More than 80 tattoo artists from all over the world, including Japan, Thailand, India, Australia, and UK participated in the three-day Nepal Tattoo Convention last week. This puts Kathmandu firmly on the world tattoo map, and it is a reflection of the freedom of expression granted by the interim constitution.

However, on World Press Freedom Day on Saturday we may need to remind ourselves that despite constitutional guarantees, both democracy and press freedom face restrictions. At a time of prolonged political transition, when the three pillars of democracy are fragile, the media’s fourth pillar must help buttress the system. But the criminalisation of politics has encouraged self-censorship and the press is, willingly or unwittingly, allowing itself to be a part of state-sponsored witch-hunts.

At 9:10am on Saturday, 5 May 2012, a huge wedge of rock fell off the south ridge of Annapurna 4. The ensuing avalanche and flood killed more than 72 people downstream. This has happened before, and it was nature’s warning about cataclysmic Himalayan tsunamis in future.

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Psst. Unmanned aerial vehicles are here.

THE SETI FLOOD

GAME OF DRONES

Pics: JAN MØLLER HANSEN

PICS: JEFFREY KARGEL

Psst. Unmanned aerial vehicles are here.

THE SETI FLOOD

GAME OF DRONES

Psst. Unmanned aerial vehicles are here.

THE SETI FLOOD

GAME OF DRONES

Psst. Unmanned aerial vehicles are here.
THE EVEREST SAGA

What does it mean if you summit a mountain by passing all the risk onto someone else (“Taking chances onChomolungma”, David Durkan, #704)? If the high altitude workers set up all the ladders for you, are you really a "mountaineer" in the traditional sense? I recognize that “Instant Everest” brings Nepal, the Soto-Khumbu region, and high altitude workers much needed income but I feel that a real re-assessment of value for the work and risk that these high altitude workers carry will only happen when they get much more recognition for the support they provide to visitors who flock to Nepal with Everest in their eyes.

This Everest tragedy must in the same way not be blamed on— as some writers have done— solely on pay scales or financial inequities or job responsibilities or financial greed or inhumane selfishness by foreign climbers or incompetent bureaucracy or incoherent expedition planning by government and so on. All of these elements may have had a part to play and, therefore, any solutions for mitigating the effects of future disasters must address all stakeholders and all potentially contributing factors as a whole—a system, and not as individual aspects to be dealt with by diverse departments, agencies and other stakeholders in an uncoordinated fashion.

If, indeed, a coordinated mechanism for change could be accepted and supported, it must determine priorities in consideration of work opportunities and long-term environmental effects before engaging in more focused deliberations about pay scales, pay equity, fees, expedition staff roles and responsibilities, insurance, limitations on the number of climbers, scheduling, vetting of climbing companies and other aspects. I cannot stress enough that without a trans-stakeholder approach, engaging multiple stakeholders in reasoned, patient deliberations leading to coherent policy formulation and— essentially —implementation, improvements in the mountaineering context will remain wanting.

Sangita S

- We have not realised the appalling conditions the Nepali people have to endure on the world’s highest mountain so others can earn great money. The writer is right to challenge injustice.
- There are a lot of good points made by David Durkan. But the points would have been better made if the author had kept the sarcasm, cynicism and hate out of his writing and presented it more objectively.
- The joint demands from Everest Base Camp had many operators and owners as some of the signatories, and this brings an absolute conflict of interest. Unless the demands come from strictly ‘climbing Sherpa guides’ without any influence from trekkers operating and owners, we won’t be able to discuss our demands for salary that Sherpa guides.
- David Durkan’s enthusiasm is vital to the whole concept and discussion. You are right to challenge injustice.
- It’s been a while.
- Various writers have already written about the various issues. From what I have seen, it’s gorgeous.
- The relationship between climbers and porters must change, formally employing charge for insurance ("Instant Everest", Brinku Rai and Matt Miller, #704).
- Compensation of human loss by money is not a remedy for victims.
- There would be no “Instant Everest” if the government did not want it. It is the government’s duty to ensure that Nepali Sherpas and climbers are paid.
- There would be no “Instant Everest” if the government did not want it. It is the government’s duty to ensure that Nepali Sherpas and climbers are paid. The recent disaster on Everest that saw more than a dozen Sherpas killed is a grim reminder of the tremendous risks these people face on expeditions. (Dangerous business,” Editorial, #704). Over the years, even amateurs have climbed the peak, thanks to the Sherpas.
- The good thing is that the Sherpas literally carry most of the mountaineers from afar on their shoulders to the top. Yet all for the hard work, they’re not adequately paid. Therefore, in light of the grave risks they face on the slope of the peak, it’s only right that they ought to be adequately compensated.
- Nothing has compiled a list of all known human rights abuses during the civil war (“Haunted by ghosts of the past”, Rumeena Mahato, #704)? Which leads to the deeper question: Was it a civil war, or are we calling it the “conflict”?
- There is no need to run down other climbers with this judgmental, holier-than-thou attitude. Toning down the rhetoric would have made your argument points much more persuasive: better work conditions for the Nepali staff.
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नयी वर्षा नयी फिटनेस, लाक्षी लाक्ष्य कसाइकेट

नयी वर्षा नयी फिटनेस, लाक्षी लाक्ष्य कसाइकेट

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DHAHANSHA -- While 50,000 plus students who gave their SLC examinations last month anxiously await their results, 1,070 students from three centres in Dhanusha district still have their Social Studies paper to complete.

The Judicial Council led by Chief Justice Cholendra Prasad Pandey included Law Minister Narahari Acharya, Justice Ram Kumar Prasad Shah, and two lawyers Upendra Keshari Neupane and Khem Nanyan Dhungana. All had reportedly pushed their own candidates for the vacant positions in the Supreme Court. The appointment of the controversial justices has raised questions of accountability of the Judicial Council itself, with blistering attacks from the Nepal Bar Association, the second largest party in parliament the UML, former chief justice and the legal community at large.

Analysts have pointed out that at a time when the performance of the executive and the legislature leave much to be desired during the constitution-writing process, the role of an independent judiciary becomes even more important. However, they say, the new appointments will raise questions about the integrity and independence of the judiciary itself.

Former Chief Justice Min Bahadur Rayamajhi and Amup Raj Sharma have been sharply critical of the appointments, questioning the motives of the Judicial Council in bypassing temporary justices of the Supreme Court, who have been at their jobs for the last five years and distinguished themselves with some landmark rulings.

Saroj Mishra, the minister of education Chitrakala Yadav wasn’t even aware of the confrontation until very recently when she came on an official visit to Janakpur.

The NC’s Ram Krishna Yadav, who won 2013 elections from Dhanusha-3, did raise the issue on the CA Floor, but most Tarai-based parties and politicians have remained shockingly mum. The future of thousands of students is at stake, many of whom see passing their SLC exam as a way to break out of the cycle of poverty despite the staggeringly high drop-out rates. It is at times like these when political parties’ grandiose promises of promoting Madhesi identity and bringing the concerns of historically marginalised groups into the national mainstream ring hollow.

The unfortunate event at Yadukhola and Dhabauli once again highlight unwarranted police brutality and impunity in the region. The police could have fired tear gas or used rubber bullets to disperse the crowd. Instead they resorted to firing live rounds into an unarmed group of students and parents. ‘Yes, parents and students were also at fault, but so far nobody has even bothered to find out who was responsible for the shooting and who is trying to cover up the police’s misdeeds’ says Mishra.

The government needs to move swiftly and make a decision not only on the fate of the 1,070 students, but also prosecute the police personnel who pulled the trigger.

One of the judges from the Appellate Court recommended by the Judicial Council is Cholendra Samsher Rana, who was named for action by three divisional benches, including one of former Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi. Rana was accused of giving a clean chit to many corrupt figures when he was in the Supreme Court.

The choice of Gopal Prasad Punjuri, Jagdish Sharma Poudel and other judges over serving temporary Supreme Court justices who have performed well in the past three to five years has raised eye brows. Temporary justices bypassed by the Judicial Council were endorsed twice in past parliamentary hearings. And while there are two vacant posts remaining for permanent and almost ten posts for temporary justices, the Judicial Council has recommended only eight career judges.

The remaining two permanent posts have apparently been left vacant for two members recommended by the then Nepal Congress-led Nepal Bar Association and the Jhalanath Khanal cabinet respectively.

Initially, the Judicial Council had asked Nepal Bar Association and Legal Department to recommend ten and five figures respectively to be justices. In the end, the Judicial Council ignored those names and chose controversial two names for temporary Supreme Court justices, including the Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi. Rana was accused of justifying the actions by three divisional benches, including one of former Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi. Rana was accused of giving a clean chit to many corrupt figures when he was in the Supreme Court.

The recent retirement of five temporary Supreme Court justices had left only five serving justices including the Chief Justice resulting in a massive backlog of 17,000 cases. Chief Justice Sharma and other members of the Judicial Council are under heavy pressure to clarify the criteria for their appointments. The controversy means that the ratification of the nominations by parliament will also run into trouble.

The government needs to move swiftly and make a decision not only on the fate of the 1,070 students, but also prosecute the police personnel who pulled the trigger.

The Judicial Council has been embroiled in controversy in the past for appointing justices with political affiliations. There was an infamous case two years ago of some judges appointed to the appellate court immediately going to the UML headquarters to thank party leaders.

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To go or not to go

If Nepalis can’t go to UK colleges, it seems UK colleges will come to Nepal

More than 3,000 Nepali students went to UK for higher studies last year, and although student visa rules have been tightened, Britain is still a much sought after destination for education. All that may change with the establishment of institutions like The British College in Kathmandu.

If Nepalis can’t go to UK colleges, it seems UK colleges will come to Nepal. The British College is offering a British education through its fully franchised partnership with UK- Leeds Metropolitan University and University of West England at its campus in Kathmandu.

“Many Nepali students go to UK because it is easier to get a student visa and stay behind. Some don’t even bother to enroll when they get to London and stay on illegally. But with Britain tightening the loophole, the number has come down to 3,000 from a peak of 20,000 in 2009. “I personally have seen many students who went to the UK to study but actually wound up getting nothing. They wasted their time and they couldn’t get work,” said Kandel. “If I had the option of getting a UK degree in Nepal I would have done it myself.”

Kandel has his sights on not just Nepali students, but ensuring that his college is a centre of excellence that can also attract foreign students. At present there are six foreign students in a student body of 530.

Matt Miller
On 3 May, we mark World Press Freedom Day. The week will be replete with self-praise by journalists, owners of big media patting themselves on the backs for upholding democracy and defending people’s right to information. Editorials will be written and newly elected functionaries at the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNI) will reprint last year’s statement, making familiar pledges. The next day, we will go back to doing what we do best: making the dim-witted look grand in overblown profiles, reprinting press releases and being satisfied with the shallow, superficial and puerile.

Two-and-one-half decades into the free market, news has become another commodity to be bought and sold, and what seems to matter increasingly is not its content but how it is packaged.

Two months ago, the Centre for Investigative Journalism where I am program manager exposed a politician for his explicit role in a terror attack which killed five and injured scores of innocent people in Janakpur. Since then, the mainstream media has brought out bits and pieces of the ex-minister’s past criminal record. But not with the same prominence as it earlier printed his garlanded picture after he won the CA elections riding from Dhanusha on money and muscle power. Both were news, packaged differently but sold to the same public.

When the Khil Raj government proposed Lok Man Singh Karki as CIAA chief last year, apart from a fringe section, the entire media fraternity was up in arms against the appointment of a man with questionable integrity in a constitutional body. A year later, all is forgotten and the same media is highlighting his prachya remarks on good governance, his past record air brushed over.

Bypassing the bosses

On World Press Freedom Day, there are more reasons to be optimistic than pessimistic about the Nepali media. To be sure, media in Nepal has grown from strength to strength since 1990. It survived the absolute monarchy, and was always at the forefront of the struggle for democracy and press freedom. It sustained autocratic regimes that tried to stifle the people’s voice. It has exposed wrongdoing in high places, exposed human rights violations during the conflict and kept the issue alive afterwards.

Aher King Gyanendra’s information blackout and censorship, media fought back with blank op-eds and empty editorials. The Nepali media has played its adversarial role, standing firm against powerful regimes. Today, the media is free from state censorship and journalists do not face an overt threat from the government. However, a weak law and order situation, insecurity, the political-economic interests of media bosses have turned many journalists from watchdogs into lapdogs. When reporters do get their salaries, they are too low to motivate them to do a better job.

The Internet now provides a platform to bypass official controls, self-censorship and corporate influence. The news of VAT-evading business houses and shoddy government deals may not find headlines in the squeamish mainstream media, but journalists are blowing the whistle online. The content is shared and magnified through social networking sites. As the internet and smartphone penetration rates go up, the information revolution will transform the country, strengthen the Nepali media and with it democracy.

In her recently published book *Forging Contemporary Identities Through History*, prominent Indian historian Romila Thapar points towards the need for multiple interpretations of historic events, since what has been documented as history in the mainstream and academic writings thus far is at best a perspective and at worst an incomplete narrative.

The powerful of society may have been privileged in creating a selective history as Thapar claims, but their days of privilege are over. However, a weak law and order situation, insecurity, the political-economic interests of media bosses have turned many journalists from watchdogs into lapdogs. When reporters do get their salaries, they are too low to motivate them to do a better job.
This long spell of dry weather is not unusual for mid-April, but as the heat builds up in the Indo-Gangetic plains, touching 40 Celsius in Dhangadi and Nepalganj, there will be more chances of daytime cloud buildup. Kathmandu Valley will see some passing thunderstorms through the weekend, after long hot and hazy days. But because there is deficient moisture on the westerlies, it won’t bring much by way of precipitation. Which is bad news for living in Kathmandu’s dust bowl.

A t 21, Sakil Kunwar is Kathmandu’s most eligible bachelor. Every girl in town wants this talented hair and makeup artist. Not to get married to, but to paint them pretty on their wedding day. Photo features of models look incomplete without crediting him. There isn’t any ‘IT girl’ who hasn’t called him for a word of advice or two.

The Singapore-educated Sakil, however, remains unfazed by all the attention. In all modesty, he doesn’t even believe he’s all that great. But top models, actors, happy brides and bridesmaids all think so.

“I am grateful that people appreciate my work but I am not sure if I am that good as of yet,” says Sakil who is currently busy mentoring the 20 contestants of the Miss Nepal pageant which is all set to take place on 2 May.

“This doesn’t sound like the Sakil people told me about. I’d heard Sakil was loud, opinionated, and extremely critical of everything in front of his eyes. I was even warned by friends to clean up a little before my interview with this makeup guru. A few minutes into the interview I did notice him studying my face. Thankfully he decided to keep his comments to himself and I was saved from the embarrassment of hearing him go on about my amateur attempt at caking my face.

Is diplomacy something being in this trade has taught him? “Yes, and no,” he answers. “I had rubbed many people the wrong way, very early on in my career so I have learnt to be careful with my words,” he admits.

Sakil always dreamt of becoming a beauty pageant trainer. That dream materialised in 2009 when Miss Nepal Zenisha Moktan asked him to be her mentor for her Miss World Cup bid. He was 17 and self-taught.

But this was not his first job. In Singapore, where he was born and stayed until the completion of middle school, he earned pocket money putting henna on women in his neighbourhood and waiting tables at Pizza Hut.

“Growing up in Singapore taught me to be forward looking and independent at a young age. I haven’t asked for money from you since I turned 17, bai dada,” he says looking to his father, an ex-Gurkha officer, who is seated nearby.

Since the start, his family was supportive of everything he did. His father even accompanied him to India for a makeup course. After graduating high school in 2011 from Rato Bangala School, while his friends went to universities abroad, his parents didn’t question his decision to work fulltime in Nepal.

“They know that I am a focused person and don’t do things just on a whim,” he says. “Also, one is never too old to study so I thought college could wait,” he adds.

Although, the pageantry world is his first love, today Sakil is known more as a MUA guy.

“He is a thorough professional,” says one happy client who recently booked him for a cousin’s wedding. Besides making brides happy on their wedding day, Sakil also freelances as a stylist. He recently styled Odhani boutique’s collection for the TGIF fashion week and has a weekly column in M&S.

“Sakil has grown into an amazing artist, he knows how to work on different faces, keeps himself in tune with the global makeup trends and is extremely hardworking,” says Malvika Subba (pic, bottom right), former Miss Nepal.

Sakil also worked with Miss Nepal 2011 Shristi Shrestha, who became the first to make it to the top 30 at the Miss World pageant. “I believe I may have played a hand in that,” he says.
Buddha Jayanti, celebrate the birth of the great philosopher in the country of his birth. 14 May

Retrospective, a look back at the oeuvre of senior artist and cubism enthusiast Surendra Pradhan. Runs till 18 July, Park Gallery, Parkgallery.com.np

Ubhauli, celebrate the arrival of summer with the Kirat people of Nepal. 14 May

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

Chez Caroline, exquisite food, glorious sunshine and more. 9am to 10pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01)4263070/4187


Public Cave, while its pizzas, sizzlers, and spring rolls are a hit among customers, the main attraction is karaoke. Dihikopatan, Pokhara, 9856032958

Fuji Bakery, tucked in Chakupat this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. Chakupat, Lalitpur

Cha cha cha, learn one month’s worth of salsa in four days. Rs 1,000 for singles, Rs 1,500 for couples, 28 April onwards, Monday to Thursday, 7.30 to 8.30am 5 to 6pm 6 to 7pm, Salsa Dance Academy, Bhadatmani

Open house, featuring the works of artists Arpita Shukla, Ashutosh Khajuri, and Paljuna Manandhar. Runs till 7 July, 11am to 6pm, Gallery MCube Chakupat

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

Women water seeds, an exhibition of oil paintings by Australian artist Fern York. 2 to 8 May, 10am to 4pm, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Patan Museum, kathmanduarts.org, (01)5544880

DINING

Scooter Diva Cup, safely race fellow female scooter riders and win the Scooter Diva Cup 2014. 3 May, 10am, Mon sher Bash, Kopan dol

Life is flow, an exhibition by photographer Susanna Ferran and poet Frederic Hoffman accompanied by sound healer Chaitanyashree. Runs to 22 May, Image Art Gallery, Kulimha, Patan Darbar Square

By winds and tides, an art exhibition. Runs to 12 May, Alliance Francaise, Teku

Rashomon, watch the Nepali stage adaptation of one of cinema’s greatest whodunits. Rs 200, runs to 10 May, 5.15pm, Mandala Theatre except Mondays

People of Karnali, the Gallery Mitini opens to the public with an exhibition of photographs of the Karnali region by Jiban Bhai Images. 4 May onwards, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

In search of education, screening of a documentary on the difficulties of getting a good education in Karnali. 3 May, 4 to 6pm, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

Open bazaar, new and old entrepreneurs share their experiences. 3 May, 11am to 3pm, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

Support the cause, gather with like-minded fans to declare your love and support for the Nepali cricket team. 1 May, 10am, Bauentpur

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MUSIC

Rashid in Kathmandu,
go watch the great Indian vocal maestro
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Jyoti Goho, Satyajit Talwalkar, Murad Ali
Khan, Yaswanth Golcha, Manoj Gautam,
and Salikram Ghimire.
Rs 1,000/2,000/3,000/5,000, 23 May,
5.45pm onwards, Royal Academy Hall

Dance-mandu,
party with 20 sets of performers from
Nepal and India, with other attractions
like cocktail bar, children’s play area,
jembe jamming, and a
fire juggling
show. 17 May, 10am onwards, Norling
Restaurant, Darbar Marg

Kripa Unplugged,
young aspiring musicians give their own
renditions of classics.
youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged

Starry Night BBQ,
catch Cory Gurung live as you chomp on
your meat stick.
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9851046823
Intricate, snaking tattoos, tongue piercings, mohawks and body modifications of all kinds were on full display at the 4th International Nepal Tattoo Convention that concluded on 27 April.

More than 80 tattoo artists from all over the world, including Japan, Thailand, India, Australia, and UK participated in the three-day event, which saw hundreds of tattoo enthusiasts in attendance.

Before even stepping in, visitors were greeted by the distinctly audible, low buzz of the tattoo needle as it danced across these human canvases. All around, customers were splayed out in various positions at tattoo booths patiently waiting for the designs to be etched permanently onto their skin. The mood was generally festive, with many customers lapping up the attention as they showed off their body tats, and one even gamely winking for the camera.

One of the highlights was a body suspension show performed by a group of artists from North Team Suspension and Indigenak Modification Industries from Spain. Aptly titled ‘Tolerance of Pain’, attendees were left gasping visibly in shock during the show when artists were hoisted up into mid-air via hooks pierced into their bare backs.

Organised by Nepal Tattoo and supported by Mu’az Entertainment and Mohan’s Tattoo Inn, the convention was truly a great celebration of the art form that is both appreciated and shunned in equal measures.

PHOTOS:
JAN MOLLER HANSEN

ART ON BODY:
1 A tattoo artist works on an intricate face tattoo.
2 A Japanese tourist gets her first tattoo at the convention.
3 Jocke and his wife from Sweden are both tattoo enthusiasts.
4 Elin is an internationally acclaimed tattoo artist from Sweden.
5 Raul, Alex and his wife from Spain strike a pose for the camera.
6 A woman adds a new tattoo to her collection.
7 Raul from Spain shows his full back tattoo.
lapstick seems to be a must in Nepali comedies. In Nepali television, from the subtly scripted MaHa series to popular TV shows like Meri Bassai, the purposely loud acting is exaggerated by absurd characters that have a penchant for crudeness. In our recent films, physical comedy has been refined by Daya Hang Rai who has to do so little to get everyone smiling.

It is precisely Rai’s cocksure but stumbling misfit of a hero that drives Ram Babu Gurung’s new film Kabaddi. Kaji (played by Rai) is a 30-year-old good for nothing son of the village chieftain who needs help from friends to chase Maiyya (Rishma Gurung). For her part, she is trying to avoid marriage with Kaji and wants to leave Mustang for Kathmandu to study. The arrival of a relatively sophisticated city boy Bibek (played by Loot director Nischal Basnet) makes Kaji’s efforts look amateurish and the each of them plot moves, as if they were playing kabaddi, to run off with Maiyya.

The comedy gives way to a bit of drama when Bibek succeeds and the film shifts to Kathmandu. It turns out Bibek was previously cheated by Maiyya’s father, a gangster who runs an overseas labour racket, and he went all the way to Mustang to abduct the daughter and obtain a ransom as revenge. Then, in a show of commitment, the bumbling Kaji arrives in Kathmandu looking for his one true love and rather coincidentally meets Bibek on his first night in the capital. Hilarity ensues as both are forced to cooperate.

Ram Babu Gurung, who also wrote this film, invests a lot of screen time to make us laugh, and as a result other aspects of the film seem weak. For example, Bibek’s wooing of Maiyya isn’t convincing, Kaji’s sidekicks are often redundant, and the gangster father passes off as a brute and not a formidable nemesis who has amassed fortunes by conning others. In retrospect, the Bollywood film Delhi 6’s Kelly and the two Guy Ritchie movies it drew from are good reminders of what Gurung could have done with the plot.

Still there are other reasons to appreciate Kabaddi. A day after it was released, its distributors deemed facilities at one cinema inadequate and had the confidence to remove the film from being screened. And, if reports are true, the film’s crew exchanged salaries for stakes in the film’s profits, which means filmmakers are now willing to take risks to finance their own projects.

The producers of Kabaddi made Loot in 2012 and fortunately for them the witty one-liner formula is still fresh. Underneath the rustic humour, Kabaddi is a show of two halves that suffers considerably once the action moves to Kathmandu and the story becomes feel-good and predictable.

But like its predecessor Loot, Kabaddi will succeed in theatres despite its flaws because Nepali audiences crave a good laugh, especially when it comes in their own language.

DEAR MUM: Women pay respect to their deceased mothers by lighting lamps on the occasion of Mother’s Day at Pasupati on Tuesday.
The face of faceless art

I

For a place that claims to be the shopping and eating centre of Kathmandu, Darbar Marg is seriously lacking in good restaurants. There are many places but the quality of their food and service, barring a few notable exceptions (Koto anyone?), are usually sub-par.

So it was with great trepidation that I agreed to go to The Zanzibar Restaurant. Do not, like me, be misled by the name for if ‘Zanzibar’ conjures up images of exotic African dishes lush with the aroma of a thousand different spices, you will be in for quite a rude awakening.

In fact, Zanzibar serves Chinese food of a distinctly Nepalicised variety. There is nothing authentic about the cuisine here. And because they are so unapologetic about it, admitting that they cater to Nepalis and their dishes are designed to suit our palate, the dishes are weirdly enough work okay.

We decided to go with our server’s recommendation and ordered the cold pork salad (Rs 310) and spicy crispy cauliflower (Rs 190) as appetisers. The pork was well-spiced and cooked to just the right texture. The batter for the cauliflower had received liberal lashings of cumin and coriander and should have been tagged as cauliflower pakora for that is what it was.

I want to take a minute to talk about the dipping sauces that our appetisers came with. The one accompanying the meat had fish sauce and garlic and chillies and was just perfect, for it added so many layers to the boiled meat that it was elevated to so much more than just a plain platter of cold meat. The tomato sauce with the cauliflower was bursting with flavors, tangy sweet and slightly spicy all at once.

We decided to play it safe and stick to foolproof dishes and got the mixed chowmein and mixed fried rice (Rs 260 each). The chowmein was delicious. This stir fried noodle dish in its many versions is what Pradhan is known for. A musical band wearing Tika on the forehead of the subjects, Nepali topis with drums hanging at their waists, and the best versions are usually what Pradhan is known for. A musical band wearing a spattering of Tika on the forehead of the subjects, Nepali topis with drums hanging at their waists, and the best versions are usually

Together, the 40 pieces of Pradhan’s art paint the picture of Nepal. Each painting is a window, and what it frames stands on its own. Each parade scene and gossiping neighbours stands alone, each is a window into life in Surendra Pradhan’s native land, and his identity.

Matt Miller
Surendra Pradhan – A Retrospective
Park Gallery, Pulchok
Sunday to Friday, 10.30AM to 6PM

Great Food Deserves Carlsberg
That calls for a Carlsberg
A 50-year-old Palden Lama (name changed) from Samagaon in the Budi Gandaki Valley. He had come to Kathmandu when he suddenly suffered severe headache, fever and vomiting. After a series of laboratory tests including a spinal tap to test the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) which bathes the brain, he was diagnosed with meningitis and was subsequently treated with antibiotics.

His treating physician, Buddhi Paudyal, noted that the bacteria (Neisseriae meningitides) was well known for causing meningitis. Fortunately, the patient improved rapidly and went home. But be returned with similar complaints again and again. In fact, it became an annual ritual for Palden to come to Patan Hospital and be treated with antibiotics. Amazingly, he was cured of his illness each time, without any medical complications such as stroke and deafness.

Palden then went to South Korea as a migrant worker. He was wise enough to have a legible note in English from his Nepali doctor stating clearly that he had suffered from recurrent meningitis which responded well to a set of antibiotics. He had two bouts of meningitis in South Korea.

The doctors there had to perform so many spinal taps that he decided to return to Nepal. The spinal tap is an invasive procedure, and for many, a painful one; but the procedure is absolutely essential to make the diagnosis. Perhaps the South Korean doctors wanted to monitor him more closely, resulting in more spinal taps than he wanted.

When he returned to Kathmandu, he again met Paudyal at Patan Hospital who strongly advised a special high resolution CT scan of his head to detect any leakage of the CSF fluid to account for repeated meningitis. Sure enough, a tiny leak (dehiscence) at the base of his skull was detected which communicated directly with the back of his nose (nasopharynx). So, bacteria from the back of his nose in all likelihood travelled to the brain through the gap to cause these repeated hours of meningitis.

As though confirming this, Palden again went to Patan Hospital with headache and fever, as well as what he termed “mineral water” like discharge from only one side of his nose. His wife told him that this was indeed very strange, that without catching a cold he had this colorless discharge from his nose. Paudyal promptly sent the nasal discharge to the laboratory.

A simple microscopic study of the material revealed that the discharge was CSF fluid tracking down from the hole in the base of his skull to his nose. He was referred to eminent neurosurgeon Upendra Devkota, who skillfully repaired the dehiscence at the base of the skull. Palden recovered safely and has been meningitis free for many years now.

Stories like this are probably common in Nepal, where an astute doctor in need. Many years ago, this level of diagnostic sophistication and treatment was unavailable here. But suffering from meningitis 14 times must be a world record good enough for the Guinness book to consider.
Nepal has no laws for unmanned aerial vehicles but drones have enormous potential for conservation and tourism. And surveillance.

**SUNIR PANDEY**

Lt Col Chakra Shah of the Nandabaksh Battalion inside Chitwan National Park has been on daily jungle patrol guarding the endangered species inside Nepal’s most famous nature sanctuary. The work of Shah and his fellow soldiers has paid off: not a single tiger or rhino was poached in the park in the past 12 months.

But his work in Chitwan and the army’s support for conservation could get a huge boost if it could deploy drones to replace the drudgery of foot patrols. In fact, Shah has seen for himself how effective drones can be by serving as the eye in the sky.

From mid-2012 onwards, he has been part of an effort by the World Wildlife fund (WWF) and Chitwan National Park to try out unmanned aerial vehicles to help in conservation. The results were so encouraging that the National Park is keen to start using the devices as soon as possible.

“The long-term future of national park protection lies in the replacement of patrols with drones,” says Shah. Currently, the army can only assemble and fly the vehicles but can’t maintain or repair them if they crash.

Co-founded by Singaporean ecologist Lian Pin Koh and Dutch primate biologist Serge Wich, the organisation Conservation Drones (CD) has been training national park and army officials to fly drones and analyse data from them. From the feedback they received, CD has selected the particular drone that would be most suitable for Chitwan.

Based on a drone named after a potent Brazilian cocktail called Caipirinha, the ‘Caipy’ is capable of flying for 25 minutes sweeping 20 sq km area at a speed of 13 km/h. Weighing only 630g fully loaded with fuel and a GoPro camera on board, the craft can be controlled with an Android app on a phone or tablet to launch the drone as well as log into check points across the surveillance area.

Koh says the possibilities for drone use in conservation are unlimited: 3D mapping of forests, monitoring deforestation rates, using heat-seeking cameras to detect poachers or illegal loggers, using WiFi to download images from camera traps, tracking radio-collared animals.

Conservation is not the only area where drones can provide help. A drone was used in the production of a spoof video of the Game of Thrones shot on location in Nepal through stunning aerial shots. Fixing a camera on a drone gives photographers and filmmakers a unique travelling vantage point while trekking or mountain trekking.

Drones can also be useful in future disasters like floods and earthquakes, and help in search and rescue efforts. When seasonal roads get wiped away by landslides, drones could deliver small packets of high energy food, medicines, cell phones and other essentials to remote areas. Even journalists could use drones for investigative reports.

But Nepal’s laws don’t spell out the legality of drones, which is why the Chitwan initiative is stuck. Article 2(d) of Nepal’s Civil Aviation Act, 1996, defines aircraft as “any machine which can derive support in the atmosphere from reactions of the air, and this term also includes balloons, whether fixed or not fixed with land airships, helicopters, kites, gliders, hang gliders, microlight, balloons and any other flying machines.”

The most recent annual report of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal too doesn’t mention a single drone being licensed for private, public, or commercial use in the past year. Just like Nepalis are flying radio-controlled fixed-wing model planes without any permission, drones will also be here with or without government regulations.

Yet there is ample evidence on Youtube that people have already brought in drones and are using them. Don’t be surprised next time you hear a high-pitched whine above Patan Darbar Square.

**GAME OF DRONES**

**EYE IN THE SKY:** Two rhinos crossing a stream (zoomed, inset) in Chitwan National Park in an image captured by a camera on a drone. Conservationist Rupak Maharjan (left) launches the drone for a test flight over Chitwan.
Anatomy of a Himalayan tsunami

KUNDA DIXIT

It was a bright and sunny Saturday morning on 5 May, 2012 and many people from Pokhara had come to cool off in the Seti River, or were taking a dip in the scalding hot springs on its banks. High above them, Captain Alexander Maximov was piloting a two-seater plane on his second tourist sight-seeing flight of the morning. Suddenly, Maximov noticed a falling brown cloud below Annapurna 4. Minutes later, he saw that the normally white Seti River before him had turned turbid brown. A wall of water carrying mud, boulders and tree trunks was surging down the Seti gorge. Maximov turned his plane around and raced the flooding river ahead a warning to Pokhara airport.

At Sardi Khola on the banks of the Seti, 13-year-old lake lover Pun and her family were among hundreds bathing in the river when they heard what sounded like thunder. There were screams as people climbed to higher ground. Chahana and a sibling were lucky, but the angry river washed away their parents and a baby brother. At least 72 people were killed that morning, including three Ukrainian tourists. Many of the bodies had been never found.

Maximov downloaded the video from his wingtip camera and was astounded to see the brown cloud, providing first proof to scientists that the flood was not a result of a glacial lake outburst as originally thought, but caused by a huge rockfall at Annapurna 4. Halfway around the world at NASA’s Earth Observatory, hydrologist Jeffrey Kargel and in on satellite imagery, analysed silt deposition from the flood, radioing ahead a warning to Pokhara airport. Many of the bodies had been never found.

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The winter of our spring

The amorality of the market plays out on Everest, the laws of profit and price determine the ultimate success of an expedition

TASHI SHERPA

My last name is an accident of birth and not an achievement. But in the past two weeks I am even more convinced who my heroes are. The continuous outpouring of emotion from around the world hasn’t stopped since 18 April. They call because of my ownership to a last name and brand that has dedicated itself to honouring the unsung heroes of the Himalaya.

I have always been close to my idols Ang Thargay, Da Namgyal, Tenzing, Norgay Gombu – names from an era almost forgotten, now precious as rare coins. I read their stories, reveled in the borrowed glory of being next to them. I stood in awe of their indomitable spirit and the easy humility of wisdom that sigsly everything the world knows as ‘Sherpa’.

In the 1980s we boasted about a new generation of Sherpas: our Pentemb, Ang Rita, Sundare, Babu Chiri and the biggest little man, Pemba Doma. Their total summit counts began to feel like a stock index. They were feted and paraded, and then fled as footnotes to someone else’s glory on Mt Everest.

We didn’t know how to brag, so when the first ‘satchi’ came, they became our ‘sathis’. Even ordinary Nepalis took pride in the brief mention in the media about summiters.

There was a sense of purpose and pure passion. But the Khumbuley didn’t care who was on top first as long as they could get them to peak their summit and enjoy their day in the sun.

The Sherpa got his quota of Hadidas, precious new down gear and money to last till next Losar. Meanwhile, the client went on lecture circuits becoming the motivational toast of the month featured in interviews, cover stories and reaping in the benefits of having tasted thin air on the peak of peaks.

But then some sathis discovered trophy seekers with easy money. Socialites, investment bankers, rich retirees, software moguls, wealthy Arabs, spoilt Asians, scions of big money, all came to Everest Base Camp which became a jamboree of high profile expeditions with even higher profile clients clashing the ultimate high. No previous experience needed.

Just high altitude training for six months, bring your pack and Amex or Visa, and we’ll do the rest. Those in the know knew what to charge and share with their partners in Nepal, but someone forgot to send the memo to the actual Sherpa climbers, the ones who were supposed to ‘take care of it all’.

The Sherpas watched in bemusement and in the quintessential Buddhist way of accepting what life throws at you went about doing what they do best. Grateful they at least had work for the season, they never thought to question the specious generosity of being employed. As Nepalis we have a built-in insouciance to the mixed vociadities of life. Few of us plan for the future, the distant horizon is too far, we focus on the next hill.

The amorality of the market plays out on Everest, the laws of profit and price determine the ultimate success of an expedition. Those who take the most risk are assigned the lowest value in this bizarre equation. The Nepal Government makes in millions of dollars in fees from Mt Everest, western and Nepali expedition agencies eagerly calculate the spring months to be their breakout revenue season.

And every year, the queue for Everest gets longer. Nepali expedition agencies eagerly calculate the spring months to be their breakout revenue season. And every year, the queue for Everest gets longer.

Tashi Sherpa is the founder and CEO of Sherpa Adventure Gear.
Incomplete house

Editorial, Kathmandu, 29 April

The second Constituent Assembly (CA) election took place six months ago, and it has been four months since the first meeting of the CA took place. But 26 members still remain to be nominated. In their absence, there are many doubts about the legitimacy of CA decisions. The Khiyraj Regmi-led government should have initiated consultations with political parties regarding the 26 before the first CA meeting. But it did not and even after nearly 100 days in office, the Sushil Koirala-led coalition has also failed to come up with names.

Police woes

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Delaying the nomination of the remaining 26 members raises questions over the political parties’ commitment to the drafting of the constitution within a year. The cabinet will decide on the nominations, but this requires cooperation from all the parties. It will not be fair if they are divided among the parties based on power, money and influence. If it becomes a bargaining tool, then many candidates who lost the election will try to redeem themselves or buy their way to the parliament through the remaining 26 seats.

The government should pay special attention to nominating only those who can actually contribute to the constitution writing process.

Not to amnesty

parliament. The two bills were passed on Friday after making several amendments to the initial draft. Fourteen organisations consisting of families of conflict victims released a joint statement on Sunday, requesting that the political parties reconsider some of the contentious provisions in the bills.

“We strongly object to the provision regarding amnesty and reconciliation that don’t require the consent of the victims,” reads the statement.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court released a decision prohibiting grants of amnesty for serious human rights violations committed during the armed conflict. The court found that grants of amnesties, limitations on criminal prosecutions, and the 35-day time limit on filing cases do not conform to the standards established by the Nepalese Constitution and international law.

Families of conflict victims have raised concerns regarding the possible effects of the amnesty provision for serious human rights violations in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission on Enforced Disappearances (CED) bills passed by the legislature.

Sikkim to Mumbai

Nepal, 27 April

Interview with Nepali-Indian actress Geetanjali Thapa, 25, after she won India’s National Film Award for Best Actress for her role in the 2014 film Liar’s Dice.

Nepal: What led you to acting? Geetanjali Thapa: I used to act in school plays, but I never wanted to become a professional actor. When I was studying in Kolkata, some friends suggested that I start modelling. One thing led to another and I was cast in Prashant Rasha’s film Mynt. After that acting just kind of took off.

How did you land the role in Liar’s Dice? I was in a film called ‘0.’ Rajeev Ravi, the cinematographer of the film, recommended my name to his wife Githu Mohandas, who is the director of Liar’s Dice. She then cast me in the film.

What are your plans now? I prefer to act in films that raise socio-economic issues rather than in musicals. If song-and-dance films are done in a new way, I wouldn’t mind heading to Bollywood right away. But for me, a good script is the most important thing.

What projects are you currently involved in? I have been cast in a film by Oscar winning Serbian filmmaker Danis Tanovic called White Lies, alongside Emran Hashmi. The funny thing is I went for the audition just hoping to meet the director, didn’t really think I would get selected.

Have you faced any trouble in the industry because of your Nepali roots? There have been times when I have been rejected because of my non-Indian looks. But this is to be expected because filmmakers are under a lot of pressure to cast Indian faces. Still, I am happy with the number of films I get.

Are you familiar with Nepali films and filmmakers? I watched Jai Bajrangi when I was very small. The recent movies I’ve seen are Aruyna, Kathe, and Sungava. Among the directors I only know Prashant Rasha and Subarna Thapa, whom I met at a film festival.

Do you have any plans to work or stay in Nepal? I’d like to work in Nepal films as long as the filmmakers like my work and I like their scripts. I’ve never been there, and my friends in Kathmandu always ask me to visit, so maybe I will go once the shooting for White Lies ends.
Climbing for the 2014 Mt Everest spring season now seems to be over. The final decision was due to a combination of factors that led to large commercial expeditions and their hired high altitude workers leaving Everest Base Camp last week after the devastating avalanche on 18 April that killed 16 climbers on the Khumbu Icefall.

Mountaineer Alan Arnette tracks activity on Everest, and in a blog declared the mountain ‘functionally closed’ for the season. As of Monday morning, all large expeditions on the southern Nepali side of the mountains have abandoned their climbs. Arnette reports that three teams are rumored to still be at Base Camp including a Russian, Chinese and American science team. Science team member John All said in a post Wednesday that the non-profit team would collect data on Himalung, a 7200m peak on the border of Nepal and Tibet, rather than 8848m Mount Everest. At least 10 expeditions from the northern Chinese side are currently in the acclimatising phase and are proceeding as planned.

Large expeditions were allowed by the government to collaborate in chartering helicopters to retrieve supplies already stowed at Camps 1 and 2. Supplies are being allowed to be stored under locked mesh coverings on the Western Cwm until the next season.

As the majority of climbers from large expeditions return to Kathmandu via Lukla, more detailed accounts of their experiences following the 18 April tragedy have started being posted on the Internet. There is talk of a small group of Nepalis who are bullying and harassing those, who still wanted to climb the mountain.

The Nepal government, for its part, says the mountain is still open. It has said climbing will not be refunded, but an official told expeditions at Base Camp last week that their season’s permits will be valid for the next five years. It is unclear whether this applies to individual climbers, or only to the teams as constituted in spring 2014.

Large commercial expeditions, like Himalayan Experience and Asian Trekking, employ most of the Nepali high altitude workers, the decision was not an easy one explained Nepali Sumit Joshi, Himalayan Ascent’s founder. “Emotionally, mountain workers were being pulled from all angles to make a choice: respect for the dead, alliance to the better rights cause, family pressure and their own safety” he said in a blog post.

The last straw for those still at Base Camp was a series of smaller avalanches that dropped on the same section of the Khumbu Icefall that was hit on 18 April.

Rainier Mountainering Inc (RMRI) guide and 15-time Everest summiteer Dave Hahn summed it up in a blog: “For now, suffice to say that the risks outweigh the possibility of success.”

Mt Everest is officially still open, but functionally closed due to factors, only one of which is the mountain and intimidation became too dangerous to ignore. Others such as British guide Tim Moselade and John All overtly tied the threats to Maoists who have hijacked the tragedy for their political agenda.

For Western clients and Nepali high altitude workers, the decision was not an easy one explained Nepali Sumit Joshi, Himalayan Ascent’s founder. “Emotionally, mountain workers were being pulled from all angles to make a choice: respect for the dead, alliance to the better rights cause, family pressure and their own safety” he said in a blog post.

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In Gods we trust

Those of you who think that Nepal's politicians have made a mess of things and that there is no hope for this country – you are wrong. What you don’t know is that our rulers are a god-fearing bunch and they have a special hotline to the Almighty who advises them on important matters of state. In fact, those who oppose this government’s recent decisions are all godless atheists and disciples of the Devil.

Chairman Sri Sri Sri Prachandacharya set the tone soon after he was elected PM in 2008 when he propitiated the gods by publicly worshipping Yamaraj’s vehicle, the water buffalo. In a departure from his predecessor, Sri Sri Sri Sri Sri Gyanendra, PKD did not decapitate the animal. Comrade Awesome must have had a hunch that sacrificing five species of livestock, domestic fowl and household rodent in a Tantrick ritual couldn’t save the monarchy, he needed a different modus operandi to protect the First Republic.

It is understandable that Nepal’s secular rulers think they are gods because most are named after Him. Take Comrade Bum Dev, the terrible infant of the current cabinet who thinks he is God’s left hand man, just because that is what his name means. His Holiness the Tourism Minister must have realised that sacrificing black goats and sprinkling their blood over the nose landing gears of Twin Otters has not saved them from mishaps over the past three decades, which must be why he ordered a strictly vegan welcome for the new Chinese MA60 plane in Kathmandu this week.

Our theocrats aren’t worried because their High Level Political Mechanism can refer any pending matters to an Even Higher-up Authority in Heaven and take guidance from Him. According to our special correspondent at the Poorly Gates, the workload has expanded so much that God has had to set up a Special Task Force of Researchers and Analysts to deal exclusively with Nepal and doubled the number of His Handlers down here. Even so, from time to time the entire Mechanism has to go to the Kumbha Mela in Chhatara for a direct briefing with the Omniscient Being, or troop off for a meeting with God’s roving ambassador, Swami Kamalnayanacharya and other visiting Godmen in Pashupati. It must have suddenly dawned on those who killed, tortured and pillaged that even if they get temporal amnesty for past sins, they will still be sent to Purgatory. Unless they bribe the Gods.

Even Dash leader, Commiesar CP Gajurel, has been dashing about touring holy sites around the country after sacking his Dalit driver, because he was an untouchable. (That last bit is true, swear to God.) His hopes about a future for the Dash must have got dashed because the Group of 99 fought pitched battles last week in Kirtipore, throwing chairs and desks at a rival faction. Good thing we took away their guns otherwise there would have been a bloodbath between Comrade Cloudburst and Comrade Big Plop.

It may appear to the casual outside observer that the government is stuck, because constitution writing is still in limbo, 26 new CA members have yet to be appointed and the new Minister for Vodoo and Black Magic has still not been named. Nothing could be further from the truth. Insider sources tell us that hectic behind-the-scenes negotiations are going on even as we speak. No, not within High Level Political Mechanism, but between the High Level Political Mechanism and God. A breakthrough is expected soon, God willing.

God Himself is understandably worried about His status after Nepal declared itself an Atheist Federal Republic and whether He will still be allowed to rain thunderbolts down from heaven when he gets the urge. Through this column, we would like to reassure God on that score. As a God-fearing people, we would like to retain Him and his Pantheon as a tourist attraction. So no need for Him to panic just yet.