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Enough is enough

As the tortuous negotiations over Madhesi demands for changes in the constitution drag on in Kathmandu, and 28 million people reel under a two-and-half-month long siege, there are feeble feelers from all sides to seek face-saving ways out of the prolonged deadlock.

The Nepal government senses that the nationalistic chest-thumping is giving way to public anger over shortages, Madhesi leaders similarly feel their slogans against 'colonial' Kathmandu are beginning to ring a bit hollow among a people who have suffered a five-month shutdown, and over at the PMO in New Delhi there is creeping disquiet about the growing domestic political backlash as well as

rising international concern about its handling of the Nepal mess.

Negotiations between the Big 3 parties and the Madhesi Front that had broken off after killings in Birganj and Saptari resumed this week. While there is still a lot of posturing going on, the two sides appear to be more

flexible. There are also rifts appearing within the Madhesi groups, with Rajendra Mahato of the Sadbhavana Party taking a more radical line on the main sticking point: the demarcation of the two Tarai provinces. The realisation seems to have set in that playing with boundaries in these volatile times could unleash violence and mire Nepal in instability.

The Big 3 are trying to come up with a common position, and plan to meet with the Madhesi Front again soon.

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CALLING A BLOCKADE A SPADE

Whatever your political persuasion, accept that Nepal is in throes of a humanitarian emergency.



GOPEN RAI

As the tortuous negotiations over Madhesi demands for changes in the constitution drag on in Kathmandu, and 28 million people reel under a two-and-half-month long siege, there are feeble feelers from both sides to seek face-saving ways out of the prolonged deadlock. The Nepal government senses that the nationalistic chest-thumping is giving way to public anger over shortages, Madhesi leaders similarly feel their slogans against ‘colonial’ Kathmandu are beginning to ring a bit hollow among a people who have suffered a five-month shutdown, and at the PMO in New Delhi there is creeping disquiet about the growing domestic political backlash as well as rising international concern about its handling of the Nepal mess. Only the really naive still believe that the border blockade is entirely the result of anger in the Tarai. It is fairly obvious where the strings are being pulled from, and Indian officials and diplomats don’t even try to hide it

anymore. But still, realpolitik dictates that the international community is loath to call a blockade a spade and depart from the party line laid down by the regional cop. Officials in one western capital were so fearful of hurting the feelings of a country with which they just signed a \$12 billion trade deal that, in conversation with a visiting Nepali MP this week, blamed Nepal for the blockade of Nepal. Given the might-makes-right doctrine in international geopolitics, it is totally understandable that the UN cannot name a certain member state responsible for not letting essential supplies through. Still, this week’s statement by the UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake lays out the human cost of this outlandish siege: 3 million Nepali children under five are under direct risk of death and disease due to shortages of fuel, food, medicines and vaccines. Indeed, whichever side of this debate you are on (a supporter of the coalition government in Kathmandu, a

champion of Madhesi rights, or a believer that India has no hand in this blockade) it is undeniable that what is now happening in Nepal is a humanitarian emergency. The question that must be asked in New Delhi, Kathmandu and Birganj must be: Whatever the reason, is reprehensible human harm on this scale acceptable in the 21st century? Why are the very people on whose behalf this struggle is supposedly being waged made to suffer the most? How does this ensure political stability in Nepal? Is a border siege exonerated by international treaties and humanitarian law? Are there no other targeted pressure points a country can legitimately employ to ‘persuade’ a smaller neighbour? Fortunately, there now seems to be a realisation that pushing Tarai demarcations at this volatile time will lead to bloodshed and long term instability. All this doesn’t let the rulers in Kathmandu off the hook. Prime Minister K P Oli’s strategy is to heap all the blame on India, play the patriot, and hope to garner political brownie points. It has worked so far, but it won’t last. Sooner or later, people waiting in the gas lines, suffering power cuts, shortages and inflation are going to ask: “What are you doing to end our misery?” The answer so far is: nothing. The NC, UML and Maoists botched emergency relief after the April earthquake, and have let their political rivalry prevent the formation of the Reconstruction Authority. They bear a large part of the blame for being so blinded by greed and ambition that they miscalculated Madhesi and Tharu sentiments with the fast-track constitution in August, allowed tensions to escalate and spread across the plains. They misjudged India, misread cues, and failed to act in time. And with the situation already out of hand, and despite the country’s near-total dependence on India, Prime Minister Oli keeps making things worse by thumbing his nose at New Delhi every chance he gets. There are ways to exercise tactical acquiescence to gain larger strategic advantage, but our rulers are not versed in those subtleties of international relations.

Times

THIS WEEK



PHOTO: GOPEN RAI (19,217 PEOPLE REACHED)

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YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

SOS
Declare state of emergency, close all borders with India and mobilise the Army ('SOS', Editorial, #784). Also, arrest all trouble makers and violent protestors.
Bharat Gurung

- The root cause for the current crisis is the idea of federalisation which was bound to fail in a country like Nepal. Carving up a unitary state into federal republics has always ended up as a disaster for the people as proven historically. What the people need are roads, good schools, jobs and a government that is democratic and accountable to them. The last thing they need are multiple provincial feudal chieftains lording over them, and using their misery as political bargaining chips.
Dev Batsya
- The government must reach out to India and work to mend its broken ties with its once closest neighbour. India on its part should leave Nepal be. Let it address its own problems, don't get involved in the Madhes issue and add more complexity.
Sherchan Ghale

NEW FORCE
I would like to see Dr Baburam make public the financiers of his new campaign ('May the force be with you', David Seddon, #784). If he can't disclose his backers then there's no way we can trust him and his interests.
Mohan Sharma

- Nepalis need to stop spewing out anti-Indian remarks, admit the new constitution is flawed, and work to end the present crisis.
Bharat Bhushan

ENDING AIDS
What amazes me is how acute issues - mother/child health, forestry, HIV, etc. - are being addressed in this 'small', 'poor', 'illiterate', 'beggar', 'communist', 'satellite', 'partially sovereign', 'communal', 'racist' nation ('Ending AIDS', Satish Pandey, #784). We must be doing something right. Congratulations to everyone (named and nameless) who toil tirelessly for their brethren.
Namah

- Thanks to the author for this comprehensive summary on the HIV

and AIDS situation in Nepal and for highlighting ongoing prevention to care program which forms the road map to end AIDS.
Deepak Dhungel

- Why do we keep voting for the same group of people/parties who keep on disappointing us time and again ('In the absence of hope', Bidushi Dhungel, #784)? Unless we give a chance to new people, things won't turn around for Nepal.
Raghu Shrestha

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #785

Q. Should the government accept Madhesi Morcha's demand for two Madhes provinces?



Total votes: 256

■ Yes 44.14%

■ No 48.05%

■ Don't know 7.81%

Weekly Internet Poll #786

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think the Nepali media is biased?

Times

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Invest, include, improve

As with Nepal's politics newsrooms here lack representation

Newspapers in Nepal have often been accused of practicing lazy journalism, misreporting events, masquerading views as news, and toeing the party line on issues. Of late the media's coverage of the Madhes crisis has drawn flak from readers for lacking objectivity and investigation, being one-sided and partisan, and failing to represent the whole truth. Is that the real truth?



BETWEEN THE LINES

Tsering Dolker Gurung

"Just as with our politics, the newsrooms here lack representation and this has never been clearer than at present in our reporting," a journalist who works as a news coordinator for a national daily admitted to me.

There are currently a dozen or so daily broadsheets newspapers in Nepal, and the editors of all of them are men, mostly from the same community that dominates national politics. The case is the same for other online and broadcast media outlets.

While there has been an increase in number of women and people from traditionally excluded communities in the media, they typically occupy entry-level positions and are rarely seen at the top.

"The bias in coverage of the Madhes issue and the unwillingness to view the movement from an alternative perspective stems from this," explained another journalist who has been covering politics for over ten years. "It is easy to get the media to echo your beliefs when you share common ideology."

Critics have also noted that the media has been selective in coverage of violence, repeatedly misinterpreted statements issued by the international community in order to reinforce their



BIKRAM RAI

beliefs, and failed to hold the government accountable for the current crisis.

On social media, the polarisation is more stark. Nepali journalists openly take sides and engage in not-so-dignified status updates. Many have asked India to 'back off', others question the authenticity of the Madhes movement, and few in vivid displays of ultra-nationalism have gone as far as to tweet derogatory, racist remarks against Madhesis and janajatis.

What used to be back-handed jokes shared in the confines of the newsrooms are now being transmitted openly in the public sphere. Journalists themselves admit that their newsrooms lack professionalism, are blatantly pro-establishment, unabashedly promote views matching their agenda.

"It's shocking the kind of things I have heard reporters in my newsroom say," confides a friend who is the only woman in her editorial team, "it is also extremely demoralising."

Aside from personal bias, reporters attribute the poor quality of journalism to limited resources and the reluctance

of their publishers to invest in stories.

"Even if I want to go to Tarai and report on the crisis, I will have to do it at my own expense," says one political correspondent who admits to spending half his salary on costs that are not reimbursed. "It's either that or

armchair reporting."

Like everywhere else in the world journalism is one of the lowest paid professions in Nepal. In 2012 the Ministry of Information and Communications renewed the basic salary for working journalists and set it at Rs 10,800. For district-based

journalists it is only Rs 7,200. In June the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) proposed demanding the government increase the existing minimum salary to Rs 20,000. For now, that remains just a proposal.

Very few media houses pay their employees on time, reporters going on strike to demand outstanding salary is rarely news here. The collapse of advertising revenue has made this much worse.

"The truth is almost hundred per cent of reporters have to find alternative sources of income. Some work extra jobs, others compromise on their integrity," says the news coordinator.

All journalists I spoke to for this article admit poor pay has affected their work performance and given a better opportunity, most said they would leave the profession altogether.

Asked one reporter: "Just take the current blockade. The office doesn't manage fuel for us, we are forced to buy it at thrice the normal price in the black market and then are expected to produce ground breaking reports. How messed up is that?" @TseringDolkerG

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Over the hump

The fragile state of the highway to Tibet doesn't offer much immediate hope in expanding Nepal-China trade



PICS: DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

Joint Statement on the importance of education

Education is not a privilege but a fundamental right of children. All should therefore join hands to ensure unhindered and equal access to education at all times including during and after disaster, political strife and conflict.

In addition, education fosters today's children to become capable, well-informed and active citizens of tomorrow. This in turn helps the society to become more cohesive and resilient. Education is also the foundation for a nation's sustainable economic growth and progress in key social development areas such as health and nutrition. At the individual level, education enables children to reach their full potential and provides them with more capacity to earn a decent livelihood.

Global evidence shows that the disruption in regular school attendance substantially increases the risk of children dropping out and never coming back to school. This also affects the future generations. According to Government of Nepal, the current school closure in Nepal is putting an estimated 1.6 million children at risk of not completing their primary education while Nepal has yet to fulfill its commitment towards ensuring universal primary enrollment under the Millennium Development Goal 2.

On August 3rd, 2013, almost all political parties in Nepal signed on a joint commitment to make schools as a "Zone of Peace." As adults, we have an obligation to set a good example for our children, we cannot fail to translate this commitment into reality so that it won't remain only on paper. We owe it to the Nepali children, who need to be fully equipped with basic education to carry the torch we pass onto them for the better future of Nepal.

On behalf of the Development Partners supporting the Nepal Government in the education sector:







DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
in RASUWA

As Madhesi protesters backed by India continue to block some of Nepal's southern border checkpoints, the Nepal government is trying to find an alternative source of fuel and other commodities from China.

However, with the Kodari Highway blocked by the earthquake, the government is pinning its hope on the Rasuwa border point. However, this one-lane road (*pictured*) needs to be upgraded and widened if it is to serve as a new lifeline.

Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has already imported 1.3 million litres of fuel donated by China through this road. And negotiations are underway to finalise a deal on the commercial supply of fuel from across the Himalaya.

But even if that agreement is signed, importing essential commodities from China will not be easy given the poor condition of the only operational trade link between the two countries.

The 153 km-long Kathmandu-Rasuwa Gadi highway is a narrow, treacherous and serpentine mountain road that follows the Bhote Kosi. It has some dangerous landslides along the way. Truckers find it difficult to pass through Ramche, Mul Kharka, Phul Kharka and many other sections. A couple of excavators can be seen, but none are in operation due to the fuel crisis. Repairing and maintaining the only road linking Nepal with China is tediously slow.

Rasuwa's DSP Avadesh Bista says: "At some points, even a single truck cannot pass through." The Indian blockade amplified



the voice for trade diversification, but the Department of Roads (DoR) has not shown any sense of urgency to repair the Rasuwa road. "At least the narrow sections must be widened and the damaged parts repaired," says local businessman Kumar Karki. "Otherwise, it would be difficult to import goods from China."

The Department of Roads (DoR) says the lack of diesel is delaying repair work, and although the NOC had given 2,000 litres of diesel to the DoR it was enough only to clear landslide debris. The DoR is now demanding an additional 10,000 litres of diesel to expedite repair work here.

Rasuwa MP Janardan Dhakal says: "This road could be our lifeline if the blockade drags on, so the government must give priority to it."

Last week Finance Minister Bishnu Poudel landed in Rasuwa by helicopter and said the government would upgrade the road into a two-lane highway in two years. Locals of Rasuwa are cautiously hopeful. 



HANNAN LEWSLEY

Eye in the sky

Post-earthquake, Nepal government cracks down on use of drones

HANNAN LEWSLEY

Till an hour before David Beckham's charity football game against school children in Bhaktapur on 6 November, the BBC production team and UNICEF were waiting for the final permission to use a drone to get aerial footage of the match. The papers from the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Information and Communication were in order, but the green light from the Nepal Army was still awaiting. Minutes before the starting whistle came the disappointing news: the Army had turned down the request to use a UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) to film the game.

The Nepal Army's action highlighted official sensitivity about the growing proliferation of UAVs and the increasing need for explicit legislation on their lawful use not just in Nepal, but around the world.

Prior to the April earthquake drones were not regulated, and many rescue and relief agencies brought their own craft for reconnaissance and to document the destruction. And it was because of the uncontrolled influx of UAVs through international media and humanitarian teams that the government was forced to take action and restricted their use. (See box)

Now, anyone looking to deploy drones needs to apply for a license from the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) and some 55 permits were granted since April and about the same number rejected based on objection from

either the CAAN or the Home Ministry or the Ministry of Information and Communication, all three of which must approve the application for a license to be issued.

"After the earthquake it was easy for people to collect aerial footage and use it overseas with a potentially negative impact," explained Subhash Jha of CAAN, whose main worry was about the chances of mid-air collisions with aircraft on approach into Kathmandu. The worry at the Ministry of Information and Communication was about surveillance and security, while the Army appears to have been concerned after a Chinese national was caught filming its headquarter in Kathmandu from a drone.

Now, after obtaining a license UAV operators need to be accompanied by a liaison officer from the Home Ministry, and there have been several instances of the Home Ministry confiscating drones that contravened guidelines.

DRONE RULES

- Don'ts for UAVs less than 20kg:
- No flying over or within 150m of a congested area
 - No flying 150m of any outdoor assembly of 1,000 people or more
 - No flying 50m of vehicle or building
 - No flying 50m of any person
 - Craft must be visible to operator
 - Cannot be flown at night
 - Cannot be used for aerial mapping, data-gathering work
 - Cannot be flown near airports

GPS TECHNOLOGY

Track drone's position allowing capabilities such as an automatic return to the take-off site.

ROTORS

Communicate with the UAV's computer to allow compensation for wind and smooth flight.

BATTERIES

Calculate power and distance from take-off point to ensure power failure does not occur.

CAMERA

Provides real time footage as well as photographs. Controlled by remote smart phone apps.

SENSORS

Collect and process information, to assist with landing and flying whilst allowing the UAV to hover when not controlled.

As they become more popular and accessible (the cheapest ones can be ordered online for as little as Rs 2,000) governments around the world are scrambling to come up with rules. There will be some 1 million drones sold around the world this year. Bangladesh has put an outright ban on all drones until further notice. Whilst India has banned their use in public airspace. Drones fitted with cameras are banned in Thailand. Drones could be used freely in Japan until one landed on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's rooftop earlier this year and rules were tightened. China, where 80 per cent of the drones sold worldwide are manufactured, allows UAVs with less than 7kg to be flown. This week, the US introduced new laws requiring drones to be registered with the federal government.

However, UAVs can be put to a lot of positive use in Nepal as a significantly cheaper, safer and less obstructive option to a helicopter for reconnaissance and rescue, conservation, anti-poaching activities, and the film industry. In Nepal, their use in adventure tourism and creating videos for the promotion of trekking, mountaineering and rafting expeditions is limitless.

In Papua New Guinea where tuberculosis prevalence is among the highest in the world Medecins Sans Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders) utilised drone technology to collect samples of suspected tuberculosis cases from remote locations, saving both time and lives. There could be similar use in Nepal.

Disaster mapping of earthquake damaged areas in Panga have been turned into physical maps accessible and contributable by the community, producing comprehensive and essential visual representations of damage.

Patrick Meier is the director of UAViators which coordinates drone-based data collection in disaster areas and operated in Nepal following the April earthquake. He says a coherent policy is essential. "It sounds like different officials are saying different things about the rules regarding their use, the impact of the post-earthquake data is high but most of the information is not public due to those initial sensitivities." 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK

BIZ BRIEFS

Survivors meet

Survivors Nepal, a movement that begun as a response to the April earthquake, has concluded its 1st Annual General Meeting. The program was inaugurated by the chairman of Health Nepal Network, Arun Singh Basnet. The group had provided relief aid including tarpaulin sheets, medical supplies and health care in the most affected areas.



Global IME Bank

One more

Global IME has opened a new branch in Kathmandu. The branch and an ATM which were opened in Suredhara were inaugurated by the bank's chairman, Chandra Prasad Dhakal. With this, the number of branches the bank has in Kathmandu has increased to 31 and the number of ATMs to 46.

Growing presence

Shikhar Shoes has opened a new outlet in Gongabu. The new outlet was inaugurated by founder, Sangeeta Kadariya. This is Shikhar's 26th outlet. The Nepali brand manufactures party shoes, sports shoes, office and regular shoes, casual shoes.



The Banker



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Tea and biscuits

Nepal's political leadership should be a part of the solution, and not a part of the problem

Two weeks ago Madhesi leaders came to Kathmandu from the Tarai already reeling from chronic shortages of essential goods due to the blockade hoping that they could find a way out. But emerging out of Singha Darbar Upendra Yadav was downbeat. "We ate biscuits and chatted a bit," he said.



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

While the Madhesi leaders blame the Big Three for not taking their demands seriously, top leaders from NC, UML and UCPN-M were critical of the Madhesi Front for refusing to sit for talks. Both are right.

But what is also true is that the Front had submitted an 11-point demand to the government a month ago, but instead of engaging in a serious homework with all parties to negotiate a settlement Prime Minister KP Oli and his Maoist Home Minister decided to escalate confrontation with an unprovoked crackdown, first at Raxaul border on early morning of 3 November and last



GOPEN RAI

week in Saptari where thousands of protesters were occupying the highway.

Although protesters were within their constitutional rights to express dissent, on both occasions they overstepped the law by forcibly obstructing public movement. In Saptari police were attacked with petrol bombs. A four-year-old child sitting on a terrace was shot in a disproportionate use of force and live bullets. In any case, Raxaul and Saptari incidents derailed the talks for a month.

Tempers have gone down since and the MF is back at the table in Kathmandu. However, the Big Three have still not agreed on a response to Madhesi demands. On Monday (*pic*), more tea and biscuits were consumed and another opportunity was wasted.

The Big Three were supposed to meet among themselves to discuss the demands, but the Maoists failed to attend. The madhouse leaders went down to Dhanusha next day to address a mass meeting instead.

Birganj based journalist Chandrakishore Jha has had a ringside view to the Raxaul protests, and believes the government is making a dangerous mistake by playing a waiting game to tire out the protesters. "The longer this drags on, the greater the risks of criminal elements taking over and we have seen that recently," Jha said.

The Tarai protests have now dragged on for over 100 days and the border blockade has lasted more than two months. More than 50 people have died, and hundreds have been injured on

both sides. There have been at least three rounds of fruitless negotiations.

We point fingers at New Delhi for pulling strings in Kathmandu, but what is stopping K P Oli from taking decisive steps to end the deadlock within Nepal? Instead of sending Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa to Delhi for the second time in matter of months, the Prime Minister should have sat down with his coalition partners, opposition NC and the Morcha top brass to mull over each of the 11 points.

Some demands including that of having more than one administrative languages in a province, giving each province representation in natural and financial resource distribution commission, ensuring proportional representation at all levels of the

state including constitutional bodies and determining constituencies according to population while ensuring minimum representation to all remote areas, seem fair.

The sticking point is the demand for two provinces in the Tarai, but even this is not too far from the current demarcation which can be resolved in a spirit of compromise. In the last 60 years, Nepal's administrative map has undergone several alterations in district and zonal boundaries, yet for the plains people nothing has changed. It is the leaders, fearing for vote banks in the constituencies, who seem to be part of the problem.

Nepal's mainstream media is also playing a role in polarising the national discourse. Half baked opinion pieces about rumored Indian takeover of the Tarai and of the big rivers only serve to rabble rouse. After all, constitutional provisions guarantee central jurisdiction over large river projects. These opinions serve to only insult the Tarai people by questioning their loyalty to this nation.

Indeed, there are genuine grievances that need redressal, but unnecessarily trivialising them or whipping up nationalist sentiment will only result in political chaos, providing fertile grounds for the northern and southern neighbour to further assert themselves in our internal affairs.

It is time the political leadership on both sides became a part of the solution in negotiations, and not a part of the problem. 🇳🇵

@Anurag_Acharya

A visible change

To compete with social media, Nepal's legacy papers need to prioritise visual storytelling

AYESHA SHAKYA

In the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, the iconic image of five-month-old Sonish Awale being rescued after being buried for 22 hours under the rubble went viral. The baby caked in dust being lifted up by rescuers spoke to thousands affected by the earthquake and quickly became a symbol of hope to a country ravaged by destruction.

Yet, lack of exposure and training, weak design sense and poor motivation has meant that much of Nepal's legacy journalism remains text-heavy and dull, making them unable to compete for eyeballs with the spread and impact of multimedia content online.

"Powerful visuals such as the earthquake baby evoke emotions and speak to your stomach," says Thomas Borberg, photo editor-in-chief of Danish newspaper Politiken who was in Nepal last month for the Photo Kathmandu festival. "When we scan through a newspaper, images are the first thing to catch our attention. A good picture talks directly to our emotions and can be just as valuable in telling a story."

International media outlets such as *The New York Times*, Reuters and *Politiken* have remained benchmarks in incorporating visuals in their storytelling online. Through their immensely popular photo blogs to long-form multimedia

pieces, they have seamlessly transitioned into digital platforms and enhanced the art of photojournalism itself.

Borberg conducted a weeklong workshop in which he dissected Nepal's broadsheet newspapers and critiqued their layout and design, use of images, and general aesthetics and readability. Needless to say, some of his comments were scathing. In most papers, the text does all the talking. Reporters 'tell', rather than 'show'. The concept of white space is almost non-existent and pages are congested with grey text. Visuals are afterthoughts.

"There is a lack of priority for images in the Nepali media. Editors need to stop using visuals as just hole fillers and photographers need to be able to communicate what they want to photograph and how it is used in newspapers," Borberg told an attentive group of editors, reporters and designers.

The disregard for visuals is clearly evident in the way images are either cropped or manipulated that their significance is lost to the readers. While visuals help bring readers into the story, the opposite is achieved in Nepal. Said Borberg: "Editors and photographers need to stop complaining about each other and take responsibilities. You need to learn to pick some fights for your work."

Newspapers in Nepal are also notoriously predictable in their selection of images, making it difficult to differentiate



PAWAN JOSHI/ PHOTO KATHMANDU

STORYTELLING: Thomas Borberg at a visual storytelling workshop for Nepali journalists in Kathmandu last month.

one paper from the other. Borberg proved his point by spreading out the morning's broadsheets on the carpet (with all of them using the same generic image of politicians meeting) to illustrate his point.

"Instead of having the politicians sitting in a line and staring straight at the camera, it would be more interesting if more candid shots could be captured," Borberg added.

The concept of visual storytelling is still

new in Nepal, both on paper and online. Traditional ways of journalism have held back media organisations from completely adopting the 'digital first' mantra. Despite the flexibility and space on digital platforms, visuals are still sparsely used and often just plopped together with the text, without much regard to the message the visuals are trying to convey. Changing this mindset will take time and, in Borberg's own words, a 'visual revolution'. 🇳🇵

Borberg is the photo editor-in-chief of Politiken and part of the jury for next year's World Press Photo Awards.



The massive circulation over the Bay that has brought record rainfall to South India has a long tail of moisture. But this is curling away from us because of the westerly jetstream (see satellite radar composite) which means that although it will bring some cloud cover into the weekend over Kathmandu Valley there won't be much by way of precipitation. But this will keep the maximum temperature below 20 Celsius, and shroud valleys in central Nepal with fog. Mixed with firewood smoke caused by the fuel shortage and the trans-border pollution haze from India, this smog will be persistent till noon.

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DINESH SHRESTHA

JUST RUNNING AROUND

For most humans, the mere idea of running 172km non-stop is horrifying. But to do that going up and down the circumference of the Kathmandu Valley is beyond belief. However, that is exactly what Seth Wolpin (*pic, right*) did this week.

Running continuously day and night for 49 hours and 55 minutes, Wolpin made his way right around the rim of Kathmandu. For the American university professor from Washington this wasn't just about breaking records. It was to test the limits of what his body could do, while opening up new areas for hiking and helping the land he has come to love.

"It is about the experience more than the time I took to run it," he said from the comfort of a café in Thamel after the conclusion of his epic achievement.

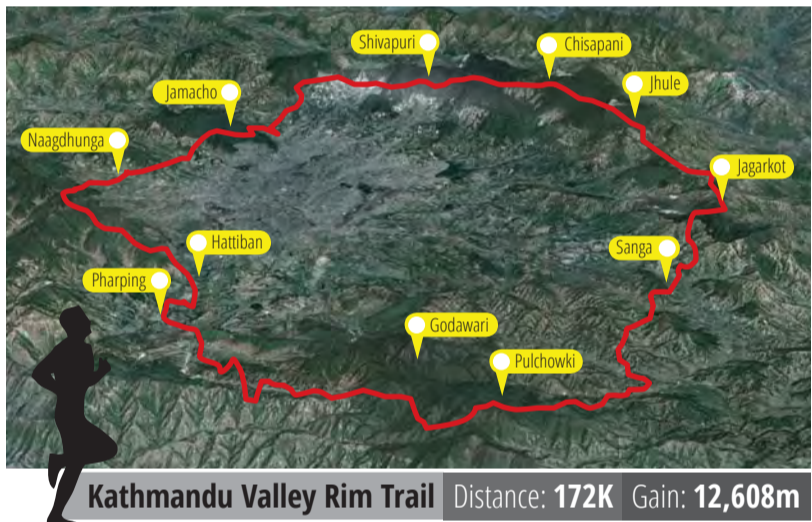
With a vast history of significant feats, including summiting Everest in 2011, running across the continental United States a year after in 107 days and then completing the high

route of the Greater Himalayan Trail in 87 days, Seth is well-acquainted with pushing himself to the physical limits.

Such an effort does come with challenges. Running through the Shivapuri National Park alone at night presents an array of threats, from wild boars to leopards. But for Seth more than the physical difficulty, it was a psychological battle. "The first morning I was ready to quit ... if I kept the pace of the first day it would have been a three or four day run rather than two," he says. But support from friends was enough to overcome it: "Knowing that they were looking to meet me, I couldn't just quit."

Wolpin is committed to opening up the area to allow other people to experience it. His route (*see pic*) was recorded by GPS and the information along with comprehensive track notes will go onto his website soon with the intention to open access for other runners and hikers.

"No one owns the trails ... I'd love to see other people go out



and hike it, or break my record," he said. "The epic grandiosity of Nepal's landscape inspired me, not just seeing it, but being there, and adventure running is a different type of experience, you live a whole lifetime in a day."

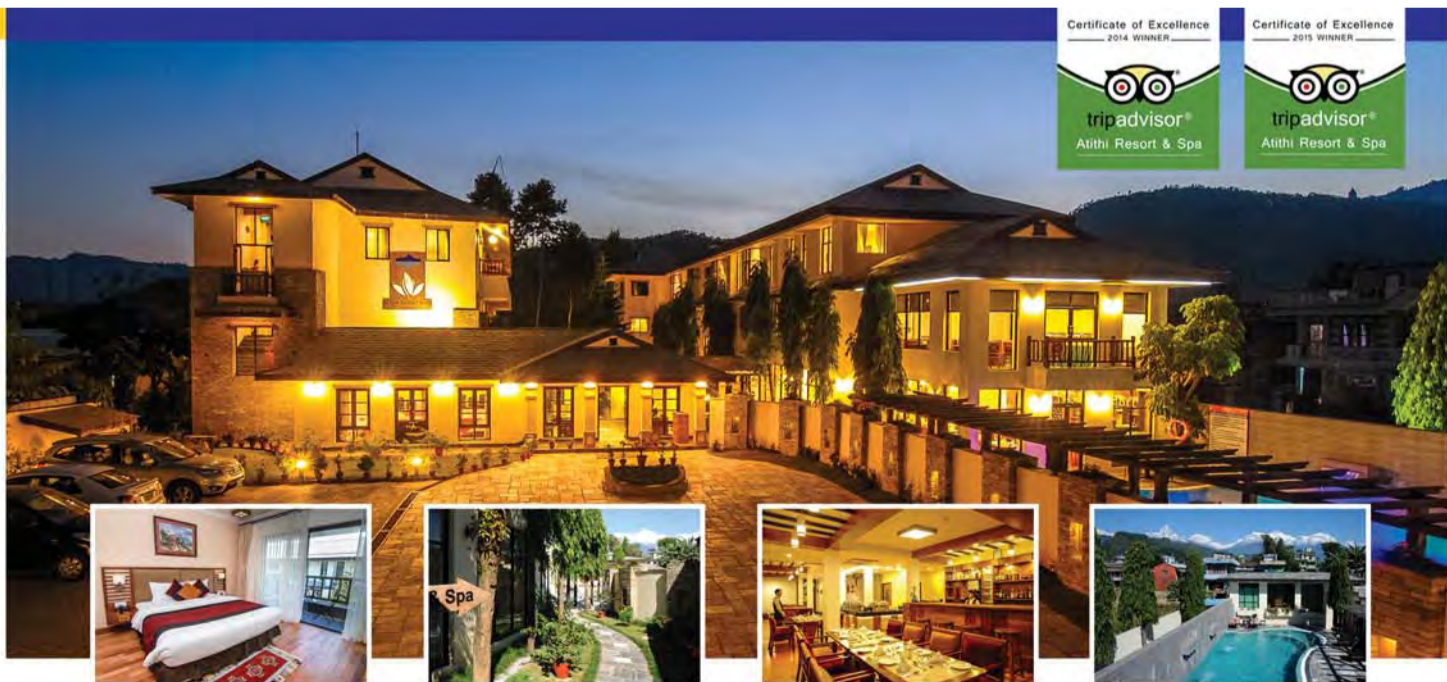
Wolpin's commitment to Nepal goes beyond running and climbing. After his first trek to Annapurna Base Camp he realised that he could make a real difference and

sponsored his guide's children's education. "I realised I could give these kids an education for less than my monthly phone bill," he recalls, "I wanted to do something less selfish, it grew from there".

He set up Wide Open Vistas Nepal in 2011 with long-time adventure partner Dorjee Sherpa to help Nepali children, especially girls, with education. The organisation operates on the

philosophy that education can be used as an effective means of preventing problems, rather than reacting to them when they occur.

As for the future, ongoing work with Wide Open Vistas is a priority for Wolpin, but the draw of the mountains still features. Along with fellow trail runner Sudeep Kandel, Wolpin is co-directing the Annapurna Trail Race next year. Hannan Lewsley



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URMILA DANUWAR, 30, worked at a poultry farm in Rajasthan and now lives in Ilam.

SARITA RAMAMOORTHY



LAXMI MURTHY

FAR F

Urmila Danuwar, 30, worked in a poultry farm in Rajasthan. Having saved some money to build her own house in Ilam, she dreams of returning to India.

Like other migrants from Eastern Nepal, elderly Manmaya remembers how she landed up in a coal mine in Meghalaya. Cooking for miners, keeping house and even safeguarding their earnings was a lot of fun, she recalls, “We used to have such a good time there. It used to be like a festival.”

For many women migrants, however,



HANNAN LEWSLEY

It is impossible to escape a sense of awe when you look at Youdhisthir Maharjan’s pieces currently on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. The Nepali-born artist who lives in the US has taken pages of repurposed books

and turned them into what he calls a “new language that transcends its humble origin and takes a new life of its own”.

Each piece is inspired by the title of the books the pages are taken from and carries social and

Mixed media

political themes.

The entire process is an organic one. Asked how he chooses his books, Maharjan has a philosophical answer: “The books find me rather than the other way round.” The second-hand bookshops within his home state of New Hampshire provide the means for that.

The meticulously-altered pages achieve powerful political and social messages that evoke contemplation. “People do not know what to think when they see these works, they evoke questions within the viewer,” Maharjan says. It is here that the power of his work lies.

One can’t help feeling captivated by the delicate intricacy of Maharjan’s works. For him, that complexity is really the essence of

his art and craft.

Maharjan’s works are the result of forced circumstances. Initially he used the traditional media of paint and canvas but he lost the required art space when he moved to the United States. This compelled him to turn to other media.


Also on exhibit are the works of the American-born, Nepal-based Maureen Drdak (*pic, left with Maharjan*) whose works offer a fascinating insight into the cross-cultural capabilities of art.

Inspired by the traditional Patan tradition of repoussé, she translates the timeless Nepali metalcraft into a contemporary art form. The result: exceptional mixed media pieces that Drdak herself refers to as “repoussé-paintings.”

Her work forms a connection between contemporary western

and traditional Nepali art forms. She notes that her work is “an exploration of philosophical and cultural synthesis in which Eastern and Western iconographies are meaningfully integrated”.

Drdak learnt repousse from the renowned master Rabindra Shakya, a local of Patan, who initially regarded his work with apprehension. But Shakya was left delighted by the final products that came out of months of his teaching and was amazed by the unorthodox way in which his traditional craft was presented.

For Drdak it was the interest and appreciation she received that gave her the greatest sense of achievement. She says: “The approval of the masters makes it all worthwhile.” 

Hannan Lewsley

*Exhibition open until 9 December
Siddhartha Art Gallery
Babar Mahal Revisited
Sunday-Friday: 11am-5pm
Saturday: 12pm-5pm*

REVIEW



GEETI BK works as a domestic help in the emerging residential suburb of Bellandur, Bengaluru in India.

FROM HOME

life is tough, and they tolerate it only for the sake of their children. Geeti BK, whose journey from Bajhang to Bengaluru was by no means easy, sticks it out to help her family back home. These Nepali women are often uncounted in statistics on labour and migration, and have stories to tell: of toil, of troubles, of joy and of hope.

Remittances from workers abroad make up 29 per cent of Nepal's GDP, the highest in South Asia. Nearly 90 per cent of migrant workers are in India because of ease of travel

PREVIEW

and proximity. No passports and permits are required to cross the open border.

A glimpse into these women's lives is presented in an audiovisual exhibition by HRI Institute for South Asian Research and Exchange that will run from 8-10 December at Nepal Art Council in Babar Mahal. 🇳🇵

*So far from home:
Nepali migrants tell their stories
8-10 December
Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal*



SHOBHA SHARMA runs an NGO and hostel for abandoned children in Hennur, north Bengaluru.

LAXMI MURTHY

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EVENTS



Nepali drama,
A new Nepali play, *Katha Sarangi Gau ko* (The story of Sarangi Village) by Kishor Anurag. Until 12 December, show starts at 4.45pm everyday (except Wednesdays), Theatre Mall, Sundhara, 9841595956

Art Fair,
An annual art fair showcasing works of 40 artists. Until 6 December, 10.30am to 6pm, Park Gallery, Pulchok, Lalitpur, (01)5522307, parkgallery.com.np



Kathmandu Chorale,
The Kathmandu-based choir group presents its annual holiday concert, features an eclectic mix of Christmas songs and a few classical pieces. 5 December, 3.30 to 4.30pm, 6 to 7pm, The British School, Sanepa, Free entry

Mixed Media,
Exhibition of works by Maureen Drdak and Youdhisthir Maharjan. (see page 8 for review) Until 9 December, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal, (01)4218048/4433930

KIMFF 2015,
Over 80 films from 25 countries will be shown at this year's Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival. 10 to 14 December, Kumari Hall, Kamalpokhari, (01)4440635, kimff.org, (see page 11 for more details)

Christmas Bazaar,
Shop for gifts from local artisans, enjoy traditional festive biscuits and mulled wine. 13 December, 11am to 6pm, Bikalpa Art Centre, Pulchok, Lalitpur

Migrant voices,
An attempt to document the life stories of Nepali women migrants working in the informal sector in India. (see pages 8-9) 8 to 10 December, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, (01)4220735

French cinema,
Screening of the film *Une vie de chat* (A Cat in Paris) by Alain Gagnol 17 December, 5.30pm, Alliance Francaise, Teku Road, (01)4242832, alliancefrancaise.org.np

Help rebuild,
A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). www.photoktm.com/#support



Photography workshop,
Level 1 workshop for aspiring photographers, organised by Artudio. 13 December, 7am to 9am, Rs 4000, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, Swayambu, register: 9851182100/9803779777

DINING

Bodhi books & Bakes,
A bookstore-cum-patisserie. Maharajganj, 9851193262

Dhokaima Café,
Beat the cold with indigenous cocktails at the Rukhmuni Bar. Patan Dhoka, (01)5522113, dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com

Kairos Café,
Offers excellent coffee and traditional British pub food. Jawalakhel (behind the zoo), 9813173747

Piano B,
If Italian is what you crave. Offers limited but authentic fares. Bhanimandal, Ekantakuna (01)5000641



The Old House,
An adventurous new restaurant dedicated to the art of French cooking. Darbarmarg, (01)4250931

Quiz Night,
Sal's Pizza hosts weekly quiz contests. Every Monday, 7pm, Lajimpat (behind the Indian Embassy), 9813570076

Maan Nam,
Enjoy a nice cuppa coffee in the lush garden or try out your golfing skills. Naxal (across the road from Bhatbhateni Supermarket), (01)4427055



Pho 99,
An excellent place that shouts authentic Vietnam through its food as well as setting. Jhamsikhel, 9803203119

MUSIC



Bipul Chhetri Live,
Celebrated singer Bipul Chhetri will perform for the third time in Kathmandu. 19 December, 2pm onwards, Sano Gaucharan Ground, Gyaneshwor



KANTA dAbdAb,
This musical trio combines sitar, percussion and bass to create a soulful fusion groove. 19 December, 6pm, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, Rs 300



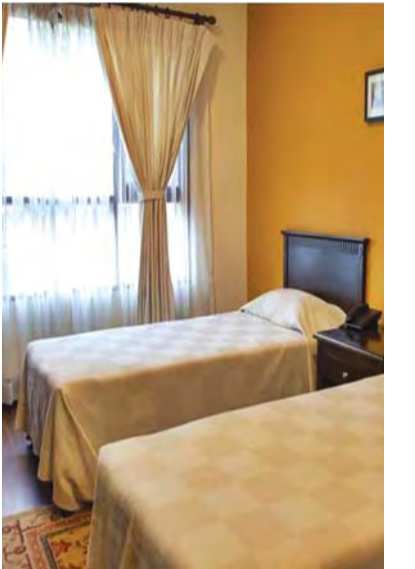
Joint Family Internationale,
The Kathmandu-based reggae group will be performing live. 6 December, 7 to 9pm, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, Rs 300

The mixtapes,
For an evening of 90s tunes - from Britpop to Grunge, ending at Ska and Funk. 12 December, 7.30pm, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs 300

GETAWAYS

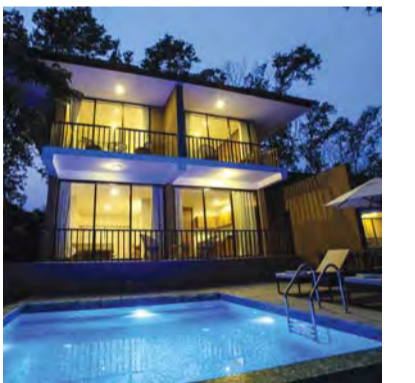


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Mountain Cinema

The 13th Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival opens next week



The Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) returns to the capital for its 13th edition next week. Over 80 films from 25 countries will be screened at the five-day festival which starts 10 December at the Kumari Cinema Complex.

Expect a wide spectrum of films – from documentaries to fiction, adventure cinema to experimental shorts – all highlighting the relationship

between the dramatic natural landscape of mountains with human cultural practises, religion, extreme sports and adventure.

The festival this year opens with the screening of *Bhagyale Bachekaharu* (Nepal Earthquake: Heroes, Survivors and Miracles), a documentary film by Ganesh Panday. A short-film competition 'Seismic Shift' focusing on the experiences of Nepal's during the

earthquake has been added to this year's event.

British climber and journalist Ed Douglas, Korean film scholar Eun Young Kim, Indian film editor Namrata Rao and film critic Premendra Nath Mazumdar are the jury members for this year's festival. The four will judge the best documentaries in the international competition, the top documentary and the fiction film in the Nepal Panorama section.

The winning film in the international competition category will receive a prize of \$1,500, whilst second and third place winners are awarded \$1,000 and \$500 respectively.

In the Nepal Panorama Category Rs 50,000 will be awarded to the winning fiction and documentary film, and \$1,000 will be awarded to the best film on mountain development issues within the region.

As in the past, the festival will include discussion forums, guest lectures, photo exhibition and installation art projects. Folk-rock star Amrit Gurung of Nepathya will join *Nepali Times* Editor Kunda Dixit to present the popular Know Your Himal Quiz.

KIMFF 2015
10-14 December
Kumari Cinema, Kamalpokhari
kimff.org

Telling the Sherpa story

One of the highly anticipated films to be screened at KIMFF this year, *Sherpa*, tells the dramatic story of the avalanche on Mt Everest last year. Released in October, the film by Jen Peedom was named the official selection for the Toronto, Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals and won the Best Film: Mountain Culture at the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival.

Nepali Times spoke to Jen Peedom who will attend this year's festival in Kathmandu.

Nepali Times: You have quite a history in the Himalaya, what lead you to Nepal to begin with?

Jen Peedom: I first came to Nepal to go trekking with a friend in 2003. We trekked to Chhukung, and like so many others, I was entranced by Nepal and the sheer force and beauty of the Himalaya.

What inspired you to produce a film on Sherpas?

Over the years, I watched Sherpas being left on the cutting room floor of many Everest films, and while they would never say anything, I knew that it hurt them, because they knew they were taking a disproportionate share of the risk in getting foreigners to the summit and back down safely. So we set out to make a film that followed an Everest expedition from the Sherpas' point of view. But we could never have anticipated what happened on the mountain last year and the avalanche highlighted the very real risks that Sherpas take every time they step onto the mountain. The simple truth is, that they are exposed to the risks more than foreign climbers, as they spend more time on the mountain, carrying loads, setting up camps, and fixing ropes.

Your intention for the film to begin with were entirely altered by the 2014 avalanche. Where were you and how did it affect your storytelling?

I was in my tent at Base Camp when the avalanche struck. I heard it, and very quickly realised that it would probably change everything. Given that we were there, documenting a Sherpa specific story, I felt we had a responsibility to continue filming and to see where the story led us.



The avalanche provided you with a filming opportunity that you obviously didn't expect, what are some of major difficulties that this presented?

The biggest issue was communication. The base camp rumour mill went into overdrive after the avalanche and it was hard to fully understand what was going on. There were many competing agendas and the emotion was very intense. I spent a lot of time walking up and down the glacier, visiting the camps, talking to different people, trying to take stock of what had happened, what was happening, and what it all meant.

I had a Sherpa interpreter with me, Nima

Sherpa from Lukla, who was invaluable, but it wasn't until we got home and had all the footage translated did I realise what I had on my hands. As time went on, Sherpas started to know about our film, and many came and visited our camp, wanting to share their point of view. It was very validating to know they were prepared to talk, share their views and were being supportive of the film.

Was there a difficulty in producing a film amongst the chaos of the proceeding events without being exploitative?

As a documentary filmmaker, you always

tread a delicate ethical line. I use my instincts as much as I can, and consulted on an almost hourly basis with my Sherpa team. We had a Sherpa translator on the team, a Sherpa camera assistant and two specially trained Sherpa cameramen - Nawang and Nima Sherpa from Phortse.

There have been a number of documentaries made on Sherpas. What kind of new insights can viewers expect to gain from watching this film?

I think what viewers can expect to gain from watching this film, is a unique point of view at a moment in history on Everest that changed everything. Things will never be the same after that avalanche. The Sherpas effectively cancelled the season, and in doing so, proved to themselves, and the world that the Sherpa/Foreigner dynamic on Everest has irrevocably shifted.

The images, sound and music on this film are world class. The reviews of the film all speak of the breathtaking visuals. The film has had an incredible run on the international festival circuit, picking up lots of awards, including the best documentary at the London Film Festival.

What do you hope to achieve with your film?

With Everest constantly in the headlines, and seemingly and endless supply of people wanting to climb it, I hope we have presented a side to the mountain that makes people look at it in a different way. I hope it makes people who want to climb Everest, think a little harder about what they are asking their Sherpas to do, and understand the risks that they are asking the Sherpas to take. Jon Krakauer (Into Thin Air) recently had the chance to see the film, and this is what he had to say.

Sherpa is a stunningly beautiful, highly nuanced, extremely powerful documentary. It explains what the Sherpa do on Everest—and the terrible price they pay—in a way that no other film or book ever has. I wish that every foreign climber who ever attempts Everest in the future, or has ever attempted it in the past, would take the time to see this film.

Mr. Holmes

Over the years there has been a proliferation of Sherlock Holmes adaptations in literature, and in film and television, with the likes of Michael Chabon writing *The Final Solution* – a slim, erudite, charming novella about Holmes’ older years, Neil Gaiman’s delightfully trademark creepy, supernaturally motivated *A Study in Emerald* (both published in the last decade) and of course the innumerable,



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande



star studded visual adaptations that have brought the dour but beloved detective firmly into the 21st Century.

Mr. Holmes, starring the great British thespian Sir Ian McKellan, is a bit of a departure from the romanticised Holmes that one has come to expect from Arthur Conan Doyle himself and the multiple, sophistications that have almost deified the character.

Adapted from the cleverly titled novel *A Slight Trick of the Mind* by Mitch Cullin, and directed by Bill Condon, the film is set in 1947, in Sussex, with a 93-year-old Holmes living in quiet retirement,

occupying himself mainly with bee-keeping, carefully watched over by his housekeeper Mrs Munro (the wonderful Laura Linney) and her young son Roger (played to wrench heartstrings by Milo Parker).

Holmes is in a state because he is slowly losing his memory, a terrifying deterioration that he attempts to mitigate by secretly traveling to Japan to locate royal jelly obtained from a plant called prickly ash, which is reputed to energise brain and particularly memory function.

Over the years, as Holmes has aged, his failing memory has altered his recollection of certain

events – in particular a case that Holmes is determined to solve despite his debilitation, helped along by little Roger’s immense interest in both sleuthing and bee-keeping.

This is a tender film that examines the twilight years of a once great mind as he struggles with the indignities of old age, but is also possibly, oddly, at his best, a naturally crotchety nature being mellowed by old age and the charm of a precocious little boy.

Ian McKellan, in his rendition of the famous detective, poignantly brings to life a character study that is designed to give you slow burning but nevertheless powerful surprises, revealing mysteries about both the weirdness of the human heart and of course, as with every proper whodunit, an unexpected, and in this case deeply tragic solution to the mystery that so occupies Holmes’s mind.

To me this quiet but deeply thoughtful film, while not quite what I expected, lived on my mind in a way that none of the other glibber films about Holmes have done because of its unusual trajectory and the beautifully drawn later life of one my own favourite fictional characters. While it may not be set in Baker Street, it is an essential imagining and extension of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



MEA INDIA

HI AND BYE: Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

BACK ON THE STREETS: Nepali Congress youth leader Gagan Thapa (*second from right*) leads a rally in Kathmandu demanding the government to resolve the Madhes crisis on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

HUMAN CHAIN: Former prime minister and UML leader Jhulanath Khanal (*centre*) at a protest rally against the Indian blockade in Kupon-dole on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

CURTAIN RAISER: Festival director Ramyata Limbu unveils the poster for this year’s Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) at a press briefing in Lajimpat on Tuesday. KIMFF will run from 10-14 December.



GOPEN RAI

AIDS AWARENESS: A participant poses next to a red ribbon, internationally recognised as a symbol of HIV awareness, at a program to mark World Aids Day in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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Watchdog vs CIAA

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 1 December

कान्तिपुर

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) unveiled a chilling report this week, exposing irregularities in earthquake relief distribution. The report said relief was distributed to fake earthquake victims, sub-standard materials were purchased at suspiciously high prices and there were irregularities in procurement of medicines.

But the CIAA has not filed a case against any government authority involved in irregularities or in relief distribution. Nor has it dared to name them.

The CIAA is a constitutional watchdog against corruption, but by not carrying out a proper investigation, naming wrongdoers and filing cases against them, the CIAA seems to have forgotten its role and responsibility. The CIAA report lists anomalies but lacks factual details to back them.

By sharing its half-baked investigation report with the media, the CIAA has prompted us to raise questions about its motives. Is it alerting the guilty and giving them time to tamper with evidence? Is it not against its own guidelines about maintaining secrecy before concluding an investigation?

The CIAA needs to be clear: its duty is not monitoring and cautioning government authorities. There are other agencies with that mandate. It needs to stick to its constitutional responsibility: investigate corruption and ensure punishment against the guilty. If not, it will lose its credibility.

‘Yellow journalism’

CIAA reply on its official Facebook page, 1 December

facebook

Our attention has been drawn to an editorial in Kantipur on our report on earthquake relief distribution. It is misleading, ill-intentioned and aimed at belittling a constitutional body. Unlike what Kantipur’s editorial claims, the CIAA report is not shallow. We put in a lot of hard work to prepare this document, and it examines every aspect of the irregularities. It also scrutinises relief from abroad with

recommendations to effectively manage future post-disaster relief distribution.

Why should Kantipur get a headache when the CIAA publishes a report benefitting the state and earthquake survivors? Kantipur has been consistently attacking the CIAA and its current chief, Lokman Singh Karki.

The CIAA respects responsible journalism, and is happy to work with the media. But yellow journalism is unacceptable to us. We will never forget what Kantipur has written against us, and this is the last time that we are writing a rejoinder to it.

The worst drought

Janak Raj Sapkota in *Nepal*, 29 November

नेपाल

Thirty two-year-old Brahma Bahadur Shahi along with two hundred others from his village in Mugu recently walked two days to Gamgadhi, the district headquarter, to purchase rice.

While in previous years the villagers grew enough crops in the summer to last them for six months, bad weather and scanty rainfall affected their harvests this year.

“We will have to buy rice for the whole year,” said Shahi who purchased 50kgs of rice during his visit.

The situation for the farmers has been made worse by the current blockade which has affected transportation of food supplies from the Nepal Food Corporation to remote areas.

“It didn’t rain the entire monsoon, so the district is facing an acute food shortage,” said Chandra Prasad Risal, Chief of District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) in Mugu, “This is probably the worst drought faced by the district in 15 years.”

According to a preliminary report prepared by the district

office, 14 out of 24 VDCs in the district have been severely hit by drought, accruing a loss of Rs 217 million. Out of the four belts in the district, Gam is the worst hit.

The situation is no better in Humla where locals say there hasn’t been any rain for four months. According to Dinesh Ray, Chief of DADO in Humla, all 27 VDCs of the district are facing food shortage. The first tri-annual report prepared by his office concludes that food scarcity and the risks of famine are set to increase. The transport of fuel supplies by air have also been affected in places inaccessible by road.

Says Narayan Singh KC of Nepal Food Corporation in Humla: “Many more people need food supplies, but we are running out of rice. We don’t know what to do.”

The situation is similarly dire in villages across the Karnali district. Kul Bahadur Shahi of DADO in Kalikot says, “We need to double the amount of rice distribution. It is likely more people will move to India to look for work if this continues.”

In five of the 30 VDCs of Kalikot, the crop production has gone down by 90 per cent according to DADO.



Rabindra Manandhar in *Nepal*, 29 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Baburam Bhattarai’s ‘new political force’ is nothing but a rusted weapon of the bourgeois.”

Chairman of UCPN-Maoist Prachanda in *onlinekhabar.com*, 1 December

No permits for e-buses

Pravin Dhakal in *Nagarik*, 25 November

नागरिक

Prime Minister KP Oli in his address to the nation last week promised to immediately introduce electric public transport in the capital. Similar words have been spoken by many other leaders in the past. But, promoters of electric vehicles say the government has shown no enthusiasm towards making that possible.

When promoters of NEVI Trade Link, the company involved in Safa Tempo campaign, requested route permits for its electric buses, the Department of Transport Management (DoTM), turned down the request citing unsafe design. The company then added walls to the buses’ previous design and once again filed a request. This time, their application was rejected citing lack of policies regarding electric vehicles.



“Every time we apply for route permit the department comes up with new ways to reject our application,” said Dharma Kumar Shrestha, managing director of NEVI, who has been trying to obtain permits for electric buses since 2011.

According to Rajesh Paudel, chief of Transport Management Office in Bagmati, the e-buses couldn’t get permits because

of a provision introduced two years ago that requires public vehicles plying inside the Ring Road to seat minimum of 26. The e-buses can only seat 14. However, he said permits will be issued to vehicles plying outside the Ring Road.

According to Krishna Chandra Paudel of Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, the government is serious about promoting the use of electric vehicles.

“There’s a plan to reduce the 60% tax on e-vehicles to 10%. We are also encouraging establishment of charging stations at various locations,” said Paudel.

Earlier, a report prepared by a committee from DoTM had suggested policy reforms as well as slashing taxes on electric vehicles to promote their use. But nothing much has come of it.

“People are beginning to pay attention to electric vehicles now and even the government seems interested in pushing its use due to the current fuel crisis. But once the blockade is over, we doubt it’ll be on the government’s priority list,” said Shrestha.

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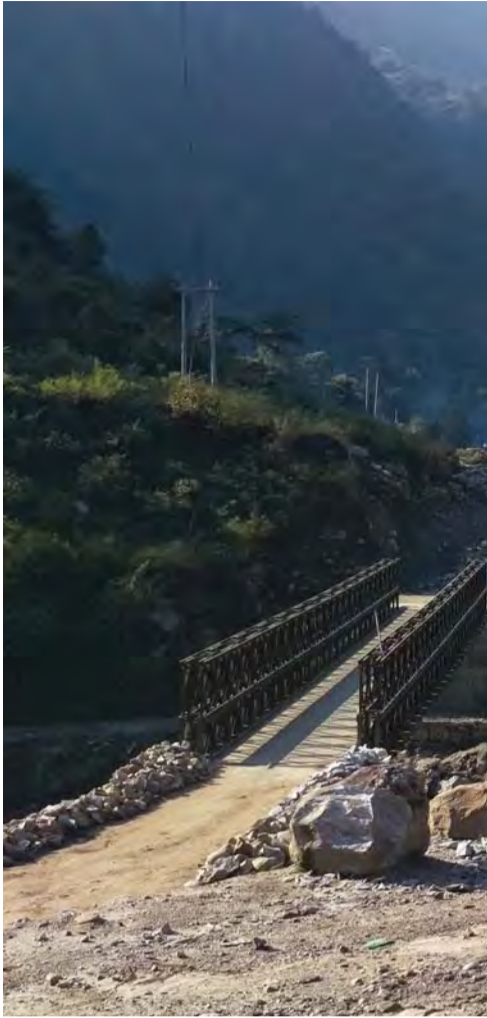
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PICS: SEULKI LEE



Boomtime in Lamjung

Political stability would allow district to benefit even more from hydropower and tourism

SEULKI LEE

“A garland of hundreds of flowers ... land of knowledge, peace, of Tarai, Pahad and Himal...” the cheerful melody of Nepal’s national

anthem echoed across the school yard in Besisahar on a sunny morning recently. One of the most vivid proofs of Nepal’s political transformation

in the past 10 years is the national anthem. The country has gone from war to peace, from monarchy to republic in less than a decade. And here in

Lamjung the transformation is even more apparent: the once sleepy backwater of Besisahar today looks like a boomtown. It is now a trading hub, the staging post for dozens of

Back after 10 years

“When I returned to Nepal last month, the place was once more in political and economic turmoil.”

The most vivid reminder of the passage of time was how much the children had grown. Back in 2005, when I arrived in Besisahar of Lamjung to volunteer in an orphanage the children at the shelter were at my waist level. Now they were as tall as me.



COMMENT
Seulki Lee

Nine of the 16 children I took care of for five months ten years ago are still living in the shelter run by the local community here. They were either victims of the conflict, or had been abandoned by their families and had ended up on the streets. They were not technically orphans, many had mothers who were widowed by war.

Ten years ago, Lamjung was a ghost town. There were dozens of checkpoints along the highway and it took the whole day to travel to Kathmandu. There were few mobile phones. The conflict



BEFORE AND AFTER: Bichod when he was five in 2005 (*left*) and now. Masinu (*right*) ten years ago, and today at 15. Both were abandoned by parents during the conflict.



Raju and Sujana, went to live with their grandmother. The two biggest boys, Kiran and Kesh Ram, left Lamjung for college and work.

I was a 22-year-old student when I first came to Nepal 10 years ago, on a semester break from Chonnam National University in Gwangju, South Korea. I was looking

for a plausible excuse to get away, and do something meaningful with my life.

I had heard of Nepal mainly from mountaineering lore, and fantasised about it. While hiking in Korea, I had met university seniors who were professional mountain climbers. The evening ritual in the tent was to listen to their adventures in Nepal over cups of *soju*.

On 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra staged a military coup to defeat the Maoists once and for all. I got the news as I was about to board the plane at Incheon on my way to Kathmandu and Lamjung. We learnt that the military had cut phone and internet, political leaders, journalists and democracy activists were being arrested.

Along with five other volunteers, we were warned not to go to a troubled country. But for me it was all the more reason to go. The organisation sending us were inspired by democratic achievement and ‘The Miracle of the Han River’ also wanted us to go ahead with the trip.

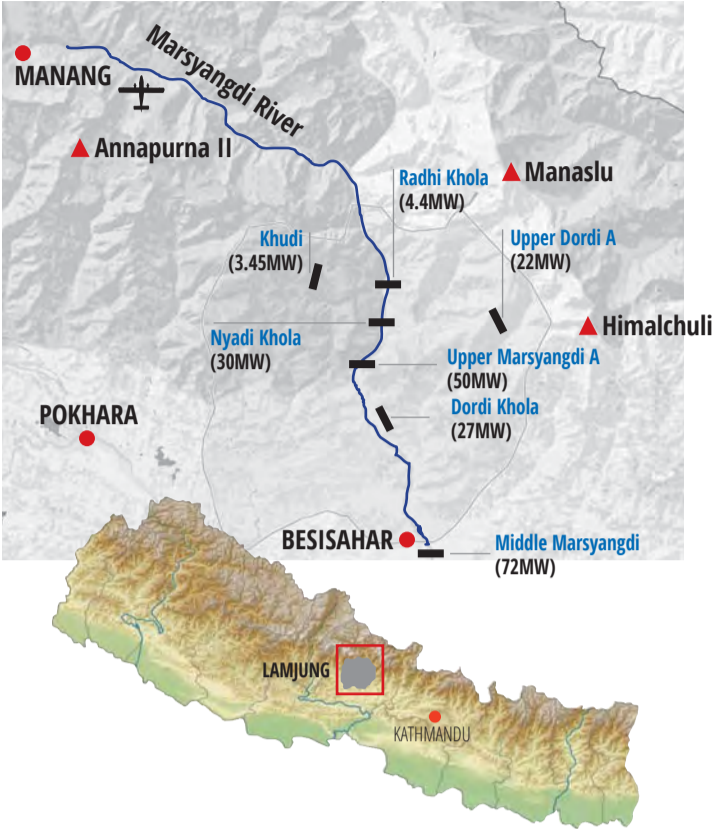
But like many other volunteer experience clichés, Nepal helped me to open my third eye. I learnt more about contemporary history and politics than all my text books and newspapers could teach me. The five months in Nepal launched me in my current profession of journalism.

I returned to my hometown of Gwangju and my university, which were at the epicenter of the famous democracy uprising on 18 May, 1980 and then went on to work in Malaysia and Indonesia.

But such is the pull of Nepal and its people that I have returned to Nepal and to Lamjung. 🇳🇵



LAMJUNG'S HYDRO-ECONOMY



new hydropower projects, and a bustling market on the new highway north to Manang. “Telecommunication, hydropower and the road are the biggest developments in Besisahar after the war,” said Meena Gurung director of Radio Marsyangdi. Indeed, Lamjung was badly affected by the conflict as money for development was diverted to security, and the violence delayed infrastructure projects and drove many out. The end of the conflict revived

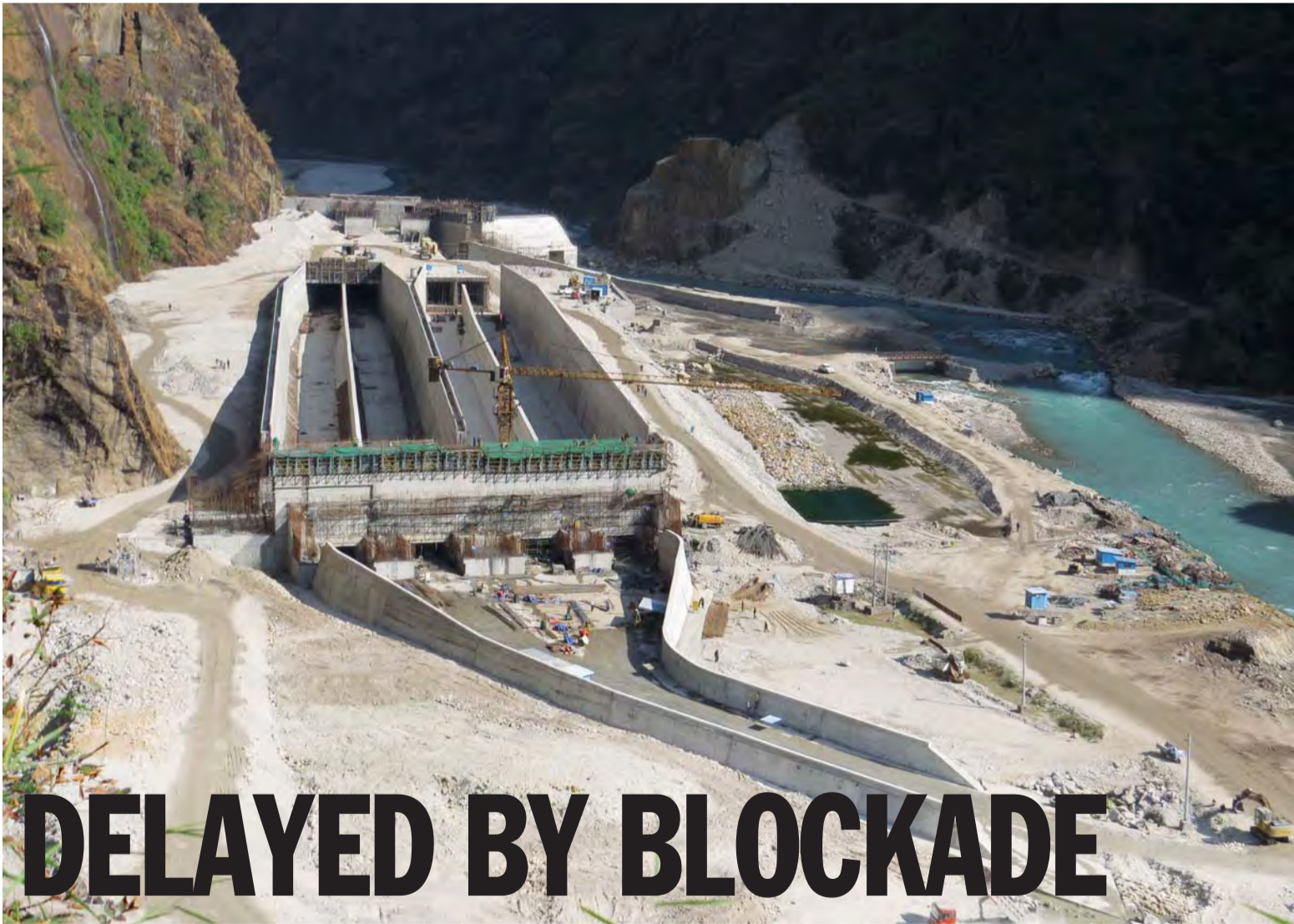
tourism, and despite the negative impact of motorable roads on the Annapurna Circuit, trekkers flocked back. Remittances from migrant workers have also added to the district’s income, and new shopping centres have opened in Besisahar to cater to families with disposable income. Besisahar has also emerged as an education centre with 12 new schools and colleges catering to the needs of high school graduates from the district’s hinterland. Indeed, this once-sleepy town

is looking like a city with tall buildings now blocking the view of snowcapped Lamjung Himal. The Armed Police, which used to patrol with guns ready in pickup trucks, are today trying to regulate the long queues for fuel at petrol stations. The Army, so visible 10 years ago at checkpoints, is nowhere to be seen. “The main engine of Lamjung’s economy is hydropower, and as businessmen we have big hope they will create jobs,” says Ram Kumar Shrestha of the Lamjung

Chamber of Commerce, adding that each 25MW hydropower project employs more than 5,000 local people. In 2005, there were no ATMs in Besisahar, today there are more than 13 regional financial institutions and branches of national banks. “With higher income for hydropower and remittances, Lamjung is being transformed and people have more purchasing power,” said Bhesh Bahadur Pandey, chairman of the Pacific

Development Bank here. The other reason for the growth is that the Dumre-Besisahar road is now jeepable till Braka in Manang, and plans are afoot to widen and pave it. There is hope that after the initial fall in trekking numbers, the road will boost the economies of Lamjung and Manang once the impact of the earthquake and blockade wears off. 

 **nepalitimes.com**
■ Watch video 




DELAYED BY BLOCKADE

LOKMANI RAI

When Prime Minister KP Oli promised to end load-shedding within a year in his first address to the nation last week, he was subjected to a lot of ridicule. However, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) Managing Director Mukesh Raj

Kafle says if the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission line is completed in time ending load-shedding won’t remain a distant dream. The construction of the 400 KV cross-border transmission line is expected to be completed by mid-2016. Through the line the NEA can import additional 90MW electricity from India. But that will reduce load-shedding by only two hours.

Nevertheless, if other small and medium-scale hydropower projects are completed this year, load-shedding can be reduced by five hours. The NEA and independent power producers are likely to complete nine hydropower projects by July next year, adding 160 MW more electricity to the national grid. But independent power producers say they can meet their targets only if they get

sufficient diesel to transport construction materials and operate heavy equipment. They say the government must prioritise hydropower projects on the basis of their progress reports and set aside a diesel quota for the projects nearing completion. The 7 MW Mai Cascade hydropower project, being developed by Sanima Hydropower is almost complete. “We need just 10,000 litres of diesel before we start our test production,” says Sanima’s Subarna Das Shrestha who is also former President of Independent Power Producers Association Nepal (IPPAN). He says hydropower projects that can be completed within this year must be given sufficient diesel if the government is serious about its plan to reduce dependence on petroleum and encourage the use of electric stoves and electric public transport. Despite India’s blockade and the Madhes movement, a total of 1,513 tankers carrying diesel entered into Nepal from mid-September to mid-November, and this represented only 15 per cent of the total national demand. Power producers say this is all the more reason that the limited diesel available should be used to expedite hydropower projects. IPPAN President Khadga Bahadur Bista says: “Some hydropower projects, already delayed by the April-May earthquakes, will have to put off their completion dates due to the shortage of diesel.” The 456 MW Upper Tamakosi, one of Nepal’s largest hydropower projects, was badly hit by the earthquakes. The tremors caused the Tamakosi dam to subside 7cm, delaying test production deadline. The project Chief Bigyan Shrestha says: “We were all set to resume construction work by October, but diesel crisis is now causing further delay.” Tama Kosi requires 50,000 litres of diesel every month for construction, and a prolonged blockade will inevitably delay its completion. 



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The Bottom Line

Friends, Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears. I stand before you today with yet another column that will tangentially, in passing, and in an oblique way mention the Blockade (hereinafter referred to in short as: 'So-called'). I can hear some of you groaning, and muttering under your breath: "Oh, no. Not another so-called column". Let me, as the bigger dude here, issue a veiled threat and remind you that you have no choice but to read this. So, get on with it. What? You are turning to page 2 to read the editorial? OK. Bye.

Many of you have asked me at the various asinine social events this past week: "What is so-called India's bottom line?" My answers are too vulgar to be printed in a family newspaper also read by minors, but I will paraphrase it thus: "£@\$^ and %&~!"

Having valiantly survived the British siege at Nalapani and the previous two Indian blockades in 1989, we Nepalis have developed a siege mentality. Ass licking the Indians never worked, so we try to head butt them every time they close our so-called border. By now, therefore, we are so

used to New Delhi having us in a half-nelson that we are battle hardened. Which is why GONe led by Prime Sinister Oli is not unduly worried about the scarcity of petroleum, hospitals being out of medicines and the country grinding to a halt. Nothing was moving in this country even before this crisis, so there is no question of things coming to a standstill. ('A motion at rest will continue to remain at rest even if it is kicked around': Newton's Third Law of Thermodynamics).

We had rehearsals for fuel lines for decades before this crisis, so this is nothing new. We have also lived without water for the last two decades in our neighbourhood, so there is no reason why we can't carry on without basic items of daily necessity like imported pomegranates. There was hoarding, blackmarket and price gouging even before, and thank goodness for that because without smuggled oil, this country would have gone belly-up long ago. Nepalis avoided going to hospitals to be prescribed



unnecessary and expensive medicines and visited shamans even before this crisis, so the shortage of medicines is a blessing in disguise. Over at the Financing Ministry, they are jubilant that the country's six month standstill means that half of Nepal's annual budget is unspent, and they can now dole it out to party cadre as pocket money.

In Baglung, the local administration decided to distribute limited LPG cylinders through a lottery. And there

are other ingenious ways we are dealing with the hardships. Comrade Bigplop felt that there was too much normalcy on the streets which gave people the wrong impression that the Indian action wasn't hurting us at all. So, in a masterstroke he brought a country already at a standstill to a halt.

Now that Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Intestinal Aerodrome has won this year's CNN Achievement Award for #1 Worstest Airport in Asia, up from #3 last year by beating Pyongyang in DPRK and Wagga Wagga in Papua

New Guinea, let me use this opportunity to congratulate each and every one responsible for this magnificent achievement. It is no mean feat to be the smelliest, dirtiest, rudest, and most anarchic airport when competition in this vast continent of ours is so strong. And yet we made it. For this we owe our collective gratitude especially to the baggage handling gang at TIA for the extra work they put in to make Kathmandu victorious in this year's contest. It was their diligence in dilly-

dallying which ensured that every passenger on the one hour flight from Delhi was made to wait at least three hours for their boxes of induction stoves to arrive on the carousel. And it is very thoughtful of TIA Management to announce plans to put up a barbershop in the arrival concourse because passengers who have waited so long for their checked-in baggage to appear are in need of haircuts. The other reason Triumverate International Airport made it to the top position is that we turned Nepal's aviation gateway into a zoological park by allowing dogs, cats, cows, monkeys, and even wild boars to roam the terminal building and showcase Nepal's rich biodiversity to arriving visitors.

It is, however, too early to rest on our laurels. We cannot be complacent, let our standards slip and allow ourselves to drop from the coveted #1 slot for Worst Airport In Asia in 2016. If that happens, we have no one to blame but so-called India.



The Ass

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