Belabouring the obvious

EDITORIAL PAGE 2

One in every five person in Qatar today is a Nepali. Nepalis are deported daily from Doha airport because they have been duped by recruiters. Every year more than 200 Nepalis come home in coffins from Qatar alone, like the one above on Wednesday.

Eighteen per cent of Nepal’s population of 30 million works abroad. Half of them are seasonal migrants in India, but no one keeps any records of where they go, what jobs they do or how much money they send home. Which is why the national discourse on migrant workers is dominated by the estimated 2 million who are in the Gulf, Malaysia, Korea and Japan.

They send home $4 billion a year, and remittances now make up more than a third of the country’s GDP. But at what cost to the country?

Zero cost migration, really?

Nepal and Qatar agreed this week that overseas contract workers shouldn’t have to pay fees to recruiters anymore. Where have we heard that before? There is little likelihood that the bilateral zero-cost agreement will ever be enforced because there is too much money to be made on the blood, sweat and tears of Nepali workers by the politically-connected manpower mafia in Kathmandu.

BY OM ASTHA RAI  PAGE 4

The Supreme Court has released on bail a fake doctor charged with embezzling millions meant to upgrade medical care in Humla.

BY BHIRUKUTI RAI  Centre for Investigative Journalism  PAGE 16-17
For a country that is so dependent on overseas contract workers, the Nepali state seems to be capable of neither protecting its citizens abroad nor maximising the benefits of remittances to the nation economy. This is a disgraceful and outrageous lapse, but not surprising given the political disarray and absence of accountability among elected officials.

Eighteen per cent of Nepal’s population of 30 million at any given time is working abroad. Half of them are seasonal migrants in the Gulf, Malaysia, Korea and Japan.

They send home more than $4 billion a year, and remittances now make up a third of the country’s GDP. Without this safety valve, joblessness among youth would be meaningless to end it working out a formula to eliminate the other problems with our rulers down to the last detail.

As long as Nepal is under the rule of the political grotesque and the people haven’t had a choice, not a mistake’, Anjana Rajbhandary, #752). It is a choice, not a mistake. If someone honestly feels that way, they should be open with their partner and have an open relationship so both partners know. Honesty is vital to any relationship.

Twenty thousand Nepalis leave for work and returning to Kathmandu airport every day is proof that they are fleeced, cheated, extorted, harassed, and abused by Qataris, reported on page 4, this is not the first time such an agreement has been signed, so hope is that this agreement will be enforced strictly.

Four years ago, President Ram Baran Yadav and Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai visited Doha separately, and met Qatari officials. Both interacted with Nepali workers and heard firsthand that the real problem was exploitation by fellow Nepali recruiters back home. The statistics are revealing: one in every five persons in Qatar}

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Unbearable yet recoverable

‘Kathmandu Valley then,’ #752.

Bagnati can be restored to its old glory with scientific and thoughtful planning even today.

Ananta R Baidya

I remember those monsoon days when the Bagnati used to flood from bank to bank but the last I saw it happen was in 1985. I want to cry when I see photos like these and feel fortunate to have experienced the Kathmandu Valley in all its glory. We need to make more exhibitions so young Nepalis know what this Valley used to be like so they can have a vision for the future.

James Glambonne

A Nepali

How we have fouled up our nest.

Alas

Dementia

Thanks for your sensible and revealing issue-based reporting (‘Remembering dementia’, Kenji Kwok, #752). Seriously refreshing to see media make the change.

Sharon Shrestha

PRIVILEGED FREEDOM

Glad to read an article where there is a choice, not something you can’t control. Those who say they can’t control it are using that lack of a choice as a way out of their commitment, an excuse. If someone honestly feels that way, they should be open with their partner and have an open relationship so both partners know. Honesty is vital to any relationship.

Rachel

ASS

I wanted to post this note on Twitter, but chickened out and will instead hide under the anonymity of the Internets and say it here. I, a 20-something Nepali, am henchman giving up on this country. ‘It’s a riot out there’, Ass, #752. I’m done. Checking out. Bye, bye. If some of you are still around until 2015 AD let me know how y’all are holding up and do post a PDF of the new constitution on the internets.

ZXY

ON CHEATING

It’s a compulsion not a choice. Source: my own experience. ‘Cheating is a choice, not a mistake’, Anjana Rajbhandary, #752.

A compulsion by definition is just a very strong desire to do something. This still leaves cheating as a choice, not something you can’t control. Those who say they can’t control it are using that lack of a choice as a way out of their commitment, an excuse. If someone honestly feels that way, they should be open with their partner and have an open relationship so both partners know. Honesty is vital to any relationship.

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get their salaries, they are paid much less than what is stipulated in the contract. The Kafala system bonds Nepalis to their Qatari employers and puts them at their mercy.

The agreement this week seems to have been prompted not so much by political will in Kathmandu, but the international criticism that Qatar is facing ahead of the 2020 Football World Cup about the treatment of overseas workers there.

The zero-cost rule is not new. Qatar and Nepal signed a similar agreement in 2005 under which Nepali migrant workers don’t have to bear the cost of air tickets, visa fees and other charges. But everyone was making so much money on the blood, sweat and tears of migrant workers that the agreement was never implemented.

Qatari employers are required to pay a facilitation fee of $260 per worker, which the recruiting agency in Doha and its counterpart in Kathmandu divide up between them. Despite this, Nepali manpower companies charge the worker Rs 100,000 just for finding them a job. On top of this, although the 2005 bilateral agreement stipulates that the Qatari employer is supposed to foot the air ticket and visa fees, Nepali recruiters still ask the workers to pay for this. Now, both ministers have agreed to take action ‘within two weeks’ against recruiting agencies in both countries.

There are more than 700 recruitment agencies in Kathmandu sending workers to Qatar, and there are 250 in Doha that hire Nepali workers.

Labour rights activists we interviewed doubt that the zero-cost migration deal will ever come into force because most Nepali manpower agencies have political protection who benefit from perpetuating the status quo.

State Minister Gurung himself is from the NC Deuba panel and his family owns a recruitment company. Enough said.
Nepal and Qatar say an overseas contract worker shouldn’t have to pay any fees to recruiters. Where have we heard that before?

DURING his four-day visit to Nepal this week, Qatar’s labour minister Abdullah Bin Saleh Mubarak Al-Khulaifi said migrant workers shouldn’t have to pay anything to go to work in the gas-rich kingdom that has nearly half-a-million Nepali workers.

After a meeting with his Nepali counterpart in Kathmandu on 5 April, Al-Khulaifi told a press conference: “Qatari employers are required to pay for everything – from visa fees to air fares of migrant workers.”

The Nepali language media reported Al-Khulaifi’s remark as if it was a major breakthrough, and rejoice that this would end extortion-like fees and exploitation of workers by recruiters in Nepal and Qatar. But as far back as 2005, Nepal and Qatar have nearly half-a-million Nepali workers in Qatar. But as far back as 2005, Nepal and Qatar say an overseas contract worker shouldn’t have to pay any fees to recruiters. Where have we heard that before?

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Forgive us our press passes

Journalists like other citizens represent the country when abroad, let’s behave

A journalist on an all-expenses paid junket was recently in Kathmandu airport immigration arguing that he didn’t have to fill out the departure form because it was “unnecessary trouble”. Following his lead, ten of his other colleagues did the same, going on to brag about how they used their press passes to cut queues, skip check and get faster service.

Between the lines

Tsering Dolker Gurung

Such is the sense of entitlement among editors and reporters that they don’t even realise how hypocritical they sound – the same people who report on the misuse of power by public officials show no qualms about abusing theirs.

To be sure, there are many respectable and conscientious journalists around. Unfortunately, it has been my distinct (dis)pleasure to meet and travel with arrogant and ill-mannered underlings.

Two members of the media but as Nepalis overseas workers are currently employed in Malaysia’s plantations, factories and gas stations. A Nepali security guard at the hotel related how Nepali workers have become easy targets for mugging because local police don’t bother to report crimes against them anymore.

“To them we are nobodies,” he said. The Nepali embassy isn’t much help, and as Nepali journalists on a free tour we must have reinforced that impression among Malaysians.

A journalist in the group was irked he wouldn’t be receiving a daily allowance on the trip from the airline even though travel, hotel and food were all paid for. Another raised an objection against abusing theirs.

We are journalists, we can’t afford unnecessary expenses,” whined one. A journalist professor once told us: “media class at university that reporters should not even accept a free coffee from a source. That may be a bit too extreme and counterproductive for us in Nepal, but the point is a valid one: where do you draw the line on freebies?

Accepting a junket, a free lunch, or a bottle of whiskey from an embassy or Diaspora makes you a taker, and opens you up to an obligation to the giver. When we go on a free trip, attend a paid conference, the sponsors feel they have more power to dictate what you write. And in the end it will be the individual’s sense of integrity that will determine how true we are to ourselves and to provide fair and objective reporting to our readers.

On the bright side, for every Nepali journalist that will stick a chewing gum on the back of a bus seat and a hack who won’t throw an empty bottle in the bin for the fear of looking less macho, there are others who are mindful of our actions and behaviour. May this kind grow in number.

@Chenreeyang
The government and opposition have realised the futility of confrontation and need to end the deadlock on the constitution

Looking beyond the senseless violence that played itself out on the streets across the country this week, there is an encouraging development taking place quietly behind the scenes. And this may be the key to ending the current stalemate.

BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

For most of the 16 months since the 2013 elections, the ruling NC and the UML were embroiled in a covert battle for power. Under PM aspirant KP Oli, the UML had hardened its position on the constitution. And the hooliganism of the Maoist-Madhesi opposition inside the CA in January was rightly condemned by all quarters, did not seem unprovoked.

UML leaders were so domineering in dialogue there was a time when Prime Minister Koirala hardly opened his mouth. But, even as politics on the ground looks muddled, the parties have never been so close to resolving the disputes in the constitution. It has practically been settled that Nepal will adopt an improved parliamentary system that will give more stability to future governments. The parties have agreed to a mixed electoral system with at least 40 per cent of the representatives to be elected proportionally from marginalised communities. The issue of having a constitutional court has also been settled and so is the matter of establishing probe committees to look into war-time atrocities.

Today, it has all boiled down to the number, name and the boundaries of the future provinces. The number now seems to be less of a concern, with both sides zeroing in on six provinces. This leaves two final issues of names and boundaries of the provinces.

I have often argued in this space that it is best to leave those things to future provincial assemblies. We only need to look across the border, where Calcutta became Kolkata and Madras became Chennai after five decades, to understand that cribbing over the names makes no sense. Negotiators must focus on the more contentious issue of boundaries.

To its credit, the NC, has understood the political irrelevance of harping about a north-south federation. No matter how ideal it sounds, for political reasons it is no longer an option. KP Oli and his ultra-nationalist cohorts need an excuse to retract from the political blunder of leaving the talks and going for a strike.

The good news is that PM Koirala and his team understand this and are in a hurry due to their party’s convention. They have extended an unconditional offer to the opposition for dialogue, holding off CA proceedings for now. Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his allies only needed an excuse to retrace from the political blunder of leaving the talks and going for a strike. There is no sign yet, that the UML will play a constructive role in the process. Their disdain for the Maoists is natural given both parties contest elections for the same left vote bank. But Oli and his comrades must decide if they want to risk being seen as the lingering roadblock to an agreement.

The ruling parties and the opposition have run out of options and will eventually return back to the table soon. Let’s hope, they go the distance this time.

@AnuragAcharya

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OPINION
The weekend promises to be sunny, with afternoon buildup in the high valleys. The maximum temperature will therefore climb as the afternoon sun gains in intensity, but minima will remain below 13 degrees for now. There is a high pressure system over northern India, and prevailing winds from the south-west will blow in some desert sand and haze, filtering some of the solar radiation. Early next week, expect a trough to take hold over central Nepal which will bring cloud buildup, evening storms and showers.

Nepalis are often asked by foreigners if they have climbed Mt Everest. In Britain, people keep asking them if they are Gurkhas, particularly in towns like Nuneaton where there are large Nepali populations due to Gurkha bases nearby.

Having grown up with Nepalis, English filmmaker Joel Davidson wanted to challenge these stereotypes through a film. “I gained an insight into a fascinating community, and I thought the best way to respect their culture was to capture it with my camera,” he says.

A year ago, Davidson started shooting short film portraits of Nepalis in Nuneaton, 165km from London. He noticed that his subjects had much more to say and that is when he hit on the idea of making a mini-documentary (a shorter form of a documentary, varying between 2 and 25 minutes), called NEPS on them.

The Media production graduate from Coventry University chose to focus on his friends, the second and third generations of Nepalis who had left Nepal when they were teenagers. “I wanted to observe these youngsters who have British citizenship and at the same time have strong cultural roots in Nepal,” he says.

Davidson says young Nepalis of Nuneaton are a positive representation of the youth in general. “They organise events that benefit not only their community, but the entire town,” he says. “If Nepalis were not there, Nuneaton would have been a boring town.”

Davidson started working on NEPS from the standpoint of visual anthropology inspired by the French filmmaker, Jean Rouch. It is a cinema vérité technique that lets the camera roll without the characters being guided.

Last month, Davidson was in Pokhara to shoot his documentary accompanied by Bijay Gurung, a young Nepali from Nuneaton who came to Nepal to convert to Christianity. He will join the British Army when he returns to Nuneaton.

The young filmmaker knew it would be challenging to shoot in Nepal as he knew nothing about the country before arriving, and sure enough there were surprises and delays.

“All this waiting around made me understand Nepalis so much better,” says Davidson. Even if he never tried to push things in Pokhara, he admits some of what was natural for the characters did not seem natural to him, as a filmmaker.

“NEPS might not be the most realistic film, but it’s the most honest,” Davidson told Nepali Times after a shooting at Pokhara’s Peace Pagoda (pic, bottom).

In Nepal, language was also a barrier. While shooting in England, the characters were speaking in English and as soon as they arrived in Nepal, they instinctively switched to Nepali.

When he started shooting NEPS in England, Davidson received plenty of support from the Nepali community there. “They are really proud to see that someone is interested in their culture,” says the filmmaker. “And they are excited to watch the film.”

Davidson recently received significant financial help from Joanna Lumley, the English actress known for her campaign to provide all Gurkha veterans the right to settle in Britain. Her father served in the British Army with Gurkhas.

NEPS will be released in June, and Davidson plans to show it in ethnographic film festivals in Europe. He will also travel with NEPS in England to screen it in towns with large populations of Nepalis.

Stéphane Huët

Nepali Times is an English language newspaper serving the Nepali Diaspora. It is published weekly from London, UK. The newspaper is the only English language daily in the Nepali Diaspora and the only English language newspaper in the UK serving the Nepali community. It is published by Nautikchya Limited, a registered company in England.

The newspaper covers a wide range of topics, including news, culture, economy, and sports. It is read by people from all over the world who have a connection to Nepal. The newspaper is known for its high-quality journalism and its commitment to providing accurate and impartial news.

The newspaper has a strong influence in the Nepali Diaspora, and its articles are widely read and discussed. The newspaper is also known for its coverage of topics related to the Nepali culture and its contributions to the Nepali community.

The Nepali Times is an independent newspaper and is not associated with any political party or organization.

The Nepali Times is a registered newspaper in England and is a member of the National Press Council, which is an independent body that regulates the media in the UK.

The Nepali Times is available online at nepalitimes.com and in print in London, UK. It is distributed through newsstands and is also available for free online.

The Nepali Times is owned and operated by Nautikchya Limited, a registered company in England. The newspaper is published by a team of dedicated journalists who are committed to providing accurate and impartial news.

The Nepali Times is a valuable resource for people who are interested in the Nepali community and its culture. It is a source of information and inspiration for people who want to learn more about Nepal and its people.
Remembering the lost sculptures,
A series of photo-realistic paintings by artist Joy Lynn Davis documenting community response to the theft of stone sculptures from Kathmandu Valley and research about the sites where the sculptures originated.
Inauguration on 15 April, 5.30pm, exhibition till 22 May, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, (01)4220735, swosti@nepalartcouncil.org.np

Cycle against VAW,
Join a group of activists as they cycle through the city, seeking commitment from major political parties and media houses to fight violence against women.
11 April, 7am, (01)4247758, (01)6207758, ayon@ayon.org, www.ayon.org

No plastic,
A 2km march organised by the Himalayan Climate organisation in support of the government's decision to ban plastic bags in Kathmandu.
14 April, 7.30am, Bhrikuti Mandap, www.himalayanclimatch.com

Etched art,
An exhibition of etchings by recipients of the Australian Himalayan Foundation Art Award Program 2014, Saurganga Darshanathari and Surendra Maharjan.
Inauguration on 15 April, 5.30pm, exhibition till 5 May, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4218048, www.siddharthaartgallery.com

Electronic Eve,
Welcome the year 2072 BS with DJ BPM.
13 April, 6pm, Trisara, Lajimpat, (01)4410200, trisara.restaurant@gmail.com

In retrospect,
An exhibition of the works of Nepali draftman, Birendra Pratap Singh, from 1971 to 2015.
14 to 26 April, Nepal Art Council Gallery, Babar Mahal, (01)4220735, swosti@nepalartcouncil.org.np

Women power,
Nine Nepali artists get together for a group exhibition, Kedar Bhakta Mathema.
13 to 30 April, Nepal Art Council Gallery, Kohathun, Kathmandu, (01)5521522, www.katanstar.com

Creative rendezvous,
A workshop on 3D artwork using papier mache, clay, cloth and more.
Rs 3600, 25 to 29 May, 10am to 2pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, (01)5523486, collective@sattya.org

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Treasure hunt,
Each participating team has to complete in a series of 10 unique tasks related to culture and environment to win the big prize.
Rs 500 per team, 1pm, Patan Darbar Square, nyca.np@gmail.com, 9803049718

Photo walk,
Calls open for professional, amateur and beginner level photographers to take part in a global photo-walk. Proceeds will go towards educating children.
18 April, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Pokhara, Dharan, info.colorsofnepal@gmail.com, www.colorsofnepal.com

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Creative rendezvous,
Locals' night,
A group of local artists will be playing their latest works for an indie-electro-folk night.
10 April, 7.30pm, Places Restaurant & Bar, Thamel, (01)4700413, kathmanduplaces@gmail.com

Sound of Blues,
A live concert by Mulla and the Revival.
10 April, 5pm, House of Music, Thamel, (01)507512, sanasy@hotmail.com

Raniban Retreat,
Situated at the other end of the Phewa Lake and nestled inside Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range.
Phewa Lake, Pokhara, (01)4411855

Neydo Monastery,
A monastery and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great siddhas. Leave your troubles behind and book a room.
Pharping, Kathmandu, (01)4040406, www.neydohotel.com

Universal Religion,
A four-day music fest celebrating the best in EDM.
9th to 27th April, Kakani, (01)4440660, info@nevlo.com, www.nevlo.com

Milla Guesthouse,
If you prefer the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far away from the city, yet miles apart.
Bhaktapur, (01)4024217

Brass tune,
A soulful and passionate local brass band takes charge of the night.
Rs. 200, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chowk, 9841226397, parasheshobh@gmail.com

Dancing in the sun,
Welcome summer with the tenth edition of Sundance Music Festival.
Rs. 4500/person, 18 and 19 April, The Last Resort, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525, info@thelastresort.com.np, www.thelastresort.com.np

Universal Religion,
A four-day music fest celebrating the best in EDM.
9th to 27th April, Kakani, (01)4440660, info@nevlo.com, www.nevlo.com

Shangri-La Village Resort,
Set amidst peaceful surroundings with a breathtaking mountain view, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience.
Gharipatan, Pokhara, (061)462222, info@atithiresort.com

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MANGA MANIA IN ‘MANDU’

It may have been a long time coming, but Kathmandu is suddenly under the grip of the Manga fever—all thanks to cable tv and the Internet.

For the uninitiated, Manga is the Japanese term for comics and refers to graphic novels that form the basis for most animation series played on our television screens: Doraemon, Naruto, Dragonball Z. While there are lots of fans of the comics, businesses here have failed to cater to this growing craze. Filling the demand-supply gap are young entrepreneurs like 19-year-old Wataru Ram Shrestha who opened Kathmandu’s first store, The Otaku Store catering to manga and anime enthusiasts.

It sells posters, merchandise, and accessories of different anime/manga themes, which Shrestha imports from China.

“When I opened my shop, I didn’t think I would be getting so many customers,” says Shrestha whose store is open only on weekends. “Rather than making money, my intent was to promote manga culture here.”

Shalini Rana, 25, Kavin Shah, 26, and Krishant Rana, 24, also got together to start Nepal’s first manga magazine called Otaku Next, which published its first issue last December.

“What we are trying to do is bring manga and anime fans together to create a culture and build a community,” says Rana, who herself does a lot of fanart.

A large part of Manga’s appeal seems to lie in Nepali youth feeling...
Manga artist at work

Young urban Nepalis

connected with stories and being able to relate with the characters. Fans also seem to appreciate the creativity and imagination that a mangaka (manga artist) brings to each comic.

“Mangas are much more imaginative and detailed with the story plot lasting years as compared to other comics or graphic novels,” says Wataru Shrestha. Shalini Rana also bought stacks of manga while studying in Singapore. “I made it a point to buy only those manga which have not been turned into anime,” she says.

Otaku Next also organised a manga competition last year, which received 15 entries, with the youngest participant being a 13-year-old. People were queuing up to buy their first issue during its launch.

“There was a reader who reviewed each and every story from the magazine and many others, compared us to Shonen Jump (one of the most popular manga magazines). While being compared is certainly a challenge, it also shows the level of manga literacy we have here,” says Krishant Rana of Otaku Next.

Otaku Next is currently working with 16 Nepali writers/artists on its second issue, which is planned for release at the end of May. IT students Bikin Ghimire, 22 and Rashik Rai, 21 who work under the name Jitomu are excited about the release of their manga The Unholy Sanctum, which is included in the issue. “The story is about virtual world taking over reality. We know we may have shortcomings and we will be compared to others but we are sure we will find readers for our manga,” says Ghimire.

Although there is no shortage of manga and anime lovers here, lack of physical space to convene means the community is scattered. Says Dipanker Shrestha Tamang, 27, an avid reader of manga: “We don’t know where to find people with similar interests, this limits the experience.”

Some consider Rakuten Kitazawa the founder of modern manga for his popular comics including Tagonosaku to Mokube no Tokyo Kibutsu (Tagosaku and Mokube’s Sightseeing in Tokyo). He was also the founder of Tokyo Puck magazine, which showcased Japanese cartoonists. Manga targeted towards boys (shonen) and girls (shojo) were already popular in the early 1960s. But it was Osamu Tezuka who gave it a global appeal with his creation Mighty Atom, an animated version of which was broadcast in the US under the name Astro Boy in 1960s.

Until Tezuka’s time, most manga were drawn from a two-dimensional perspective and in-style of a stage play. Tezuka introduced cinematic technique to his compositions modeled after French and German movies. He manipulated angles and devoted panels to capture movements and facial expressions. This not only broadened but also restructured the whole manga market.

Today manga is an integral part of Japanese culture spanning genres, it caters to all age groups throughout the world and has also influenced Chinese and Korean Manhua and manga artists.
CHANGING ROLES: Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) Gaurav Sumsher Rana meets newly appointed Chinese army attache for Nepal Senior Col Liu Xiaoguang and outgoing attache Senior Col Cheng Xizhong at Nepal Army Headquarters on Tuesday.

When the unassuming but handsome, and above all loveable, Paul Walker died, partway through the filming of *Furious 7*, the latest sequel of an immensely successful franchise of which he is one of the pivotal stars, most people were horrified by the nature of his accident: in a speeding car, not driven by himself, that crashed into a tree killing both people instantaneously.

Walker’s death was an immense loss to the Fast and Furious series, which ostensibly is about fast cars and furious men, but includes a fairly balanced dose of family values, romance and, in this particular installment, some jaw dropping, completely tongue-in-cheek action sequences that will make your eyes pop out as you grip your seat in delighted disbelief.

The producers decided not to have Brian O’Connor (Walker’s character) die in the film, a smart decision that grips the audience throughout the film, our hearts aching at the blonde, good-natured specter of a now deceased, but incredibly charismatic actor; nobody wants to see Brian O’Conner die onscreen, his death off-screen is already too much for his admirers.

Even if you are not a fan of the series, I would still urge you to go see this one. While it is a tad too long, the stunts, the camaraderie between a multi-ethnic cast that includes Michelle Rodriguez (as Letty), Vin Diesel (as Dom), Dwayne Johnson (as Luke Hobbs), Tyrese Gibson (as Roman Pearce), Ludacris (as Tej Parker), with the additions of Jason Statham (as a baddie), a canny, savvy Kurt Russell (as a mysterious, nebulous government agent), and the solid storyline, albeit a bit clichéd, but heightened by the astonishingly paced action packed set pieces, leaves something for everybody to delight in, unless you really have no sense of humour and no appreciation for the truly ridiculous.

*Furious 7* is far from a perfect film. Yet, against all odds, and a terrible tragedy, this is a film that will undoubtedly become a cult classic and not just because it memorialises Paul Walker. Directed with a surprising lightness of touch, considering the heavienss of the mechanics involved in the action sequences, James Wan, a newcomer to the franchise that has been mostly honed in its style by Justin Lin (who directed four of the seven films), manages to keep the furious, heart-stoppingly exciting action sequences balanced with surprisingly reasonable, believable dialogue.

As the film comes to a close, everyone’s hearts will tighten, unless you really are the ultimate sceptic, and if that is the case, you really shouldn’t be in a theater watching a film that is mainly about fast, beautiful cars and the people that love them.
All art lovers in Nepal will have heard of artist Birendra Pratap Singh’s famous quote: “I feel I was already ready to paint when I was born.” Singh who started painting at an early age of eight is one of the most respected names in the Nepali art scenario.

Nepal Art Council (NAC) is currently exhibiting about 300 of Singh’s artworks created between 1971 and 2015. The art exhibition is directed by Sangita Thapa and will be on display till 20 April. This retrospective features drawings, etchings and paintings, representing Singh’s artistic evolution.

The mediums and the styles might have changed over the years, but Singh points out the common denominator in his work: “All my pieces are dedicated to the environment.”

In his colourful artwork, where reference to nature is more obvious, the monstrosity of environment is more obvious, the monstrosity points out the common denominator in his evolution.

Rox’s new pasta and risotto promotional menu raffles

The Rox’s ability to serve up a delectable buffet of Italian comfort food. Diners can choose from vegetarian or non-vegetarian offerings and can also order from the Rox’s regular menu.

The Lamb Ravioli was filled with spicy carrot and squash reduction, paired penne, a slightly “tougher” pasta and provided a refreshing lift to the taste buds. Executive Chef Gopi Nandakumar’s attention to detail was apparent in his choices of pasta and their accompaniments. With macaroni, a “softer” pasta, he used crunchy fresh onions and tomatoes. On the other hand, he paired penne, a slightly “tougher” pasta, with shredded pieces of poached chicken, which were cooked in white wine for the non-vegetarian salad.

Vegetarians are also in for a treat as the chef insists on using the best ingredients like morel and button mushrooms for the vegetarian pasta. The mushrooms were sautéed till tender, and the pasta came in a delicious rich and creamy sauce. The meal gets more exciting with the risotto dishes. The vegetarian risotto was wrapped in rose leaves as the chef wanted to present the classic risotto in a “unique and interesting way”. The sundried tomato risotto was neither astringent nor too sweet.

The non-vegetarian risotto was richer in taste as it was cooked with saffron. Topped with fresh prawns, squid and rainbow trout, the seafood risotto was tastier than the vegetarian option. Similar to the pasta, the risotto was also cooked al-dente, and had a good crunch to it.

The dessert was an ingenious spin on the classic mille feuil. Filo pastry was used instead of puff pastry. Sprinkled with sugar and caramelised, the filo pastry was transformed into a crunchy sheet of saccharine goodness, layered with sweet strawberry cream. Drizzled in chocolate sauce, the dessert sealed the meal perfectly.

How to get there: The Rox restaurant and bar in Hyatt is located in Boudha, Kathmandu.
Overcoming depression

Hi again,

In our society mental health illness is a taboo and is synonymous with going 'psychiatric ward' crazy, which it is not. We all have weak moments but if you are down for a period of two weeks or longer: it is likely that you have depression. Germanwings co-pilot Andreas Lubitz’s medical records showed that he had been diagnosed with depression, and till a day before he deliberately crashed Flight 9525, he was researching the term ‘manic depression’. Awareness, knowledge and support are vital to overcome depression.

Hi, I was a good student in school but started doing badly in college. Seeing other people who were better than me in studies really affected my self-esteem, I failed classes and became very negative, and then was unable to find a job. I am in debt and my father is paying the broker. I went abroad to work. I am too embarrassed to go back home because I feel I have let down my family. I don’t know what to do with my life. I am very depressed. Please tell me what to do.

AR: I am so sorry to hear about your situation. I cannot imagine how hard this must be for you. Do not feel alone because there are many others who are in a similar place. The first thing I would suggest is to seek support, either from your friends or co-workers. Maybe try to talk to your family, I am sure they would like to hear from you, and will most probably try their best to help you. You should try to find a support group, or talk to a therapist. Therapy helps many people with depression. I am not sure which country you are in which may affect the mental health support available.

You choose your own thoughts so you should believe that you will get better. I know it is hard but you need to keep reminding yourself that you will overcome this. An individual’s will power can be strengthened, and once you have the will to get better, you will. Try to stay active and be outdoors. Be social whenever possible. Focus on a healthy diet. Practice mindfulness, be in the moment instead of thinking of all the negative things that have happened in the past: what you do now is going to affect your future, look forward not behind. Medication is not for everyone but it has helped people. Most of the time depression is not a permanent life changer, up to 90 per cent of people with severe depression can be treated. Have a strong mind. Don't give up. Have faith in yourself because depression can be managed.

However, easier said than done. You have to be patient as it will take time. Talk to someone soon. I believe that you can do this, so should you. Never give up on yourself. Write again if you need more help.

Anjana is a certified mental health rehabilitation technician and has four years of experience in adult mental health. Send your queries to: askanjanaanything@nepalitimes.com or @anjyRajy

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YANTRICK’S VERDICT: Periscope allows you to travel the world without having to spend a rupee.

Periscope brings live visual experiences across continents, and users are quick to realise this even from its beta stages. And, you also have the authority to choose to share your recordings with just your loved ones or the world right from your mobile device.

Unfortunately, that power is only available on iOS devices for now but the company says the Android version will be launched soon.

YANTRICK by YANTRICK

THROUGH ANOTHER’S EYES

The team behind the latest live streaming app Periscope writes they wanted to ‘build the closest thing to teleportation’ on the company website, and this reviewer agrees that the goal has been achieved.

You can now follow someone on a motorbike ride through New York City, stroll down the streets of Walt Disney World, or even watch an amazing sunset in South Africa – I did all this in under an hour.

Despite not being the first of such services, Periscope’s community has grown more quickly than its competitors because of its exclusive feature that allows broadcasters and viewers to see real-time comments and likes without posting them onto Twitter. It also gives the audience a chance to influence what is being filmed without having to be physically there and that opens up opportunities for professionals like travel bloggers and journalists to see more. Senior producer for BBC Nepali Service, Jitendra Raut, has already hopped onto the bandwagon and broadcasted live the exhibition of Toni Hagen’s photographs at the Patan Museum this week.

What makes this new app so appealing is not just the ability to share our experiences in real time over the internet, but also Periscope’s beautiful user interface that makes it such a joy to use. It is reminiscent of the design language used by Twitter, which acquired Periscope last month.

Twitter no longer allows apps like Meerkat to reveal its mutual users, which is now a feature exclusive to Periscope. However, it is still too early to declare a winner as Meerkat and Periscope still have a lot to learn from each other.

Despite not being the company’s website, and this reviewer agrees which it is not. We all have weak moments but if you are down for a period of two weeks or longer: it is likely that you have depression. Germanwings co-pilot Andreas Lubitz’s medical records showed that he had been diagnosed with depression, and till a day before he deliberately crashed Flight 9525, he was researching the term ‘manic depression’. Awareness, knowledge and support are vital to overcome depression.

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R

Remember the good old days when all we had to worry about was the earthquake? So began a Moving Target column in this newspaper dated May 2007, titled ‘Innocence lost’.

The war and aftermath introduced an alarming variety of worries that were far more complex than what we were used to. Murder, extortion, abduction and violent crime all competed for our attention, each new outrage taught us new things to fear, and somehow the peace agreement introduced an alarming variety of worries that were far more complex than what we were used to. Murder, extortion, abduction and violent crime all competed for our attention, each new outrage taught us new things to fear, and somehow the peace agreement introduced an alarming variety of worries that were far more complex than what we were used to.

The landscape of fear

It is now the turn of the Maoists to be afraid: of karma and the International Criminal Court, of torturing their cadres kept in disarray, people soon realised they had nothing more to fear and the cities of the valley sprung back to life.

The irony of seeing a Maoist-led government leap to the army’s aid is already well on its way to being restored. The list of luminaries who signed this petition reads like a who’s who of war criminals, each surrounded in their respective factions by a coterie of equally guilty comrades. The high and mighty who robbed and killed with impunity, secure in their status above the law, now live in abject fear of justice being served. The Maoists may feel they can manipulate the legal system like they once did the villagers but justice takes many forms and will eventually prevail. Call it karma or call it the International Criminal Court in the Hague, the blood on their hands can’t be washed off by the TRC or anyone else.

Meanwhile back on the streets, the innocence and trust Nepali society lost to the war may never be fully regained, but the inherent right of law abiding citizens to live without fear is already well on its way to being restored. Jai Nepal.
The Supreme Court has released on light bail a fake doctor charged with embezzling millions meant for upgrading medical care in Humla

BHRIKUTI RAI

Almost six months after the Kathmandu District Court ordered the arrest of fake doctor Yeshe Lodoe Lama in connection with financial irregularities at a hospital in Humla supported by an American charity, the Supreme Court released him on a Rs 1 million bail on 4 March.

The decision by a joint bench led by Chief Justice Ram Kumar Prasad Shah himself and Justice Jagdish Sharma Poudel overturned earlier rulings of the district and appellate courts and granted Lama bail citing ‘present available evidence do not show that he is at fault’.

Lama’s medical certificate was found to be fake, and he had been in judicial custody since September 2014 after the Kathmandu CDO found him guilty of embezzlement of Rs 70 million in grants from overseas donors for the Humla hospital, and for submitting fraudulent documents to the courts. Lama’s attempt to buy his release failed the first time. According to one official involved in the investigation, Lama had offered Rs 20 million to stop the probe at the DAO last year. He had such close ties with the officials there that he was able to escape from custody after being tipped off about the possibility of arrest.

Chief District Officer at the time, Basantaraj Gautam, threatened officials that if they couldn’t bring back Lama they would lose their jobs. Sure enough, an hour later the police presented Lama at the office. Yeshe then tried to accuse his American supporter, Michael Daube of Gitta USA, of stealing from him and presented a receipt to prove that Daube had asked him to withdraw Rs 34 million. The investigation later found that the signature and the documents were fraudulent, which turned out to be the strongest evidence against Lama in the case.

‘How could this even happen,’ Daube asked in a Skype interview after hearing Lama’s release. Daube, who is a New York-based artist and philanthropist, lodged a complaint against Lama at the DAO in Kathmandu for misappropriation of funds which then ordered that Citta Nepal’s bank accounts be frozen.

Although Lama submitted audit reports, Daube says they were neither timely nor transparent. Even the land for the complex in Simikot was registered in the name of Lama’s father. The facilities at the Citta Hospital in Humla were highly questionable.

Legal experts find it odd that Chief Justice Shah and Justice Jagdish Sharma Poudel decided to grant Lama minimum bail despite overwhelming evidence of fraud and malfeasance. Chief Justices don’t usually take up cases like these in their own bench unless there are serious constitutional or legal issues involved, they add.

Chief Justice Shah retired last year. He had such close ties with the officials at the DAO that he managed to escape from custody and moved to Pokhara. The DAO in Kathmandu for misappropriation of funds which then ordered that Citta Nepal’s bank accounts be frozen.

Rumours of financial irregularities and mismanagement of funds had been swirling ever since Lama appointed family members and relatives on the board of Citta Nepal and registered the hospital property in his father’s name. The facilities at the Citta Hospital in Humla were only used during the occasional medical camps and Lama was found selling donated medicines at steep prices to local patients. The hospital had an annual budget of nearly $90,000 until funding was stopped in mid-2012. Volunteers over the years had raised concerns over Lama’s medical qualifications, but Citta USA did not act on those early red flags. Then in the summer of 2012 a Spanish volunteer doctor at Citta tipped off Daube. “Lama knew nothing about medicine and surgery,” recalled Marta Faig, a Spanish physician who was conducting a health camp at Citta.

Since Lama was registered as a medical doctor at the Nepal Medical Council (Licence Number 4734), Daube did not have the authority to stop the probe at the DAO itself. According to one official involved in the investigation, Lama had offered Rs 20 million to stop the probe at the DAO last year. He had such close ties with the officials there that he was able to escape from custody after being tipped off about the possibility of arrest.

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Although Lama submitted audit reports, Daube says they were neither timely nor transparent. Even the land for the complex in Simikot with a modern 15-bed hospital equipped with an operation theatre and special emergency wards, was registered in the name of Lama’s father, Toering Lama.

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Doctor who?, #655
Watch trailer of Way of Life, documentary based on Michael Daube's life
nepalitimes.com

Out on a limb, #656
nepalitimes.com

feel it was necessary to verify his credentials. But after complaints, Banaras Hindu University confirmed that his doctor’s certificate was fake. Daube first met Lama in 1997 at a monastery in Sarnath, India where Lama was studying traditional medicine. In a district with health indicators much worse than the rest of the country and decrepit government hospitals, it was all too easy for Lama to convince the well-meaning American to invest. Lama registered Citta Nepal as an NGO on 21 July 2003 at the Kathmandu DAO. Daube now admits he was duped. “All these years I thought I was helping a young doctor who sacrificed a lucrative medical career in the city to improve the health of fellow Humlis,” he said.

Lama has since changed the name of the hospital to HEED Nepal with Lama serving as Chair. Yeshe didn’t reply to our emails and phone calls. Since the apex court granted Lama bail, legal experts four it could mean that a lower district court could hand him a lenient sentence. Said Daube: “Seems like Yeshe Lodoe Lama is trying to buy time, my only hope is that due diligence will be done to put him in jail so that health care can finally flourish for that impoverished region.”

Citta’s donors are not the only ones to be hoodwinked in Nepal. Japanese philanthropist Takaji Yamaguchi had been supporting Buddha Foundation in Pokhara to provide health services to the poor and needy. But when Dhamaraj Shrestha, a doctor who ran the foundation, tried to transfer the charity’s property to a private company called Buddha Hospital and Research Centre Pvt Ltd, the case was taken to the Supreme Court.

In September 2010, the full bench of Supreme Court judges Khilraj Regmi, Sushila Karki and Prakash Wasti ruled that ‘under no excuse can the financial support and health equipment received by Buddha Foundation Pokhara Nepal be used by Buddha Hospital and Research Centre which is established with a commercial motive’.

He asked the NBA to provide evidence of corruption if they had any. Nepal’s constitution doesn’t give the Chief Justice’s secretariat authority to demand evidence of corruption of judges and to carry out investigation. That falls under the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council (also headed by the Chief Justice). Says Karki: “The Chief Justice’s statement implied that he would investigate after receiving evidence. So we told him that he didn’t have the right to do so and would present the evidence if only the parliament and Judicial Council so demanded.”

If the Supreme Court and the NBA are serious about tackling corruption in the judiciary, it will not just benefit the larger public and the people in Humla, but perhaps also make Chief Justices more accountable in future.

Bar-bench tussle

Nepal’s Supreme Court and the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) have been on a collision course after a recent NBA assembly in Chitwan highlighted corruption in the judiciary, and called for action against rogue judges. This is the first time the NBA has been so outspoken, and Chair Hari Krishna Karki (pic, below) said: “In the past we’ve only used words like ‘malpractice’ and ‘wrongdoing’, now we’re calling a spade a spade and saying it is corruption in the judiciary.”

Chief Justice Ram Kumar Prasad Shah (pic, right) tried defending his institution by taking the unusual step of issuing a statement from his personal secretariat.

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Fleecing donors

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The Supreme Court’s precedent on this case is the only ray of hope for reopening the Citta Nepal hospital in Humla (pic, left). The German charity Shanti Lepra Hilfe, which works for the rehabilitation of leprosy patients fell out with its Nepali partner at Shanti Sewa Griha over similar issues of management and fund use.

Nepali activists say naïve foreign volunteers and donors are also partly to blame. “Foreigners are part of the problem,” says Martin Punaks of Next Generation Nepal, which helps reintegrate rescued children with parents. “They need to vet Nepali partner organisations and monitor them for integrity more carefully.”

The Supreme Court’s precedent on this case is the only ray of hope for reopening the Citta Nepal hospital in Humla (pic, left). The German charity Shanti Lepra Hilfe, which works for the rehabilitation of leprosy patients fell out with its Nepali partner at Shanti Sewa Griha over similar issues of management and fund use.

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Rajesh KC in setopati.com, 7 April

Amongst the dozens of vehicles vandalised by Maoist strike enforcers on Tuesday was a scooter belonging to a young mother of two at Chabahil. Despite the presence of security personnel in the area, protestors smashed the scooter and verbally abused the woman. The mother was in tears, and her traumatised children, aged eight and five, also began to cry. The Police managed to rescue her and the children, and whisked them away to safety.

**Quotes of the Week**

**“COLLATERAL DAMAGE”**

Nagarik, 8 April

Amongst the dozens of vehicles vandalised by Maoist strike enforcers on Tuesday was a scooter belonging to a young mother of two at Chabahil. Despite the presence of security personnel in the area, protestors smashed the scooter and verbally abused the woman. The mother was in tears, and her traumatised children, aged eight and five, also began to cry. The Police managed to rescue her and the children, and whisked them away to safety.
On 28 August 2003, Asta Raj Bajracharya, a member of Maoist-affiliated Newa Mukti Morcha, was detained by the Army. He was kept at the infamous Bhairahari Battalion base in Kathmandu for nearly eight months before being moved to the Rajdai Battalion in Jawalakhel, where he spent another five months in detention. He was released after that.

But, even so, the coppermith from Patan was included in the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 2003 list of Missing Persons as ‘Disappeared #5’.

“I asked them why my name was included when I am alive and free, and the UN staff were shocked,” says Bajracharya recalling his visit to OHCHR in Chitwan when the list came out. Scared that the Army would come for him, the OHCHR sheltered him in the Baluwatar house of a senior British diplomat named ‘John’.

For Bajracharya, the time spent in hiding proved to be almost as difficult as the Army detention. He was allowed only one visitor.” Although the kitchen was fully stocked, I couldn’t cook a meal because I didn’t know how to use the appliances there,” he recalls. “I asked OHCHR to take me away because I couldn’t eat or sleep.”

But the UN told him to stay put. They offered to send him abroad, but he refused saying he did not want to abandon his country. A case was filed at the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) on his behalf, and after nine days in hiding, he was taken by the OHCHR and NBA to the Rajdai Barracks. Following a meeting with an Army major, he was assured that he would be left alone and allowed to go home. “The OHCHR knew they had made a mistake,” Bajracharya recalls.

Three others among the 49 people listed as ‘disappeared’ by the OHCHR in 2003 were later found to be safe. Bal Krishna Shrestha of Lamjung is abroad while Nirnala Bhandari and Janak Kunwar of Nawakot were living at home.

While at Bhairahari, Bajracharya’s hands and feet were tied, and he was physically and mentally tortured. “They often put us in trucks and told us we were taking us away for execution, and they told us if they also kill our families,” he recalls.

At Rajdai Barracks, Bajracharya and other prisoners were treated slightly better before they were released. However, his wife Nishova remembers that he had a thick beard and was just a skeleton when he came home. “He didn’t look human at all,” she remembers.

Bajracharya is no longer associated with any of the five factions of the Maoist party, and says although he gets phone calls to reunite, he feels let down by a party that promised a better future for members like him. He is especially outraged by the party executing his comrade, Nawakot BK.

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Building a better Mao's trap

You know a country is starting its long slide downhill when revolutionaries can’t even shut the country down properly anymore. What is the ruthlessness and nastiness the ex-gorillas showed when they were fighting for our liberation in the jungles?

Today, we Nepalis are forced to be underwhelmed by a feeling of nostalgia for the glory days when the Mao Baddies could blockade the capital for weeks on end, bring the royal regime down to its knees and make the people quake with fear. Where is that can-do attitude to further the revolution by purging the bourgeoisie and working for the downfall of running dog capitalists and their imperialist henchmen and henchwomen?

The comrades followed Mao Zedong by the book in those days, taking very seriously his famous dictum that “you can’t make an omelet without first counting the chickens before they are hatched”. No revolution can be brought to its logical conclusion without the comrade henchwomen.

The comrades in Banepa had the right idea by throwing a LPG cylinder into the fire on a street barricade on Tuesday morning. Boom.

1. Cremating a stationary taxi on a remote section of the Ring Road is too half-hearted. The whole point about a bund is to spread terror, and the comrades in Banepa had the right idea by throwing a LPG cylinder into the fire on a street barricade on Tuesday morning.

2. Make sure the media is there to cover your terrorist act and disseminate pictures of petrol-bombed buses. Otherwise what’s the point, right?

3. Be proactive by stopping anything that moves. If taxis and buses aren’t allowed why should bicycles, tricycles, perambulators? Some people are still defying bunds by taking helicopters to their destination, incinerate some choppers while you’re at it.

4. Lightning Strike: Work stoppage without warning, doesn’t strike the same place twice.

5. Lucky Strike: A strike which achieves its result as a result of a fluke and not because of the force of its logic.


7. Three Strikes: Means you’re out.

8. Transport Entrepreneurs Strike: Bus owners go on warpath burning buses to protest a transport strike. Only in #Nepal.

9. Gas Station Strike: If the government doesn’t let us commit adulteration of diesel, we will close down our pumps indefinitely.

10. Pre-emptive Strike: Announcing your banda before someone else announces his banda, also known as ‘The Early Worm Ends Up in the Bird’s Gizzard’.

11. Relay-hunger Strike: Ingenious and non-violent way to get govt to meet your demands by skipping breakfast once every three days.

12. Hunger Strike: This is what a majority of Nepalis have been doing for the past few centuries.

13. Pen-down Strike: This column is henceforth terminated in defiance of the Essential Services Act since it is a damp squib.

But all is not lost. There is still time for the comrades to try to make a better Mao’s trap. Just to show how it is done, the Ass would like to declare New Year’s Day 14 April a model bund. There, I said it. Spread the word folks, and let’s show our amateur revolutionaries-gone-soft just how to bring the country to a standstill like they really mean it. Here are some useful hints to prevent future bunds from turning into damp squibs:

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