A Nepali Congress poster shares a tree trunk with a sign declaring the village of Kalikasthan in Achham open-defecation free (pic, above). Achham and Kalikot have become the latest districts in a government campaign of toilets for all by 2017. The rest of the country is not waiting for Kathmandu to get its politics right, as the capital’s messy transition drags on.

Suddenly, though, politics lurched forward after a three-month deadlock with the announcement of Tuesday, 19 November 2013 as the date for elections. The logjam was cleared once the Big Four political parties accepted their failure to agree on amending electoral laws and allowed the Chief Justice-led government to sort that out and announce an election date. There are still doubts about whether the parties have really abdicated their role and if the interim election government is only a rubber stamp body. But the announcement on Thursday gives it more legitimacy.

In a day of fast-paced developments, Chairman Khil Raj Regmi met Chief Election Commissioner Nilkantha Upreti in the morning to iron out details and the council of ministers worked on the wording of the changes in electoral laws in an ordinance to send to President Ram Baran Yadav for formal ratification.

The ordinance has finally bypassed disagreements between the big four main parties over the question of threshold for proportional representation, delineation of constituencies, and whether or not candidates with criminal records should be allowed to contest elections. The cabinet also decided to set up an Electoral Constituency Delineation Commission to map out new voting areas.

However, the breakaway CPN-M faction of the Maoists needs to be brought on board. “Fixing the election date without taking our demands into account could lead to conflict,” warned CP Gajurel of the CPN-M on Thursday, “we will not accept forced elections.”

Waiting to get the politics right...
Politicians may think they have more pressing matters in their hands, but the poor state of healthcare is symptomatic of massive political failure.

The replacement of the government, it is trying to demonstrate that affordable and quality care is possible. (See page 16-17) As Duncan Maru and Roxhan Bista of Bayalpata argue in their piece in this issue that healthcare has a cost even when it is free. It is the responsibility of the state to use taxes paid by citizens to pay for universal healthcare. That may seem like an unrealistic dream when successive governments waste billions to pay phantom guerrillas, loot the exchequer to distribute cash to cadres, or pocket millions in kickbacks from contracts for hydropower deals. But these are all the result of the erosion of accountability during this messy and endless transition: nothing that can’t be set right through election campaigns at the national and local levels.

Even despite the lack of elections and accountability, rife corruption, and an uncertain state, Nepal has made remarkable progress in lowering the mortality rate among mother and child, and increasing the average lifespan of citizens. Institutional deliveries are going up, even in remote areas as new roads are built. The increase in female literacy has reduced the incidence of child marriages. The work of Female Health Volunteers in pushing vaccination and nutrition in rural areas has been cited as a model for other developing countries. Now, the country is poised to remove a major cause of child deaths from diarrheal dehydration and pneumonia by making all 75 districts open-dedication free and free of indoor firewood smoke by 2017.

Now that we are making statistical progress on quantity, however, it is time to also look at quality and healthcare. As the health focus in this edition shows, there are working examples of public-private partnerships to make government hospitals affordable and efficient. If the Bayalpata model can be scaled up and spread to the cities with clear and reliable healthcare, it would automatically reduce the commercialism in the sector because people would have alternatives.

Government hospitals are understaffed, under-resourced, and under-supplied. Politicians may think they have more pressing matters in their hands, but they should know that the poor state of healthcare in this country is symptomatic of massive political failure.

IMPATIENT PATIENTS

P poor healthcare in Nepal is not a medical problem, it is a political one. The contrast couldn’t be starker between modern medical care in the cities with state-of-the-art diagnostics and sub-health posts across the country without basic medicines and personnel.

The ultra-commercialisation of healthcare in this country has put most medical interventions beyond the reach of all but the super rich. The only saving grace is that many now don’t have to go to Delhi or Bangkok for treatment because comparable care is available here and this saves the country money. But also true is that given the lack of ultrasound and MRI scans, few Nepalis can afford private hospitals.

All the while, the scale are places like Kalikot and Achham in far-western Nepal where district hospitals, such as they are, don’t have enough medicines, doctors are absent, or run clinics where they refer patients to themselves. The equipment are often not working and the generators are always out of diesel.

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The equipment are often not working and the generators are always out of diesel.
Breaking views

As elections look more probable, the mainstream media also becomes an extension of the political parties

By the Way

Anurag Acharya

Last week, during a televised interview a Madhesi leader expressed his commitment to democracy. The interviewer couldn’t help pass a snide and cynical comment: “But you worked closely with the Maoist-led government, how can you be a democrat?”

A few days earlier, a radio interviewer belittled the political intelligence of Rokha Thapa in a condescending and patronising way for joining the UCPN (M) and goaded her for joining a party that was responsible for the death of 16,000 Nepalis. “If you are fond of helping fellow human beings, why didn’t you just stick to extracurricular charity work? Why didn’t you just start new media just reflects the old media. Despite the advances in media technology it is not just a new medium of journalism, it is an extension of parties and leaders to sell their political viewpoints and smear rivals.

The advent of social media, the company of Google and Facebook, and the mainstream media’s own poor professionalism of journalists have compounded the problem. It has made fact and opinion more blurred, as views and the line between the two are often flouted as news masqueraded as opinion. Journalism rules were openly flouted as news masqueraded as views and the line between fact and opinion was blurred. “The journalist seemed more keen on firing at the prime minister by resting a gun on my shoulder than on reporting the facts of the matter to the public,” said an aggrieved senior bureaucrat dragged into the Trisuli story.

To be sure, there is nothing new in all this. Despite improvements in professionalism of journalists in Nepal, the media still unleashes smear campaigns on companies that refuse to advertise and those who blackmail and lie are not exceptions. As the elections get closer, this is bound to become worse unless the Election Commission lays down strict media guidelines.

Senior hardcopy journalists who started the popular investigative online portal, ‘Setopati’, were greeted last week by the launch of an unabashedly copy-cat ‘Ratopati’ that owes its existence to the UCPN (M). A publisher’s note on Ratopati said it could counter the ‘dominant narrative of the mainstream media’ which, it claimed was ‘status quoist and biased’. The journalist seemed more keen on firing at the prime minister by resting a gun on my shoulder than on reporting the facts of the matter to the public,” said an aggrieved senior bureaucrat dragged into the Trisuli story.

By the Way

Anurag Acharya is program manager at the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CJI). www.cijnepal.org
ne interpretation of the anti-government demonstrations now roiling Turkish cities is that they are a massive protest against political Islam. What began as a rally against official plans to raze a small park in the centre of Istanbul to make way for a kitschy shopping mall quickly evolved into a conflict of values.

On the surface, the fight appears to represent two different visions of modern Turkey, secular versus religious, democratic versus authoritarian. Comparisons have been made with Occupy Wall Street. Some observers even speak of a ‘Turkish Spring’. Clearly, many Turkish citizens, especially in the big cities, are sick of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s increasingly authoritarian style, his steely grip on the press, his taste for grandiose new mosques, the restrictions on alcohol, the arrests of political dissidents, and now the violent response to the demonstrations. People fear that sharia law will replace secular legislation and that Islamism will spoil the fruits of Kemal Atatürk’s drive to modernise post-Ottoman Turkey.

Then there is the issue of the Alevi, a religious minority linked to Sufism and Shi’ism. The Alevis, who had been protected by the secular Kemalist state, deeply distrust Erdoğan, who further unsettled them by planning to name a new bridge over the Bosphorus after a sixteenth-century sultan who massacred their forebears. Religion, then, would seem to be at the heart of the problem. Political Islam’s opponents regard it as inherently anti-democratic.

But things are not so simple. The secular Kemalist state was no less authoritarian than Erdoğan’s populist Islamist regime; if anything, it was more so. And it is also significant that the first protests in Istanbul’s Taksim Square concerned not a mosque, but a shopping mall. Fear of sharia law is matched with anger at the rapacious vulgarity of developers and entrepreneurs backed by Erdoğan’s government. There is a strong leftist bent to the Turkish Spring.

So, rather than dwell on the problems of contemporary political Islam, which are certainly considerable, it might be more fruitful to look at Turkey’s conflicts from another, now distinctly unfashionable, perspective: class. The protesters, whether they are liberal or leftist, tend to be from the urban elite – Westernised, sophisticated, and secular. Erdoğan, on the other hand, is still very popular in rural and provincial Turkey, among people who are less educated, poorer, more conservative, and more religious.

Despite Erdoğan’s personal authoritarian tendencies, which are obvious, it would be misleading to regard the current protests purely as a conflict between democracy and autocracy. After all, the success of Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party, as well as the increasing presence of religious symbols and customs in public life, is a result of more democracy in Turkey, not less. Customs that the Kemalist secular state suppressed, such as women’s use of headscarves in public places, have reappeared, because rural Turks have more influence. Young, religious women are turning up at urban universities. The votes of conservative provincial Turks now count.

Likewise, the alliance between businessmen and religious populists is hardly unique to Turkey. Many of the new entrepreneurs, like the women in headscarves, are from villages in Anatolia. Those newly rich provincials resent the old Istanbul elite as much as businessmen from Texas or Kansas hate the East Coast elites of New York and Washington. But to say that Turkey has become more democratic is not to say that it has become more liberal. This is also one of the problems revealed by the Arab Spring. Giving all people a voice in government is essential to any democracy. But those voices, especially in revolutionary times, are rarely moderate. The demonstrators are right to oppose Erdoğan’s haughty disregard of public opinion and his stifling of the press. But to see the conflict as a righteous struggle against religious expression would be equally mistaken.

Higher visibility for Islam is the inevitable result of more democracy in Muslim-majority countries. How to stop this from killing liberalism is the most important question facing people in the Middle East. Turkey is still a democracy. It is to be hoped that the protests against Erdoğan will make it more liberal, too.
Flying high
Qatar Airways released the first image of its Airbus A380-800 from the manufacturer’s Toulouse assembly line in France. The four-engine jet airliner Airbus A380 is the world’s largest passenger airliner and passengers will get to experience the thrill of this new ride by 2014.

Quality check
Continental Trading Enterprises has been awarded with an ISO 9001:2008 quality management system certification. Continental Group represents and distributes brands like Kia Motors, Komatsu heavy equipment and generators, Otis elevators and escalators, Pramac, and Esther generators in Nepal.

Vroom vroom
MAW Enterprises, the sole distributor of Yamaha motorcycles in Nepal, organised Yamaha Day-Out Rally for R15 125.0 riders in association with WFS services last week. More than 40 riders participated in the rally that started from Darbar Marg and concluded in Royal Beach Camp, Dhanding.

Connecting people
iClinic Healthcare has partnered with Haryali Travels to launch web based medical consultation services. The platform will enable patients in Nepal to connect with doctors across India.

Sporty ride
Laxmi Inter Continental, distributor of Hyundai vehicles in Nepal has launched the new i-Gen i20 in Nepal. It has 1.2 Kappa petrol engine and comes with rear parking camera, auto headlight control, rear disc brakes, and sporty alloy wheels.

Drink in style
Scotch Whisky house, John Walker and Sons has launched Odyssey, a rare triple malt whisky in Nepal. Luxury whisky mentoring session with Richard Gillam, the brand ambassador of Odyssey was also conducted at the launch.

110 and counting
On the occasion of Ford’s 110th anniversary Ford Heritage Month is being celebrated in June at Go Ford. The company is offering customers a trip to Dearborn, Michigan, USA on the same occasion.

Bright and clean
Berge Paints has launched Easy Clean and Rangoli Total Care in the Nepal market. According to a press statement, Berge Easy Clean and Rangoli Total Care are one of the safest interior paints and provide easy maintenance.

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ucked between the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area and Makalu-Barun National Park, this corner of Nepal is so isolated from the rest of the country that you have to walk two days to reach the nearest village. Olanchungola is three days away over the Lumba Sumba pass in Taplejung, a route so hazardous that few locals venture across it.

“We had a school here five years ago,” says 15-year-old Phurpu Bhote (pic, left), “but the teachers stopped coming, so we now work.”

Since he doesn’t go to school and hasn’t had much contact with outsiders, Phurpu can’t speak Nepali properly. His friends Sonam Lopsang, Pemba, Lhakpa, and their siblings (pic, below) spend their days herding yaks. As the boys get older, they will take the animals to meadows above 4,500m in the monsoon. Once they turn 18, they will get married, after which life will be a battle between growing needs and scant resources.

Even with healthy monsoons, at this altitude very little farming is possible. The 20 households here get most of their food and necessities from Tibet in exchange for timber and medicinal herbs. A wood plank two metres long fetches Rs 100 across the border and because the moist cloud forests are rich in pine and fir trees timber trading provides a good income and has sustained families for generations. But as the villagers get more desperate and Tibet becomes more affluent, the slopes around Thudam are being unsustainably logged. Without trees to hold the top soil, the mountains are scarred by landslides.

The banks of the nearby Modek Chheju River are littered with packets of Chinese noodles and candy wrappers. Selling yak milk, ghee, and chhurpi to villagers downstream brings in Nepali currency, a rare commodity in this part of the country. Having little contact with ‘mainland’ Nepal means Thudam residents feel closer to Tibet than Nepal and questions about politics in Kathmandu draw blank stares.

“Since the state has neglected them for so long, they don’t want to be associated with it,” explains Kumar Ghimire, a vet posted at Hedangna Gadi. “Villagers are used to doing things their own way and openly admit they would be better off with Chinese passports because they are dependent on Tibet for everything.”

With its lush forests, stunning scenery, and an intact culture, Thudam has tourism potential. But its remoteness and lack of facilities mean few venture here. “If we had more trekkers, we could open ourselves to the outside world and maybe that would help improve our living standards,” admits 50-year-old Tenzing Bhote, but there seems to be no interest in the district or national capital.

For now, Thudam is protected by its own isolation. But unless the villagers here have an alternative source of income, they will have squandered away the forests that would make it attractive for visitors.
The iconic image of the swinging Rato Machhindranath as it lurches through the narrow alleys of old Patan is a perennial favourite among photographers both home and abroad. Drawn by the drama and colours, 28-year-old Navesh Chitrakar, who works for Reuters in Nepal, turned up year after year to capture the chaos on his Canon 5D Mark III. But there was a problem.

The photos he took over the years were no different than the generic postcards sold in Thamel: the same low angles, the same crowds in the foreground. “The images were bland imitations of each other. So I thought why not attempt a shot from the top?” says Navesh.

Navesh met Chakala Dangol, the priest who is responsible for the coconut ceremony and convinced him to strap on a GoPro, a kind of camera used in sports and adventure photography. Programmed to take a picture every five seconds on fixed exposure, the camera was running throughout the 45 minutes that it took for Dangol to reach the top of the wooden chariot, drop the coconut, and make it back safely. Navesh was pleasantly surprised with the results.

As soon as the photo went up on Reuters’ website, the bird’s eye view image of the crowd and up-close shot of the coconut in Dangol’s palms gained immediate fame among millions across the world. But controversy was just around the corner. Fellow photographers were angered that Navesh gave himself credit for work that he had not clicked.

But the experienced lensman says he sees nothing wrong in putting his name on the photos. “Dangol dai was kind enough to help me and the images wouldn’t have been possible without him,” he explains. “Credit is usually given to the person who comes up with the concept, fixes settings, or fires the shutter by remote control. I did everything but press the shutter.”

After that hefty pre-monsoon spell, we are now seeing a giant tug-o-war over the Himalaya between westerly wind and the surging mass of moist, warm air from the Bay of Bengal. Some of the moisture that penetrates unawares gigantic storms like what we saw in western Nepal and Pokhara on Tuesday. The progress of the SW monsoon is about five days late, so expect the sweltering heat to continue as the front edge of the monsoon arrives in Kathmandu early next week.
EVENTS

FARMERS MARKET, shop for the freshest organic products. Every Saturday, 9am to 3pm, 1205 Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.

Mube Chakati Gufi, discussion and presentation on street theatre through gestures and symbols by theatre artists/director Ashish Malla. 24 June, 4 to 6pm, Gallery Mube, Chakpat, Lalitpur, (02)5460050.

Man of Steel, watch the premiere of Man of Steel and contribute to the theatre artist/director Ashesh Malla. 24 June, 4 to 6pm, Gallery Mcube, Babar Mahal Revisited, Lajimpat, Lalitpur, (01)4412193, 4785454, info@candidservice.com

ROPAIN, a day out for playing in mud and planting some rice. Rs 2500 (for adults) Rs 1000 for children under 10 yrs), 29 June, 9.30am to 4.45pm, Bajrabarahi, Lalitpur, Register at ropian@event.eventbrite.com

Utsav, an exhibition of paintings by Sagar Manandhar. 5 to 30 June, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4218048/4438979.

Unī, She!, celebrate the beauty of womanhood, a photo exhibition by Uma Bista.

BHUMI RESTAURANT & BAR, savor delicious Nepali, Indian and Italian cuisine in a welcoming environment. Lajimpat, (02)4112193

CINEMANDU, watch the screening, meet the crew and share your views on the movie Lima. Free entrance, 24 June, 3.30pm, Nepal Bhart Library, Nepal Airlines Building, Sondha.

NEPAL-AFRICA FILM FESTIVAL, watch amazing movies from 15 different African nations as well as selected Nepal movies. 20 June, Russian Culture Center, Kathmandu.

Shopping Carnival, purchase stuff worth Rs 1000 and above at Civil Mall and get a chance to win Samsung mobiles, home appliances and Bajaj Pulsar. Runs till 6 July, Civil Mall, Kathmandu.

Kathmandu Bolchaa, a video journalism workshop. Learn to tell stories through videos with minimal equipments. Rs 3000, 16 to 20 June, 9am to 1pm, VENT! Office, Sanepa Chowk, apply at bit.ly/ZHuLws.

ROPAIN, an exhibition of paintings by Uma Bista.

HIMALAYAN PIZZA, this Italian restaurant has enough options to keep both adults and children coming back for more. Thamel.


dining

Kasi, spread out over a large terrace overlooking Phora Darbar, Kasi offers a delectable plate of Newari delicacies. Darbar Marg

Falicha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab. Jhamshedh, Lalitpur

NEPAL-AFRICA FILM FESTIVAL, watch amazing movies from 15 different African nations as well as selected Nepal movies. 20 June, Russian Culture Center, Kathmandu.

Business Square, meet entrepreneurs, share innovative business ideas, and market your business in a casual setting. 20 June, 6 to 9pm, The Embers Restaurant, Krishna Gali, Lalitpur, (02)4954454, info@canalidsservice.com

DANCE MARATHON, dance away for 8 hours 8 minutes and 8 seconds. Dance Marathon, Darbar Marg, 14 June.

Dance Marathon, dance away for 8 hours 8 minutes and 8 seconds to show your support for gender equality and equity. Rs 500 for participants, Rs 200/200 for audience, 24 June, 12:30 to 3pm, T.T. Hall, Lainchour, www.facebook.com/events/2583593390996/?ref=22, register at http://bit.ly/dnmepal

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**Fete de la Music**

Start off your weekend to the sounds of music at Alliance française. Then head down to Mandalas Street, Thamel to groove to the beats of popular artists and bands. Tired of the sun but have not had enough of music? Sit back and relax at one of the various pubs for some great music with good food and better company.

On 21 June across Nepal a series of concerts to mark the International Music Day brought to you by Alliance Française, Nepal.

1 to 3 PM
Alliance Française of Kathmandu, TRIPURESHWOR

4 PM to 8PM – Mandala Street, THAMEL

8 PM Onwards – Musical Night in various pubs
KATHMANDU
Purple Haze Rock Bar, Namaste Cafe, Paddy Foley’s Irish Pub, Lhuna Bar, House Of Music, Fluid Bar, Reggae Bar, Everest Irish Pub, KC’s Bamboo Bar, Breezi Bakery Restaurant & Bar, Jingle Restaurant & Bar, Teka, Woodstock Restro & Bar

PATAN
Back Yard Food Joint, J4 Garage

8 PM Onwards – Musical Night in Pubs
POKHARA
Oxygen Lounge & Bar, Club Amsterdam , Freedom Cafe & Bar, Silk Road Restaurant & Bar, V-gins Restaurant & Bar, Center Point Restaurant & Bar

DHARAN
Roadies Bar, Hungry Eye Restaurant
21 June, Kathmandu, Pokhara, Dharan, (01) 4241163
When Norwegians Kristin Andresen and Gunvald Hagen first arrived in Kathmandu last year on a FK Norway program, they just knew one thing about Nepal: the Himalayas. “We were excited to be accepted into the program and getting the opportunity to work in a foreign country, but had little idea of Nepal,” admits Andresen.

Like Andresen and Hagen, around 200 young Norwegians travel to countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America every year through the state-sponsored Fredskorpset Norway program started in 1963. Initially modeled after the American Peace Corps, FK Norway adopted a more inclusive approach in 2000 and started mutual programs between partner companies in Norway and the global south. Since then almost 6,000 volunteers have been a part of this international exchange.

“Abandoning the traditional donor-recipient model has revitalised the entire program. Both partners now feel they are contributing equally and is a great motivation for participants,” says Nita Kapoor, director of FK Norway who was in Nepal last week to celebrate the institution’s 50th anniversary. “Usually one thinks of only countries in the south receiving development assistance, but the relationship really works both ways.”

For the past year and a half, Andresen and Hagen have been working at the Nepal Music Centre in Battisputali. “Nepal has become a second home for us,” says Hagen who teaches keyboard at the centre while his girlfriend helps in day-to-day administration. Initially, the couple were in Nepal on a 12 month assignment, but requested to extend their term by six months because they enjoyed working...
The Blue Elephants

No they are not an exotic species of elephants, just a regular jazz band with a somewhat peculiar name: Oh No! Blue elephant with no hat or straw is flying in air. The group was born last year when saxophonist Kristin Andresen and pianist Gunvald Hagen, two FK Norway volunteers, met Nepali musicians - Riju Tuladhar, Nikhil Tuladhar, and Sunit Kansakar - at the Nepal Music Centre. “We were blown away by their talent and hard work and wanted to collaborate with them,” says Hagen.

While the band plays mostly jazz music, it’s the mix of western and Nepali instruments with Riju on bass, Sunit on guitar and sitar, and Nikhil on drums that make them unique. Familiar faces in Kathmandu’s music circuit, the Blue Elephants will be out with their first album later in July. The audience in complete awe and showed how quickly she has assimilated into her new culture. The duo will also release an album with their Nepali friends in July (see box). Says Andresen: “The people we met and worked with, the music, the culture, and the experiences we gathered will live on even after we leave. We will carry a piece of Nepal with us for the rest of our lives.”

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SOUTH-SOUTH KNOT

here so much. The music centre, a partner of University of Agder in Norway, has three of its employees currently working there. FK Norway also runs a south-south program which sends volunteers and young professionals from one developing country to another. People, Energy, and Environment Development Association (PEEDA), a Nepali organisation which promotes renewable energy, is a part of this exchange and has hosted two Bhutanese and an Indian participant so far. Biraj Gautam of PEEDA spent 10 months in India in 2011 and says the stint helped improve his confidence. “My co-workers tell me I came back a more confident and efficient person,” he admits.

With over 300 local companies participating, Nepal is currently the largest partner for FK Norway. The country has hosted more than 100 volunteers and sent about 150 Nepalis across the globe in the past 12 years. While these organisations are involved in diverse fields ranging from bio-diversity to agriculture, civil society, human rights, health, media, arts and culture, FK Norway wants to shift its focus to sustainable energy. Part of the reason the institute chose Nepal to celebrate its anniversary is so that it can begin searching for potential partners in this field.

“International volunteers only have positive things to say about Nepal. Most fall in love with the people, culture, and warm hospitality,” explains Kapoor. When asked how Nepalis contribute to the program, she says: “The ability to be innovative and produce results even with minimal resources is a quality we most admire about our Nepali participants.”

Scheduled to return home at the end of August, Andresen and Hagen are looking to make the most out of their last two months in Nepal. Andresen’s remarkable rendition of the Nepali national anthem on her saxophone during Norwegian Day celebrations in May left the audience in complete awe and showed how quickly she has assimilated into her new culture. The duo will also release an album with their Nepali friends in July (see box). Says Andresen: “The people we met and worked with, the music, the culture, and the experiences we gathered will live on even after we leave. We will carry a piece of Nepal with us for the rest of our lives.”

GOING GLOBAL (l-r): Biraj Gautam of PEEDA spent 10 months in India in 2011 as part of FK Norway’s south-south program. Gautam worked at Tara Technology and Action for Rural Advancement and is seen here conducting a survey in Uttar Pradesh.

Hemanta Basnet also from PEEDA did a year long exchange in Bhutan. She worked at Taryana Foundation teaching local women about cooking and nutrition.

Director Nita Kapoor was in Kathmandu recently to commemorate FK Norway’s 50th anniversary.

nepaltimes.com
**STOKER**

South Korean director Chan-wook Park has earned cult following for years stemming from Sympathy for Mr Vengeance (2002), an astonishingly violent and very stylish film. While Park had been making films from the early 90’s, it was only with the aforementioned movie that he hit his stride - that being having a knack for making the most gory and visually disturbing film. While Park’s disturbing but riveting body of work.

As Evelyn starts to fall under Charlie’s spell, so too does India, however reluctantly in a perverse but fascinating (and incestuous) unfolding of events. There is a scene, perfectly executed, where, believe it or not, Charlie seduces India while playing the piano with her. The scene unfolds with an intensity of acting that makes the entire film worth watching just for its incredible finesse.

What happens next? Well, there is some strangling, more seduction, and of course, as in any classic whodunit, some surprising revelations.

Stoker, while without the wild style antics of his previous films, still has some very interesting, very beautiful camera work. Shot by Chung hoon Chung, the cinematography, sometimes

Stoker begins with a voiceover from 18-year-old India Stoker (Mia Wasikowska), a troubled, brilliant young woman who’s father, Richard Stoker, has just died under mysterious circumstances. India sees and feels everything, yet she hates to be touched, and has an eerily distant relationship with her statuesque mother, the beautiful slightly frigid new widow Evelyn (played by Nicole Kidman).

Enter Uncle Charlie (played perfectly by the divinely handsome Matthew Goode), Richard’s long lost brother who turns up at the funeral back from his world travels to commiserate his loss. And so, the fun begins, which, with the disappearance of the old, loving, loyal housekeeper Mrs McGarrick (Phyllis Somerville) who clearly is taken aback by Charlie’s unexpected return.

formally classical, sometimes hand held, serves the story so well that it is a pleasure to watch. It is also satisfying to be able to see the work of a naturally exuberant director, tuned down to suit the subject matter.

So, a South Korean director makes a classic Western murder mystery film to perfection. I cannot wait to see what he will do next. Watch Stoker and if you like it, go out and buy all his other films, if you haven’t seen them already. I must warn you though, there is a lot of blood and while I am not condoning violence in any way, you will hopefully understand the fascination that film lovers have for Chan-wook Park’s disturbing but riveting body of work.

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The menu here isn’t too elaborate. The owners have stuck to what they know best - Indian food. A variety of curries, kati rolls, and biryani make up the mains while you have a choice betweenalu chop, dum alu, chicken tika, and pakodas for sides. Just as with the food, the options for drinks are limited. And if like me, you are not well versed in Indian cuisine, ask Julie for suggestions as talking with the only waiter present wasn’t too helpful. But I’ll give it to him for understanding my “not too spicy” request perfectly; the food came out just the way I had imagined.

The dum alu (Rs 185), our first order, came to us looking every bit imagined. Brilliantly seasoned and cooked to perfection, it was very easy to forget table manners while tearing into the gravy they are served in. And it tasted typical Hyderabadi biryani. The alu was accompanied by naan and rice.

For mains we settled on chicken kofta curry (Rs 350) which comes either with rice or roti depending on your taste, served with raita, and pickled mango on the side. The deep fried chicken balls are as delicious as the gravy they are served in. And the chicken biryani (Rs 375) is the closest I have ever come to tasting typical Hyderabadi biryani. Brilliantly seasoned and cooked to perfection, it was very easy to forget table manners while teasting apart the large pieces of chicken.

Mama’s is ideal for those hungry days when all you want is a filling meal and not pretentious food served in miserly portions in the name of fine dining.
High devotion

A trip to Pashupati or a visit to the neighbourhood temple is how most Hindus in Nepal like to get in touch with their spiritual selves. But for devotees seeking adventure and wanting to put their faith to test, there is Shree Amarnathji yatra in Kashmir.

At about 4,000m this Shiva cave, which sees up to 600,000 pilgrims every year, is one of the most dangerous holy sites in the world. From Srinagar in Kashmir, pilgrims travel to Pahalgam by road and then embark on their five to six day trek to the cave. There is another shorter one-day route from Baltal, but this is potentially more dangerous. Over a hundred people have died each year on this trip in the last two years. 250 pilgrims lost their lives here in 1996. Add threats from militants around the region and you will understand why only the most devout undertake this journey.

This year’s yatra begins on 28 June and culminates three weeks later on the day of Janai Purnima (August 21) when about a hundred sadhus take the sacred mace called Charri Mubarak to Shiva’s shrine. The Gosainkunda Yatra in Nepal’s Langtang region (4,300m) also comes to an end on the same day with a holy dip in the surrounding lake.

While trekkers and mountaineers usually spend a long time training and getting ready for their expeditions, pilgrims are generally unprepared to meet the challenges of high altitude and harsh weather. Most don’t take time to acclimatise or wear weather-appropriate clothing. As a result, they are extremely vulnerable to altitude sickness and hypothermia. What’s more, some partially-hypothermic devotees then proceed to take ‘holy’ dips in the icy rivers. They are also more likely to have pre-existing illnesses (such as uncontrolled diabetes) which becomes worse if they fast along the way.

In an effort to make the pilgrimage safer and accident-free, in February this year the Indian Supreme Court ordered the health ministry to set up a committee to train healthcare professionals so that they are better prepared to look after visitors. The local government is also making an effort to ensure that all visitors wear adequate warm clothing, but getting Sadhus to give up their saffron garb will undoubtedly be tough.

If you are planning on taking the ultimate leap of faith this season, you are advised to spend some time learning about how to prevent altitude sickness and hypothermia. Consult your physician if you have prior illnesses so that they are well controlled during the trip. A little homework now means safety and spiritual fulfilment at 4,000m.

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People won't take to smoking just because their favourite actor smokes in the reel world…

…but try telling that to Anbumani

Every time Leonardo DiCaprio or anyone else lights up in the film, The Great Gatsby, a message pops up on the screen warning viewers of the dire consequences of smoking.

The (dis)credit for killing the joy of going to the movies in India must go to its former Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss who launched a war against smoking eight years ago. His crusade has created a new breed of pariahs – smokers – who have been hounded out from public places, made to suffer ignominy, and compelled to accept their inferiority as both deserved and legitimate. Smokers accept their status and fate grimly, not least because a barrage of statistics has persuaded them about the causal link between their addiction and a variety of health problems.

Yet, even the non-smoking public should oppose the rule demanding film directors insert a warning in every smoking scene they conceive. The rationale behind the rule is specious. Its proponents like Anbumani believe popular actors portrayed smoking on the screen could inspire the impressionable to take up the habit. The warnings superimposed on smoking footage will serve as a countervailing influence, they argue, ignoring how they intrude away from alcohol through persuasion, no consideration for those who enjoy a peg or two and are not alcoholics. Like with others who take things to extremes, there exist no shades of grey. The world is divided into smokers and alcoholics and those who don’t puff or guff. There, in equating the culture of cinema with that of liquor and freebies, Anbumani displays a deep disdain for films – and the enjoyment they provide for the masses. He presumably believes films corrupt the viewers and undermine society.

In acquiescing to his over-the-top crusade against smoking – and accepting the government’s rule demanding warnings against tobacco imposed on smoking scenes – we have emboldened him to now think of banning liquor. In case Anbumani does realise his grand dream of becoming the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, don’t be surprised if he were to impose high taxes on cinema to discourage what he presumably believes is a terrible habit.

Anbumani secured his medical degree from the Madras Medical College, so you could say we don’t necessarily imbibe what we see or are taught. Indeed, people won’t take to smoking just because their favourite actor smokes in the reel world.

From this peep into his worldview, a few quick conclusions can be drawn about Anbumani. One, he believes he is who knows what is best for people, and, therefore, must decide for them. It’s this certitude of his that led him to campaign for scrubbing out smoking scenes from films altogether, until judicial intervention had the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to settle for the less authoritarian but infinitely irritating measure of inserting the warning lines.

Two, moderation is a word which doesn’t exist in Anbumani’s vocabulary – nothing less than a ban on alcohol would do for him. No question of weaning the people away from alcohol through persuasion, no consideration for those who enjoy a peg or two and are not alcoholics. Like with others who take things to extremes, there exist no shades of grey. The world is divided into smokers and alcoholics and those who don’t puff or guff. Three, in equating the culture of cinema with that of liquor and freebies, Anbumani displays a deep disdain for films – and the enjoyment they provide for the masses. He presumably believes films corrupt the viewers and undermine society.

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Ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

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**Bekanntmachung**

für Deutsche zur Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag

Am 22. September 2013 findet die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag statt.

Deutsche, die außerhalb der Bundesrepublik Deutschland leben und im Bundesgebiet keine Wohnung mehr innehaben, können bei Vorliegen der sonstigen wahlrechtlichen Voraussetzungen an der Wahl teilnehmen.

Für ihre Wahlberechtigung ist u. a. Voraussetzung, dass sie

1. entweder nach Vollendung ihres 14. Lebensjahres mindestens drei Monate ununterbrochen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1) eine Wohnung innegehabt haben oder sich sonst gewöhnlich aufgehalten haben und dieser Aufenthalt nicht länger als 25 Jahre zurück liegt, oder aus anderen Gründen persönlich und unmittelbar Vertrautheit mit den politischen Verhältnissen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland erworben haben und von ihnen betroffen sind; sowie

2. in einem Wählerverzeichnis in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland eingetragen sind.

Die Eintragung erfolgt nur auf Antrag. Der Antrag ist auf einem Formblatt zu stellen; er soll bald nach dieser Bekanntmachung abgesandt werden. Einen Antrag, der erst am 02. September 2013 oder später bei der zuständigen Gemeindebehörde eingegangen sein kann, nicht mehr entsprechen (§ 18 Abs. 1 der Bundeswahlordnung).

Antragsvordrucke (Formblätter) sowie informative Merkblätter sind online auf der Seite des Bundeswahlleiters (www.bundeswahlleiter.de) erhältlich. Sie können auch bei

- den diplomatischen und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Die Botschaft Kathmandu wird Antragsvordrucke ab Mitte Juni 2013 voraussichtlich abgeben haben)
- dem Bundeswahlleiter, Statistisches Bundesamt, Zweigstelle Bonn, Postfach 17 03 77, 53029 BONN, GERMANY, oder per E-Mail <bundeswahlleiter-bonn@destatis.de>
- den Kreiswahlleitern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

angefordert werden.

Weitere Auskünfte erteilen die Botschaften und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

Kathmandu, 06. Juni 2013

Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

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1) Wohnung im Sinne der Bundeswahlordnung (§ 11) bedeutet ein von dem bzw. der Wähler ausgenutzter Wohnraum, der eigenständig ist, in dem die Wohnungsmiete zu zahlen ist und der die Möglichkeit der ungestörten Nutzung bietet.
After returning from a recent trip to far western Nepal, people in Kathmandu asked me what I was doing there. Covering Achham district being declared open-defecation free, I replied, amidst sniggers and an eruption of scatological jokes.

Yet, building latrines and persuading people to use them can be a matter of life or death in a country where at least five children die every day of diarrhoeal dehydration. Once regarded as backward and under-developed, Achham and Kalikot have become the latest two districts where people don’t have to defecate in the open anymore. The same can’t be said of Kathmandu yet.

Walking across the arid and rugged mountains of western Nepal 30 years ago, I used to be powerfully reminded every step of the way of the famous Nepali saying “gu ayo gau ayo”. As we approached every village, the trails would be mined with human faeces. Three decades later, climbing down from the Mangalsen-Doti Highway to the village of Bhageswor is a pleasant walk through a community forest dotted with berry bushes and scented with spring flowers. Not only is it defecation free, there isn’t the litter of plastic noodle wrappings that now deface trails across Nepal.

“If you came here five years ago, you wouldn’t be able to breathe or walk along this stream,” recalled Ratan Bohara, as he walked us to his village. Fecal contamination of water supply meant that till as recently as three years ago, cholera epidemics were common. Diarrhoea was the number one health problem for the children of Bhageswor. Today it ranks 12th.

The same community mobilisation that allowed Bhageswor to stop open-defecation has also made it the first village to be free of ‘Chhaupadi’, a traditional practice that banishes women to the cow shed during their periods and childbirth. It is also one of the first villages in Nepal to have 100 per cent school enrolment, full-vaccination coverage for all children, the village has eliminated acute malnutrition, child marriage, and domestic violence.

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If Bhageswor could be scaled up to the national level, Nepal wouldn’t be a least developed country. Even more remarkable is that the village is located in Achham, the district with one of the lowest female literacy and life expectancy standards of transparency’, a distinction only one per cent of charities evaluated received. Country director Stephen Petersen says Nyaya is lobbying for an increase of annual government contribution to $110,000. Nearly all the doctors, nurses, and volunteers are Nepali, and most of them are from the far-west. Physician Roshan Bista is from Achham and says he was motivated to give up a city practice to return to his home district. “As a boy I had seen the need for healthcare in Achham and after I became a doctor, I had to see how I could help,” he told us, while doing the ward rounds. “Money can’t buy the sense of fulfilment I get here.”

Bayalpata adheres strictly to its policy of providing free treatment and medicines since most of the 120,000 patients it has treated since 2008 are from ultra poor families. The hospital is now using two crowd-funding partners, Watsi which is used for improving access to specialised surgical care and Kangu to fund safe births. Details of deserving patients, like a child who needs heart surgery in Kathmandu or a mother with a complicated pregnancy, are put up on the sites and overnight pledges pour in.
Nearly half of all young men in Achham are migrants in India and increasingly the Gulf, so groups, female health volunteers, households through mother’s roles, and in the absence of local elections the village meeting is charting out a strategy for a higher standard of education, more reliable health care, improved water supply, increasing household income through skills training, better quality latrines where effluent can be used as fertiliser.

“I had to tell her, look, I don’t go to cow sheds when I have periods until now but our buffalo hasn’t died, our crops have been ruined by wild animals, the gods haven’t punished us,” she tells us. “But I am not satisfied that my village is Chhaupadi-free when women in my parent’s village still practice it.”

The people of Bhageswor realise that turning one village around is not enough. Achham being declared open-defecation free doesn’t mean much as long as water is scarce and contaminated, women are still banished to cow sheds every month. Still, Achham and Kalikot could shun other districts to also declare themselves open-defecation free so the country can meet the target of latrines for all by 2017. (nepalitimes.com)

Free-for-all healthcare

Equitable, just, and quality healthcare is never free, it requires state investment

DUNCAN MARU and ROSHAN BISTA

Recently the government announced it would be expanding its list of free medicines provided at district hospitals from the existing 40 to 80. But it is worth considering what ‘free’ actually means.

Somebody always pays for health-saving medicines, the question is: who should pay and when? In Nepal, patients and their families pay at the time of illness. But user fees excised at the point of care represent a deterrent to receiving effective care for the sick, especially if they are poor.

A study of seven African low-and-middle-income countries that exempted patients from user fees found that there were immediate and significant increases in service utilisation. Here in Nepal, the post-conflict interim constitution utilised strong rights-based changes into the government’s approach to healthcare delivery that prioritised access for the poor.

A policy of free care at all health posts and sub-health posts and for 40 essential medicines at the district hospital level was adopted. Other services, such as deliveries, were not provided free of charge, patients also received a small stipend to encourage use of these services.

One study covering Barda, Gaule, and Bajura showed that there was a 215 per cent increase in patients in health posts and 133 per cent increase in sub-health posts. Decreasing the financial burden patients and their families incur with ‘user fees’ has led to increased service utilisation across the board.

This supports the case for society-at-large via the government bearing the cost of essential medical care. There are ways to avoid this: should we truly value having a deep and reliable social safety net. The expansion of the essential medicines list is a step in the right direction, but its deeper impact remains to be seen. The new mandate on the right to free healthcare has, unsurprisingly, been difficult to translate into actual advances in the right to health for Nepal’s excluded populations. Much of this has to do with the inherent challenges of delivering care to the poor and excluded.

Fifty-five percent of the richest quintile births take place in a healthcare facility, compared with only four per cent of the poorest. One review of Nepal’s free healthcare policy showed that 85 per cent of hospitals suffered medication shortages and 24 per cent of healthcare facilities were understaffed owing to absenteeism and competing work by staff in the private sector.

Improving these realities is made difficult by patterns of healthcare utilisation in the post-free care era: 84 per cent of the poorest quintile utilised public sector services and 10 per cent went to the private sector, compared with 64 per cent and 29 per cent in the highest. Wealthier individuals going to private sector facilities tend to have more socio-economic means to advocate for improved services and so the accountability of the public sector suffers. Government hospitals and clinics throughout Nepal therefore remain woefully under-staffed, under-resourced, and under-supplied.

How would more medicines in this context be beneficial? A mobilised citizenry and empowered patient population, aided by more transparent data, is needed to improve government services. This requires a virtuous cycle: public sector services are more accessible, comprehensive, and professional, leading to greater citizen engagement and patient utilisation. Expanding the accessibility and reach of public sector services via expanded access to medicines can help facilitate this cycle.

The more that the public sector delivers, the more patients will utilise them, the more patients utilise services, the more they demand them. The more they demand the services, the better the government should deliver on them. Yet achieving equitable, just, and excellent healthcare outcomes is never free. It requires active investment from a state and its citizens. Nepal has been a global leader in commitment and innovations in the kinds of investments required. It has demonstrated leadership on innovations in delivering on a robust social safety net with the female community health volunteer network, existing essential medicines program, and safe motherhood initiatives. Mechanisms to finance essential medicines need to be further developed to ensure that declarations on paper get translated into effective supply chains that reach the most remote communities.

These investments do cost money, but they offer tangible steps towards making Nepal a more healthy and just nation.

Duncan Maru is co-founder of Nyaya Health which works in a private-public partnership with the Nepal government to provide healthcare at Bayalpata Hospital in Achham. Roshan Bista is a staff physician at Bayalpata Hospital.
The curse of the contraceptive

Mina Sharma, Himal Khaparkaratra, 2-8 June

Rita Lama of Devichaur, Lalitpur started Depo-Provera, a birth control drug that is injected every three months, after the birth of her first child. Five years later her weight has doubled to 90kg. The staff at her neighbourhood clinic said the weight gain was caused by overeating and sent her off. The 32-year-old doesn’t want to use temporary contraceptives anymore because of the unpleasant side-effects.

For seven years Bishnu Kumari Tamang also from Devichaur had Norplant capsules implanted under the skin in her upper arm. But the mother of two switched to Depo-Provera because the capsules were causing irregular menstruation cycles and heavy bleeding. However, with the new birth control her periods completely stopped. When Tamang visited the district health centre, the staff laughed and told her that not having periods was the best form of contraceptive.

“They didn’t even bother to find what was wrong and said it was not a big deal,” says Tamang.

Currently about 50 per cent of adult Nepalis use contraceptives. In its efforts to boost this number to 70 per cent in the next two years, the government set up the National Family Planning Policy Service in 2012. The goal is to make a wide range of birth control methods available to the general public as well as provide consultation and counseling services to couples and individuals. But most health centres only offer two types of birth control – injection or capsules – so women who experience severe side effects have no other option than to use what is available. And there are hundreds like Lama and Tamang who have no one to turn to for advice and are starting to abandon temporary contraceptives all together.

While irregular periods and sudden fluctuations in weight are the most common side effect of contraceptives, women also experience nausea, headache, exacerbating pain during menstruation, excessive vaginal discharge, and in extreme cases even amenorrhea – the complete absence of periods. The misuse of contraceptives, however, is not only harmful to the body but results in unwanted pregnancies and further trauma caused by multiple abortions.

Senior gynecologist Ibaha Ripal says the main problem in Nepal is that on the one hand a few pharmaceutical companies have a monopoly in the contraceptive market and on the other, women don't have the resources to shop and choose birth control wisely. “Temporary contraceptives are being distributed in the same way as condoms. Women need to first check whether particular methods suit their bodies or not. Unfortunately there is a lack of qualified healthcare workers to help them,” he explains. “Family planning doesn’t only mean controlling the number of children, but also taking care of your family. But how can you do this when you are sick?”

Fall and Fall

Pushkar Acharya, Karobar, 11 June

The devaluation of Indian rupee has caused the Nepali rupee to hit a record low of 53.79 against the dollar on Wednesday. The Nepali rupee which is pegged to the Indian counterpart has been sliding continuously following the freefall of the Indian rupee since the last 11 days. According to economists the sharp depreciation of the Indian rupee has been accelerated by slower growth and weaker public finances.

According to the records of Nepal Rastra Bank, the Nepali rupee has been devalued by 3.5 per cent in the past 11 days. The exchange rate was Rs 90.60 per 1 USD on 1 June. The weaker currency makes imports costlier and if the trend continues Nepal's import based economy will be adversely affected by a stronger dollar.

Advantages:
1. Nepals living abroad sending remittance
2. Export could rise if inflation is reduced
3. Increase in customs revenue
4. Decrease in imports

Disadvantages:
1. Imbalance of payments
2. Inflation increases because of increased imports (fuel etc)
3. Payment of foreign loans
4. Power Purchase Agreement on electricity in USD will lead to a loss for the NEA
5. Nepali Rupee will get hit on its revenue from international business partners
6. Black market will thrive

We believe all problems should be solved peacefully and that is the beautiful aspect of democracy.

UCPN (M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal in letter to Sonia Gandhi after the Indian Maoist attack in Chhattisgarh in which 28 people were killed last month

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We have to learn the lessons of history, implore your countrymen not to route the war inside and out, to use war for bringing a new era. We have to use the war against our enemies, not internally. If you have the least chance of escape, you should return home in the shortest period. This is the lesson of history."

Mahantha Thakur
Umita Basnet interviews chairman of Reporters’ Club Nepal Rishi Dhamala and wife Aliza Gautam on Himalaya TV.

Umita Basnet: Why did you decide to get married on the first month of the Nepali calendar?
Rishi Dhamala: New Year brings new hopes and messages. So I thought it would be the perfect time to start a new life.

How did you two meet?
RD: I saw her at a program organised by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party where she was accompanying her mother Gita Gautam. I liked the way she looked and behaved.

To fall for someone at first sight you must have thought about your ideal girl a lot then?
RD: She is everything I ever dreamt of. Look at her, she is considerate, understanding, perfect - beauty with brains.

How did you approach her?
Aliza Gautam: He talked to my mother.
RD: When it comes to marriage, families should be involved. It should be with the consent of the parents. I don’t have time to fall in love. Rishi Dhamala doesn’t have that much time to take a girl to a restaurant or a park. Let’s just put it like this - I don’t have time to date.

What is the age difference between the two of you?
Rishi Dhamala: 17 years.

Since there is a big age gap, did you ever worry that you might not get along or understand each other?
AG: No. It all happened all of a sudden. But whatever happened was for the good. Not everyone is lucky to have such a well known husband.

RD: She has a positive attitude and doesn’t let it bother her. Age doesn’t matter when it comes to love.

What sort of wife is Aliza?
RD: She is understanding and considerate. For a person like Rishi Dhamala who cannot give a lot of time to his personal life she is unbelievably understanding.

How is Rishi Dhamala as a husband?
AG: He is busy most of the time, but he still calls and texts me. And that is one thing I like about him.

Tell us about his daily routine.
AG: He wakes up in the morning and does yoga, drinks a glass of hot water, and leaves then comes home for dinner at 11 or 12 at night.

Have you made any changes to your schedule after marriage?
RD: No. Friends on facebook and twitter said my routine would definitely change after marriage, but I haven’t let it affect my schedule.

Don’t you think you are depriving your wife of quality time together just to prove others wrong?
RD: No, not really. Even though I am not there I have managed everything for her. If people want, they can make time for everything. She knows that although I cannot be by her side all the time, I belong to her and I am hers alone.

How often do you go shopping?
AG: Very regularly. I shop for him as well.
RD: Her choice is really good. She buys me beautiful clothes just like herself. I feel happy wearing beautiful clothes bought by a beautiful person.

She made a good choice - she chose you.
RD: Yes, she chose me. Otherwise she could’ve turned down the proposal when her mother talked to her. Initially I thought I’d never get married but when I met her, she had a certain effect on me and it was wonderful to have the blessings of her family.

Actually no one thought I would get married. When senior leaders like Prachanda, Bhandari Khanal, and Sushil Koirala heard I was getting married, they thought it was a rumour. And they joked that even on my wedding day I would be busy reporting. Which actually turned out to be true. On the day of the wedding, I went the radio station at 6.30am to complete my live talk show and then came back to the mandap.

Were there any other girls in your life before Aliza?
RD: There were a lot of girls who liked me and proposed. But I never looked at them or told them I liked them. I had no intention of getting married to them.

Why do you like red so much?
RD: It is part of my identity now. At first I wore a red coat and then a red high neck with a black overcoat. During winter I wore red muffler so often that people started teasing me. And now a red tie. It’s become my style statement.

Is there anything about your husband you would like to change?
AG: I wouldn’t change anything about him. I like him the way he is.

nepalitimes.com
Full interview

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FROM THE NEPALI PRESS 19
After petroleum tanker drivers went on strike recently to be allowed to steal fuel en route from Amlekhganj to Kathmandu and taxi drivers staged a show of force for the right to fleece passengers, it is now the turn of K-town’s jewelry shops who have taken umbrage at the Department of Standards and Metrology inspectors daring to test the purity of the gold they sell and check the accuracy of their weighing machines. How dare they? Don’t they know it is now standard operating procedure in the Syndicated Demagogic Republic of Nepal for crooks to cheat crooks? Not to be outdone, meat traders also went on strike this week violating the basic human right of Nepalis to be carnivores. By forcing temporary vegetarianism on the denizens of the capital, butchers have shown their dissatisfaction at not being warned before inspectors arrive to assess the hygiene level of their meat shops and to determine whether goats are really goats and not other recycled street fauna.

Why should tanker operators, taxi drivers, gold traders, and butchers not be allowed to cheat when the main bone of contention over elections is whether or not criminals should be allowed to contest elections? Yup, that’s what is holding things up. Baddies want their top comrades accused of woman and/or manslaughter to be allowed to contest elections since, if the rule banning candidates with criminal records went into effect, both Dash and Cash Baddies would have very few contenders running for elections. If this happens, Nepal will probably be the first country in the world to decriminalise murder.

It becomes clearer why LMSK was brought into the CIAA: to give those who put him there a clean chit and hound rivals. The corruption watchdog has hit the ground running by summoning all secretaries to growl at them and show who’s boss. He wants road contractors to be hauled over the coals over potholes on the streets and is going about his job with such a fine tooth comb that he only catches fleas. No wasting time investigating the bloated hymans who are purloining public land, Comrade Hasiya’s vermiculiture farm (BTW, will she have to refund the earthworms now that 3A has been scrubbed?) and the billions stolen over six years by ministers for the upkeep of Mau Mau cantonments.

Good to see that KhiRaRe is finally girding up his loins and showing that he has gonads, after all. He summoned the Syndicate to Balu Water last week and gave them an ultimatum (“either agree among yourselves, or I’ll unilaterally announce elections”) shaming the four-party cartel into passing the ball to the Chief Minister’s court. So it looks like the Regmi Regime is all set to announce an election date and let the chips fall where they may.

Still, the powers that be seem to be more interested in erections than elections. Construction is set to begin after the monsoon of the Republic Tower in Kirtipur, which when finished will surely go down in the Guinness Book as the ugliest and least functional erection ever. Costing over 90 crores, the 100m high tower will be the most expensive sun dial ever made in world history. The architects scrapped the idea of putting the figure of a phoenix on top because that could apparently have been construed to mean the monarchy rising from the ashes.

Patriotic Nepali leaders trooping off to Delhi refuse to speak in Hindi to their Indian counterparts and insist on conversing in English, re. One recent visitor burped loudly after a banquet at Hyderabad House and said: “I feel so fulfilled, I am fed up.” And while being seen off at IGIA, the Nepali politician shook the hand of his Indian host and said: “Thank you from the bottom of my heart and from my wife’s bottom, too.”