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.
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 Ministry is of critical importance because of its control over the state security apparatus during local elections that will be held 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 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 go along with the NC proposals to offering him Home. Koirala has now said that Messer 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 tactless line up 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 Idiot ideas for constitutional amendments. Then there are the people on the hard road, who are furious that their masters lost power, and now want a new constitution that will set right the ‘wrongs’ of the banandolan... 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.

Other 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 Matrka Prasad (‘Another Crossroad’, Editorial, #696). Why should we expect anything different from this new installation of the same old compromised leader who will keep on running 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.

BWS

- There maybe somebody in the NC who is ready for the kind of policies Nepalis would welcome. Somebody we know little about, a son of the Koirala family who actually seems to be quite different from the unchanging old eel then the public is used to. I am referring to Bishar 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 resonate with the electorate.

Kathikat

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 eigth clause clearly spelling out which party would get what ministry? We would have been spared this nonsense. Now these opportunist parties will waste another month in accusations and counter-accusations. I can just imagine Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai giving each other an evil problem. Roshan

- Nepali politicians cannot do consensus politics, the past 24 years have proved that amply. Can we change our older ways so that when a 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 bills repeatedly, demanding more bones after we have fed them to the till. Shame on you elected 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 more plus. Seplageneran? No big deal. Moto

- Ladies and gentlemen, here we have our 37th jitter (if you count K.C Raj Regime). Let’s see how strong the Koirala blood is. May Pushupanath protect us all. J Sharma

COUNTRY’S CONSCIENCE
Thank you Professor Chaturya Mahra for your timely article on Dr Govinda KC’s fight against corruption and political interference in the medical sector (‘Carrying the country’s conscience’, #694). Each of us should embody the ideals K.C 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’, Dambir Shreshtha, #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 the beginning to this service. The Gurkhas would have had 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 fair better future than my cousins in Nepal. Besides whenever I read news from back home, I can’t help but feel dejected. Prashanti Chamling
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.

Among the many fatal flaws of the first CA, one stood out: it was too big and unwieldy. As chief architect of the Assembly, the UCPN (Maoist) bears most of the blame for the problems associated with it. Although there were only 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 Janadikar Forum Nepal and FSP’s blackmail 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 excreting 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 Madhesis 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 fulfill 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 and hasn’t acted when he should have.

If members of the CA2 care to listen, indulgention 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 acritic, 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 a 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.

Bikari Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist and was a senior official in the government.
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, 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 vintage DC-3 Dakotas. Nepal Airlines introduced in 1955, 90 per cent have been lost.

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

Of all the crashes of various models of aircraft in Nepal since 1965, 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 their skill and bravery in dangerous circumstances but 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.
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 engaging in 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 about 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
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 (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 HHN’s hostel. 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 Nepal 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. www.sanopaila.org.np Hotline: 1660-01-33033 www.freedommatters.co.uk

Build a better future - apply for a prestigious Australia Awards Scholarship

An Australia Awards Scholarship is your opportunity to help drive the development of Nepal and build strong ties with Australia.

People from all walks of life are invited to apply. The application process is open and competitive, providing equal opportunity to everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, caste or disability.

If you want the opportunity to build a better future for yourself and your nation, apply for an Australia Award today.

Applications close: 30 April 2014

For more information please visit: www.australiaawards.gov.au www.ausawards.transform.nepal

Australia Awards Office
Panipokhari, Chhetrisakram Marg, Maharajgunj, Kathmandu - Nepal
Tel: (+977) 1 4005614
E: enquiries@australiaawards.nepal
Just like the waves of storms that have lashed UK and Europe this winter, Nepal is also getting one westerly disturbance after another. After last weekend’s blizzard and rain, there is another low pressure front headed our way. By Friday there will be cloud buildup with rain affecting western and central Nepal by Saturday. This will bring down the maximum temperature, but things should get warmer and drier by Monday.

KATHMANDU

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 huddled 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

Devotees prepare yourselves for yet another kooky Shiva Ratri celebrations

GLOBAL COOL

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.
EVENTS

- DAY OF THE DESTROYER, flock to Pasupati with thousands of other devotees and sing praises to the Lord that takes. 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. 21 February, 4pm, Nepal-Bharat Library, New Road

DINING

- Climax-Change exhibition. Runs till 24 February, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

- Dual worlds, an exhibition of the works of artists Anil Shahi and Sujaan Dangol. Runs till 17 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@wctymuseum.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 17 March, 9.30am to 4.30pm, Embassy Hall, Japanese Embassy, Pashupati

- 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 Kanukara, former president of the organisation. 21 February, 6pm, Alliance Française, Teku

- 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

MUSIC

- VULTURES WILL FEED, party with Jugaa and other Nepali thrash and hardcore bands. Rs 200, 5 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

Now... News At Your Fingertips

Experience change while reading news with the Nagarkot News App & step up towards a new platform. Get News engine, anywhere at your fingertips and also get a chance to be the first one to upload and share crucial news and photos.
The ongoing Climage+Change exhibition brings exciting programmes this week:

21 February, Plastic Free Himalaya, panelists will discuss the repercussions of plastic disposal in Nepal’s national park and protected areas. Followed by a session on sustainable mountain architecture in the Hindu Kush and Himalaya. Day ends with screening of Solar Mamas, a documentary on rural electrification.

11:30 am; 1:30 pm; 3:30 pm; 5:30 pm

22 February, workshop for children between 7 and 15 with artist Sujan Dangol who makes artwork out of waste material. Followed by a concert by Kutumba featuring local artists from Janakpur, Helambu, and Kathmandu.

11:30 am; 1:30 pm

23 February, a special edition of PechaKucha Kathmandu featuring practitioners, artists and innovators of sustainable living.

5 pm to 8 pm

Celebrate the power of women at the upcoming European Union Film Festival.

20 February
11:30 am, Applause, Denmark, 83'
1:30 pm, After five in the forest, Germany, 94'
3:30 pm, The first assignment, Italy, 86'
5:30 pm, Viper in the fist, France, 90'

21 February
11:30 am, Princess, Finland, 98'
1:30 pm, House, Slovakia, 90'
3:30 pm, Back to your arms, Lithuania, 86'
5:30 pm, Eszter’s Inheritance, Hungary, 87'

22 February
11:30 am, Kuma, Austria, 88'
1:30 pm, Lora from morning till evening, Bulgaria, 92'
3:30 pm, Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl, Portugal, 63'

23 February
11:30 am, Take my eyes, Spain, 102'
1:30 am, The Dark House, Netherlands, 101'
3:30 pm, Beyond, Sweden, 95'

Celebrating women, 20 to 23 February, QFX Kumari – Hall 2
When Udaya Rana announced he was leaving 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.

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 that he believes helped him claim a victory here.

Inspired by party founder BP Koirala 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.

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 that he believes helped him claim a victory here.

Inspired by party founder BP Koirala 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.
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 1960 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.

“We are still trapped in Bollywood’s grip and as we scramble to break production records, we have sacrificed quality,” says Veteran actor Rajesh Hamal: “Our industry is lost, we don’t know where we are headed.”

It’s a big travesty that our filmmakers need to step up their efforts. Lifting restrictions placed on foreign investments in Nepali movies, improving our presence at international film festivals, providing 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 undervalue the intelligence of their viewers.  

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 scramble to break production records, we have sacrificed quality.”

“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.

Karishma Manandhar: “Our industry is lost, we don’t know where we are headed.”

Says Veteran actor Rajesh Hamal: “Our industry is lost, we don’t know where we are headed.”

It’s a big travesty that our 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 undervalue the intelligence of their viewers.

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.
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.

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.

Introducing Dabur Herbal Toothpaste

Hamro Herbal Expert

With 125 years of Herbal Expertise, Dabur presents new Dabur Herbal Toothpaste with the goodness of five Herbal Extracts- Blackberry Bark, Budlet Wood, Babul Bark, Lodhra, Akarakene and Minerals-Salt & Calcium. Dabur Herbal Toothpaste makes your teeth strong, healthy, clean and gives refreshing breath naturally.
Busy Bee’s live music experience is to trickle in after 9, it is easy to another, and young travelers begin across a wide area, and offers both Lakeside’s dining district. Why the café cum bar cum lounge itself packed to capacity, most honeymoons, the place sees European backpackers to Indian in Pokhara’s lakeside. From F running at 8 minutes, the toils of Arabia for the oasis of home. Declares. A song that evokes the chaos and futility that has come to resemble Kathmandu. Memo Funk is another jocular, upbeat treatment of our national staple. As the in-house band belts Aisha’s Dream is another jocular, or 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 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 comfort, the place has this palpable buzz which is further accentuated 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. Sunir Pandey

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 Trikik Guru 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. Memo Funk is another jocular, upbeat treatment of our national staple. The band channels some Purbeli folk in Hay Sail, 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 Band will bring back memories. Others will have to simply conclude themselves, Dasain-Tihar being a world away from foggy February mornings. The band skips from Deusi to Chyangha hot Chyangha with consummate ease. Improvisation is everyone’s middle name. The remaining two tracks are Baja Guja 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 Napa Music Records, Thamel, (01)4382460

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

REVIEW

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 accentuated 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 Carlsberg

BUSY BEE CAFE

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 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 accentuated 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 CARLSBERG

BUSY BEE CAFE
I t 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 interfere with daily life. Often become persistent, overwhelming, are not triggering anxiety, these medical problems withdrawal - which simulate drug abuse, and alcohol thyroid diseases, asthma, heart and lung diseases, an anxiety disorder, it is disorder. Although there is or post-traumatic stress washing described above) example the constant hand compulsive disorders (for example, acrophobia, the fear of heights), obsessive example, acrophobia, the fear of heights), obsessive irrational behaviour, they are they might be aware of their any purpose and though certain rituals (for example constant hand washing) 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 clearly linked to 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.

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.

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 a kilogram) 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 S1’s 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 Yantick’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.

Yantick’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 S1Duo is for you. And it’s a great way to practice your Swype.
Moody and Godhra, deserves even by questions haven’t been asked his pronouncements? These RK Raghavan, to account for the man who chaired the SIT, (SIT)? Should it not be asking Special Investigation Team the Supreme Court-monitored given to Modi by none less than been questioning the clean chit inexplicable. Shouldn’t it have silence on Mitta’s charges is covets. and suitability for the post he expresses deep worry about the fact-finding in the 2002 riots. To prove that ministerial candidate in India’s communal riots of 2002. Narendra Modi of the Indian through which Chief Minister state of Gujarat was declared to 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 accountability 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 been beckoned a group of 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 guilty of dereliction of duty as he had been?

It wasn’t a surprise, therefore, that the SIT created an elaborate smoke screen 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 Elham Jafari 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 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.

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

**A SCHOOL WITH**
- Progressive Learning with Smart Classrooms
- Child Centered Approach
- Skilled & Experienced Teachers
- Balancing Body, Mind & Soul through Extra Curricular Activities
- Thoughtfully Designed Infrastructure
- School kitchen serving Hygienic & Nutritious Food

RAJARSHI GURUKUL
www.rajarshigurukul.com

**OPEN HOUSE**
TMD. SRK.
DATE: 22 FEB 2014
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

Farsh 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 nations,” said Babu Ram Marasini, Director of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division of Nepal’s Department of Health Services (DOHIS).

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 DOHIS the epidemic was discharged into the water system.

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.

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 preventive 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.

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 NGOs.

4. Alcohol abuse prevention bill
Specific measures to reduce alcohol consumption like regulating existing policies, will bear the brunt of cancer.

Countries like Nepal will bear the brunt of the global cancer epidemic 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.

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 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 preventive 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.

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 NGOs.

4. Alcohol abuse prevention bill
Specific measures to reduce alcohol consumption like regulating existing
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 personnel were given regular 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 2011.

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 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**

Keeping the peace, p.570
Cholera cholera, #543
Media coverage on the Haiti epidemic

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.

Elian 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 Bharaiwa and Lumhini 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 3km of track from Simara to Bardilhada,” says Newaraj Bhatta, an engineer at the DoR.

After the DoR went on a site visit to Butwal to survey the alignment, residents of Kalikanagar were terrified 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 making 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 259km of rail tracks from Janakpur to Jayanagar.

Reform in two weeks

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

Himal Khabarpatrika:
After taking up leadership at the department, what do you see as the main challenges?
Krishna Hari Pushkhar:
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, functionalities and 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.

Dear Democracy

Shankar Niraula, Kanpur, 19 February

I hope you are doing fine my friend. As far as 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.

Farewell.

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

UML Deputy Chairman Bamdev Gautam, Naya Patrika, 19 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

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

UML Deputy Chairman Bamdev Gautam, Naya Patrika, 19 February
Lease of life

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

GET UNLIMITED INTERNET FOR JUST RS. 699/Month

Enjoy a whole month of unlimited emailing and more with Unlimited Internet at one fixed cost. Experience 3G speed Internet at the same price as before and continue to surf at 3G speeds with no additional cost even after consuming all the data from the pack. It's time you stop the being limited.

Dia 171225 to activate.

Ncell, Here for Nepal | www.ncell.com

Cost/included volume with 3G speed; Rs. 699 for 10GB pack, Rs. 1,999 for 5GB pack and Rs. 2,999 for 10GB pack. Rates exclusive of taxes. Unlimited Internet Packs are valid for 30 days from activation date. This offer is valid for 3 months only from the date of launch, unless terminated earlier. For more information, dial 17223.

Terms and conditions apply.
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 Owesome 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 gobarment 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 Effluse.
3. Tukucha at Rastriya Samachar Samiti: The anaerobic fermentation of the sludge releases an ollatory 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 gummyness, and the plesoth of unidentified floating objects (UFOS) giving it a full-bodied fruitiness.
6. Bagmati at Chobhar: This is a premium red with a purple 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.