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A top-down view of a white ceramic coffee cup filled with a latte. The coffee foam is decorated with a simple smiley face design using dark chocolate or coffee powder. The eyes are two solid black circles, and the mouth is a wide, curved line. The cup sits on a dark, textured surface.

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BIKRAM RA

NOT AGAIN

Families of the victims of the Nepal Airlines 9N-ABB Twin Otter crash on Sunday, gather at Tribhuvan Airport to collect the bodies of their loved ones. The plane that crashed at Masine Lek, Arghakhanchi with the loss of 18 lives was flying from Pokhara to Jumla. Nepal has a notorious record for aviation safety and the EU blacklisted Nepali operators last December. 114 people were killed in eight aviation disasters between 2007 and 2012.

TWIN OTTERS IN THE NEPAL SKY

BY KUNDA DIXIT PAGE 4



WIDEN YOUR WORLD

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TO THE UNEXPLORED.
TO SEE THE BEAUTY
IN THE STRANGE AND UNKNOWN.
THOSE OF US WHO GO OUT THERE WITH A SENSE OF
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TURKISH AIRLINES 



COMATOSE GOVERNMENT

An apocryphal anecdote doing the rounds in Kathmandu these days goes like this: a Nepali man fell into a coma for 14 years and was kept alive on life support. He came back to life, but refused to believe he had been unconscious since 1999, insisting that he had just been asleep overnight. To prove he was right, the patient asked the nurse a few questions:

Patient: How many hours of load-shedding is there?
Nurse: 12 hours.
Patient: Has the Melamchi Project been finished?
Nurse: No.
Patient: Who is the prime minister?
Nurse: Koirala.
Patient: See? I told you, I have just been asleep overnight.

It has been three months after elections and two weeks after Sushil Koirala was sworn in as prime minister and the haggling goes on. Koirala may have moral stature, but doesn't have the charisma and leadership qualities needed to whip the coalition into shape. He has partially surmounted internal pressure, but has had to confront the stalemate with the UML over the Home Minister's post.

Frustrated, the prime minister is said to be thinking about putting off the nomination of a UML Home Minister and is cobbling together a partial cabinet. But even for that there is bound to be a tooth-and-nail tussle over juicy ministries and Koirala has to appease the UML as well as the rival camp within his own party led by Sher Bahadur Deuba. The three-time prime minister is obsessed with keeping Water Resources for one of his cronies.

The country is exactly where it was 14 years ago

The NC and UML are in a tussle over the Home Ministry for all the wrong reasons. The UML knows that the Congress knows that the ministry is of critical importance because of its control over the state security apparatus during local elections if they are held later this year. Bam Dev Gautam was Home Minister during the 1998 local elections and engineered a resounding victory for his party, which dominated village and district councils and municipalities across the country. That was the very reason Deuba scuttled local elections in 2002 when he was prime minister, citing the insurgency as an excuse. The other reason the Home Minister is such a sought-after job is that more than any other portfolio, it commands a budget which is at the discretion of the minister and for which he doesn't have to account for like other members of the cabinet do.

NC ministers Krishna Prasad Sitaula and Minendra Rijal have been trying to sort things out with the UML and it has now emerged that they were instrumental in assuring Bam Dev Gautam and the UML that the Congress would have no objections to offering him Home. Koirala has now said that Messr Sitaula, Rijal et



al had no authority to do that. The other issue is that Gautam is not all that popular within his own party and after his tactical alliance with strongman KP Oli, the other two ex-prime ministers (Madhav Nepal and Jhal Nath Khanal) are wary of Gautam becoming too powerful within the UML.

How these various equations play out in the days to come will determine how soon we will have a complete cabinet and a functioning government. But for now, we can only rue that the country is exactly where it was 14 years ago. In an editorial in this paper from issue #18 of 20 November 2000, we had written: *'The Unified Marxist-Leninists see the Maoists stealing their thunder so they half-heartedly put forward their own bright ideas for constitutional amendments. Then there are the people on the hard right, who are furious that their masters lost power, and now want a new constitution that will set right the 'wrongs' of the Janandolan ... The snowball effect of public cynicism about the state of the country has little to do with flaws in the constitution. It has to do with short-sighted, narrow-minded, and self-serving politicians who don't deserve to rule. Blame the driver, not the car. Blame the carpenter, not his tools.'* It is a travesty for Nepal that this paragraph is as relevant today as it was when the country went into a coma 14 years ago.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

ANOTHER CROSSROAD

The new prime minister is from the Koirala clan and so far no one from that family has shown any capacity for 'personal sacrifice' starting from Matrika Prasad ('Another crossroad', Editorial, #694). Why should we expect anything different from this new installation of the same old corrupt lineage which has and will keep on ruining Nepal? When will the Congress party wake up? Even months after the election results are out, the NC still can't agree on sharing ministries, how pathetic.

BNS

- There maybe somebody in the blind spot ready for the kind of politics Nepalis would welcome. Somebody we know little about, a scion of the Koirala family who actually seems to be quite different from the unchanging old echelon the public is used to. I am referring to Bhaskar Koirala. He is not yet in the spotlight, but his upbringing and personal quests can eventually make him a proper candidate for becoming a PM. We need somebody with young blood and a sensitive soul, somebody whose heart can resound with the electorate.

Kathkat

WHOSE HOME

Both the NC and UML's behaviour is utterly disgraceful ('Whose Home is it anyway?', Trishna Rana, #694). They are acting like dogs, fighting for Home Ministry while Nepal and

Nepalis are bleeding and weeping. What kind of leadership is that? The saga over portfolios proves that our politicians are selfish and immune to the sufferings of the people. It was silly of us to vote for these same men and expecting them to solve our problems.

Narayana Prasad

- Once again the fools who lead our country have shown zero foresight. When the NC and UML were formulating their seven point deal, why couldn't they include an eighth clause clearly spelling out which party would get what ministry? We would have been spared this nonsense. Now these loathsome politicians will waste another month in accusations and counter-accusations. I can just imagine Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai giving each other an evil smirk

Roshan

- Nepali politicians cannot do consensus politics, the past 24 years have proved that amply. Can we change the laws so that whichever party wins the most number of seats in elections, gets to make unilateral decisions? This will save us a lot of time since there will be no need for five point deals and seven point deals every other week.

Elina Pant

- It's frustrating to see the downward spiral of Nepali politics. Even dogs are faithful to their food givers. Our leaders, on the other hand, come back to bite us repeatedly, demanding more bones

after we have fed them to the gill. Shame on you date expired politicians.

Kishor Dahal

- I was embarrassed that our new prime minister, Sushil Koirala, is almost three quarters of a century old. Then I checked Wikipedia and was happy to learn there are several heads of state who are 90 plus. Septuagenarian? No big deal.

Note

- Ladies and gentlemen, here we have our 37th joker (38 if you count Khil Raj Regmi). Let's see how strong the Koirala blood is. May Pashupatinath protect us all.

J Sharma

COUNTRY'S CONSCIENCE

Thank you Professor Chaitanya Mishra for your timely article on Dr Govinda KC's fight against corruption and politicisation within the medical sector ('Carrying the country's conscience', #694). Each of us should embody the ideals of KC and become agents of change by doing whatever we can to challenge the rotten system. Little by little when people with similar beliefs come together, the nation will begin to transform.

Neeti Aryal Khanal

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Those who fought for equal treatment of the Gurkhas, including activist Joanna Lumley, have been ill advised by various unnamed parties with vested interests ('No place like home',

Dambar Shrestha, #694). They should have lobbied for equality in pension first, rather than residency rights in the UK.

Although I understand why most ex-Gurkhas have succumbed to the lure of the UK, life is not easy there and prices and living costs are high. Yes, there is free healthcare and education, but many families have problems integrating and living in cramped accommodation. Racial tension is on the rise and resentment from little Englanders is also growing as Nepalis flood into the same areas and put local resources under strain. The proud name of Gurkha has been diluted.

It would have been cheaper for the British government to allow for parity in pensions and backdated this to the beginning of service. This would have afforded a nice lump sum for ex-Gurkhas who could have lived like kings in Nepal rather than paupers in a foreign land. Their income would have had a multiplier effect on the local economy and they could have contributed to making the country better.

Anonymous

- As the daughter of an ex-Gurkha soldier, I am happy that my father chose to settle in the UK. Yes, we had to face a lot of challenges, but I have a far better future than my cousins in Nepal. Besides whenever I read news from back home, I can't help but feel dejected.

Prashanti Chamling

- Judging by the condition of retired Gurkhas in the UK, the four men mentioned in the article seem to have made the wise decision of staying back in their own land. If only other former Gurkhas had chosen to do the same and fought for equal pension rather than jumped at the chance of moving abroad, one could imagine the wonders it would have done to Nepal's economy.

Aakash Tamu

- Gurkhas are like creative yeast: wherever they go, they prosper. For instance, they are doing great in Hong Kong. By choosing to settle in the UK, the ex-servicemen are giving their children the kind of opportunities that would not have been possible in Nepal. Besides what would they have done if they had stayed back home? The state has just thrown them out to rot in the dump.

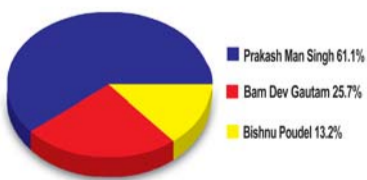
'Whatever'



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Weekly Internet Poll #695

Q. Which leader should be the new home minister?

Total votes: 821



Weekly Internet Poll # 696. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Are you happy with Subash Nembang's appointment as CA chair?



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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
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Printed at Jagadamba Press | 01-5250017-19 | www.jagadambapress.com



The architecture of democracy



Indigenise Nepal's polity by addressing the birth defects this Constituent Assembly has inherited from the previous one

Last year, when the first Constituent Assembly was dissolved, it was widely perceived to have been inevitable because it was born with many birth deformities. Some of these genetic defects seem to have been inherited by the second CA.



GUEST COLUMN

Bihari K Shrestha

Among the many fatal flaws of the first CA, one stood out: it was just too big and unwieldy. As chief architect of the Assembly, the UCPN (Maoist) bears most of the blame for the problems associated with it. But the NC-UML combine were either willing accomplices or gave in to all the demands from the Maoists in order to appease them to adhere to the peace

process.

Despite all attempts to reduce the size of the new CA, this time it was the Madhesi who threatened a boycott unless there were 585 members. It was up to the self-styled messiah of ethnic rights, the Federal Socialist Party (FSP), to jack up the total back to 601.

While the four-party syndicate initially put up the pretense last year of nominally reducing the total membership to 491, it put up no resistance at all to the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal and FSP's blackmails because this parasitic embellishment benefitted all and sundry. Having 601 seats in the new CA meant that all parties could auction off their proportional representation seats to the highest bidder.

Despite their democratic garb, the parties have been exacting their pound of flesh from long-suffering Nepalis. Given the extreme frustration

of the people, the Election Commission had tried to introduce a threshold of five per cent of votes for a party to be represented in the second CA through the proportional channel, thus limiting the parties in the chamber to a more manageable number.

But the same politicians, addicted as they already were to sharing in the spoils, successfully ganged up against the commission thus ensuring that the CA2 would have an unwieldy number of parties represented. For all practical purposes, therefore, the CA2 is a genetic clone of the CA1. There is only one difference: the Maoist and Madhesi parties have been cut down to size for their many sins of the past. And the FSP has been nipped in the bud.

But the tragedy for us hapless citizens is that despite such a resounding verdict in the election, the NC and UML, otherwise the principal beneficiaries of popular disenchantment, remain mysteriously wedded to the federalisation agenda that was imported by the Maoists, who

literally forced them to agree at gunpoint. In short, the second Constituent Assembly like the first is based on lies, blackmail, and perversity which is why it is highly unlikely that it will fulfil its mission.

What is worse, while Nepal's polity has always remained the fiefdom of the few politicians in power, a domestic driving force to make a difference has been conspicuous by its absence all along. Most countries allow their presidents, however ceremonial, to assume extraordinary powers to put their democracies back on track. In Nepal it is a case of double jeopardy though. The president has acted when he shouldn't have and hasn't acted when he should have.

If members of the CA2 care to listen, indigenisation of our democracy is what is needed. India had faced the problem of lack of accountability of her politician as early as the 1950s and the then ascetic, erudite, and highly respected socialist politician, Jaya Prakash Narayan advocated the "reformulation of India" based on the five-tiered Panchayat system, each such tier linked organically to the one immediately below.

Given the fact that Narayan was in Kathmandu at the invitation of King Mahendra, before he replaced multiparty system in Nepal with his own version of the Panchayat system, it would be fair to maintain that the Narayan model did influence the shift in political dispensation in Nepal at the time except for one basic difference. While Narayan's prototype provided for an elected executive president at the top, Nepal's version was led by the king.

Though limited in scope, Nepal already enjoys genuine grassroots democracy in at least two sectors: forestry and health. While forest user groups have been instrumental in restoring the country's natural wealth in record time, Mothers' Groups have made Nepal the international role

model for achieving MDGs in child survival and maternal mortality reduction.

In these and other similar institutions, it is people's own participation in decision making that has assured transparency of management and accountability of leaders. These two essential attributes of a genuine democratic practice have been achieved even against Nepal's unchanged feudalistic backdrop. Such experiences show that our democratic architecture can and must be specially fabricated if it is to deliver goods to the people for whom no known regime has provided any respite so far. ■

Bihari Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist and was a senior official in the government.



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Twin Otters down

The rugged Canadian plane has been the workhorse of Nepal's domestic aviation for four decades, but has suffered terrible attrition

KUNDA DIXIT

The hardy Canadian-built DHC-6 Twin Otter was designed for flying in the challenging environment of countries like Nepal with rough and short airfields carved out of mountain sides. Pilots say the plane handles well, needs minimal maintenance, is built to last, and can take a lot of punishment. Which must be why Twin Otters are affectionately called 'Land Rovers with wings'.

However, even a plane like this doesn't tolerate careless and reckless flying. Because it has been built to operate in difficult terrain and extreme climates like the Canadian Arctic, or the high mountains of Papua New Guinea it has seen more crashes than other types of planes.

Of the 844 Twin Otters built since 1965 by de Havilland Canada, 263 have crashed with a total of 1,423 fatalities among passengers and crew. For comparison, of the 673 Beechcraft 1900s built, 33 have been written off.

In all, 25 Twin Otters have



OTTER TWINS: The first two Twin Otters of Royal Nepal Airlines in happier times at Lukla Airport in 1972. Both have crashed.

operated in Nepal of which 16 have crashed. Nepal Airlines (formerly known as Royal Nepal Airlines) has lost 70 per cent of its Twin Otter fleet since it started operating the aircraft in 1972. The state-owned airline has owned 12 Twin Otters in the last 43 years, of which only one is airworthy today. Of the other four that haven't crashed, three are sitting engine-less in the hangar in Kathmandu and one

has been leased to Yeti.

The plane that crashed on Sunday on Masine Lek of Arghakhanchi district with the loss of 18 lives was registered 9N-ABB and was one of the two first Twin Otters that Royal Nepal Airlines introduced in 1972 to replace its World War II vintage DC-3 Dakotas.

Even before Nepal Airlines, the Royal Flight service had bought an older model Twin

Otter with registration 9N-RF9, which came to grief less than a year after entering service. Later, the Nepal Army also bought a Twin Otter (RAN 26), which also crashed in Jomsom in 1983.

Much has been made of the fact that the plane that went missing this week was 43 years old. But Twin Otters are so sturdy that the unpressurised plane can fly safely as long as its maintenance and flight protocols are strictly followed. Some of the fleet of amphibian Twin Otters flying for the Maldivian Air Taxi, for instance, are more than 45 years old.

Of all the crashes of various models of aircraft in Nepal since 1955, 90 per cent have been what is technically known as CFIT (Controlled Flight Into Terrain) in which a disoriented or careless pilot flies a plane into a mountain hidden in clouds. In fact, none of the Twin Otters that have crashed in Nepal have gone down primarily because of a technical malfunction. Nearly all have been due to human error.

Nepali pilots have won international praise for effortlessly landing short takeoff and landing aircraft

on precarious runways like in Lukla or Talcha. However, the fact that so many of the crashes have happened on takeoff or final approach shows that the training and experience pilots should have to fly in the challenging operating environment of the Himalaya need to be re-evaluated.

Except for the crash on a flight from Pokhara to Kathmandu of a Necon Air HS-748 in 1999, there have been no major mishaps on trunk routes to and from Kathmandu in the past 30 years. It is the extreme difficulty of flying in the mountains in bad weather that makes travelling to remote area airfields so dangerous.

Aside from topography and weather, there are other factors that have contributed to Nepal's dismal air safety record. Overloading aircraft due to corruption of ground staff has been the reason for at least one Twin Otter crash and has been cited in crashes of other aircrafts in remote areas.

But it is not just flying that is dangerous in Nepal, the country's rate of highway accidents is one of the worst in the world. Modern technology needs a strict adherence to rules on operational safety and maintenance, something that is glaringly lacking in Nepal. Rules are routinely broken, shortcuts are the norm, bravado and macho-ness are on open display on the roads. These traits can be disastrous when manifested in the cockpit.

Combined with other factors like ageing equipment, cash starved airlines cutting corners on spares, and cut-throat competition, it is not surprising that Nepali operators have been blacklisted by the EU.

Given that so many disasters are due to pilot error and CFIT, it should now be mandatory for all domestic planes to only fly VFR (Visual Flight Rules) without exceptions. Planes must be required to have Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning systems on board, de-icing equipment, and weather radar.

But even with these additional safety measures, nothing can save us from carelessness. There is no excuse anymore for the criminal negligence and the loss of more lives. 🇳🇵

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Dirty money

ERIK SOLHEIM

The world is now less than a year away from the deadline to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals set in 2000. Extreme poverty has been halved, as promised. But more must be done to meet the health, education, environment, and gender-equality goals.

One way to speed up the progress is to limit the large amounts of money illicitly flowing out of developing countries, where it could be invested, into assets and bank accounts in the OECD.

An estimated \$1 trillion, almost one-third of Africa's GDP, leaves less developed countries (LDC) annually, though the true size of hidden transfers is, by definition, almost impossible to ascertain.

One obvious cause of these outflows is poor governance in developing countries. But recent OECD research suggests that rich countries are also at fault for failing to devise and enforce adequate laws to track and prevent illegal money transfers.

Governments are concerned mainly with two types of illicit financial flows. The first involves cash from criminal activities such as human trafficking, drugs, smuggling, and corruption. The profits are laundered via intricate webs of shell companies into foreign banks and property, emerging in the form of respectable homes and legitimate businesses. The second involves legitimately-earned money seeking to evade taxes.

In either case, the illicit cash requires access to the global financial system in order to find a safe hiding place. It is not in a country's interest to allow that. For starters, illicit financial flows deprive governments of tax revenues to fund health care, education, and other vital public services. Worse, once legitimised, illicit money is often used to fund further illegal activities, including civil wars and terrorism.

Money launderers and tax evaders can be stopped if they are exposed to the harsh light of financial transparency. Unfortunately, even the best-

governed countries are unable to see the full picture.

27 of the 34 OECD countries do not have sufficient corporate ownership information and none is fully compliant with the Financial Action Task Force's recommendations on preventing money laundering. The priority for tax and legal authorities must therefore be to discover who owns what assets and where they come from.

This is best achieved through global governance and cooperation. But there are other potholes too. For example, efforts to improve tax collection – a key problem for many struggling economies – will achieve little if corrupt officials can simply siphon revenues. Similarly, improved tax collection will not prevent multinational companies from using their complex global shareholding structures to transfer profits to lower-tax jurisdictions.

Fortunately, there is growing political will to tackle these issues. The G-8 and G-20

SPEAK UP: Demonstrators in New York protest against HSBC in February 2013 for the bank's involvement in money laundering for drug cartels and alleged terrorists.

recently agreed to share tax information. Governments have started to close loopholes and force companies to disclose full ownership information. The United Kingdom, for example, recently approved the creation of a public registry of company owners. At the same time, banks found guilty of assisting money laundering now face record penalties. HSBC, accused of laundering Latin American drug money, was fined \$1.9 billion.

Britain's new financial-crime investigators have also managed to repatriate \$1.2 billion of the missing \$4 billion that former Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha hid in Switzerland, Luxembourg, Jersey, Liechtenstein, Belgium, and the UK.

Such successes may deter crime, but only up to a point. An estimated \$1 trillion in bribes to state officials continues to be paid every year by companies and wealthy individuals. Half of OECD member states have yet to see a single prosecution. If such crimes are not prosecuted and severely punished, dishonest companies will continue to flout the law, while responsible companies, having lost business after refusing to pay bribes, may start to rethink whether the ethical approach makes commercial sense.

Corruption corrodes trust in our financial institutions, brings out the worst in even the best of us, and, when one considers its impact on ordinary lives, is morally repugnant. We must thus take our own rules and responsibilities more seriously. www.project-syndicate.org

EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Wooden delights

Kunal Furnishing has unveiled a new range of home décor which includes curtains, sofas, wallpaper, carpets, home and office furniture. Established in 1989, the furnishing store houses both locally manufactured products as well as imported goods.



Home shop

Salesways Group opened its latest outlet Salesberry at Satdobato in Lalitpur. "Spread over 10,000 sq ft, the department store offers more than 30,000 products," reads the press release.

One more

NMB Bank inaugurated its new branch in Putalisadak on Monday. With the recent addition, the number of NMB branches operating in the country has reached 26.



Hearty celebrations

Close Up Love Fest, the annual Valentine's Day event managed by the toothpaste company, saw thousands of eager participants. The celebrations, which took place over two days in various locations in the city, included live music performances, couple games, and tarot card reading.

Hashtag Qatar

Qatar Airways recently launched its first international Instagram contest '#destigram'. To compete, visitors have to share photos taken from any of the eight new Qatar Airways destinations and upload them using Destigram hashtag and the name of the corresponding city. Prizes for winners include flight tickets and Qatar Airways Qmiles.



forward their queries regarding the services.

Branching out

Global IME Bank inaugurated its branchless banking service in Khaplung VDC in Taplejung on Sunday. "Along with Khaplung, 17 other VDCs will now be able to enjoy banking services," read the press statement. An interaction program was also organised where locals put



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SUNIR PANDEY

SUNIR PANDEY

At the edge of Kathmandu Valley's urban sprawl in Dhapakhel, new houses stand adjacent to vacant farming lots. One of them belongs to Paras Pokhrel.

From the outside, the Pokhrels seem like a typical modern family. The daughter is a dance teacher, the son is still in school, and father Paras owns a restaurant. But on 14 February, officers from the Central Investigation Bureau

(Un)happy homes

IN SAFE HANDS: Pemba (left) and his sister Dolma (centre) testify to police after the CIB rescued them from a house in Dhapakhel last Friday.

(CIB) raided their home after Lojung Kippa Sherpa reported that her three children were missing. Earlier in the day, she had filed a case against Bishwa Pratap Acharya, president of Happy Home Nepal (HHN), an orphanage in Dhapakhel.

In 2006, upon her sister's insistence, Sherpa agreed to let her eldest daughter Phurlamu travel from Makalu, Sankhuwasabha to Kathmandu and stay at Happy Home. Son Pemba and daughter Dolma

followed in 2008 and 2010 respectively. The owners promised to not only feed and educate the children, but also help with the treatment of Phurlamu, who suffers from a disability.

"The last time I saw them was when I went to drop them off at the airport in Tumlingtar," Lojung, 43, told *Nepali Times* ahead of the rescue. "When I came to Happy Home last year, I was told my children weren't there."

CIB had been interrogating workers at HHN since the early hours of Friday. When the police first questioned Acharya about the children's

whereabouts, he lied and said they were at HHN's hostel. Later he admitted that Pemba and Dolma were at Pokhrel's house.

But Phurlamu was still missing. Again Acharya tried to mislead the investigators and claimed she was with his wife Puja in Pokhara. He retracted his statement minutes later and said Baluwatar. Police eventually found her near Nawakiran Ashram in Hattiban.

The Sherpa children have been living in HHN's different hostels around the Valley with at least 70 others. All of them are registered as orphans or abandoned and donors from Czech Republic, Slovakia, and United Kingdom have been funding their education and upbringing. In January 2013, however, the same donors accused Acharya of fraud and child abuse and asked the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) to investigate.

Since Acharya's first brush with the law, testimonials from former donors, volunteers, and teachers have poured in. Seven months ago, another complaint was filed against him for hiding children from parents. It was then that Sano Paila, a Birganj-based organisation that works against child-trafficking in partnership with UK charity Freedom Matters, followed up on HHN's activities.

Kanchan Jha of Sano Paila insists that most of the children at HHN have parents back home. "He has been using Phurlamu's disability to milk well-meaning donors for treatment money," says Jha.

When Lojung was reunited with her children at the District Police Headquarters in Jawalakhel on Friday, she found out that only Phurlamu could speak Sherpa. However, that was the least of her problems. Subsequent medical check-ups revealed the children were malnourished and suffered from body lice. Phurlamu was diagnosed with TB and is under antibiotic medication. The youngest girl told counsellors she had not been to school for two months.

Police eventually arrested Bishwa on fraud, kidnapping, and child-trafficking charges and he is now in custody. Since the investigation is still ongoing, the extent of fraud and abuse remains to be discovered. Puja Acharya is still on the run and it hasn't yet been confirmed if Paras Pokhrel is also an accomplice in the crimes.

On Sunday, police rescued another girl from HHN. The home is currently being run by a management committee that, without the Acharya couple, is struggling to take care of the children. SP and CWISH (Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights) are now seeking permission from the National Human Rights Commission and CCWB to rescue and rehabilitate the remaining children from Happy Home.

www.sanopaila.org.np
Hotline: 1660-01-33033
www.cwish.org.np
www.freedommatters.co.uk

nepalitimes.com

Long way home, #573
A far away rescue, #571
Juggling with young lives, #405



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IN THE NAME OF THE DESTROYER

Devotees prepare yourselves for yet another kooky Shiva Ratri celebrations

Shivaratri is upon us and so are hundreds of bearded, naked, marijuana-smoking incredible feat-performing ascetics. Shiva: creator, destroyer, Lord of all Lords, and patron saint of all stoners.

Every year, on the 14th day of the Krishna Paksha in the month of Falgun, thousands of devotees flock to Pashupatinath. Most go to pay their respects, but there are those who are lured more by the offer of Shiva's prasad, ganja and bhang, than by devotion.

No one is entirely sure why we celebrate Shivaratri: it is Shiva's honeymoon, the night he performed the tandava, or dance of destruction, or the day he drank the churned out poison from the ocean of the gods, thus gaining his distinctive blue throat, or neela kantha.

But a better and less often heard story is about how Shiva came to be the main man of the trinity. It all started when Shiva was asked to arbitrate a dispute between Brahma and Vishnu about who was stronger. Our hero transformed himself into a gigantic linga and posed the fighting parties a challenge: to find its beginning and his end. They didn't figure it out, of course, and in the end the massive column slit open, revealing Shiva reclining inside. A little strange and certainly anatomically impossible, but he did strike awe-and-modesty-into the hearts of the other two and they gave up their little discussion. And this, readers, is why the various babas who congregate around Pashupati do the things they do. And why Shiva is regarded as the

perfect husband.

Come Thursday, things are likely to get a little kooky around Pashupatinath. The sadhus with the huge tika, tridents, and orange-red robes are to scare the children with. The heavy duty ones are the ash-covered, bearded, dreadlocked, naked babas. The chillum is a standard accompaniment, but the other odours and the greasy, sinister black tika on the forehead make them even more forbidding.

If you come across a group of nanga babas chanting, getting high, or wielding their weapons, stand back. Unsuspecting and overly curious onlookers have been known to be cursed heartily. 🚫

 PR 

 **Mahaadev**
@MahaDev

"If God made everything, He must be somewhere in China as everything is made in China." Well said, I stay at Kailash 6638, Tibet, China. ॐ



From the cement we use to build our homes to the dhoops we light for aartis, Shiva is an omnipresent force in the subcontinent. Half our family and friends are named after him. Now this fiery-eyed destroyer of worlds is becoming something of an international cult figure as well.

He was on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine as US President Barack Obama in 2010. His inked avatars adorn countless bodies and he spawns several parody accounts on social media. And with the help of Indian writer Amish Tripathi's best-selling *Shiva* Trilogy the dance loving, ganja smoking, bhang consuming, moody Hindu deity is boosting his global cool and mesmerising a new generation of bhaktas.

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EVENTS



DAY OF THE DESTROYER, flock to Pasupati with thousands of other devotees and sing praises to the Lord that taketh. *27 February*

In conversation, leading political scholar Lok Raj Baral talks to journalist Sudheer Sharma. *21 February, 4pm, Nepal-Bharat Library, New Road*

Gyalpo Losar, the Tibetan and Sherpa community celebrate the new year. *2 March*

Trading paint, an exhibition of the work by artist Julian Parker-Burns. *Runs till 21 February, 10am to 5pm, Image Ark Gallery, Kulimha Tol, Patan Darbar Area*

Go green, a week-long festival showcasing viable green technologies and practices, at the ongoing

Climate+Change exhibition. *Runs till 24 February, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal*

Dual worlds, an exhibition of the works of artists Anil Shahi and Sujan Dangol. *Runs till 7 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal*

Noodling, stake your claim as Nepal's top graphic designer and win up to Rs 25,000 and a spot at an exhibition in prizes. *Send entries to events@thecitymuseum.org by 20 February*

Touch wood, the famous Edo-period woodblock print artist Toshusai Sharaku is given a modern interpretation by Japan's contemporary artists. *1 to 11 March, 9.30am to 4.30pm, Embassy Hall, Japanese Embassy, Panipokhari*



BORDERLESS, watch *MSF (Un)limited*, a film shot in Lebanon, Congo, Rwanda, Serbia and Montenegro about the Doctors without Borders' work with HIV/AIDS patients and its Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines, and meet Dr Unni Karunakara, former president of the organisation. *24 February, 6pm, Alliance Francais, Teku*

DINING



GHAR-E-KABAB, serving the best of north Indian cuisine, with live Sarod recitals on some days. *Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg*

Saigon Pho, spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes. *Lajimpat*

Mulchowk, the blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era. *Babarmahal*

Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake. *Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)463614/463163*

Chopstix, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven. *Kumaripati, (01)5551118*

Lal Durbar Restaurant, authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows. *Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com*

Backyard, incredibly reasonable prices and modest and simple food have made this restaurant a favourite

among Nepalis and foreigners alike. *Jhamsikhel*

Pizza Delight, imagine a pizza and eat it too. *21 February to 9 March, Alfresco Restaurant, Soaltee Hotel, Rabibhawan*

K-too, go in for the best steak in Thamel, a warm dining room, live sports on TV, and free Irish coffee with every main course and seasonal specials. *Thamel, (01)4700043*



NEW TUSHITA RESTAURANT, relaxing ambience and good food. Don't miss out on its penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. *Lajimpat, (01)44432957*



PAGODA CHINESE RESTAURANT, Head to this jade palace if you are in the mood for Chinese with clean, green and peaceful environment. *Park Village Resort, Budhanilknatha, (01)4375280, pvh@wlink.com.np*

MUSIC



VULTURES WILL FEED, party with Jugaa and other Nepali thrash and hardcore bands. *Rs 200, 1 March, 11am onwards, Fluid Bar, Thamel*

Starry Night BBQ, catch Ciney Gurung live as you chomp on your meat stick. *Rs 1,299, 7pm onwards, Fridays, Shambala Garden Café. Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999 (Ext. 7520/7515)*

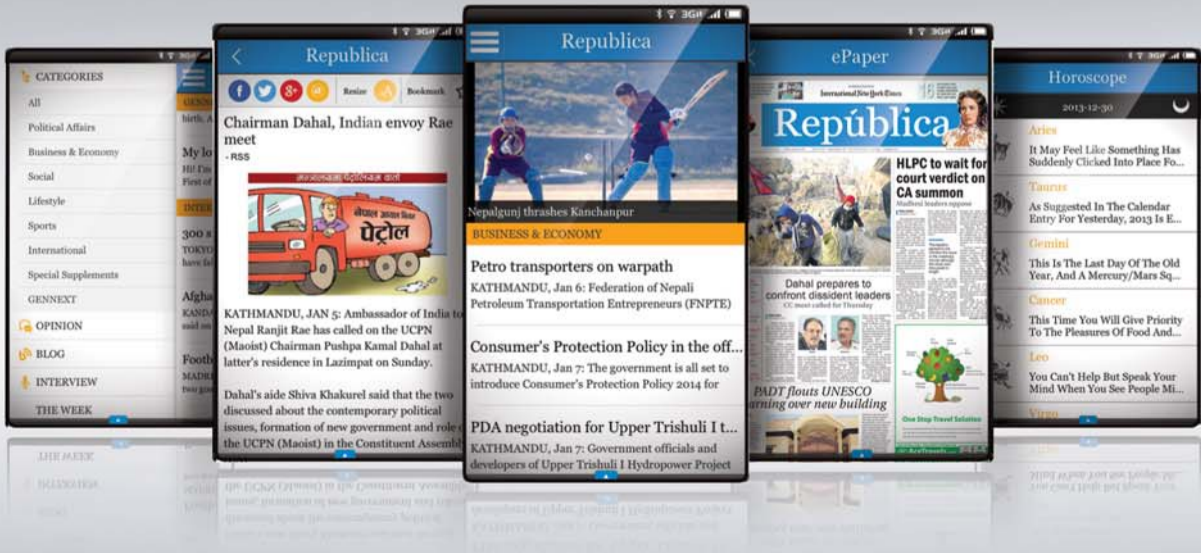
Kripa Unplugged, young Nepali musicians and seasoned veterans give an acoustic rendition of their favourite songs. *http://www.youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged*

SHASTRIYA SANGEET, dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music. *1 March, 3pm onwards, Kirateswor*



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BIKRAM RAI

When Udaya Rana announced he was joining politics, many mocked him for his naivety. Some called his decision ‘amateur’, while others termed it merely a ‘hobby’. He was, after all, sacrificing a lucrative job and a career in international development. But his family knew better and extended support. Today, Rana wields a fair degree of influence within the Nepali Congress in addition to being the president of the party’s youth wing, Tarun Dal.

His victory in last year’s November poll not only helped cement his position as an upcoming leader, but also provided Rana much needed relief after his defeat in 2008 CA elections. “If I had lost again, things would have looked quite grim for me politically,” he admits. The victory was even more special because Udaya’s father, Sagar Rana who is long-time NC member, had failed to win previous polls from Lalitpur-1.

Although Rana’s political career began when he joined Nepal Student Union in 1985 and formed its Delhi chapter during the Janandolan I, politics took a back seat once democracy was restored in the country in 1991 and college became a priority. After graduating from Cornell University with a Master’s degree in International Relations, Rana returned home and worked with several development agencies. But that life, he says,

didn’t appeal to him and he found himself drawn to politics once again.

In 1999, Rana was elected as the president of the Lalitpur chapter of Tarun Dal. Years of hard work and perseverance finally paid off in 2012 when he took top post of the youth wing.

Although breaking into mainstream politics was fairly easy for the 42-year-old, he admits it is often a challenge for young leaders to find a place for themselves in the party. “Because there is no retirement age in politics, senior leaders don’t want to leave at all. But if you are dedicated to the party cause and remain sincere, then nobody can stop you from fighting your way up,” he says.

Like fellow CA member Rajeev Bikram Shah (*see below*), Rana didn’t let his first time loss deter him from working in his constituency. His development efforts in the area have been much lauded and this is what he believes made the locals vote in his favour.

“I joined politics because it was challenging and I like being the underdog. I think I have proved my mettle over the years and that is why I have been able to sustain so far,” he says. A self-confessed dreamer, Rana’s ultimate dream is to build a prosperous Nepal so that the youth no longer have to leave home and slog it out in foreign countries. 🇳🇵

LEADING THE YOUNG

Rajeev Bikram Shah and Udaya Rana have a lot in common. Both come from a family of influence, spent much of their youth studying abroad, and ventured into politics despite having promising careers elsewhere. Both members of the Nepali Congress, Shah won in his home district of Jajarkot-2, defeating UCPN (M) candidate Bhakta Bahadur in the party’s heartlands, while Rana sealed his victory in Lalitpur-1, traditionally a UML stronghold.

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

Driving back home after being sworn in along with 564 other CA members last month, Rajeev Bikram Shah had a moment of epiphany. The 45-year-old businessman turned politician pondered on his career change and wondered, “How did I end up here?” After all, joining politics was never a part of the plan. His goal was to make his real estate business a success and dabble in tourism.

“I wanted to open a resort in Kakani and even though I had the resources, the plan failed because of the Maoist insurgency. I became wary of politics,” recalls Shah. “If the conflict was affecting me so much, I could not even imagine how those who were less privileged than me were faring.”

But even then he was more inclined to work as a civil society leader than a politician. That feeling, however, changed with time. “I didn’t want to talk about the country’s problems at cocktail parties and social gatherings. I wanted to become a part of the solution.” So when senior NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba nominated him to a proportional representation seat in the

2008 CA, the timing couldn’t have been more opportune.

Shah failed to make the final cut to the assembly floor, but continued working actively in his home district of Jajarkot. In 2009, he spearheaded relief efforts after a cholera outbreak, for which he was widely appreciated. He set up the Jajarkot Cholera Disaster Coordination Committee, chartered private helicopters to rush doctors and medicines to those in need, and lobbied in Kathmandu for a more substantial relief package. It is these efforts and not his lineage (Shah is a descendent of the rajas of Jajarkot) that he believes helped him claim a victory here.

Inspired by party founder BP Koirala and other senior leaders including Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Sushil Koirala, Shah hopes to make significant contribution to his district and not let the people who voted for him down. “Dividing time here to fulfil my duties at the parliament and my constituency is proving to be a major challenge but I will do my best for my people,” says Rajeev. 🇳🇵



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BIKRAM RAI

LIGHTS, CAMERA, COPY PASTE

Nepal's film industry needs to step out of Bollywood's shadow

SARALA GAUTAM

When Nepal's first feature film, *Ama*, released in October 1964, only a handful of countries had their own movie industry. The current pop culture powerhouse of Asia, South Korea, began its film revolution in 1987 at the end of military rule. Yet the two industries' couldn't have charted a more different path: last year Korean movies raked in \$860 million just in ticket sales. Nepal's filmmakers, on the other hand, are caught in a time warp of the 80s and 90s.

Directors and producers here say clichés of Bollywood-style movies – four songs, four fight sequences, boy-meets-girl love story, family drama – still work very well because the audience's 'taste' hasn't changed much in the past five decades. "We are giving viewers what they want," admits director Chhavi Ojha.

Critic Prakash Sayami, however disagrees and points to how even the Hindi cinema industry is undergoing a tectonic shift where filmmakers are experimenting with difficult, non-mainstream subjects like communal violence, revolutions, and politics.

"Nepali viewers are more sophisticated now and their

preference has evolved, it's the makers who have fallen behind," laments Yadav Kharel, director of the seminal movie *Prem Pinda*. "We are still trapped in Bollywood's grip and as we scamper to break production records, we have sacrificed quality."

While the influence of Indian films is felt elsewhere in the subcontinent as well, Nepal has unfortunately never been able to break free from its neighbour's shadow. Bollywood has undoubtedly played a huge role in building our tinsel town from scratch: it was in Mumbai where the first Nepali-language film, *Satya Harishchandra*, was produced in 1951. Even today, our actors, directors, producers, technicians all look up to their counterparts in India for inspiration and direction.

Says Veteran actor Rajesh Hamal: "Our industry is lost, we don't know where we are headed."

It's a big travesty that our films fail to reflect the ethnic, lingual, and cultural diversity of Nepal and neglect the stories of millions of ordinary Nepalis who lived through a decade long war. And whatever technological progress we have made, we have squandered it by serving formulaic films that rely solely on sleaze and

violence to sell tickets with little work put into script, acting, or direction.

"Nepal is a treasure trove of wonderful stories and yet we have a chronic shortage of innovative ideas," admits comedian Hari Bansha Acharya, who in his four decade long career has always provided social messages through his films, TV serials, and plays.

Movies are not just products to be sold in theatres. They form an integral part of our culture and literature and provide a window into our country. As we get ready to mark 50 years of Nepali cinema, both the state and filmmakers need to step up their efforts. Lifting restrictions placed on foreign investments in Nepali movies, improving our presence at international film festivals, introducing filmmaking classes in universities and colleges, and building a national archive are good places to start. Directors and producers, on their part, have to show more honesty towards their art and not underestimate the intelligence of their viewers. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

The queens of drama, #646
Selling sleaze, #608
Lights, camera, censor, #608

OUR HEROINES



BHUWAN CHAND

Nearly 50 years ago, Bhuwan Chand made her silver screen debut as the lead heroine in *Ama*, the first film produced in Nepal. Although her family was supportive of her from the beginning, Bhuwan says it was difficult facing harsh criticism from society. "After every performance, we used to sneak back into our homes like thieves to avoid the neighbours taunts," recalls Chand of her early days in theatre. The 66-year-old, who still follows Nepali cinema, is appalled by the vulgarity and nudity that have crept into the industry. Says Bhuwan: "No matter how modern we become, we still need to maintain our Nepalpan in our movies."



KARISHMA MANANDHAR

More than two decades after the release of her debut movie *Santan*, Karishma Manandhar's effervescent beauty and compelling performances on screen continue to leave her admirers in awe. However, she is disappointed by the quality of work in Nepali movies. "The script these days aren't appealing enough for actors to bring them to life," she says. "It is unfortunate that the level of filmmaking has stagnated."

REKHA THAPA

The Nepali film industry may still be waiting for its watershed moment to step out of Bollywood's influence, but Nepali heroines are already taking a step away from being mere arm candies. Leading this movement is Rekha Thapa, the local beauty pageant runner up from Morang, who came to Kathmandu with big dreams. With over a 100 films to her name, Rekha is defying stereotypes and changing how actresses are perceived in Nepali cinema. From fighting the bad guys to taking the bullet, Thapa is not afraid to take on traditionally masculine roles. As a producer, she has given numerous budding actors their first break and is creating her own women-centric brand of movies.



"Today's heroines are perfectly capable of carrying movies on their shoulders, it's just a matter of giving them more opportunities," says Rekha.

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THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN

The Academy Awards this year will take place on the 2nd of March which leaves me with two more weeks to bring to your attention some of the lesser known but nonetheless quite brilliant foreign language films that have been nominated in that category. This year there are five, but in the interest of space, I will not list them all.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

One of these five films is a Belgian melodrama that centers around the love affair between a bearded bluegrass musician (yes, bluegrass in Belgium) and a stunning free spirited tattoo artist who eventually joins the band

as their lead singer. The film's structure jumps back and forth in time, showing us how Didier (Johan Heldenbergh) and Elise (Veerle Baetens) first meet at her tattoo parlour. He invites her to his show later that week, and thus begins a beautiful but doomed love affair that lasts seven years and leaves pretty much everyone in the film heartbroken. Differing from most melodramas, in *The Broken Circle Breakdown* it is not just the love affair that disintegrates, leaving everyone bereft. Rather, through the flashback narrative, we learn of the tenderness in Didier and Elise's relationship, their humour when they deal with each other, and their obvious connection. Tragically, it is the birth and death of their six-year old daughter Maybelle (Nell Cattrysse) from cancer that irrevocably shatters

this couple's relationship and the portrayal of that disintegration is one of this film's strengths. For the most part, melodrama is unbearable to me, hence my hesitance to sit through the majority of the three-hour prolonged Bollywood confections. However, when a story is so strongly anchored with believable character, real anguish, and, I must add, however skeptical you might be, truly great bluegrass music, it is hard not to continue watching despite one's growing realisation that one's own heart might break a little along with those of the characters'.

The Broken Circle Breakdown - named after a famous bluegrass song titled *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*- is an unexpected but beautiful hybrid of a film out of Belgium, refreshing in its willingness to take on an overly familiar subject but addressing it with sincerity and real skill, both in its directing as well as in the acting. Felix Van Groeningen's film (which he also co-wrote) may not win the Foreign Language Oscar this year. There is another rather obvious front runner- Italian Paolo Sorrentino's *La grande bellezza* (The Great Beauty), which I will review next week, but regardless of this if you have a chance and the inclination, pick up the film and watch it for a few hours of great bittersweet cinema. 🇳🇵

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HAPPENINGS



ANANDA RAM DANGOL

HEAR ME : UML leader Subash Nembang (right) leaves Constituent Assembly hall after being elected the Speaker of the Legislature Parliament at New Baneshwor on Tuesday.



PREM NARAYAN ACHARYA

UNSAFE SKY: Security forces undertake a rescue operation at Masine lekha in Argakhachi where a Nepal Airlines twin otter crashed on Sunday.



PAWAN POUDEL

DARING LEAP: Students of Himalaya Secondary School in Tanahun compete in high jump during the school's sports day celebrations on Monday.



HARIZ BAHARUDIN

ROCK ON: Amrit Gurung (right) woos the audience at Nepathya's first outdoor concert in Pokhara on Saturday.



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Dance with abandon

Cadenza sure know how to have fun. Anyone familiar with Nepal's first consistent jazz band will testify to the group's ability to concoct the sublime out of the ordinary. It is their energy that has conceived a jazz scene in Kathmandu and given Nepalis opportunity to be within touching distance of greats like Trilok Gurtu and Ari Hoenig.

But besides organising international jazz festivals and performing live every weekend, Cadenza have also, once in a while, recorded albums that instantly become collectors' items. Nine years after their last album, the exceptional *Groove for Shiva*, the band has finally released another - *Back to the Roots*.

Opening the proceedings is *Namaste*, a song that evokes the chaos and futility that has come to resemble Kathmandu. *Momo Funk* is another jocular, upbeat treatment of our national staple. The band channels some Purbeli folk in *Hey Saili*, calling its heroine to forget the toils of Arabia for the oasis of home. Running at 8 minutes, *Aisha's Dream* is drummer and bandleader Navin Chettri's tribute to his daughter - I'm in love, he declares.



Long time listeners will notice the band goes back to old material on *Nepali Happy* and *Hip Break*. The original versions were lively pieces in an earlier album, but the band has chosen a sleeker sound in the current renditions. As the twin saxophones prompt each other, the album gains a balanced feel.

For those who were present at 2013's Jazzmandu concert in Patan, *Deusi*

REVIEW *Bhailo* will bring back memories. Others will have to simply console themselves, Dasain-Tihar being a world away from foggy February mornings. The band skips from *Deusi* to *Chyangba hoi Chyangba* with consummate ease. Improvisation is everyone's middle name.

The remaining two tracks are *Baja Gaja* at number 5 and its spaced out reprise as closing piece. Trust Cadenza

to underscore their point, twice, with exuberance as they go from Fela Kuti to bhajan mode and back at the drop of a hat.

Part Afrobeat, part Nepali, the album is a return to material the band is most comfortable with. Gig-goers may say most of the stuff on it has been played live at concerts over the years, but the plus side is the band's live verve permeates this studio outing with ease.

The album is available on CDs at leading music stores in Kathmandu and for fans around the world, the band plans to release it on major online audio outlets in the coming month. Get your copy and dance with abandon.

Sunir Pandey

Back to the roots by Cadenza Collective, 2014

CDs available at Nepa Music Records, Thamel, (01)4382460

Cadenza Collective:
Navin Chettri on drums and vocals
Pravin Chettri on saxophone and keyboards
Samir Chettri on bass and vocals
Rajat Rai on guitar and vocals
Inap Raj Shrestha on saxophone and vocals



For a long time, Busy Bee has held the crown for being the 'hippest' joint in Pokhara's lakeside. From European backpackers to Indian honeymooners, the place sees itself packed to capacity, most nights of the week. An evening of drunken reveling here will explain why the café cum bar cum lounge continues to reign over host of other establishments that line the Lakeside's dining district.

The two-storey café is spread across a wide area, and offers both indoor and outdoor seating. The ambience which is definitely the bar's USP gets a facelift after sun-down when live music fills the air. A blazing hearth in the centre, and colourful paper lanterns strewn all along the rafters add to the laid back feel of Busy Bee that has made it such a hotspot.

As the in-house band belts out one old-school hits after another, and young travelers begin to trickle in after 9, it is easy to forget you are in Nepal. While Busy Bee's live music experience is



PICS: HARIZ BAHARUDIN

unbeatable, its menu however drew mixed reactions at the table.

The only 'special' thing about our first main Busy Bee Special Chicken (Rs 495) was the creamy sauce it was drizzled in.

After the initial let-down, our order of grilled fish (Rs 535) brought our appetites back. Grilled to a mouth-watering hue of red, the fillet was cooked tenderly, and the fish crumbled perfectly in my mouth. The smoky flavour from the grill

BUSY BEE CAFE



cut down the sweetness perfectly. Furthermore, the meat tasted fresh and being the optimist that I am, I would like to believe that the fish was caught that very day from the lake.

Ordering steaks has been a risky venture in the capital so while a bit nervous, I decided to sample the Busy Bee Special Steak (Rs 530) which turned out to be surprisingly good. Moist and soft, and filled with flavours, it was a joy just watching my knife cut into the steak so smoothly. The piping hot cheese laden on top of the thin crust and oregano garnish makes the cheese tomato pizza (Rs 300) at Busy Bee's one of the better pizzas

I have tried.

The portions served at Busy Bee are larger than most other restaurants so do go in with an empty tummy and a large appetite. Even though, the place as usual was packed to the brim, our server was quick and attentive and that's one reason I will be paying another visit soon.

While Busy Bee fails to nail all its food orders with equal consistency and finesse, it is easy to see why the place is so popular. The place has this palpable buzz which is further accented by some of Pokhara's best live bands that plays here.

So, if you are in town, why not head over for live rock and pop performances in English, Nepali and Hindi.

Toh EE Ming

How to get there: Busy Bee is located next to Bollywood dance bar and base camp trekking shop in Lakeside.



Great Food Deserves Carlsberg

That calls for a

EASING UP

It is natural to be worried or fearful every now and then, but sometimes these feelings become persistent, overwhelming, and interfere with daily life. Often there are feelings of intense panic and perhaps even a sense of doom.



DHANVANTARI

Buddha Basnyat, MD

Some start hyperventilating (rapid breathing) accompanied by sweating and trembling with palpitations (being aware of the heart beating), while others feel like they are reliving traumatic events of the past, which may have triggered these symptoms in the first place. Patients may feel an irresistible urge to perform certain rituals (for example constant hand washing) without any purpose and though they might be aware of their irrational behaviour, they are unable to help themselves.

All these symptoms can be categorised under a broad umbrella of anxiety disorder which include phobias (for example, acrophobia, the fear of heights), obsessive compulsive disorders (for example the constant hand washing described above) or post-traumatic stress disorder. Although there is no blood test to confirm an anxiety disorder, it is important to rule out certain common medical problems—heart and lung diseases, thyroid diseases, asthma, drug abuse, and alcohol withdrawal - which simulate an anxiety attack.

Once it is clear that these medical problems are not triggering anxiety,

a treatment strategy needs to be planned. There is some evidence to show that people who live in developing countries are less anxious than in the West. However, this difference is shrinking rapidly. Although the environment we grow up in definitely shapes our thought processes, there is strong proof that anxiety disorder is genetic.

While medications for anxiety disorders and depression are often the same, they are two very different illnesses. Sometimes depression is so debilitating that patients cannot lead regular lives without treatment. Those with long-term anxiety disorder, on the other hand, are not as constrained and can continue being active and contributing to society. In fact there are many people with anxiety disorders that lead very successful lives.

Bill Russell, the star centre of

the US basketball team Boston Celtics, used to be so nervous that he vomited profusely before almost every game he played in. On nights he did not vomit, his teammates worried about the outcome of the game. Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of evolution, also suffered from social anxiety and found it very difficult to leave his house. Famous British actor, Hugh Grant, suffers from so much stage fright that he has often strongly considered quitting films altogether.

However, there are ways to cope with anxiety disorders and it is important for family and friends to reassure their loved ones, who suffer from the disease, that they can keep going. Broad treatment plans include psychotherapy also known as cognitive behavioural therapy or psychological counseling.

Lifestyle changes such as avoiding alcohol and coffee may be helpful especially if these are clear triggers for the problem. Quitting smoking is also beneficial as the nicotine in the cigarette can increase the heart rate and blood pressure and cause anxiety. Relaxation techniques such as meditation and regular exercise are also highly recommended. With the advice of a doctor anti-anxiety medication may help. And what is not emphasised enough in the management of anxiety disorders is the importance of restful sleep in a quiet environment.



GIZMO by YANTRICK

Acer's solid Liquid

There was a time when the only thing which men boasted "Mine is smaller than yours" was their mobile phones. But that is so 2010. As the mobile platform grew bigger to accommodate all the cool new multimedia features that 3G and 4G make it possible for us to have in our pockets, tablets became all the rage. The smartphone industry responded to the competition by making its mobiles bigger. Today, looking at macho men talking into palm-size phones in their SUVs it is clear that size, after all, matters.

These hybrids between phones and tablets are called (what else?) phablets and phone hardware companies are trying to woo customers with features not found in mobiles for customers who find tablets too unwieldy.

The most affordable Phablet we have seen so far in Kathmandu is the newly arrived Acer Liquid S1 Duo and we took one for a spin this week to see if we could ever get used to having a clunky phone the size of a Cadbury chocolate bar (and weighing nearly 200gm) in our pockets. We didn't. So, if you are one of those small-is-beautiful types this one's not for you. But if you usually store your phone in your shoulder bag and not your pocket, you travel a lot and don't want to hold an iPad in your hands through a five hour flight, or you need larger fonts because of advancing years then this one's for you.

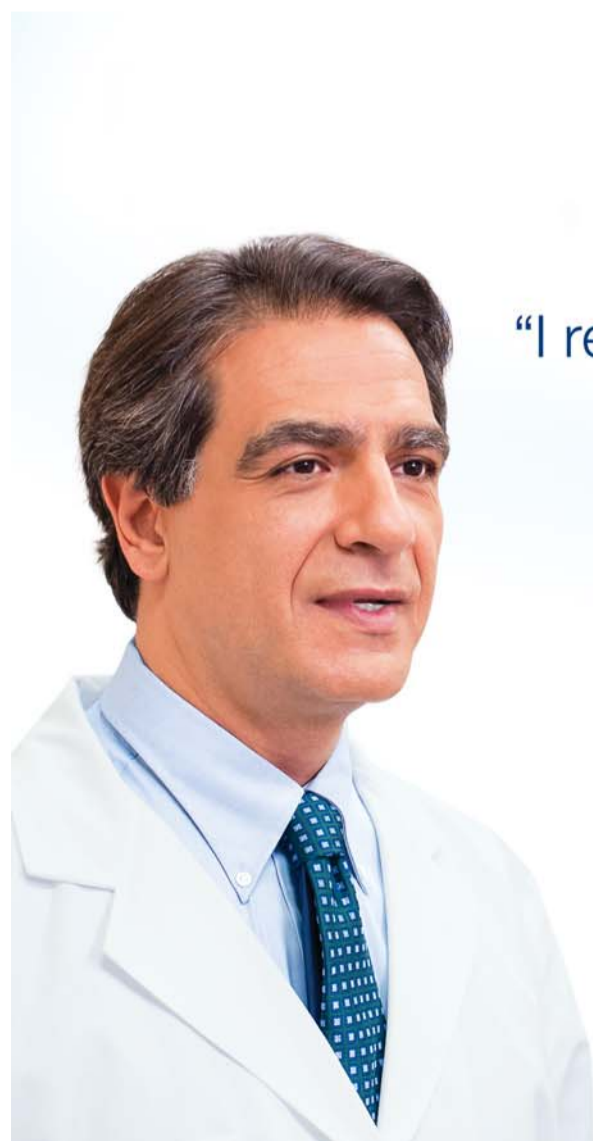
So let's look at the bright side. First, the price. At Rs 45,000 (excluding VAT) the S1 is a steal compared to its competitors in the market. It is the only one in its size class that has a double SIM, becoming really essential in Nepal because our two telecom companies are still not on speaking terms. The 5.7" screen is about the same as the competition, although the 1280 x 720

pixel definition is not as fine as the others. The Samsung and HTC are friskier and niftier, but for its price the Acer's speed is adequate.

But what really blew Yantrick's mind was the Swype keyboard which allows users to slide the finger across the keyboard and not key in letters. Swype is available in other phones as well, but on a Phablet it increases the speed and accuracy of texting. Typing as we know it may become extinct.

The S1 Duo comes with standard apps (weather, wifi hotspot, FM radio, LiveScreen, a double camera that can click with a "cheese" voice command etc). There is an apps shortcut page that can be customised and minimised so you can work on something else while it is open.

Yantrick's Verdict: Phablets are a work in progress. If you don't care about good looks, want an interim technology to get used to the size and weight of outsized phones that are smaller than tablets, and don't want to splurge, the Acer S1 Duo is for you. And it's a great way to practice your Swype.

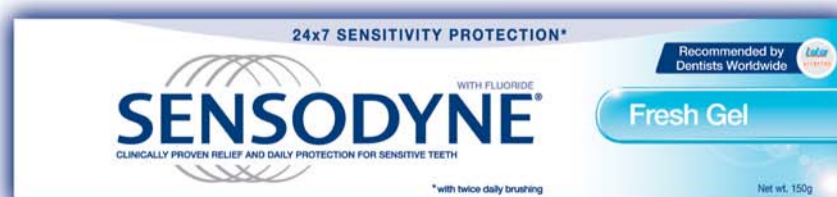


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Fact-fudging in Gujarat

New book exposes Indian prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi's involvement in 2002 communal pogrom

Journalist Manoj Mitta's investigative book, *The Fiction of Fact-Finding: Modi and Godhra*, deserves more than just a book review. The author has clinically revealed the convoluted process through which Chief Minister Narendra Modi of the Indian state of Gujarat was declared to have not been culpable in the communal riots of 2002.



LOOK OUT

Ajaz Ashraf

Modi is now the BJP's prime ministerial candidate in India's general elections. To prove that the fact-finding in the 2002 riots was a sham is tantamount to expressing deep worry about Modi's style of governance and suitability for the post he covets.

This is why the media's silence on Mitta's charges is inexplicable. Shouldn't it have been questioning the clean chit given to Modi by none less than the Supreme Court-monitored Special Investigation Team (SIT)? Should it not be asking the man who chaired the SIT, RK Raghavan, to account for his pronouncements? These questions haven't been asked even by *The Times of India*, where Mitta works as a senior editor.

To begin with, Mitta questions the suitability of appointing Raghavan as SIT chairman. Reason: Raghavan was responsible for the security at Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, where former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed. An inquiry commission disbelieved Raghavan's affidavit, which claimed Gandhi had beckoned a group people to come near him, thus allowing the LTTE suicide bomber to slip into the sterile zone.

Raghavan's 'beckoning' theory was dismissed because photographs of the site, fortuitously discovered, showed the bomber had been present in the sterile zone long before Gandhi arrived there. Worse, Raghavan, wasn't near Gandhi at the time he was killed, having 'turned around' to make arrangements for his return journey. He couldn't consequently have witnessed Gandhi's gestures. Mitta asks if it was appropriate to appoint as SIT chairman a man who tried to save his own skin through a plainly absurd story in the past, particularly as the Gujarat administration he was asked to probe was, to say the least, as



Survivors of 2002 post-Godhra violence look at photos of the victims at a programme to commemorate them on the 10th anniversary of the killing, in Ahmedabad.

guilty of dereliction of duty as he had been?

It wasn't a surprise, therefore, that the SIT created an elaborate smokescreen to conceal Modi's controversial role in the 2002 riots. Thus, when Modi claimed he had described the burning of a train coach by Muslims on 27 February as only a pre-planned conspiracy, the SIT didn't confront him with the official press release which quoted him saying that it was a "pre-planned inhuman collective violent act of terrorism". His characterisation of Godhra as an act of terror, as is well known, provoked the Hindu backlash.

Again, Modi told the SIT that he came to know of the massacre at the Gulberg Society, a Muslim residential complex where former MP Ehsan Jafri was brutally killed, five hours after its occurrence. However, Mitta says Modi's claim is highly improbable given that the state's top police brass knew of the tragedy unfolding nearby. Really, how could they have not communicated to the chief minister the massacres in the city?

In a damning chapter, *Shifting Bodies, Shifting Facts*, Mitta demonstrates how the SIT strained itself to ensure Modi wasn't linked to the contentious decision to hand over the bodies burnt in the Godhra train fire to Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Jaydeep Patel and bring them to Ahmedabad for cremation. Unfortunately for the SIT, this decision had been recorded in a letter issued by the revenue officer of Godhra to Patel. The question to ask

was: could a junior officer have given the custody of the bodies to a non-government person without instructions from a person high in the administrative hierarchy?

No, thought Raju Ramachandran, who was an amicus curiae in the cases the SIT was investigating. The SIT thought otherwise, prompting Mitta to note, 'The SIT's exoneration of Modi owed much to its reluctance to link

the dots and get the big picture of Gujarat as it stood on the eve of the post-Godhra carnage ...'

Ramachandran wanted the SIT to further investigate Modi, but it balked at calling the chief minister afresh. The contradictions between Modi's replies and the evidence collected as well as narratives of other eyewitnesses were not explained. Modi's answers were simply accepted as true.

The book is full of hitherto



The Fiction of Fact-Finding:
Modi and Godhra
By Manoj Mitta
Harper Collins 2014
284 pages
Price IRs 599

unknown stories about investigations into the 2002 riots which provide an extraordinary rich material for the Indian media to report and debate. Are we then to assume that the media, including *The Times of India*, is either too apprehensive of writing against Modi or has decided to back his prime ministerial ambitions? Either way, Mitta names and shames them all. 

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Cholera in the time of peacekeeping

Haiti's cholera epidemic may have ebbed, but the controversy over its links to Nepal refuses to go away

NARESH NEWAR

Four years after the cholera outbreak in earthquake-devastated Haiti, genetic analysis has traced the strain of the microbes that caused the epidemic to Nepal, but the authorities here continue to deny that Nepali UN peacekeeping troops were responsible.

"It is easy to blame Nepali soldiers as they contribute a lot to UN peacekeeping missions and they happened to be in Haiti right at the time when

the epidemic occurred, but it is dangerous to pinpoint a group of nationals," said Babu Ram Marasini, Director of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division of Nepal's Department of Health Services (DOHS).

The issue resurfaced late last year when lawyers representing families of the victims in Haiti filed a lawsuit in New York against the United Nations, charging the outbreak had been triggered when sewage from infected Nepali peacekeepers was discharged into the water system.

Following the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake on 12 January 2010 that killed more than 200,000 people, Haiti suffered an outbreak of cholera for the first time in over a century. From 2010-2013, the total number of cholera cases reached 682,573, of which 379,870 were hospitalised and 8,330 died.

Scientists initially linked the origin of the cholera outbreak to a rise in temperature and salinity in a river in western Haiti. This hypothesis was backed by cholera experts in a 2012 epidemiology article.

However, reports by international news agencies sparked debate among observers when they suggested the epidemic had links to unsanitary conditions and inconsistent medical exams at a UN peacekeeping military camp, where 1,280 Nepali troops were living at the time.

A cholera epidemic in Nepal's Jajarkot district in 2009 killed 300 people, many of them children, but according to Nepal's DOHS the epidemic



Communicating about

ELINA PRADHAN
AND BIGYAN R BISTA

Earlier this month, the International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC) released the World Cancer Report 2014 with dire warnings on global cancer burden over the next 20 years. Sadly and predictably, nations like Nepal that lack resources and effective health policies, will bear the brunt of cancer pandemic. The most impoverished will be disproportionately affected due to inequities in access to health services.

The burden of care on Nepal's health systems from non-communicable diseases (NCD) is high, causing 82 per cent of outpatient visits and 89 per cent of hospitalisations. The National Living Standards Survey (2010/11) reveals a rise in both chronic and acute illnesses. NCDs are responsible for nearly half of total deaths, yet despite the overwhelming need, health infrastructure to deal with

these diseases remains inadequate. Only 0.7 per cent of the government budget is allocated for NCDs.

The first national survey into NCDs in 2008 found 37 per cent of the people used tobacco and 28.5 per cent consumed alcohol. Diabetes prevalence was at 10 per cent and hypertension at nine per cent. Sugar consumption, adoption of western-style diets, and air pollution are known risk factors for many NCDs including cancer. A leading cause of death among women is suicide, yet mental health issues remain the most stigmatised and least-addressed of health problems.

More than half of Nepal's population is between 15-59 years and there is a decreasing dependency ratio. The demographic dividend can provide tremendous boost to economic growth only if aligned with the right fiscal and health policies.

The following policy actions should be taken into consideration to deal with non-communicable diseases:

1 Provide more resources to the NHEICC:

National Health Education, Information, and Communication Centre (NHEICC) is the government entity responsible for prevention strategies, facility level dissemination of knowledge, and public health communication. Given the upward trend in NCD risk factor prevalence and disease incidence at every level of care, prevention must be the principal strategy in Nepal. The primary recipient of the annual tobacco tax revenue should be the NHEICC whose current budget is a mere 1.8 per cent of that revenue. A Health Education Officer post must be set up in every district hospital to provide preventative counseling and launch awareness campaigns through mass media.

2 Approve and implement a national NCD policy

A national NCD policy draft has been awaiting government approval since 2009. It should be discussed among experts and stakeholders such as the Nepal Public Health Foundation,

Countries like Nepal will bear the brunt of the global cancer pandemic unless we act fast

National Research Council, the Ministry of Finance and Department of Health Services, and pushed through legislation by the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) immediately.

3 Create a surveillance system for NCDs and risk factors

MOHP has conducted only one national survey for NCD risk factors in 2008, this should continue focusing on alcohol and tobacco use, diabetes, and hypertension prevalence. The ministry needs to partner up with and mobilise health service NGOs.

4 Alcohol abuse prevention bill

Specific measures to reduce alcohol consumption like regulating existing



MINUSTAH/FLICKR

was under control by the time of the Haiti outbreak. Protestors in Haiti blamed Nepali troops in 2010 for bringing cholera to the island.

The Nepal Army, which provides soldiers for UN peacekeeping missions, denied the allegations and insisted personnel were given regular health checks. Each soldier is properly vaccinated while serving domestically and when travelling abroad, officials said.

“The UN has already made it clear that our Nepali soldiers had nothing to do with the epidemic and that is also our official position,” Nepal Army

spokesperson Brig Gen Jagdish Chandra Pokhrel said.

But the UN’s position is not quite so categorical, stating instead that the source of the outbreak cannot be identified with total certainty and that its development into an epidemic was caused by a range of factors including the poor state of sanitation and health infrastructure.

According to the UN’s 2011 Final Report of the Independent Panel of Experts on the Cholera Outbreak in Haiti, “The precise country from where the Haiti isolate of *Vibrio cholerae* O1 arrived is debatable,” noting,



however, preliminary genetic analysis indicate that the strains isolated during the cholera outbreak in Haiti and those circulating in South Asia, including Nepal, at the same time in 2009-2010, are similar.

“This kind of blame game is dangerous because now again the Nepali connection in Haiti’s epidemic is [being] published in media stories across the world,” public health expert Resam Lamichanne from the DOHS said, pointing out that cholera has been successfully controlled in Nepal and there were zero cases in 2013.

But a 2013 report published by the Global Health Justice Partnership at Yale Law School in the US claims the cholera strain in Haiti has been scientifically linked to a single origin in Nepal and that the troops ‘inadvertently carried the disease [to Haiti].’

Citing deep anger over the outbreak among the Haitian public, the report calls on the UN to ‘re-establish its institutional legitimacy’ in Haiti by taking concrete steps to apologise publicly, and ensure such outbreaks never occur again.

“The world is not blaming the Nepali peacekeepers,” said Daniele Lantagne, a cholera specialist from the US, who co-authored a report by an independent panel formed by the UN Secretary-General to

investigate the source of the 2010 outbreak.

She said the outbreak resulted from a confluence of events, which included someone infected with cholera being in Haiti, the person’s faeces being disposed of inappropriately, and cholera proliferating in the environment, compounded by a lack of transmission prevention once the bacteria were in the open. “All four [factors] were required to start the current Haitian outbreak,” Lantagne said.

Four years after the outbreak, people in Nepal are still reacting to the claims against the country’s soldiers. Shiva Yadav, a community health worker at a government health post in Banke district, 500km west of Kathmandu, agreed: “I really feel sorry about the situation in Haiti and we are ready to offer our help because of our own success in controlling the epidemic.”

According to Nepal’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the country is the seventh largest provider of peacekeeping troops in the world, with more than 4,000 soldiers active in 2012.  **IRIN**

nepalitimes.com

Keeping the peace, #570
Cholera choler, #543
Media coverage on the Haiti epidemic

A history of maladies

The first recorded instance of cholera in Nepal was 1823. And although it had probably happened before, the water-borne disease began to be detected with regularity ever since. A British doctor in Kathmandu did a study of the 1885 epidemic, revealing there were worse outbreaks in 1831, 1843, 1856, 1861 and 1876.

‘Nepali’ cholera became infamous when an outbreak in Haiti was alleged to have come from Nepali peacekeepers who were stationed upriver from major coastal settlements. Because Jajarkot had an epidemic in 2009, it was automatically assumed that Nepali soldiers carried the disease with them to Haiti.

Although scientists are still debating, reports in the western media have questioned the UN and its waste management contractor’s efficiency in disposing waste from the MINUSTAH camp.

Sameer Mani Dixit of Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal says it is impossible to establish three years later what really happened in Haiti.

“They could have found out what happened and how if samples from Haitians were compared with samples from Nepali peacekeepers in 2011,” he says. “But to compare two outbreaks that occurred two years apart and affected two groups of people isn’t scientific, let alone conclusive.”

Dixit says strains of cholera are very closely related and mutate easily over a short period of time. An upcoming research paper co-authored by his organisation reveals that strains found in Nepal in 2012 also matched strains found in Bangladesh and Haiti in 2012. They conclude that closely related strains are undergoing global dissemination.

non-communicable diseases



BIKRAM RAI

LINE UP: Women and children await their turn at a health camp organised in Siddhi, Chitwan earlier in the year.

excise tax on alcohol, increasing public awareness, rallying support around creating a comprehensive anti-alcohol abuse bill should be adopted until the passage and implementation of the bill.

5 Increase mental health-specific resources


The legacy of the conflict, the effect of poor working conditions of millions of Nepalis, and the suffering of separation of their families need to be addressed. Neuropsychiatric conditions are responsible for 10.2 per cent of total disability-adjusted life year lost in Nepal. Mental health disorders are underreported, so awareness, prevention, and treatment programs are a must.

6 Expand early detection and screening centres

One of the NCD policies currently in place in a few districts is screening for breast and cervical cancer, hypertension, and diabetes. This should be extended nationwide as a preventive measure.

Vaccinations against Hepatitis B and human papillomavirus can greatly reduce liver and cervical cancers.

Nepal has come a long way in the last 30 years in reducing poverty, improving sanitation, and decreasing the total fertility rate. It is on track to meet most of the millennium development goals. However, the country is facing an epidemiological transition, which makes it critical to focus on high morbidity and mortality from non-communicable diseases across the socio-economic spectrum.

The newly elected government and Constituent Assembly must make health equity a priority through legislative action and their implementation. 

Elina Pradhan is a doctoral student in the Department of Global Health and Population at the Harvard School of Public Health. Bigyan R Bista is a doctoral candidate in Cancer Research at the Department of Biology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Train a-comin'

Madhav Nepal, *BBC Nepali Service*,
14 February



Officials have said work on the East-West electric rail has already begun in different sections across the Tarai. According to the Department of Rail (DoR) this includes handing out compensation to landowners whose properties fall on or along the rail



track. According to the DoR, a Korean consultant conducted a survey and submitted a proposal to build the 65km Tamsariya (Nawalparasi) – Butwal (Rupandehi) section with links to Bhairawa and Lumbini via a station in Butwal.
The state has already allocated funds for the railway in this year's budget and the

DoR is pressing ahead with its plans in certain sections. "We have also begun to dig 5km of track from Simara to Bardibas," says Nawaraj Bhatta, an engineer at the DoR.
After the DoR went on a site visit to Butwal to survey the alignment, residents of Kalikanagar were terrorised by the prospects of having their homes bulldozed. They are now going from door to door of local politicians and district officers demanding that the government provide them with clear and timely information about the railway.

"The officials went around marking off places while conducting the survey and now people are confused and think their properties will be torn down," says Ram Raj Pokhrel, a local of Kalikanagar.

The entire line runs almost 950km from Kakarbhitta to Mahendranagar and laying down the tracks alone is estimated to cost an average of Rs 200 million per kilometre. Besides this ambitious project, the government has already signed an agreement with India to link five border customs points to the East-West railway line. Currently, the country only has 29km of rail tracks from Janakpur to Jayanagar.

nepalitimes.com
Trespassing into nature, #691

Dear Democracy

Shankar Niraula, *Kantipur*, 19 February

कान्तिपुर



I hope you are doing fine my friend. As for us, we are managing to get by somehow. While political turmoil, violence, and corruption have torn apart several countries, we have been resilient so far and have managed to cling to the sliver of hope.
But why have you abandoned us for so long Democracy? Do you not

miss Nepal and your dear Nepalis? I spent my entire school life memorising US President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." But here in Nepal, democracy is only meant for top leaders and those who travel around in expensive cars.
Dear Democracy, I have read so much about you in books, speeches, and on special days each year. They say you came in 1991 and then later in 2006, but when will I actually get to see you my friend. I often hear that you have moved to the US and Europe. But let me tell you, in your absence a lot of things have been going wrong in our country.
I am waiting for that moment when people in remote and far flung corners of Nepal will actually see you in their homes and daily lives. I have written to you many times asking you to come visit us. I hope you will not disappoint us this time.



Up: Cheating Hospital
Down: Teaching Hospital

नेपाल Rabindra in *Nepal*, 16 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



NC got our support for the PM elections but now they are backpeddling on agreements because they want to keep the Home Ministry.

UML Deputy Chairman Bamdev Gautam, *Naya Patrika*, 19 February

"Reform in two weeks"

Interview with Krishna Hari Pushkar, the new director of the Department of Foreign Employment. *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16 February

हिमाल

Himal Khabarpatrika:
After taking up leadership at the department, what do you see as the main challenges?
Krishna Hari Pushkar:
You often hear about how the department is plagued by various problems. But most of it is just rumours spread by those who want to take advantage of the situation. There are many people within and outside the department who have intentionally



created loopholes in the system so that they can cheat service-seekers. Also if previous leaders had been honest, then most of the mess would have been cleared a long time ago.

How will you tackle interference and influence from outsiders?
If the chief of Foreign Employment Department doesn't seek personal gains from anyone, then the department will not be subjected to unnecessary pressure and threats.

How will your tenure at the department be different than your predecessors?
I will try my best to motivate my staff so

that we can provide better service delivery. Starting this month, the department will be open from 7am to 7pm to renew labour permits. I can assure that the ordinary Nepalis will feel the difference in two weeks.

You were part of a committee that had proposed a list of reforms for the department. Will you be able to execute these changes?
Most of the recommendations have already been implemented, for instance documents now get processed through a single desk, unlike earlier when it had to be taken to 22 different places. The department has already initiated two work shifts to improve efficiency. Now all that needs to be done is to mend some of the technicalities.



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Lease of life

Krishna Bahadur Budha talking to Pradeep Bashyal, *Nepal*, 16 February

नेपाल

Five years ago I left for Dubai to work in construction. The little savings I could manage from my salary of 800 Dirhams per month went into paying for my wife's uterus cancer treatment back in Nepal. She died while I was still abroad. When my three-year contract ended and my visa expired, I didn't return home because I was knee deep in debt.

Although I managed to find illegal work in Dubai, my employer knew how desperate I was and squeezed every penny out of my pay-checks. A friend told me about paying 1,500 Dirhams up front to go to Greece. I would need to pay \$1,000 once I got there, but that was no big deal because he told me I could make that much in a month.

Departure was fixed for 15 March 2013. There were other people, including 26 Nepalis and others from Pakistan and Bangladesh, who had signed up for the journey. From Dubai, we were taken to Oman on the back of a car. After resting for a night, we spent the next day walking over dry, rugged landscape and reached a private beach the next morning. We spent two days here waiting for the others to join

us. When they did, we were all lined up, searched thoroughly and robbed of all our belongings. I lost 400 Dirhams and a watch.

From there we boarded a motorboat to cross the Persian Gulf. The ride was rough and I felt my heart jumping every time the boat rocked. Later we learnt that a man from Syangja died of heart complications on the next boat. The smugglers buried him in the sand once we got ashore to Iran after eight hours.

When we reached a camp in the middle of a jungle, we met 200 others like us. Nepalis, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Iraqis, you name it. Some of us were taken away once in a while, we couldn't imagine why.

One day five Nepalis, including me, were moved to a two-storey house at midnight. Five of us shared what was only enough for two people to eat. The following morning, they cornered us and told each of us to call home for money. That's when we found we were duped and we would never reach Europe.

I only knew my in-laws' number in Nepal. My captors found out I couldn't get money off of them and they beat me with a gas pipette. As I was crying to my brother-in-law, asking him to save my life, the smugglers looked like they were running out of patience. Three Nepalis

who actually got their families to send money to an account in Dubai were let go.

We couldn't understand what they were saying, but judging by their body language I understood they wanted to get rid of me and Jabar Singh Darlami, the remaining two Nepalis. Five days later we were driven in a red van to Minab and put on a bus to Tehran. After spending 18 hours on the floor of a bus we reached Tehran. There we were about to be picked by the smugglers' contacts.

As they tried to force us into a van, we noticed a tap in a nearby garden. We told those men we were thirsty and sped off without looking back. After half an hour of running through this strange city, we saw a policeman at a park and tried to talk to him in our broken English. He took us to a police station and filed a report, and told us to come back in a week instead of putting us in prison. In the meantime, he gave us the phone number and address of Nepal's honorary ambassador in Tehran. and advised us to seek its counsel.

When we reached the office twelve hours later, a woman told us she would help us return home and told us to return some days later. She gave us 5,000 Rial for food but that didn't last very long because



HOME AT LAST: Krishna Bahadur Budha, 41, who worked as a labourer in Dubai, was trafficked by agents on the promise of sending him to Greece.

one roti cost 1,000 Rial.

We slept in a park for a week until we were told it was illegal to do so. An Afghani man found us loitering and employed us at his construction site, paying us in meals and sleeping quarters.

Twenty days later when we went back to the honorary embassy, the woman gave us a written note in Persian and told us to take it to the police. We were arrested upon arrival, tried twice, and jailed for 91 days because we had broken immigration laws. Which wasn't so bad because we had two square meals a day.

Three months later, they shifted us to immigration jail

because we had overrun our initial sentence and still didn't have the means to go back to Nepal. Isolated in prison, we didn't know what went on outside.

One day some people from an international organisation came and took our interview, and told us they would help us return home. And would you know it, three weeks later Jagat and I were standing at Tehran airport. I cried throughout the flight home, blessed with my new lease of life.

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Unidentified floating objects

This is what our democracy has come down to: firing off cannons in Tundikhel at the break of dawn on Democracy Day. Maybe that is because we are now a Federal Democratic Gun Tantric country?



There is now proof that the Ass is not the only Jackass in town, we are populated by other philistines. When Hariprasad Chaurasia, the famous Indian flautist, completed *Song of the River* at his rain-soaked concert at the embassy the other night he said he had seven more minutes and asked for requests. Someone shouted out for his famous raag *Pahadi*. There were guffaws from the boorish Forum wallahs at the head table who shall remain nameless to protect them from national embarrassment.



It was a sight to see how the roar of Baddie Chair Comrade Owsome has now turned into a meow. His speech at the CA the other day, in which he grudgingly accepted Subhas Uncle as House Speaker, was the kind of meek whining one hears from the leader of one of the 33 smaller parties. No one used pepper spray in our parliament, but sometime one wishes someone would threaten the honourable members with mace so they'd get on with the job of constitution writing and gobarmment formation.



Kathmandu Valley's idyllic setting is enhanced by the bucolic rivers,



streams, brooks, and creeks that gurgle through our great capital. Every ancient civilisation is known by its rivers, a river is for a civilisation what a flush tank is for a WC. Take the Nile Valley Civilisation, the Euphrates Civilisation, or in our own neck of the woods, the Tukucha Open Sewer Civilisation. After a brief inspection trip, I am glad to report that fears of the imminent collapse of the Kathmandu civilisation are grossly exaggerated and everything is hunky-dory in the boondocks. Unlike sterile European rivers, Kathmandu's waterways are a biodiversity sanctuary, teeming with microscopic organisms like the *Vibrio cholera* and the *Salmonella typhi* which we have rescued from the brink of extinction.

Sampling the aroma of Kathmandu's rivers is an art, a bit like wine rating and is only for the connoisseurs. After my tour of the rivers, here is the Ass' verdict:

1. Bagmati at Thapathali: Brut non-vintage redolence, the light-golden

straw-colour with its effervescent bubbles. Very soft on the nose, rich and well-structured with a powerful aftertaste of fresh gundruk.

2. Bishnumati at Teku: Deep green and translucent, with an attractive nose and intense notes of semi-digested gorgonzola. It is supple on the palate, round, velvety but well-balanced, and very reminiscent of a vintage 1997 Jamuna Effluence.

3. Tukucha at Rastriya Samachar Samiti: The anaerobic fermentation of the sludge releases an olfactory elegance conveying the nostalgic memory of Accham district before it was declared Open Defecation Free.

4. Manohara at Pepsi Cola: Even from the bridge, one's nostrils are overpowered by the fragrance of this great river. There is slight hint of roasted almonds superseded by a bouquet of buffalo innards. This robust river is not for the faint-hearted.

5. Hanumante at Thimi: Among the reds, this one needs an honourable mention. It is a deep crimson since it is situated downstream from a carpet dyeing unit. Against the light, it looks full-blooded and is imbued with a racy nose with a hint of licorice, a touch of gameyness, and the plethora of unidentified floating objects (UFOs) giving it a full-bodied fruitiness.

6. Bagmati at Chobhar: This is a premium red with a purply hue and a tangy whiff of over-ripe durian. There is slight sparkling effect due to incomplete enzyme activity, giving it a rich and persistent champagne-like finish.

The Ass



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