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.

INVEST, INCLUDE, IMPROVE
BETWEEN THE LINES
BY TSERING DOLKER GURUNG
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TEA AND BISCUITS
BY THE WAY
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ONE MORE BEAUTIFUL DESTINATION: DURBAN

EYE IN THE SKY
Post-earthquake, Nepal government cracks down on use of drones
BY HANNAH LEWSLEY
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Calling a Blockade a Spade

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

A month long siege, there are feeble feelers from both sides to fairly obvious where the strings are being pulled from, blockade is entirely the result of anger in the Tarai. It is disquiet about the growing domestic political backlash as against ‘colonial’ Kathmandu are beginning to ring a bit shorter. Madhesi leaders similarly feel their slogans 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 micromanaged 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 thumping 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 vexed in those subtleties of international relations.

The government must reach out to the people 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 Madhesi issue and add more complexity.

Shrancha Ghale

Q. Should the government accept Madhesi Morcha’s demands?


Congratulations to everyone (nominated 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 who keep on disappointing us time and again? (‘I am the hope of’, Bidushi Dhungel, #784?) Unless we give a chance to new people, things won’t turn around for Nepal.

Raghu Shrestha

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’. He can’t disclose his backers then there’s no way we can trust him and his interests.

Mohan Sharma

ENDING AIDS


Bharat Bhushan

Q. Why do we keep voting for the same group of people who keep on disappointing us time and again? (‘I am the hope of’, Bidushi Dhungel, #784?) Unless we give a chance to new people, things won’t turn around for Nepal.

Raghu Shrestha


Bharat Bhushan

Q. Should the government accept Madhesi Morcha’s 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 nationalist chest-thumping is giving way to public anger over shortages. Madhesi leaders similarly feel their slogans are roads, good schools, jobs and a disaster for the people as proven 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 UNESCO 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 putting 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 micromanaged 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 thumping 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 vexed in those subtleties of international relations.
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?

“In the same way 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 the 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 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 Madhesi and janajatis.

What used to be backhanded 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 women 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
The fragile state of the highway to Tibet doesn’t offer much immediate hope in expanding Nepal-China trade

Over the hump

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

HANNAH LEWSLY

Till an hour before David Beckham’s charity football game against school children in Bhaktapur on 6 November, the BIC 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 restrict 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.

“As after the earthquake it was easy for people to collect aerial footage and use it overseas with a potentially negative impact,” explained Subhas Thapa 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.

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. These can be anything from being 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 the government forced small drones to be registered amongst the highest in the world Medecins Sans Frontieres (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 implementation is not public due to those initial sensitivities.”

Survivors meet

Sunsun’s Nepal, a movement that began 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 Sukedhara 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 Gengabu.

For the first time, an outlet was inaugurated by founder, Sangenta Kadiyana. This is Shikhar’s 26th outlet. The Nepali brand manufactures party shoes, sports shoes, office and regular shoes, casual shoes.

Bank of the Year

Standard Chartered Bank Nepal has been awarded the prestigious “Bank of the Year” award at The Banker Awards 2015. The award was announced at a grand gala dinner program held at an award ceremony in London on 2 December.
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 of Tea and biscuits Nepal’s political leadership should be a part of the solution, and not a part of the problem

A visible change To compete with social media, Nepal’s legacy papers need to prioritise visual storytelling

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 MCPN-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 Rasauli border on early morning of 3 November and last 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 safety. 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 two bullet. In any case, Rasauli and Saptari incidents detailed the talks for a month.

Temper 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 Dhansaha next day to address a man meeting instead.

Borberg is a specialist based journalist and photojournalist who was in Nepal last month for the Politiken photo editor-in-chief of Danish newspaper and criticising 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 Maoists to bring the blockage to an end. No one, including young analysts, has not yet come up with a feasible solution for ending the deadlock.

Some demands including that of having more than one administrative languages in a province, giving such 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 redress, but unnecessarily trivialising them or whipping up nationalist sentiment will only result in political chaos, putting fertile grounds for the northern and southern neighbour to further asset themselves in our internal affairs.

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

Ayesha Shyak

I n the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, Sonish Awale was 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 viral. The baby caked in dust being lifted up by rescuers spoke to thousands affected by the earthquake and quickly became a viral.

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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 notorious for being late for the story. “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 in basing our content solely adopting the ‘digital first’ mantra. Despite the flexibility and space on digital platforms, visuals are still sparsely used and often just plugged 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.

A visible change To compete with social media, Nepal’s legacy papers need to prioritise visual storytelling

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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 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.
It is impossible to escape a sense of awe when you look at Youdhishwar 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”.

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.

Each piece is inspired by the title of the books the pages are taken from and carries social and 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 result: exceptional mixed media pieces that Maharjan himself refers to as “repousse-paintings.”

Hannan Lewsley

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

Mixed media

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

LAXMI MURTHY SARITA RAMAMOORTHY 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”.

Drak 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 Drak 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: 12am-5pm
Saturday: 12am-9pm
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 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 Bharatpur.

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

PREVIEW

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

SHOBHA SHARMA runs an NGO and hostel for abandoned children in Hennur, north Bengaluru.
The British School, Sanepa, Free entry
5 December, 3.30 to 4.30pm, 6 to 7pm, and a few classical pieces.

Kathmandu-based choir group Kathmandu Chorale, (01)5522307, parkgallery.com.np
The choir will present its annual holiday concert, featuring an eclectic mix of Christmas songs. Presents its annual holiday concert, with traditional festive biscuits and mulled wine.

Art Fair, An annual art fair showcasing works of 40 artists.
Until 6 December, 10.30am to 6pm, Park Gallery, Pulchok, Lalitpur, (01)4522077, parkgallery.com.np
A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT).

Migrant voices, An attempt to document the life stories of Nepali women migrants working in the informal sector in India. (see pages B9-10)
until 10 December, Nepal Art Council, Babor Motel, (01)4420735

French cinema, Screening of the film Une vie de chat (A Cat in Paris) by Alain Gagnol 17 December, 5.30pm, AllianceFrancaise, Tejo Aroad, (01)4420832, aclaffrenchoffice.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).

Photography workshop, Level 1 workshop for aspiring photographers, organised by Artstudio. 13 December, 7am to 9am, Rs 4000, Artstudio, Chitwan Hospital Road, Sauraha, register: 9851170/9867797777

Quiz Night, Sal’s Pizza hosts weekly quiz contests. Every Monday, 7pm, Lupin’s (behind the Indian Embassy), 9817570179

Maan Nam, Enjoy a nice cuppa coffee in the lush garden or try out your golfing skills. Noon (across the road from Bhadresvari Supermarket), (01)4270355

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

KANTA dAbdAb, This musical trio combines sitar, percussion and bass to create a soulful fusion groove.
19 December, 6pm, Biso Combo, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, Rs 300

Joint Family Internationale, The Kathmandu-based reggae group will be performing live.
6 December, 7pm to 9pm, Biso Combo, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, Rs 300

The mixtapes, For an evening of 90s tunes - from Britpop to Grunge, ending at Ska and Funk.
12 December, 7pm, House of Music, Arnil Marg, Thamel, Rs 300

Bipul Chhetri Live, Celebrated singer Bipul Chhetri will perform for the third time in Kathmandu. 15 December, 2pm onwards, Sano Gphone Arena, Grameenwah

Santa Express package, Spend the holidays in Pokhara. For details: (01)4420252/4420299

Kasara Resort, A luxury resort located in the lush setting of the Chitwan National Park. For those who value their privacy and prefer a more secluded stay, Kasara offers two private villas with private pools.
Chitwan: (01)4443571/4441851, kasara@kfas.com.np

Kantha Sarangi Gau ko Katha (The story of Sarangi Village) by Kishor Anurag.
13 December, 7am to 9am, Rs 4000, Artstudio, Chitwan Hospital Road, Sauraha, register: 9851170/9867797777

Photography workshop, Level 1 workshop for aspiring photographers, organised by Artstudio. 13 December, 7am to 9am, Rs 4000, Artstudio, Chitwan Hospital Road, Sauraha, register: 9851170/9867797777


Nepali women migrants working in the informal sector in India. (see pages B9-10)

International Mountain Film Festival. Over 80 films from 25 countries will be shown at this year’s Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival. 10 to 14 December, Kumari Hall, (01)4427055

Kantipur Times, Special offer.

Put your body, mind, and spirit in harmony.
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.

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 Kathmandha.

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 things without being exploitative?

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 language assistant 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 an avalanche. The Sherpas effectively cancelled the season, and in doing so, proved to themselves, and the world that the Sherpa/Foreign 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 endlessly supply of people wanting to climb it, I hope we have presented a side to the mountain that makes people look 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 Sherpa to take. Jen 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 Sherpas 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.

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.

Telling the Sherpa story

The 13th Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival opens next week

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 Bhagyalal Bachakharu (Nepal Earthquake: Heroes, Survivors and Miracles), a documentary film by Ganesh Panday. A short-film competition ‘Seismic Shift’ focusing on the experiences of Nepalis 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.

As in the past, the festival will include discussion forums, guest lectures, photo exhibition and installation art projects. Folk-rock star Amit Gurung and Nepali 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
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, 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 defied 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 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.

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MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

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No permits for e-buses

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 in Nagarik, 25 November

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.

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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 Besishahar 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.

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 had caused great human suffering and an economic crisis.

Seven of the children I had looked after had left. Eight-year-old boy Laxmi died after a bout of diarrhoea in 2007. Surendra and Rosan, sons of a soldier killed in action had gone back to their relatives. The sons of a Maoist guerrilla killed during the war, Raju and Sujan, 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 in South Korea 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 epicentre 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.
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 snow-capped 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 230 MW 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 Bresh Bahadur Pandey, chairman of the Pacific Development Bank here.

The other reason for the growth is that the Dumre-Besisahar road is now jearable 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.

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 Kaffe 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 90 MW 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 this 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 the country’s 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 Khashga 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 Tamakoshi, one of Nepal’s largest hydropower projects, was badly hit by the earthquakes. The tremors caused the Tamakoshi 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.

LAMJUNG’S HYDRO-ECONOMY

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 Accidently delayed, the 90 MW Kali Gandaki B project, one of the nation’s biggest hydropower projects, was badly hit by the April-May earthquakes. The tremors caused the Kali Gandaki B dam to subside 2.2cm, delaying test production deadline. The project Chief Bharat 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.

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).

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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 Kaffe 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 90 MW 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.

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Tama Kosi requires 50,000 litres of diesel every month for construction, and a prolonged blockade will inevitably delay its completion.
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 antinus 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: ”888$ 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 Minister 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 standoff 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 Biglip 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 Wagge 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 Trinumverate 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.