As the mountaineering community prepares to mark the first anniversary of the Everest avalanche tragedy last year which killed 16 high altitude workers, the Nepali guides have gone back to what they have to do for a living – risking their lives to fix ropes, ladders and ferrying rich western clients to the top. Despite the attention to insurance and compensation, the disproportionate risk that the 300 high altitude workers face while employed every year on Everest has not diminished. The least-paid workers are still doing the most arduous and dangerous work on the mountains. A team of eight Nepali guides were busy fixing ropes and ladders on a new, hopefully safer route up the Khumbu Icefall as heavy unseasonal snowfall engulfed Mt Everest this week (pic, above). More than 300 climbers are waiting at Base Camp for the route to be ready and the weather to clear.
W

ith the Nepali new year comes new hope that there may finally be some progress on finishing the pending business of writing a new constitution. The public is fed up, and if their patience wears thin, the politicians will do something about it.

We don’t want to say that the political parties should finish writing the constitution during 2072, because they may take that to mean they have another year to do it. Nepal’s rulers must realise that a political transition cannot go on forever, and even for their own self-interest and self-respect they should now end this farce and allow the country to move ahead.

That will happen when Nepal gets a democratic constitution that doesn’t exclude any citizens. Every Nepali must be guaranteed equal access and say in every state institution. It is hard to imagine excluding any citizen. Every Nepali must be.

The main agenda of the April 2006 pro-democracy movement was peace and development. After that, all main political forces also agreed that this ethnically diverse country could make most rapid progress by being a federal, secular republic. What the leaders of the main parties have failed to fathom is that their delay in writing the constitution is calling into question the institutionalisation of these agreed guiding principles.

Although for the sake of balance we tend to generalise and lump all political parties together for equal blame on the constitution delay, it is clear that the current obstruction is mainly from the Maoist-led 30 party opposition alliance. It is a blocking action for the sake of it: the losers don’t want a constitution that is not made during their watch. Their stand on ethnicity-based federalism may once have been a progressive one, but it has been recently rejected by the public – the latest in the Baglung by-election in which what remains of the Maoist party got less than 10 per cent of the vote.

Earlier, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal had already got the message from the low turnout of his own cadre at a mass rally he called last month to protest the Supreme Court decision to reject amnesty provisions in the Truth and Reconciliation Bill. Then a three-day nationwide shutdown enforced by the 30-
party alliance fizzled out humiliatingly after the first day because of public outrage.

By now the message must have got through to the Maoist hierarchy that their strategy of stoking identity politics and using threats and violence is not working. The Madhesi parties should also have got the message after the 2013 election in which a majority in the Tarai voted for non-Madhesi politicians, proving just how discredited they are. The agenda of a Madhes-only province is not going to fly because it has few takers even in the Madhes.

By now, it looks to the Manists who waged a war to end class and caste-based discrimination, and the Madhesi parties who wanted respect and autonomy, that ethnicity-based federalism with Madhes-only provinces will not further those aims. And proof of that is the 180 degree turn they have made in the past week.

Even though Chairman Dahal was not listening to the Nepali people, he got the message loud and clear last month during his China visit, and an earful from Indian Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyan Jaishankar in Kathmandu on 2 April. Dahal has returned to the negotiation table demanding assurances that his party will not be prosecuted for war crimes, and that his overseas assets will not be tampered with.

The NC-UML, and especially hardliner KP Oli of the UML, are also under pressure from home and abroad to be more accommodating in negotiations. There are indications that if the disagreements on power sharing, amnesty and money are resolved, the dispute over the allocation of five Tarai districts will not be a stumbling block.

So, there is a new silver lining. Let’s all hope that 2072 will be the year of the new constitution.
Plastic-free new year, not easy

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Three days after the government ban on plastic bags went into effect on New Year’s Day, it is still freely available in many mom and pop stores, butcher shops, and fruits and vegetable stalls around the capital.

A customer at a meat shop in Bag Baran said he knew about the ban but was unsure how to carry meat in a paper or cotton bag. “It is the shopkeeper’s responsibility to ensure the plastic he provides is of the set criteria,” he added.

Ravi Adhikari, a footpath vendor, says, “Adding the cost of cotton bags will make my products more expensive. Customers don’t make purchases if the price is high. So unless they bring their own bags or the government provides us with some, we have no option but to use plastic bags.”

Like everything else in this country, the law is meaningless because of the lack of enforcement. Public awareness about the environmental cost of the bags is lacking, and most shoppers are unwilling to forego the convenience.

This is not the first time that there has been this ban. In 2013, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City was forced to withdraw its ban even before it completed its month-long awareness campaign after the Supreme Court passed a stay order filed by the Nepal Plastic Manufacturers’ Association (NPMA).

This time, however, things may be different. The NPMA once again demanded a stay order but to everyone’s surprise, a joint bench of Justice Sushila Karki and Gopal Parajuli rejected the petition citing public health concerns from plastic bags.

“This came as a boost to our campaign to ban plastic bags and not only reinforced our faith in government, but the judiciary as well,” said Palzem Pradhan of the Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI), a youth-led environmental group working to ban plastic bags since 2013. HCI’s ‘No Thanks!’ campaign has provided awareness through organised public dance events and promotion of cloth bags.

“The ban is a perfect example of the collaborative effort of the government and the civil society,” said Pradhan. It has been more than a decade since a government directive required all manufacturers of polythene bags to start phasing out its production. In 2002, the SC ordered the government to enforce the decision, but it was never implemented.

In 2011, the Ministry of Science Technology and Environment came up with Plastic Bags Control and Regulation Directive, which prohibits the import, storage, sale and use of plastic bags less than 20 microns (later amended to 30 microns) and imposed a fine of Rs 500 to 50,000 for manufacturing and using such bags. It was never put to practice.

This time, too, the government had tracked from its earlier decision to put a blanket ban on the use, production, distribution, and import of all types of plastic bags in Kathmandu Valley to state that only bags up to 40 microns will be banned. With this loophole, some say the ban can easily be circumvented.

“The government should put a blanket ban on plastic bags altogether instead of citing numbers like 30 or 40 microns,” says urban planner P S Joshi. “Unless we build the capacity to fully implement the ban, we should not go into numbers.”

When you go into numbers, it gets harder to enforce.”

While the government has been pointing at jute and cloth bags as alternatives, the NPMA has been fighting a rearguard action to keep manufacturing and selling plastic bags. It says the ban is being implemented without proper research and long-term planning, considering how half-hearted the government is, the Association is probably right.

More than 300 tons of plastic bags are used all over Nepal every day. Most of them are used once and thrown on the side of the street or into a river. Street cattle are often found dead after ingesting the bags. The non-biodegradable bags stay in the environment for hundreds of years.

Dharam in eastern Nepal announced a ban on plastic bags in 2013 but it has been only partially successful.

Sunit Nepal of Dharam Municipality says the amount of plastic in the in Kathmandu Valley has decreased, but plastic bags are still in use.

Basu Dev Baral, a tourism entrepreneur in Dharam says: “Although the drive looked promising in the beginning after an exception was made for butchers, other traders simply followed suit and started using plastic bags again.” This may be a lesson for Kathmandu: ban the bags completely, don’t make exceptions and provide alternatives.
On 14 April, hundreds of people participated in a rally organised by the ‘No Thanks I Carry My Own Bag’ initiative to celebrate the government ban on plastic bags in Kathmandu. The campaign led by members of Gen Nep-Nation First, a youth development platforms initiated by Himalayan Climate Initiative has been working to declare Kathmandu a plastic bag free zone since 2013.

“For a moment we were worried the Supreme Court (SC) would agree to the petition filed by the Nepal Plastic manufacturers’ Association (NPMA) to put a stay order on the ban as they did in the past,” said Palzom Pradhan, campaign coordinator for ‘No Thanks I Carry My Own Bag’. “But luckily we had the support of environmental lawyers and now the ban has been enforced,” she added.

In December 2013, just two months after its formal launch, the campaign was endorsed by CA members Gagan Thapa and Rabindra Adhikari. A year later the campaign received support from popular faces including banker Anil Shah and former Miss Nepal Malvika Subba, who has been actively promoting the use of cloth bags. Members of the ‘No Thanks I Carry My Own Bag’ campaign have been actively raising public awareness about the negatives of using plastic. Over 50 institutes are now plastic bag free zones and over 50,000 petitions were signed in support of banning the polythene bags.

The group is also working with Hamri Bahini to promote the use of cotton, jute and paper bags as affordable alternatives. Hamri Bahini which employs women from underprivileged background has so far sold 130,000 bags.

“As they say a thousand mile journey begins with a single step and this is the first step upon which we hope to achieve future successes,” says Pradhan.

Sahina Shrestha
Led by the young

Gionee S7
Gionee has officially launched its flagship smartphone, the Gionee Elite S7 in Nepal. The Elite S7 is the slimmest dual-sim phone with a 5.5mm thin design with a body made of aviation-grade alloy. It is powered by 1.7GHz octa-core 64-bit processor and runs on Amigo 3.0 OS and has a 5.2 inch 1080p FHD AMOLED display.

Summer flavour
Real Fruit Juice has announced the ‘Guess the Real Flavour’ campaign for the upcoming summer season. Consumers have to guess the Real flavour through the clues given in Real advertisements published in various national dailies; type REAL followed by the correct flavour and SMS it to 2010. Participants can win different prizes including the super bumper prize-Fiat Punto Dynamic Car.

Happy Ford year
Ford has launched its New Year offer-Happy Ford Year 2072 under which customers booking Figo, Classic, Fiesta, EcoSport, Endeavour and Ranger models of Ford during the period will win one of the six sure shot gifts. The offer is valid till 18 April.

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New year price
On the occasion of Nepali New year, Him electronics, the authorised distributor of Samsung in Nepal has launched its Samsung Fresh New Year, Fresh New Prices offer. Under this offer, Samsung is offering reduced prices in all its consumer electronics and home appliance products. The offer is valid till the end of June.

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Bar vs Bench

Enough accusations of corruption in the judiciary, time to start investigating them

The Nepal Bar Association (NBA), the umbrella organisation of lawyers, recently declared at its 13th National Conference in Chitwan that there was rampant corruption in judiciary. It said the justices themselves were on the take, and asked the Chief Justice to take action against them.

The public has come to take any allegation of corruption in high places as commonplace. They aren’t surprised that the Supreme Court has also been tarred by the same brush. But this time it was the NBA making the allegation — a body that is supposed to keep the judiciary accountable.

The personal secretariat of Chief Justice Ram Kumar Prasad Shah then fired off a letter to the NBA asking it to provide evidence to back up its accusation against the apex court. This was unprecedented, the Chief Justice or his office had never before written such a letter to anyone. In fact it was highly irregular for the Supreme Court to do so.

Apparently the justices felt alluded to pressure Chief Justice Shah at a full court meeting to send the letter. One of the justices told me, on condition of anonymity, that his colleagues argued that if the Chief Justice did not ask for the evidence then it would seem like they were guilty.

As expected, NBA was not able to provide evidence to Chief Justice of corruption at the Supreme Court — after all the corrupt don’t leave a paper trail. In their written statement, however, the Bar said they did have evidence but that they would provide it to the Judicial Council or Parliament Hearing Committee.

The NBA’s answer also came across as careless and irresponsible. If they have evidence as they had claimed earlier why did they hesitate to share it with Chief Justice, who after all, is also the chairman of Judicial Council? The Chief Justice would have been under pressure to take action.

After the NBA’s response, we haven’t heard a peep from the Bar. The Chief Justice should have taken it up at the Judicial Council and asked for further evidence by now. The Parliament Hearing Committee which was active during the appointment of Justices has also not taken the NBA letter with the seriousness it deserved.

Every year, Transparency International’s report has shown that there is rampant corruption in Judiciary. But no Justices from SC have ever been charged with corruption. The then Justice Prakash Wasti’s five-member committee had also confirmed that there is corrupt justice in Judiciary. A recent national conference of Justices had also made the same statement.

Enough accusations, the time has now come to investigate them. After all, we are talking about the Supreme Court — and that final provider of justice should not just be making allegations, it should be weeding out the crooks.

In fact it is the media that is providing the evidence that the NBA isn’t through with stories like the one by Bhrikuti Rai of the Centre for Investigative Journalism and printed in this paper (#753) about the Chief Justice letting off a fake doctor who embezzled money meant for medical care in Humla on bail.

The Bar and the Bench are in a perpetual state of war, and that is nothing new. In 2008, the president of the NBA, Biswa Kant Mainali made the statement that the post of Justices is a license to corruption. The full court had decided to seize his advocate license for six months. But after lawyers took to the streets, the decision was revoked.

The NBA and the Supreme Court are both there to dispense justice. There are always two parties involved in corruption: the giver and the taker. So we can’t ignore those who are bribing the judges either.

It is already too late to expose corruption in the judiciary, and restore people’s trust in an impartial justice system. Both the Bar and the Bench from their side have to work together to take action against the corrupt in their midst. Otherwise, it will be interpreted that they themselves are afraid that the issue will negatively affect them.

@binitadahal
KUNDA DIXIT

In 1995, Nepal’s pioneer anthropologist and crusader against the caste system vanished without a trace. As with many such mysterious disappearances, there have been conspiracy theories but no plausible explanation. And no sign of the man.

Now, documentary maker Kesang Tseten has tried to piece together clues from Bista’s early years in a Cibheti family in Karhmundo, his fieldwork as an anthropologist, his work in Jumla, which brought him in direct confrontation with members of his own family, the royal palace (for saying that Nepal’s kings were descendants of Magars) and upper caste elders in Jumla where he retreated in 1991 to build a model caste-free community in the village of Chaudabisa.

Tseten travels with Thapa to what remains of the Karnali Institute in Jumla. This is where Bista wanted to put his theories into practice to prove that eliminating the caste hierarchy could help a community develop. He was soon the victim of a vicious slander campaign in culturally conservative Jumla. There was a backlash against his attempt, for instance, to stop the custom of ‘jari’ payment when a local inter-caste couple eloped.

Despite his dogged work in remote Chaudabisa and his popularity among poor villagers, Bista made enemies in Khalanga. He had taken in an intelligent young local woman under his wing, educating her with the hope of giving her a future. His enemies seized upon this, publishing in a local paper that he was having an affair with her. ‘One is born alone and dies alone.’ A long shot of the windy cliffs near Chisapani bridge.

The cinematic craft is classic Kesang Tseten. The director lets the story unfold through interviews, locales and talking heads of a cross-section of Nepalis describing how the caste system affects their everyday lives. Bista disappeared before the conflict began in 1996, a revolution to end ethnic discrimination. The film shows us Bista’s sparse room in Jumla, and we learn the heavy irony of how the Maoists trashed it and burnt all his books.

The caste system has eroded since the last two decades, but there are still incidents like the one of a Dalit youth who could not put up with a Janajati girl, forsaking him because of his low caste, and poured acid on her face.

Tseten shows us an archival clip of Bista burying a time capsule in a Jumla school in 1994 with instructions to open it in 100 years. What does it say? We will have to wait another 80 years to find out.

Castaway Man
Shunya Films, 2015
Directed by Kesang Tseten
1 hr 22 min
nepalitimes.com

LOOKING FOR DOR BAHADUR BISTA

Kesang Tseten’s new documentary investigates the disappearance of Nepal’s foremost anthropologist 20 years ago.
Documentary series,
Screening of Silence in the Courts by Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage and Kesang Tseten’s new documentary, Castaway Man.
17 April, 11.30am and 5.30pm, Hotel Shanker, Lajimpat, (01)4472807, info@soscbaha.org, www.soscbaha.org

Heritage ride,
A 60km bicycle ride to explore the seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley on the occasion of International Day for Monuments and Sites.
Rs 500, 18 April, 9841729965, tdl.p4p@gmail.com

Explore photography,
A workshop for budding photographers who want to take their photography skills to the next level and develop an eye for the craft.
Rs 6000, 20 April to 7 May, 7am to 8pm, School of Creative Communications, Kapan, (01)5546705, 9840061192, scc.kathmandu@gmail.com, www.scc.org.np

Creative rendezvous,
A workshop on 3D artwork using papier mache, clay, cloth and more.
Rs 3600, 25 to 29 May, 7am to 9am, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, (01)5523486, collective@sattya.org

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.
Till 22 May, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, (01)4220735, swosti@nepalartcouncil.org.np

Beyond auto mode,
A 12-day workshop with Aishu Mathema on the use of art and science in photography.
Application deadline 24 April, 26 April, 5:30pm to 7pm, workshop.canon@gmail.com

Tattoo convention,
The 5th International Nepal Tattoo Convention.
Rs 200/day or Rs.500 for 3days, 24 to 26 April, 10am to 9pm, Yak & Yeti Hotel, Durbar Marg, www.nepaltattooconvention.com

Girls on wheels,
Hop on your scotty and ride through Kathmandu as you solve different clues and puzzles on the way.
Rs 1500, 25 April, 7am to 11am, Clean up Nepal office, Minbhawan, 9841381046, info@cleanupnepal.org.np

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, Nepaliya, Pokhara, Dharam, info@coloringnepal@gmail.com, www.coloringnepal.com

Up-cycling,
A workshop to teach participants how to introduce ‘upcycling’, a form of recycling that creatively turns waste into useful items.
Open to up to 25 individuals, 29 April, 8am to 11am, Clean up Nepal office, Minbhawan, 9841381046, info@cleanupnepal.org.np

In retrospective,
An exhibition of the works of Nepali draftsman, Birendra Pratap Singh, from 1971 to 2015.
13-20 April, Nepal Art Council Gallery, Botan Motel, (01)4210781, swosti@nepalartcouncil.org.np

Etched art,
An exhibition of etchings by recipients of the Australian Himalayan Foundation Art Award Program 2014, Suraj Sunar, Saurabh Mahboub and Surendra Maharjan.
10-5 May, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Botan Motel, (01)4210781, swosti@nepalartcouncil.org.np

Dhokaima Cafe,
For delicious food, coffee and cakes.
Patan Dhoka, (01)5522113

Downtown Restaurant,
Go Indian at this restaurant, although it serves Chinese and Continental food too. Don’t miss out on the biryani.
Pulchowk Road, (01)5010751

DINING

EVENTS
Universal Religion,
A four-day music festival celebrating the best in Electronic Dance Music.
21 to 24 April, Kakani, For tickets call 9802013960, info@urnepal.com, kgarira@gmail.com, www.urnepal.com

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

Brasspackers live,
This eleven-piece brass band, all the way from France is sure to make your body moving and your soul grooving.
Rs200, 17 April, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 985-1075172, shresthasanzey@gmail.com

Plebeian live,
An indie-rock gig by a Kathmandu-based band.
17 April, 7.30pm, Irish Pub, Lazimpat, (01)4416027

GETAWAYS

Glacier Hotel,
Good value and friendly service for travellers on the lip of Lake Phewa.
Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)463722, www.glaciernepal.com

Famous Farm,
Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the aankhjhyal.
Awadah, (01)4703435, info@famousfarm.com

Mango Tree Lodge,
Culture walks; rafting in the Karnali; wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.
Bhetani, Bardia, (84)402008, info@mangotreelodge.com

Dhulikhel Lodge Resort,
Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.
Bhetani, Bardia, (84)402008, info@mangotreelodge.com

Ezer book cafe,
Cozy up with a good book over some Korean food.
Sanepa, Lalitpur, (01)5540712

The Village Cafe,
Authentic Newari food that comes straight from the heart.
Puchowk Road, (01)5540712

The Heritage,
Escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta.
Thamel, (01)4405433

Trisara,
With dishes like sun-bread prawns, crispy chicken, and khao soi, it would be a folly to ignore its aromas.
Lalitpur, (01)4410200

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Lalitpur, (01)4410200

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Not a usual resort.......... 
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When she was nine years old, Saraswati Adhikari was trafficked to India by a trusted family friend from Hetauda, and trained to do acrobatics in a Kerala-based travelling circus. She never went to school, was married at 14 and had three children by the time she was 18.

Adhikari and other Nepali children had to practice with their troupes and were often beaten and poorly fed. They were never paid. After she was rescued five years ago, Adhikari returned to Nepal and today, aged 23, works as a professional artist in Circus Kathmandu.

“I don't want people to see us as victims but as role models by focusing on our strengths,” she told Nepali Times this week as she packed for her troupe’s tour of Australia later this month.

Adhikari and her fellow artists have worked hard to perfect their routines and become world class circus performers. Circus Kathmandu has staged international events where the artists have become ambassadors for Nepal, wowing audiences with not just acrobatics but also with their incredible stories of struggle and survival.

After they were rescued, Adhikari and her mates came back to Nepal to an uncertain future in a shelter. They had minimal prospects, lived far from their parents, had no citizenship certificates and lacked income.

“Today, we have passports, live in rented apartments and have our own money to support our families,” says 27-year old Jumuna Tamang (pic, right), a deft rope artist.

Tamang was trafficked from Hetauda when she was only 12, and wants to become an activist against child-trafficking and travel across Nepal. At some point she also wants to return to her old company in India and teach her former employers that circuses can be run professionally and ethically.

Adhikari and Tamang were circus slaves in India during their childhood. Today, they are confident young women with a vision of preventing others like them from falling victims to traffickers.

They credit their self-assurance to Circus Kathmandu founders Sky Neal and Robyn Simpson, who are

NARESH NEWAR

Trafficked children grow up to be world class performers in Circus Kathmandu
CIRCUS KATHMANDU: Founded by Sky Neal and Robyn Simpson, Circus Kathmandu is the first project of its kind in the world, helping support a group to move from being vulnerable young adults to successful, empowered artists and anti-trafficking advocates.

Besides performing in Nepal, Circus Kathmandu has performed at international venues including Norway, Dubai and at the Glastonbury Festival in the UK. Their tour of Australia starts this month.

Rajan Baswal, 23, is the group’s high pole climber.

Circus Kathmandu performers with their Hula Hoop act.

Watch video of Circus Kathmandu performance:

A faraway rescue, #571

Nepal’s circus champs, #575

nepalitimes.com

themselves international circus artists.

“When I first came to Nepal four years ago with a trapeze and a camera, I had no idea how much my life was going to change,” Neal told Nepali Times from London.

The duo started Circus Kathmandu at a time when attitudes towards circuses were negative, but working with trafficked circus children rescued from India made the project unique.

Simpson recalls how the girls were very excited to go back to what they were good at doing.

“The irascible that came from us all being circus girls, that I think helped them trust us and to start seeing their lives differently”, Simpson explained.

Rajan Baswal, a 23-year-old high pole climber also turned his life around. “I’m not ashamed to talk about my past because today I am very successful,” says Baswal, originally from Butwal and was a drug addict at 12.

For Circus Kathmandu, long-term sustainability is a priority and they hired two young Nepali professionals to develop indigenous management skills.

“For Circus Kathmandu, long-term sustainability is a priority and they hired two young Nepali professionals to develop indigenous management skills. “There was a camaraderie that came from us all being circus girls, that I think helped them trust us and to start seeing their lives differently”, Simpson explained.

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For Circus Kathmandu, long-term sustainability is a priority and they hired two young Nepali professionals to develop indigenous management skills.

Simpson recalls how the girls were very excited to go back to what they were good at doing.

Circus Kathmandu is the first project of its kind in the world, helping support a group in an uplifting story of a journey from being vulnerable young adults to successful, empowered artists and anti-trafficking advocates.

“Circus connects or reconnected people with an inner strength, resilience,” says Simpson.

Circus Kathmandu was spurred to act after seeing how young women rescued from the clutches of traffickers were stigmatised and how they lost out on education and a livelihood.

“Nepal has so many talented and creative people, it makes sense to try different approaches,” says Simpson. And Circus Kathmandu is living proof of restoring a sense of self-worth for young men and women who never had a childhood.

MARK ROBINSON

MARK ROBINSON

What is Drop, Cover, and Hold on?

Large earthquake may strike any time. If we adopt safe behavior during earthquakes our lives can be saved.

“Drop, Cover, and Hold on” is one of the effective ways practiced worldwide to be safe from earthquake while you are inside home, office or school.

Be Prepared. Stay Safe.
I n the coming months, with the announcement of Hillary Clinton’s second run for the democratic nomination and eventual presidential candidacy, the United States will be scrutinised by the world that sees America’s unique brand of self-determinism, or, to use the loftiest of terms, that idea of “manifest destiny”, a now historically problematic phrase that was coined as the nation was trying to define itself. The romantic notion that the US was wide open for everyone who wanted to come, conquer, and create a new, free world, capitalising on the riches of the vast continent that stretched from sea to shining sea, is one that still brings people streaming to the US.

If you have never lived in the US, one can easily laugh at the proud way in which the country and its citizens see themselves. Yet, having had the benefit of an American liberal arts education on the East Coast, in a small pastoral campus in Western Massachusetts, I can understand the yearning to buy into the kind of longing, and that endless possibility that the American countryside can open up in one’s mind.

This infinite possibility is exactly why Wild, the film, produced by and starring Reese Witherspoon (as Cheryl Strayed), and based on Strayed’s bestselling memoir Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail is such a successful film.

While the idea that a burnt-out woman, mourning the loss of her mother, fighting heroin addiction, recovering from a recent divorce, and trying to mend relations with an estranged brother, can be saved by hiking 1,100 miles on the Pacific Crest Trail (which runs an astonishing 2,663 miles from Mexico to the Canadian border) is unapologetically of the American New Age, the film is saved by Witherspoon’s incredibly compelling, vulnerable, and humorous performance, grounded by a great adaptation written by none other than Nick Hornby, and some unerring direction by Jean-Marc Vallée. Then there’s the overarching idea that America, the land itself, offers that very ability to redeem and remake oneself, through an intense engagement with the varying, epic landscapes, and ultimately the power of the harsh but essential beauty of nature.
BHAIDEGAH RESTORATION

Like many other great monuments of the Kathmandu Valley, the Bhaidegah Temple in Patan was destroyed in the Great Earthquake of 1934. Built in 1678 by Patan’s Chautaria, (prime minister) Bharo Bhaiya, the Bhaidegah Temple was the largest Shiva temple in Mangal Bazar.

After 1934, the temple was rebuilt in a stucco-Mughal style instead of its original three-tiered pagoda architecture to protect the Shiva lingam inside.

In 2011, a group of Nepalis established the non-profit Sanskritik Sampada (Cultural Heritage Conservation Group/CHCG) and started the Bhaidegah Rebuilding Project to restore the temple to its original form. The total amount required for the project was estimated at $475,000 of which $300,000 was pledged as a grant from the Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu.

This week, the group held a low-key installation of one of the four carved wooden doors to be used as part of the restored Bhaidegah Temple during the Nepal visit of Norwegian State Secretary Morten Høglund.

The door was carved by artisans of Bhaktapur who worked on it for six months and depicts Shiva and Parvati on it. Bhub Ramkhur, conservation architect with CHCG, said: “It is very important to correct some of the improper restoration that was done after the earthquake, and it says a lot that it has taken nearly 80 years for the temple to be restored to its 1934 splendour.”

Kanah Dure, vice-chair of CHCG said that Henry Ambrose Oldfield’s 1853 water colour showed that Bhaidegah was one of the most beautifully carved temples in the Valley.

Joshi, who was 13 during the 1934 earthquake, spoke about the intricacy of the woodcarvings on the original temple. “I precisely remember each detail of the temple before the earthquake,” he told the gathering at the inauguration.

Minister Høglund said he was proud of Norway’s association with the project: “Seeing this outstanding carving, I look forward to coming back to Nepal when the restoration of Bhaidegah Temple is complete.”

Kanah Dure

8848Mt Bar & Patio

A mere 30-minute drive from the city, Gokarna Forest Resort offers a quiet respite from the tumult of Kathmandu. The hotel has four restaurants, and this time we chose to dine at 8848Mt Bar & Patio.

The bar is spacious, offering a nice view of the hotel gardens. Although casual, the interior decoration could have been cosier to correspond with the overall grandiose architecture of the resort.

8848Mt Bar & Patio has a wide offering of cuisines but before eating though, try the refreshing Florida mocktail, (Rs 400) a mix of orange, pineapple, mango juices and a hint of mint. This was a simple yet, really pleasant combination.

To finish the meal, we had two desserts. The first was an apple pie (Rs 450), served with ice cream on top (Rs 450). It was cream cheese over it tasted a bit bland. The lettuce was from the hotel’s garden. Although the chef mentioned that he had tried to make healthier recipes, the salad served with frozen chips lacked the freshness factor.

In response, the chef explained that Nepali potatoes were simply not rich enough in starch to make good French fries. The grilled tenderloin steak (Rs 650), lightly peppery was our third dish. The meat imported from Dubai was cooked medium-well and very tender. For the side dish, there were tasty pumpkin sticks accompanied by French beans and fried potatoes. This was a simple yet, really pleasant combination.

Our favourite dish was the pork chop (Rs 1800). It was cooked to perfection with a homemade mustard sauce drizzled upon it to sublimate its taste. The pork was served with mashed potatoes subtly mixed with green apple - an unexpected combination, which was surprising to the taste buds.

In addition, all the dishes were plated beautifully. To finish the meal, we had two desserts. The first was an apple pie with ice cream on top (Rs 450). The pastry was smooth and the apple filling was delicious. We were however disappointed with the chocolate mousse (Rs 450). It was not creamy enough and we felt the price was too steep for what was on the plate.

8848Mt Bar & Patio offers simple bistro cuisine but with a touch of originality that will surely make dining there an interesting and enjoyable experience.

Stéphane Huët

How to get there: The Gokarna Forest Resort is a 10km drive from Kathmandu’s airport and is located inside the Gokarna Forest Reserve in Thali.
Job interviews are like first dates

Hi everyone,

In most jobs employers are looking for someone who works well with others, and can achieve goals. The ideal candidates have problem-solving abilities, experience and skills, and achievements to make themselves stand out from the crowd. You just have to ‘sell’ themselves to the interviewers by focusing on your strengths, and achievements to make them believe you can achieve goals. The interview is not natural so it helps to practice answering typical interview questions.

Outcomes are unpredictable. Awkwardness can occur. For doing it. Job interviews are not natural so don’t overthink it. First dates. Good impressions count. Awkwardness can occur. Outcomes are unpredictable. (Then there is nepotism.)

Do email me your questions to askanjanaanything@nepalitimes.com

Dear Anjana,

I have been looking for a new job and gone on a lot of interviews but have not been hired. I feel like I come across as a confident professional, although occasionally I ramble on too long in my answers, which I’m working on. Going on interview after interview but never getting hired is starting to damage my self esteem. Do you have any advice on how to nail the interview and get the job offer, and also how to keep my confidence up while hunting for work?

Rachel

AK: First of all I would like to congratulate you for getting selected for interviews because in this competitive world, even getting an interview is a big deal. Interviews are not natural so it helps to practice answering typical interview questions. Rambling is the most common interview blunder because either people get nervous or they like to hear what they are saying instead of answering the question. Be mindful to be concise, listen to the whole question carefully before answering. Think before you answer.

It’s smart to research the company and the employer so you can ask the right questions and that also shows you have done your homework. Make sure to bring your portfolio, extra copies of resume, a pen and notebook to take notes. Get there a few minutes early. Breathe and stay calm. Always helps to make good eye contact, don’t stare, and listen.

You are trying to stand out from the mob for the same position, so try to relate the job to your accomplishments. Keep your answers short and to the point. Have faith in yourself, take every interview that did not work out as a practice towards your dream job. Remind yourself that not acing an interview is not an indication of your career or self-worth. Practice, practice, practice. Never give up on yourself. Be assertive: not overconfident or too modest.

At last, follow up by sending a thank you note or email to the potential employer or interviewer within 24 hours and include anything important (but briefly) that you may have forgotten during the interview. Do the best you can and the rest is up to luck and fate. Good luck.

Anjana Rajbhandary is a certified mental health rehabilitation technician and has four years of experience in adult mental health.

@AnjyRajy
We are not a country that scores high when it comes to respecting international human rights norms. It is no consolation that our two big neighbours – China and India – fare even worse.

After the passing of the highly objectionable bill on forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (CEID), the hope that relatives of the victims of the conflict would get justice had died.

But thanks to the courage and determination of 234 petitioners who challenged the shameful amnesty provisions that would allow perpetrators to go scot-free, that is now unlikely to happen. Had the existing provisions been allowed to stay on, those who suffered would be asked to pardon those who murdered or disappeared their relatives. If they refused, the Commissioners would do so. The Supreme Court (SC) emphatically rejected any provision that would allow conflict-era perpetrators to get away with their crimes.

This raised the hackles of the six Maoist parties, even though the Army and Police personnel would also be equally liable for prosecution. They concluded that the SC order was against Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and organised a joint rally against the order in the capital, only to see that very few of their own cadre turned up.

The worry, however, is that government and the two main ruling parties have given disturbing signals to scuttle justice. The denial of justice could be institutionalised because it could become part of a ‘package deal’ that the three major political parties – the Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML and the UCPN (Maoist) are negotiating on the constitution. This deal not only would untie the federalism knot and power-sharing after the new constitution is drafted, but also water down the provisions in the TRC.

The NC and the UML leaders are also wary of their own fate if justice is allowed to run its course, and do not want to offend the Nepal Army which matched, and in some cases, topped the revolutionary comrades in rights abuses.

So, we hear a familiar script from Maoists and their apologists accusing rights activists as being backed by “dollars”. They even questioned the death of hunger striker Nanda Prasad Adhikari who wanted the murderers of his son to stand trial. Nanda Prasad’s body is still in the morgue of the Teaching Hospital as the family has refused to perform the last rites until justice is done.

Politicians say transitional justice cannot be separated from ‘politics’. Really? Tell that to the family of Maina Sunar, or to parents of Sarla Sapkota – tortured and murdered in army custody – who are still waiting for justice. Or to the families of the five Madhesi youth from Bhanusa murdered by army. Headmaster Muktinath Adhikari’s hands and limbs were broken before he was executed by the Maoists and his body hung in public view. Mention ‘politics’ to the family of eight-year-old Kapil Khatum and four others who were burnt alive in a bus in Chitwan. Ram Kumar Bhandari has been searching for his father, Tej Bahadur Bhandari, ever since December 2001 when security forces took him away – talk to him about ‘politics’.

Now, the Maoists want bygones to be bygones and to forget the tortures and executions of their own supporters in Doramba or Bhairabnath Battalion. Can they look into the eyes of the victims? Can these crimes be justified just by the use of the term ‘revolutionary violence’? Some radical left writers who keep sermonising others on behalf of Maoist have actually justified even heinous crimes as a small price to pay for the emancipation of the people.

Those who demand justice are labelled ‘Maoist baiters’. They forget that the activists are as critical about abuses by the Army and Police. It was the Baburam Bhattarai government which promoted Col. Raju Basnet, the army officer named by national and international human rights bodies for torture and executions at the Bhairabnath Battalion.

Besides the Maoist parties and their lackey intellectuals, the victims’ families are also up against the NC, UML and the Nepal Army. It might be possible to deny justice for the time being, but sooner or later the truth will be revealed. World history is replete with examples of our crimes and abuses being prosecuted after a long gap as in Cambodia and Bangladesh. Nepal cannot be an exception.

@damakantjayshi
The tragedy on the Everest Icefall on April last year was followed by mountaineers screaming foul-play because they could not climb Mt Everest. They criticised the ‘Sherpas’ for refusing to climb, and the tourist expedition industry complained about lost business and money.

Both figures are correct: 16 men died and 31 children lost their fathers, but there should have been a third number: 50. There were 50 Nepali high altitude workers in a known high-risk avalanche area with no western guides or mountaineers.

The clients are the rich pampered ‘mountaineers’ who sleep in five-star lodges or drink kaffee latte in luxury tents in Base Camp waiting for the rope and ladder road to be constructed all the way from the base to the summit. Often incompetent and unfit individuals, lacking mental ability to tackle the demands of functioning at high altitude.

That should have been the headline last year after the Everest avalanche killed 16 Nepali climbers.

H eavy unseasonal snowfall engulfed Mt Everest this week as a team of eight Nepali guides fixed ropes and ladders on a new, hopefully safer route up the Khumbu Icefall. More than 300 climbers from 35 expeditions are waiting at Base Camp for the route to be ready and the weather to clear.

The ‘Icefall Doctors’, as they are called, are doing the most dangerous part of the Everest climb: spending long periods on a treacherous, moving glacier exposed to avalanches from the West Shoulder.

Last year, one such avalanche on 18 April killed 16 Nepali guides, only 13 of the bodies were retrieved.

The government appointed a Board of Inquiry comprising representatives from the very same organisations noted above. Devastated by the deaths of their friends and the magnitude of the tragedy, mostly-Sherpa guides last year refused to go up, forcing the cancellation of all expeditions.

Few things have changed but much remains the same on Everest. Devastated by the deaths of their friends and the magnitude of the tragedy, the mostly-Sherpa guides last year refused to go up, forcing the cancellation of all expeditions.

The government agreed to increase their life insurance amount to Rs 1.5 million and medical insurance to a few things have changed but much remains the same for Nepali high altitude workers.

31 Nepali children
lost their fathers

There are two questions about last year’s avalanche: Who built the Icefall road, and why did the route up the icefall go so close to the obvious potential avalanche route up the icefall? And why did the last year’s avalanche: Who built the Icefall road, and why did the last year’s avalanche?

In December 2014 I presented to the Secretary of Tourism and 20 representatives from the tourism industry 24 possible changes. One obvious suggestion was to reduce the number of expeditions and individuals allowed on Mt Everest at a given time. As expected, the Ministry did the exact opposite, reducing the fees for even more traffic probably influenced by powerful business interests.

No one wants to stop the Everest expedition industry, but we should question its lack of integrity and lack of vision. There are 140 virgin mountains in Nepal, innumerable ones that have only one climb on them. Real mountaineers around the world wish to visit Nepal and climb, but today’s ‘model’ has become too expensive. Yet the Everest package lacks substance and soul.

Edmund Hillary was, and I assume Tenzing would be, not too disappointed by today’s scene. It is time to put back the ‘why’ we climb, that leads to ‘how’ we climb. It is time to stop embracing the meaningless: ‘What’ we climb.

David Durkan is a traveller, mountaineer and author of the book, Penguins on Everest. durkan@david@gmail.com

New records

When the brief summit window opens toward the middle of May this year, some new records may be made and some broken on Mt Everest.

Octogenarian ex-Gurkha soldier Min Bahadur Sherchan (5c, above), 84, is again preparing to be the oldest person to climb the world’s highest peak, a title that he lost to Japanese climber Yuichiro Miura, 80, in 2013. In this long-running duel, Sherchan has claimed the title that was held by Miura since 2003. Sherchan today is waking up and down the staircase of his three-storey house with a load of 25 kgs on his back at least 20 times a day, and his guide Shiva Sapkota insists Sherchan can climb the mountain if the weather is all right.

Another Nepali climber wants to become the fastest person up and down Everest. Loka Bahadur Banerji aims to be on top within 10 days of leaving Kathmandu and returning in the same period. Singh Kangri is scheduled to become the first visually impaired South Korean to summit Everest. Nepali woman climber Chhurim Sherpa is set to take the live Australian cricketer Philip Hughes’ bat and jersey to the top.

While dozens of expeditions have already made their way to Everest, no single expedition has yet asked for a permit to climb Kanchenjunga, which marks the 60th anniversary of its first ascent on 25 May. Informal officials at Department of Tourism. Same is the case with Makalu with only three expeditions having left so far to climb the fifth highest mountain in the world which also marks the 60th anniversary of its first ascent on 15 May.

Rs 400,000. It has also made it mandatory for expeditions to bear the cost of rescue helicopters for all members, including their guides, porters and support staff.

“Mountaineering guides and porters had always demanded better insurance and arrangement of rescue helicopters, but it was never heeded,” says Santa Bir Lama of the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA).

As per its commitment made to Sherpas last season, the government is now creating a fund using five per cent of mountaineering fees to be spent in Solukhumbu district which will be used to support mountaineers and their families in case of future deaths and injuries on the mountain.

Dhewak Pokharel of the Everest Summiters Association says the tragedy did lead to reform. “It highlighted the issue of Sherpas and created pressure on the government as well as expedition companies to do more for their risky work.”

However, despite the attention to insurance and compensation, the disproportionate risk that the 300 high altitude workers employed every year face on Everest has not diminished. The lost-paid workers are still doing the most arduous and dangerous work on the mountain.

The new route up the middle of the Khumbu Icefall skirts the edge that was exposed to avalanches, but it still has the risk of seracs collapses. The workers also spend more time fixing ladders to span crevasses and to get over huge vertical blocks of ice which are more numerous than in the old route.

Turing Tenzing is overseeing the team of Icefall Doctors at Base Camp this year. He says: “We are still a bit scared, I tell them to relax and not to worry. In reality, an Everest route is safe.”

Climbing Everest always had inherent dangers. The only problem is that Nepali high altitude workers face disproportionately more risk than their climbing clients. Pemba Gyale Sherpa of the Nepal National Mountain Guides Association, the 43-year-old veteran who made the heroic rescue of fellow-climbers on K2 in 2008, says many clients treat their guides as servants, not as fellow mountaineers. Many clients make the heroic rescue of fellow-climbers on K2 in 2008, says many clients treat their guides as servants, not as fellow mountaineers. He says: “Sherpas are putting themselves in harm’s way more than their affluent clients. There must be more equity, respect and trust on the mountain.”

When the brief summit window opens toward the middle of May this year, some new records may be made and some broken on Mt Everest.
Cleaning up the Bagmati

Interview with Chief Secretary Leela Mani Paudyal who led the 22-month long Bagmati Clean-up campaign.

Setopati, 13 April

Setopati: Can you tell us how the clean-up campaign started?

Leela Mani Paudyal: The campaign began on 29 January 2012 with a cleaning drive from Singha Darbar to Baneshwor. The then Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai was himself involved and took part in cleaning the Bagmati River. The plan was to mobilise over a million volunteers including retirees, students and youth in various sectors throughout the country. But with the change in government, the campaign took a back seat.

What brought along the revival of the campaign?

I was visited by representatives from few organisations who informed me about 500 volunteers from India wanting to come to Nepal to clean the Bagmati River. I then felt that it was our responsibility to clean up the mess we created. So I spoke to Secretary of Urban Development, Kishor Thapa, Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development and the chief of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC), and started the campaign on the foundation day of Ministry of Urban Development.

How does it feel to complete 100 weeks of the campaign?

This campaign shows that when both the government and the non-government sectors work together, we can achieve our goal.

What are the achievements of the 100 weeks?

We collected 5,000 metric tons of waste from Bagmati and its tributaries. We have cleaned banks and are planning to make gardens in 12 places. We have handed over the responsibility of cleaning and managing the banks to locals in five other places. More importantly, we have laid down sewers in various locations including Fashopati, Tilganga and Manahara.

How much money did the government spend on the campaign?

The government has not spent a rupee on this project. This is not a project to be completed in four months. This is not a project that has a start and a finish date, we have to continue working.

Will you still be involved with the campaign after you retire in four months?

My retirement will not make a difference to my work. Whether or not I remain the chief secretary, I will continue working for Bagmati.

What are your plans after retiring?

I will remain in the campaign as a volunteer.

Will you be working only for the Bagmati Clean-up Campaign?

I want to work in awareness building and alleviation of people’s problems. A lot needs to be done in the sectors of public transportation system, migrant workers and violence against women. I would like to work on these issues. Let’s see what happens.

How long will it take for Bagmati to return to its previous state?

It is human to want instant results but that is not possible in reality. We have to work together for a long time in order to undo the pollution of 40 years. This is not a project that has a start and a finish date, we have to continue working.

How much has been spent on this project so far?

The government has spent not a single rupee on this project. This is not a project that can be completed in four months. This is not a project that has a start and a finish date, we have to continue working.

Leela Mani Paudyal:

Setopati: Can you tell us how the clean-up campaign started?

Leela Mani Paudyal who led the 22-month long Bagmati Clean-up campaign?

Interview with Chief Secretary

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala quoted in setopati.com, 16 April

From sockballs to volleyballs

Sixteen-year-old Jemma Malla of Kailali who began playing volleyball with a sock stuffed with grass is now a member of Nepal’s national volleyball team. Malla was a seventh grader at Kalika Secondary School when she led her team to victory in the district-level President’s Cup.

“The following year, she was selected for the mid-western regional team and last year she made it as a national player.”

Malla is proud of having led her regional team to several victories. Her team won the regional championship in Nepalganj and came in second at a national competition held in Kathmandu.

“Now that the SLC exams have ended, I can fully concentrate on the game,” says Malla, who had to juggle schoolwork and volleyball for the past four years. Malla was a seventh grader at Kalika Secondary School when she led her team to victory in the district-level President’s Cup. “I don’t know when I got addicted to the game but now I want to make a career of it,” says Malla who has participated in four regional-level and two national-level competitions.

Although she is happy to be representing the nation, Malla feels that the National Sports Council is not doing enough to promote players from rural areas. “They only come looking for players right before the competitions. We are then made to compete with the police and army teams without proper training,” says Malla.

“Even when we have the confidence to do something, we cannot perform well due to lack of opportunities and regular trainings,” she adds.

She has won the best player award in four regional competitions and plans to move to Kathmandu to ply more volleyball.
VETERAN politician Surya Bahadur Thapa who became Nepal’s Prime Minister a record five times, serving three kings, passed away in New Delhi on Wednesday night after an operation. He was 88.

Thapa was the mentor leader of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and was appointed prime minister in 1963 by King Mahendra two years after sending an elected prime minister to jail after a coup. Thapa was made prime minister again four times (1965-1969, 1979-1983, 1997-1998 and 2003-2004).

Although many analysts have used historical hindsight to criticise Thapa for being a staunch defender of the autocratic Panchayat System, and especially his role in selling off forests to fund the royalist campaign in the 1980 referendum, Thapa was a decisive pragmatist. He was also not afraid to speak his mind, sometimes against the palace establishment and unnamed “underground cliques” who exercised power in the name of the king. He was imprisoned in 1983, and it was rumoured that Prince Gyanendra was behind his ouster.

Thapa later served as prime minister under King Gyanendra after he started his ‘creeping coup’ to sideline parliament and the political parties in 2003-2004. He was a sharp political analyst, and was seen as a veteran leader that everyone trusted to be a mediator.

Thapa could be a ruthless politician when he wanted to. He put his own friend Bishwo Bandhu Thapa in jail for meeting BP Koirala and unseated his political rival Lokendra Bahadur Chand in 1997.

Ever since the young man from Muga in Dhankuta was handpicked by King Mahendra to chair his Advisory Council in 1959, Thapa was always at the center of Nepali politics. Whether during the Panchayat System or after the restoration of multi-party democracy, he was a pivotal political player.

After Nepal was declared a republic in 2008, he did not get a chance to become Prime Minister but chaired the Constituent Assembly (CA) sessions by virtue of being its eldest member.

Thapa was Mahendra’s confidante and remained loyal to the royal palace throughout his life. It is said that Mahendra, before his death, had advised his son Birendra to consult Thapa during any political crisis. But after Mahendra’s demise, Thapa shared a bitter-sweet relation with the palace, demanded changes in the Panchayat System and was even jailed for his role in pushing reforms.

“He always believed that the source of power was people and stood against Narayanhiti’s intervention in Singha Darbar,” said RPP leader Prakash Chandra Lohani, who is close to Thapa’s rival Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

“That was why he was sometimes tormented by the palace. In a way, he contributed a great deal to democratisation of governance. Despite being a key political figure, Thapa did not shape national politics, but national political shaped him. He adapted adeptly to any political system that Nepal took on: absolute monarchy, constitutional democracy, or a return to autocracy.”

Journalist Kedar Sharma, who had been working closely with Thapa on his memoir for the past three years says Thapa always knew which way the wind was blowing, but did not allow it to blow him off course.

Perhaps because of this very quality, Thapa always remained relevant to Nepali politics. Thapa’s Panchayat-era political rival Tulasi Giri vanished after the first pro-democracy movement of 1990, came back after Gyanendra Shah seized power in 2005, and vanished again after the second pro-democracy uprising of April 2006. But Thapa was always around through thick or thin, like a political fixture.

Thapa was active till the end, hosting a meeting of top leaders of four political parties last month to find a compromise on the constitution, and what he could do to help break the political impasse.

“He was always alert and full of energy,” Sharma recalls about their many hours together working on the book. “His mind was sharp, he remembered everything from the past, and knew exactly what was going on in present-day politics.”

Lohani, who has worked with Thapa since the Panchayat era, wishes Thapa had played a greater role in ending the political deadlock. “He was one leader everyone respected and listened to, he has left a great void.”

Thapa had undergone surgery in his stomach at Medanta Hospital in New Delhi last week, and was recovering well when he suddenly complained of respiratory problems and was put on a ventilator. Doctors pronounced him dead at 10:44 pm on Wednesday. He will be cremated at Pashupati on Friday.

Thapa was active right till his death. He was handpicked by King Mahendra to chair his Advisory Council in 1959, Thapa was always at the center of Nepali politics. Whether during the Panchayat System or after the restoration of multi-party democracy, he was a pivotal political player. After Nepal was declared a republic in 2008, he did not get a chance to become Prime Minister but chaired the Constituent Assembly (CA) sessions by virtue of being its eldest member.

Thapa was Mahendra’s confidante and remained loyal to the royal palace throughout his life. It is said that Mahendra, before his death, had advised his son Birendra to consult Thapa during any political crisis. But after Mahendra’s demise, Thapa shared a bitter-sweet relation with the palace, demanded changes in the Panchayat System and was even jailed for his role in pushing reforms.

“He always believed that the source of power was people and stood against Narayanhiti’s intervention in Singha Darbar,” said RPP leader Prakash Chandra Lohani, who is close to Thapa’s rival Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

“That was why he was sometimes tormented by the palace. In a way, he contributed a great deal to democratisation of governance. Despite being a key political figure, Thapa did not shape national politics, but national political shaped him. He adapted adeptly to any political system that Nepal took on: absolute monarchy, constitutional democracy, or a return to autocracy.”

Journalist Kedar Sharma, who had been working closely with Thapa on his memoir for the past three years says Thapa always knew which way the wind was blowing, but did not allow it to blow him off course.

Perhaps because of this very quality, Thapa always remained relevant to Nepali politics. Thapa’s Panchayat-era political rival Tulasi Giri vanished after the first pro-democracy movement of 1990, came back after Gyanendra Shah seized power in 2005, and vanished again after the second pro-democracy uprising of April 2006. But Thapa was always around through thick or thin, like a political fixture.

Thapa was active till the end, hosting a meeting of top leaders of four political parties last month to find a compromise on the constitution, and what he could do to help break the political impasse.

“He was always alert and full of energy,” Sharma recalls about their many hours together working on the book. “His mind was sharp, he remembered everything from the past, and knew exactly what was going on in present-day politics.”

Lohani, who has worked with Thapa since the Panchayat era, wishes Thapa had played a greater role in ending the political deadlock. “He was one leader everyone respected and listened to, he has left a great void.”

Thapa had undergone surgery in his stomach at Medanta Hospital in New Delhi last week, and was recovering well when he suddenly complained of respiratory problems and was put on a ventilator. Doctors pronounced him dead at 10:44 pm on Wednesday. He will be cremated at Pashupati on Friday.
AD or BS?

As we plunge headlong into the year 2072 BS, it is time for us as a nation to take stock of the past year and look forward to more of the same pointlessness in the coming one.

In hindsight, it seems ridiculous, almost comical, how we blundered around aimlessly going to work every day last year when we could have announced nationwide shutdowns.

On the occasion of the new year, therefore, we pay tribute to the political myopia and official narrow-mindedness that has made Nepal what it is today. No point being disheartened, folks, however low a country sinks, however chaotic the past year, as the Carpenters put it so eloquently, “tomorrow will always be brighter than today and yesterday all our troubles seemed so far away”. Or was it the Beatles?

One never knows during these uncertain times how long we in the fourth estate will be allowed to vent our frustrations in broad daylight before the govt says enough is enough and curbs our freedom of expressionism. So, to protect every citizen’s right to know, we media persons have to defend and uphold our own right to get things totally wrong. We may not like what is going on around us, we may not agree with everything that is being said, but the constitution gives us the right to make things up as we go along.

Luckily we are all professionals here and we stick to our journalistic code of ethics, and consider that lying is ok as long as we don’t do it on purpose. That makes life much easier and allows columns like these, which would be banned in any civilised country. Anyway, as a brief recap we print below a few items of news that did not see the light of day in 2071 because of space constraints:

**Bomb Found and Lost at TIA**

A plastic explosive that French police secretly planted inside an unsuspecting passenger’s suitcase in Paris last week to test airport security has been located in the baggage of a passenger arriving at Tribhuvan International Airport Thursday morning, unusually unreliable sources said.

The bundle of explosives, which French sniffer dogs could not detect at Charles de Gaulle was ferreted out by Bhalu, the mongrel who has made TIA’s international apron his home and is often seen pre-inspecting incoming luggage for interesting tidbits.

“Yes, I can confirm that we have unconfirmed reports that Bhalu found the bomb, took it to an undisclosed location,” the head of airport police told reporters, requesting anonymity, “he may have mistaken it for a sausage and shared it with friends.” A Code Red dog-bomb alert has been put out in the capital.

**NOC Employees Strike for Expensive Gas**

Employees of the state-owned Nepal Oil Corruption (NOC) went on an indefinite strike Monday demanding a steep hike in petroleum prices.

“How can we make our ends meet and provide for our families if gasoline is so cheap,” asked an employee who was gheraoing the corporation’s premises by gham tapoing in the lawn. The All-Nepal Federation of Adulterating Gas Stations (Revolting) also joined the strike to create a manmade shortage demanding that the government hike falling petroleum prices by 50 per cent. “Just because oil prices drop in the world market doesn’t mean Nepal must follow suit, we are a sovereign country and should set our own prices,” said one oil baron.

**Cowdung Supplies Sufficient: Govt**

Responding to panic-buying by desperate citizens, GONe has assured all and sundry that Nepal’s strategic stockpile of cowdung patties are enough to meet the nation’s demand for the coming fiscal year.

Faced with a severe shortage of LPG cylinders, the public has reverted to dried cowdung, a traditional fuel. Kitchens of five star hotels have switched to buffalo droppings, and pizza parlours specialising in wood-fired ovens are now offering dung-fired double-topping pepperonis.

“Thanks to the generous contribution of Nepal’s cattle population, our cowdung supplies are enough to meet any exigencies,” said the Minister of Animal Husbandry and Bullock.

**Jhusil Da to Stay On**

The Nepali Congress Central Committee meeting today decided unanimously to allow Jhusil Da to stand in the forthcoming Nepali Kangres Party Convention for President for the Tenth Term until he is 112 years old.

“He is going to stand but in consideration of his advanced years, we are going to allow him to sit,” said his niece, Sujata Koirala, herself not a spring chicken. Mr Koirala had earlier promised that he would step down as Primordial Minister “the minute the constitution is written in 2072”. It now looks like he won’t have to step down at all because he meant 2072 AD.