Politics stands in the way of justice for conflict victims despite this week’s Supreme Court ruling.

BY THE WAY

BY ANURAG ACHARYA

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A Chinese couple getting ready for a wedding portrait on the steps of the Nyatapola Temple in Bhaktapur on Monday. The number of Chinese tourists visiting Nepal saw a 17.5 percent rise in 2014 compared to the previous year. There are now 35 flights a week operated by four Chinese airlines connecting Lhasa, Kunming, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Hong Kong to Kathmandu. Two more Chinese airlines are starting flights soon, including from Shanghai. Meanwhile, the number of Indian tourists showed a dramatic 35 per cent drop in the same period. Find out why.

HITCHED

The denudation and mining of the fragile hills threaten the plains of Nepal and India.

STUCK IN THE MUD

The reasons for the delay in reopening Kathmandu Airport and passing a new constitution are the same: bad management, lack of contingency planning, blame-throwing, failure of coordination, and an inability to gauge the gravity of the situation.

EDITORIAL

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BAD TO WORSE ...

... at Kathmandu airport

PAGE 4

CHURE ECO-SYSTEM COLLAPSE

The denudation and mining of the fragile hills threaten the plains of Nepal and India.

PAGE 16-17
STUCK IN THE MUD

Just like it took four days to get an Airbus out of the mud at Kathmandu airport last week, Nepal’s constitution is also proving to be a difficult one to get unstuck.

And just as the jet averted a bigger disaster, perhaps by holding back a fatally flawed constitution we may actually have avoided a major upheaval.

Nearly two months not of being in speaking terms, the various political formations in the country are holding preliminary talks about resuming talks. All sides have now vowed off steam, there has been a lot of chest-thumping, sahe-rattling and name-calling. All have been suitably chastised by public disgust, and our impatient southern neighbour also seems to be twisting some tails.

But Nepal’s netas are going around behaving as if they have all the time in the world. The first round of re-negotiations this week failed, as expected. After all, you can’t immediately have an easy consensus when you have walked for so long, you have to make the public think that it is a long and arduous process.

But Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal appears to have realised that his show of force in Kathmandu was more of a ‘shoe of face’. The ideas all along was that the street presence would improve his bargaining position when negotiations restarted. It doesn’t seem to have helped much.

But he doesn’t want to be seen as a stick in the mud, so he has taken the personal initiative to reach to have helped much.

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But he doesn’t want to be seen as a stick in the mud, so he has taken the personal initiative to reach to have helped much.

Just another example of the poor standard of the TIA Airport. There was no update on the official TIA webpage nor was any information provided on the NTO websites after the Turkish accident. I remember long ago RNAV was considered to be of very high standard to fly with and you could be proud.

Interestingly after more than 20 years of democracy, the meddling and corruption brought nothing good to TIA. How can someone believe a second international airport will function when the first is a total mess and showed its inability to handle a simple accident? Three days of no flight, no assistance, with Nepali passengers getting even worse treatment when they pay the same fare. Shame on the authorities.

Navyo Eler

THE REASONS FOR THE DELAY IN RETRIEVING THE AIRBUS AND PASSING A NEW CONSTITUTION ARE THE SAME: BAD MANAGEMENT, LACK OF CONTINGENCY PLANNING, BLAME-THROWING, FAILURE OF COORDINATION, AND A BREATHTAKING INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION.
Justice adjourned

Nepal’s conflict victims have got legal relief, but it is unlikely their quest for justice will be addressed.

Last month, the Supreme Court gave a landmark verdict on the case filed by more than 230 conflict victims against the Government of Nepal that changed the course of transitional justice from a political imperative driven by the spirit of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement to a victim-centered judicial process driven by universally accepted principles of human rights.

After years of disappointment, victims on both sides have a slender hope that justice may finally be served. The three-member special bench instructed the government: make immediate necessary amendments to the existing act to ensure it is consistent to the interim constitution, international treaties and earlier court decisions.

The elaborate verdict which runs into 85 pages meticulously considers submissions made by both sides, as well as several international landmark cases and treaties before scrapping provisions of Article 26(2) and 29 (1), and instructing amendments to Articles 22(1), 24, 25 (3), 25 (4) and 26(5).

On Article 26(2), the verdict states that the commission should not be looking for any grounds to grant amnesty in cases of grave human rights violations because such grounds simply don’t exist.

The judgement expresses concern that controversial provisions in the act provide room for amnesty to perpetrators of grave human rights abuse to petition and secure amnesty even without the victim’s consent. And that, Article 25 (4) of the act, in particular, allows perpetrators in the state security forces to escape accountability by facing flimsy departmental action, without being brought to the civilian judicial process.

It is evident that the presiding judges were gravely aware about the national and international interest in the case, as well as its political implications for the country. The verdict derives a strong authority under the Article 107 of the Interim Constitution which gives the apex court right to scrap any law that it deems unconstitutional and issue a writ to safeguard public interest and individual’s fundamental rights.

Addressing the commissions directly, the verdict reads: ‘To say nobody must escape the accountability for grave human rights violation is also to say nobody should aid the perpetrators. And anybody who dares to do so must ultimately face the consequences. This bench believes that legally appointed bodies like the commissions will not indulge in such activities.’

National and international rights bodies have welcomed the SC decision and urged the government to implement them at the earliest. But in private conversation they all admit political conditions are not favourable. If the NHRC and SC push for its implementation, they will be on a direct collision course with the political leadership.

As the constitutional drafting process remains deadlocked over contentious issues of governance and federalism, the opposition Maoists have been further discomfited by the verdict. Not surprisingly, both Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Mohan Baidya have issued a joint statement warning of grave consequences on the ongoing peace process. We can only guess that there must be worried faces at Army HQ and in the hierarchy of the ruling parties as well. We’ll have to see how all this will play out in the days ahead when PM Sushil Koirala sits with the opposition to resolve the deadlock.

Nepal’s peace process is unique because it brought together two warring sides into a power sharing agreement, where the power balance has benefited perpetrators on both sides. None of the political forces command the moral authority to demand accountability for their atrocities resulting in this shameful silence.

Although Supreme Court decision has provided legal relief to conflict victims in Nepal, it is unlikely that their quest for justice will end so soon.

By the Way

Anurag Acharya

Principles of human rights.

BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya
Bad just got worse

The chronic mismanagement of Kathmandu airport was magnified after its four-day shutdown last week

OM ASTHA RAI

The chaos that followed the four-day closure of Nepal’s only international airport after a Turkish Airlines Airbus veered off the runway on 4 March only recurred when everyone always knew – it is one of the worst airports in the world.

The Turkish jet blocked the runway, closing the airport for all international flights, exposing many shortcomings: the lack of contingency planning, the unavailability of recovery equipment, the absence of information for stranded passengers, and a woefully inadequate infrastructure.

Landing charges and ground handling fees in Kathmandu are among the top five in the world. Fuel cost here is up to three times more than that in Bangkok or Dubai. Add to that poor management and incompetence, and it’s a recipe for disaster.

Even before the Turkish accident, incoming flights had to circle for hours because of poor visibility or lack of parking bays. Once the flights finally landed, ground handling was so inefficient it took three hours for luggage to arrive at malfunctioning carousels. Unable to handle flights smoothly even at the best of times, Kathmandu airport was incapable of servicing the 130 flights a day that started flying in and out from Saturday night.

On normal days, there are only 80 international flights daily.

There were chaotic scenes all week at the international terminal as airlines struggled to get angry passengers off flights out of Nepal. The airport was burning at the seams, there was no centralised information system, hapless migrant workers and tourists looked lost.

The 85-hour closure of the airport was another example of the lack of preparedness and equipment for removing aircraft disabled on the runway.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal manages the airport. ground-handling is done by Nepal Airlines, immigration is Home Ministry turf, customs is the Ministry of Commerce, and there has always been a lack of coordination between them.

When a widebody jet blocked the runway, there was no one in charge, decisions were ad hoc and information sparse.

Kathmandu is the country’s only international airport, and there is no other way in or out of Nepal by air. For tourism entrepreneur Ram Kaji Gurung, the chaos this week was nothing new.

Earlier this year he had to wait four hours for his tour group to come out of the airport because the baggage took that long to arrive at the belt.

“...things all the time,” says Gurung, “a former president of the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents, “at times, tourists get so frustrated they swear they will never come back.”

Immigration is disorganised, badly planned and often corrupt. Tourists without visa have to wait in three different lines for up to 30 minutes each: one to submit forms, one to pay and then to get passports stamped.

A Swiss national working for an INGO in Kathmandu told us immigration officials are often rude and harassing foreigners. Actually, Nepalis are not treated much better.

“Most of these problems can be solved easily,” says Gurung, “but airport management passes the buck, no one is in charge.”

There are 236 stakeholders and more than 60 unions at the airport, but there is little coordination between them. This leads to perennial problems like dirty departure halls, smelly toilets, inadequate trolleys, broken baggage belts, sluggish immigration, rubber-stamp security checks, and arbitrary customs procedures.

Kathmandu’s new terminal and apron were designed three decades ago. In the last decade alone the annual passenger volume has grown three fold. A 892 million dollar expansion plan supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the terminals, taxisway, apron and runways has been plagued by delays.

“The terminal building was just not designed to handle so much traffic. Passenger volume is ten times more than when it was built in 1990,” says Shrestha.

There are just nine parking bays in the international apron, but only two can fit widebody jets.

There are now 28 international airlines flying to Kathmandu, and more are coming. Nepal Airlines does ground handling for all of them except Thai and Air India, and it is so mismanaged that everything from check-in to baggage delivery is grossly inefficient and expensive.

Kathmandu airport provides the first glimpse of Nepal to visitors, and a lasting impression when they leave. For now, it is not a very positive image.

Kunda Dixit

O n Wednesday morning at 7:45 a Turkish Airlines flight had a near disaster while landing at Kathmandu Airport. But in blocking the only runway of Nepal’s only international airport, it visited the real and bigger disaster on the country.

The airport was closed for four days for all international and some domestic operations, more than 40,000 people were stranded in Kathmandu and inbound airports. For a country so dependent on tourism and labour migration, the loss to the economy was colossal.

A technical team from India managed to raise the plane with inflatable bags and tow it away. But relief of re-opening the runway on Saturday night gave way to dismay as the airport authorities seemed incapable of handling the pressure of back-logged flights.

The airport was open 24 hours, but as airlines brought in multiple widebody shuttles to fly stranded passengers in and out, the airport became a disaster zone.

Flights circled for hours, waited in the taxiway for another hour just for a parking slot. The check-in area had standing room only, the security checks were overwhelmed by lines.

The real cost of the accident and its aftermath was to the country’s economy. No one has yet estimated the cumulative losses, but airlines alone suffered an estimated $80 million dollars in loss.

Hardships for individual passengers, especially migrant workers, was staggering.

A major international conference on hydropower was cancelled, treking trips were scrubbed, and many international marriages postponed.

In the short-term, there are management issues that need to address ground handling delays, repairs to baggage carousels and streamlining passenger flow.

In the medium-term Kathmandu airport’s $922 million dollar upgrade needs to be expedited. Then there are the longer-term issues of expediting alternate airports.

Blairava and Pokhara expansions are two and three years from completion, and will take the pressure off Kathmandu somewhat. But Nepal airport is an unrealistic political white elephant for now.

The Turkish Airlines accident could have been catastrophic, and the runway was re-opened with much improvisation. But the crisis at Kathmandu airport is far from over.

“Making another approach”

The Turkish 737-800 aircraft had been flying all night from Istanbul with 224 passengers and 11 crew on 3-4 March. The airline had just trained its pilots to carry out the RNP-AR (Required Navigation Performance-Authorised Required) approach in Kathmandu, which is a more precise satellite GPS-based landing compared to the steeper VOR-DME landings. Qatar, Korean and Druk also use this approach, which allows jets to land at under 1,000m visibility, compared to 3,000m earlier.

On 4 March, visibly in the early morning was at below minimum and 726 circled over Simara for an hour before making an approach, but had to pull up at the last moment. “Runway not visible at decision height,” the captain told Kathmandu Air Traffic Control when asked about the reason for the go-around.

The plane carried out a standard missed approach procedure, turning west and climbing to 10,500ft and then 20 miles south of the airport. By this time, the crew must have been calculating how much fuel it still had on board, and needed enough for a diversion to Dhaka. The captain opted for an immediate second try.

Tower reported visibility at 3,000m but added casually, “Visibility at 1,000m southeast of the runway.” By the time the plane was at 5,000ft and 3 miles out a patch of fog suddenly moved in over the threshold. For some reason, despite poor visibility the pilots decided to go ahead and land.

Passenger accounts speak of an extremely hard landing “10 times more violent than normal”. The plane veered off the runway to the left, the nose gear popped and the Airbus A330 came to rest between taxiways B and D. The grass was soggy due to the last two days of rain, and probably saved the plane from careening across the apron towards the terminal building.

Photographs and videos of people coming down the evacuation slides that morning show fog so thick that it is hard to see the plane’s tail. (See pic, left). Why the pilot decided to go through with the landing, and why the ATC did not warn of fog patch are questions that will need to be answered.

Kunda Dixit

Jet averted disaster, country suffered it

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Tourism flatlines, Chinese are up

The total number of tourists visiting Nepal has remained stagnant after the last sharp growth recorded during the 2011 Nepal Tourism Year. In fact, the total number of tourists has actually decreased in the last three years.

The dramatic growth in Chinese tourists by nearly 18 per cent in 2014 compared to the previous year could not offset the plummeting numbers of visitors from India which declined by 35 percent in the same period.

This led to a decrease in the total number of tourists in 2013 and 2014, according to figures released this week by Nepal tourism Board.

In 2012, the number of Indian tourists visiting Nepal by air was 103,142 and this fell to 102,382 in 2013. The number of Chinese tourists, on the other hand has been going up steadily: 113,173 in 2013 from 71,861 in 2012. In 2009, only 32,272 Chinese visited Nepal.

Travel trade officials say that the drop in Indian tourists was mainly due to security concerns, the closure of casinos in Nepal, and Indians having cheaper options to visit South-east Asian destinations.

European tourists have also fallen off because of the economic crisis, and American visitors tend to be negatively affected by travel advisories issued by the embassy in Kathmandu.

Tourism entrepreneur Ranjan Rajbandary says the lack of promotional activities was another reason for the steady drop in numbers. “We have not marketed Nepal well,” he says. “Tourists don’t know why to go to Nepal, what to do in Nepal. They also fear poor security situation resulting from news of political instability.”

However, none of this seems to affect the Chinese who are flying in droves. The reason appears to be publicity from a popular Chinese movie ‘Up In the Air’ that was filmed on location in Nepal and went viral on the Chinese micro-blogging site, Weibo. Chinese guidebooks describe Pokhara as one of the top ten places ‘to see before you die’. Beijing has also declared Nepal as an ‘official destination’ for its nationals.

Nepal also seems to have benefited from increasing numbers of mainlanders visiting Tibet after the construction of the Beijing-Lhasa railroad.

“Most Chinese tourists who visit Lhasa want to visit Nepal as well,” he says. “From Lhasa, they can come to Kathmandu by bus or jeep and living costs are not as much here.”

To cope with the demand, air connectivity between Nepal and China has also grown, with four airlines operating 35 flights a week between Kathmandu and Lhasa, Chengdu, Kunming, Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

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A yam between five boulders

Despite differences, Nepal and Laos have so much in common, academics of the two countries should meet and compare notes

DAVID N GELLNER

I

magine a beautiful
mountainous landlocked
country squeezed between
larger, richer, and more populous
neighbours. The country is a
tourist paradise, with gorgeous
rivers for canoeing and rafting,
exquisite countryside for trekking,
and, in its few urban centres,
ancient Indic temples.
The rivers have great
potential for hydropower, only
partially exploited. The valleys
are sculpted with terraced rice
paddies, cows and water buffalo
graze on the post-harvest stalks.
In winter the valleys fill with
mist that is burned off as
the day advances. In the
hills, and mixed in with each other, the
country has over 50 officially
recognised ethnic groups and
many languages.
Despite these differences, the
country rid itself of its
monarchy, thanks to a
powerful communist movement.
During its chequered political
history, the country has shared a
long and asymmetrical border/relationship
with just two, as in Nepal’s case.
Laos has borders
with five countries (China,
Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia,
and India), and, in its few urban centres,
neighbours that are among the
most economically dynamic
countries in the world, Nepal,
and on the other hand, has freedom,
including the freedom for
political parties to compete and
ethnic groups and trades unions to
organise. It has a vibrant
public sphere with many Nepali-
language newspapers and radios.
Nepal has one huge advantage
over Laos. Nepal may have
suffered a ten-year civil war in
which 17,000 died, but Laos
has suffered far more and for
far longer. In particular, as part of
the Vietnam war the USA,
in a secret operation, spent $17 million a
day for nine years dropping bombs all over Laos in a
mismatched attempt to wipe out
communism. That unexploded
ordnance (UXO) is still scattered
all over the country and kills or
maims 100 Laotians a year. Small
NGOs (including the Manchester-
Based Mines Advisory Group) are
doing brilliant work painstakingly
clearing the mines, one village at
a time, but that work is a drop in
the ocean.
Prithvi Narayan Shah
famously compared Nepal to a
yam between two boulders. For
better or worse, Laos is a yam
between five boulders – and
perhaps, given the legacy of
US bombing, that should be six
boulders. Whatever USAID is
contributing to this effort (said to
be a mere $4,000 a day), it is not
efficient. The United States has
never accepted responsibility for
what it did, the Laotians are living
with the consequences and will
be for the foreseeable future.
David N Gellner is a professor at
the School of Anthropology and
Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford.
The spell of crisp, cool spring days couldn’t last, and they won’t. We are looking at some partly cloudy skies on the weekend with chances of showers early next week. The haze from the plains is blocking mountain views again. The good news is that minimum temperature is now in the double digits, with maxima going up to 25 when the sun comes out.

FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY
23° 10° 11°
25° 11° 11°

The League will be played in a ‘home and away’ format. Former assistant coach of the Nepal national team, Jagat Tamata says participation at the Championship will provide Nepali cricketers much needed international exposure. He told us: “To be able to play with great teams for two years is an incredible opportunity.”

If Nepal is able to place itself in the top six at the League, it will be selected to play at the Cricket World Cup Qualifier to be held in Bangladesh in 2018, where two teams will qualify for the World Cup 2019 in England and Wales. This might seem like a distant dream, but Tamata says the focus shouldn’t be so much on the outcome. “Win or lose, the team will benefit from this championship.”

The focus he says should be on increasing number of players, ensuring six months of play, conducting league tournaments, and building stadiums in all five regions. Tamata suggests retaining players who have played with U-19 team but failed to make the cut for the national team. He says: “These young players don’t lack in talent. They need encouragement and experience.”

Playing in the World Cricket League Championship will give the Nepali Cricket team much needed international exposure

TUFAN NEUPANE

At the ICC World Cricket League Division Two tournament in January in Namibia, the Nepali Cricket team failed to reach the finals despite putting on a good performance. This dashed our hopes of playing with the big boys. Nepal came fourth in the league, but had we been one of the top two, Nepal would have qualified for Division One Cricket and got a chance to play at the World Cricket League Championship. But there is still hope. After the International Cricket Council (ICC) decided to allow Afghanistan and Ireland, the two top teams from Division One, to directly qualify for the World Cup Qualifier 2018 in Bangladesh, Nepal and Kenya have been asked to take their slots at the World Cricket League Championship which starts in mid-2015. This will be a two-year tournament in which eight teams including Division One teams Hong Kong, Papua Guinea, Scotland, UAE, Namibia, Netherlands and Division Two teams Kenya and Nepal will compete for the title.

Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) is now preparing to send the team to Sri Lanka for training and has started work to upgrade the stadiums at Kirtipur and Pulchok where seven of the League’s matches will be played. Work has also begun at the Pokhara stadium.

The current team is playing well, but Tamata says it’s time to concentrate on the future. “We should try to develop our domestic cricket so we can produce quality players to play for the national team.”

Former captain and assistant coach Binod Das agrees. “The Nepali Cricket will only improve if we start thinking about our future now,” he says.

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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, Theatre Village, Lajimpat, 9808041124, oneworldtheatreinnepal@gmail.com

Masculism, An exhibition by Gopal Das Shrestha Kalaprem. Till 15 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4218048, sthapa@mos.com.np

Democratic revolution, A lecture on global debates on democracy theories and a discussion on ‘What led to the 2006 Democratic Revolution in Nepal?’ 15 March, 7pm, Ashok Hall, The Shanker Hotel, Lajimpat, (01)4472807, info@shankernepal.com


Francophonie, A week-long program with an exhibition, a photo call, cinema screenings and joint family internationale in concert to celebrate the French language. 16 to 20 March, Alliance Française of Kathmandu, Tripureshwor, (01)4214163, general@afk@gmail.com

Rock, ride, run, Climbers, cyclists and runners are invited to compete at the Himalayan Outdoor Festival. 21 March, Hattiban Hills, (01)6218484, hello@himalayanoutdoorfestival.com, www.himalayanoutdoorfestival.com

Yin Yoga, A new moon meditation where the sound of a live violin will guide your spirit to dive into your deepest self. 20 March, 5.30pm to 7pm, Pranamaya Yoga Studio, Budhanilkantha, 9802104696, info@pranamaya-yoga.com, www.pranamaya-yoga.com

Me and the Other, A show combining physical theatre with clasic and contemporary dance, focusing on how cultural heritage influences our perceptions. Rs 300, Rs 200 (student), 1 to 4 April, 5.15 pm, Mandala Theatre Kathmandu, Anamanagar, (01)6924269, info@mandalatheatre.com, www.mandalatheatre.com

Chantalassa, An exhibition of sound, video, drawing and photography by Mexican artist, Alain Ledezma, in residence at Mcube. Inauguration on 15 March, 5.30pm, exhibition till 21 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4210840, sthapa@mos.com.np

Women’s exhibition, Nine Nepali artists get together for a group exhibition. Inauguration on 13 March, 3.30pm, exhibition till 30 April, Newa Chen Art Gallery, Kulimha, Kobahal, Patan, (01)5533532, www.kalavoice.com

Falcha, Give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab. Thapathali, Lalitpur, 9851013475, bipinpiya@gmail.com

Caffe Italiano, The newly opened cafe in Pokhara is offering 20% discount on its Italian and continental menu, coffee and ice-cream. Mayo Bazar, Pokhara, (061)538913

Fuji Bakery, Tucked in Chakupat, this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. Chakupat, Lalitpur, (01)5549678.

Fire and Ice, For the best pizzas in town. Thamel, (01)4250210
**MUSIC**

**March of Pigs**
Progressive rock metal band, Kamero pre-launches their debut album *The Atmose*.

**The Immigrants live**
With violin, accordion and clarinet in hand, this European trio promotes a musical Friday.

**A new beginning**
Nepal’s favourite rock band, 1974 AD performs its first concert after announcing a new line-up.

**Nepal Jazz Workshop**
An opportunity to attend jazz classes conducted by international virtuosos, bassist Margie Pos, pianist Jeremy Siskind and saxophonist Mariano Abello.

**Combs concert**
KJC’s faculty trio, with Nepali guest musicians and students of the Nepal Jazz Workshop come together for a live jazz concert.

**Underside live**
The metal band celebrates ‘Satan’s Night in Hell’.

**Dwarika’s Resort**
A holistic lifestyle retreat, drawing on ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and for oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings.

**Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel**
Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area.

**Raniban Retreat**
Situated at the other end of the Phewa Lake and nestled inside the Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Himalayan range.

**Getaways**

**Shangri-La Village Resort**
Spend your weekend under the shadow of breathtaking mountain views, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambiance.

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A holistic lifestyle retreat, drawing on ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and for oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings.

**Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel**
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For many of Nepal’s development partners, the priority is poverty-reduction, health and education. But as Nepal makes progress in literacy and mother-child survival, some have turned to preserving Nepal’s unique and rich cultural heritage.

Among the countries that has invested heavily in heritage conservation is the United States through its Ambassadors’ Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). Set up 15 years ago, it has so far supported 650 cultural projects in 100 developing countries around the world.

In Nepal, the US Embassy has invested $1.9m for the implementation of projects ranging from the restoration of the 17th century Patan Darbar (pic, above) to the preservation of a remote Sherpa monastery near Mt Everest.

Current US Ambassador to Nepal, Peter Bodde (pic), has had a long-standing association with Nepal, having served here as a diplomat twice previously and was also involved in setting up AFCP in 2000 when he was working in Washington with Bonnie Cohen, the under secretary of State for management, who helped put AFCP together.

“We felt that ambassadors needed the flexibility to help out the country where they were assigned with cultural preservation,” Bodde told Nepali Times.

There is strong competition to be accepted by the AFCP for a grant. Every year the US Embassy in Kathmandu receives up to 10 projects, and only two or three are preselected to be reviewed in Washington for the worldwide competition.

The first funding in Nepal was for the restoration of Kal Bhairab Shrine in 2003, since then 17 projects have been supported mainly in Kathmandu Valley. But quantity isn’t Bodde’s objective. “To me,” he says, “the most important is to do a good job by spending the money wisely.”
The program has helped the Lo Gyalpo Jigme Cultural Conservation Foundation for the restoration of ancient Buddhist chortens in Mustang, the Mountain Institute for the restoration of Pangboche Monastery in Khumbu and for the preservation of the Rinchenling Monastery in Halji of Humla.

AFCP doesn’t just restore old buildings. In 2012, the program supported Alliance for Ecotourism for the preservation of intangible heritage, the Kartik Nach dance which had not been performed in its full form since 1949. Ambassador Bodde says he was touched when he sat through the performance and watched hundreds of young Nepalis proud of a revival of a nearly-lost part of their heritage. “If we can help do that, we’ve done something special,” he said.

Bodde has seen a lot of changes in Kathmandu since his first tenure here in 1982. Nepal has developed, and the Valley has become more crowded, and he thinks this makes the work of the AFCP all the more important. Although the United States is also involved in basic health and education, for Bodde, cultural preservation is equally important. “You don’t want to lose the soul that make this place unique,” he said. The AFCP works with local partners like the Department of Archaeology, and local communities to implement the projects and for their upkeep. “The key of the program is that we help Nepali help Nepali,” said Bodde. “Otherwise, it’s just an old ambassador trying to preserve his old memories.”

Cultural preservation also creates jobs. With the restoration of the Bhandarkhal Courtyard of Patan Darbar that AFCP supported, wood carvers and handicraft workers got jobs. Every year Nepal gets at least one project supported by AFCP and is among the countries receiving the most funds.

Said Bodde: “Nepal really stands out in Washington when it comes to cultural preservation.”
Normally, I wouldn’t really gravitate towards watching an animated film named Big Hero 6, a rather banal title that connotes a dodgy sequel to a probably bad original film. However, this particular Walt Disney Animations Studio production did win the Best Animated Feature Film award this year (not that this is always a great indicator of quality) and I found myself curious about the film behind the absurd title. I admit I was surprisingly entertained and frequently delighted by a film from which I had pretty low expectations.

Don’t get your hopes up though, Big Hero 6 is no Princess Mononoke (1997), just one of the fierce, enchanting, animated films that are the product of Studio Ghibli, the brainchild of the great Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki.

Directed by Don Hall and Chris Williams, Big Hero 6 is adapted from a Marvel comic by the same name, though the writers chose not to base this screenplay off of a particular comic book storyline choosing instead to try and develop slightly more original content. While they have not necessarily succeeded in this endeavour (the plot is fairly hackneyed), the creators have managed to bring to life a fully fleshed out world complete with some pretty memorable characters that include the titular “Hiro” (voiced by Ryan Potter) and an inflatable white marshmallow like robot named “Baymax” (Scott Adsit) who manages to charm while never changing his expression. Big Hero 6 is set in the futuristic, fictitious San Fransokyo (another terrible name), a weird amalgam of San Francisco and Tokyo, where the precocious 14-year-old Hiro and his equally brilliant brother Tadashi (Daniel Henney), live with their loving aunt Cass (Maya Rudolph) above a coffee shop that Cass runs which is completed by an adorable, very fat cat.

Hiro’s slight delinquent tendencies are put to the test when his brain wave controlled microbot creation gets stolen by a masked man who uses the bots for nefarious but mysterious purposes. Aided by an oddball mix of Tadashi’s nerd-scientist friends, Hiro embarks on a mission to retrieve his invention and discover the identity of the masked man.

As with all good animations, the creators of Big Hero 6 understand that captivating your audience requires digging deep into the characters and their backstories so that all of the motivations and the actions of the characters ring true. This is true of Big Hero 6 making it therefore a charming film for kids but also worthwhile for adults though the villains won’t scare you too much and the subtle nuances about parenting, loss, and self-sacrifice. There is plenty of humour but also some essential principles that children can absorb while watching some pure fun.

**Big Hero 6**

**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pande

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**IN RECOGNITION:** Maiti Nepal honours educator Angur Baba Joshi with the lifetime achievement award on the occasion of 105th International Women’s Day at the Maiti Nepal office in Gaushala on Sunday.

**BUILDING BLOCKS:** Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and NRR President Shesh Ghale lay the foundation stone for the NRR building in Baluwatar on Monday.

**IN RECOGNITION:** Maiti Nepal honours educator Angur Baba Joshi with the lifetime achievement award on the occasion of 105th International Women’s Day at Maiti Nepal office in Gaushala on Sunday.

**WEDDING BELLS:** A Chinese couple pose for a photo at Bhaktapur Darbar Square on Tuesday.
A Shop with a Story

A newly opened 'A Shop with a Story' store in Baber Mahal Revisited, a group of women have gathered for their monthly meeting. They share a lively banter as they sit down to discuss the month’s progress and plans for an upcoming Easter event.

There are small tables around them displaying locally produced artifacts—candles, soap nut jewelleries, naturally dyed shawls, wooden handicrafts and felt accessories.

Each table represents a social enterprise, part of a collective of entrepreneurs formed by Change Fusion Nepal who helped set up the shop.

The first thing that greets you as you enter the store above Chez Caroline is the colourful and scented candles made by members of the Candlestick women, a company started by Sita Tamang. Tamang came to Kathmandu from her village in Rolpa seeking better opportunities. Once in the capital, she learnt to make different handicraft products and later opened Candlestick women with two other friends.

Other eye-catching products are the eco-friendly handmade jewelries of soap nut, silver, turquoise and recycled rubber, created by the women of the Kevin Memorial Eco-Foundation. Kakarik Himalayan Natural Dyes’ pashmina shawls are beautiful and a must-have for the winter. Rita Shrestha of Newa Decor tries to promote the Newari tradition through her table, which has conventional Newari arts and crafts along with husk dolls. She hopes people will start leaning away from lower quality Chinese goods to these local products.

In the next table, Friend Handicraft has accessories and gift items made of felt. Two college friends Nirjala Shrestha and Shanti Shrestha started this with an initial investment of Rs 6000. Today they employ over a hundred women from low income families.

A newly added table in the middle of the room is an eclectic mix of handmade income, pencils made from recycled paper, sukali (hay mattresses) and alpine coffee from different ventures.

What sets this shop apart from other handicraft stores is that the creators are directly involved in retail. There is no middleman involved, which cuts cost and the entrepreneurs themselves are in charge.

“Earlier when we sold our products to other stores, they would rebrand and re-price them but at ‘Shop with a Story’ these products stay authentic,” says Tamang. Prices range from Rs 15 to Rs 5000.

“We want the social ventures to expand from being small scale to being fully self-sustainable,” says Luna Shrestha of Change Fusion Nepal. The hope is that the ventures will be able to open their own shops in the next few years, freeing space for newer ventures in need of help.

The response from the customers and the revenue from the sales seems to have given these social entrepreneurs a sense of confidence.

“Now I believe I can venture out on my own and establish a showroom,” says Shanti Dolma Shaky, Founder of Kakarik Himalayan Natural Dyes. Suhina Shrestha

www.facebook.com/shopwithastory

A Shop with a Story

Cynthia Choo

How to get there: Brew Coffee Port is located on the second floor of Capitol Complex at Darbar Marg.

Brew Coffee Port

Decorated in a minimalistic red and white, Brew Coffee Port is the ideal place for a casual coffee date or semi-professional business meeting when you are in the Darbar Marg area.

Though the café is spacious and has balcony seats overlooking the busy streets, I recommend you choose the sofa where you can lounge around in the afternoon with a cup of coffee.

From the classic cappuccino to strawberry latte, Brew Coffee Port’s selection for a cup of Joe will leave you spoilt with choices. From the myriad of coffee options, I suggest you go there for the lattes.

Unlike lattes in most coffeehouses where the milk and froth overpower the espresso, Brew Coffee Port manages to retain the robust coffee aroma, without being overly bitter.

The caramel latte (Rs 185) is perfect for those with a sweet tooth yet still have a caffeine craving.

Those who prefer something stronger can opt for the café latte (Rs 150).

With the weather warming up, perhaps a blended iced frappuccino would be ideal to beat the heat. I distinctly remember being distracted by the blended mocha frappe (Rs 275) at the next table, which looked simply exquisite.

However, for a café that gives one an abundance of beverage choices, the food menu is painfully limited.

For starters, the café only serves vegetarian food, which limits the choices for non-vegetarian diners. There are only four food options: the first being vegetarian patties (Rs 95), French fries (Rs 130), Maggi noodles (which ranges from Rs 95 to 130 depending on the toppings), and French bread sandwiches (Rs 160).

The sandwiches are the most appetising. The French baguette that was used for the grilled vegetable sandwich (Rs 160) was freshly baked. Soft and delicious, I could have eaten the bread by itself. Yes, it was that good. So were the sautéed veggies, which were nicely seasoned and complimented the sandwich bread perfectly.

The grilled mushroom sandwich (Rs 160) wasn’t bad, but the pan-fried mushrooms would do better as a standalone side dish, rather than paired with the French bread.

To complete the meal, we decided to go for the brownie with ice-cream (Rs 185). Though the brownie could have been more moist, the velvety vanilla ice-cream helped to counterbalance the dryness of the pastry.

Those who do not fancy chocolate desserts can opt for the blueberry cheesecake (Rs 225). It had a nice buttery biscuit base and the blueberry jam was not overly sugary.

The food at Brew Coffee Port may not be something to write home about, but the café brews some of the best coffee drinks in the city.

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Ask Anjana Anything

Anjana Rajbhandary

Happiness. You should choose it because you deserve it. Thank you for the questions. Keep them coming at: askanjanaanything@nepaltimes.com.

I was born and raised in a semi-modern extrovert Newari family. I am married with two kids. I studied abroad and was provided a comfortable life by my parents. My in-laws moved in with us recently, and we tried to make it work but it has been terrible. I want to be traditional and respectful, but currently we are not getting along, we can’t even look at each other. I want us to live on our own, but my husband does not understand. We are always fighting and the home environment is very negative. I am very unhappy, and I don’t know what to do.

P Tuduathar

AR: Thank you for writing and expressing your concern. It is good to take care of your parents-in-law, but if it is not working out and causing you unhappiness it may be best to separate from your in-laws. Holding on to resentment can have a negative effect on your marriage and your children. I would suggest putting your ego aside and trying to talk to them, perhaps with a more neutral mediator. I believe we should want to take care of our parents, not feel obligated to. It’s important to treat our elders with respect but it is a two-way street. I hope you are able to work things out, and if not, separating might be the smart choice, as in the end we all deserve to be happy. Good luck.

I have a friend who just got engaged and says she is happy. However, the more time I spend with the two of them, the harder it is to ignore her fiancé’s condescending tone. He often behaves in a socially inept way - he can rant for hours about himself without asking anything to others or listening. I find it hard to stomach the flaws to which she is so blind. I find myself withdrawing from our friendship because I feel I can’t be honest with her. I just can’t stand the dude or understand her choice!

AR: Thanks for writing and expressing your concern regarding your friend. It is very easy to judge other people’s relationships from the outside. I think it is smart not to interfere in your friend’s relationship: it will only affect your friendship as she might get defensive. As long as she does not acknowledge it and it does not bother her, I would suggest, staying out of it and respecting your friend’s choices. Do try to put your biases aside.

I would suggest you distance yourself just because you do not like her fiancé. You are an adult, try to be a good, mature friend. She will appreciate it, and you will feel better in the long run. Good luck.

THE NEPALI SMARTPHONE

While you’re trying to save up for the Sony Xperia Z1, iPhone 6, or even the recently announced Samsung Galaxy S6, the folks at Him Electronics have introduced their new ARK smartphone, specially tailored for Nepal. This week we got a chance to do a hands-on review of the latest ARK EDGE A5 HD, the first of their premium lineup.

The ARK EDGE A5 HD is powered with Android’s KitKat 4.4.2 and a 1.3 Ghz Quad Core Processor, which means you will have access to all the applications and flexibility of the Android system and Google Play Store. The device weighs a tad less than the iPhone 6 plus at 164 grams, feels rather well-made, and easy to hold. Even though the brushed surface at the back is consistent with the design of some premium android phones in the market, there were times when I wished there was a better grip to the phone.

The 5.0-inch HD IPS screen with DGS Display will definitely appeal to users who enjoy watching videos on the go, and also ensures a comfortable reading experience while texting or browsing the web. The touch-screen display is very responsive, with the option of enabling haptic feedback. Overall performance of the phone is fast and well managed by its 1GB RAM.

Unsurprisingly, this does take a toll on its battery life but the ARK EDGE A5 HD comes with a remarkable 2000 mAH battery that should guarantee up to six hours of talk time. You can bring an extra battery along if you are worried about the battery life. The smartphone supports an external Micro SD card up to 32 GB with an internal memory of 8GB, so you should not have a problem bringing your favourite movies everywhere with you. The ARK EDGE A5 HD is also integrated with a 13.0 MP rear camera and a 3 MP front camera, which is likely to please all selfie-lovers.

Him Electronics, under the Golchha Organisation, aims to introduce technologically superior products in the Nepali market and they have certainly delivered their promise with the ARK EDGE A5 HD. This will allow the average Nepali to own a stylish smartphone that is coupled with features that guarantee a gratifying mobile experience.

YANTRICK’S VERDICT: At a price that the makers promise will be ‘unbeatable’ compared to others in the market, ARK EDGE A5 HD, a premium smartphone from Nepal’s first smartphone brand might just be the one to get.

“I recommend Sensodyne for all day everyday sensitivity protection.”

–Dr Spiro Condos, dentist practising in the US

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Biomass has been serving as Nepal’s indigenous energy source for centuries. Firewood, agricultural residue, and dried dung are still widely used for heating and cooking, even in urban areas. According to one estimate, up to 80 per cent of the energy needs of Nepalis is actually met with biomass. Nepali industries are also increasingly using biomass for thermal energy: for drying in tea estates and as combustors in other thermal applications. Yet, nowhere in Nepal has biomass been harnessed for rural electrification. There are economic and ecological considerations that determine the use of appropriate energy. With concerns about fossil fuel burning that emits sequestered fossil carbon into the atmosphere, biomass energy has suddenly become a much more attractive proposition. Countries rich in fossil fuels do not consider the biomass energy option unless their reserves start to deplete or environmental regulation controls and the increasing toll on the environment due to the usage of fossil fuels begin to weigh down heavily. There are also countries that are still using coal-based power plants for generating large power (100-1000 MW), which are unlikely to switch to biomass-based power systems.

There are two considerations for using biomass for generating electricity. Biomass availability should allow a sustainable demand-supply chain throughout the year. For example, the sugar industry can be a source of bagasse and sugarcane leaf for a medium-size thermal power plant for up to 50 MW. The second aspect is the size of the population or community to be served. The availability, procurement, and processing of biomass poses problems in countries with large population centres. But here in Nepal, biomass energy technology is most likely to succeed because we are heavily and increasingly relying on imported fossil fuels to offset our power shortage. Our demographic distribution is ideal for biomass-generated electricity – especially in the Tarai where microhydro is not feasible and there is an abundance of biomass from fast-growing Ipomoea and Eucalyptus plantations.
CRUSHING TALE OF THE CHURE

SWEPT AWAY

Grassroots action

The government says it has banned groups from felling trees in Chure. Is it true? There is a difference between what is said and what people understand. The Chure-Madhes Conservation Development Committee didn’t ban felling. What shows there is a gap between what is said and what is understood by people at the grassroots. The people of the Chure have some rights on their natural resources.

Community forestry has worked elsewhere, but not in the Chure. Why? Community forestry in the mountains were nurtured and protected by local communities because of their agro-forestry use. In the Tarai and Chure, these are national forests which have great commercial value. So when local people asked to be part of the community forestry program, it was actually to cut the trees and sell it. Even before political groups cut the trees, it was already being settled by migrants, and this trend continues. This is why the President had to step in to stop an eco-system collapse. What will be the consequences of an eco-system collapse? Due to population growth in the Tarai, plants, animals and other biodiversity have moved to the Chure forests for refuge. But people also started moving to the Chure because of congestion in the Tarai. The Chure is therefore the last resort of poor people and endangered species like wild elephants, rhinoceros, snakes, tigers, sal, orchids and medicinal plants. So, if the Chure is gone, many species will be extinct from Nepal. But how can agriculture and forests coexist? Agriculture in the Chure should take the soil and slopes into consideration. Because the crops are not suitable, people are turning to mining and extraction for jobs. The Chure has a very thin top soil. If you take it away, or if it is eroded, you have a desert.

What are the options? We should promote aquaculture, silviculture and agriculture only. And we should resolve the conflict between those who depend on the natural resources for survival and those who want to exploit it for profit. Local farmers with a few cattle are not the problem. The problem is the infrastructure boom across the border in India. Fifty years ago, Nepal’s sal forests were cut for railway lines in India, now it is our sand and stones for their highways and irrigation canals. History is repeating itself. So, the solutions? First is grassroots awareness and action. Local people know about the threats in the Chure. Crossborder cooperation with the Indian state of Bihar, since destruction of the Chure will ultimately affect farms and towns in Bihar.
Under the personal initiative of President Ram Baran Yadav, the Tarai-Madhesh Conservation Development Committee was formed in Kathmandu two years ago and headed by former chief secretary Rameswor Khanal. But here on the ground there is little to show for it.

“All they are doing is documentation work, not conservation,” says Dahal. “It has become a dumping ground for retired forestry staff.”

As a member of a local group that manages the medicinal plants and other by-products of the Chure forests, Dahal is acutely aware of the need for conservation. The loss of forest cover is mainly due to population growth forcing people to migrate and settle in government-owned forests.

“The Chure recharges ground water in the same way a recharge card recharges mobile phones,” Dahal explains to visitors, “but stone and sand mining and the loss of forests leads to the desertification of not just the Chure but also of the Tarai downstream.” The water table in the Tarai is falling at 1m a year because of the denuding of the Chure catchment.

But when there is water, there is too much of it. Last year, a flash flood entered the village of Parwanipur, drowning Babu Yonjan of Sarlahi and leaving his family of 11 destitute (see box). Their farm is now full of boulders and sand.

Neighbour Bhim Bahadur Gyaba has given up planting anything, and now earns a living as a day labourer along the East-West highway.

In the town of Lalbandi in Sarlahi District one of the two crusher plants is still working, but at night. Residents complain of noise and the dust has affected their crops. During the day, the wind blows the sand from the dry river beds into their homes.

Shrenesh Nautkola and Ushi Baidar contributed to this investigation.

**DEVASTATED LAND, DESTITUTE PEOPLE:**

(1) Tipper trucks haul the Chure's sand and gravel to India, raising the hills and causing floods.

A flash flood killed Babu Yonjan of Sarlahi last year, leaving his family in a desperate state.

With the boulders gone, rivers flowing out of the Chure erode farmlands, but tractors are still mining stones along the river beds.

Bijay Kumar Singh: “The Chure can’t be saved overnight”

Nepali Times: There is a lot of complaints in the Chure that your organisation isn’t doing enough to conserve the region.

Bijay Kumar Singh: Our area of jurisdiction is only within the Chure range where we won’t allow sand mining and logging. We consult foresters and geologists, perform IEE and EIA to see if extraction can be allowed, how much and where. But if there is sand and boulders that are washed down and outside the Chure belt, then the relevant District Forest office or the DDC can award contracts.

At present, the Committee is working in accordance with the plan of action prepared by the Government of Nepal. We are also working on our own Master Plan for Chure conservation and management. At present we are doing field work and data collection to make the basis for our master plan.

But meanwhile the Chure is being gradually destroyed. This is why we are working on this strategy with conservation groups to collect data on the sensitive areas of the Chure and suggest urgent measures to work with local communities for conservation. Our area of work will be the entire Chure belt, from the Bhabar mountains to the Indian border.

Can the Chure be protected?

Protection of the Chure is not something that can be done overnight, we don’t have a magic wand for that. The problems didn’t appear overnight, either. The Chure is being exploited and encroached upon for the last 50 years. We work with forest offices, the Department of Geology and Mines, agriculture experts and NGOs in a multi-stakeholder approach. Our first priority is to shift people living in areas prone to floods and landslides.

This presents problems because most Chure slopes are fragile and vulnerable and there are settlers there. It is necessary to give them alternatives, we can’t just throw them out. We will propagate ponds and cultivation of amaranth grass so the slopes are protected and incomes raised. One priority is undergrowth in the forests, which have thinned because of overgrazing.

What is the main obstacle you grapple with?

It is the illegal settlement of migrants. They don’t have ownership and therefore little responsibility to conserve what is a very vulnerable environment. We have to create awareness and behaviour change among them. They need alternative jobs, so they don’t need to depend just on the forests and rivers. The Chure is a gigantic sponge that holds water and releases it in the dry season. If we don’t protect these hills the Tarai in Nepal and the Indian plains will also become a desert.

The Chure can’t be saved overnight

- Size: Covers 15% of Nepal’s 147,000 sq km area
- Height: 300m in east, 2,000m in west
- Geology: Fluvial sedimentary rock, thin topsoil
- Vegetation: Sub-tropical evergreen forests of sal, teak and sisal

*CHURE BELT*

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18

FROM THE NEPAL PRESS

“1 am a risk-taker”

Bhupendra Dahal interviews UCPN (M) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Fireside
(Kantipur TV), 9 March

Bhupendra Dahal: Why are the Maoist-Madhesi parties stopping the NC-UML from writing the new constitution?

Pushpa Kamal Dahal: Some people accuse us of obstructing the constitution writing process in the name of consensus. They have a misconception that we want consensus just because we lack numeric strength in the second CA. But even when we had numeric strength in the first CA, we never sidelined the NC-UML. At that time it was they who were pressing for consensus. Now, they are hell-bent on using their numeric strength.

The political force defeated by the Jan Andolan II has grown stronger in the second CA, so do you seek a larger reconciliation? Yes, their strength has certainly increased. And their voices should also be heard. If political parties that collectively led the Jan Andolan II unite, we can still go ahead with the agreements we made to the people through a new constitution.

If so, why is the constitution so difficult?

The political scenario has changed. When we joined the peace process, Girija Prasad Koirala led the NC. After Gyanaendra Shah seized power, the political scenario has changed. When we joined the peace process, we had decided to go ahead with the NC-UML’s idea of Westminster system, writing a constitution that was the Prime Minister's reaction, he said the constitution could not be written with the opposition’s reservations. He later apologised to me, saying he did not understand what I meant by note of dissent.

As of 16 February, 996 people have been caught on CCTV cameras violating traffic rules. The police first installed the CCTV cameras at key intersections in October 2013. Since then, 23,146 drivers have paid Rs 4.7 million in fines for lane violations alone.

We had sorted out everything except federalism that day. We agreed in principle with the model of judiciary and electoral system. As for form of governance, we had decided to endorse our 19 January deal postponing the federalism issue. But, things have changed now, and we are pressing for a package deal.

How thorny is the issue of the five Tarai districts?

That is not the main issue. Creating federal states as envisioned by the interim constitution is the crux. We define federalism as a process to ensure rights of oppressed communities. But, the NC-UML define federalism as dividing the country geographically or administratively. That is not federalism. That is just decentralisation.

Despite this, can you write the constitution?

On behalf of all political parties, I promise we will show utmost flexibility, but the NC-UML leaders still believe they can write whatever they like in the constitution on the basis of their combined two-thirds majority.

We had sought out everything except federalism that day. We agreed in principle with the model of judiciary and electoral system. As for form of governance, we had decided to go ahead with the NC-UML’s idea of Westminster system, writing a constitution that was the Prime Minister's reaction, he said the constitution could not be written with the opposition’s reservations. He later apologised to me, saying he did not understand what I meant by note of dissent.

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Pasang Sherpa, a former Maoist guerrilla, has migrated to India and sells medicines and clothes door-to-door. He occasionally visits Nepal to meet his wife and children.

Karma was the first Maoist from the Sherpa community and used to be the founding Chair of the Sherpa Liberation Front, one of many ethnic wings of the Maoists. He later became a deputy brigade commander, fought in many battles, and was partially paralysed by a shrapnel in his body. Declared physically unfit to join the Nepal Army, he opted for voluntary retirement.

Yam Bahadur Adhikari, who was Karma’s commander, joined the army as a lieutenant colonel, the highest post given to an ex-Maoist combatant. Even those who fought under Karma were inducted into the army.

The Maoists promised Karma a ticket to contest the second Constituent Assembly (CA) elections from Solukhumbu district. But, at the last moment, they did not give it to him. Frustrated at the way his party treated him, he left Nepal.

"The Maoists just exploited us," he says now. "I feel like we fought the war just to catapult some leaders into power."

Karma is not alone in disillusionment so great that he has not just abandoned his party, but also Nepal. Hundreds of ex-Maoist combatants have already left the country, regretting their part in an insurgency that killed 17,000 people.

Chandra Prakash Maliwal, who is now in-charge of South State Committee of the Maoists says more than 100 ex-guerrillas have migrated for work abroad from his area alone.

Karma says those who fought bravely and bravely built the country during the war are now working as manual labourers in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Qatar where they work in construction, on farms, and as cattle herders. Some are in Japan and Hong Kong. "Feeling the country with money looted during the war. No matter where they are and what they are doing, they say the war did no good to the country and their lives."

Hari Bahadur Nepali, an ex-Maoist combatant from Rolpa, is known among his war-time comrades as a "living martyr". He fought in countless battles, was nearly killed several times, got injured more than twice and lost two fingers during the war. "I now regret joining the Maoists," he says. "They used us. While they came to power, they ignored us."

The war was over, Nepal was a failed state. It would be useful to the Maoists if I were to serve the Nepal Army. But, he did not qualify. He sought the party’s help to start his life anew, but they ignored him. He went to work in Afghanistan, but his health deteriorated from his war wounds, so he returned. Today he runs a small poultry farm in Harisiddhi on the outskirts of Patan.

San Budha Magar of Rukum, Durga Lal Budha Magar ‘Kanchan’ of Rolpa, Dhruba Neupane ‘Bachan’ of Okhaldhunga and Bhum Devi Rana ‘Santosh’ of Rolpa were all senior commanders of the Maoist army. All are now abroad. They say they joined the Maoists to create a classless society free from any kinds of oppression and discrimination. After the war was over, they say they were themselves oppressed and discriminated by their party. They say: "The Maoists betrayed me; I now ask myself: what did I fight for?"

Yam Bahadur Adhikari, who was Karma’s commander, joined the army as a lieutenant colonel, the highest post given to an ex-Maoist combatant. Even those who fought under Karma were inducted into the army.

The Maoists promised Karma a ticket to contest the second Constituent Assembly (CA) elections from Solukhumbu district. But, at the last moment, they did not give it to him. Frustrated at the way his party treated him, he left Nepal.

"The Maoists just exploited us," he says now. "I feel like we fought the war just to catapult some leaders into power."

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Feeling like god already?

Just as we were all about to give up on Nepal comes the happy news that three of the country’s tourist spots were voted among the World’s Top 75 Destinations by Wonderlust Magazine this week. (Up to this point everything in this column is true. - Ministry of Information and Communicable Diseases).

The three spots are: the World’s Highest Mountain Chomolungma, the World’s Deepest Gorge Kali Gandaki and I think the last one is the World’s Fastest Clock at Ghantaghar, but let me make a mental note to double check that, and get back to you.

These recognitions put Nepal right up there among the world’s top destinations even though as a nation we may not know precisely what our destination is at any given moment in time. For a country that can’t seem to figure out where it is we are going, we sure as hell are getting there fast. And that’s what counts.

Coming so soon after the Conde Nasty Traveller Awards 2015 recognised Nepal in two prestigious categories: Hardest Place to Get Into and Hardest Place to Get Out Of in recognition of our top-secret tourism strategy to make Nepal as challenging a place to visit as possible so as to preserve our mystique and aura. Only the really adventurous, the really determined, and the really foolish will venture our way. So far, we are doing great.

Which is why we treat our guests as gods by keeping visa procedures as cumbersome as possible at the Tribhuvan Unintentional Airport so that we can separate the wheat from the chaff or, in certain cases, separate the goats from the sheep.

But in the unlikely event that a hapless tourist does manage to somehow slip into Nepal, the idea is to prevent him/her/it from leaving. (New Nepal promo slogan: ‘Visit Nepal and Stay There!’). For this, our government has hit on a cunning plan: strictly limiting the number of outbound airline seats available, and from time to time to close down the airport for four straight days without any prior notice.

But what will tourists who can’t leave do while in Nepal? For this, we have organised a plethora of ten unique attractions:

1. Thamel Trash Heap. Nepal’s USP is that our tourist ghettos are different from tourist ghettos in Bangkok or Istanbul. That’s right, no other country invests so much in piling trash along its tourist hub as effectively as we do.

2. Poo on Mt Everest. From now on GONe will pay mountaineers to climb Mt Everest so that they can poo on the summit and make it the highest mountain not just in the Turd World, but in the planet as a hole.

3. Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE). We will do this by ensuring that the international airport has fat, well-fed rats scurrying around the arrival concourse.

4. Fast-track queue. Arriving Nepali passengers will henceforth have to spend no more than three hours waiting in line at immigration. Tourists will have to wait to longer to give them a chance to hit the ground running and acclimatise to the Nepali custom of not doing today what can be done tomorrow.

5. A free sauna has been installed at the departure gate so that dear and departing passengers can relax, sweat like pigs, and pass out if they so wish in case they haven’t already been knocked unconscious by odours emanating from the nearby arsenal.

6. Passengers must have noticed that there are no clocks in the entire airport premises. This is deliberate. It is to give visiting tourists the impression that time stands still in Shangrila. (Flight Attendant: “Ladies and Gentlemen, Gods and Goddesses, we have just landed in Kathmandu, where the local time does not exist.”)

7. Our divine visitors now have gender segregated pre-boarding security checks where they receive a free shiatsu of their kundalins, and have their wallets mandatorily inspected for tips by uniformed masseurs.

8. The carousel area now has extra trolleys which are equipped with NASA-designed state-of-the-art oval wheels to give extra traction. Passengers also have a choice of extreme left-leaning or extreme right-leaning trolleys depending on their political affiliation.

9. The airport’s baggage belts have been deliberately switched off so that the luggage will take till infinity to arrive. This is a test: are you going to say “Om” and be zen-like about it or are you going to complain? If you are a whiner then, let’s face it, Nepal is not for you.

10. The country may have gone back 50 years but it is still ahead of its time because we have Ghantaghar, the world’s Fastest Clock.