Four months after elections, the committee set up to draft rules of the House is deadlocked and its term has been extended twice. The next hurdle is the nomination of the remaining 26 members to complement the technical expertise needed in the CA to write a proper democratic constitution. Because the parties are in the habit of buying and selling CA membership, this is expected to delay things further. These prolonged gridlocks have once more spread disillusionment and hopelessness among the voters who showed up in large numbers last November to elect this body. As always, the leadership of this country is more concerned with political score-keeping and the immediate goals of sticking to the power than anything else.

For a nation writing its constitution, we don’t display the level of enthusiasm or ambition to discuss larger issues that will determine the socio-political and economic direction of the country. If we need long-term resolutions of problems plaguing us, we have to start here and now.
I t has become the hallmark of political horse-trading in Nepal that the protagonists put the cart before the horse. It happens over and over again, just after the people have taken tremendous pain and risks to reassert their trust in the democratic polity in 1990, 2006, 2008 or 2013 the honourable members of the elected House proceed to fritter it all away.

It is happening again. At a time when they should be working overtime to finish writing the constitution in eight months time, ruling party CA members are taking to the streets to free cronies in the guise of ‘students’ who were caught red-handed with weapons in a taxi at 3 am on the streets of Kathmandu.

When they were debating state structure, type of government, election rules, justice for wartime atrocities, and citizenship they waste three weeks in haggling over who should first agree on the rules. Oh boy, did they underestimate their ability to find compromises.

Four months after elections, the committee set up to draft rules of the House was deadlocked and needed to have its term extended twice. The most egregious disagreement was between the NC and UML who over who should formally authenticate the new constitution with the NC insisting that it is President Ram Baran Yadav’s job, while the UML wanted its very own House Chair Subhas Nembang to do it. It is hard to believe that was such an intractable problem that it needed weeks and weeks to resolve. The committee finally decided to send the matter ‘upstairs’ for a political resolution and announced on Wednesday to allow the chair to certify the constitution, while the president will make a public announcement in this regard.

The stalemate in the rules drafting committee also concerned whether or not cross-party caucuses can be formed and if party whips should take effect during CA debates. As expected the parties were divided according to perceived advantage certain rules would give them. The disadvantage over the formation of caucuses of women, Dalit or Janajati members is slightly less whimsical. Here, the NC and UML were on the same side and it was the UCPN (Maniat)’s move to undermine the Protection of Democracy. But three weeks after being sworn in and one foreign junket later, the man is being defied by dissidents within his own party and openly disparaged by the UML and the opposition.

After the rules committee delay, the next hurdle is the nomination of the remaining 26 members to complement the technical expertise needed in the CA to write a proper democratic constitution. Because the parties are in the habit of buying and selling CA membership, this is expected to delay things further.

It’s time the prime minister showed statesmanship, hitched the horse to the front of the cart, and started cracking the whip.

When they should be busy drafting a constitution, honourable members spend weeks haggling over who should take credit for promulgating it.
Missing the point

When it is possible to circumvent the democratic process and still enjoy political power why would anyone want to be accountable?

O ur leaders wasted three months just to form a government and spend most of that time bargaining for the home ministry. They were stuck for three weeks over a superfluous debate on who should promulgate the constitution.

We see a familiar pattern emerging. As always, the leadership of this country is more concerned with political score-keeping and the immediate goals of sticking to power than anything else.

Never mind that we are at a critical point of nation-building that requires a great deal of commitment, long-term vision, and self-effacement on part of key political stakeholders. Perhaps all that is too much to expect from a political community whose survival has always depended more on appealing to the interests of external forces than any popular endorsement from the inside.

While the political parties are busy at their games, a vibrant media about why ‘development’ debate is raging in the national political space of the moment, this is where we have to start.

The only good thing about living in challenging times is perhaps everyone can play a role in making great changes. This generation may feel burdened with the legacy of problems it has inherited, but we also stand at a unique position to contribute in the process of nation-building, define the basis of statehood, and while doing so avoid the mistakes that others have committed. In the closed political space of the moment, there is not a lot we can do, but we can start by asking the right questions and picking the right fights.

democracy to automatically usher in development and good governance, forgetting that democracy is not an irreversible process and is prone to rollbacks and failures if not nurtured and strengthened from within. Of course the war did not help, but we might have avoided a lot of problems if some questions were settled in the crucial first few years after 1990.

A major source of instability is that even now we are not reconciled with some fundamental questions about how the country should be run and what political and economic systems are acceptable. Some political parties still see liberal democracy as a bourgeois conspiracy and consider state-capture as their ultimate goal. There are forces that promise to deliver development and stability in return for giving up democratic freedoms. Are we okay with the use of violence to attain political goals however grandiose or benevolent they may be?

Consolidated and functional democracies have often been violated by those claiming to be benevolent. As always, the politicians who should promulgate the constitution are we so used to the idea of India micro-managing our affairs that it is not an issue anymore. There is absolutely no debate about what our foreign policy should be in the changed times. We are so engrossed in the humdrum of day-to-day politics and in the daily struggle to meet our basic needs these questions don’t occur to us anymore. For a nation writing its constitution, we don’t display the level of enthusiasm or ambition to discuss larger issues that will determine the socio-political and economic direction of the country. If we need long-term resolutions of problems plaguing us, this is where we have to start.

Perhaps all that is too much to expect from a political community whose survival has always depended more on appealing to the interests of external forces than any popular endorsement from the inside. This discussion may be several decades too late, but it is a good sign nonetheless. A lot of us simply expected it is a good sign nonetheless. a lot of us simply expected it is a good sign nonetheless. what should be a workable model for us.

Still, we are not reconciled with some questions and picking the right fights.
It will come as a big shock to many Indians to learn that they are the world’s number one in the most important global competition in the world: the competition in economic performance. In the United States, their per capita income now ranks as the highest of any ethnic group: in 2010, Indians earned $37,931 annually, compared to a national average of $26,708.

If India’s population of 1.2 billion could achieve only half of the per capita income of Indian immigrants in the United States, the country’s GDP today would be $24.65 trillion instead of a relatively trifling $1.85 trillion, less than Italy’s. India’s performance in the US arena is not exceptional though. Wherever they go, they have done well.

However, the gap between India’s potential and its actual performance is huge, perhaps the biggest of any country in the world. Sadly, few Indian leaders or policymakers seem to have understood the meaning of this comprehensive global data on the economic competitive abilities of Indians. If they did, India would become the top champion of more rapid globalisation. Instead, even though the evidence shows that Indians could benefit from globalisation’s acceleration, the government continues to put its foot on the brakes whenever globalisation is discussed. To reverse this disastrous pattern of self-destructive behaviour, Indian society should immediately embrace three new attitudes.

Firstly, it should completely change its mindset about the competitiveness of the Indian economy. Instead of seeing it as a weak and defenseless economy about to be ravaged by global competition if trade and other barriers are reduced, it should work on the assumption that Indians in India, like Indians outside, will thrive when faced with open global competition.

Secondly, India should make greater use of one of its richest natural resources: the successful Indian diaspora. The appointment of Raghuram Rajan as the governor of the Reserve Bank of India was a brilliant move. He exudes cultural confidence. This was the man who bravely stood up to all the heavyweight American economic gurus and told them that a major global crisis was about to unfold.

Thirdly, India’s business barons need to drop their ambivalence towards globalisation. This hesitancy is understandable. On the one hand, they realise that they are globally competitive. Many Indian firms have succeeded globally, including Tata, Wipro, and Infosys. On the other hand, they are reluctant to push the Indian government to say “yes” to WTO negotiations because they don’t want to give up their privileged access to the fast growing Indian consumer market. They see no reason why they should share this huge market with others.

In adopting this ambivalent attitude, India’s business barons are sacrificing both their own and India’s long-term interests in return for some short-term profits.

The big question remains: can Indian companies become as culturally confident as Indians in America in competing on a globally level playing field? If so, they would become the new champions of globalisation that our world desperately needs.

Yes Indians can understand the meaning of this comprehensive global data on the economic competitive abilities of Indians. If they did, India would become the top champion of more rapid globalisation. Instead, even though the evidence shows that Indians could benefit from globalisation’s acceleration, the government continues to put its foot on the brakes whenever globalisation is discussed. To reverse this disastrous pattern of self-destructive behaviour, Indian society should immediately embrace three new attitudes.

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One of the first ministers to be inducted into Sushil Koirala’s cabinet, Ram Sharan Mahat has emphasised the need to get the country’s economy on track by exploring potential in manufacturing, hydropower, agriculture, and tourism. Nepal TImes caught up with the finance minister to talk about the new government’s top economic agenda.

Nepali Times: How does it feel returning as finance minister after six years?
Ram Sharan Mahat: This is my fifth stint at the Finance Ministry and I feel like I am back home. I am well aware of the challenges and responsibility that lie ahead. Nepal’s rulers have neglected the economy for far too long and as a result, the economy is tottering precariously. We need to inject new life into it. Despite these shortcomings, we are performing well on several financial indicators largely because of foreign remittance. For instance inflation is under control and tax revenues are satisfactory. However, investment in the manufacturing sector remains dismal. Manufacturing makes up only six per cent of the national GDP, down from 10 per cent. The development of hydropower projects and transmission lines has been painfully slow and we are still living in darkness.

What are your top priorities?
My first priority is to pass ordinances in the parliament related to finance. The reforms that happened in the 1990s need to be updated. The administration needs to be more efficient and achieve the targets it has set out for itself so that people there is good governance in the country.

How will the new government ensure development and good governance?
The newly elected government is sending out a positive message to investors that all stakeholders are serious about growth. Just last month, Kathmandu hosted two high-profile conferences: one on Business Ethics for a Prosperous Nepal and the other a hydropower summit, which was attended by high level government and private sector officials from various countries, representatives of Asian Development Bank, and prospective investors. If we can maintain political stability in the country, deliver on our commitments in time, and trim down on bureaucratic red tape, large investments will soon start to pour in.

How much importance is the government putting on hydropower?
Our priority is to complete all the projects and programs that lay stagnant. And it is not just hydro, agriculture also has immense potential. If the villages are well connected with roads, irrigation network, and electricity, agriculture in Nepal will undergo a major revolution. Tourism is equally important for the economy, but we need an international airport at Nijgadh and link it with the fast track. Many finance related bills are still stuck in parliament. We just cannot complain about the lack of investment when laws are not being formulated.

Where do local elections stand on the priority list?
Local elections are a national agenda and all political parties are committed to it. Polls are imperative to guarantee financial transparency and accountability at the local level.

How will Nepal progress from a least developing to a developing country when the economic growth has stalled at below 4 per cent in the last decade?
The reason Nepal’s financial system is floundering in uncertainty is because we failed to focus on our economy. If we are willing to shift our focus, then economic expansion is possible in Nepal. Politically driven policies that don’t yield returns need to be discarded from the budget.

How can the government curb criminal activities that currently plague the transportation and medical industry and well as the private sector?
These problems are a result of the lack of rule of law and a weak government. The state needs to reassert its authority to ensure the success of liberal economic system. I am committed to making the tax department more efficient and punishing those who evade taxes.

What about reforms within public institutions that are a burden to the state?
We are planning to invite the private sector in our efforts to manage the now defunct public institutions. We paid millions of rupees to the employees of the Janakpur Cigarette Factory after it was shut. We want to initiate steps to restart Nepal Metal Company, Magnesite, Butwal Threads, Nepal Medicine Limited among others. Instead of being run by the state, these institutions need to function on a public-private partnership model.
The last two westerly fronts that swept through Nepal have now rid themselves of most of their moisture. Which means that in the coming weeks we will get more clouds, but no rain. Expect partly cloudy skies with snow in the mountains of western Nepal. Kathmandu Valley will continue to be plagued by smoggy mornings and minimum temperatures will still stay in the double digits.

KATHMANDU

The festival of colours is back, but the lolas can wait for a long time, the full moon day in the month of Fagun has been celebrated as the victory of good over evil, the beginning of spring, and a celebration of life. The Hindu scriptures, the Puranas, say that Holika, a legendary demoness, was burnt to death on this day. Although she had this nifty power of being resistant to fire, she was burnt to death when she leapt into a pyre with Prahlad, her (pious) nephew who refused to accept his father Hiranyakashyapa as the most powerful creature on earth.

Other legends have the young Krishna playing pranks on Radha and her friends in the forests of Vrindaban during this season; clearly the inspiration of wannabe Krishnas today, who see sexual harassment as justified by religion.

In Northern India, Holi fires are lit on the eve of the festival. In Nepal, the chir pole is put up in Basantapur Darbar Square a week before Holi to be burnt symbolically. However, Fagu Purnima isn’t just about ushering spring, it commemorates a good harvest and the colours and water symbolise rebirth and rejuvenation.

Here is a look at similar spring celebrations around the world where families and communities come together to cherish new beginnings:

AYO Holi!
The festival of colours is back, but the lolas can wait.

THINGYAN, BURMA

Thingyan or the water festival marks the Burmese New Year and is usually celebrated over four days. Historically, the date for Thingyan was calculated following the traditional Burmese calendar, but today it is based on the Gregorian calendar. Water cannons and hoses fill the streets of Rangoon, the capital, during the festival. Thingyan celebration is similar to Songkran in Thailand, Pi Mao Lo in Laos, and Chaul Chnam Thmey in Cambodia.

NOWRUZ, IRAN

Nowruz, which means ‘new day’ in Persian, marks the Iranian New Year. With its roots in Zoroastrianism, the festival is celebrated across Central Asia and in parts of Syria, north-western China, and Albania and marks the first day of spring. Celebrations include a traditional spring cleaning and the Wednesday Sari, the festival of fire in which participants jump over bonfires to symbolise the triumph of light (the good) over darkness (the bad).

AU NATUREL

If your idea of fun on Fagu Purnima is smearing everyone in sight with colour and hitting them with those lethal water balloons, think again. Lab tests on two of the most common colours, abir (red and yellow) reveal high percentages of toxic heavy metals like chromium, cadmium, lead, nickel, and even traces of mercury. Some of these can leave permanent harmful traces in the body if inhaled or ingested, others cause skin irritation and eye infections. Try out these DIY tricks and keep your skin and eyes happy and healthy.

Make a paste from these ingredients and mix them with gram flour (besan) for volume:

- For yellow – marigold, chrysanthemums, turmeric powder
- For red – rose, hibiscus, tomato, beetroot
- For green – henna, spinach, dried leaves of Royal Poinciana (gulmohar)
- For brown - boiled tea leaves

HOLLA MOHALLA, PUNJAB (INDIA)

One day after the Hindu festival of Holi, another big spring celebration takes place across the northwestern state of Punjab: Holla Mohalla. During this three-day Sikh festival, people showcase their martial art skills in mock fights and the art of fire breathing. The festival is also a time when followers reaffirm their devotion to Khalsa Panth (the worldwide community of Sikhs).

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- For brown - boiled tea leaves
Karmic Vibes, get great discounts on drinks and products, with live jazz music, pizza feast, and a kids’ corner. 15 March, 12 to 5pm, Motah, Jhamiskhel

Haat bazar, a chance to buy from, sell to, and meet everyone in the agro-industry. Runs till 15 March, 11am to 7pm, Nepal Art Council

Howzwat!, four days of insane cricketing. 14 to 25 March, 21 to 22 March, Riverside Springs Resort, Kunutar

Open house, Docskool will hold the second Nepal Cine Symposium later in 2014, and invite you to a series of discussions, presentations, installations, and interaction with everyone of substance in the emerging Nepali film industry. Runs till 27 March, Teko

Film Lab, learn film history, storytelling, scriptwriting, cinematography, editing, project handling and network with professionals. 12 April to 15 May, register at (01)4251335

CRAFTED IN NEPAL, attend the 6th Handicraft Buyer Seller Meet 2014, and meet the artists who make them. 21 to 25 March, toll program on 22 March, 10am to 5pm, Patan Museum, Patan

STARRY NIGHT BBQ, dine fine with Ciney Gurung singing for you. Rs 1,499, every Friday, 7pm onwards, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri La, (01)4412999

Délécis de France, taste a piece of France in the heart of Kathmandu. Thamel

Falcha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab. /hamiskhel, Lalitpur

Le Sherpa, past the downtown chaos on the road outside is culinary paradise. Panipokhari, Lajimpat

Waterfront Resort, head to this eco-friendly resort to make your stay right in front of Phewa Lake. Sedi Height, Pokhara, (861)463427, sales@waterfronthotelnepal.com

Bariha Jungle Lodge, the first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Park, spa, boutique guest room, individual and two in one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool. Andrahul, West Chitwan, www.barajunglelodge.com
**HOLI DAY**
The festival of colours and water balloons is upon you, celebrate it with friends at these events

**WOMEN MONTH**
Martin Chautari brings you women-themed discussions throughout March:

- **18 MARCH**, former police SP Parbat Thapa and former army brigadier general Lalita Joshi talk on challenges to women in the state’s security apparatus. 3pm
- **20 MARCH**, Laxmi Ghalan, Durgha Thapa, and Manjila Chaudhari talk on sexual minorities in the ongoing social change. 3pm
- **23 MARCH**, Seika Sato, PhD, talks about challenges faced by women outside their home in gender exclusionary places in Kathmandu. 3pm

Martin Chautari, Thapthali, (01)4238050, chautari@mos.com.np

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**ROCK, RIDE, RUN**
Join professional and amateur outdoor athletes from Nepal and around the world to hit the mountains. Run, climb, or bike through trails, rocks and downhill slopes.

If that isn't enough, you can take part in dyno competitions, slacklines, ice-axe pull-ups, flying fox, mini zip-line, rappelling, mud run, and an auto expo. Plenty of music, food, and booze to keep you busy as well as gear and cycle stalls to tease your restraint.

Himalayan outdoor festival 21 March, Hattiban Resort, Pharping

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**On the terraces**
The ongoing Climage+Change exhibition brings exciting programmes this week:

- **14 March**, Haat bazar talks, experts, entrepreneurs, and students will present on farming practices. 3 to 5pm
- **15 March**, children will learn from artist Sunita Maharjan on how to create fish from recycled material and install them in aquariums and rivers created by Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung. 12 to 2pm
- **20 March**, screening of Erin Brockovich, a 2000 biographical film by Steven Soderbergh, on the real-life Brockovich who fought against the energy corporation Pacific Gas and Electric Company. 5.30 to 7pm

Climate+Change Runs till 21 April, closed on Tuesdays, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal 9845513933, nocha@photicircle.com.np

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**Tomatinca, celebrate Holi with tomatoes instead of water balloons, rain dance, food festival, live music, matka breaking, and plenty more stuff:**

- **16 March**, Swimming Pool Complex, Sattalbasa, 98608983 98324373, 98523800
- M&H Holi party, soccer splash, colorful foods, and two separate music stages.
- **15 March**, Imperial Court, Sanepa Rang, party with DJ Drawcan and MC Essence on Holi.
- **3 to 5pm**

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**HIMALAYAN OUTDOOR FESTIVAL**

- **21 March**, Hattiban Resort, Pharping
- **3 to 5pm**

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**M&S HOLI PARTY**
- **16 March**, Swimming Pool Complex, Satdobato, 9843008833, 9851146713, 9841186840
- **Rs 500**, **16 March**, **6pm onwards**, Embassy Restaurant

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**Tomatina**
- **16 March**, Swimming Pool Complex, Satdobato, 9843008833, 9851146713, 9841186840
- **5.30 to 7pm**
- **Climate+Change** Runs till 11 April, closed on Tuesdays, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal 9845513933, nocha@photicircle.com.np

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**WOMEN’S MONTH**
The festival of colours and water balloons is upon you, celebrate it with friends at these events
THE VILLAGE CAFÉ
Home-cooked Newari goodness
With its home-made quality food and affordable prices, The Village Café is an ideal place for lunch and dinner. Started by Sabah Nepal, SAAAC Administration Business Association of Home Based Workers, the café employs around 30 women. The women use their indigenous culinary knowledge to whip up tasty Newari dishes seven days a week. Besides Newari favourites ala Bara, Choyela, you have to try their thin-skinned momos and boy, they’re good. Drenched in a large, piping hot bowl of achaar (tomato sauce), the thin-skinned momos remind us once again why this simple dish is a national staple.

**Best dish:** Chhewa Yamari  
Meal for one: Rs 35

**Best dish:** Shig Mitta  
Meal for one: Rs 400

**Best dish:** Jhol Momo  
Meal for one: Rs 400

Towards the near end of Jhamshikhor’s Restaurant Lane, opposite to New Orleans and next to Singma Food Court.

JAPANESE NOODLE K
With love from Japan
Japanese Noodle Kitchen may not of places: at the Dhobighat stretch cafe, dust and debris. But its neighbourhood not known for high offers a fresh, fast, uncomplicated, and affordable price. The focus, as whether in ‘dry’, curried dishes, or bowls of broth. All noodles come with condiments (powdered and pickled) spices up a little.

**Best dish:** Chicken Curry noodles  
Meal for one: 400

Coming from Jaisalgarh, turn right and you’ll find Japanese Noodle K Grill and Quality Food Café.

LE TRIO RESTAURANT AND BAR
The experience of eating momos in a Parisian café
Le Trio is one of the inexpensive places to eat in an otherwise expensive street. The vintage-esque posters that line the walls, silver gilt-edged clock, and rustic wooden tables all give the impression that you’ve stepped out of noisy Kathmandu into a 1960s Parisian café but the menu is very much local in its taste. The restaurant is known for serving the best jhol momos and boy, they’re good. Drenched in a large, piping hot bowl of achaar (tomato sauce), the thinly skinned momos remind us once again why this simple dish is a national staple.

**Best dish:** Jhol Momo  
Meal for one: Rs 400

Towards the near end of Jhamshikhor’s Restaurant Lane, opposite to Singma Food Court.

KOREAN KITCHEN PICNIC
Japanese style lunchboxes with Korean flavour
Among the Korean options in Thamel, Korean Kitchen Picnic is the cheapest but least Korean. No tableting or per kalbi cooking action in either one of its oddly separated dining areas; no spicy, pickled napa cabbage (a standard kimchi) so essential to Korean cuisine. Instead this decade-old establishment once run by Korean expats, offers an extensive catalog of traditional Korean intermixed by Korean expats, offers an extensive

**Best dish:** Pork BBQ
Meal for one: Rs 500

Off a tangent on the northern side of Tridevi Marg opposite the taxis train, closed every 25th of the month.

NEW DISH
No pampering service but the best momos
Few Dish (ND) has the most basic décor. It serves no tea or coffee, and lingering long after one’s meal is frowned upon. Also, there are only 14 tables and there is always a rush. It’s not the most conducive environment to have a heart-to-heart but you don’t go to ND for long conversations. You go there to eat, eat good food quickly and leave. With just about twenty items, your choice is limited: soup, momos, fried rice, noodles, a few well-loved Nepali snacks and not much else. But momos are what ND is famous for and what great momos they are.

**Best dish:** Pork Momo
Meal for one: Rs 150

In New Road, enter the road leading to Kichapokhari and look out for a little Shiva Linga. In front of it is a little dark entrance, the shops surrounding it sell musical instruments and cheap lingerie. Enter, walk up the flight of stairs and you are there.

CAFÉ HESSED
Stop your calorie count once you enter
For those accustomed to our chiya pasal ko doughnuts, Hessed is a revelation. Take your pick from rows upon rows of doughnuts glazed with dark and white chocolate (with multi-coloured sprinkles), doughnuts armed with choco-chips, strawberry jam-filled doughnuts, and more. Prices are reasonable too, at Rs 60-70 per piece, compared to other ‘fancy’ coffee shops about town. Most of what’s at Hessed is consistently good rather than exceptional, which probably suits cupcakes and doughnuts just fine. Along with the sugar-filled goodies, the café also whips up intriguing drinks from green tea lattes to more safe choices. Hessed is ideal for coffee dates, or simply to bring your laptop and work without the distraction of restobar tastes in music.

**Best dish:** Blueberry filled doughnuts
Meal for one: 300

Towards the near end of Jhamel’s Restaurant Lane, on the right before New Orleans, 5530993

YAK RESTAURANT
Dusty and grimy tables offering the best Chinese
At Rs 20 a pop for a bowl of rice and Rs 10 for a tingmo, a visit to Yak may feel like travelling back in time. This tiny hole in the wall serves the best Chinese food to be had this side of the border at the most reasonable prices. A good old plate of mala tofu costs Rs 130, the chicken with fungus Rs 240, fried white fish Rs 170 and chicken fried rice Rs 120. No chop suey drowning in tomato ketchup or chili this and that which make up most menus at so-called ‘Chinese’ restaurants. Go in only if you are ready to overlook the dirt and grime for the pleasure of digging into bowls of gustromatic delights.

**Best dish:** Spicy pork
Meal for one: Rs 400

Walk clockwise around the Bouddhanath Stupa until you see an alley beside a huge gumba. Walk through the alley pass the street-side shops until you see Yak Restaurant on your right.
**THAKKOLA THAKALI CUISINE**
Fill your belly with the best Thakali in town. Situated at the end of the cluster of up-market restaurants in Jhamsikhel, Thakkola Thakali Cuisine (TTC) has carved a niche among scores of other eateries offering Chinese, Indian, and continental varieties. TTC skips the MSG-enhanced fare dished out by many and specialises in Nepali food of the Thakali kind. Both squat-down and table-chair seating options are available. Start with Aalu Anda Timmur (eggs and potato fried in Schezwan pepper), sukuti fry with tinnru ko chop (deep fried, dried mutton served with Schezwan pepper powder), and then move on to the choice dish: the rice set. Don’t forget to try a glass of chhyang, the fresh rice brew here is thicker than usual, a scent of cardamom and there a hint of cinnamon.

**Best dish: Dibdo set**
*Meal for one: Rs 400*
Turn right from the fire brigade bus stop in Pulchok and head towards Dibdibhat. Turn left at the second four way crossroad and TTC is on the other side of the road.

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**HONACHA**
Aila and choyela go hand in hand If you’ve ever set on a quest to find the best Newari food in town, you’ll have surely heard of Honacha. This Newari bhatti situated right behind the majestic edifice of Krishna Mandir in the heart of Patan Durbar Square has been serving the hungry and the thirsty for decades. The menu has remained the same and so has the setting. A full meal with cold drinks for four sets your wallet back by a mere Rs 500. If you want to breathe in the multiple flavours of the common men and women of the country, there is no better place than Honacha. But if you are one of the delicate ones, take home some bars, switch on your favourite channel, and enjoy them with aperitifs in the comfort of your home.

**Best dish: Keema Bara**
*Meal for one: Rs 200*
Honacha is located right behind Krishna Mandir at Patan Durbar Square.

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**CHIKUSA CAFE**
A lot goes down at the back of the cafe The former Japanese cafe, established in 1998, specialises in ‘real coffee’, breakfast items and pressed sandwiches—all made to order behind a narrow, diner-like bar straight out of an Edward Hopper painting. Bottles of American maple syrup and extra-large “Super Dad” mugs that line the shelves yield a homespun charm. Every plate, prepared in plain sight, is just plain good. No green eggs and ham, the ham and eggs (as you like it) are a savory side that compliments any of the sweet, back-menu treats, including crepes, waffles and real flapjack pancakes topped with sliced bananas and syrup. The only drawback is that substitutes can’t be made for items in the fixed breakfast sets (Chikusa and English), and sides like baked beans and sausages can’t be ordered separately.

**Best dish: Banana Pancakes**
*Meal for one 400*
Jog south from the Moroccan Consulate in Thamel and look for “Real Coffee!” under the Lhasa Guesthouse.

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**NOYOZ**
*Taste from the east*
This tiny little joint in Bharatpur serves momos, aludum, meat and more meat, and they all taste like your mother’s home-cooked dishes. Originally from Dharnar, Barsha Limbo, the proprietor and chef, learned cooking from her mother, grandmother, and her many aunts and they tried to emulate their style in her own kitchen by serving up nutritious, hearty, and wholesome meals with a special astern touch. Sargemba (Rs 150), the Limbo version of blood sausage is truly delicious so is their Dharane style pork momos (Rs 95). In a relatively short time, Noyoz has become extremely popular among nomadic writers, artists, and musicians from east Nepal and it has taken on the air of an ‘intellectual adda’. They congregate here to talk about all things Nepal while eating bona fide *purvul* meals, just like back home.

**Best dish: Abudum with roti (Rs 100)**
*Meal for one: Rs 300*
Noyoz is smack opposite the Chinese Embassy’s gate in Bharatpur.

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**SANDWICH POINT**
*Skim small, opt for extra-large at this sandwich bar* If you’re in the mood for something adventurous, you can opt for the ostrich grilled burger (330 Rs). Besides fast-food, Crazy Ford is also well-known for its western dishes like pastas, milkshakes and pizzas.

**Best dish:** Fish Burger
*Meal for one: Rs 200 *
From Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel, walk straight, when you reach a curve look on your right.

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**ALMAYA FRIED HOUSE**
18 minutes of wait equals to half an hour of deep fried pleasure Move over KFC, Almaya Fried House is here to claim its rightful place as the choice fried chicken joint in Kathmandu. At Almaya’s fried chickens are served in kilos. A kg (Rs 760) is enough to feed a hungry group of three and served piping hot with a delectable tangy sauce. Besides this southern comfort, this hidden gem also offers more exotic Néwari offerings like fried tongue, liver, and lungs. So dig into oily goodness.

**Best dish:** Fried Spicy Chicken
1 kg Chicken Spicy Rs 700
From the Gongkoi Bazz Stop at Ring Road, head north-west for about 300m. Almaya Fried House is located after the second junction.

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**CRAZY BURGER**
Juicy, meaty, filling burgers
Crazy Burger is one of those places that offers pretty decent fare at affordable prices. We satisfied our burger cravings with the fish burger (Rs 185). Though sliced a little too thinly, the fried fish fillet packs a punch. Enveloping the fish is chewy and warm bread. Altogether, the burger feels like a healthy choice, and the portion is just enough to fill your tummy. Its other burgers sound equally promising, like its chicken tikka, big ham, and spicy chicken burger. If you’re in the mood for something adventurous, you can opt for the ostrich grilled burger (330 Rs). Besides fast-food, Crazy Ford is also well-known for its western dishes like pastas, milkshakes and pizzas.

**Best dish:** Fish Burger
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**THE CHIPS FACTORY**
Fresh, fried, homemade chips
Serving over 15 different flavours, ranging from the conventional (tomato, chilli, cheese) to the exotic (pineapple, banana, mango) this no-name chips shop at Pimbahal, Patan is a well-kept local secret. The chips made at the owner’s house are fresh and crunchy to the bite. The friendly owner even lets you mix the different flavours at no extra cost. Rs 100 gets you a bag of chips that is enough to be shared by four people. Next time you throw a party, you know where to get a bag or four.

**Best chips:** Tomato flavour Chips
*One bag starts from Rs 20*
The epicly strange and oddly beautiful Tilda Swinton and the chiseled, Byronically good looking Tom Hiddleston are perfectly cast in Jim Jarmusch’s latest indie concoction Only Lovers Left Alive. The love story portrays the relationship between Adam (Hiddleston) and Eve (Swinton), two millennia old vampires who drift world wearily through their existence with languid elegance, anchored only by their fortuitous connection (call it love if you will) with each other.

This addition to the now ubiquitous canon of vampire lore is an entirely different animal from Twilight or any of the other teen romance nonsense though. If anything, Jarmusch, a deeply erudite, highly experimental filmmaker is more interested in the premise of love evolving over eons and battling the ennui of living forever – hence the handy trick of having his two protagonists be blood drinking beings with attractively pointy teeth.

Hiddleston’s tortured Adam lives in a romantically desolate and beaten up Detroit, surrounded by cassettes of his music, his antique guitars, and a reliable source of pure O negative from the local corrupt doctor. Disgusted by humanity (whom he rather meanly calls ‘zombies’) Hiddleston asks his local fixer Ian (the always endearing Anton Yelchin) to find him a wooden bullet – using the subterfuge of a potential art project to hide his recurring suicidal thoughts.

Luckily, Eve reaches out to him just in time from her abode in Tangier. Realising that all is not well with her immortal beloved, she flies through the night to be with him in his desolation, cheering him up with her ethereal beauty and her graceful acceptance of what they are.

Watching these two lovers together is one of the great pleasures of this very particular film, which seems – once it has ended – more of a wish fulfillment on the part of Jarmusch (albeit a sublimely gorgeous one) than a proper film as convention would have it. That being said, most of Jarmusch’s films are similarly meandering in their whimsy, sometimes almost incomprehensible in terms of dialogue and always filled with the most eclectic and marvelous music. In that particular way this brilliantly atmospheric film is no different – taking us out of our rather banal ordinary lives and into the richness of a cinematic world where Christopher (Kit) Marlowe (played by the wonderful John Hurt) is a vampire too, living in Tangier, writing prose that surpasses Shakespeare and stroking Tilda Swinton’s Blonde mane as he talks to her about arcane philosophy.

There is a story of sorts in Only Lovers Left Alive – but the real reason to watch this film is to immerse oneself in a world alive with romance and possibility, where beautiful age old beings drift about dancing to rock music, with their sunglasses on as they reminisce about Tesla, Einstein and Schubert. Does this sound insufferably arty to you? It isn’t, mainly because of the brilliant casting and Jarmusch’s unerring sensibility.

Under CONTROL: Fire fighters try to douse the fire that erupted in a squatter settlement at Shimanagyal on Sunday.

Nepalis take part in Women In Concert to celebrate International Women’s Day at Lainchaur on Saturday.
A forgotten genocide

In his new book, The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide, Gary J. Bass, recounts an incident where former secretary of state Henry Kissinger is correcting US President Richard Nixon as he repeatedly refers to the then East Pakistani leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Mujo, not Mujib. Many Nepalis may find this anecdote hilarious if not for the deadly atrocities that were being committed in present-day Bangladesh with tacit approval of two of the most powerful men.

While the Watergate revelations have caught the global public’s imagination for decades, Nixon and Kissinger’s support of West Pakistan’s military dictatorship in East Pakistan and subsequent brutalities are not as well-known. Bass effectively mines the heretofore-unexploited portions of the Oval Office tapes that Nixon secretly recorded in 1971, to divulge the dirty secrets of Bangladesh’s liberation war.

Nixon and Kissinger were told in no uncertain terms by their diplomats (chiefly Archer Blood in Dhaka, hence the title Blood Telegram) that they would go on to pen the tragedy in South Asia in the several books that they would go on to pen.

The Blood Telegram is that rarity apparently blander than Bosnian, about 10 million refugees poured into the Indian state of West Bengal. The Indian government was at its wits end trying to control the unfolding calamity. Much to India’s credit, it did not close its borders to the Bengali Hindus who were fleeing their own country from the murderous Pakistani soldiers. Finally with the intervention of the Indian army and the Bangladesh liberation fighters (at times the latter group sought their own cruel justice), Dhaka fell in the winter of 1971 and a new country was born.

What comes across very strongly and again in The Blood Telegram is that Nixon and Kissinger were driven to do what they did not just by Cold War realpolitik, but a bitter personal dislike for Indira Gandhi and India. And not unsurprisingly both men gloss over this important ‘game-changing’ tragedy in South Asia in the several books.

The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide
By Gary J. Bass
Knopf 2013
Price $30 (hardcover)
528 pages

I had been waiting with bated breath for Indian restaurant chain, Hyderabad House, to open right next doors in Tangal. An ardent lover of hyrani, just the signboard announcing ‘opening soon’ had been tantalising me for months. Adding to my anticipation was the fact that this restaurant chain has been around since 1975 and has franchises around the world, and now finally was opening an outlet in Kathmandu. I walked in with high expectations, only to have the page prove true - expect in haste only to repent in leisure (or words to that effect).

Though the entrance is unobtrusive, the owners have tried to imbibe the restaurant with some old-world charm by hanging pictures of the Nizams of faded sepia prints of Hyderabad, in its days of yore, on the walls of the staircase leading to the main dining area. But the décor is mostly nondescript and comes right out the cookie-cutter mould of most Indian restaurants, along with the de rigueur maroon upholstered chairs.

The menu is impressive to say the least with offerings of goshts and laghums and halamehs; melt-in-the-mouth delicacies that promise a legacy of delicious meat marinated in exotic spices and slow cooked over a hot tandoor. And that in a nutshell is the problem with romanticism; for reality always pales in comparison.

The chicken 65 (Rs 373) that the waiter assured us was their speciality starter was nothing more than chicken chilli with curry leaves a strange amalgamation of two divergent cuisines that didn’t really gel well. While the meat on its own without the dousing of masala would have been passable, the combination just makes for a strange combination. The mutton seekh kebab (Rs 352) didn’t fare much better being dry and just generally lackluster.

The description on the menu sold us on the gosht dumphu bharani (Rs 688), is described as a traditional bharani with choice tender pieces of mutton with basmati rice and a ‘potpourri of traditional Hyderabadi spices’. What was served to us was cold and oily and not particularly tasty. The accompanying ratha and the mircchi ka salan were tastier than what for this restaurant is its signature dish.

The saving grace of our meal was the roomali roti (Rs 51 per piece) and the talabha pudding, a good old panner curry. We ended our meal with the double ka meetha (Rs 160) - a sticky sweet bread pudding with what tasted like gujar ka halwa.

After the meal that we’d had, the dessert was a letdown and after all we were expecting. Or maybe we had just decided to be extremely forgiving by this point.

When new restaurants, offering a specific cuisine not available at every other place in Kathmandu, open up, my initial reaction is glee, only to be let down on sampling their fares. And that is the problem with Hyderabad House. It’s a crying shame, for Kathmandu needs a really good Indian restaurant that is not ensconced in a five star hotel.

How to get there: Hyderabad House is opposite Bhatbhateni Supermarket in Tangal, in the same building as Anmol Sweets.

Great Food Deserves Carlsberg
That calls for a Carlsberg

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Imagine you are a mountain guide on an Everest expedition and are attacked by a client with an ice axe at 7,000m. If this were a dream you would wake up in cold sweat. Yet in almost every season, an encounter of this nature is not uncommon in the high Himalayas.

As mountaineers ascend tall peaks, altitude sickness especially in its life-threatening forms like high altitude cerebral edema (HACE) and high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) can affect climbers. Excessive brain swelling at altitude or HACE may lead to psychosis, violent behaviour, and eventual death due to cold exposure or accidental falls.

The Himalayan range, which includes 14 peaks above 8,000m, is unique in that it begins where the European Alps reach the highest point (about 4,000m). The Himalayan range in the world. For example, the probability of suffering from HACE at Mount Rainier (4,392m) in Washington State, USA is much lower than in the 8,000m Himalayan peaks.

Now that climbing season is almost here, it is relevant to discuss ways in which guides can help climbers at these very high altitudes. Nepali guides are well-trained in many aspects of mountain climbing, but knowledge about life-saving drugs is unfortunately amiss.

Acetazolamide (Diamox) is a familiar drug which prevents and treats acute mountain sickness, the harbinger of the more dangerous forms (HACE and HAPE) of altitude sickness. But another lesser-known drug, dexamethasone, can be far more useful in life-threatening situations.

Dexamethasone very effectively decreases swelling of the brain and treats symptoms like psychosis, which can potentially help the climber cooperate in his own rescue. Unlike drugs like penicillin, this corticosteroid (different from the kind that the infamous Tour de France cyclist Lance Armstrong consistently took to win), does not cause a deadly anaphylactic (allergic) reaction; in fact dexamethasone is used in the treatment of anaphylaxis.

Although mountain guides are not trained medics, perhaps an exception needs to be made because finding a doctor at 7,000m to administer dexamethasone is extremely unlikely. Besides, the risk-benefit analysis tilts clearly in favour of giving the drug: the medicine works within hours, has very little side-effects, and usually one dose is enough. Having a properly trained guide could, therefore, mean the difference between life and death for the climber.

But administering dexamethasone orally to a patient who is trying to kill you with an ice axe due to temporary derangement caused by high altitude hypoxia, might not be possible. It will need to be injected into the muscle or vein. The hardest part for the guide will, therefore, be to administer the injection to the sick climber.

Life-threatening illnesses at high altitudes are best prevented. But in reality, our mountain guides will be faced with these problems and will need the skills and knowledge to deal with them. Hence proper, conscientious training in administering this drug will help guides save the lives of intrepid climbers and go a long way in projecting Nepal as a safe and attractive destination for mountain climbing.

**Drop by drop**

The impending summer brings with it the constant need to keep hydrated and to help you beat the heat in style, Indian water purifier giants Kent has introduced four new water purifiers.

Maintaining its reputation of providing safe drinking water solutions at affordable prices, Kent sets a new bar with its gravity-based ‘Gold’ range: Plus, Optima, Cool, and Crystal.

The four water purifiers all function with the state-of-the-art UF (Ultra Filtration) technology at their core. UF technology is known to destroy close to 100 per cent of harmful micro-organisms such as bacteria and cysts from tap water, apart from other impurities like dust, sand, chlorine, etc without the need of any chemicals. Each Kent water purifier is equipped with a UF membrane, which in combination with fine nylon filters, effectively remove dust and sand particles as well as organic impurities and dissolved gases in water, ultimately resulting in colour-free, great tasting water. A UF membrane is capable of filtering up to 1,000 litres of water before it needs replacing.

The new models are neither electricity-dependant, nor do they use chemicals such as chlorine, bromine or iodine for purification, thereby making water extremely safe, healthy, and convenient for consumption. The quality and purity of water produced by the gravity-based purifiers are guaranteed to be clean and safe, as certified by the Gold Seal awarded by the Water Quality Association (WQA), USA, one of the most recognised certifications in the drinking water treatment industry.

Of the four water purifiers, Gold Plus (Rs 4,790) is a tabletop purifier that can hold up to 20 litres (20 litres of purified water), Gold Optima (Rs 3,990) is another tabletop purifier with a capacity of 15 litres (five litres of purified water), Gold Cool (Rs 6,690), with a capacity of 12 litres (nine litres of purified water), features a thermally-insulated designed, which keeps water chilled for more than eight hours, ideal for when the mercury crosses 30 degrees.

Kent’s Crystal water purifier can be placed directly on top of water dispensers, an ideal replacement for those cumbersome 20 litre jars. The crystal can hold up to 15 litres of purified water. All four purifiers are constructed of non-breakable food-grade plastic which ensures higher durability and long life. Kent’s Verdict: Reasonably priced, non-electric, chemical free, and easy to install, Kent’s range of gravity-based water purifiers are perfectly suited to the Nepali market for those long summer load-shedding hours when your AC-powered purifier is just an expensive paper-weight.
No political party, even in the world’s largest democracy, seems immune from the temptation to take cynical decisions to woo voters. India’s Congress-led government decided recently to include the powerful peasant caste of Jats in the category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) which is a list of socially and educationally disadvantaged groups and entitled for reservation in jobs and education.

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In Punjab state, Hindu and Sikh Jats are a prosperous and powerful social group and not exactly disadvantaged. The Congress-led UPA had not included Jats in Central list, but then the Akali Dal-BJP government in Punjab decided to include them paving the way for their eventual inclusion as a disadvantaged group at the Centre.

As in Nepal, where the second Constituent Assembly will have to grapple with the backlash of ‘higher’ caste Brahmins and Chhetris to declare themselves indigenous peoples, the decision threatens India’s affirmative action efforts. It mocks the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) which is responsible for including those excluded from the central reservation pool. The NCBC has persistently advised the government against including Jats in the Central OBC list, but the lame-duck UPA government did it anyway.

What is also worrying is the silence of other political parties at this brazen subversion of the reservation policy. There hasn’t been a squeak from the BJP, the Left, the regional parties, even the Aam Aadmi Party. But how could you have expected them to behave otherwise? India’s parliamentary elections are just a month away and nobody would want to anger the powerful Jats concentrated in contiguous pockets. Jats make up a quarter of the population of the northern Indian state of Haryana and drive its politics.

India’s mainstream media has largely preferred to ignore the story, demonstrating the bias of predominantly upper caste journalists, as their interests are not affected by the decision to extend reservation to Jats. Their children compete for jobs in the general pool, the Jats can only eat into the share of the more underprivileged classes.

Though the Jats have been agitating for an inordinately long period to be included in the Central OBC list, it can be argued that the UPA chose to override the advice of NCBC now only because of the political implications of the anti-Muslim Muzafarnagar riots.

The NCBC had earlier wanted to conduct a social survey to determine whether the Jats are indeed socially and educationally backward to be included in the Central OBC list. But the UPA cabinet decided: ‘NCBC be requested to reconsider its earlier decision of conducting a survey and tender its advice of inclusion of Jats in the Central list of OBCs based on the reports and material available.’

The Congress seems to have attributed its defeat in local assembly elections in December to the alienation of Jats and the Muzafarnagar communal riots pushed the Jats towards the BJP. More significantly, the Congress’ suggestion to the NCBC to ‘tender advice’ on the ‘reports and material available’ was the government’s method of mounting pressure on the NCBC to fall in line. Unfortunately for the Congress, the NCBC not only refused an OBC status for Jats, it issued a dire warning that if Jats are included they will corner all jobs and opportunities going to the excluded groups.

But this is precisely what the UPA government did last week, illustrating vividly how India’s reservation policy has become skewed. The very idea behind forming the NCBC was to conduct periodic social surveys to weed out from the reservation pool those castes which had been scientifically determined to have overcome backwardness. This was thought necessary in order to ensure the benefits of affirmative action accrue to the most backward classes. But India is going into reverse: including castes which are socially advanced. As Nepal charts out for itself a democratic future, it may as well look closely at India’s experience with the politics of identity and steer away from its pitfalls.

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A warm morning in March, the maternity ward Dhulikhel Hospital is abuzz with activity as doctors and nurses move from one room to another helping with deliveries and checking up on the newborns and their mothers. The hospital delivers around eight babies everyday and resident doctor Anjana Dangol is in charge of all cases.

Just hours ago she delivered a boy to Sangita Shrestha, 18, of Sindhupalchok. “First you take off the cap, wash your hands, apply the entire contents, wrap the baby with a shawl, and leave the cord to dry for around seven minutes,” instructs Gita Parajuli, an FHCV since seven years, to a group of new mothers at Ugratara, Kavre. When Parajuli had her first baby at 18, the ointment wasn’t available and her husband’s family did what they did – massage the baby with mustard oil. Now, except for some who still want to take care of their children in the old-fashioned way, most expecting parents ask volunteers for the ointment themselves.

Last month, USAID awarded the Nepali government with the pioneers prize for its exceptional support and leadership in the chlorhexidine cord care program. Inspired by our success, 11 other countries like Nigeria and Kenya are looking to promote chlorhexidine as a effective method of reducing neo-natal mortality. Nepal Nutritional Innovation Program Sarlafi found that cleansing the umbilical cord stump with a chlorhexidine solution would reduce neo-natal deaths by 23 per cent. Similarly, a pilot study undertaken between November 2008 and May 2009 in Banke by the Ministry of Health and Population, supported by USAID and JSI Research and Study Institute, found that families preferred using gel on their newborn whose texture shields their baby from infections.

Forty per cent of deaths occur because of infections. In 2005, a study conducted by the Nepal Nutritional Innovation Program Sarlafi found that cleansing the umbilical cord stump with a chlorhexidine solution would reduce neo-natal deaths by 23 per cent. Similarly, a pilot study undertaken between November 2008 and May 2009 in Banke by the Ministry of Health and Population, supported by USAID and JSI Research and Study Institute, found that families preferred using gel on their newborn whose texture shields their baby from infections.

Established in 1988, the 52,000 factory. The tube is available for Rs 18 of Navi Malam a day at its Gothatar factory. The tube is available for Rs 18 as part of the government’s National Safe Motherhood Program.

“We didn’t want our ‘intervention’ to seem out of place, so we stuck to a formula that locals were most comfortable with,” says Shanda L. Steiner, director of USAID’s Office of Health and Family Planning.

Since it was first introduced in 2011, ‘Navi Malam’ has been adopted in 41 out of Nepal’s 75 districts, thanks to the role played by Nepal’s Female Community Health Volunteers. Established in 1988, the 52,000 strong force has been instrumental in convincing new mothers and especially their families, that the ointment really shields their baby from infections.

An ointment applied on newborns’ navels could prevent one out of four neonatal deaths

Belly-Gazing

SUNIR PANDEY in KAVRE

One of the first things she did after cutting off his umbilical cord was to get a nurse to squeeze out a tube of Navi Malam and apply it on the stump. Navi Malam is a colourless, odourless gel that contains the disinfectant chlorhexidine. When applied correctly to a newborn baby’s umbilical cord stump, it binds to the skin and closes the open wound on the infant’s belly and repels water and other traditional ointment. “The easiest way to prevent infections is by keeping the naval area dry and untouched until the stump falls off,” explains Dangol. “But since most of our patients return home a day after delivery, we give them the cream.”

Almost 750,000 babies are born every year in Nepal and up to two thirds of all deliveries take place at home in the absence of skilled birth attendants. Four out of 10 newborns will have their cords treated in the customary manner – backed off with a hasiya and a mixture of turmeric, ash, and mustard oil applied on the remainder. Lack of healthcare services and superstitions surrounding child-rearing mean that Nepal has one of the worst neo-natal mortality rates in Asia (see chart).

Over the next two years, the government worked closely with Birth partners (USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Grand Challenges Canada, and the World Bank) and a local pharmaceutical company Lomus to develop such an ointment. Lomus now produces up to 10,000 tubes of Navi Malam a day at its Gothatar factory. The tube is available for Rs 18 as part of the government’s National Safe Motherhood Program.

“At first you take off the cap, wash your hands, apply the entire contents, wrap the baby with a shawl, and leave the cord to dry for around seven minutes,” instructs Gita Parajuli, an FCHV since seven years, to a group of new mothers at Ugratara, Kavre.

When Parajuli had her first baby at 18, the ointment wasn’t available and her husband’s family did what everyone else did – massage the baby with mustard oil. Now, except for some who still want to take care of their children in the old-fashioned way, most expecting parents ask volunteers for the ointment themselves.

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Nepal Times

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Nepal Times
When Megharaj Ban first joined Maunabudhuk Health Post (MHP) in Dhankuta in 1987, there were no road networks connecting this small village to district headquarters and health workers were faced with a chronic shortage of medicines. His own villagers were skeptical about how far he could improve the well-being of the community.

Twenty-five years on, Ban has single-handedly reformed the VDC’s health-scape. From convincing locals to adopt preventive care measures to upgrading facilities at MHP in spite of a lack of funding, the health-worker has become so popular that every time he gets posted outside Maunabudhuk, villagers request the district administration office to send him back.

On Monday, the 49-year-old, who is now a public health inspector at MHP, was presented the Nick Simons Award for his outstanding contribution to improving health services in his village and his unwavering commitment towards his people. For the past six years the Kathmandu-based NSI has honoured healthcare workers in rural Nepal who have overcome financial obstacles and lack of resources to help communities.

In November 2012, Ban helped establish, entirely with local resources and knowhow, a new birthing centre at MHP with four rooms where mothers and their babies receive 24-hour care. Next on Ban’s to-do list was a health laboratory. Again with no financial support from the government, he helped build a well-equipped laboratory, which also employs a local lab assistant. Now, patients no longer have to travel to district headquarters in Dhankuta or Dharan in the Tarai for basic services like blood tests, HIV tests, and DOTs treatment.

Ban also started a safe motherhood emergency fund in 2009 so that expectant mothers could take out interest-free loans to cover their medical bills. The fund, now worth Rs 80,000, can provide loans up to Rs 10,000 for three months.

Call it chance or a twist of fate, but a career in public health was the last thing on Megharaj’s mind after completing his SLC in 1985 even though he had trained and worked as a health assistant. The eldest of four siblings, Ban studied economics in high school and wanted to join the civil service. He had even passed his Lok Sewa exams, but at the last minute his post was given to someone else. So Ban chose public health.

But his two decade long journey has not been without its challenges. During the height of the insurgency, Ban had to flee Dhankuta and seek refuge in Kathmandu. Most of his friends migrated abroad, but he felt he wasn’t cut out for it. After working for nine months in the state-run Vitamin A program in western Nepal, Ban was selected for a six-month senior assistant health worker training in 2004, after which he returned to Maunabudhuk.

“I am grateful that the hard work that the team has put into the health post over the years has finally been recognized,” says an elated Ban. “Now that people know about us, we will have to put in more effort to live up to their expectations.”

Sunir Pandey

Inspector Ban
Put Ranjit Karna behind bars

Wild Ones: Members of the NC-affiliated Nepal Student Union (NSU) disrupted traffic in the capital and hurled bricks at the police on Monday after five cadre were arrested in the morning for carrying guns with expired licences. So far the NC has not made any public comments on the arrests or on Karna’s statements. The mother party needs to uphold the rule of law and stop its students from hindering investigations. Otherwise, its legitimacy to rule and NC leaders and politicians will lose their credibility.

Monday’s arrest once again exposes the criminalisation of student unions in Nepal. Leaders of different student organisations have time and again been caught breaking the law and being involved in illicit networks. To protect the country’s educational sector and to nurture a new generation of qualified and respectable leaders, it is important to bring the unions under the purview of parent parties.

Banner: “Constitution in a year”

What will the public think when our own student wing is clashing with the police while we are in power?

UML CA member Surendra Pandey, Naya Patrika, 11 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

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Ranjit Karna, CA member and president of the NC-affiliated Nepal Student Union (NSU), has overstepped his jurisdiction by demanding that SSP Ramesh Kharel, who arrested five NSU members on Monday for carrying guns with expired licences, be prosecuted. More than a personal opinion, Ranjit’s statement was an explicit threat to authorities at a time when his own party is heading the government.

During a regular traffic check on early Monday morning, the police caught Shubha Ram Basnet, president of the Free Student Union at Shanker Dev Campus, along with four others at Sitapaila with three guns. The police discovered that the licence of one of the pistols had not been renewed. However, Ranjit claims the security check was premeditated and prejudiced and that his cadre should be released after they pay a fine for the guns. He blames Kharel for taking the law into his own hands and is insisting that the SSP be tried in court. But perhaps Karna is unaware that it is not just guns, it’s a crime to even drive with an expired licence.

Instead of immediately suspending the five men from NSU, president Karna put undue pressure on the police and incited other students to come out on the streets to protest. This is not the first time that NSU has bought the city to a standstill and disrupted daily life. Over the past month, Congress students have frequently wreaked havoc in front of Shanker Dev Campus. If Karna continues to instigate students and if his men cause further suffering to common Nepalis, then the CA member should be held responsible for such disorderly behaviour and must be arrested. No one, not even a parliamentarian has the right to interfere in a criminal prosecution. So far the NC has not made any public comments on the arrests or on Karna’s statements. The mother party needs to uphold the rule of law and stop its students from hindering investigations. Otherwise, its legitimacy to rule and NC leaders and politicians will lose their credibility.

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK
Thou shalt not lie

The media can't just function as a business, it has to relentlessly pursue the truth so our freedoms are protected

Last month, police caught a man who they said was the key link to solving the mystery of the Janakpur bomb in 2012 that killed five and wounded a dozen other Mithila activists at Ramananda Chok.

Mukesh Chaudhary had provided local journalists with copies of his telephone conversation with the alleged mastermind four months after the bomb. But the mainstream media largely ignored the news. In May last year, a television news channel telecasted a report playing the tape and an interview of Chaudhary in an unknown location.

However, the report itself lacked credibility due to tampering with the tape in the first few seconds where Chaudhary addresses the second speaker as 'minister'. After the incident, there was widespread speculation that the blast was intended to intimidate the Mithila movement activists. Even Mukesh claims that to be the real reason behind the explosion in his 'exclusive' interview. But the original conversation in the tape reveals that the target was only one man sitting among the protesters at Ramananda Chok that day.

What remains unanswered is: who was the target and who felt threatened by him? After investigating the incident for over a year, we have compelling evidence that behind the political pretext of the Mithila movement, Janakpur is reeling under a turf war between a political strongman and a local businessman, both with criminal backgrounds.

But it is not just Janakpur, the entire Tarai belt of Nepal has become a hotbed for corruption and crime. From illegal sand mining and logging, drug peddling, human trafficking, and smuggling of small arms, most Tarai districts sharing the border with India are de-facto being run by powerful mafia with political protection. There is a dangerous nexus of bureaucrats, politicians, and organised criminals who seize all development contracts and plunder local resources. These are the same resources they use in the long run to elevate themselves to power. It is a shame that those supposed to be behind bars are sitting in the parliament writing the constitution of this country.

Driving through the much touted Postal Highway of Dhanusha, Mahottari, and Sarlahi, filled with crater size potholes, it is not difficult to see that the Rs 2.5 billion spent by the Indian government to build eight border roads along three districts have been pocketed by the contractors and their political bosses.

“It's looting in broad daylight. I drove on the roads they constructed a week ago and there is a big pothole,” a local bus driver told me as we drove along the Janakpur-Jaleshwor road. Neglected by Kathmandu and betrayed by those claiming to be their true leaders, it is the poorest of the poor who are bearing the brunt of underdevelopment and mis-governance in the Madhes.

Reports published by the Centre for Investigative Journalism in the last two years reveal that politically sheltered school committees in several Tarai districts are pocketing grant money by inflating the number of students. Illegal sand mining companies are operating along the East-West highway causing irreversible damage to Chure hills. There is an organised group of timber smugglers who have bought over the entire local administration in far-western Tarai districts, plundering the community forests for the last three decades.

All this is happening while our mainstream media is busy covering who gets to pose with the copy of the constitution infront of national and international media, but would not dare publish a story that exposes how profit mongering business houses are gambling with public health, putting millions of lives at risk.
Visit Nepal, Read Slogans

But today, foreigners have Nepal by the gonads.

Nepal also has the world’s fastest clock.

The world’s horniest people live in Nepal.

Yeah and Nepal is ruled by hairy octogenarian men.

Only 8 of them have bathrooms.

And it has been downhill ever since.

When it comes to attracting more visitors to Nepal we haven’t even started to scratch the tip of the proverbial iceberg. It is plain that we in Nepal have fallen behind the rest of the world in exploiting the vast tourism potential of this great nation of ours. Let’s face it, folks at the Ministry of Tourism and Fatalism, the Nepal Tourism Board, and the Department of Immitation need to get their balls rolling if we are to hit the target of a million visitors by the end of this year. And for this there is no other way but to gird up their proverbial loins.

Which is why we commend the initiative taken by Thiruvananthapuram International Airport’s public-private partnership initiative to get a liquor maker to come up with welcome signs at the arrival concourse to give visitors a quick summary of why Nepal is great. We don’t know who came up with these great blurb, but quite a lot of vodka must have been consumed in thinking them up.

That is true and we just made asses of ourselves.