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DEVAKI BISTA

HITCHED

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 per cent 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.

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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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JUSTICE, ADJOURNED

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

BY THE WAY
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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

i  Carlsberg

Probably the best beer in the world



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.

After nearly two months of not being in speaking terms, the various political formations in the country are holding preliminary talks about resuming talks. All sides have now vented off steam, there has been a lot of chest-thumping, sabre-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 sulked 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 'show of farce'. The idea 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 out. The other factor that has goaded him is that his party rival Baburam Bhattarai went off to New Delhi and met some pretty hefty Indian leaders. He is probably hoping that this will tar Bhattarai's public image as being an Indian stooge. In fact, Bhattarai's detractors within his own party have ridiculed him for remarks in Delhi asking India to be "more proactive" in Nepal.



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.

After this cooling off period, we have one more chance for the Maoist-Madhesi alliance to abandon their irresponsible and risky stand on identity-based federalism, and for the NC-UML combine to convince Dahal and his cohort that their future lies in adhering to the democratic process and not their politics of threats and division. Dahal must understand that the NC-UML is not against inclusion, but that the formula of federalism that his alliance proposes is inherently against national unity and stability.

The best option for now seems to be the one that the Madhesi leader, Bijay Gachhadar has been pushing ever since January, which is to shelve federalism for now and pass a constitution. After all, the dispute over the demarcation of the five Tarai districts is the only issue holding things up and there is general agreement on basic federalism, secularism and inclusive democracy.

Federalism has now become a dead horse that the Maoist-Madhesi alliance has to keep flogging because there is nothing else they can do. The Madhesi people have realised that a separate Madhes province will not be in their best interest, neither for identity nor for prosperity.

The silver lining is that the leaders are sitting down again. The real hurdles being over power-sharing after the constitution, there is a move to form a national government. If that helps, so be it. But let's end this absurdly lengthy standoff.

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 an inability to understand the gravity of the situation.

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

#IWD2015

Archaic laws are a result of a decrepit, decaying society ('Being Nepali or becoming Nepali?', Anjana Rajbhandary, #748). Citizenship in the name of the father is not only gender discrimination but also a gross human rights violation.

Namah

'Nepal has one of the most progressive laws on gay and lesbian rights.' Ever wondered how this came to be? I bet it happened the same way we became 'secular' overnight with the EU and its henchmen forcing our social agenda.

Ava

The proposed law requiring both a father AND mother for citizenship would render the children of same-sex couples stateless. A country that discriminates against women can't have progressive LGBT laws. L's = women.

Manjushree Thapa

Simply making laws and policies aren't enough. Nepal is hardly known for implementing laws that are in place.

Vijay Kant Karn

Progressive LGBT laws have not necessarily translated into more accepting/tolerating society, there's so much to do.

Trishna Rana

I guess it's our societal view and norms on female roles that should

be modified, and educated to see changes within women.

Lakpa Nepali

How did he acquire the acid in the first place ('Corrosive laws', Binita Dahal, #748)? How do we allow the sale of such chemicals? When I am hard pressed to buy a few fire-crackers during Tihar, how is it that buying acid is so much easier?

N

Lovely to see changes in terms of women's participation in different professions, the same needs to happen in the political sector too ('Standing above the crowd', #748).

Prit Gurung

It feels good to read about these strong women who are breaking the stereotype in Nepal.

Ayush Karki

CLEAN KILNS

Well reported feel-good article that highlights positive aspects of factory owners who have voluntarily decided to clean up their operations ('Clean kilns', Sonia Awale, #748). Unlike *The Guardian* piece, which was populist and offered no hope.

Jens

Goods things are happening at micro level. But, not much is being done at macro.

Airline Guy

The low visibility leading to air traffic delays and accidents is another

worrying aspect of this that I hadn't thought of.

Dina

India needs to play a leading role to control black carbon and mitigate impacts of CC in the subcontinent ('The other bad carbon', Kunda Dixit, #748).

Ananda Raj Devkota

Forget climate change, forget glaciers melting in the Himalayas, brick kiln smog is killing us right here in Kathmandu. Let's fix that first; trying to control global warming from Nepal is just too ambitious.

Biren

TIA

As a long-time visiting mountaineer, I can only acknowledge the incompetence of Nepal's government in every aspect of life in the country. ('Disaster averted, unfolding disaster', Kunda Dixit). I have a lot of information since I am friends with quite a few Nepalis from all areas, from all castes and ethnicities. It makes me sick to see what is going on in Nepal. So many nice people and so many corrupt politicians.

In my country, Europe's most corrupt, we have started to go against this. When will Nepali people (politicians included) do something? It has to start from every home, every village, and every community. Bribing and personal benefits are killing your country like it has almost killed mine. Act now.

Jannis Papadopoulos

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 NTB websites after the Turkish accident. I remember long ago RNAC 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 assistance, with Nepali passengers getting even worse treatment when they pay the same fare. Shame on the authorities.

Navyo Eller

FOREIGN HAND

Welcome back, Foreign Hand. I used to be a loyal follower of your columns in *Nepali Times* in 2006 when I was posted in Kathmandu. You exposed the hypocrisy of the so-called revolutionaries fearlessly. As I see it from afar, nothing has changed.

Marion

Is there any honest, brave, patriotic visionary in Nepal who can deliver us from the filthy clutches of failed and corrupted politicians of all parties that have destroyed Nepal and murdered Nepalis?

Alex Shrestha

THIS WEEK



BIKRAM RAI (65 LIKES)

Most liked on Facebook
UPDATE: The nose of the Turkish Airlines Airbus has been lifted off the ground.

Most shared on Facebook
Disaster averted, unfolding disaster by Kunda Dixit (23 shares)

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Standing above the crowd by Cynthia Choo, Stéphane Huët and Ayesha Shakya (64 retweets, 73 favourites)

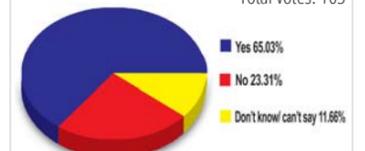
Most visited online page
Disaster averted, unfolding disaster by Kunda Dixit (9657 views)

Most commented
Being Nepali or becoming Nepali? by Anjana Rajbhandary (15 comments)

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll #749

Q. Do you think Baburam Bhattarai's India visit opened the door for Indian interference?

Total votes: 163

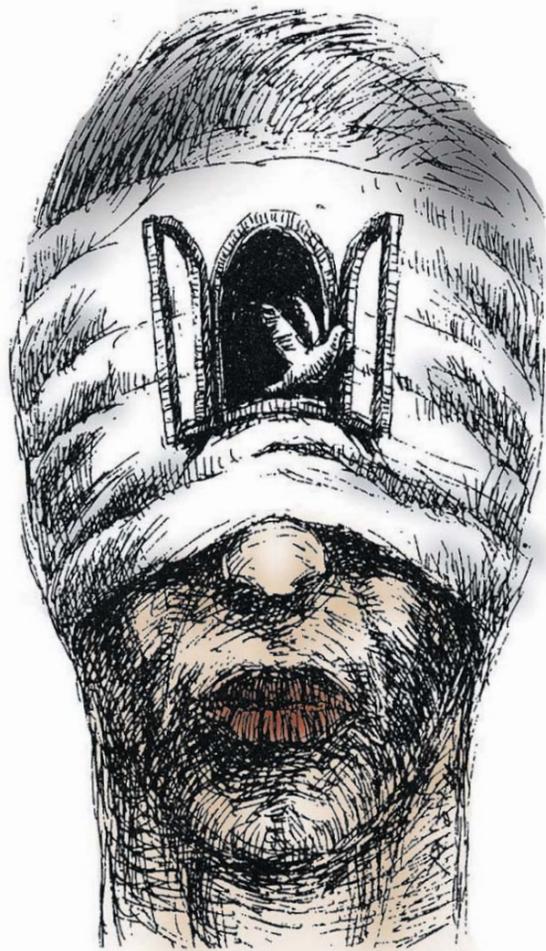


Weekly Internet Poll #750
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should our law have a provision for death penalty?

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



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

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.

Taking exceptional note of the violation of its 2 January, 2014 ruling while promulgating the controversial act, the decision also instructs the government and the newly formed Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission on Investigation of Enforced Disappearance (CED) to revisit its earlier decisions and abide by them while making amendments.

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. ☑

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Bad just got worse

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



BIKRAM RAI

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 reconfirmed what 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 on flights out of Nepal. The airport was bursting 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 luggage took that long to arrive at the belt.

"It happens 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 harass 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 \$92 million dollar expansion plan supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the terminals, taxiways, 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. 

@omastharai

Jet averted disaster, country suffered it

KUNDA DIXIT

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

The airport was closed for four days for all international and some domestic operations, more than 80,000 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, trekking 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 \$92 million dollar upgrade needs to be expedited. Then there are the longer-term issues of expediting alternate airports. Bhairawa and Pokhara expansions are two and three years from completion, and will take the pressure off Kathmandu somewhat. But Nijgad 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 726 Airbus 330-300 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 -Authorisation 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, visibility 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 5,600ft 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 "20 times more violent than normal". The plane veered off the runway to the left, the nose gear collapsed and the Airbus 330 came to rest between taxiways D and E. 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 the fog patch are questions that will need to be answered.

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.

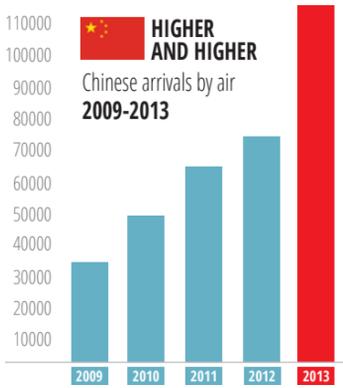
The dramatic growth in Chinese tourists by nearly 18 per cent in 2014 compared to the previous year could not offset the plummeting numbers of visitors from India which declined by 35 percent in the same period.

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 163,142 and this fell to 105,282 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 Rajbhandary 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. Sichuan Airlines is also set to add flights from the Chengdu hub. 🇨🇳

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Art cart

United Traders Syndicate has announced the winners of the Toyota Dream Car Art Contest. The best paintings from each of the three categories were given a cash prize and a certificate.



Cheers

Johnnie Walker has unveiled the new limited edition Blue Label 2015. The limited edition is available through exclusive retailers, is inspired by and pays tribute to the art of blending.

Window smart

Booking for Color Mobile's first Windows Phone WIN W10 is now open. The new WIN W10 will run on Windows 8.1 operating system, 1.2GHz quad-core processor and has a 4.7 inch HD IPS display. It is priced at Rs 15,495.



Gastronomical delight

Chefs from all five continents led by top French chef Alain Ducasse will gather at The Chimney Fine Dining Restaurant at Hotel Yak & Yeti to celebrate French food on 19 March. Tickets are priced at Rs 5000.

Slim deal

Gionee has unveiled the new Elife S7, the slimmest dual sim phone. The new phone boasts a 5.2 inch super AMOLED screen, an aviation-grade alloy unibody and ultra-smart cameras. Elife S7 will be launched in Nepal in April.



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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

Imagine 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.

During its chequered political history, the country rid itself of its monarchy, thanks to a powerful communist movement. For development it is heavily dependent on foreign 'donors'. Perinatal maternal mortality is high and in remote areas people are among the poorest in the world, but health and education indicators are going in the right direction.

The country shares a long and effectively open border with its



DAVID N GELLNER

powerful southern neighbour. Many of its citizens work in the neighbour's factories. Its national language is linguistically close to that of the southern neighbour, its script is similar. Most people speak the southern neighbour's language. The tv, the films, the music, the magazines, and the literature of the southern neighbour are overwhelmingly dominant. There is a dark side to dependence on the neighbour in that many local girls end up in its brothels.

The country I am describing is not Nepal, but Laos. Its big 'southern' (actually southern and western) neighbour is Thailand. A Nepali in Laos would probably feel very much at home, but might wonder at the fact that there are

so many cows and buffaloes and no one thinks to milk them. A Laotian in Nepal would wonder at the sight of Nepalis worshipping cows but never think to eat them.

The parallel between Nepal and Laos is not complete. Most strikingly, Laos's population is only a quarter of Nepal's in a similar-sized territory. There are far more forests and its cities are less crowded. There is 24-hour electricity (however, most villages remain unconnected to the grid as yet). Laos has borders with five countries (China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam), not just a highly asymmetrical border/relationship with just two, as in Nepal's case.

Laos's political history is tied to Vietnam rather than Thailand.

During the colonial period it was ruled by the French from Hanoi. Laos has a single-party communist regime which retains all ultimate power, despite recent economic liberalisation. Chinese investment in Laos is huge today: in dams, in roads, and in rubber plantations.

Despite these differences, the structural similarities between Laos and Nepal are such that surely it is time for the academics and intellectuals of the two countries to meet and examine them in detail in order to see what each could learn from the other.

Laos has many advantages that Nepal lacks: a relatively small population, a strong and stable (if authoritarian) government, and neighbours that are among the most economically dynamic

countries in the world. Nepal, 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 misguided attempt to wipe out communism. That unexploded ordinance (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 enough. 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.



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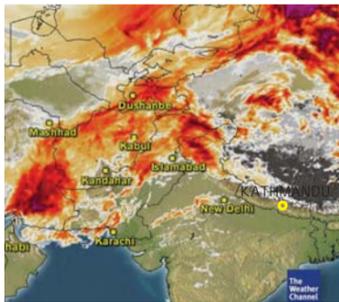
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The spell of crisp, cool spring days couldn't last, and they won't. We are looking at some partly cloudy skies on the weekend with chances of showers early next week. The haze from the plains is blocking mountain views again. The good news is that minimum temperature is now in the double digits, with maxima going up to 25 when the sun comes out.

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NEPALI CRICKET CROSSES BOUNDARIES

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.

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."

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.

CAN's CEO Bhawana Ghimire says the cricketing body is also preparing to host several domestic one-day and T-20 competitions ahead of the League Championship.

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.

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." 🇳🇵




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EVENTS



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 Kalapremi.
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, 3 pm, Kailash Hall, The Shanker Hotel, Lajimpat, (01)4472807, info@soscabaha.org

Int'l Social Work Day,

A symposium based on theme of International Social Work Day 2015, 'Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People'.
17 March, 12.40pm, St Xavier's College, Maitighar, (01)4221365, ktm@sxc.edu.np, www.sxc.edu.np

Francophonie,

A week-long program with an exhibition, a photo call, culinary stands, film screenings and Joint Family Internationale in concert to celebrate the French language.
16 to 20 March, Alliance Française of Kathmandu, Tripureshwar, (01)4241163, 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, Boudha, 9802045484, info@pranamaya-yoga.com, www.pranamaya-yoga.com

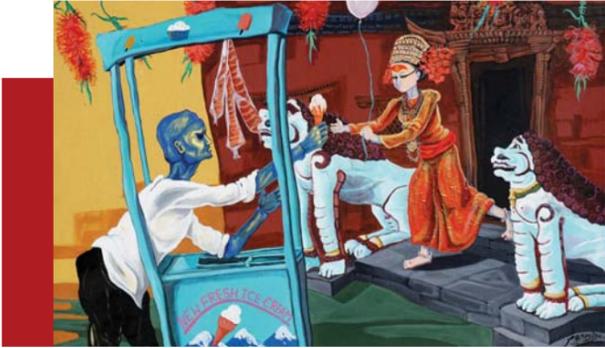
Me and the Other,

A show combining physical theatre with classic and contemporary dance, focusing on how cultural heritage influences our perceptions.
Rs 300, Rs 200 (students), 2 to 4 April, 5.15 pm, Mandala Theatre Kathmandu, Anamanagar, (01)6924269, info@mandalatheatre.com, www.mandalatheatre.com



Phantalassa,

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)4218048, 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

DINING



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Chakupat, Lalitpur, (01)5543678,



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Rs 1000 (KJC members), Rs 1500 (non-members), 18 to 20 March, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01)5013554, sunita@katjazz.com.np, www.katjazz.com.np

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, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01)5013554, sunita@katjazz.com.np, www.katjazz.com.np

Underside live,

The metal band celebrates 'Satan's Night in Hell'.
Rs 400 (pre-sale only), 28 March, 6pm, Club 25 Hours, Tangal, 9843664132

March of Pigs,

Progressive rock metal band, Kamero pre-launches their debut album *The Absence Paradox* with friends, Tumbleweed Inc, Vomiting Snake, Social Nerve and Horny Monks.
28 March, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9803719781



The Immigrants live,

With violin, accordion and clarinet in hand, this European trio promises a musical Friday.
13 March, 8pm, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chowk, 9841226397, pareshkshrestha@gmail.com



A new beginning,

Nepal's favourite rock band, 1974 AD performs its first concert after announcing a new line-up.
13 March, 7pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01)5528362

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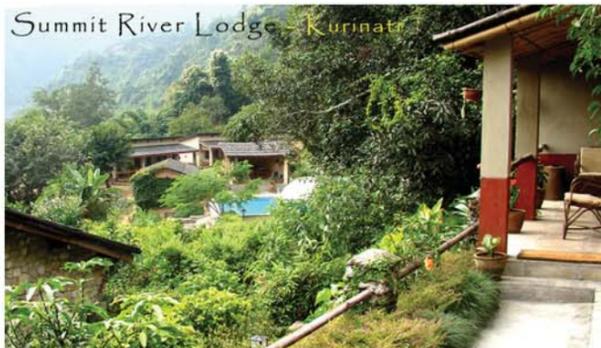
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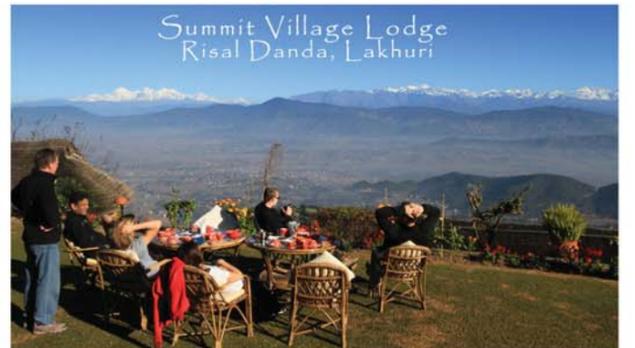
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ALOK TULADHAR

COMING SOON: THE BAGMATI HERITAGE WALK

Photographs of the holy Bagmati River from 50 years ago show a clean, clear river flowing across a sandy flood plain. Today, that is a distant memory.

Today at Teku where the Bagmati meets the Bishnumati one is greeted by the apocalyptic sight of embankments of garbage, squatter settlements, vultures and kites circling overhead and the overpowering stench of sewage and rotten refuse.

The once holy ghats are no longer on the banks of the river, which is now flowing a thick black paste along a canyon-like channel. The temples

and guest houses are crumbling. The two-km stretch of the Bagmati from Teku to Thapathali is now a symbol of fetid urban decay.

But all this is about to change come June. In an effort to revive the largely forgotten cultural heritage along this stretch of the river, the government has started construction of a heritage walkway and Hutram Baidhya Memorial Environmental Park to commemorate the late scientist and conservationist who spent a lifetime trying to save the Bagmati Civilisation.

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and Department of Archaeology have already started cleaning up a 1km stretch from Teku.

Says Shriju Pradhan of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Department of the KMC: "The plan is to preserve the cultural heritage on the way and create an environmentally friendly area. After the work is complete, this place can be the meeting point for both Kathmandu and Lalitpur."

The restoration work will be part of the concept of a Bagmati Park being built by the Ministry of Urban Development. Once the construction of the 2km wide promenade is complete people can walk, cycle, rest, play football and exercise in the area. The walkway will also be accessible for the physically disabled with wheelchairs.

The buildings in the area date back to

the Malla period, including the Laxmeswor, Purneswor and Tripureswor temples. They were all damaged during the 1934 earthquake and were restored. Suresh Shrestha, chief of Department of Archaeology, admits the lack of research regarding the structures in the area but adds that the department plans to collaborate with the KMC and Guthi Sansthan for their preservation.

The Jang Hiranya Hem temple made by Jang Bahadur Rana in 1857 is an exquisite example of Mughal architecture from the Rana period, which the strongman dedicated to his two wives: Hem and Hiranya. The temple is believed to have been his repentance for the Kot Coup in which Jang Bahadur seized



PRESERVING

STÉPHANE HUËT

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 (pics, 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."



TODAY



TOMORROW

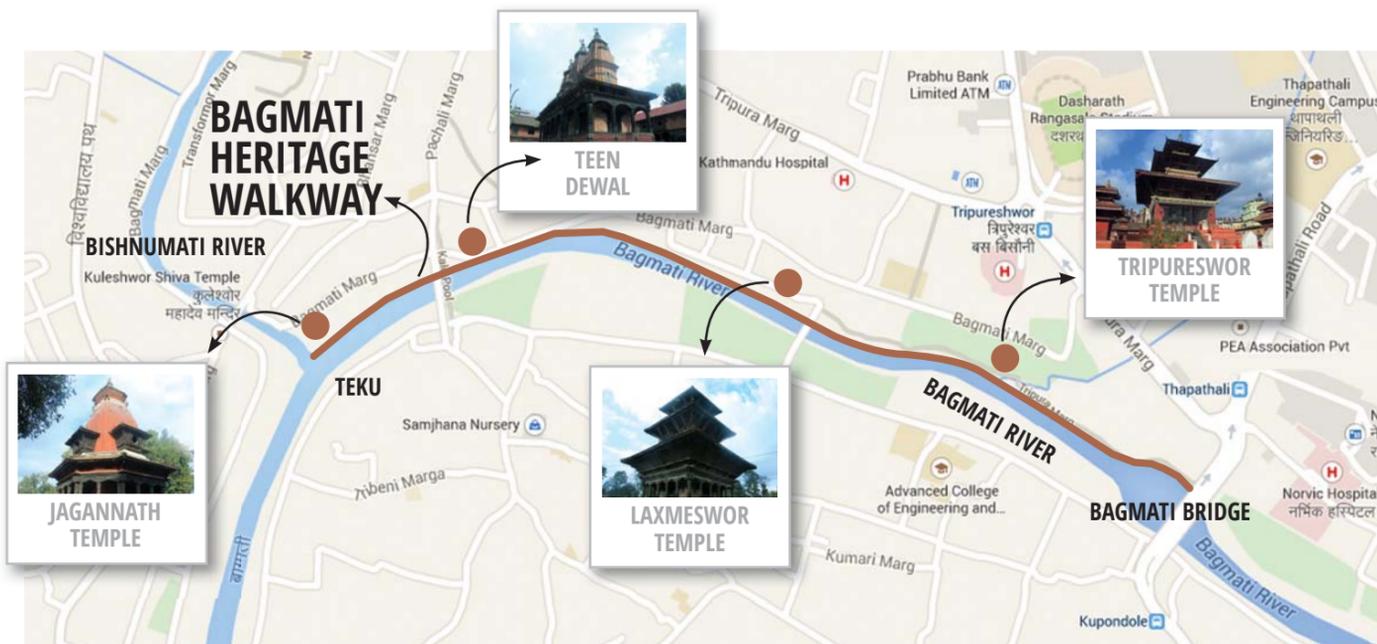
COMPUTER MONATYPE: SURESH SHRESTHA

WAY

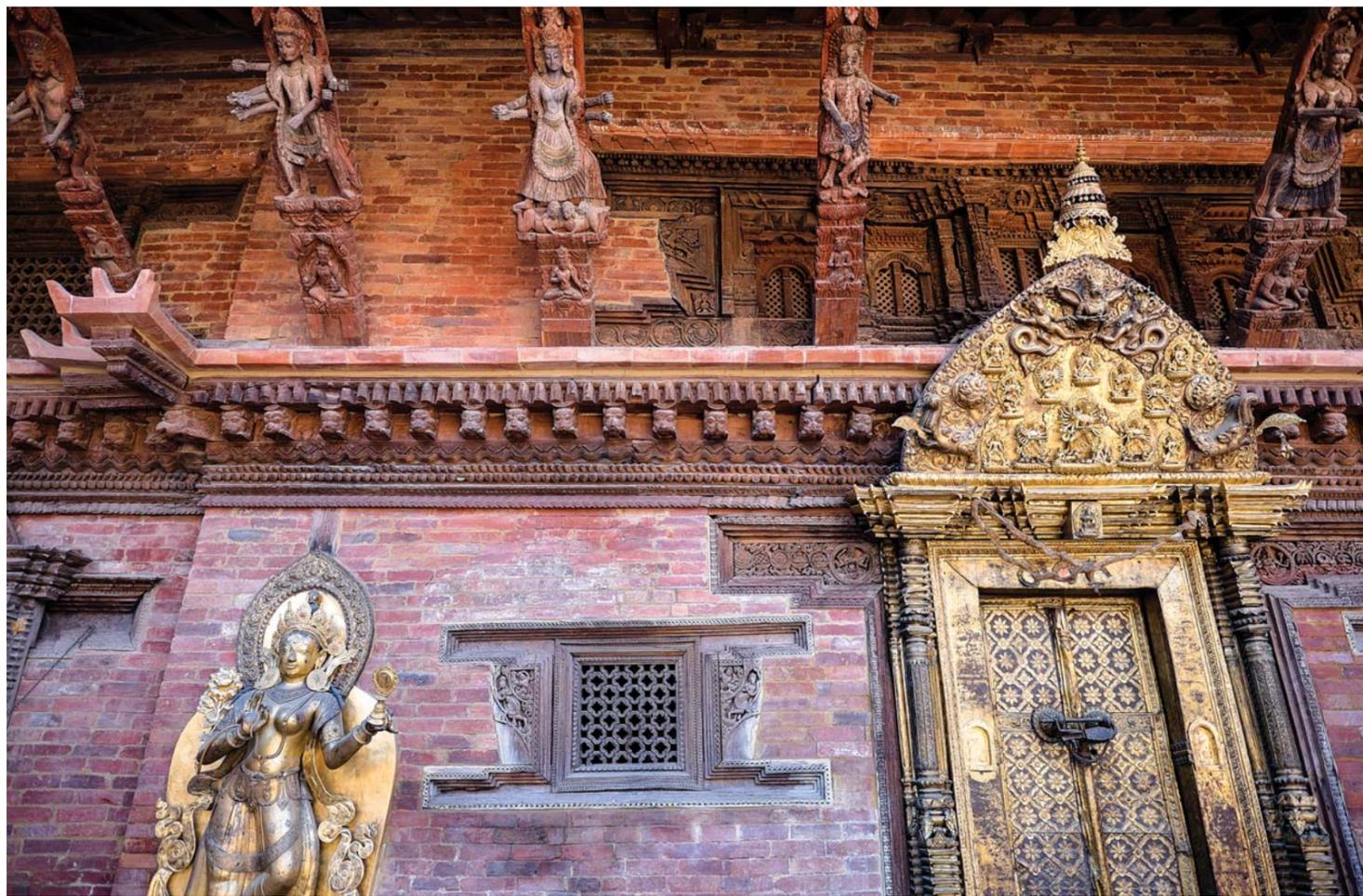
power, and it is thought the weapons used in the massacre are buried under the temple. Three ashrams constructed by Jang Bahadur, including the Pachali Bhairav and Shiva temples also lie between Teku and Thapathali.

KMC has allocated a budget of Rs 20 million for the project this year, up five fold from last year. Youth groups have been actively promoting the heritage walkway via social media. With money and motivation, there is no reason why the banks of the Bagmati cannot bring back some of its tarnished glory.

Tufan Neupane



US EMBASSY



PICS: KENJI KWOK

NEPAL'S SOUL

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 handcraft 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

Big Hero 6

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) for 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. 🇨🇦

nepalitimes.com

Trailer



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

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



HAPPENINGS



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



SRK IN NEPAL: Indian actor Shahrukh Khan greets fans upon arrival at the Tribhuvan International Airport on Monday. Khan was in Kathmandu to attend promotional events for a paint company.



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.



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

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At the 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 jewellerys, 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 jewellerys of soap nut, silver, turquoise and recycled rubber, created by the women of the Kevin Memorial



A SHOP WITH A STORY

BIKRAM RAI

Eco-Foundation.

Kakani 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 incense, pencils made from recycled paper, sukul (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 ChangeFusion 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 seem 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 Shakya, Founder of Kakani Himalayan Natural Dyes.

Sahina Shrestha

www.facebook.com/shopwithastory

Brew Coffee Port



OPEN FROM 10AM TO 10PM

PICS: KENJI KWOK

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 with 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 cafe brews some of the best coffee drinks in the city.

Cynthia Choo

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



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Enjoy With Responsibility

Ask Anjana Anything

Hi again, sometimes trying to make everyone else happy can leave you a little empty on the inside but you are the only one responsible for your



ASK ANJANA ANYTHING

Anjana Rajbhandary

own happiness. You should choose it because you deserve it. Thank you for the questions. Keep them coming at:

askanjanaanything@nepalitimes.com.

■ I was born and raised in a semi-modern extrovert Newar family. I'm 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 Tuladhar

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!

-NM

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.

GIZMO by YANTRICK

THE NEPALI SMARTPHONE

While you're trying to save up for the Sony Xperia Z3, 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 OGS 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 removable 2000 mAH battery that should guarantee up to six hours of talk time. You can bring an extra battery along if you are going out for a long day, though they could

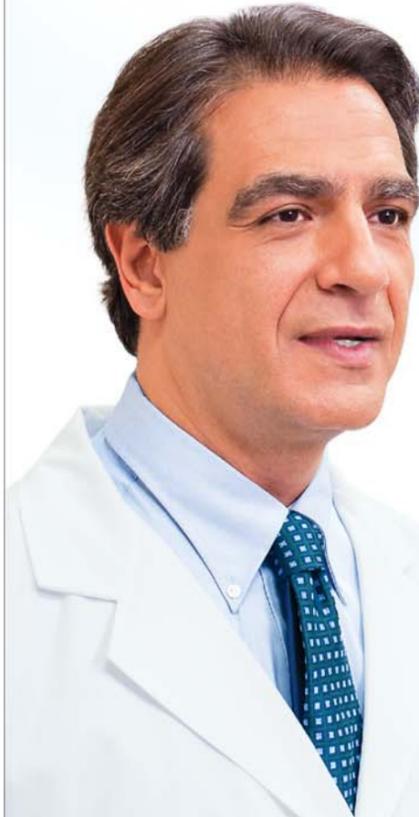


have just gone ahead with a larger battery capacity.

The smartphone supports an external Micro SD card of 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.

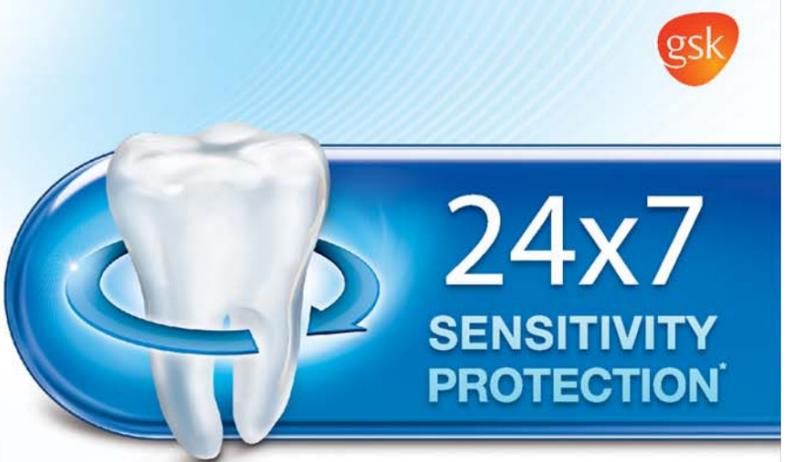
Him Electronics, under the Golchha Organisation, aims to introduce technologically superior products in the Nepali market and they have certainly delivered their promise with the ARK EDGE A5 HD. This will allow the average Nepali to own a stylish smartphone that is coupled with features that guarantee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



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A new energy mix for a New Nepal

Hydro for the hills, biomass for the plains

SURAJ PANDEY

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.

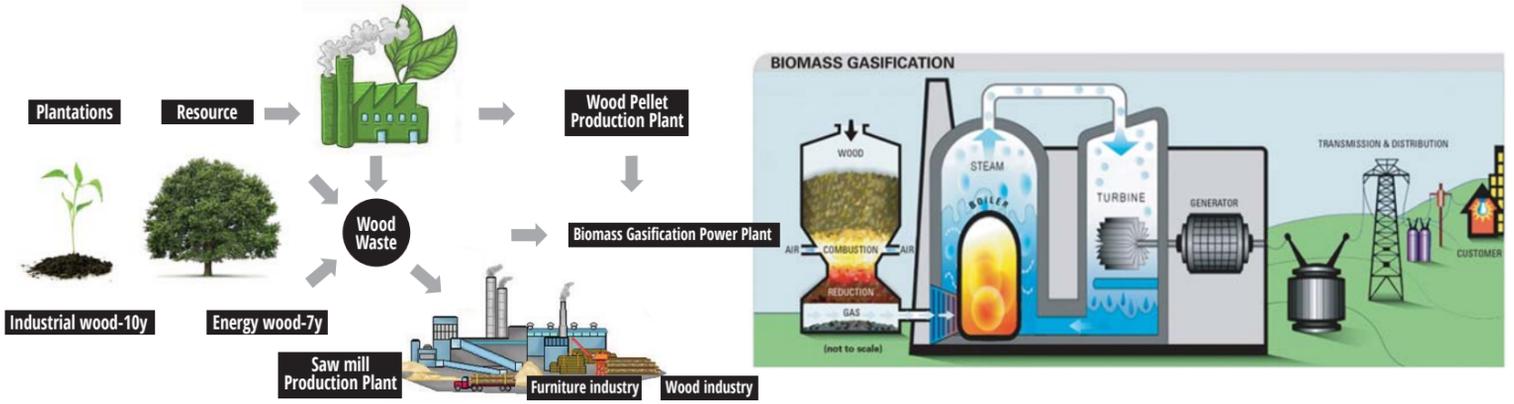
There are economic and ecological considerations that determine the use of appropriate energy. With concerns about fossil fuel burning that emits sequestered fossil carbon into the atmosphere, biomass energy has suddenly become a much more attractive proposition. Countries rich in fossil fuels do not 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.

It is much more expensive to generate power from imported solar PV systems than locally produced biomass gasification electricity. The electricity generated from these biomass plants can be distributed to local consumers via microgrids.

Nepal has prioritised hydroelectric systems, solar photovoltaic and other sources including fossil fuels, which means biomass energy is not considered feasible. These



renewable energy systems are believed to be cost effective and environmentally friendly, but the cost of biomass for electrification at the power level of 5-100 kWh is one-third of micro-hydro. It is a quarter of that for wind energy systems and a tenth of those for solar PV systems.

A major hurdle in Nepal is that the government needs to promote industrial biomass

energy with policy and regulatory frameworks. Nepal needs to wake up from its 100-year slumber of failed electricity policies and a 'hydro only' linear approach. A suitable energy mix that is applicable to the vast dynamic geography of this country needs to be mapped and implemented. Where transmission lines can be built cost effectively and quickly, hydroelectricity would

be ideal. But microgrids in the Tarai could be a much more feasible option with each village or community generating and distributing its own electricity. Mountain villages can carry on installing micro hydropower and settlements in the Tarai can use local biomass for micro-grids. To come up with real applicable energy solutions, the National Planning

Commission and the government needs to start implementing this appropriate solution for energy self-sufficiency. 🇳🇵

Suraj Pandey has a Masters in Mechanical Engineering (Gasification) from the University of Padova, Italy and holds international patents for biomass gasification systems up to 4kW and is an EDC member.

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CRUSHING TALE OF THE CHURE

SAMEEN RAUT and **DINESH PANTHI**
in SARLAHI

Every time a strong wind blows down the canyons of the Narayan Khola, boulders shaken loose tumble down the cliffs of Parewa Bhir. This isn't because of deforestation or soil erosion, it is simply the geology of the fragile hills of the Chure.

They are made of crumbling sedimentary layers pushed up by the tectonic forces that formed the Himalayan mountains. The youngest and environmentally vulnerable hills need no help to disintegrate. However, in the last few decades they got plenty of help from new human settlements.

Fueled by the construction boom in Nepal and the burgeoning demand for aggregates from India, the Chure doesn't stand a chance. Everywhere one looks, the hills and rivers have been ravaged by quarries, sand and boulder mining, and illegal logging. Excavators and bulldozers claw at the river banks, and stone crusher plants blight the landscape.

Media coverage of the devastation caused by the quarry mafia enjoying political protection prompted the government to ban the export of aggregates to India last year. But a lot of the damage has already been done. River beds devoid of boulders which used to keep the velocity

of the water in the monsoon in check have washed away farms and homes, damaging bridges and highways.

"The first mistake was made by the government," says Sita Ram Dahal, chairman of a local network of forestry user groups. "It was a mistake to let contractors extract sand and boulders from the river beds without regulating them."

Once contractors paid the VDC fees, they were free to excavate as much sand and boulders as they wanted. Tipper trucks from as far away as India roared through narrow village roads to carry off the sand and stones. The ventures were so profitable the contractors made their own roads along the rivers, but the 60 ton trucks are so heavy they have destroyed the tarmac of the East-West Highway.

Some of the stone crushers have now been abandoned because of the ban, while others still operate clandestinely at night. But local villagers, who had been promised jobs and prosperity, are now paying the price.

The angry rivers change their course often, washing away crops and depositing sand on fertile farms. In the monsoon, the roads built by contractors become river channels leading to water-logging of fields.



Swept away

Babu Yonjan of Parwanipur was bringing home groceries from the market late one monsoon evening last year. It had been raining steadily all day, and a brown flood of sand and mud came down the Jharjhara River without warning sweeping him away. Yonjan was a subsistence farmer, whatever he grew was enough just to feed his family of 11. The farm, two chicken and two cows are all that remain for his surviving family.

Yonjan's family was paid Rs 100,000 by the government as compensation, but the money has long since gone. Yonjan's third son, who was working as a labourer in Kathmandu, has returned home and helps grow vegetables and corn to feed the family. His siblings work as drivers or labourers and have no savings to help out. Flash floods are now common in the area, because besides stone crushing plants and quarries there is also illegal logging and encroachment of forests. With the vegetation gone, the thin Chure topsoil is easily washed down in the monsoon while perennial springs go dry in winter.



Ecologist Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha speaks to *Nepali Times* about why the Chure eco-system is important.

Grassroots action

The government says it has banned groups from felling trees in Chure. Is it true?

There is difference between what is said and what people understood. The Chure-Madhes Conservation Development Committee didn't ban felling. Which shows that 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,

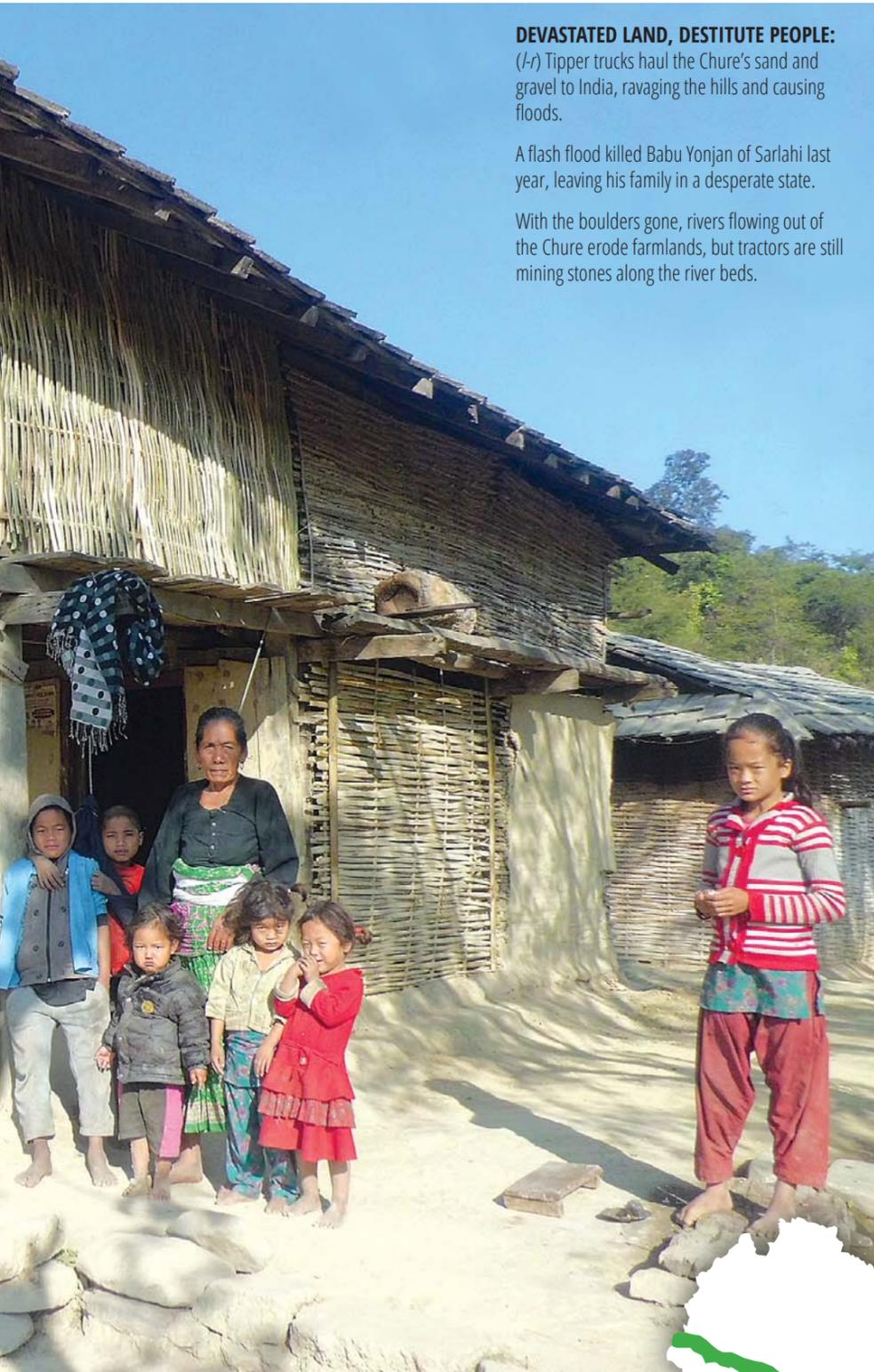
people are turning to mining and extraction for jobs. The Chure has a very thin top soil. If you take it away, or if it is eroded, you have a desert.

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, but not the immediate benefits of conservation. Crossborder cooperation with the Indian state of Bihar, since destruction of the Chure will ultimately affect farms and towns in Bihar.



DEVASTATED LAND, DESTITUTE PEOPLE:

(l-r) Tipper trucks haul the Chure's sand and gravel to India, ravaging 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.



PICS: SAMEEN RAUT/DINESH PANTHI

Under the personal initiative of President Ram Baran Yadav, the Tarai-Madhes 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.

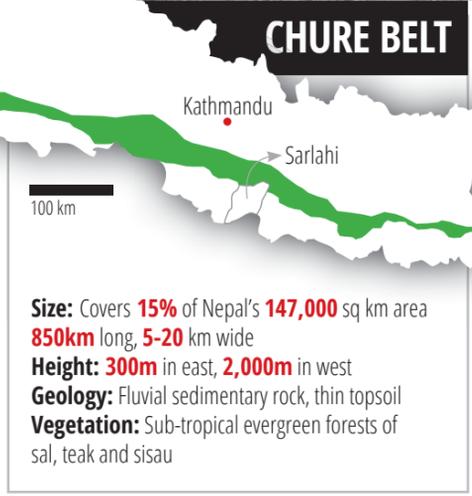
"All they are doing is documentation work, not conservation," says Dahal, "it has become a dumping ground for retired forestry staff."

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 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 denudating 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 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. ❏

Shreesha Nankhwa and Uzabi Baidar contributed to this investigation.

"The Chure can't be saved overnight"



Bijay Kumar Singh of the President's Chure-Madhes Conservation Development Committee spoke to *Nepali Times* about his organisation's effort to protect the Chure.

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.

That 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 amareso 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.

“I am a risk-taker”

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



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

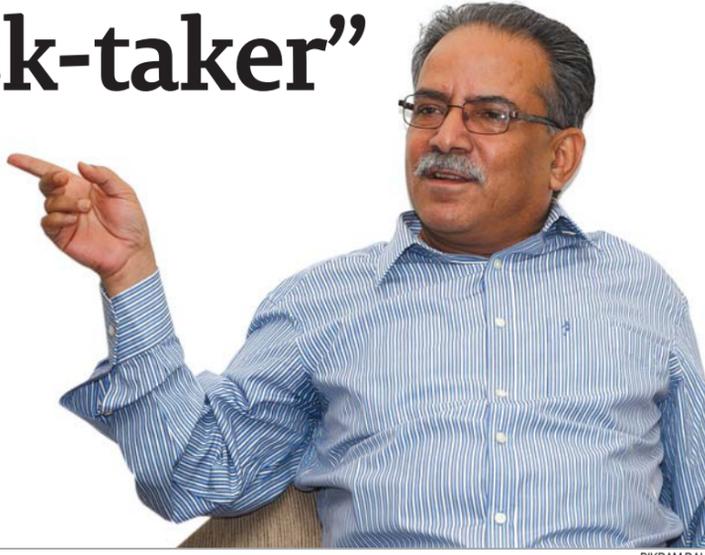
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: Some people accuse us of obstructing the constitution writing process in the name of consensus. They have a misconception that we want consensus just because we lack numeric strength in the second CA. But even when we had numeric strength in the first CA, we never sidelined the NC-UML.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

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 fulfill whatever promises 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 Gyanendra Shah seized power in 2005, he had actually asked me to join a joint struggle against the monarchy. UML leader



BIKRAM RAJ

Madhav Nepal also played a role to persuade us to join the peace process. After Girija Prasad's demise, there is no leader who can rise above personal interests to reach out. Even Madhav Nepal has lost his say in the UML. The NC president Sushil Koirala and the UML Chair KP Oli are just average leaders.

Can you not play that role?

I am a risk-taker. When it seemed impossible to pass the new constitution on 22 January, I took a risk. I agreed to go ahead by writing a note of dissent on the form of governance. I thought the NC and the UML leaders would be happy with that, but they walked out. What surprised me even more 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. He is now pushing to move forward with the agreements we reached on 19 January.

What exactly happened on 19 January?

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 go ahead with the NC-UML's idea of Westminster system, writing a note of dissent. We put the issue of federalism on hold. The Prime Minister is now in favour of writing the constitution by endorsing our 19 January deal postponing the federalism issue. But, things have changed and now, 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 30 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.

Warning: you are on CCTV

Himal Khabarpatrika, 8 March



When Anil Thapa, 24, of Sitapaila stopped at a traffic light at Thapathali, a traffic policeman asked for his licence. She informed him that he had been caught on camera violating the lane discipline a few minutes previously. He paid a Rs 200 in fine and attended an hour-long lecture at the Metropolitan Traffic Police Office at Baggikhana.

Accompanying him in the class was Rahul Sharma, 25, of Bhaktapur. His experience was a little different. He said he was penalised wrongfully for lane violation. "All I did was leave way for the other motorcycle. But the police handed me a ticket saying that it was already recorded on the camera," said Sharma.

As of 16 February, 569 people have been caught on CCTV cameras violating traffic rules. The police first installed the CCTV cameras at key intersections in October 2013. Since last October, violators were made to attend mandatory orientation classes. Every day the police has three sessions for drunk driving and five for lane violations. According to MTPD, 23,146 drivers have paid Rs 4.7 million in fines for lane violations alone.

SSP Narayan Khadka says more than 200 CCTV cameras have been installed and are monitored in Baggikhana. The cameras have not only helped in identifying violators of different traffic rules but also in catching criminals.



Govinda Bhattarai of Nepal Automobiles Association says that after curbing drinking and driving, the use of CCTV is another welcome step taken by the MTPD. "Along with monitoring and regulating traffic, the laws should be rectified and a separate lane should be made for pedestrians and cycles," he added.

However, the move is not without criticism. Manoj Maharjan, 36, had to wait for five hours to attend an hour long orientation class and said he was treated like a criminal. Bikash Thapaliya, 27, who was penalised for lane violation in Thamel, said: "They don't treat us properly. And at times it's not our fault. I was caught for violating lane discipline but there was no street centre line."

In a move to ease the traffic management in the capital, the police is planning to introduce Intelligent Traffic System (ITS), which will not only be able to manage traffic lights directly but also receive the information of any traffic rule violations. The system will initially be implemented in Lajimpat-Tripureswor, Darbar Marg-Bhadrakali and Jai Nepal-Thapathali routes.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The Supreme Court's verdict on the TRC will push the country back to war.”

UCPN (Maoist) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal in himalkhabar.com

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परजिवीबाट संक्रमित लामखुट्टेको टोकाइबाट सर्ने हातीपाइले रोग निवारणको लागि बिसं२०७९को आम औषधि सेवन गराउने कार्य तपाईंको घर दैलोमा तालिम प्राप्त स्वास्थ्यकर्मी तथा स्वास्थ्य स्वयंसेवकहरूबाट दुई चरणमा सम्पन्न हुदैछ ।

विश्वमा हालसम्म आम औषधि सेवन कार्यक्रमका कारणले रोग प्रसारणमा ४३ प्रतिशतले कमी आएको पाइएको छ । बिभिन्न सर्भेक्षणहरूले नेपालमा हातीपाइले रोगको परजिवीको संक्रमण सरदरमा ९३% (जिल्ला अनुसार ९%-४०% सम्म) देखाएको छ । हातीपाइले रोगका परजिवी भएका मानिसहरूमा गोडा सुनिने, सेतो पिसाव बग्ने, स्तन तथा जनेन्द्रीय सुनिने जस्ता लक्षणहरू देखिन्छ । बाहिर लक्षण नदेखिएका तर शरीर भित्र यो रोगको परजिवी भएका मानिसहरूमा यो औषधि सेवनबाट शरीर भित्र रहेको परजिवी नष्ट भै रोग अझ जटिल र अशक्त हुनबाट बच्न सकिन्छ र रोगको लक्षण विकास हुन पाउदैन । त्यसैले कोही पनि व्यक्ति, हातीपाइले रोग लागेको होस् अथवा नलागेको होस् अभियानमा खुवाइने दुई थरी औषधिले रोगको उपचार हुनुको साथसाथै रोग लाग्नबाट समेत बचाउने हुनाले यी औषधिहरू सेवन गर्नु आवश्यक छ । यी दुवै औषधि वर्षौ देखि उपचारको लागि प्रयोगमा आइरहेका औषधि हुन् । यो विधि अपनाई चीन, जापान, कोरिया तथा ताइवान लगायतका देशहरूले हातीपाइले रोगलाई निवारण गरी सकेका छन् । हातीपाइले रोगको लक्षण देखिएमा यसको उपचार हुदैन ।

नेपालमा पनि सन् २००३ देखि नै यो कार्यक्रम शुरु भई प्रभावित सबै ६९ जिल्लाहरूमा आम औषधि सेवन कार्यक्रम विभिन्न चरणमा सञ्चालन भईसकेका छन् । हालसम्म २० वटा जिल्लाहरूमा ६ पटकसम्म आम औषधि सेवन कार्यक्रम सम्पन्न भई सकेको छ र सर्भेक्षणले यी जिल्लाहरूमा परजिवीको संक्रमण निवारणको स्थितिमा पुगेको देखिएको छ ।

हातीपाइले रोगको औषधि दुई वर्ष नपुगेका केटाकेटीहरू, गर्भवती र ७ दिन सम्मका सुत्केरी, छारे रोगी तथा सिक्किस्त विरामीहरूले खानु हुँदैन यो औषधि खाली पेटमा खानु हुँदैन । अरु सबै व्यक्तिले स्वास्थ्यकर्मी तथा स्वास्थ्य स्वयंसेवकहरूले भने अनुसार खानासँगै वा खाना पछि औषधि खानु पर्दछ ।

हातीपाइलेको औषधि सुरक्षित मानिएको छ । विश्वमर अरवौ मात्रा र नेपालमा हालसम्म पटक पटक गरी ८ करोड भन्दा बढी मात्रा औषधि सेवन भई सकेका छन् । हातीपाइलेको परजिवी शरीरमा भएमा औषधिको सेवन गरे पछि कसै कसैमा ज्वरो आए जस्तो हुने, टाउको दुख्ने, रिङ्गटा लाग्ने, वाक वाकी लाग्ने जस्ता सामान्य असर देखिन सक्दछ । यस्ता असरहरू बिना उपचार आफै केही समयमा ठीक भएर जान्छन् । यदि ठिक नभएमा नजिकको स्वास्थ्य संस्थामा तुरुन्त जाओ र जाने सल्लाह दिओ । हातीपाइलेको औषधि खाएर आफु र आफ्ना सन्ततीहरूलाई रोग लाग्नबाट बचौ र बचाओ ।

मिति २०७९ फाल्गुण ३०, चैत्र १ र २ गते -३ जिल्लाहरू : काठमाण्डौ, ललितपुर र भक्तपुरमा आम औषधि सेवन अभियान सञ्चालन हुदैछ ।



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WORKING AFTER WAR



TAKING LEAVE: Pasang Sherpa in uniform during the conflict (above). A former Maoist guerilla he now lives in India, selling medicines and clothes. A picture of Sherpa during his visit to Shanghai from his album.



Madhab Basnet in Nepal (8-14 March)

नेपाल

Pasang Sherpa 'Karma', a former Maoist guerilla, 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 Khanal, who is now in-charge of Avadh State Committee of the Maoists says more than 100 ex-guerrillas have migrated for work abroad from his area alone.

Khanal says those who faced hardship and braved bullets 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, fleeing 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 for the country and their lives.

Hari Bahadur Neparu, 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 wives during the war. He now regrets joining the Maoists. "I feel insulted," he says. "They used us. When they came to power, they ignored us."

When the war was over, Neparu was hopeful that he would get a chance 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, Dhruva Neupane 'Bachan' of Okhaldhunga and Bhim Dutta Khadka '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.

Says Comrade Bachan: "I now ask myself: what did I fight for?"

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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 govtment 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

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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 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 kundalinis, 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.



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