It is well known that Nepal is home to refugees from Bhutan and Tibet, but what many may not know is that there are about 1,000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in transit from trouble spots around the world living in Kathmandu. They are from Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma or Iraq, and arrive here in the hope that they will be resettled, or are economic migrants duped by human traffickers.

Meanwhile, of the 120,000 refugees from Bhutan who have lived or were born in refugee camps in Nepal in the last 22 years, 90,000 have been resettled in the United States and six other countries. However, one mother doesn’t want to leave behind an abandoned baby she adopted six years ago.
When it rains in Delhi insecure politicians in Kathmandu unfurl their umbrellas.

Nepal’s self-opinionated like to think that when Delhi sneezes Kathmandu should catch a cold. Just to show how little we think of ourselves that we bosterox outsiders with such vast powers over us. Hence the same happened in the aftermath of the astounding victory of the Bharat army in the battle of Kathmandu (BJP) and the ascension of Narendra Modi: when it rained in Delhi, insecure politicians in Kathmandu unfurled their umbrellas.

Nepal’s public sphere is still resonating with speculation about a rollback on secession, Nepal being declared a Hindu state or even the restoration of the monarchy. It doesn’t seem to matter that the Nepali people post-2006 have opted for a federal, secular republic. Just because a certain religious-right party has swept elections in a neighbouring country why should that influence our political evolution?

To be sure, if Nepal itself decided in a possible future referendum to shun secularism and declare the country a Hindu state (as the fourth-largest in the Constituent Assembly, the RPP-N wants) so be it, but not because of political trends in another country.

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala himself set the trend by1 begging/inviting a silver Shiva Jinge to Prime Minister Modi when he went to Delhi last month. We haven’t tried to find out what the other South Asian leaders gifted, but this was Koizala pretty brazenly establishing a religious basis for India-Nepal relations. In the aftermath of the Modi victory, Nepal’s opposition leaders have started saying publicly that secularism may have to be re-evaluated.

The swirling to the right is even evident in the Maoist party, with Pushpa Kamal Dahal telling BJP chairman Rajnath Singh that his party “made a big mistake” by abandoning the Hindu state.

Nepali Premier Baburam Bhattarai, regarded as a moderate within the BNP, on a recent visit to Kathmandu met all top leaders of the RPP-N (RPP-N together with the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Baburam Bhattarai have been constantly hounded. Politicians make mistakes all the time, let them do their jobs!

PK

PRASHANTA JHA

Surprised to see Nepal Times give so much space to a mediocre and heavily-slanted book (Interview with Prashant Jha ’11). On the other hand, not really surprised because you have always codded closed Maoists like Conrad Prashad who has never bothered to hide the fact that he is an Indian agent.

Singh

THE ‘F’ WORD

The thorny issue of state religion (The ‘F’ word, Editorial, #711) can be easily resolved if we take the opinion of people residing in the districts. Seven districts of in Tana have Pahadi majority (more than 50 per cent) population. So some would like to retain their closeness with the adjoining hilly districts.

Danny

Nepal would see it so much better if Nepal’s politicians just did their jobs honestly. Just give us water, energy to light our homes, jobs, law and order. We need to pass on the leadership to the present corrupt 50% (50% of the people) that have a lot to do. Just like Muslims complain about being treated like a Pakistani warrane in India.

Namah

It is not about natural resources (Fighting for yerba, Britral Rai ’11), it’s not about a new system of governance and mobility of development?

Nepali

The Maoists deserve criticism but the other parties are not any more deserving of blame. Neither are they more democratic or concerned about the citizens than the Maoists. They seem different at all in action. The difference is only in their voices.

B

When it rains in Delhi insecure politicians in Kathmandu unfurl their umbrellas.

Once upon a time I used to be a regular reader of Nepal Times because it gave balanced views on all issues. But there has been a lot of unfair Marxist bashing in the past few years and Prachanda and Babaram Bhattarai have been constantly hounded. Politicians make mistakes all the time, let them do their jobs!

Michal

I don’t like what’s happening, but I appreciate being informed. When will men realise that shooting into the air means that there is a wild bullet that will come back down somewhere?

Barbara Clay

The Nepal Police are a bunch of criminals. The international donor community needs to evaluate the activities of the Nepal Police and bring sanctions against the government. The support and funding of Nepal Police needs to be suspended immediately.

Bhiman

RETURN OF THE MICROBES

A timely article (“Return of the microbes,” Suril Pandey, #711) to fight against the scoure of Tuberculosis which has presented yet again in a new form. Prudent antibiotic prescription practice is necessary amongst the medical diaspora in Nepal. Physicians rampanty use fluquinocines and Cephalotropin, and mostly when they are least required. I would suggest antibiotics protocol adherence to must in countries like Nepal that may soon find itself engulfed in the arms of even more serious resistant infects.

Saili Pradhan

Two Wheels Good

Bicycle couriers (‘Two wheels good,’ Toering Dolker Gurung, #711) inside Ring Road? I am lying on my prayer mat in deep prayer for these sorry souls. Life expectancy 30 plus in light of the bailing air? I would rather finish a pack of cigarettes before breakfast.

Carl

LUMBINI TAKES OFF

Some points in this article might confuse those who do not know Lumbini well (Lumbi set to take off, Matt Miller, #711). Most temples in Lumbi were built representing their origin and traditions. Yes, there are a few which neglected the guidelines in the Knoel Tange Lumbini Master Plan but that happened mainly because of the unclear guidelines. The writer says the Lumbini development area is already “overbuilt”. Seems like this is the massive concrete jungle being spread outside the area.

Sayalay Bhaddamanika

When it rains in Delhi insecure politicians in Kathmandu unfurl their umbrellas.
Least harmful future

The second CA will soon have to make some hard choices, and ensure minimum damage

Based on who you ask, you will hear different versions of what led to the failure of the first Constituent Assembly, but journalists worth their salt know what really happened in the frantic few hours before the CA was ungraciously dissolved at the stroke of midnight on 28 May, 2013.

It was a collective failure of the NC and the UML, incompetent, corrupt and easy targets that they were and are, took the blame from Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai. Rather predictably, they were accused of sabotaging the process so that the predominantly Madhesi and Janajati parliament would not have their way. But the truth is, the Maoist, Madhesi and the Janajati coalition did not want a constitution either, at least not the kind that was going to be announced if the compromise that was agreed on had been honoured. They decided to let the CA collapse instead.

Airbrushed accounts of history might leave out this crucial piece of detail, but we would do well to remember this as we relive those same moments in the second CA. It is disheartening that the first CA failed and the same issues vex this one too. But the fact is that there is really no point in having a constitution if it is not the majority, feels unsatisfied with it.

We would only end up pushing the country into more instability and conflict. The Maoists, Madhesis and the Janajatis felt they were getting a raw deal and if we are to have any hope for a new constitution, it can only be done by taking them into confidence, not by sidelining or overriding them.

It is important to reach a compromise on the number, names and delineation of future states this time around. Madhesis and Janajatis are concerned that the NC and UML’s proposed federal arrangements would not grant real autonomy and identity, and the latter feel threatened by the new power dynamics that forced them to the fringes in the first CA. There is also a great deal of mistrust amongst parties about each other’s intentions. But unlike what many would have us believe, consensus is not impossible. Both sides need to show a bit more confidence in the other and be willing to engage in give and take.

If one side is adamant that the names of states be based on ethnicity, then so be it. As long as all the ethnicities have equal rights and opportunities, names need not be a bone of contention, especially if it gives ethnic groups a sense of recognition. This is not the time to bring up the five development region model as an alternative to federalism either. This will only distance ethnicities who struggled to establish the federalism agenda and will remove what little trust remains between parties.

The Madhesis on the other hand will have to reconsider their demand for One-Madhes, which has not just alarmed hill communities but would be fiercely resisted by Tharus and other groups in Tarai. The current state of indecision cannot drag on for very long.

Sooner or later, we will have to make some difficult choices. The question is how do we do it with the least amount of harm. How do we make sure not to make lasting damage to the relationships between communities or create new avenues for resource based conflicts amongst competing states in the future?

There is no guarantee that things will be smooth after the conclusion of the second CA. We might discover that the model we finally settled for comes with more troubles than we bargained for, or we might end up делютилируя and re-delimiting state borders.

Whether we like it or not, our problems will not go away with the new constitution. But having stakeholders feel ownership of the document will certainly make it easier to resolve these issues when they arise in the future.

@rubeenaa
Nepal Telecommunication Lack-of-Authority

The expansion and upgrade of mobile phone services is stuck because of regulatory failure.

RAMESH KUMAR

After initial rapid progress following the entry of an international mobile operator 10 years ago, the development and spread of Nepal’s telecom infrastructure has ground to a halt because of a weak regulator and political interference.

Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA) is supposed to be an independent government regulator in charge of renewing licenses, allocating frequencies, deciding on mergers and acquisitions, negotiating with foreign investors and monitoring cross-holdings.

However, a Supreme Court decision two years ago barring Chairman designate Digambar Jha from taking any decisions has left the NTA leaderless and rudderless. Jha was appointed by previous Communication Minister Rajkishore Yadav, but was accused of not being qualified for the job.

“Let alone policy rulings, the NTA hasn’t even been able to take day-to-day decisions,” says former NTA Chairman, Suresh Kumar Pudasaini.

Regulatory paralysis has impacted service providers like Nepal Telecom (NT) and Ncell which applied for 4G licenses three years ago. Ncell has been waiting to spread its 3G service nationwide but the NTA has given it neither a ‘yes’ nor a ‘no.’ Customers have also been affected because the NTA hasn’t been able to decide on telecom tariff adjustments.

Trade industry insiders say politicians and bureaucrats in the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) would prefer a weak NTA so they can take over its regulatory functions, make policy decisions, as well as appoint a crony as its new head to favour the politically connected.

In the past, no NTA chairman has been able to complete his term because of political interference from the ministry. There is also a conflict of interest because the MOIC secretary is also on the committee to select the NTA chairman and board of directors.

The MOIC renewed NT’s license this year without stipulating its license fee and payment term. According to current regulations, NT should have paid Rs 20 billion for a five-year license renewal, but it only paid Rs 180.9 million. This sets a precedent and Ncell may also not have to pay Rs 20 billion when its license expires in September.

“It’s clever of the service providers to avoid paying the Rs 20 billion license renewal,” says former NTA Chairman Bhesh Raj Kandel.

Service providers deny they are colluding, but say it should be a level playing field. They are not happy with delayed decisions and indecisions on their proposals for expansion and upgrading. For example Ncell is still waiting to hear from NTA on its Unlimited Call Campaign which it says would benefit customers.

Three years ago NTA unveiled a new frequency distribution and pricing policy under which Smart Telecom paid Rs 370 million to get a unified license, while Indian-owned UTL is waiting and watching. Renewal of a unified license is set at Rs 20.13 billion, with provisions for auctioning off 4G licenses, but all this is at a standstill because of the absence of an executive.

The future of telecom development in Nepal, as elsewhere in the region, is in data as more and more people upgrade to smartphones. Operators know this, and are in a hurry to improve bandwidth and technical capacity.

The rural telecom fund has accumulated Rs 7 billion from a two per cent tax on the operator profits. This was supposed to be used to upgrade and expand services in remote areas, but it is in limbo. Ncell has not been able to repatriate dividend worth Rs 360 million to its overseas shareholders because of the lack of Central Bank clearance, and this has made it think twice about plans to invest a further $100 million to expand and upgrade its service.

All this is making foreign investors wary, not just in telecom but also in other infrastructure projects, about putting money into Nepal. Still, Smart Telecom proposes to use its unified license to partner with a foreign telecom company. Arun Sumargi of Hello Mobile is also wooing a foreign partner after it upgrades to a unified license. NT is working to appoint a new foreign partner from among eight bidders, and STM Telecommunication Inc has also applied for a unified license after the Chaudhary Group bought 80 per cent share in the company that is presently concentrated in eastern Nepal.
Manik Lal Risal’s father and grandfather used to make intricate jewelry for Nepal’s royal family. But when he emigrated to the United States 34 years ago, it was hard for him to get a job because few believed he had the skills since he came from a poor country.

But Manik impressed everyone with his art and skill, and got his big break making jewelry for the luxury retailer Tiffany’s in 1994. “Everything I learned, I learned from my father,” says Manik. “My ancestors were all jewelers and they passed the skills down to me.”

Fittingly, Manik (in white) taught his son Dharma (in blue) the art of jewelry crafting, and he is now also a designer for Tiffany’s. Dharma followed his father to the US when he was 17 and actually studied jewelry technology there. He now combines that knowledge with traditional handcrafting skills passed down from his ancestors. “Combining the two sides helps me a lot,” Dharma said during a recent visit to Nepal with his father.

Manik and Dharma don’t design traditional Nepali jewelry for Tiffany’s, but their ability to craft by hand what is designed by computer is what makes them stand out in the world of jewelry in the US. Father and son make rings and multi-million dollar necklaces, as well as the famous Victoria bracelet which is Tiffany’s most popular. “It is when I can do what computer designers are unable to that I am most proud,” says Manik.

Manik’s grandfather used to take him to the palace in Kathmandu during Dasain, and the royal family admired his family’s discipline and craft. That was a very different upbringing from what his grandchildren now have in the Bronx in New York, but it is still a closely-knit family with Manik’s six children and grandchildren all living in the same neighbourhood.

Manik’s second son is an aerospace engineer, and his other children are not likely to carry on in the family business. “If you have a family, you have to watch them out for them and put the young generation on the right track,” Manik says, “that is the most important.” He says one of the biggest mistakes Nepali immigrants make is not make enough time for family.

Manik has no plans of retiring, but he says he may want to pass on his knowledge and give opportunities to Nepali apprentices outside his immediate family. For someone who has been in the jewelry business for decades in the US, you would expect Manik to look ostentatious. Just the opposite, his simplicity, charm and positive attitude describe a man with much higher standards than gold.

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The buzz that followed the appointment of Narendra Modi as India’s prime minister last month is only going to get louder with the announcement that he will visit Nepal in August.

Not since IK Gujral has India had a prime minister more interested in the South Asian neighbourhood. But when it comes to Nepal, there will be intense speculation and debate on the usual issues that vex relations between Delhi and Kathmandu. The political party leaders in Nepal can be expected to behave predictably: to look for personal, party and national interest – in that order. An official from India’s Ministry of External Affairs told a visiting Nepali journalist earlier this year that every Nepali prime minister visiting India – with the exception of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Manmohan Adhikari – had muted their personal and party rivals while there. So it does look like the two Maoist prime ministers we’ve had doth complain too much about “Indian hegemony” in Nepal.

Baburam Bhattarai recently brought up the subject of Nepal’s “unequal” relations again. His exact words: “India should stop micro-managing Nepal through its intelligence agencies (RAW) and bureaucracy, and maintain relations with Nepal at the political level.” This, coming from a politician who during the height of Maoist insurgency in Nepal, was mostly in cahoots with Indian spooks from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Intelligence Bureau (IB). It goes without saying that he offered the same reason RAW has offered through its own Nepali channels: it is “necessary to engage with all actors.”

The second question is why do our politicians need to engage with the security agencies of friendly countries at all? Isn’t that in itself a proof of an “unequal” relationship? Why can’t the leaders in Nepal gradually work towards a situation where they talk, discuss and negotiate with their political and government counterparts? India says it respects Nepal’s sovereignty and wants political stability. Is interference and micro-managing to ensure that?

A lot of it has to do with the subservience of Nepal’s politicians and those running the government. By rushing to seek Indian support on matters related to inter- and intra-party rivalries, and even petty personal requests, they open themselves up for manipulation.

The task of engaging with the Indian political class is long overdue. I am sure most Nepali leaders have the good of the country at heart. But there is a tendency to seek support from outside for inside struggles for power. The political leaders in Nepal need to resolve to not seek personal and party advantage at the cost of the national interest. Working for equal status requires strength, will and self-confidence. This is easier said than done. Moreover, it could attract hostility, or at least annoyance, from some quarters in India. But the start has to be made and made soon.

In journalism, we wait for a peg to write a story that has always been there. We have that peg now – a new, decisive government in India whose prime minister acts more like an executive president and wants to leave a stamp of authority. Who knows, he might even see merit in an assertive Nepali leadership. It may be futile, but I would be happy to be proven wrong.

@damakant

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He joined up with like-minded colleagues to launch a news portal a year after it started. He noticed that Dhakal’s previous jobs, and convinced with his technical manager at the Setopati office in Jumla, earlier this month (above). "We noticed that Dhakal’s iPad has seen better days, its touchscreen is cracked and taped up.

“We don’t have deep pockets, we have no partners," guips Dhakal. "I could have bought a new tablet, but this one still works."

Indeed, in the brave new world of digital media setopati.com is turning everything on its head. It has shown that you don’t need massive investment, there is no gestation period for startups and journalists can be their own bosses.

Dhakal had worked before at The Kathmandu Post and helped start Republica but quit after differences with publishers. He joined up with like-minded editors Narayan Wagle and Yubharaj Ghimire to launch. Setopati on 4 April 2013. Having seen the potential for online media in Nepal in their previous jobs, and convinced that they didn’t want to work for anyone anymore, Dhakal and Wagle decided to start a Nepali news portal with serious, exclusive and investigative content in longform journalism format.

"If we had started a newspaper, we would never have got this kind of readership within one year," says Dhakal, “and all journalists need readers."

Whereas a popular story in the print media would be read by 20,000 people at most, Setopati’s most read story by Kamala Thapa about her botched delivery at a maternity hospital got 325,000 readers and nearly 24,000 shares on Facebook. A profile of heart surgeon Bhagwan Koirala by Binita Dahal was read by 125,000 people in the first week of publication.

"I could never have got that kind of readership when I was working for Nager," Dahal said, who used to be a Setopati reporter and is now with BBC Nepal.

With the number of Facebook users approaching 4 million and 400,000 on Twitter, Nepal now has a critical mass of online users. Low startup costs mean that new portals are sprouting all over the place. Mainstream media also have digital editions, although in many cases their sites are just dumping ground for print content. Setopati has tried to ride this digital wave, and has managed to prove wrong a lot of assumptions about online media. Says Dhakal: “Setopati is proof that you don’t need multimedia content or light sensational news to attract readers.

Even the readership breakdown indicates that Setopati users in the diaspora are more high-brow than other popular entertainment and gossip-driven portals. The Gulf countries and Malaysia are not among Setopati’s top ten countries: it is Nepalis in the US, Australia, UK, South Korea and Japan who login most frequently.

The most pressing challenge for the portal is to make the venture sustainable. There is virtually no advertising on Setopati, including from Google AdSense since the portal is in Nepali. Dhakal is planning on launching an aggressive marketing drive to cash in on the eyeballs, and perhaps even a voluntary subscription model in the future.

He doesn’t rule out accepting donor funding.

Says Damakant [jashy] of Panos South Asia and Dhakal’s former colleague at Republica: “Setopati is refreshing, it is doing what Nepali language journalism sorely lacked: perspective and analysis. It is a must-read portal for me, but needs to expand its coverage.”

Setopati spent its first year maximising readers, which it did successfully. The reason Setopati hasn’t spent resources on augmenting content with video and images is because of low bandwidth in Nepal. Dhakal explains, but all that could change with the spread of 4G enabled mobile platforms. “We want to earn our readers, not buy them,” he adds.

The name ‘setopati’ (which means whiteboard) came about by chance as the original team was at a brainstorming retreat and discussing possible names for the portal, as it turns out, on a whiteboard.

But perhaps the most telling measure of setopati.com’s success is not the surprising number of readers it has amassed so far, but that it has so many copycats with names like ‘ratopati’ and the soft porn site ‘nilopati’. Imitation, after all, is the best form of flattery.

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Cha cha cha, learn one month’s worth of Salsa in four days. Rs 1,500 for couples, Rs 1,000 for singles, Monday to Thursday, 7:30 to 8:30am/4pm/6pm-7pm, Salsa Dance Academy, Bhatbhateni

City Museum Kathmandu, head down to Darbar Marg’s newest gallery on the block for personalised guided tours. Tours run daily, accommodates up to 15 people, info@citymuseum.org

Movie time, watch acclaimed films from Israel at the 9th Israeli Film Festival. 20 June, Russian Cultural Centre, 12.30pm, 3pm, 5.30pm

Kickoff, watch all the matches of the football World Cup live. Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, Basanta

Refugee stories, photo exhibition, films shows and talk programmes on the millions of refugees who have either found new lives or still yearn for home. 20 to 30 June, The City Museum, Darbar Marg

On glamour, Rajan Nepal, editor of Shukrabar, will share his experience on women, media and glamour. 24 June, 3 to 4.30pm, Martin Chautari

Open house, featuring the work of artists Arpita Shakya, Ashutosh Khajia, and Palapasa Manandhar. Runs till 7 July, 11am to 6pm, Gallery Mcube, Chakupat

Conversations, Seina Tamang talks to journalist Prashant Jha. 26 June, 4pm, Nepal Bharat Library, New Road

Birdwatch, head to Nagarpal to catch sight of Kathmandu’s rare birds. 27 June, 6.30am, Anandhan Gate, 9841388576

Kickoff, this tiny little joint serves food that tastes like your mother’s cooking. Bhatbhateni

Mike’s breakfast, huge breakfasts and an endless supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this cafe, popular among tourists and locals alike. Lakeside

Golden Dragon, breathing fire, roasting duck, ‘Joosnoh’

Mulchowk, the blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era. ‘Babamah’

New Tusita Restaurant, relishing ambience and good food. Don’t miss out on its platter with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lajimpat, (01)44432957

Project Fight Back, teaching women to take care of their own safety and fight back if necessary. At 500, 22 June, 10.30am to 12.30pm, Jodhesch, Pashupati

Tuning Earth and Sky, a rare collection of the works of artist Jimmy Thapa. Runs 11 to 27 June, Galleria Ishño, Kapanedk Heights, Sanepa

Conversations, Seina Tamang talks to journalist Prashant Jha. 26 June, 4pm, Nepal Bharat Library, New Road

I feel free, listen to poets Bikram Subba and Manu Manjil recite their poems. At 100/200, 28 June, 8pm, Gobesh Theatre, Batsapal, (01)4469621

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

Rinpoche, chance to learn about Buddhism and meditation from the Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche, twice. At 1,000, 21 June, 2.30 to 5.30pm, Pranamaya Studio, 9802045484

Noyoz, serves authentic Chinese food, try the mala tofu, chicken with fungus, and spicy pork spare ribs. Basanta, Kathmandu

Yak Restaurant, serves authentic Chinese food, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company. Lakeside, Pokhara

Vootoo, the new home of Newari cuisine, as well as a continental menu for those who don’t want an adventure. Lajimpat, (01)4400222

Laskus Restaurant, welcome to the best taste your palates can get. Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel, (01)4704040, info@laskus.com

Ghar-e-kabab, serving the best of north Indian cuisine, with live Sarod recitals on some days. Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg

Pashupatinath, Bhatbhateni
Waterfront Resort, the lakeside hotel invites you for special barbecue dinners on Friday and lunches on Saturday. <br>Sedih Night, Lakeside road, Pokhara, (061)46869/3904, www.waterfronthoteiplk.com

Better weekends, good food and good company by the pool and jacuzzi to begin your weekends on the right note. <br>Rs. 1,600 net rate, 12, 20pm onwards, Saturdays, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency

Shastriya sangeet, the best of Hindustani classical every new moon night. <br>27 July, 6pm onwards, Battisputali

Music at Manny’s, Ike Hindi and Nepali pop music with Shubnum Gurung and Dinesh Quartet. <br>Manny’s Eatery and Tapas Bar, Jawalakhel

Starry Night BBQ, catch Ciney Gurung live as you chomp on your meat stick. <br>Rs 1499, 7pm onwards, Fridays, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999

Reggae night, get a load of jah music from Chari Amilo Kala Samuha every weekend. <br>Rs 200, 21 June, 6pm onwards, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel

Monsoon madness get away from the capital this monsoon and beat the heat in Pokhara. <br>Rs 3,555 for 2 Nights/3 Days, Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, salesvr@hotelshangrila.com, (01)4410051, (061)462222.

Relax, a special one night accommodation package for two, including breakfast, and spa <br>Rs 3,600, Hyatt Regency, (01)4481234

Aithi Resort, a perfect place to stay, nearby pool, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice. <br>Stompton, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)46769, (01)4402077

Barahi 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. <br>Arborel, West Chitwan, www.barahijunglelodge.com

Shangri-La Village Resort, set amongst peaceful surroundings with a breathtaking mountain view, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience. <br>Shangrila, Pokhara, (061)462222, (01)4410051, shangrilavillage@gmail.com

Mum’s Garden Resort, head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range. <br>Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com

Monsoon madness

Date Nepal Time Fixture Location
20 June 00.45 am Uruguay vs England Sao Paolo
3.45 am Japan vs Greece Natal
9.45 pm Italy vs Costa Rica Recife
21 June 00.45 am Switzerland vs France Salvador
3.45 am Honduras vs Ecuador Curitiba
9.45 pm Argentina vs Iran Belo Horizonte
22 June 00.45 am Germany vs Ghana Fortaleza
3.45 am Nigeria vs Bosnia & Herzegovina Cuiaba
9.45 pm Argentina vs Iran Porto Alegre
23 June 00.45 am Korea vs Algeria Sao Paolo
3.45 am USA vs Portugal Brasilia
9.45 pm Costa Rica vs England Rio De Janeiro
24 June 1.45 am Cameroon vs Brazil Brazilia
1.45 am Brazil vs Mexico Portugal
9.45 pm Nigeria vs Argentina Argentine
25 June 1.45 am Japan vs Colombia Colombia
1.45 am Ghana vs Ivory Coast Portugal
9.45 pm Nigeria vs Argentina Argentine
26 June 1.45 am Brazil vs Switzerland Brazilia
1.45 am Ecuador vs France Portugal
9.45 pm Portugal vs Ghana USA
27 June 1.45 am Korea vs Belgium Sao Paolo
1.45 am Algeria vs Russia Curitiba

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Nipa

MUSIC
Their story has all the makings of a Hollywood sports blockbuster: a passionate coach, an underdog team, hordes of critics and finally, an unexpected climactic victory. Meet the girls basketball team from Gangyap, a village in western Sikkim near the border with Nepal.

The girls from Gangyap stole hearts and headlines when they won India's U-19 CBSE Basketball National Level Championship in 2011, becoming the first team from North East India to do so.

Formed by educator Siddhartha Yonzon (pic), the girls are all students of Eklavya Model Residential School, where Yonzon serves as the principal. The school, opened in 2007, is a part of the initiative of the Indian government to provide education to children from indigenous communities. Most of the school’s students come from families who raise livestock and farm.

“Many people thought I was crazy to want to teach basketball to a group who had never heard, seen or played the game,” says Siddhartha who along with the team was in Kathmandu last week to participate in the HIMS Basketball Tournament.

Basketball was a sport limited to Sikkim’s privileged and to boys, and Siddhartha himself has no professional training in coaching and didn’t play the game in school. But he loved the game and started building a team around two of his players from his previous school. Among the first to be selected from Eklavya was team captain Nima Doma Bhutia whose natural talent for the game caught Siddhartha’s attention.

“When you see her play, you know she was destined to play basketball,” says the coach of his player who was named the MVP for two consecutive years at the U-19 National Level Championships in 2011 and 2012.

For years, the girls practiced on a pasture in the middle of a maize field with boards hung from tree tops. They got a proper court to play on only last year. But that didn’t stop them from winning local tournaments. Aged 11-13, the girls beat teams with much older players in open-state tournaments and earned the monicker, “army of ants”.

At the semifinal match against Saipal Academy at the recent tournament in Kathmandu, coach Yonzon was seen standing, jumping and screaming instructions at players, even though they had a double-digit lead most of the game.

While other competing teams - three of the best basketball girls’ teams in Kathmandu - headed to monicker, “army of ants”.

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This girls basketball team from Sikkim went from herding yaks to winning basketball championships.

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the canteen, Yonjon sat the team down. Individual errors were pointed out, another round of layoffs were demanded. There was no time for food. For an outsider, Yonjon’s coaching style might appear harsh and his passion easily confused with aggression, but the players don’t think so. “He knows what we are capable of doing. That’s why he’s disappointed today,” says Nima Doma Bhutia, the team captain. The other players nod in agreement.

Nima Doma is one of the five girls from the team who’ll be graduating this year. Their visit to Nepal is a part of a fundraising effort organised by Siddhartha’s friends, former schoolmates and collegemates to pay for the girls’ college. The girls have plans to attend LNIPE, a physical education college in India. A benefit dinner organised at Hotel Shambhala in Maharajganj, owned by one of Siddhartha’s friends, managed to raise enough money to pay for the girls’ college for two years. One of his friends has already offered to cover the remaining amount. Although individual support has humbled the team, lack of support from the state of Sikkim leaves Siddhartha surprised. The state’s failure to get affiliation with the Basketball Association of India has hindered the girls’ dream of playing for their state.

“Many coaches have approached me to let my girls play for other states, but I refused because of this sentimental connection with Sikkim. I want them to wear a jersey with Sikkim imprinted on the back,” says Yonjon. But with the association showing no interest in getting an affiliation soon, Yonjon worries if that day will ever come. His other worry is that five of the girls will be graduating soon. Like many other players in the team, Nima Doma’s ultimate goal is to play for team India. “That’s been my dream since I learnt to play,” she says.

www.emrsgangyap.com

DRIBBLE, RUN, SCORE (l-r): Coach Siddhartha Yonjon started the Gangyap girls basketball team in 2007. The team went on to win several local level championships within its first year of formation. Players of Team Gangyap practice lay-ups before their match against Saipal Academy at HIMS on Thursday which they won. Team captain Nima Doma Bhutia tries to dribble past an opponent. Yonjon points out errors and discusses tactics with his players during a time out during Thursday’s match.
**HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2**

Animation is an art form. Hayao Miyazaki, the director of some of the most classic animated films of all time like *Totoro* (1988), *Spirited Away* (2001), and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) is regarded as a national treasure in his native Japan and his announcement that he would retire at the grand old age of 73 was met with dismay the world over.

In the past decade there have been some wonderful animated films such as *The Incredibles* (2004), *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), and *Up* (2009). These films are as much made for grown ups as they are for children. They have complex characters, tragic turns in the story line that are true to real life, nebulous villains who are not always that villainous but flawed rather, and yet of course there are also flights of fancy and moments of glorious beauty – an essential component of some of the most brilliant works of animation.

*How to Train Your Dragon* is another classic from DreamWorks. The first installment chronicled the story of a young Hiccup (voiced adorably by Jay Baruchel), a Viking boy who lives on an island plagued by dragons. Convinced that there is more to these creatures then just their fiery capacity to destroy, something his father Stoick the Chief (voiced with bombastic pleasure by Gerard Butler) is convinced of, Hiccup sets about befriending Toothless – a baby Night Fury dragon. As Hiccup and Toothless become fast friends and learn to fly together, Hiccup starts the impossible task of trying to convince his village that dragons are sentient, sensitive creatures and not the monstrous killers everyone imagines.

In this second film the entire village has been converted - everyone rides their own beloved dragons, who are more their friends than pets. But of course, disaster looms in the form of Drago Bludvist (Djimon Hounsou) a dragon hunter who captures and tortures his dragons to serve his vast dragon army.

As a grownup Hiccup struggles to reason with Bludvist he discovers a whole new world, animated with much detail and loving care. This second story offers some truly original new pleasures with the addition of some wonderful new characters, one of whom is voiced by the spectacular Cate Blanchett.

Toothless the dragon is one of the main attractions of this film even though he doesn’t speak a word and undoubtedly one of the most loveable and intelligent creatures ever to be borne of animation. Aside from a few slightly too long maudlin moments in this film - it is a near perfect pleasure. Take your children but be warned, at the end of it you might be wanting a dragon of your own.
I

n Kathmandu it’s easy to see who the stars of the World Cup are. Hundreds of Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo jerseys crowd the streets. But the dramatic performances of a majority of other players and nations are getting plenty of attention during the late-night broadcasts.

The first round of matches featured only a single scoreless draw. However the tournament is getting less notoriety for high-scoring and entertaining football, than an epidemic of play-acting, embellishment, flopping, faking, diving and cheating.

Setting the tone in the opening match between the hosts Brazil and Croatia, Brazilian striker Fred earned a penalty when he jumped onto his backside, kicking his feet high into the air like a cartoon character who stepped on a banana peel, after the Croatian defender between him and the goal grabbed his shoulder.

Fred’s dive ranks as the worst in a tournament and sport where this is the norm because of its impact on the outcome of the game. Brazil took a 2-1 lead in the 71st minute of their eventual 3-1 victory, and Croatia accused Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura of favoritism towards the host nation.

It came at a crucial moment of the game, but Fred’s theatrics had more than just one element of a quality dive that scores high with Olympic judges, and low with fans.

Dives are judged on a combination of elaborate and difficult techniques including: contorted facial expressions, hang time, jazz hands, knee and ankle grab positions, revolutions in the air, tumbles, face clutching, volume and pitch of screams, and nation of origin.

US Olympic swimming and diving coach Drew Johansen told an Australian newspaper “Similar to the sport of diving, it’s all about getting the judges attention. I think Fred’s use of his arms really got the job done on that dive. I would score at 9.5 on the Olympic scale.” Add to the fact that he plays for the home nation, that’s probably a 10.0 performance.

The judges of each perceived dive are the millions of football fans who have taken to Twitter to air their grievances. Each game and kick of the ball is an onslaught of 140 characters or less, raking Diego Costa of Spain for a dive in the box, or equal numbers praising him or other nation’s honour on the exact same play. Every play is judged with equal scrutiny.

The six penalties awarded in the first round of matches were to Brazil, Spain, Uruguay, Germany, France and Algeria.

It’s not that all six penalties weren’t earned, but save for Algeria, that who’s-who of elite football nations certainly breeds suspicions. The first half penalties didn’t help Spain and Uruguay from 5-1, and 3-1 thrashings however.

On the other hand, A New York Times article this week argued American values like honesty and battling through contact, more than their inability to dive, is the reason the vaunted Americans don’t dive in matches. Other American problems include making too much money, and having too much freedom.

In addition to earning a penalty earlier in the first half, 24-year-old German forward Thomas Muller gropped his face, crumpled to his knees and yelled out after receiving a hand to his shoulder region from hot tempered Portuguese defender Pepe. His rash reaction to the theatrics earned him a red card. Ethical or not the performances earned Muller a hat trick, Germany a dominating victory over a 10 man squad from Portugal, and a highlight of Cristiano Ronaldo angrily chasing down an official, not playing brilliantly.

The most spectacular dive of the tournament wasn’t embellished at all, but a brilliant diving header from Dutchman Robin Van Persie against Spain. However most of the matches are a reminder that those watching at home playing the “Diving Drinking Game” will feel worse in the morning than the losing teams.

PERFORMANCE ART

MATT MILLER

The place like the rest of the world has succumbed to the World Cup fever and the walls were emblazoned with flags of various nations while pennants and streamers waved a merry dance in the breeze of the fans. The furniture painted in bright primary colours and the cozy couches create an aura that is cheery and welcoming and it appealed to us immediately. The concept behind Friends was “inspired by exquisite meals in the warm company of friends from across the world” and their menu clearly reflects that. Choices range from paella to pies, stews to shwarma, hot pots, burgers to tortillas, and no Nepali restaurant worth its salt would be complete without momos.

The mint lemonade came replete with chunks of the freshly mixed herb but required a good stir from time to time. Refreshing and icy cold, it is the perfect drink to beat these summer blues.

The waiter recommended the chicken momos (Rs 250) and as he was so inordinately proud of them we decided to humour him, not expecting too much but to our great delight the momos were delicious- steaming hot, moist and delicately flavoured with just ginger. No pre-packaged momo masala atrocities were committed here. The pinchos (Rs 275), our other starter, was an assortment of toppings – fried mushroom with goat cheese, aubergine with cheese, and salt-cured salmon with organic goat cheese – suitably skewered onto toasted bread and made for a perfectly adequate snack.

The steak shacklik (Rs 550) at Friends is served with chimichurri, which is originally an Argentinian sauce made with garlic, olive oil, parsley and vinegare, and is a must try. The barbequed chunks of perfectly grilled filet mignon (medium rare was my choice) was meltingly soft and just delicious. The steak filet mignon (Rs 550) was as tasty, though the creamy mushroom sauce that accompanied it was bland and boring. The mince used to make the beef kebabs (Rs 475) had been kneaded well with a variety of spices that helped the meat absorb those flavours wonderfully but the end product was dry and wasn’t capable of holding its own in comparison to the other dishes we’d ordered.

The accompanying pickled cucumbers were delightful in their own right- crisp and sour and flavoureuse. The beef kebabs were doggie bagged and brought home, sliced and tossed with tomatoes, mint, onion, cucumber, yoghurt and stuffed into a chappati and made for a delicious lunch the next day.

The meal ended with an OR2K favourite: Kiss from Zuri (Rs 295). A chocolate truffle with a creamy- cheesy topping and chocolate sauce, it’s decadent and sinful and just right for a meal that heavy and satisfying.

The service was satisfactory, the restrooms clean and stocked with tissue paper and water and individual little towels to dry your hands. The people who own the Friends should congratulate themselves on creating this little haven that promotes lounging and eating and conversing.

The elements that make for a memorable meal. I will definitely be going back because there are so many tempting dishes still to sample and meals to savour.

Ruby Tuesaday

How to get there: In Thamel, enter Mandala Street that starts opposite Pumpernickelz, and make your way past OR2K and The Last Resort office and Friends is on your right, up a flight of stairs.
physicians from uppsala

Imagine going to watch a dissection of a human corpse in a small amphitheatre (pic, above) as an after-dinner event. This is exactly what the nobility of Uppsala, Sweden did in the Middle Ages.

The University of Uppsala in Sweden is renowned for its excellence in academia, but historically the most fascinating part of the university is the anatomical dissections. The church allowed only people who were executed by the hangman to be dissected. For prisoners executed by hanging, dissection was preferred, because then they would receive a proper Christian burial.

Human dissection was not for the faint of heart though. Although the dissection was carried out chiefly for the sake of the medical students, the Uppsala nobility also attended. It was the thing to do. There was no embalming then, so the stench in the dissection hall was like a physical blow. Many handy supports were built for people feeling sick to hold onto, and the walls of the amphitheatre were painted a reddish colour so stains from people who became ill would be less prominent.

The amphitheatre, with its magnificent dome, is preserved today in a beautiful museum called the Gustavianum, next to the world famous cathedral of Uppsala.

The tradition of dissection in the amphitheatre was started by Claes Rudbeck. He returned from Leiden, Holland around the 1650s after receiving training in human dissection. He wanted to establish a similar dissection environment as the one in Holland, so that medical students in his town could have the same learning experience.

Rudbeck’s close attention to detail during dissections in the amphitheatre paid off. He was able to discover the lymphatic system in the human body which, until this time, was unknown. He presented his findings to Queen Christina of Sweden in the spring of 1652, and she was suitably impressed and helped him in his career.

In terms of intellectual content, Rudbeck is not the only famous physician from Uppsala. Physican and botanist Carl Linnaeus from Uppsala laid the foundations for the modern biological naming scheme in botany. He is known as the father of modern taxonomy in botany, which is a way of classifying plants.

Linnaeus’s classification was a challenge to memorise in pre-medicine training. In the present era, another important person in medicine from Uppsala is Otto Cars. He has devoted almost his entire career to research about antibiotic resistance (ABR). Long before the alarming World Health Organization report on ABR came out, Otto Cars in his self-effacing manner was always reminding the world of the potential threat of ABR.

The nearby Karolinska Institute in Stockholm associated with the Nobel Prize in medicine may be better known, but clearly some ground-breaking medical work has been carried out in Uppsala too.

The World Cup is in full swing, and you are thinking of upgrading your 32-inch tv set. But the price tag of upwards of the Rs 700,000 mark many established tv brands put on their 65-inch televisions is threatening to derail your dreams of watching Cristiano Ronaldo dismissing defenders on a 65-inch HD slate. Thankfully, Chinese electronics giant TCL has recently launched its 65E5690 model. At almost half the price of Samsung, Sony and LG 65-inchers, it’s easily the most affordable 65-inch ULTRA HD smart tv in the Nepali market.

The sixth-largest television producer in the world, TCL certainly knows a thing or two about manufacturing good televisions, and it shows with the 65E5690. With a stunning 65-inch panel adorning the front, and the matte-black finish, along with a thin bezel, a silver metallic frame and a sturdy hexagonal base frame the TCL 65E5690 looks the part right out of the box. Power it on, and you immediately realise what the Ultra High Definition (aka 4K) fuss is really about. Packing four times the resolution of a regular full HD tv, sharpness and clarity take on a whole new meaning when you are watching 4K content. It can only be described in one word, stunning. The 65E5690 boasts 24k Conversion and Compatibility Technology. Simply, regular 1080p HD video on a 4k display produces better output than a 1080p display showing the same media. Being 3D-ready, TCL has also taken care of your 3D needs.

The traditional 3D technology in the 65E5690, which intuitively controls the smart tv via hand gestures and body motion. Your connectivity needs are taken care of by the on-board two HDMI ports, two USB 2.0 ports, a USB 3.0 port, a SD card slot, an AV port, a VGA port, and a LAN port. Optional gaming and multimedia accessories like a wireless keyboard, wireless mouse Smart Pen Kit, sound bar and camera allow for further enhancement of your entertainment and connectivity needs.

Yantrick’s Verdict: Retailing for approximately Rs 350,000, this beauty is by no means cheap. However, if you are in the market for a 65-inch Ultra HD TV, the TCL 65E5690 is definitely a bargain, an Ultra High-Definition bargain.
THE WORLD CUP

WORLD CUP

The beautiful mirage

It is unreasonable to expect a World Cup by itself to guarantee political and social change

MARCELA MORA Y ARAUJO in BUENOS AIRES

The eyes of the world, and especially those of South America, are on Brazil as it stages the World Cup in June and July. Even weeks before the event, football stories had been dominating the media, and not just in the sports pages. Advertisers cannot get enough of it; companies are altering production lines to cater to it; and politicians are postponing all but their most essential meetings until after the final.

Football’s magnetic force has drawn supporters worldwide into intricate discussions over the validity of a goal, the intention behind a foul, or the missed opportunities of an attack. Such debates will be especially animated in South America’s three main footballing countries – Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay – whose people view success on the field as signifying more than just sporting prowess.

“Football is the one area in which we can compete with the big countries of the world as equals,” remarked Daniel Passarella, Argentina’s former national coach. This is certainly true for Argentina and Uruguay; in the case of Brazil which has won the tournament more often than any other country, it is, if anything, an understatement.

Latin American pride is justified. Uruguayans still derive immeasurable satisfaction from their soccer successes, including two World Cup triumphs back in 1930 and 1950, and a semifinal in South Africa in 2010. Argentina has twice held the trophy, and boasts two of the game’s greatest players ever, Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi. And Brazil’s roll call of heroes includes Pelé, Garrincha, Ronaldo, Ronaldo, and Neymar, to name only a few.

However, the competition also has its detractors. People will talk of nothing else, while pressing social, economic and political questions are left to fester. Brazil’s highly organised anti-World Cup protesters hoped to divert some of the vast sums spent on the tournament into social programs. In Argentina, opposition groups worry that the government will use these crucial weeks to bury bad news.

While these concerns are undoubtedly valid, the broader question is whether protesting, boycotting or banning such events encourages or impedes social and political change. For example, Argentina’s military dictatorship, which staged the 1978 competition, sought to bolster its image with the world’s media attention and its military defeat by Britain. However, the regime also has its detractors. People will talk of nothing else, while pressing social, economic and political questions are left to fester.

It is unreasonable to expect a World Cup by itself to guarantee political and social change. It is unreasonable to expect a World Cup by itself to generate lasting change. The tournament’s ability to turn the eyes of the planet onto a single ball is truly impressive but ultimately meaningless. For the duration of the match, we are entranced; afterwards, everything returns to how it was.

Marcela Mora y Araujo is a football specialist, writer, and broadcaster. www.project-syndicate.org
It is well known that Nepal is home to thousands of refugees from Bhutan and Tibet, but what goes unnoticed is the growing number of asylum seekers from trouble spots around the world.

Many from Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma and Iraq arrive here in the hope that the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) will facilitate third-country resettlement, or they are duped by human traffickers who bring them to Nepal with the promise of flying them to Europe from Kathmandu airport on forged documents.

UNHCR is taking care of at least 500 ‘urban refugees’, but the actual number is probably much higher. Nepal denies on-arrival visas to 11 countries, but many cross the open border from India. The Nepal government treats them as illegal migrants and they amass fines of $6 a day for overstaying. There are only three exit strategies for urban refugees: repatriation to the home country, third-country resettlement or integration in Nepal.

Nepal has not signed the 1951 UN convention on refugees that would ensure legal and economic rights to those forced to flee their homelands, and the government is keen to discourage UNHCR from recognising and supporting more refugees for fear that Nepal could turn into a hub for human trafficking.

On World Refugee Day on 20 June, UNHCR presents a ten-day photo exhibition, Refugee Stories, with documentary film screenings and talk programs at the City Museum in Durbar Marg.

Some of the images of refugees from Tibet, Burma, Pakistan, and Somalia who live in Kathmandu by Jan Møller Hansen featured here will be on display.

Sunir Pandey

Axis of Despair, #107
In Timai Camp Sector D5 Hut Number 46. Next morning, the two had disappeared leaving the baby behind. Debimaya named the baby Angela, (pic, right) and she grew up with her children Jipesh and Apsana.

Four years later, Debimaya’s resettlement process is stuck because of that act of kindness. Her relatives have all been resettled around the world, but because of Angela, Debimaya’s family cannot leave. “I cannot abandon her again here, I raised her,” Debimaya pleads, “but the sirs at UNHCR and IOM say I can’t take her with me.”

Debimaya’s own daughter was two when Angela was abandoned in her hut, and she breast-fed the undernourished Angela along with her own daughter.

“She sleeps on my lap, I raised her, and did everything except give birth to Angela. She is my daughter,” says Debimaya.

But UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and IOM (International Organisation for Migration) say they are bound by rules that only refugees are allowed to be resettled. So far nearly 90,000 of the 120,000 refugees have been resettled in a process that started in 2008, mostly to the United States (see map).

Ram Bahadur Baniya, 30, of Sanischare Camp of Morang district also used to live in Timai Camp and was ready to leave for the US, but in April the Department of Homeland Security rejected his application for being associated with a terrorist organisation. He had been caught extorting money from fellow-refugees eight years ago.

The other 27 members of Ram Bahadur’s extended family, including father, mother, five brothers and four sisters have already been settled in Ohio. After being prevented from leaving, Ram Bahadur’s wife Purna Maya left him and lives separately with their son in the Camp, and their resettlement papers are being processed. Ram Bahadur himself married again and runs a provision store in the Camp.

There are an estimated 200 other refugees whose resettlement documents have been either rejected or are under investigation. Among those is also Lilaprasad Bhujel, 31, a refugee from Bhutan who met Sita Bhujel, 27, from Heklang of Palpa district at a church. They got married in 2007, but by then Lilaprasad’s first wife, Karna Maya, had already left for the US with their seven-year-old son. His father and mother have also been resettled in America. “They say I am not eligible for resettlement until I can prove I am divorced from Karna Maya,” says a dejected Lilaprasad.

“UNHCR and IOM say I can’t take her with me,” says Lilaprasad. UN sources say most of those whose applications have been withheld have multiple marriages, have criminal records, or have been found to be affiliated with “terrorist organisations.” There are some refugees who don’t want to be resettled, but they are exceptions. Some 1,974 refugees without identity papers who had been rejected resettlement went on an 11-day hunger strike in 2012, and 1,800 of them were finally registered as refugees. There are a hundred or more families living outside Beldangi waiting and hoping that they will also one day be included.
Who’s where in Nepal

Amrit Dhakal,
setopati.com, 11 June

In terms of representation, opportunities and social and economic well-being, the Kayastha caste of the Tarai is ahead of everyone else in Nepal, an extensive study by the Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tribhuvan University shows.

At second and third are Hill Brahmin and Thakalis respectively. Hill castes such as Chetris, Thakuris, Sannyasis and Tarai groups like Rajput, Tarai Brahmin, and Marwaris also make the top 10. The bottom 10 consists mostly of Hill and Tarai Dalit castes.

The study considers 39 important factors, among them economic, political, social, cultural, gender, literacy etc. Based on a scale of 1 to 10, the Kayastha caste scores 9.66 in terms of social and economic well-being, the Kayastha caste of the Tarai is ahead of everyone else in Nepal, an extensive study by the Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tribhuvan University shows.

The annual budget looks at the allocation for development under a three-year plan. Up to 60 per cent of this comes from foreign aid. Nepal government has to raise the rest from taxes and revenue. The 24 per cent of the budget (amounting to up to Rs 20 billion) that is set aside for small local projects has always been mired in controversy. Local roads, bridges and irrigation projects is also where there is the most interference and abuse. Enacted lawmakers, ministers and local political cadre lobby hard to get projects allocated to their constituencies. MPs take delegations to meet the Finance Ministry and apply pressure. Then there are the property-owning class which tries to profit from the proximity of new roads. Although large infrastructure projects are important for long-term development, local development when responsibly executed can help to ensure a dramatic improvement in people’s lives. If one believes that development can only be possible through decentralised decision-making then these projects must be implemented at the district level.

There is less chance of the project being hijacked and more likely that the amount will be spent. A budget is effective when such small irrigation, road and water supply systems are built locally. There is relatively more accountability and checks and balances at the local level. Of course, things would have been even better if local elections were held. Transparency is the most effective way to fight budget misuse. money in the current fiscal year is allocated for the coming year, the budget allocation for these areas wasn’t increased.”

The NPC has set a budget ceiling of Rs 596 billion for the next fiscal year, but it looks like the government will struggle to balance this with the demands from political parties and other interest groups for pork-barrel funds for their districts.

Differences over budget priority among the parties in the ongoing pre-budget discussions have also made it difficult to narrow down the priority areas. While the Nepali Congress has tried to prioritise the development of the energy sector, UML has been pressing for infrastructure development with a focus on roads. “Infrastructure should be the main priority in the upcoming budget with roads being first on the list followed by energy, agriculture and irrigation,” says Chandra Mani Adhikari, NPC member from UML.

Though the largest party in the parliament is pushing for prioritising the energy sector, a majority of the CA members have demanded infrastructure in their home districts. “Despite pushing for energy, 80 per cent of the projects that have been demanded are regarding construction of roads and bridges,” says Pokharel.

Bijay Devkota in Kurobar, 18 June

Preparations for the upcoming budget have become uncertain after political interference and pressure from lawmakers for allocations have distorted emphasis on priority areas.

“The main priority of the budget should be agriculture and energy but we cannot allocate significant budget for these sectors,” says Govinda Raj Pokharel, the newly appointed vice chairman of the National Planning Commission. “Unless donor assistance increases, revenue collection goes up or the unspent funds for their districts.”

According to Pokharel, allocating a huge sum of money on a few priority areas doesn’t necessarily yield better results and the budget is unspent and lapses. The government had allocated around Rs 13 billion for the energy sector this year but many projects couldn’t move forward because of disputes over compensation. Similarly, only 70 per cent of the allocated capital budget for Rs 85 billion is set to be spent by the end of the current fiscal year.
Life with sickle cell
Little known genetic disorder that afflicts Nepal’s Tharu population needs urgent government attention

The lead nurse in the sweltering Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepalgunj goes through patient files. She stops at one of them and says, “Every week we get a couple of new cases of sickle cell disease.”

Since 2011, the hospital has received numerous Tharu patients with chest and joint pains and recurring jaundice—common symptoms of sickle cell disease. In which regular round red blood cells are replaced with sickle-shaped red blood cells which get stuck in the veins, deplete oxygen flow and cause severe body pain in patients.

In the past three years the number of patients diagnosed with sickle cell has increased to over 250. It is a genetic disorder inherited from both the mother and father, and affects the Tharu community in Nepal’s Tarai plains.

It is suggested that sickle cell disease is prevalent in areas affected by malaria because the gene for sickle cell provides its carrier with resistance against malaria. The Tharus who have a sevenfold lower prevalence of malaria than non-Tharus are indigenous to the Tarai.

“When I first consulted my senior doctors, they did not believe the test results for sickle cell disease,” recalls Rajan Pande, the only doctor keeping track of the disease. “Most of my patients do not know about sickle cell disease. They come here, having previously been diagnosed with hepatitis, arthritis, and some come with no diagnosis at all.”

Pande took us to the ward to meet Moti Ram Tharu whom he diagnosed last year. His skin was yellowed by jaundice, arm firmly strapped to a steadily emptying IV. The 46-year-old firm was yellowed by jaundice, arm firmly strapped to a steadily emptying IV. The 46-year-old firm was yellowed by jaundice, arm firmly strapped to a steadily emptying IV. The 46-year-old firm was yellowed by jaundice, arm firmly strapped to a steadily emptying IV.

“When I went back to Lucknow, they told me I tested negative for Hepatitis B,” Moti Ram said.

Sickle cell disease is like diabetes because it requires long term care and medication. The family needs to manage the disease for life which is a severe financial burden for most Tharu patients.

Patients from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Kailali travel for hours to buy their medications in Nepalgunj. For others, such as Buddhi Ram Tharu, the trip doesn’t end there.

Five years ago Buddhi Ram’s son Deepak was diagnosed with sickle cell disease in Kathmandu’s Teaching Hospital. Since then he has been making regular trips to Kathmandu for his son’s required blood transfusions.

“I come from a humble background, and going to Kathmandu every month is very expensive,” Buddhi Ram says. “How can I have the money to go every month? I am already Rs 700,000 in debt.”

Basmati Chaudhary, a mother of five, says her eldest son Anish has been sick since he was born. Anish is 27 now, and his family is heavily indebted. “We have a lot of loans and we are still taking out loans,” says Basmati. “Where do I get money for my son’s treatments?”

Anish’s younger brother has gone to India to earn money to treat his diseases. But his mother fears that even her younger son could be suffering from the same condition, as he complains frequently of joint pains.

Priyankar Chand, Emtithal Mahmoud and Rashika Pattni, the three authors are students at Yale University working on a pilot research and education project for sickle cell disease in western-Nepal. sicklecellnepal@gmail.com
Weapons of ass destruction

Recently, the Ass has been kept awake nights worrying about the declining self-esteem of Nepalis, and trying to come up with ideas so the international community will take us seriously once again.

France is the latest country to stop issuing visas in Kathmandu. If you want to go to France you have to apply for a visa in Delhi. Any self-respecting country would then retaliate by cancelling visa on arrival for French nationals and requiring them to apply in Côte d'Ivoire for their Nepali visas. Similarly, in the spirit of reciprocity, Australians would have to apply in Fiji, and Italians at the Nepal Embassy in Addis. Wait, we have no embassy in Addis? Serves the Italians right.

There is a point when a country just throws up its hands and says: "Enough is enough of being kicked around. We are going to start work on developing weapons of mass destruction." Here, our role model is North Korea, known to close friends as the Kim Dynasty.

Now that the Department of Geology and Mines has found vast deposits of uranium in Mustang, we must immediately start buying up centrifuges, incubators and salaried civil servants who do nothing all day. These drones may look like they are asleep at their desks, but they are decoys. The drone project is already mass producing tubes of sworn enemies with explosive force. The two bacteria can blow up the gastro-intestinal reticulum, the germs wreak havoc on the eradication of malaria in the Tarai, we have no forward line of defence and need new ways to conduct germ warfare. For this, the Nepal Army's clandestine Bio Warfare Division is culturing genetically-modified versions of the Vibrio cholerae and Giardia lambia bacteria which can blow up the gastro-intestinal tubes of sworn enemies with explosive force. The two bacteria have already proved to be highly effective in foiling a tourist invasion of Nepal. Covertly infiltrated into the endoplasmic reticulum, the germs wreak havoc on the digestive tract of potential invaders and make them think twice about entering Nepal's Toilet-Free Buffer Zone again.

And did you know that Nepal is also working on a top secret drones program? I could tell you about it, but then I'd have to kill you. Anyway, if you promise not to breathe a word of this to anyone, I can divulge in strictest confidence that the drone project is already mass producing salaried civil servants who do nothing all day. These drones may look like they are asleep at their desks, but they are decoys. Actually, they are trained to wake up and deliver groin kicks to any foreign army that dares to invade Singh Darbar.

Then we come to the most secret weapon in our military arsenal and urinal: Nepal's highly secretive biological weapons program which is so hush-hush that even the prime minister doesn't know about it, which is not saying much, I admit.

For centuries Nepal kept out foreign invaders by deploying malaria-carrying female anopheles mosquitoes along our southern border. We were never colonised because of our Mozzie Army. But since the eradication of malaria in the Tarai, we have no forward line of defence and need new ways to conduct germ warfare. For this, the Nepal Army's clandestine Bio Warfare Division is culturing genetically-modified versions of the Vibrio cholerae and Giardia lambia bacteria which can blow up the gastro-intestinal tubes of sworn enemies with explosive force. The two bacteria have already proved to be highly effective in foiling a tourist invasion of Nepal. Covertly infiltrated into the endoplasmic reticulum, the germs wreak havoc on the digestive tract of potential invaders and make them think twice about entering Nepal's Toilet-Free Buffer Zone again.

Understandably, Nepal hasn't publicised this highly classified project, but that doesn't mean the international community can ride roughshod over us. We should be able to tell them: "Don't ride roughshod over us, you big fat bullies, otherwise we will paralyse your command and control system with verbal diarrhoea and force you to sign a mutual non-aggression pact."