RED GUARDS

The opposition may have to go through with its show of force on Saturday, but should try to get it over with minimum fuss to resume negotiations on the constitution. The Maoists revived their Young Communist League and paraded them with sticks in a rehearsal for the big march on Monday (pic, below) blocking traffic and stranding commuters in the centre of Kathmandu.

IN AN AGITATED STATE

EDITORIAL PAGE 2

TABLES TURNED

Outnumbered in the CA and lacking numbers on the streets, the opposition is waiting for a face-saving way to return to the table.

BY THE WAY

BY ANURAG ACHARYA PAGE 3

NOT YET BOILING POINT

The people of the Tarai are angry, but not angry enough to join another protest movement led by Madhes politicians.

BY NAVIN JHA

IN NAVALPARASI PAGE 4

Waiting for a Nepali Kejriwal

GUEST COLUMN

BY BIHARI K SHRESTHA PAGE 6

EMPTY EVEREST

Big drop in mountaineering this spring leaves Nepali guides high and dry.

PAGE 10-11
The opposition may have to go through with its show of force on Saturday, but should try to get it over with minimum fuss to resume negotiations on the constitution.

Saturday’s show of force at the centre of Kathmandu is likely to prompt many to ask who are behind it, and why.

Let’s try to simplify it for you: The NC-UML formed a coalition government after winning the 2013 elections. After trying in vain to come to an agreement on disputed issues in the constitution, the Constituent Assembly missed its 22 January deadline. The NC-UML led government then tried to use its numerical strength in the CA to push the agenda to a vote.

The UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi parties, still smarting from their election defeat, tried to make a distinction between their ‘revolutionary mandate’ and the ‘election mandate’. This is their way of saying, “we lost but we still want you to have our say.”

The CA has been in limbo for over a month now, there have been no negotiations on the constitution draft. The Maoist-Madhesi opposition alliance is determined to go through with its self-described ‘make or break’ protest on Saturday. It’s a risky thing to do, to make public turnout the only indicator of its future existence as a force to be reckoned with. The Maoists have issued a threat to their own cadre that those who don’t show up on the streets will be punished. They must be pretty desperate if one political rally is going to be a life-or-death issue.

In the run-up to Saturday, the Maoists have threatened to go on a warpath, unleash another bloodbath, and warned an Armageddon. “Prachanda, give us the order, we will pull the trigger,” the newly-revived YCL shouted on the streets this week. They have used insurgency-era terminology to designate their top leaders to head the Eastern, Central and Western ‘Commanders’ to prepare logistics for the protests. Their message to the people is: “We lost the election, but if the NC-UML don’t agree to our demands and give us a share they must be pretty desperate if one political

To be sure, the last 12 months of the Koirala-led government has not exactly been a scintillating success. To be sure, the last 12 months of the Koirala-led government has not exactly been a scintillating success. The prime minister has fumbled and not shown enough statesmanship to bridge the gap on the constitution with its government. Its record has been patchy, and even the improvement of the investment climate, for which Koirala tried to take credit, happened mainly because of the proactive role played by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

However, the NC-UML have backtracked from their demand for a CA vote, and they have put the process on hold. This was the demand of the Maoist-Madhesi alliance on 22 January, so we see no discernible reason why they should push through with their agitation now. It is time for them to reciprocate the gesture.

The opposition has positioned itself into a corner, they cannot backtrack from the streets without losing face, so they must go ahead and try to paint the streets red for a day. Our advice to the Maoist-Madhesi combine would be to go through with their protest if they must, get it over with minimum fuss, and get back to the negotiation table. If there is one option left, that is it.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

The perpetrators should not be allowed to evade justice under any pretext (‘Who doesn’t want a TRC?’, Om Astha Rai, #745).

Nobody apart from the murderers on either side or their cronies have faith on the new TRC.

Pram Dhamai

The TRC’s role is to find facts and rectify. But victims have the right to either forgive or not.

Man Bid Rai

Forgiveness follows penance. Where is the penance? Have perpetrators of violence publicly renounced their past path? Have they committed their wealth to their victims? Have they renounced active participation in public life? Have they apologised official public post which they might be holding today?

RE-EDUCATION

Exams test the lowest level of learning, memorisation (‘Learning from the super rich like Upendra Mahato and some foreigners as well – sure, why not?’)

Sarit Bhatta

Problem is lack of qualified and committed teachers, and decent salaries and prospects, and low government expenditure on education.

David Seddon

Great job Babita and all the other felicitations (‘Back to the village campaign’).

Cynthia Choo, #745.

This is such an important work by Teach for Nepal. But our education also needs a structural overhaul.

Prem Dhamai

Time for a one year compulsory national (community) service in Nepal which will reduce unemployment and contribute hugely.

D.S

THE HOLY ECONOMY

The fact that those going abroad are considered the ‘Villain’, ‘bad guy’ is symptomatic of Nepali society (‘The holy economy’, Ganesh Luitel, #745).

Have met exchange students in the US from Japan, Germany, Chile, Korea. Which of these nations were/are Third World? There’s nothing wrong with being offshore, forging your own destiny, learning new habits, about new customs.

The real question is: what can the present government/civil society, etc. do to call these people back? They bring experience, money, know how. Many will form companies, hire Nepalis and some foreigners as well - sure, why not? I do wonder, especially when the super rich like Tarek Mahato comment on the Shepardian’s capacity with blanket statements like the one in the article. - So what have you done to ensure class egalitarianism?

Namah

One of the factors could be our socio-cultural setup that limits critical thought process to surface in the society.

Vimal Ghimire

I can only hope that the upcoming generation is flexible enough to agree on something that they have in common. We couldn’t!

Samiksha

Nepal remains, for all the superficial changes, deeply patriarchal and authoritarian - real need for progressive transformation

@piggreen

KING

I would rather give the King the benefit of the doubt any day than believe the thugs who have been lying and cheating us for years (‘Ex-King speaks’, 18 February). The King had asked for just three years to solve the problems, but these monkeys denied him that, and they have taken 10 years to accomplish absolutely nothing.

Bairagi Khukuri

What a creep! He would do anything to ensure political chaos continues for an indefinite time to present his ‘democratic’ credentials. M.G, you are history, accept it. Enjoy retirement in Nepal at GoN’s expense.

Sean

Q. Will the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have any power over the military? (67 likes)

A. Neha: One of the reasons it is considered the ‘villain’, ‘bad guy’ is symptomatic of Nepali society. Right? Right!

Jagadamba

Weekly Internet Poll #748

Go for Plan C’ by Arjun Karki

Weekly Internet Poll #747

Go for a referendum! by Kunda Dixit

Most commented

Go for Plan C! by Arjun Karki

Most shared on Facebook

Most liked on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

Getting it all right by Aruna Malla Adhikari and Priyadarsini Pradhan (36, 27 February)

Weekly Internet Poll #749

Do you think the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will have any power over the military? The poll was fixated.

Total votes: 96

N

ASS

This is so hilarious it actually brought tears to my eyes (‘Great Leap Forward Year’, Ase, #745).

The sad thing is that this is not satire at all, those are actual words from Comrade Assossa’s speeches.

Sean

How was your week with the new constitution to pronounce?

Nirmal Ghimire

Plan C

Back to the village campaign by Cynthia Choo (69 likes)

Back to the village campaign by Cynthia Choo (69 likes)

Back to the village campaign by Cynthia Choo (69 likes)
More than a month has passed since the parties missed their self-imposed constitutional deadline, and yet there is no end to the political arm-twisting that has deadlocked the CA proceedings. The ruling NC-UML remains adamant, while the opposition Maoist-Madhesis have decided to snub the Prime Minister’s call for talks. Both sides seem determined to test the other one last time, which is why the coming weekend could witness yet another ugly showdown on the streets of Kathmandu.

However, the public mood across the country remains uncharacteristically cynical. “People are not going to come out onto the streets just because the parties want to parade them for the show of their strength,” I overheard a group of students chatting over a cup of tea near Patan Multiple campus earlier this week.

If this is the general mood, it will be a blow to opposition’s plan of intimidating the ruling parties with their bamboo stick-wielding YCLs on the streets this Saturday. But Pushpa Kamal Dahal may be looking just a little ahead into the future than most of his opposition comrades.

With NC’s party convention due in September, Dahal knows, pressure is building on Prime Minister Sushil Koirala from within his own party. In the NC central committee meeting this week, a majority of the leaders, especially those from the rival Sher Bahadur Deuba faction, criticised Koirala and advised him to get the opposition on board, even if it is to initiate the majority voting on statute. This should be reassuring for Dahal. The enemy of your enemy is your friend, after all.

Losing the party presidency by a narrow margin last time, Deuba will be a favourite to win unless Koirala regains his stature in the party by delivering the statute. This will mean extending a compromise offer to Dahal, which seems unlikely at the moment given opposition’s continuing protest. However, Dahal’s recent one-on-one meetings with Koirala leaves that possibility open.

Another likely scenario is that there will be an internal arrangement between the leaders to hand over parliamentary and government leadership to Deuba, allowing Koirala to retain party leadership. The opposition will still fancy its chances negotiating with Deuba, who has come forth as more flexible and willing in the top leadership meetings. The only problem with this option is, KP Oli and UML are eying the next government leadership as well, as per their ‘gentleman’s agreement’ with NC.

In any case, it’s a tough call for Koirala, who, like his cousin GP, wants to have his cake and eat it too. Sushil Koirala has also received unsolicited advice from the international community, who are understandably concerned about deteriorating political environment, and have in all good faith urged the government to act in consensus. Although, the Prime Minister remains positive about their concerns, the Foreign Ministry headed by his coalition partner UML has been warning the diplomatic missions against ‘interference in the internal affairs’.

Whether KP Oli and UML are more worried about national sovereignty or only trying their best to undermine Koirala’s efforts to get the opposition back into negotiation, is a matter of perspective. An NC leader loyal to Koirala seemed very sure: “Oli wants to bring down this government by locking horns with the opposition and antagonising the international community, so that he can become the next PM.”

Cornered within his own party and troubled by the coalition partner, Koirala will be eager to get the statute drafting process started again. But can he reclaim the leadership of the dialogue process from Oli, who has been dominating the past negotiations with his rabble-rousing idioms against the opposition? Let’s see how Saturday’s showdown pans out.

@AnuragAcharya

BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya
After the CA Chair Subhas Nembang, apparently under pressure from the ruling coalition, initiated a vote on the new constitution last month, the Maoist-Madhesi opposition alliance has been on warpath — not withdrawing their protest programs even after Nembang halted the voting process.

UCPN(M) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has declared Kathmandu, Madhes and ethnic strongholds of the hills as three ‘fronts’ of the alliance’s protests. But he knows that the real test of the success of his agitation will be the Madhes if it is to have any effect in pressuring the government.

Reduced to third party status after the second CA elections, the Maoists are trying to regain some strength through street protests. The Madhes-based parties, on the other hand, want to restore their foothold in the Madhes by trying to ignite a political movement.

In remote villages of the Tarai however, the people are in no mood for another stir. “It is not easy to make people hit the streets,” says Kaushalendra Srivastav of this district in the central Tarai. He is disillusioned by the divisions among political parties, and the lack of progress in jobs and development.

The Maoist-Madhesi parties, however, are not the only political players in the Madhes. CK Raut, who was repeatedly detained on charges of treason for his separatist pronouncements, and later freed, has increased his political activities. Matrika Yadav, who formed his own party when CPN (M) became UCPN (M), is also active in the Madhes. After serving a one-year jail term on charges of corruption, JP Gupta is spearheading his Tarai-Madhes National Campaign. There has also been a surge in the activities of shadowy armed groups.

The political landscape of the Madhes is rapidly changing, but the parties that claim to be champions of the cause of the Madhesi people seem oblivious to this. For them, it is politics as usual.

The people of Madhes are frustrated with the prolonged deadlock and politically incorrect statements by ruling party leaders, particularly UML Chief KP Oli who antagonised locals by equating Madhesis with Indians. Separatists like CK Raut have made the best out of this political fallout.

The ruling NC-UML and the opposition Maoist-Madhesi disagree over whether five Tarai districts (Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari in the east and Kailali, and Kanchanpur in the west) should be part of the Madhes or the hill provinces in the new federal set up. The ruling parties want these districts to be clubbed with hill provinces, the opposition parties want all five to remain as part of the southern provinces.

Chakradhar Pandey, a local MEP-Nepal leader in Kapilvastu who played a key role in the Madhes movement, says if there is another movement in the Madhes, it will be directed not only against the ruling coalition but also the Madhesi parties who, according to him have failed to fight for Madhesi autonomy and self-rule.

This is not the first time the Madhesi people are demanding autonomy. In fact, it was first raised in the 1950s by Nepal Terai Congress. In the 1980s, the Gajendra Narayan Singh-led Sadbhawana Party demanded autonomy of Madhes from hill administration but was snubbed by Kathmandu for being ‘separatist’ and ‘pro-Indian’.

Srivastav, who was a long time aide to Singh, believes the attitude of the hill people towards the Madhesi people has not changed, and is at the root of the demand for Madhesi autonomy.

‘The people of Madhes want to be citizens of this country on their own terms, and if Kathmandu does not respect their desire, they will never be emotionally integrated in the national mainstream,’ he says.

Across the Tarai, ordinary people see the leaders using their grievances for their own political gain. The recent unrest in Simara (pictured, above) and Kalaiya were also seen as such. They are not angry enough to join any major reenactment of the Madhes Movement of 2007.

But if the leaders in Kathmandu over-read their electoral mandate and disregard Madhesi sentiments, the people of the Tarai could rise up again. And no one knows how far they will go the next time.
Lifting modern Nepal

With Kathmandu’s real-estate prices soaring, developers are investing in taller apartments, office blocks and shopping complexes. This means Nepal has suddenly become a booming market for elevators and escalators.

A decade ago, there were hardly any high rises in Kathmandu and there were almost no representatives here for companies manufacturing and installing lifts.

The Duisberg-based multinational ThyssenKrupp specialising in elevators is one of the first to realise the huge potential for growth in Nepal and has appointed InfraTech as its authorised dealer to sell passenger and freight elevators, escalators and moving walkways in the Nepali market.

“Nepal is a growing market with a lot of potential and we hope to tap into that,” says Bharat Vishnani, managing director of ThyssenKrupp Elevator (India). The company has already sold 20 units of elevators from ThyssenKrupp to housing projects in the Valley since it established its presence here, and is moving aggressively to expand its market share.

During a recent visit Vishnani said Nepal was poised to show a spurt in economic growth and a surge in investment in infrastructure. This is expected to translate into a growth in demand for elevator products, escalators and moving walkways.

ThyssenKrupp says its German-engineered lifts are rugged and designed for countries like Nepal with power-cuts. Its lifts consume 40 per cent less electricity and have an automatic rescue device that ensures orderly evacuation of passengers in case of unexpected power outage.

InfraTech says maintenance and equipment safety are of paramount concern, and it will be carrying this out periodically with customers through trained technicians.

Istanbul stopover now easier for Nepalis

Turkish Airlines has announced the possibility for Nepali passport holders to apply for e-visa for Turkey so they can enjoy a stopover in Istanbul on the way to Europe or North America.

Earlier, passengers had to send their passports to the Turkish Embassy in New Delhi for processing. From this month, Nepalis travelling via Istanbul having a valid Schengen or OECD country visa or residence permit can now get a single-entry e-visa for up to 30 days.

This visa should be applied online and passengers should have their onward OECD or Schengen visa with them when travelling.

The visa will now make it easier for Nepalis flying on Turkish Airlines to spend the transit time in Istanbul instead of simply waiting at the airport. Tours, with English speaking guides, provide three timing options every day to see the city while in transit.

“We distinguish ourselves from other airlines by transforming a long wait into a delightful discovery of Istanbul, one of the world’s premier destinations,” said Celal Baykal, manager of Turkish Airlines in Kathmandu.

Passengers wishing to join the tours need to present themselves at the hotel desk in the arrivals hall of Ataturk International Airport at least 30 minutes prior to the departure of the tour. No advance reservation or booking is required and the tours are free to all eligible passengers.

However, passengers must have adequate transfer time to complete the tour.


Seat sale

Etihad Airways has announced a global seat sale with discounts up to 30 per cent. Customers travelling between 3 March and 12 December can book their tickets at a discounted price till 3 March.

E-visa

Turkish Airlines has announced the possibility for Nepali passport holders to apply for e-visa for Turkey so they can enjoy a stopover in Istanbul on the way to Europe or North America.

Profit shares

The 20th annual general meeting (AGM) of Bank of Kathmandu approved 10.41 per cent bonus share to its shareholders. The bank earned operating profit of Rs. 363 million and net profit of Rs. 254 million in the last fiscal year.

Cricket mania

CG has announced its ‘Catch the Match’ offer. Customers buying CG LED TV will receive gifts signed by Nepali cricket captain Paras Khadka and an opportunity to play cricket with him.

New GM

Radisson Hotel Kathmandu has appointed Janet Fitzner as its new General Manager. Fitzner has 26 years of international experience in hospitality.
On social media and on listservs like NNSD, all the talk this past week was about what effect Arvind Kejriwal’s surprise landslide victory in New Delhi elections would have on Nepal.

It rained in Delhi, and we are unfurling our umbrellas in Kathmandu.

Most commentators hope that, one day, we will get our own Kejriwal in a Dhaka topi, and that may not be so far-fetched because Nepali voters are sufficiently mature and such changes will emerge in their own time. But we must not forget the three main factors that made this anti-corruption crusader win big:

1. He was able to put together a critical mass of a dedicated political team with vision, commitment and visible integrity.

2. Kejriwal addressed concerns of Delhiwalas for clean government, free drinking water and cheaper electricity.

3. The voters of the Delhi Union Territory are overwhelmingly urban, working in predominantly non-agrarian pursuits and living in sprawling slums or vast estates in the suburbs. They have no feudalistic loyalties to power centres.

Having won the election, Kejriwal’s challenge will be to deliver on his populist promises. That is where most opposition parties, particularly the BJP, are hoping the Aam Admi Party will fail. Kejriwal’s challenge is to prove that this win was no fluke of history.

Most factors that propelled Kejriwal to power in Delhi are abundantly present in Nepal. For one thing, corruption is now standard operating procedure seemingly condoned by the highest executive authority in the land. For instance, in the recent annual day celebration of the anti-corruption watchdog, the CIAA, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala had no qualms in publicly admitting that he received complaints about his own ministers having been involved in corruption. But he did not mention any action he took or intended to take against them. Instead, in the same breath, he accused the CIAA chief of remaining preoccupied with corruption among junior officials, while he let the big fish free.

While corruption remains endemic, the citizens grapple with daily shortages of everything: no cooking gas, no power, no water, and no jobs, no security, no health, no education. There should have been a thousand Kejriwals on the streets of Kathmandu already. Unlike Delhi, Nepal remains rural. In addition, a convergence of high caste status and economic power give rulers the license to extract resources from society. Since the feudalistic order is invariably attended by the chronic persistence of widespread poverty and all-pervasive lack of functional literacy, money effectively plays a major role in elections and that provides a perfect alibi for a feudal elite masquerading as politicians to remain deeply enmeshed in corruption. As things stand, a successful politician in Nepal is necessarily a corrupt man.

To be sure, there are a few Kejriwals in the political parties, but they are pressed down by the deadweight of corrupt aparatchiks. Take Gokarna Bista of the UML who performed superbly as an energy minister but was punished for his integrity.

Nepal’s democracy needs an altogether new architecture under which concerned citizens are empowered to make their own decisions. Our success in forestry through forest user groups and in primary healthcare through mothers’ groups are based on the same approach. Potentially, our grassroots communities are full of Kejriwals. So, the Gokarna Bistas in all the parties have to redefine their role and mission in life. The sooner they come out of their party cocoons, the faster our country can mass-produce Kejriwals.
They say that if a butterfly flaps its wings in Brazil, there will be a typhoon in Taiwan. Well, it's not as bad as that, but this week's front has brought rain and overcast skies. This westerly that has brought rain and overcast skies this week comes all the way from the Mediterranean, and is the aftermath of the snowstorms that caused havoc from Turkey to Iraq. We will see continued cloud cover with the sun peeping out from time to time. This will bring down the maximum temperature, and there may be drizzles on Sunday. So, don't bid winter goodbye just yet.

KATHMANDU

KENJI KWOK

When German publisher Hans Hoefer decided to pursue his interest in organic greens by buying a farm in Kavre in 1993, he ended up growing more vegetables than he could ever eat. His wife – Cynthia Wee Hoefer (pictured) however had a plan and set up a business to export the farm's vegetables to her home country, Singapore. Organic Himalaya was born. Fast forward 21 years and more than 200 kg of organic salad vegetables and jams are air freighted from Sanga to Singapore every week. The vegetables are hand-packed as per order and delivered to Singaporean families and kitchens that wait eagerly for their weekly supply of organic Nepali greens.

"Although the farm was thrown to me, I enjoy running it as a business," said Cynthia who oversees the entire production process single-handedly. The self-taught businesswoman swiftly established a marketing arm for the business by spreading the benefits of the healthy greens through word of mouth and social media, amassing close to 1,700 people on her mailing list since Organic Himalaya first started. She attributes the success of her venture to the allure of the Himalayan brand. "When I tell people that the greens are from Nepal, they immediately associate it with the purity and freshness of the Himalaya," she said.

Employing and training local farmers was also a good decision, as it gave the brand a face. "My customers seem to like it when they know local Nepali farmers are the ones growing the vegetables." Beans, lentils and salad greens are the best sellers, says Cynthia. She is also trying to introduce green garlic, yacon and leek – vegetables not commonly found in Singapore.

Real Food, a Singaporean café-chain that imports Organic Himalaya Greens, attested to the quality of Nepali greens. "One main item we import is lentils. We use it to make our lentil soup which is amazing," said Jee Yang, co-founder of Real Food. Besides supplying produce to individuals and restaurants directly, Cynthia also sells the farm’s produce in a weekend farmers market called Loewen Gardens in Singapore.

However, everything was not always smooth sailing. The seasoned traveller had once thought of ending the business venture when her wanderlust struck. "Having a booth at the farmers market is a commitment and it doesn't allow me to take any weekends off," she said. Her dilemma was also between growing the business and keeping it a boutique venture. "There are times when a certain vegetable is not in season and we cannot deliver as promised. But as a small business, customers are understanding because we interact with them personally," said Cynthia.

This personal touch to her business has also made her grow a fond attachment to the farmers and customers, which was why she ultimately continued the business. "Whenever I consider closing shop, I think about the farmers losing their jobs, and disappointing my customers," she said. The satisfaction she gets from personal interactions with her customers is what keeps her going. The 63-year-old said: "I love it when they tell me how much they loved the fresh vegetables or give me feedback to improve my service."

Jee Yang said that Real Food Singapore will continue to order supplies from Cynthia, because they prefer small and ethical suppliers. Cynthia said: "By remaining small, I’m confident of the products that we produce because I know the customers, the workers, and most importantly, I know the farm."
Birdwatch, A bird watching event organised by Bird Conservation Nepal. 28 February, 7am, Jholol Park Parking Spot, Chabahil, 9811300576, 9801024777, bc@birdconservationnepal.org, www.birdconservationnepal.org.

Photography grant, Applications open for a Rs 100,000 grant to produce in-depth photographic work on social, political, and climate change issues. Deadline 28 February, (01)4256909, mediacenter@ntb.org.np.

Online realm, An interactive workshop with UK Curator, Rachel Entwistle to explore curatorial practice online. 28 February, 10am to 3.30pm, Vite Asia Centre, Patan Cinema, 9849519933, nischal.oli@gmail.com.

Trash-free Tundikhel, Say no to littering in public, join the Trash-free Tundikhel, 28 February, 8am to 10am, Tundikhel, 9849519933, nischal.oli@gmail.com.


Tangal Wood Estate, The official opening of Tangal Wood Estate. Performances by Circus Kathmandu, DJ Tshering Sherpa and more. 27 February to 1 March, 5pm to 9pm, Tangal, 9851178070, nikisha.wilmiwarsi@gmail.com.

Nippon cinema, A two-day Japanese film fest organized by the Embassy of Japan in association with Japanese Language Teachers’ Association of Nepal. 27 and 28 February, Tribhuvan Army Officer’s Club, Tundikhel, (01)4256809, mediacenter@klb.org.np.

Lady luck, Send a photo of you and the special lady in your life, with a brief description to gro@clubhimalaya.com.np. Must ‘Like’ Club Himalaya on Facebook to qualify. Winner gets free accommodation for a night at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. Deadline 3 March, (01)4423567/9, gro@clubhimalaya.com.np.


The Laramie Project Directora Deborah Merada and Daya Dev bring to stage the famous docudrama about the story of American Matthew Shepard who was beaten to death in 1998 because of his homosexuality. The play raises important questions about prejudice, hate, exclusion and draws relevance of the incident to modern Nepal. Produced by One World Theater, the play stars celebrated Nepali theatre artists Raj Kumar Paudel, Daya Dev, Shanti Giri and Sudhikshya Bharai. Premiere show on 27 February, Rs 2000, proceeds go towards funding the play. Rs 500, 28 February to 15 March, Theatre Village, Lopan, 9808041124, oneworldtheatreinnepal@gmail.com.

Video challenge, A short video entered in ‘Gender Equality in Nepal’ by UNDP and UNFPA. Videos should be no longer than 4 minutes and can be in any language spoken in Nepal. Deadline 3 March, (01)5523200, (01)5523880, kamal.sigdel@undp.org, schhetri@unfpa.org.

Masculinism, An exhibition by Gopal Das Shrestha Kalpakram. 7 to 15 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal, Renémond, (01)4218008.

Call for artists, Local visual artists, sound artists and writers are invited to an open call for residency at Gallery McCube. Deadline 3 March, Gallery McCube, Mitra Marg, Patan, (01)5260110, gallerymccube@gmail.com, www.gallerymccube.blogspot.com.

Physical theatre, Learn to use your body as an instrument to tell stories without words in a workshop by theatre director, Nikita Mansupaty. Rs 750, from 7 March, 10am to 4pm, SPAK, Shankatika, (01)5600010, 9813930688, www.spaknepal.com.


Going digital, A crash course on digital filmmaking, 1 to 6 March, Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchowk, 98013524, bikalpaartistscenter@gmail.com, www.bikalpaartistscenter.com.

Video collective, Artists, Anil Subba and Ritchu Mahajan put on a collective performance. 7 March, 6pm, Gallery Mouth, Mitra Marg, 981360116, gallerymccube@gmail.com, www.gallerymccube.blogspot.com.

Why volunteer, Shailendra Raj Giri of Mero Job talks about the benefits of having volunteering experience on your resume. 7 March, 7am to 7pm, Cafe & Shop Mitini, Mitini, (01)5260110, gallerymccube@gmail.com, www.gallerymccube.blogspot.com.

Conservation photography grant, Applications open for a Rs 100,000 grant to produce in-depth photographic work on social, political, and climate change issues. Deadline 28 February, (01)4226471, info@cleanupnepal.org.np.

Nippon cinema, A two-day Japanese film fest organized by the Embassy of Japan in association with Japanese Language Teachers’ Association of Nepal. 27 and 28 February, Tribhuvan Army Officer’s Club, Tundikhel, (01)4256809, mediacenter@klb.org.np.

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Conservation photography grant, Applications open for a Rs 100,000 grant to produce in-depth photographic work on social, political, and climate change issues. Deadline 28 February, (01)4226471, info@cleanupnepal.org.np.
Manny’s coffee
Try delicious coffee blends at Manny’s coffee lounge.
Manny’s Eatery and Tapas Bar, Jawalakhel, (01)5536919.
mannytapas@gmail.com

Lal Durbar Restaurant,
Authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows.
Hotel Food & Bar, Durbar Marg, (01)4248999.

Bhajan authentic,
Bhajan – Authentic Nepali cuisine for the satisfied travelers with wholesome 100% Nepal farm fresh vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes in Radisson’s new wing.
Rs 800 and Rs 900 plus taxes.
The Coffee Shop, Radisson Hotel. Lalitpur, (01)4411818.
mikeks@radcat.com

Mike’s breakfast,
Huge breakfast and an endless supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this cafe, popular among tourists and locals alike.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (01)200171

Holi buffet,
Rangoli, a Holi special lunch buffet, to celebrate the festival of colours.
Rs 1400 plus tax per person.

Album launch,
Nepal rock band, Monkey Temple launches its third self-titled album.
27 February, 7pm, Le Grande, Thamel, 9810250895

Black history,
The final night of Black History Month where jazz musicians from Kathmandu will pay tribute to jazz legends like John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.
Rs 250, 27 February, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172.

Outallectuals collective,
A night of electronic bliss with Amin Payne’s Hip-hop, Ganesh’s ethnofusion, Gretinalia’s chillwave, and Cultivation’s dub.
28 February, 7pm, Places Restaurant & Bar, Thamel, (01)4700413.

Improvise,
Improvisation lessons for various instruments facilitated by Manoj Kumar K.C. and Raju Rai.
Rs 499 pre-registration, Rs 699.
28 February, 11am, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Jhamsikhel,
foreducationfoundation@gmail.com, www.foreducationfoundation.com.np

Promo gig,
Progressive rock metal band, Kamero pre-launch their debut album The Absence Paradox with friends, Tumbleweed Inc, Vomiting Snake, Social Nerse and Honey Markis.
28 March, 7pm onwards,
Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel. 9803717871

Barahi Jungle Lodge,
The first eco-friendly lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool on offer.
Andhran, West Chitwan, (01)4411712.
dj@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com

Shangri-La Village Resort,
Spend your weekend under the shadow of breathtaking mountain views, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience.
Gharipatan, Pokhara, (01)462222, (01)4410051.
booking@hotelshangrila.com, www.hotelshangrila.com

Jhule mountain resort,
Resting 2050m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic home stay experience.
Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Jhule, (01)6212399.

Mango Tree Lodge,
Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.
Bhetani, Bardia, (084)402008, info@mangotreelodge.com

Direction: Future.
Porsche is expanding its network into Nepal.

As the Porsche range continues to grow, we are seeking a strong partner in Nepal to expand our global network. If you share our passion for Intelligent Performance, please refer to our Investor Selection Platform at www.porsche.com/middle-east/investment-opportunity
**OM ASTHA RAI**

I 

In previous years, Pasang Sherpa (pictured, left) would now be packing up his gear, getting ready to receive his expedition and fly off to Lukla for another Everest climb. This spring, the 38-year-old is out of a job because most Everest expeditions have been cancelled after last year’s avalanche that killed 16 high-altitude guides. Many of those killed were his friends, and Pasang had decided that this profession was just too dangerous. But with no other jobs available, he changed his mind and was ready to join an expedition. However, negative international publicity of the avalanche and confusion about government policy has prompted most companies to cancel their expeditions this year.

With just over a month left for the climbing season to start, Pasang still hasn’t been contacted by any expedition team, and he is now worried that he will not be able to make any money this year. Not a single expedition group has applied for permits so far this season. And even those who abandoned their expeditions last season have yet to confirm if they are climbing this year. Only 10 of 35 climbers who went to the Everest through Shangrila Treks Nepal last year, for example, are coming this year, says Jeevan Ghimire of Shangrila Treks.

“I am just praying that the situation will improve,” says Pasang, who summited Everest in 2013.

More than 300 Sherpas are directly employed during the average Everest season as so-called ‘icefall doctors’, guides, porters and support staff. For most of them,

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**The Present**

‘Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift and that’s why we call it the Present’.

I don’t know who wrote these clever words, I wish they were mine. This one fits my theme of a present or gift. Imagine if I gave you the gift of foresight, that you would know what was going to happen tomorrow, next week, next year. How wealthy you could be. Imagine if I said ten years back that every Nepali I know would own a smart phone. I think I might have been laughed at.

“Yesterday is history” is a good place to start. I first came to Nepal in 1983 to climb Manaslu, and a lot has changed since then. It is a fact that things change, not always for the better. Perhaps the major change I have seen in Nepal is that it is now a Republic. The King is gone, just like in the west where we have no ‘ruling Monarchs’.

‘Tomorrow is a mystery’ but you may see it need not be so. Not so in Nepal because whatever happens here has happened in the ‘West’ previously: the spread of the mobile phones, power taken from kings. Political regimes, some good and many bad have come and gone. Russia: the home of communism has abandoned it as a ‘bad job’, a system that never benefitted anyone in a voteless, powerless society.

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**Aftershocks of**

Big drop in Everest bookings this spring affects the livelihood of high-altitude Nepali guides

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the Everest avalanche

the Everest season from April-June is an opportunity to earn enough to take care of their families for a year. Every climbing client employs at least five high-altitude workers on Everest, so if there are no expeditions hundreds will be out of jobs. Industry insiders say the main reason for the mass cancellations is the Ministry of Tourism’s inability to decide whether members of expeditions who cancelled last year have to travel in the same group, or can climb individually.

This is a continuation of the mishandling of the immediate aftermath of the avalanche last year, when it gave confusing statements about whether expeditions would be allowed or not. The government also botched the strike at Base Camp by distraught friends and relatives to meet their demands for higher insurance and compensation. All expeditions were then cancelled, but despite this some climbers reportedly took helicopters to Camp I and actually summed Everest.

The government had then assured those who had to abandon their expeditions that they could climb Everest anytime up to 2013. However, it was never clear whether members could climb individually or by forming or joining other groups. Tourism Minister Ilhim Acharya promised to sort this out, but was soon replaced by Deepak Chandra Amatya. Both are from the UML, a partner in the ruling coalition.

Ministry officials realise that it needs to revise Mountaineering Expedition Regulation (2002) to allow individual members of the abandoned expeditions to climb Everest individually, or as parts of other groups. Bureaucratic red tape has delayed a decision, which is being reviewed by the Law Ministry before it is forwarded to the Cabinet.

‘Realising that it would not be practical for members of the abandoned expeditions to be in the same groups, we recommended revision of this regulation,’ Ganendra Shrestha of the ministry confirmed to us.

In January, the Canada-based Peaks Freaks cancelled all its Everest expeditions for spring 2015 citing ‘fickle posturing of the government’. Although no other company has followed suit, they have not confirmed their expeditions, either.

Ghimire of Sangri Treks says, “I would have received a list of clients from my agent by January in previous years. Not a single one has confirmed their expedition this year.” Krishna Aryal, secretary of Expedition Operators’ Association (EOA), says the delay has already affected tourism with cancelled hotel bookings, flights and porter hiring.

‘The longer the government takes to decide, the more expeditions we lose. No one is prepared to wait, they will just go and climb Everest from the north side,’ he told Nepali Times.

Expedition companies say they are also receiving queries from clients in the US and Europe to seek assurances that they will not be abandoned by their high-altitude guides like they were last year after the avalanche.

Pemba Gyelje Sherpa, president of Nepal National Mountain Guides Association, admits that the Sherpas’ behaviour in the aftermath of the avalanche was not ‘professional’ but says it would be wrong to only blame them.

‘It was our collective failure, even foreign climbers did not contribute to managing human crisis that ensured the avalanche,’ says Pemba, a six-time Everest climber. ‘And they did not try to diffuse tensions later, they just acted like onlookers.’
Oscar snubs and good TV

Once again the Oscars have come and gone, disappointing many in the wake of the seemingly arbitrary decisions that the Academy voters tend to make in say, awarding Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu’s Birdman the

Best Picture award over Richard Linklater’s Boyhood – a heroic 12-year cinematic journey that deserves recognition for its bravery.

Let me start with the most frivolous of the lot: Gotham, which just started this season and is a throwback to the days when Bruce Wayne was a little boy dealing with the aftermath of witnessing the brutal shooting of his parents. This series succeeds primarily because of its stellar ensemble cast and the inclusion of clever origin stories regarding most of the villains we now know from the Batman comics and films, including Catwoman, Poison Ivy, and Penguin. Flash too, which just began, has saved itself from banality by its range of characters, including strong female leads (well, almost leads), and its real sappy love story to bug it down with. The characters in Flash sometimes, and to their advantage, overlap with those of Arrow, another comic book based show that is now in its third season and was terrible in the beginning but has started to move towards becoming watchable – having finally decided to concentrate on character development.

This year there were also a few strong stand alone mini-series’, one of them being The Affair – a 10-part show that chronicles, in a ‘He says/She says’ manner, the torturous affair between a married man and a waitress, and set in the lush Hamptons. The series is a study of psychological complexity, family ties, and human motivations which while sometimes a bit slow paced, is, nevertheless, very compelling. It has just been announced that the show will return for a second season - also in 10 parts.

There are a number of other ongoing shows that I would like to draw attention to the increasing number of television shows that have started to captivate audiences with their excellent writing, inclusive casting, and range in subject matter.

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INTOLERANCE FOR HATE

Kurchi Dasgupta as a rehearsal of The Laramie Project

Tamarind Restro and Bar

What used to be a car dealership nestled at the end of Jhamsikhel is now a lively eatery for food, drinks and entertainment.

Sit under the verandas in the patio to catch up with old friends, cheer on your favourite football team as they screen live matches, sway along with jazz music in the indoor lounge called ‘The Oath Room’, or set up a music in the indoor lounge called ‘The Oath Room’, or set up a

business meeting in the brightly lit restaurant space ‘Empress Dining’ adjacent to the lounge.

While you’re at it, don’t forget to order up an array of delectable dishes that Tamarind has to offer.

For starters, go with the Chicken Wings (Rs 350). The fried pieces of chicken marinated in a sauce, similar to a Korean red hot pepper paste dip, made for the perfect blend of sweet and spicy. Appetisers like this are good for two or three, but the snacks platter (Rs 680) would be a better fit for a family.

It is easy to get spoiled given the array of options from Intercontinental to Thai and Mexican: Tamarind can do no wrong.

The Pork Chop (Rs 600) was well-seasoned and grilled till perfectly charred. Although it was slightly overcooked, the layers of fat left to render on the slab of pork balanced out the toughness of the meat. Though the dish was served beautifully on a bed of mashed potatoes and baked vegetables, Rs 600 seemed like a hefty price to pay for a dish that was relatively small in serving size.

If you’re looking for something delicious yet filling, opt for the Pad Thai or Chinese rice dishes. The Chicken Pad Thai (Rs 375) was a big serving with generous slices of chicken that made it well worth the price. The glass noodles were fried well, every strand was coated with a distinct Thai fish sauce making the dish very aromatic.

Though fragrant, a little kick of chilli could make the dish more savoury and perhaps more palatable to most Nepalis.

Wash down the hearty meal with your beer of choice or a Tamarind cocktail. Happy hours last from 4pm to 7pm on weekdays, with special promotions for Ladies’ Night on Tuesdays. My advice is to go on Tuesdays, where you can watch salsa dancers take the dance floor.

Despite so much going on, the restaurant still feels spacious. You won’t get the feeling of other diners at the other table encroaching on your space or eavesdropping on your conversation. The whole restaurant has a relaxed vibe - waiters don’t rush you to order, diners are mostly young adults or families having a casual dinner, or groups of men catching their favourite football team while chugging beers.

If you’re looking for a chilled night out, Tamarind is the perfect place to be.

Cynthia Chau

How to get there: Tamarind Restro and Bar is located on Jhamsikhel Road, opposite Southern Comfort.
Detecting heart murmurs

Krishna Kumari, 24, from Palpa arrived at the hospital complaining of palpitations. She felt her heart was racing. When she was 12, Krishna had fever and developed uncontrolled movements of her limbs and tongue for a month although she never lost consciousness. In her adolescence she also had painful joints and the pain migrated from one large joint to the next, such as her knees. But pain migrated from one large joint to the next, such as her knees. But the good news is that ultrasound technology is developing so rapidly that small, portable, and user-friendly echocardiogram machines are available for use even in remote corners of Nepal.

In about 70 per cent of those with ARF develop rheumatic heart disease. ARF is prevalent largely in developing countries because of poverty and overcrowded settlements.

In medical schools in Nepal, listening to heart murmurs caused by rheumatic heart disease is an important part of training. The most commonly affected heart valve by rheumatic heart disease is the mitral valve and narrowing in the region of this valve (mitral stenosis) causes a typical murmur. Students are extensively tested on their ability to pick up this murmur on examination of patients.

The skill of carefully listening to heart sounds with the stethoscope and determining the kind of murmur and which heart valve it may be originating from is gradually disappearing. This is because it is so much easier to do an echocardiographic study and generally come up with a precise diagnosis. It would be ideal if doctors today carried out physical examinations with the same rigour as their predecessors and used echocardiogram to confirm the diagnosis. But the good news is that ultrasound technology is developing so rapidly that small, portable, and user-friendly echocardiogram machines are available for use even in remote corners of Nepal.

What is most important in the treatment of rheumatic heart disease is monthly injections of penicillin. A sore throat caused by streptococcus bacteria is a very common cause of pharyngitis, which can easily exacerbate the heart condition of a patient with rheumatic heart disease. Monthly injections will hence be useful in preventing further valvular damage which sometimes requires surgery. Thanks to the immense and exemplary work of cardiac surgeon Bhagwan Koirala, who initially headed the Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre in Kathmandu, many Nepali patients now have access to proper heart surgery necessitated by complications of rheumatic heart disease. Prevention is better than cure, so proper, judicious treatment of some throat with appropriate antibiotics will help avoid the problem in the first place.
Let’s talk about hair conditioners and how important they are for your hair. Conditioners made with natural, nutritious ingredients that add moisture to your hair, make it smooth and protect it from breakage, and even repair split ends. Conditioners contain ingredients that have the potential to cleanse your hair and help rinse away dirt and bacteria.

Don’t use just any conditioner available in the market: while they might make your hair look shiny and well-maintained, they could also be coating your hair with harmful chemicals. Using the right conditioner can make your hair look more natural, prevent breakage, and help seal and lock in colour.

There are three types of conditioners – the normal conditioner, the leave-in-conditioner and the deep conditioner: each of them targeting to soften your hair.

Always choose the right conditioner for your hair type. The normal traditional conditioner is applied every time you shower and after you rinse your shampoo out. This type of conditioner works to repair the damage done to your hair by chemicals and heat styling damages.

For long hair apply the conditioner from the middle to the tips of your hair and try to apply it to every strand. Your conditioner should be applied mostly to the ends of your hair, as this is the part that is most damaged and oldest. Do not put conditioner near your scalp and roots as it can clog your hair follicles, slow hair growth and increase oil production.

Depending on your needs, there are many varieties of leave-in-conditioners. There is the spray on and the cream kind. Leave-in-conditioner does not need to be rinsed out but it needs to be applied to damp hair. For normal hair, leave it in for a couple of minutes and if it’s dry you can leave a little of it all day. It helps your hair remove buildup and help limp hair get back to normal.

Deep conditioner repairs dry damaged hair. Scoop some conditioner and apply a thick coating to your entire head focusing on the ends of your hair, by separating large chunks of your hair so that each strand gets a coating. Feel free to spread it all the way to the roots. Wait for it to set by putting a shower cap for 20 - 30 minutes for it to work its magic. Use cold water to rinse it out thoroughly.

Always choose the type of conditioner that is advised for your hair type whether you have curly, straight, frizzy, damaged or limp hair.

If your hair is frizzy, dry and damaged choose a conditioner that is rich and thick, labeled for dry and damaged hair.

If your hair is limp, straight and fine then look for a conditioner for fine, thin hair as these conditioners will make your hair bouncy and look thicker.

If your hair is healthy with shine and body look for a conditioner which says for ‘Normal Hair’.

As conditioner doesn’t completely wash out, leaving conditioner in after shower may weigh down your hair, leaving your hair ‘flatter’. Reversing this habit is a smart trick to create extra bounce and body.

Every two weeks wash your hair with a clarifying shampoo to clean the residue left by conditioner or other hair products.

Daily shampooing will make your hair dry, but skipping frequent conditioning can leave your hair dry, frizzy and prone to breakage.

Cotton pillowcases can cause more breakage while silk and satin are more gentle on the hair.

You can use eggs (all hair types), plain yogurt (dull hair), honey (dry-sun damaged hair), beer (fine hair) or avocado (frizzy hair) as DIY conditioners every two weeks.

Cotton pillowcases can cause more breakage while silk and satin are more gentle on the hair.
Six years after announcing a tender to sub-contract the management of Kathmandu’s waste to private companies, the government finally gave its nod to two firms this month, the first time garbage disposal has been given to private firms.

Nepwaste and Clean Valley Company are preparing a feasibility plan to collect, recycle and dispose the nearly 1,000 tons of trash that Kathmandu Valley residents throw away every day. The rubbish can be turned into a viable business because 60 per cent of it is organic, which the companies can turn into commercial fertiliser, and recycle the rest of the plastic and metal.

“Kathmandu’s garbage situation has reached a crisis stage and we now need to start planning for the long term, and involving the private sector is key to achieving that goal,” says Sumitra Amatya of the Ministry of Urban Development’s Solid Waste Management Technical Support Center.

Nepwaste, a joint venture of Finland-based Compunication, Poyry, Bioste and the Dutch-Nepali enterprise The Organic Village will be involved in Kathmandu. The Nepali-Indian joint venture Clean Valley Company will focus on Lalitpur, Kirtipur and Bhaktapur. If the Detailed Project Report shows that the firms are technically and financially feasible, project development agreements will be signed to manage solid waste.

SAHINA SHRESTHA

The 2011 Solid Waste Management Act sets regulations and fines for transgressors and requires every household to sort waste, but enforcement has been weak largely due to unclear guidelines.

Lasse Laaksomen of Compunication says, “The most common problem in Kathmandu is segregation of waste. Very few households do it themselves, but with our technology waste can be sorted mechanically.” At present, only half of the Valley’s biodegradable waste is turned into compost.

Once the companies finish their feasibility, they hope to show that the cost of garbage collection and disposal can be reduced, and the amount of garbage that ends up at the landfill site will also be lessened. At present the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) spends 10 per cent of its annual budget (Rs 500 million this year) in transporting waste from its collection centre at Teku to the landfill site in Sisdole (see box).

Companies like Nepwaste and Clean Valley know there is cash to be made from trash, and the Finnish group has experience in managing waste profitably in countries including Germany and Sweden.

Glass and metals like aluminum and iron can be reused and recycled while 90 per cent of plastic and paper can even be converted to diesel. The organic waste can be turned into compost. Without a mechanism to segregate waste at source, most of the organic, recyclable wastes at present ends up in landfills. The only form of segregation is done by scavengers who collect plastics and other salable materials from the site. “Maximum material reusability is the key. Everything will be used optimally and turned to electricity, fertilisers, oil through environment-friendly processes,” explains Laaksomen.

With increasing per capita waste production, the current mechanism of collect and dump is not going to work for long. The only functioning landfill in Sisdole is almost full, and the long-term disposal site in nearby Banchare Banda has not been completed even a decade after it was started.

“The general trend seems to be to dump everything into the landfill and forget about it,” says Sanjaya Nath Khanal of Kathmandu University’s Department of Environmental Science. “Proper handling of the waste is necessary and maintaining and upgrading landfill is important.”

However, the only long-term solution is the public’s attitude must change, he adds: “Individuals must take responsibility for the waste they generate by following the 3R’s: reduce, reuse, recycle.”

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RUPEES FROM RUBBISH

Private companies are stepping in to manage and make money from Kathmandu’s garbage
E-waste

Have you ever wondered what happens when you dump your used broken laptop into the neighbourhood garbage pile? Or toss an old mobile into the trash can?

Computers, televisions, stereos and phones are electronic products that are not like any other waste because so much of it can be reused, refurbished, or recycled, and if it is not disposed of properly, it can contaminate the environment with hazardous substances. With every individual now owning two to three electronic devices, e-waste is emerging as a problem. Without a proper mechanism for proper disposal, they can be hazardous,” says Sanjaya Shrestha, professor at the Department of Environmental Science and Engineering at Kathmandu University.

You can smell the stench even before you crest the ridge and drive down the side other to Sisdole, the little hamlet in Nuwakot that has now become synonymous with garbage. Sisdole is Kathmandu’s landfill site, where everything we throw away eventually lands up.

All along the dirt road, there are bits and pieces of plastic, an odd sock or old jacket where they fell off the trash track. Along the way, a group of children have blocked the road with a bamboo stick balanced on old suitcases, asking for money for Shivaratri.

They have learnt well from Sisdole elders, who this week have once again closed down the landfill site demanding more compensation from Kathmandu for the privilege of throwing its trash in their neighbourhood. Garbage is once again piling high on the streets of Kathmandu this week.

“We got the suitcases from the dumping site,” says 11-year-old Amit Neupane, playing with his cousin Ramit. “The boys plan to take the suitcases they salvaged home to play with the other ‘toys’ they found in the dumping site,” says 11-year-old Amit Neupane, playing with his cousin Ramit. “The boys plan to take the suitcases they salvaged home to play with the other ‘toys’ they found in the dumping site.”

Sunita Tamang, 25, rummages through the trash heap, sorting bottles and other recyclable material as her sick five-month-old son sleeps under an umbrella beside her (pic, above). Her three-year-old son Ashish is playing nearby.

“I suffer from a cold now and then, I don’t know if it is the garbage that does it,” says Tamang. “We need the money from recycling, we’ll move once we earn enough.” She earns Rs 4 per kg of everything that is sent for recycling.

Sisdole is just 29 km from Teki Transfer Station in Kathmandu, and over the years the 600 tons of garbage that lands here daily has nearly filled up the deep ravine. Environmentalists have warned of contamination of the ground water, and locals fear disease from the rotting trash.

“The smell is unbearable during the summer,” says Thoti Maya Balami, 50, who lives nearby, “Sometimes it is hard to breathe and I have a dull ache in my chest.”

Climbing up the landfill with his goats, 20-year-old Gopal Shrestha remembers a different Sisdole from his childhood. “There used to be terrace farms here, now it is all waste and there are flies everywhere,” he says.

Livestock often die grazing among the refuse because the landfill area is not fenced in.

On the dusty road, Tanku Nath Neupane and Madhav Neupane recall the agreement the village made with the Kathmandu Municipality. “When they came to us, they said it was for only three years, they never kept their word, and they dump it haphazardly,” he adds.

The municipality also promised to build 3 km roads every year, and that promise hasn’t been kept either. The household near the landfill receives a small compensation from Kathmandu, but locals complain that it is not distributed equally.

Neupane tells us: “All I know is that the landfill has to be moved elsewhere,” A yellow garbage lorry comes up the road, he flags it down and hitches a ride into the city.

Sahina Shrestha in Nuwakot
Challenges for new governor

Ashish Gyawali in Annapurna Post, 25 February

With Nepal Rashtra Bank (NRB)’s governor Yubaraj Khatiwada’s five-year tenure coming to an end next month, the government has announced its search for a new candidate. On Tuesday, the cabinet formed a three-member panel led by Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat to recommend two names for the post.

Many aspirants, from bank CEOs to former finance secretaries, have begun lobbying for their candidacy. A host of challenges however awaits the new governor.

Immediately after assuming office, the new governor will have to decide whether to release businessman Ajaya Raj Sumargi’s money which is currently withheld by NRB. After news that Sumargi’s company has not been registered with the Department of Industry to light, the NRB withheld around Rs 3.5 billion, which was deposited in Sumargi’s bank accounts by unknown sources in the British Virgin Islands.

How the new governor deals with Sumargi’s case will be an early indicator of his political alignment.

Another decision that the new governor needs to make is whether to allow Ncell from repatriating Rs 8 billion in dividends to its foreign promoters which has so far been barred by the NRB. How the new governor acts on this issue will partly determine the future of foreign investment in Nepal.

During Khatiwada’s tenure, nearly a dozen financial institutes were declared ‘problematic’.

Khatiwada had also stopped issuing licenses to new banks and financial institutes. But, there are many development banks and financial companies still sailing through rough water. Will the new government introduce stringent policies to save problematic financial institutes?

CEOs of some private banks are already lobbying for issuance of new licenses. It will be a challenge for the new governor to withstand this pressure, apart from continuing with the NRB’s bank merger policy. Bankers will also exert pressure on the new governor to withdraw his predecessor’s decision to restrict chiefs of banks and financial institutes from serving more than a certain period.

The NRB is now in the process of revising some key acts, including NRB Act-2002, but, bankers are opposed to some provisions in the revised acts. Whether the new governor will defend revisions of acts or give in to pressure by bankers will define Nepal’s future financial policies.

Pension woes

Tulsi Neupane in Himal Khabarpatrika, 22-28 February

In 1958, Indra Bahadur Thapa from Palpa joined the Indian army like hundreds of other Nepalis. In the army’s records, instead of his wife’s given name Dil Maya, he put down her nickname Krishna Maya Thapa. In those days, documents proving identity or educational background were not considered as important when one was physically capable.

Back in Nepal, Indra Bahadur’s wife got her citizenship under her given name Dil Maya. The discrepancy in her names has been the cause of her woes for 25 years. After the death of her husband in 1998, she has not been able to collect pension of IRS 4500 due to the difference in name in the citizenship versus army records.

Tirtha Shrestha from the same district had changed his last name to Rana to join the Indian army. He registered his wife Jham Kala Shrestha’s name as Chandra Kumari Rana. After Shrestha passed away in 2003, the pension camp in Pokhara asked Jham Kala to ‘correct’ her name and surname. “My mother collected the pension when my father was sick, but she was refused the money after his death as the name in citizenship and the records don’t match,” says his son Bishnu Shrestha. “We don’t know where to go or whom to talk to,” he adds.

According to Kuli Bahadur KC, secretary general of a committee for the welfare of Ex-Indian Army Servicemen, there are around 13,000 people who have not been able to collect the pension due to difference in name in the records.

Under the Indian government’s regulations, the pension of an ex-serviceman transfers to his widow upon his death. But many families are facing problems as the name in the army’s official records and their citizenship do not match.

In a meeting between the foreign ministers if India and Nepal on 25-26 July 2014, a consensus was reached to aid the collection of pensions for the pensioners whose names, date of birth and address were different on the record. For this the district administration office will have to provide the proof along with the photo. But the Government of Nepal is yet to issue any instructions regarding the matter. Says KC, “The problem would be solved if the government issues a circular for the matter but that hasn’t been done yet.”
The political crisis in January caused by the failure of the parties to meet a deadline on the constitution widened fissures between ideological groups in Nepali social media.

The deadlock is likely to be a result, rather than the cause of the acrimony between deeply divided groups of public intellectuals, media and civil society. There are cliques in the public sphere and social networks, as there are in politics. Members of a clique share interests, and hold common beliefs, forming groups of people having more interactions among themselves than with others.

Network scientists have studied the nature of communities in online environments. Communities with a healthy share of intra- and inter-community interactions are more innovative, dynamic, and more likely to find and solve problems.

Twitter has grown to be an important platform for public discussion in a section of Nepali society. Politicians, journalists, writers, and members of backstage intellectuals, and students use twitter to discuss general events, share news stories, and share political positions. Twitter is used similarly all over the world and studies of users during important events are common.

Network analysis is one of the tools for new social norms are spread and established, the way influential users influence their followers, and whether a network has healthy amount of interaction among communities or if they are conversing within enclosed systems. Studies like this one have been done in the Israeli-Palestine and Afghan conflicts, most notably by Gilad Lotan.

About 990 tweets (16-24 Jan and 29 Jan-3 Feb) that shared links from popular Nepali news websites were mined for this analysis. A user is considered to have a connection (or a link, or interaction) with another user if either has retweeted the link shared by others. Generally, people retweet links they like or agree with.

Very popular users like major newspaper editors or prominent media personalities were removed. Similarly, users who had not retweeted any link or none of whose tweets were retweeted by others were also not included. The resulting network with its major communities is shown in the diagram. Each circle denotes an individual twitter user, and each colour denotes a ‘community’. The size of the circle is proportional to the number of times that user’s links have been retweeted.

While tweets not containing links might have been retweeted dozens of times, they were not a part of this analysis, neither were tweets not containing links from major Nepali news websites.

Elsewhere in the world, there are online community structures that are very deeply divided and not even talking to each other. This is not the case in Nepal where there are some communities that at least interact with other communities. The findings show that communities that lie between community boundaries or in communities that lie between communities with their major communities. People may be well suited to bridge the division between opposite communities and they may be the one that are more trusted.

The biggest community in this study, Community 1 (Red) is also the most active (its size is about a third of the total network and its activities amounted for more than 40% per cent of the total interactions in the whole network). But an overwhelming amount of this activity happens within the community, in fact, disproportionate activity within any other community. Exceptions, most members also seem to only interact with fellow community members. Community 2 (Pink) is the only one close to Community 1, while Communities 3 (Green), 4 (Yellow) and 5 (Light Blue) do not have such strict boundaries.

A community’s link sharing indicates the stance of the Moost-Madhesi alliance in the constitution, retweeted links and editorials criticising the CA Chairman. In comparison, the Green Community 4 shared links and editorials supporting the position of the ruling coalition to go for a vote in the CA. This community also shared news about the government’s warning to foreign ambassadors, while Community 1 shared links that criticised the Prime Minister’s diplomacy.

An op-ed by columnist CK Lal that was very popular in Red and Pink Communities 1 and 2 was also the most ignored by communities 3, 4 and 5. Community 1 and 2 largely ignored news about the burning of taxis and vehicles by organisers of an opposition banda, while it was popular in the other three communities. Pittambar Sharma’s article in federalism that was hugely popular in Community 1, however, was also shared by some other communities.

Despite heavy activity in communities 1 and 2, a quarter were used in retweeting the links of other communities, mostly the Pink Community 2. The Green Community, which is diametrically opposite to Community 1, used close to a third of its activity retweeting the links of other communities.

Compared Community received the least amount of retweets from users outside the network of these six communities. This ‘outside network’ can be thought of as the group of average Nepali twitter users who are not bloggers, civil society members, journalists, or with links to them. In other words, the average Nepali social media user ignored links shared by the Red community the most.

Community 1 has civil society leaders, English writers, foreign correspondents, editors of major newspapers and some columnists. But why is it that most of the activity of this community is limited to itself? Why are other communities not giving importance to them?

Is this social and intellectual deficit play a role in the country’s political deadlock? Politics is often influenced, even led by social realities, and divisions in the public sphere could spill over to the general population.

The tendency to wallow in self-promotion and not engage with others. Such people may be well positioned in the public sphere, but few are critical of the political leaders. Could this suggest a groupthink phenomenon? Or are community-members afraid of airing dissenting views that could be targeted by them? Could this be part of a social media phenomenon?

All of these questions are important to citizens and those in the media, and analysing them may help correct biases and improve balance in views. This could be done by presenting both sides of the story together and letting the readers decide, or through moderators positioned between communities.

Equally important is to ask why social and intellectual presentations are present in the first place. Could a tendency of rejecting differing views, or using ad hominem attacks to deter criticism be responsible? Or is there a fundamental flaw in the assumptions and ideas that others find it impossible to reject?

Discussing these issues in future could narrow existing divisions, inject new ideas and keep opposing sides engaged.

Bibek Paudel is a graduate student who likes studying large networks. A longer Nepali version of this article appeared in Nepali magazine.
Show of farce

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aturday’s rally is supposed to be opposition sabre-rattling to scare the sheeptos out of the unnerving coalition, but it looks like all our Young Commisses are going to be doing is some bamboo-rattling. The party has ordered 100,000 bltons and many bamboo groves on the city outskirts have sacrificed their existence in recent days to further the glorious proletarian revolution.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior Design has acted promptly and effectively by classifying bamboo sticks as lethal weapons under the rules of warfare of the Geneva Conventions, and declared that anyone found carrying them on Saturday will be arrested on the spot. However, burning buses, vandalising shops and beating up motorists are all ok, and police will not intervene because those are deemed legitimate forms of free expressionism in our democracy.

Comrade Awesome Possum’s intention is to give one of his fiery 2-hour speeches, promise fire and brimstone and threaten to turn K-Town into Soddom and Gonorrhea if he is not taken more seriously henceforth and heretofore. He has chosen Saturday because it is a holiday so there will be a bigger attendance of people watching and waiting from the overhead bridges to see if he will once more break into tears while remembering the ultimate sacrifice of his comrade-at-arms. Baddies have threatened fellow-Baddies of unspecified punishment if they don’t join the long march, and Chairman Lotus Flower is showing his own commitment to take the revolution to its logical conclusion by not staying home over a bottle of Blue Label to watch the England vs Sri Lanka cricket match at the ICC World Cup on Saturday.

In fact, it will be Nepali patriotism and our historic geography and are now cricket fans. This is an imperialist plot and a grave conspiracy to undermine Nepal’s sovereignty and independence. Why else would the ICC, under the influence of Indian expansionists and running dog comprador of international capitalism, time its matches to exactly coincide with the UCPN-(M)’s glorious show of farce?

In large parts of Nepal people would rather eat cricket than play it. And there are still patriots among us who can’t make head or tail of the game. But, we have to move with the times, and if Nepal is going to make it to the next World Cup we better brush up on cricket. And the YCL can start by welding cricket bats instead of bamboo sticks. After clocking an average of 12 hours a day carefully watching the ongoing ICC Cricket World Cup I have become somewhat of a pro, if I may say so myself, and can now explain the nuances of this complicated game to fellow Nepalis:

1. Cricket is actually a very simple game: a bowler throws the ball at about 550 mph at a guy holding a bat to try to knock off both his tentacles from a distance of 50 ft.

2. Like in all sports, there are some simple precautions that need to be taken so no one gets hurt. Therefore all cricketers who value their crown jewels wear groin guards to prevent themselves from being inadvertently castrated by a bowmer.

3. Cricket players take food and drinks seriously, and every game has a Lunchen Break of 40 minutes and two Tea Breaks with Samosas of 10 minutes each.

4. Under Section E, Chapter VII, Verse 235 of ICC Rules: Where an innings concludes within 10 minutes of the scheduled or rescheduled time of the Tea Interval, or it falls at, or after that time, or when less than two minutes remain, play will continue but only if it doesn’t start raining, in which case play will be suspended until the sun comes out tomorrow, which is only a day away.

5. As in Nepali politics, Fair Play and a Level Playing Field are the hallmarks of cricket. Players can hurl racist epithets at each other, throw tantrums and chairs from deep square leg and/or silly point and even kick the umpire in the gonads. Which is why the umpire should also wear proper cricket attire, including groin guards.