Three-fourths of the sky

Every day should be International Women’s Day in Nepal, not just 8 March because there is much left to do for gender parity. Of the two dozen ministers in the coalition cabinet only two are women. Only about 15 per cent of the teachers in Nepal’s high schools are female. At last count, just 13 per cent of the membership of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists were women. But the most glaring example of structural gender exclusion is the refusal of some lawmakers to allow citizenship in the name of the mother.
Every day should be International Women’s Day

The number of cases of abuse and India and this has increased women also migrating to the Gulf has been a sharp rise in the number of separation. Worryingly, there has been a shortage of farm hands and we now have to worry about our children. In Nepal, the population statistics for China and the elderly. The gender imbalance has many consequences, from a shortage of farm hands and construction labour, to increased domestic violence in families which suffer long periods of separation. Worryingly, there has been a sharp rise in the number of women also migrating to the Gulf and India and this has increased the number of cases of abuse and exploitation.

On the plus side, the 4.5 million Nepali contract workers in India, the Gulf states, Malaysia, Japan and Korea send home $5 billion annually, saving the Nepali economy from collapse. The other, less studied, aspect of male migration is that households and community groups in rural Nepal today are being run mostly by women. This may be why, despite a dysfunctional government, there is still some development going on where there has been steady improvement in health and education.

For instance, the number of girls sitting for SLC examinations this year has overtaken the number of boys for the first time this year. Among the men, gone, women have more of a say in school management committees, forestry user groups, development councils. Women have had to take on jobs traditionally done by men, and while this has increased their responsibilities it has also given them more say than they had previously.

One of the main reasons for Nepal’s underdevelopment has been its globally sanctioned gender discrimination. The districts with the highest rates of female literacy, and where caste and other forms of discrimination are entrenched. There is a direct correlation between female literacy and Nepal’s dramatic progress in reducing maternal and child mortality in the last 15 years.

But what we can see is that although there has been quantitative progress in education, we lag behind in quality. Most women can now read and write, but what they haven’t seemed to be leading to more balanced gender relations in this patriarchal and culturally conservative society. The average age of marriage for girls has gone up by two years to 18, but child marriages are still rampant. Violence against women is tragically common as recent cases of child rape, immolation of daughters-in-law, and acid attacks on students have shown.

The most glaring example of structural gender exclusion is the refusal of some lawmakers to allow citizenship to women. This is the refusal of some lawmakers to allow citizenship in the name of the mother (See Anjana Rajbhandary’s story on page 6). The other is the inability or unwillingness of Nepal’s powerful to comprehend just how serious the imbalance in the country’s gender representation is. Look at any photograph of the top leaders, and they are all elderly Brahmin men. Of the two dozen ministers in the coalition cabinet headed by Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, only two are women. Only about 15 per cent of the teachers in Nepal’s high schools are female. At last count, just 13 per cent of the membership of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists were women.

Even the Maoist party, which claims to be inspired by Chairman Mao seems to have forgotten his most famous quote: “Women hold up half the sky.” Although women made up more than one-third of the Maoist guerrilla force during the insurgency, today what remains of the UCPN (M) Central Committee is dominated by male comrades.

It shouldn’t just be March 8 that should be marked as International Women’s Day in Nepal. We should be giving women a token holiday on this day. The day should be marked by striving even harder for gender equality in the home and workplace. Every day should be International Women’s Day.

AGITATED STATE

The editor's too soft a government that has proved itself hopelessly inadequate - there is much to be done, constitution or not (in an agitated state. Editorial, #747). David Seddon

Some so-called analysts have made up their minds against ever opposing even the most insignifi cant. They are the cause of argument.

Santamrud Pathak

Just because people are used to seeing agitators with blades weapons doesn’t mean an environment of terror doesn’t exist.

Nirmal Ghimire

This is what we get for continuing to lump up a group – Maoists – that have lost all moral, political geography of Nepal’s Twittersphere Most popular on Twitter

Real Deal

To pretend that their what through their relatives is not only less objective but too simplistic of a measure in front of such a complex issue.

NG

It is not surprising that the self-appointed and West-ancitiated are rightly ignored by the civil society they purport to represent.

G Funk

TRASH TO CASH

Good But success will depend on how it will be different to the “methodology” we have in place right now (“Ruppes from rubbish”, Sahana Shrestha, #747).

The most challenging task here is to change the Nepali lifestyle into becoming more environmentally friendly.

Nirmal

Wasn’t there some foreign private company looking to invest in electricity generation from waste sometime ago?

Roht R Rai

EVEETN AVALANCHE

Only means the World’s highest mountain is not going to be overshadowed (Aftermath of the Everest avalanche, Om Atha Rai, #747). That’s something to be happy about. And, besides according to the APF big a drop, 150-200 foreign climbers and about 250 Sherpas will be enough for a single season. There are other 8000ers and trekking activities for Sherpas.

Chhita R. Pokhrel

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Among the most important constitutional issues in the CPDCC once again gears up for the consensus on vital provisions in the new constitution is the model of judiciary too. The contentious sticking points seem to be over whether the judiciary should be under the purview of the Parliament and whether the Parliament (not Supreme Court) should be the final interpreter of the constitution.

The most striking task here is to change the Nepali lifestyle into becoming more environmentally friendly.

Nirmal

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**Us and them**
How to play dirty politics and call it an identity struggle

If the UCPN (Maoist) and the Madhesi Morcha think that busing in their cadre from all over the country to the confines of the Open Theatre in Kathmandu is a show of democracy they should beware: the UML has a far bigger party organisation and can truck in an even larger mass as a “show of force,” if that is what we are talking about.

In the name of equality and rights of all faiths it has been rightly argued that the Nepali state should not be associated with any religion. A Hindu Nepal will not be inclusive, agreed. But how is a Nepal restructured as federal units in name of select ethnic groups be inclusive, pray?

Nepal has 123 ethnic groups and 93 languages at last count, how many of these are marginalised? And who decides how marginal you have to be in order to have your own federal state?

Why should only Limbus, Tamangs and Newars have their own states? According to Census 2001, there were 686,000 Gurungs or 2.39% of the population and Muslims 971,056 or 4.2%. Is it inclusive to propose a Gurung state but not one for Muslims? Similarly, the population of Dalits scattered across the country is in the double digits. They do not have a state but the CA committee named a state after the Magar (7%), Tamang (5.5%), Newar (5.4%) and Limbu (1.58%), among others. Aren’t Dalits and Muslims marginalised in this country?

Let’s face it. This was never about identity, or for that matter, about the number of states. Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has said his alliance would accept a fewer number of states, six to be precise, if the states are carved and named on the basis of ethnicity. If they are not, then he will accept no less than nine states. What is the rationale behind this?

Basing the names and boundaries of future states according to ethnicity is dangerous business. But then, our selfish politicians will go for it because they can play divide and rule, and come out on top. You sow seeds of “us” and “them” about federal boundaries, dividing up rivers and forests and where is it all going to end?

We have had wake-up calls on this. During the tension-filled days of debate on federalism in the first half of 2012, there were ethnic clashes in Ilam over forestry products. In the Far West there have been clashes over dividing up the region. This is not “fear-mongering” by how to play dirty politics and call it an identity struggle.
Women in business and leadership roles

Yasmin Darwich is the newly-elected president of Business and Professional Women (BPW) International, and calls herself a “Mexican mother, doctor, advocate”. She was in Kathmandu last week for BPW’s first South Asian sub-regional meeting.

So it is not just about educating girls, but also boys so that they grow to share responsibilities.

Exactly. We also have to be very honest who brings up the kids, it is usually the mother. She may be reinventing the stereotypes by telling her daughter you can have your food only after your brother. Human beings are traditional, we do what our grandparents and parents did. As a gynaecologist by profession, I see this all the time, and these things must change.

Besides education, which are your focus areas?

The thing that makes BPW International totally different from other women’s organisations is in our name: we are business and we are professional. We are the only one in the world with that combination. We think and act locally, nationally and internationally, we network, mentor and lobby to develop the professional business leadership potential of all women. Affiliates can also work on various sectors, like environment. For example, in Latin America we have the ‘Tree Is Life’ campaign and planted five million trees in Brazil. We train our members how to be more involved in our issues, how to be a leader, how to be more self confident because sometimes, women have all the education, they have degrees, they have money and everything, but what happens when we start to go outside our comfort zone?

BPW International is the best university you can go to, it’s the best university for women. Here we learn all about social matters and we can share within the region with our sisterhood.

What were the main decisions you took at the Kathmandu conference?

This was the first sub-regional meeting and we discussed how South Asian women could work together. We need to know what experience and advice we can share within the region with our new sisterhood.

Marcia H Rioux is Research Professor at York University in Toronto, where she is affiliated with Disability Rights Promotion International (DRPI). She was recently in Kathmandu to meet with private sector employers, and to discuss how to promote access to opportunities in the labour force for people with disabilities.

Excerpts from her conversation with Ashutosh Tiwari:

Nepali Times: How did you get involved with the Nepali private sector employers to hire people with disabilities?

Marcia H. Rioux: We have a global project that looks at disability rights from the lens of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Within that broader scope of monitoring rights, we thought it would be interesting to look at a specific theme, poverty and employment, which are two major issues facing people with disabilities.

We chose to work in Nepal because a regional program on rights that we conducted with National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal (NFDP) showed that there was already a lot of cross-disability work – an existing organisational environment for people with various disabilities to come and work together on a common platform – going on here. That, we thought we would add scope, capacity, themes and technical skills so that there would be a wider awareness about disability rights being like any other movement.

Given Nepal’s demography, employers can easily fill positions with the available pool of regular job applicants. Do they then not balk at the prospect of hiring people with disabilities?

Employers are reluctant to hire people with disabilities. Most of them have no experience and no understanding. Some of them try, but fail. Earlier, we used to train people with disabilities to look for jobs. But when those jobs did not work out, they lost courage, confidence and motivation. We then learnt that we needed to work closely with the employers too.

In Nepal’s case, there is a huge out-migration of people, which reduces the number of available employees. As such, workers with disabilities are more likely to provide a stable labour market. From the meetings I’ve had with Nepali businesses, it’s clear that they know this but need assistance.

Hence, through our Nepal outreach work, we will work with them on issues related to recruiting and training, workplace safety, performance and productivity, and general adaptation.

The act of hiring people with disabilities is seen to be closer to doing charity than running a business. Is there a business case to be made here?

The business case is obvious. You change your consumer market. Businesses have long gone after women, children, the elderly, the ethnic minorities and so on. But people with disabilities remain the largest untapped market that’s available to businesses. From studies, we know that people with disabilities always go to companies and businesses that are disability-friendly, both as employers and customers.

Take the case of this barbecue restaurant (Baje Ko Sekuwa in Battisputali), because a customer who uses wheelchair asked them to put in a ramp for his wedding reception, they saw a consumer market they did not notice before and they complied. For a minimal cost, this restaurant is likely to increase its business.

For other Nepali companies that do businesses globally, letting your buyers know that you have progressive employment practices, which include hiring employees or serving customers with disabilities, makes them more likely to source goods and services from you.

You’ve visited a few companies. What are some of the examples you’ve seen of Nepali businesses’ hiring people with disabilities?

We saw that the pharmaceutical company, Deurali Janata has hired 15 people with disabilities. Most of them come from the surrounding community. This has addressed two problems – employment and transport – while strengthening the company’s ties to local communities. The company has also hired a sign language interpreter who helps the disabled workers understand instructions and attend meetings. Bakery Cafes chains have long been famous for employing many people with disabilities. Four Season Travel and Tours is working with tourism product developers and with consumers with disabilities abroad to make Nepal their first destination.

These examples are neither about charity nor corporate social responsibility. The people with disabilities hired at or served by those companies form the core part of the business.
Nepali Times: Did you ever feel that you had to work extra hard to prove your capabilities to superiors because you are a woman?  
Janet Fitzner: I don’t recall being denied opportunities because I am a woman. I was fortunate to have mentors who were always supportive of my ambitions. But, I have felt sometimes women need to be empowered to feel they can aspire to the top positions when they work in a male dominated industry.

Sinead O Reilly: Honestly speaking no, I have been lucky to work with previous general managers who actually believed females were equally productive and proactive as male counterparts.

What do you like the most about your job?  
Fitzner: Running a successful hotel requires a good deal of teamwork. I enjoy bringing together different strengths of people from different backgrounds in order to achieve a common commercial goal; service excellence. I also enjoy the diversity of the job.

O Reilly: The fact that no day is ever the same, you can never say you are bored, and you come across new challenges. Also, the fact that you meet so many people from all around the world and it is a joy to see their happiness when we as a team contribute to their vacation or business experience.

Is this what you always saw yourself doing?  
Fitzner: Yes, I have a passion for the hospitality business that ignited when I started my career in hospitality as a trainee. My mother actually wanted me to become a banker or a teacher because she didn’t want me working long hours. I was, however, determined to pursue my goals, and I worked my way up to eventually take on the role of general manager.

How do you want guests to feel when they stay at your hotel?  
O Reilly: We want our guests to feel that they are enjoying a “memorable experience” and feeling the “authentic hospitality” that we as Hyatt Regency Kathmandu wish to extend to our all guests.

Women still remain under-represented in most senior and leadership roles, and there are only few female general managers of hotels. Why do you think is the case?  
Fitzner: Like any other industry, the hospitality industry is male dominated but this is slowly changing. Few look at Radisson in Kathmandu; the male to female ratio in management sector is very good. We already have 30 per cent women working in the management sector, which I believe is a very good ratio. That’s the ratio we want to achieve all over Radisson. Last year we started a program which aims to double women in leadership positions by 2016 at all Radisson Hotels.

O Reilly: As with many industries, the hospitality sector also has few women in leadership roles. In many cases, this scenario could arise out of equal opportunities not being made available and some form of discrimination being perceived in certain societies. This is further escalated when there is a perception that women unlike men will not be able to devote their full time and energy due to family constraints. Furthermore, I believe a network of like-minded women leaders are limited who can guide and assist other women aspiring to take on leadership roles.

What is your personal philosophy?  
Fitzner: To work hard, never give up and always maintain a fighting spirit, and most importantly to do things with integrity and passion.

Any advice for young women who aspire for the top job in the hotel business?  
Fitzner: First of all, believe in yourself. We have a motto at Radisson, which says “Yes I can”. Secondly, take your education and training very seriously, and never stop learning. Also, don’t give up. You will find that all successful business people (men and women) have encountered obstacles and difficulties in their journey to the top. The ones who make it are the ones who did not give up. As a final note, be creative and innovative, as this world and the workplace is constantly evolving, so being adaptable is very important.

O Reilly: Work hard and achieve the results and knowledge in at least two industry disciplines; sales, operations for example.
Since I was first hit by a balloon on my way to school 12 years ago, I have always dreaded the week before the Holi festival. If it weren’t for the rain that doused pre-Holi terrorism this week, I would have reached work, drenched, multiple times.

For the first few Holis, my defence tactic was to just ignore, and walk away. After all, that was what my mother taught me. Every time I came home, angry at having been hit by a water balloon, she’d say: “There’s no point arguing with losers. They’ll never stop.”

I thought she was right, so whenever I saw a kid, a boy, a man with hands hidden behind his back, I’d run as fast as I could, and duck when the missiles whizzed past me.

But it was after high school that I really began to question this method of saving myself from being hit. It wasn’t me who was in the wrong, so why was I running? I decided then that I would not let a hooligan who took pleasure in throwing water (and eggs and tomatoes) at strangers keep me from going about my life. If they felt it was their right to stand on the street and abuse passers-by, I too had the right to walk the same streets without getting harassed.

The first time I decided to shout back at a kid, whose water balloon hit my butt right on target I was a bit nervous about confronting him. Even though I had a few years and inches over the little guy, a part of me was fearful that his ‘gang’ of friends would retaliate with verbal abuse which would only embarrass me. He slunk away.

Since then, I give earfuls to strangers who catcall me, or tell off those man-spreading in a crowded bus, or give a sting eye to someone whose eyes are glued to my chest. But when incidents like the horrific acid attack on two teenage girls last month happen, the fear returns. Especially because the culprit is still free.

Women are taught to be fearful and shameful for things they have no say in.
The westerly weather wave this week was much bigger than we had anticipated, the low pressure system was forced up the mountains and dumped snow and rain right along the western Himalaya. The front has now passed, but its residual water vapour is likely to cause afternoon buildup and even some isolated rain or snow in the mountains. Kathmandu Valley will have misty mornings with sunny, brighter days for Holi. Temperature hitting 24, but the minima still in the single digits.

Through rain and overcast skies this week, a Buddha Air ATR-42 is on its final approach to Kathmandu. The aircraft parks in the domestic apron, and passengers make their way out. Following the cabin crew, the last person to alight is Captain Sunita Dhital.

"I had back to back flights to Pokhara and there was quite a bit of turbulence today," she says, "but we arrived on time and had a smooth landing." Dhital has been flying with Buddha Air since 2009 and recently got her captain's stripe.

Since Sony Rana became Nepal's first woman pilot in 1988, more women have opted for careers in the cockpit making the profession less male-dominated than before but still much needs to done. Out of Buddha Air's total cockpit crew of 59, there are only four female captains and four co-pilots. Nepal Airlines has only two female captains whereas Yeti Airlines has four female captains and 13 co-pilots.

"I was flying to Bhairawa with Capt Yasodhara Thapa and one of the passengers was shocked to see that both pilots in the cockpit were women. But after the flight he came to us and thanked us," Dhital recalls.

With stereotypes eroding, there is increasing support from family for women to fly. Ashna Acharya, co-pilot with Buddha Air since 2010 wanted to become a pilot since she was 11-years old, and was encouraged by her father. "While my relatives were initially nervous, they have supported me," says Acharya.

Both Dhital and Acharya say flying alongside a female pilot is not much different, since once inside the cockpit it is all about professionalism and following procedures. "I don't think I am breaking gender stereotypes as a pilot. It is becoming more of a norm now as more women join the workforce," Acharya adds. While female pilots have become common, the gender gap among aeronautical engineers and technicians is still heavily skewed in favour of men. In a hangar full of male technicians, Shinza Upadhyay is the only female aeronautical engineer in the hangar.

"When I studied Mechanical Engineering at Kathmandu University, there were 50 boys and only two girls in the class," says Upadhyay. Inspired by her engineer father, Upadhyay always knew she would be an engineer and is currently responsible for planning maintenance and inspections at Buddha Air. As the only woman engineer, she doesn't face any discrimination but admits she has experienced people questioning her about her career choice. She adds: "When I first started working it involved a lot of heavy lifting and climbing ladders. Some colleagues would ask me why wouldn't I just stick to a desk job. But once they got to know me, the questions stopped."
the coffee table of the Dihad Airways office in Kathmandu is a business magazine addressed to General Manager ‘Mr Pawana shrestha’. In the GM’s office, busy juggling between two computers and a smartphone, however, is a woman. At 31, Pawana Shrestha is the youngest and only female Nepali country manager of an international airline in South Asia. Yet, this hasn’t stopped her from being mistaken for a guy. “Although more women are joining the aviation industry, their number at managerial level remains low,” she says. According to the 2014 Tourism Employment Survey men make up an overwhelming 83 per cent of the workforce among international airlines in Nepal, while women constitute only 17 per cent.

Shrestha however doesn’t think of it as being a disadvantage. “When there is a female executive, people sit up and pay attention,” she says. “They listen to what you have to say.” But she says women first need to be confident of their abilities, speak up and have ambition. Shrestha started her career at 16, working behind the ticketing counter at Gulf Air, before joining college where she studied Management and Rural Development. “I never compared myself to men, I just focused on what I could do, and how I could

The big green Sajha Yatayat bus makes its way through Kathmandu’s busy traffic, making heads turn. At a zebra crossing, pedestrians stop to stare. Passersby squint at the driver. In a bright pink jacket, a high bun and dark sunglasses, Rebika Thapa (pic, right) does look striking. She is the only female driver not just in Sajha, but also the only woman driving heavy buses in Nepal. “It wasn’t my childhood dream to be a bus driver, but circumstances in my life put me in the driver’s seat,” says Thapa who had been driving electric three-wheelers and vans for a travel agency on the Pokhara route for 11 years.

She applied when the newly-revived Sajha had a vacancy two years ago, but recruiters at Suvinda Sewa assumed she wouldn’t be able to drive Sajha’s heavy Tata buses. “A lot of men who had applied after me had got the job, but I wasn’t even contacted,” Thapa recalls. “I told them to take my trial again if they wanted to.” After a route test, Thapa was hired a year ago. She acknowledges that there are differences between how male and female drivers are treated (she had to give a route test whereas male drivers could start driving right away) but she is grateful for the opportunity.

She still remembers what her manager at Sajha told her the day she was hired: “You didn’t get the job because you are a woman, you got it because of your ability.” Says Thapa: “That has stayed with me throughout this past year, and I always remember it when I am behind the steering wheel.” As a familiar face on the route she drives, Thapa says passengers often come up to chat, and traffic policewomen greet her. She says she personally has not been treated differently just because she is a woman. Her support system extends beyond her supervisors and colleagues at Sajha Yatayat to her own son. “When my son’s teachers talk about what I do, my son feels proud of me. I don’t feel bad that

I am a driver because if I hadn’t done this job, I would not have been able to educate and raise him,” says the single mother. Besides Thapa, the bus crew today includes conductor Srijana Nepal (pic, above) who left her teaching job in Sindhupalchok to

become a conductor in Sajha with her husband. The couple work the same position in alternate shifts while raising their two children together. Passengers are used to loud, and often rude, young male conductors on microbuses. Nepal is polite, but firm, as she calls out for passengers and gets the bus moving between stops. Both Thapa and Nepal have endured bemused looks and snide comments. Pedestrians sometimes take pictures of them from the sidewalks, or motorcyclists try to chat them up at traffic lights. “There are a few times when some passengers are impatient and use foul language, but that is rare,” says Nepal.

Both Thapa and Nepal are often on duty together and feel that working alongside other women makes them more comfortable, and it is easier to develop a bond. As she brings her bus to a halt at the Lagankhel terminal, Thapa says: “I hope more women will join Sajha, we have to stand up on our own feet and work independently to motivate other women.”

Ayusha Shakya

Women at the

In the driver’s seat

DRIVING TO WORK: Sajha bus driver Rebika Thapa (left) and conductor Srijana Nepal often work together on the same route.

nepalitimes.com
better myself,” she says. This positive outlook is the reason she says she has never felt any discrimination at the workplace.

The Etihad Kathmandu office has predominantly women executives. Besides Shrestha, there are Sales Account Manager Sarita Jha, Guest Support Coordinator Nilisha Dangol Shrestha and Sales Support Administrator Samina Banu.

Although all the women say there is no sense of discrimination in the aviation business, they have been at the receiving end of humiliating remarks and discouragement from men in previous jobs.

“I’ve been told that I could not do my job because it’s unsuitable for a woman to go out to meet people and negotiate sales deals,” says Sarita Jha, “people say both men and women are equal, but in reality we are not.”

Jha is comfortable working in an office with mostly women. “I feel proud working here, it’s easy for us to understand each other’s problems and help each other during difficult times,” she says.

Nilisha Dangol Shrestha says the camaraderie and teamwork helps the office perform better. She says: “Support from colleagues and family is the most important to stay positive.”

Looking at live musical acts in Kathmandu, it is no surprise that the rock scene is dominated by men. But one woman is trying to find her place in this masculine music milieu. Sareena Rai (pic, above) is the vocalist of anarcho-punk band, Rai Ko Ris (“Rai Anger” in Nepali). This talented musician has also played in various other bands.

The prefix ‘DIY’ (Do It Yourself) has been an integral part of all the bands she has been associated with. This description perfectly fits her perception of music and life in general. For her, people have to remain true to themselves. “A lot of women, and even men, don’t question their conditioning,” she says. “I choose to resist this conditioning.”

Rai has often been called a feminist, but she doesn’t like to be put in a box. She says, “I hate any kind of injustice, not only towards women.”

In a 10m² practice room with her current band, Yuva Ekta, she suddenly seems more alive as they play Asamanta (‘Unequality’ in Nepali). “Sometimes you have to push yourself harder just because of your age, gender or sexual preference,” she adds.

Rai didn’t get into music for fame. But in her own unique way, she has been contributing to Nepali music for the past 20 years. Rai is active in the anarchist punk scene because that is where women are most encouraged to play music.

Ganga Rai Benzenkaar, Yuva Ekta’s guitarist, is a powerful example of the emancipation. “She came to Kathmandu from her village with only Rs 500 and a knife in her pocket,” says Rai, “today she is a guitarist in a punk band.”

Rai wishes there could be more interesting stories like Ganga’s. She believes that if rock music has mostly been men’s affair, it’s because they’ve had more freedom than women. She comments: “I got used to it, but honestly it sucks.”

Stéphane Huët
**La Lit 4.0.**  
Launch of the literary magazine’s fourth volume.  
7 March, 1.30pm to 6pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, editor@lalitmag.com, www.lalitmag.com

**Women’s Day**  
Women entrepreneurs exhibit merchandise produced by Nepali women.  
7 March, 10am to 6pm, International Club, Sanepa, (01)4222340, 9841411384, fwean.info@gmail.com, www.fwean.org.np

**Masculism,**  
An exhibition by Gopal Das Shrestha Kalpatri.  
Till 15 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babah Mahal, Revanthi, (01)4771848, satya@revanthi.com.np

**The Laramie Project,**  
The One World Theatre brings to stage a docudrama telling the story of American Matthew Shepard who was beaten to death in 1998 in Laramie because of his homosexuality.  
Rs 500 (adult), Rs 200 (student), Till 15 March, 5pm, 8pm, (student), 7pm 14 March, 1pm, Theatre Village, Lalitpur, 9800471734, oneworldtheatre nepal@gmail.com

**Golf Open,**  
In a stableford format with 3/4 handicap game format.  
7 March, Bam, Gokarna Golf Club, Ajaykumar Gokarna, (01)4450444, gokarna@gmail.com

**Why volunteer,**  
Shafendira Raji (L) of Mercy Job talks about the benefits of volunteering.  
7 March, 11am to 1pm, Café & Shop Mitini, Lalitpur, (01)4226471, info@cleanupnepal.org.np, www.cleanupnepal.org.np

**Call for artists,**  
Local visual artists, sound artists and writers are invited to an open call for residency at Gallery Mcube.  
Deadline 7 March, Gallery Mcube, Mitra Marg, Patan (01)5260110, gallerymcube@gmail.com, www.gallerymcube.blogspot.com

**Video collective,**  
Kirsan Rai Subba and Ritesh Maharjan put on a collective performance.  
7 March, 4pm, Gallery Mcube, Mitra Marg, (01)5260110, gallerymcube@gmail.com, www.gallerymcube.blogspot.com

**Questioning equality,**  
Shreni Mryehaturi looks at the status of women in Nepal through the lens of equality.  
8am to 9.30am, 5 March, Hotel Sainter, Lalitpur, sghkohromando@gmail.com

**Happy Hour,**  
Enjoy a new menu and a live band with special ‘Buy one, get one free’ offer on regular spirits, house wines and domestic liquors.  
Every day, 4pm to 7pm, The Corner Bar, Radisson Hotel, (01)4411818, double@radcat.com.np

**Coffee Escape,**  
In the heart of the city, the main highlights of this place are its Italian Illy coffee and pastries.  
Lalitpur, Arundh Bhawan, (01)4445447, 7.30am to 9.30pm

**Social café,**  
An afternoon of music for the opening of Sisters Café & Beauty, a social enterprise promoting equality and dignity to Nepali women through training and employment.  
7 March, 1.30pm, Sampa, Patan, sisterskathmandu@gmail.com

**Art Market,**  
Buy/sell art work, correct and share ideas. Live concert by jazz trio, New Age.  
7 March, 10am to 4pm, The Yellow House, Sampa, (01)5000665, angelan@nepal-ark.com, nagaran@photonik.com.np

**DINING**

**Rock, ride, run,**  
Outdoor athletes are invited to compete in this mega event.  
21 March, Hattiban Hills, (01)6218484, hello@himalayanoutdoorfestival.com, www.himalayanoutdoorfestival.com

**North meets south,**  
Enjoy the best of north and south Indian cuisine, expertly crafted for you by chef Satish Chandran.  
Kanakari Restaurant, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01)4273999, reservation@scp.com.np, www.crowneplaza.com/kathmandu

**Masculism,**  
An exhibition by Gopal Das Shrestha Kalpatri.  
Till 15 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babah Mahal, Revanthi, (01)4771848, satya@revanthi.com.np

**Double anniversary,**  
Sixtieth anniversary celebration of St Mary’s High School and 20 years of its alumni association, ASMAN.  
Rs 1000, 7 March, 2pm, St Mary’s High School, Jorpatikot, (01)5001192, info@asman.net.np, www.asman.net.np

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**The Laramie Project,**  
The One World Theatre brings to stage a docudrama telling the story of American Matthew Shepard who was beaten to death in 1998 in Laramie because of his homosexuality.  
Rs 500 (adult), Rs 200 (student), Till 15 March, 5pm, 8pm, (student), 7pm 14 March, 1pm, Theatre Village, Lalitpur, 9800471734, oneworldtheatre nepal@gmail.com

**Golf Open,**  
In a stableford format with 3/4 handicap game format.  
7 March, Bam, Gokarna Golf Club, Ajaykumar Gokarna, (01)4450444, gokarna@gmail.com

**Why volunteer,**  
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La Lit 4.0.  
Launch of the literary magazine’s fourth volume.  
7 March, 1.30pm to 6pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, editor@lalitmag.com, www.lalitmag.com

Women’s Day  
Women entrepreneurs exhibit merchandise produced by Nepali women.  
7 March, 10am to 6pm, International Club, Sanepa, (01)4222340, 9841411384, fwean.info@gmail.com, www.fwean.org.np

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MUSIC

Reggae Dub,
The only reggae sound system act from Nepal will make you move and groove this Friday Night.
Rs 200, 6 March, 7pm, House of Music, Thamel, (01)4011112, sanzey@hotmail.com

Ciney Gurung Live,
Enjoy listening to one of Nepal’s most popular singers sing live.
17 March, Mission Inn Restaurant Lounge & Bar, (01)4415613, nepalgolfzone@hotmail.com

Nepal Jazz Workshop,
An opportunity to attend jazz classes with international virtuosos, bassist Margie Poo, pianist Jeremy Siskind and saxophonist Mariano Abello.
Rs 1000 (KJC members), Rs 1500 (non-members), 18 to 20 March, Kalimandao Jazz Conservatory, Baneshwor, (01)5013554, sunita@katjazz.com.np, www.katjazz.com.np

Dhulikhel Lodge Resort,
Located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north.
Dhulikhel, (011) 480114/494, www.dhulikhelodgeresort.com

Famous Farm,
Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the anokhihyal.
Nawanoth, (01)494340, info@nepal-heritage.com

Hotel Landmark,
Made entirely from traditional Nepali bricks and woodcraft, this hotel is not only rich in heritage, but also in services and boasts an award-winning restaurant, the Hungry Eye.
Pokhara, (061)462908/463096/464897, www.landmarkpokhara.com

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Last Resort,
Canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort.
Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247, info@thelastresort.com.np, www.thelastresort.com.np

Mum’s Garden Resort,
Head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range.
Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardeneresort.com

GETAWAYS

Combos concert,
KJC’s faculty trio, with Nepali guest musicians and students of the Nepal Jazz Workshop come together for a live jazz concert.
Rs 3000, 20 March, 7pm, Music, (01)5013554, sunita@katjazz.com.np, www.katjazz.com.np

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Classical Hindustani,
A live concert with Indian classical musicians Rakesh Chautara, Vijay Ghale and maestro Navraj Gurung.
10 March, 4:45pm, Nepal Academy Hall, Kamalpuri, (01)5013554, chautaricreation@gmail.com, www.chautaricreation.com

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Kingsman:
The Secret Service

I have often been accused of being an easy viewer, something that I occasionally admit to myself after having enjoyed what I know to be a thoroughly bad film. But reviewing films, or anything for that matter, is really all about personal choice and opinion, borne out of the specific life experiences that either hone your tastes towards only the lofty and arty or sometimes allow you to enjoy (having put aside your cerebrum) the thoroughly ridiculous.

That being said, I truly doubt that anyone with a sense of humour would hate Kingsman: The Secret Service – the latest film directed by Matthew Vaughn, who produced Guy Ritchie’s Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) and Snatch (2000), and who now has quite the pedigree as a maker of blockbusters after also having directed Kick-Ass (2010) and X-Men: First Class (2011). Adapted from a comic called The Secret Service by Dave Gibbons and Mark Millar, the film itself is a hilarious (but sometimes also oddly serious) spoof on the good old British Secret service, and in particular to a certain fictitious agent, with its age-old traditions, reverence to “Queen and country”, and commitment to gadgets that should have become obsolete in the age of the smartphones.

The plot centers around a shadowy group of spies (though not government affiliated) called the “Kingsmen” who operate using code names such as Arthur, Galahad, and Lancelot while not necessarily sitting at a round table. When Lancelot (Jack Davenport) is killed under suspicious circumstances, Arthur (Michael Caine) calls for a replacement pushing all the Kingsmen into choosing a candidate each, overseen by Merlin (Mark Strong). It is Galahad (the wonderful and very talented Colin Firth), that throws a spanner into the mix when he selects Gary Unwin aka Eggy (played by newcomer Taron Egerton) as his protégé, driven partly by guilt (Eggy’s father died saving Galahad on a mission), partly by gut instinct, but mostly by slight awe at Eggy’s very specific “flying by the seat of my pants” style and boyish charm.

All kinds of antics ensue during Eggy’s training alongside his Oxbridge educated competitors, allowing us a particularly captivating introduction into a fantasy world of intrigue where a spy’s coming of age is heralded by the commissioning of a bespoke, bulletproof suit from Saville Row.

As people are betrayed and Eggsy struggles to save the world from a crazed tech billionaire, aptly named Richmond Valentine (Samuel L. Jackson), the jokes and the bullets fly. The extreme violence and action sequences are suitably stylised to keep you from throwing up in your seat, and the send offs as well as the tipped hat to the Bond films are so clever and charming that you will almost forgive yourself from being so thoroughly entertained by such a piece of fluff.
KAKORI

I’m not a food connoisseur but when a friend asked me if I wanted to review the flagship Indian restaurant at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza, I could not let it pass. Having spent three wonderful years in Delhi for college, and having eaten some of the best North Indian/Mughlai dishes there, I thought my palate was well-seasoned to take on the dishes there, I thought my palate of the best North Indian/Mughlai restaurant was running a special promotional menu with Kebabs and Parathas.

We started our dinner with the customary chutneys, relishes and roasted papadums. Soon after, our order of Charminar Banjara Kebab (Rs 900) was brought to the table. According to Chef Yubaraj Pokhrel, this dish was a favourite of the nawabs and emperors who did not have teeth. The kebab was served alongside Khameeri paratha and chutney. The outside of the kebab was a little crispy and smoky and the inside was full of spice and it easily melted in our mouth.

The combination of kebab and paratha with the chutney was heavenly. The chef candidly told us that these kebabs were made extraordinarily soft to accommodate the nawabs and emperors who did not have teeth. For the vegetarian amongst us, we ordered a Jaffrani Tawa Kebab (Rs 950), which was a shallow fried assorted patty of beetroot, sweet potato, peas and paneer. The patty was soft but the paner’s taste overpowered all other ingredients.

All kebabs were served with two different parathas and dal makhani. The Taftaan paratha (Rs 200) was a multi-layered roti that went well with the dal and the soft kebabs. The Warki Kulcha paratha (Rs 200) on the other hand was very rich and aromatic as it had been generously marinated in ghee and saffron. I did not like that the parathas were a little stiff. Some of the best parathas I’ve had have been soft, easy to tear and able to scoop any accompanying dishes.

Throughout our meal, the chef remained present to answer any questions we had about the dishes. Some of the kebabs he mentioned needed three days of preparation and many ingredients were sourced from abroad. Although not all the dishes that we sampled had an excellent taste, we enjoyed our meal overall. The price may put off many diners from enjoying a dinner here, but in the restaurant’s defence, it is worth the effort that goes into making these truly authentic and quality dishes.

Prabhas Man Singh

How to get there: Kakori is inside Soaltee Crowne Plaza in Tahachal.

STÉPHANE HUËT

The Nepali anti-trafficking organisation, Shakti Samuha, has received the annual French Republic Human Rights Award, which is given to only three individuals around the world.


This recognition is the latest in a long list of international awards Shakti Samuha has received in the last few years. “We’re very proud as this medal acknowledges our work,” said Sunita Danuwar, the founder of Shakti Samuha at the awarding ceremony last week at Alliance Française in Kathmandu.

“Learn, Understand, Act” was started in 1996, the organisation’s major mission was to empower survivors of trafficking. Shakti Samuha was created by survivors of trafficking themselves who were stigmatised by family and society when they came back from India. “We knew it wasn’t our fault,” says Danuwar who was herself trafficked, “so we decided to transform our tears into power.” Shakti Samuha means ‘Power Group’ in Nepali.

Since then, the group has built a network of about 2,000 volunteers in 11 districts most at risk where it organises communities to prevent young women from being lured away. The group also works for the protection and rehabilitation of survivors who return to Nepal.

At Shakti Samuha, survivors are provided with shelter, legal aid, vocational training and counseling for three months. Survivors have two options when they are ready to leave Shakti Samuha: urban reintegration or return to their home village. If they decide to go back, they risk being trafficked again and are regularly followed up with.

Shakti Samuha has to send monitoring reports for each survivor to the partner organisations in India working to free trafficked Nepali women. “This is how we ensure the zero risk of retrafficking,” says Danuwar. Of the 663 women who have returned, not one has gone back to India. Established by 12 trafficked women, Shakti Samuha today is still run mostly by survivors. “Sometimes it’s hard to talk about our past,” says Danuwar, “but it’s important to tell our story to sensitise people.

When the founding members of Shakti Samuha were freed and sent back from India in 1996, the authorities didn’t want them back in Nepal. Since then there has been a lot of progress in laws, but implementation is lagging behind.

This week, Sunita Danuwar flies to New York to participate in a conference of the Commission of Status of Women at the United Nations. She sees it as an opportunity to exchange experiences with other anti-trafficking organisations around the world.

She says: “Most importantly, I will be coming back from New York with lots of experiences to share with my colleagues in Nepal.”
Ask Anjana Anything

Anjana Rajbhandary

A SAGOON FUTURE

When giants like Facebook and Google+ on top of the list with over a billion registered users, it is getting increasingly difficult to make a breakthrough in today’s market, but Govinda Giri was determined to reinvent the way we communicate through social media. The newly launched Sagoon is more than just a platform for sharing content, and what’s interesting is that they will definitely worth a try.

Sagoon chose to go with an integrated social calendar that allows you to create, customise, and keep track of your plans for the days ahead — Facebook events can certainly learn a thing or two from this. This also comes with the weather forecast for the next two days.

Another interesting feature in Sagoon is the ‘secret box’, a fresh new way to share content in an easy secure manner. It allows you to either send three new photos using your webcam or existing images from your computer, add secret texts, and preview before sending out the private message. The team behind this new social networking site based in India does this really well through a neat interface, where information shared with your friends will expire after they have read it, so you can be assured that none of your secrets will be saved on Sagoon’s server.

There’s also a feature to share memorable events to specific groups of people, by sorting events to specific groups provided: friends, family, or co-workers. This system for managing contacts will also allow you to choose who you want to share your secret messages with.

Since Sagoon is still in its nascent stage in open beta, there is certainly room for it to unleash its potential through their dedicated user feedback system. But even with more than 10,000 registered users, it will still be a big challenge to persuade all our friends to jump on to another platform, especially since we are rather content with Facebook.

YANTRICK’S VERDICT: Sagoon definitely has the potential to develop into a household name in the future but for now, it has to do much more to persuade anyone to sign up for yet another social networking service.

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—Dr. Spiro Cordos, senior practicing in the US

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Being Nepali or becoming Nepali?

Nepal has one of the most progressive laws on gay and lesbian rights, but still treats its women as second-class citizens

Deepti Gurung’s older daughter had to give up her dream of being a doctor because the medical college would not admit her without a Nepali citizenship certificate. She doesn’t have one simply because Nepali law doesn’t allow citizenship in the name of the mother. Nepal has one of the most progressive laws on gay and lesbian rights, but still treats its women as second-class citizens because children whose fathers are non-Nepali, who are raised by single mothers or whose mothers were victims of rape, are not eligible for citizenship.

Nepal has one of the most progressive laws on gay and lesbian rights, but still treats its women as second-class citizens because children whose fathers are non-Nepali, who are raised by single mothers or whose mothers were victims of rape, are not eligible for citizenship.

Deepti Gurung: “People told me to get my daughter married or request the biological father to be allowed to get citizenship for her. I raised my daughter to be strong and independent, not needing a man for her identity. It is a crime not to provide citizenship to children of Nepali mothers, not just discrimination.”

If a Nepali woman is married to a foreigner, he has to give up his citizenship and wait 15 years to be considered, which does not always happen. During this process, their child is also unable to become Nepali.

Jorge, 32, also struggled to get his citizenship. He was born and raised in Nepal to a Nepali mother and a European father. He has applied for a passport, but is being given the run-around. “They gave me a list of Nepali male names and said pick one, but I couldn’t, so I don’t have a passport. It’s hard, but life is still beautiful and I will fight because I feel Nepali.”

The other category of children who are not eligible for citizenship are those whose mothers were victims of sexual assault, or if their husbands have abandoned them. Not having a citizenship leaves people in limbo: they are unable to get jobs, to go to school, and drive a car or travel.

Activists say there are about 4 million ‘stateless’ people in Nepal, and the numbers are multiplying because parents who cannot prove their citizenship are having children who are also not eligible to be Nepali. Many are not able to go abroad to work, or find jobs at home, and some are turning to crime and violence.

Even refugees have an identity when they seek asylum, but many Nepali who are born and raised in Nepal cannot call themselves citizens of Nepal because they are unable to provide proof of a Nepali father. “This is outrageous,” says Gurung. “Earlier, citizenship was a right, now it has to be granted by the state. Women have been discriminated for centuries and this is an extension of patriarchy.”

Human rights lawyers point out that an abandoned child on the streets will be given citizenship by the state, but children with a Nepali mother cannot get their papers. Stateless people are not registered anywhere, so officially they do not exist.

Powerful politicians have refused to allow citizenship in the name of the mother because they say Nepali would be swamped by Indian men marrying Nepali women. However, this ‘nationalism’ argument falls flat because children of Nepali men who marry non-Nepali women can get citizenship over the counter.

Suhin Mulmi of the Forum for Women, Law and Development says, “Till February 2014 there was not a single known case of a child born to a Nepali mother and a foreign father successfully acquiring their naturalised citizenship.”

Meanwhile, Deepti Gurung’s daughter is currently in law school, which does not require Nepali citizenship. She hopes to become a lawyer to fight for her rights, but she would still need a citizenship certificate to get a legal practising license.
CLEAN KILNS

Lack of incentives for green bricks means factories are still using old, polluting technology

Sonia Awale

oot particles emitted from Kathmandu brick kilns contribute at least 40 per cent to the Valley’s air pollution in winter, and this is not just a health hazard but also hastens Himalayan glacial melting.

Cheaper, cleaner and more energy efficient technologies are available, yet brick factories continue to spew out thick black smoke from their stacks on the city outskirts.

“Brick kilns, along with crop fires and vehicle emissions emit soot particles that exacerbate climate change, contribute to glacial melting, affect monsoon rainfall and also cause cardio-pulmonary ailments in people living in Kathmandu,” says Arurco Panday, Senior Atmospheric Scientist at ICIMOD.

However, hope is at hand. A recent conference in Godavari showcased cleaner and energy efficient technologies for brick kilns that could reduce air pollution in Kathmandu and lessen the emission of black carbon that cause glaciers to melt.

Of the 1,100 or so brick kilns in Nepal, one-third are in Kathmandu Valley. Most use traditional Bull Trench models that are inefficient, energy-intensive and polluting.

The improved Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) that burns less coal and emits less smoke is being used in only eight brick factories in Nepal, including two in the Valley.

“The shafts burn much less coal much more efficiently so the bricks are ready in 24 hours, and you can see there is very little dust and smoke here,” said supervisor Raj Kumar Lama (pic, above) while showing visitors how clay moulds are loaded into the furnace of the Satyanarayan Brick Kiln in Imadol. Lama is much sought after in Nepal and abroad, having helped build VSBK factories in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Unlike other kilns, clay mould-making here is mechanised so the bricks produced are of standard weight and dimensions. They are then dried in the sun for a week before being loaded into the vertical shafts. Coal bits are loaded in between before the furnace is fired.

However, despite the better technology, customers still prefer bricks made from traditional factories because they are redder, and do not crack as easily. VSBK bricks are smoother, and can be used for Rat Trap masonry walls which have better insulation, are sound-proof and lighter because fewer bricks are needed.

VSBK factories are more expensive to build, but the brick-making needs more water, and factories need to employ workers all year round. Therefore, electricity which is in short supply all this drives up the cost of bricks.

Kathmandu’s demand for bricks grows 15 per cent annually, as the construction industry booms. Unless cleaner kilns are used, the Valley’s air is bound to get dirtier.

There are regulations about zoning of brick factories and their pollution levels, but enforcement is lacking,” says Suyesh Prajapati, an international expert in brick technology in Kathmandu. “If there were incentives and rewards for factories to be green, they would change to cleaner technologies.”

The other bad carbon

Black carbon is easier and faster to control than carbon dioxide to reduce global warming and health hazards

Kunda Dixit

F or decades, governments around the world have tried to cut emissions of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere so global warming stays below a 2 degree rise by the end of the century. That target is not likely to be met.

But there is another kind of carbon – tiny soot particles given off by vehicles, cook stoves and crop fires called ‘black carbon’ – that contribute significantly to global warming which may be easier to control.

An international conference in Kathmandu last week organised by ICIMOD and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) discussed the best and fastest ways to reduce soot emissions. Recommendations will be presented at a summit of world leaders in Paris in December.

“To meet the 2 degree target, it would be quicker and easier to reduce black carbon than carbon dioxide,” Norway’s Special Envoy on Climate Change and GCAC Co-Chair Hanne Bjurstrøm told Nepali Times.

“and that would also reduce the harm to human health from pollutants.”

Black carbon particles smaller than 2.5 microns, are emitted after incomplete combustion of diesel, coal, firewood, or crop residue, and are second only to carbon dioxide gas in warming the earth. Himalayan glaciers also melt faster when this ash darkens snow and ice.

Since global negotiations to cap carbon dioxide emissions are stuck, cleaning up vehicular exhausts, reducing smoke from domestic stoves, brick kilns and forest fires could reduce global warming by 0.5 degree by the end of the century, scientists say.

Black carbon is classified as a ‘short-lived climate pollutant’ together with methane, aerosols, the refrigerant HFC, and surface ozone, which together add to the warming caused by carbon dioxide from fossil fuel-burning.

Controlling black carbon would also have enormous health benefits. At present air pollution kills 2.5 million people every year around the world. In Nepal,
Child-free bricks

N epal’s brick industry has been under fire for decades for poor labour practices, but more and more brick owners are under pressure to improve conditions.

Media attention, lobbying by activists and the threat that customers may not buy bricks made by children has guided some owners to ban workers under 18, set up day care centres, and even try to send children of working parents to school.

Debaki Adhikari is a mother of three from Sindulpulchok who has joined her husband to make clay moulds at the Satyanarayan Brick Factory in Imadol of Lalitpur. The children go to nearby schools, and one daughter is home preparing for her SLC exams of Lalitpur. The children go to nearby schools, and one daughter is home preparing for her SLC exams.

Co-worker Jaimali Budhamagar has been coming to Kathmandu from Rolpa every winter for the past 12 years. “My son went to school this morning, he is in Grade 3,” she says proudly.

Across the Valley, the Champi Mai Brick Kiln has set up a day care centre for children of workers between the ages of five months to five years where they get three meals a day. The company has enrolled older children in nearby government schools.

Yam Kumari GC, also from Rolpa, moves to Kathmandu with her family for six months in a year to earn extra income, and she is happy her children can go to school while here. “My daughter goes to school every day, she is really interested in her studies and is doing well in class,” Yam Kumari tells us, looking up from her washing.

Champi Mai is one of five kilns which is working with activists from the Better Brick Nepal Program to get a BCN (Brick Clean Network) certification for correct labour practices and environmental standards. Satyanarayan uses the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) technology, while Champi Mai uses Zig-zag kilns, both of which are less polluting than traditional furnaces.

Raj Kumar Lama, who operates the modern furnaces at Satyanarayan, is an international VSBK expert. He says: “Our workers don’t want to go to other kilns because there is much less dust and smoke here.”

At an international conference on brick kiln reform in Godawari last month, Satyanarayan’s owner Chandra Maharjan said: “Nepal is making progress in eliminating child labour. Owners have realized that social responsibility need not be expensive. They now know that child-friendly bricks is good for business.”

“The great thaw

Himalayan snow and ice are melting three times faster than previously thought.

Kathmandu Valley’s winter inversion that traps vehicle and brick kiln emissions makes it one of the most polluted cities in the world. For example, one survey in January on the outskirts of Kathmandu found that pollution levels doubled when brick kilns went into operation. Acute respiratory infection caused by indoor smoke is a major killer of children in rural Nepal. “Other cities have pollution emergencies, but in Kathmandu we regularly live through undeclared air quality emergencies,” says ICIMOD’s Arinco Panday, Senior Atmospheric Scientist at ICIMOD.

Although the Nepal government has a target of making all homes indoor smoke-free by 2017, forest fires and the practice of burning agricultural residue will be harder to control. Even if Nepal reduces it, prevailing winds will still blow up pollution from crop fires in the Indian states of Haryana and Punjab. Farmers set fire to their fields after a harvest to quickly clear it for another crop, and there is a mistaken belief that ash is good fertiliser. However, crop fires can be outlawed. For example, the former Soviet Balkan republics don’t do it anymore, but fields are still set on fire after harvests in Russia. Soot from these fires are deposited in the Arctic, causing the ice there to melt faster.

Svanta Bodin of International Cryosphere Initiative, an expert on crop residue fires says there is precedent that incentives and legislation can control agricultural fires. But he adds: “In South Asia, you have to start with farmers.”

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Annapurna Post, 2 March

Bal Kumar Nepal in Annupurna Post, 2 March

Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) Chair Pashupati Shumsher Rana has made the sensational disclosure that the political parties had reached a secret deal with the then king Gyanendra in 2006 to not abolish the monarchy. However, former Indian ambassador Shyam Saran played spoilsport and overturned the deal.

Rana told journalists that Karan Singh mediated between the political parties and Gyanendra to save the monarchy. But, Saran, who was by then India’s Foreign Secretary visited Kathmandu after Singh and the agreement unravelled.

Sinh had come to Kathmandu as a special envoy of India at the height of the April Uprising-2006, and shortly after Gyanendra announced that he was ready to step down as Chair of the Council of Ministers and form a new government of political parties. But, political parties rejected Shah’s offer outright.

Gyanendra reinstated parliament which he had dissolved accusing political parties of being ‘inefficient’ in dealing with Maoist violence, maintain political stability and ensure good governance.

“What Karan Singh said publicly before returning to India indicated that there was a deal between then king and political parties,” said Rana. “But, the deal was off when Saran returned to Delhi.”

Rana is related to Karan Singh, and this revelation at a politically critical time is now being viewed as meaningful. Highly placed sources say the secret deal would have amended a law about the monarchy in the first session of the reinstated parliament on 18 May 2006.

Last month, issuing a statement on eve of Democracy Day, Gyanendra claimed he had reached an agreement with political parties in 2006 which they had gone back on. He urged political parties to implement that agreement, but did not specify which one it was.

Meanwhile, the political parties denied any agreement with Gyanendra, and NC leader Krishna Sitaula has said the only deal was that political parties would allow the ex-King to live in Nirmal Niwas.

“You and I”

Lyricist Rajan Mukarung on his Facebook page, 1 March

This song was not written by Kali Prasad Rijal but by the state’s hill-centric mentality.

“May my eyes see the mountains as soon as I wake up, may these hands forever play the sarangi. What difference will there be between you and I, if I also become as narrow-minded as you? If it bothers you that we suggest you become more open-minded, then you can continue with what you have been doing. However, my friend, you must understand that the only thing getting worse will be your ability to see. We are only asking you to remove your blindfold and see things with clearer eyes, we are not trying to deafen you. Are you too reluctant to listen to the cries of the victims?”

“Only those who experience discrimination close and personal know what it is and how deeply entrenched it is in our society. And, they are usually the ones speaking up about the issue. Everyone else is just busy poking holes into the validity of the cause. To them I say, hold back your opposing voices. How can you promote humanity when you are too reluctant to listen to the cries of the victims?”

“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”

Prem Bahadur Singh, Spokesperson for the 30-party opposition alliance as quoted in himalkhabar.com, 5 March.

“...if there’s no consensus by 10 March, we will launch another round of protest campaign...”

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By Barta, a newly signed singer who is a member of an all-female Nepali folk band, Shree Tara.

“Saran undid monarchy deal”

Sajana Baral in Nepal Post, 2 March

Barta Gandhurani’s petite figure belies her powerful voice and sarangi skills. A native of Bhipur, Barta first learnt to play the traditional Nepali violin from her mother with whom she travelled around villages earning a living. Today, the 27-year-old performs at concerts, rubs shoulders with popular bands like Kolumba, but says making a living is as difficult as it was then.

“When I go, people ask me if I can play the guitar or the keyboard. The sarangi is not appreciated much,” says Barta who is a member of an all-female Nepali folk band, Shree Tara.

Barta studied music at Lalit Kala Campus and sarangi at Nepal Music Centre on a scholarship. Now she teaches at Norway’s University of Agder and Nepal Central Vibhaya. She also taught sarangi to students at Arvi Choying Dhens’a Aya Tara School for seven years before the classes were canceled by management due to lack of funds.

She feels that since the sarangi is mainly being used for fusion music, the importance of traditional sarangi has decreased. Barta says that being ‘inefficient’ in dealing with Maoist violence, maintain political stability and ensure good governance.

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Sedition + Treason = Self-Loathing

Those who question the legitimacy of the current government should review the last election results.

It took full blown self-righteous indignation to drag the Hand Kerry out of retirement after a half decade of blissful indifference. As the constitution writing continues to be blocked by the same people who insisted on the process in the first place, we’re now hearing threats of armed revolt from all parties who lost the last election. Isn’t that illegal, screamed my beleaguered mind?

A newspaper report on a recent meeting of the CPN (M), detailing their decision to become a ‘Militant Party’ and ‘develop’ an army of 10 to 15,000 cadres, got your columnist wondering why these people aren’t thrown in jail. Can any party form a private militia (sounds feudal to me) to wage war on the state just because nobody voted for them? After ten tragic years of pointless conflict and therefore we have less injuries.”

The Nepal Rugby Association (NRA) was established in 1992 and registered at the National Sports Council in 1995. It’s only in 2012 that Tanka Gir, a travel professional from Jumla, gave the sport a real kick-start in Nepal.

“The NRA has plans to evolve the team and attract more support. We have plans to recruit ex-military and ex-police. Our new team will be competitive and will play against international teams.”

The meaning of words can change over time, of course, and I wondered if my dog-eared dictionary wasn’t out of date. Perhaps a more current definition of sedition and treason should read ‘derivative activity initiated by floundering politicians who have lost all touch with reality.’ As support for the Maoists collapses, firing up their base with cries to rebel must be a last ditch attempt at regaining the good old days when they were still relevant.

Rugby gets a kick-start

Twelve players of the Nepal Rugby Sevens are facing Bangladesh, UAI and Nepal at the Asia Rugby Development Sevens in Chennnai on 7-8 March.

This week, despite the rain the team has been training hard. Coach Govinda Ghimire says he isn’t sure about their chances at the Asia Rugby Development Sevens, but says the team will give their best shot.

Team manager Tanka Raj Giri is more concerned with the condition of his players when they reach Chennnai. “We have to travel three days by road,” he says, “and we only have one day break when we arrive.”

The Nepali Rugby Association (NRA) was established in 1992 and registered at the National Sports Council in 1995. It’s only in 2012 that Tanka Gir, a travel professional from Jumla, gave the sport a real kick-start in Nepal.

“I discovered rugby when I joined England’s Aldershot and Fleet RUFC in 2002,” recalls Gir. “When I came back home, I wanted to create a team here.” He got together with Tanka Lai Ghising and Chetan Ghising, and set up NRA.

Tanka Gir preferred starting with the seven-a-side rugby. “This format is the best to begin,” he says. “There are less tackles and therefore we have less injuries.” It took time for rugby to catch on in Nepal. “We got a few people together from all over Nepal,” he recalls, “and they created clubs in their respective districts. This rapid enthusiasm enabled the NRA to organise its first national tournament last January.

With five teams from different regions of Nepal, the January tournament was the opportunity to select our players for the Asia Rugby Development Sevens," says Raj Gir. The NRA was affiliated with the Asian Rugby Union last year. “That was a big step for us,” says coach Ghimire. "We are now allowed to compete in international tournaments.

In November 2014, the team went to New Delhi for a series of friendly matches against Delhi Hurricanes, the All India and South Asia Rugby Tournament. “We won one of our three matches,” says the Nepal captain, Navin Giri. “It was a good experience to play with an international team.

The players are also showing much more confidence. “We know how good we are and I believe we can win,” says team member Rabin Bhujel. Nepal is currently in the ‘Development category’ and if they win this tournament in Chenni, it will reach the professional group of Asia Rugby Sevens.

NRA has plans to evolve the team and to make rugby more popular in Nepal. “We’ll take the opportunity of the World Cup next September to organise campaigns to recruit new players,” says Tanka Gir. “I hope we’ll be able to recruit our own women’s team after that.”

NRA also wishes to have Nepal’s very own XV Rugby team. “Rugby is still new in the country,” says Navin Giri. “We have to go slowly to reach this next big step.”
Holi guacamolí

Nepal’s tourism calendar is filling up with exciting events, reinforcing the country’s image as an “adventure” destination and proving once more that Nepal is one of the most untapped countries in the world. Closing the airport for four days was a brilliant move. It improves the Nepal brand by allowing the country to play hard-to-get. It adds an additional sense of mystique and curiosity, excitement and unpredictability to a Himalayan hortidray. This public relations masterstroke allows us to build on international publicity after Tribhuvan Incontinent Airport was placed in the Top Ten Worstest Airports in the World for the third year in a row in 2014. This week, TIA is trending all over RuzzleFeed, YouTube, Huffpost -- free worldwide publicity that money can’t buy. But this doesn’t mean we neglect Nepal’s traditional attractions like our cultural heritage and festivals. Which is why the Maoist Million Man Long March last week was such a great tourist draw. Where else in the world (besides Pyongyang) can you in this day and age see portraits of Kim Il Sung and Stalin adorning the stage at a rally organised by a party inspired and age see portraits of Kim Il Sung and Stalin adorning the stage at a rally organised by a party inspired and Stalin adorning the stage at a rally organised by a party inspired by Mao Tse Tung? Next time, Time Warp Tours and Utopian Nostalgia should sell package tours to those who still think Communism is a bed of roses. Never a dull moment in the Nepal Spring. After the May the Force Be With You Show last week at the Khula Munch, the nation marked Holi festival with two holidays: one for the Madhes and one for the Pahad. This country has already been carved into autonomous federal units, what are they arguing on about? This country has already been carved into autonomous federal units, what are they arguing on about? This country has already been carved into autonomous federal units, what are they arguing on about?

Back home in Kathmandu, even if there is no water in the mains there is enough in the drains to splash each other this Holi. It is important to bear in mind the importance of observing and conserving Nepal’s festivals. Otherwise, pretty soon the only customs we will have left will be the one at Tribhuvan Intermittent Airport. Look, for instance, at our national past-time of partaking of a noon nap at Tundikhel. There used to be a time when Tundikhel was so jam-packed with our snoozing ancestors that it was standing room only. Latecomers had to move to Sano Tundikhel, and even that got pretty full up on some lazy winter afternoons. But today, you’d be lucky if you saw even one person dozing there. The relentless march of time in a globalised world with its consumerist materialist juggernaut, and the rat race of our stressful urban lifestyles have all contributed to making the glorious practice extinct, and the nation is a whole lot poorer for it.

But all is not lost. Over at the CA Secretariat, there is no hurry to get the constitution finished anymore, so the entire staff has been rendered unconscious. Nearby, at the Ministry of Rest and Recreation senior civil servants have been caught napping at their desks, and keeping the tradition of national siesta alive. This Holi Week, the Ass was glad to see that we respect our hoary past and rich heritage by getting stoned out of our minds and lobbing lolas filled with Bagmati effluent at damsels on the sidewalks totally soaking them from head to toe. Hahahahahahaha!(Blood-curdling laughter.) So fun.

If, god forbid, Holi disappears we will no longer be able to get stoned out of our minds and lobbing lolas filled with Bagmati effluent at damsels on the sidewalks totally soaking them from head to toe. Hahahahahahaha!(Blood-curdling laughter.) So fun. But all is not lost. Over at the CA Secretariat, there is no hurry to get the constitution finished anymore, so the entire staff has been rendered unconscious. Nearby, at the Ministry of Rest and Recreation senior civil servants have been caught napping at their desks, and keeping the tradition of national siesta alive.

However, it is my sad duty to bring to my mythical readers’ notice that these fun and games, these magnificent customs, may soon be a thing of the past. They are now under threat from a spoil-sport administration that has announced that those hurling water balloons in the restricted area in front of the CA building will be tear-gassed. Miscreants will be nabbed on the spot on a first-come-first-serve basis so that no untoward incidents take place.

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