lodges inside the park was that it discouraged wildlife poaching and kept track of animal movements. It is still too early to tell, but in Sauraha the perception is that wildlife poaching has increased and one of the reasons could be the absent lodges. In Africa, poaching levels increased in national parks where lodges are kept outside.

There are also financial implications, lodges were maintaining the roads and fire breaks, and patrolling the jungle. Now, without the hefty annual leasing fees the lodges were paying, the national park doesn’t have enough money for maintenance.

Nepal needs to maximise its income from its tourism product. It can’t afford to lose the income and taxes from the lodges, the loss of 1,500 jobs, and another 1,000 or more daily wage staff. There was also the multiplier effect on provisions suppliers, transporters, and their families who have been adversely affected.

There is a clear danger that with the closure of Chitwan lodges, there is an imbalance between quality and quantity tourism in Nepal. We have the ‘quantity’ side in the lodges in Sauraha, but the higher-paying quality tourists have stopped coming.

We have the Himalaya, Mt Everest will always be there, Pokhara offers adventure tourism and fine hotels, the Great Himalayan Trail can revitalise trekking, and there is a vast potential for pilgrimage tourism to Lumbini, Muktinath, and Pashupati.

And with Chitwan, we have potentially the finest wildlife experience in the world. What more can a country ask or offer? Nepal must make sure to attract both ends of the market to maximise the potential of tourism to generate income and create jobs. We have the expertise, the products, and the service, but we must stop this downward drift towards ‘quantity’ tourism only.

Chitwan can still help Nepal reverse this trend and ‘quality’ can be restored if the lodges in the park are given a new lease on life.
Radioactive decay

Bhojraj Bhat, Nepal 2 June

Marie Curie won two Nobel prizes for her pioneering work in the field of radioactivity. Her discovery of radioactive elements proved to be a boon for modern science. But the discovery of uranium in Tinbhangale of Makwanpur district seems to be doing more harm than good for its residents. The Department of Mines and Geology confirmed the discovery of uranium in parts of the village of Santa Gyaneshwor Guro who lives in an area with the highest level of radioactivity. Her discovery of radioactive elements proved to be a boon for modern science. But the Department of Mines and Geology confirmed the discovery of uranium in Tinbhangale of Makwanpur district seems to be doing more harm than good for its residents.

LOSING IT: Sati Maya Jimba’s nails are falling most likely due to long term uranium exposure.

Jure, Dadagaur started migrating here from mid-60s onwards. Almost everyone in the village suffers from diarrhoea, vomiting, and skin diseases. Other harmful effects of radioactivity such as hair fall, falling of nails, miscarriage during pregnancy, and lung diseases (like tuberculosis) are also on the rise. Even the cattle fall sick often. Santa Gyaneshwor Guro who lives in an area with the highest level of uranium says he feels nauseous every time he enters the house. He has lost his appetite and has difficulties sleeping at night. Fellow village Man Bahadur’s 57-year-old mother Kanti maya suddenly stopped eating three years ago. Numerous trips to the capital have proven unfruitful as the doctors cannot diagnose her ailment. Man Bahadur himself looks emaciated and sick.

Lat Bahadur Lungwa of Chatwan Kathelokha suffers from skin cancer. About 10 months ago he noticed something that looked like an insect bite on his neck. At first Lungwa didn’t pay much attention, but with time the bite began to hurt. He went from hospital to hospital seeking treatment but with little success. At Bharatpur Hospital he discovered he had cancer.

Dahal: “Comrade Bhattarai is washing away his sins in the Trisuli.” Signboard: Trisuli III-A

Rajesh KC in Nagarik, 5 June

“I will never be proud of these three things in my life: world’s highest peak in Nepal, Buddha was born in Nepal, I am proud of these three. The Nepal government has failed me, I am not a monster, I do not want to be called a monster.”

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

Not a usual resort........... refresh yourself
The dark night

Yubraj Ghimire, Setopati, 2 June

I was in Seoul with a friend when I read online about the royal family massacre. We left the conference and flew back to Nepal immediately. Since there was a curfew in town, the police drove us from the airport to Kantipur’s headquarter in Tinkune. The entire nation was in shock and denial. Nepalis just couldn’t bring themselves to accept that they had lost their beloved King Birendra and his family. And they were neither in the mood to accept Crown Prince Dipendra as the murderer.

When I met the new king three months later for the first time, I told him how the faulty investigations had left Nepalis searching for the truth. Since the CJ-led team had already submitted its report, it was too late to form another investigation panel. So it wasn’t hard to understand the miseries of a king who couldn’t show any signs of weakness despite losing his entire family on his way to the throne.

When the Constituent Assembly decided to abolish the monarchy in Nepal, Gyanendra challenged those in power by telling them that he would cooperate with any investigation into the massacre. Nobody accepted his challenge. Instead all the leaders like Pushpa Kamal Dahal continued accusing him.

The prince’s fiery temper and obstinate nature were no secret among close friends. Dipendra once half-buried a lover to scare her. Another time he locked a girl in the bonnet of his car as he drove around town. “We never thought these behaviours would eventually lead to him killing his entire family,” says one of his friends on the condition of anonymity.

Twelve years on, there are still no clear answers about what actually happened on the night of 1 June, the debate lingers on. We can attribute much of the confusion to the lethargy that has come to characterise this country’s politics and administration. When filmmakers and historians try to reconstruct this tragic event in the future, the validity of their stories will depend on humanitarian instincts or its lack thereof.

with endless rumours. No one had even heard about the serious injuries that Gyanendra’s wife Komal had sustained. In cases like these, the blame is usually put on those who happen to benefit from the event the most. Ever since that dreadful night, Gyanendra had to deal with insulting and unfounded accusations with silence. And due to his notoriety, his son Paras – who had used his presence of mind to save many family members became the prime suspect.

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Many of you have been taking the Ass aside at parties in the past weeks to ask when elections will be held. And I have confidently and unequivocally replied: “How the hell should I know? I am an Ass, not an astrologer.” But if you really want a prognosis on CA elections, then all you have to do is follow the student union elections which have just been postponed infinitely. In fact, college unions in this country have always behaved exactly like their parent parties, which is why when the students grow up they just keep on continuing to burn effigies of each other. No surprise: the First Daughter’s union was involved in padding up the electoral rolls with fake students by mobilising 20 lacks for their admission fees. The other unions cried foul, not because they were outraged but because they didn’t have that kind of moolah. The young turks couldn’t agree on a date for union elections and therefore effectively cancelled it. Which is probably what is going to happen to national elections.

Ass first into the monsoon

Take it from me: don’t even think about elections until the Maddies unite and form an alliance with the Baddies. That is Awesome’s strategy to ensure a 2/3rd majority to ram through a constitution that will make him an executive president. But the problem is that the Maddies are so divided that they hate each other more than they hate the hillybilly parties. Thakur Sa’b called a meeting to forge unity, but Rajinder (fast-unto-death) Mahato didn’t go because he is trying to be the supreme himself, neither Gutch nor Updaro attended saying, “Just because your father calls us you think we will come?” or words to that effect. Upadro can’t stand Gutch, neither can stand Jupta, and Sarat doesn’t get along with Gutch and no one likes Rajinder. The Hidden Hand must have hands full trying to sort that out.

It must be because we are a backward country that Nepalis are forever striving to be the first in the Guinness Book to be the first to do things backward. Couple of years ago, someone became the first person to try to read the best-selling Nepali epic, Muna Madan, from back to front. This season on Mt Everest, a Nepali mountaineer wanted to enter the Guinness book by being the first person to climb the world’s highest peak ass-first. By the time he got to Camp II the poor fellow had frost-bitten toes and had to be medevaced. And now, a fellow hack wants to travel across Nepal riding a bicycle backwards. Ass’ take: when the country itself is going backwards, why bother?

Many readers from all worldwide nooks and crannies have been writing worried notes to us asking if it is safe and sound to return to Nepal for the summer holidays during the forthcoming monsoon season and if they do, whether they can eat the salad. Because most of the queries have come from highly litigious countries in the western hemisphere, we have consulted our lawyers and now can be brutally frank: no, keep off, leave us alone this monsoon season. We can’t afford to be sued. And, no, don’t touch the salad.

The monsoon gets a bad press, and it is time to rebrand it by extolling its virtues:

1. Your gut reaction will be to stay away because of the prospect of a violent uprising caused by diarrhoea. True, it is not covered by the Warsaw Convention, but diarrhoea is a great way to lose weight. Slogan: Visit Nepal and Lose 10kg in 10 days.

2. The road-widening project has turned the streets into sludge and we can take political mud-slinging to a whole new level in Mudmandu by launching our version of the Glastonbury Festival.

3. Road-widening has also blocked all drains, flooding the city. Rickshaws could be replaced by gondolas and Kathmandu can be promoted as the ‘Venice of the East’.