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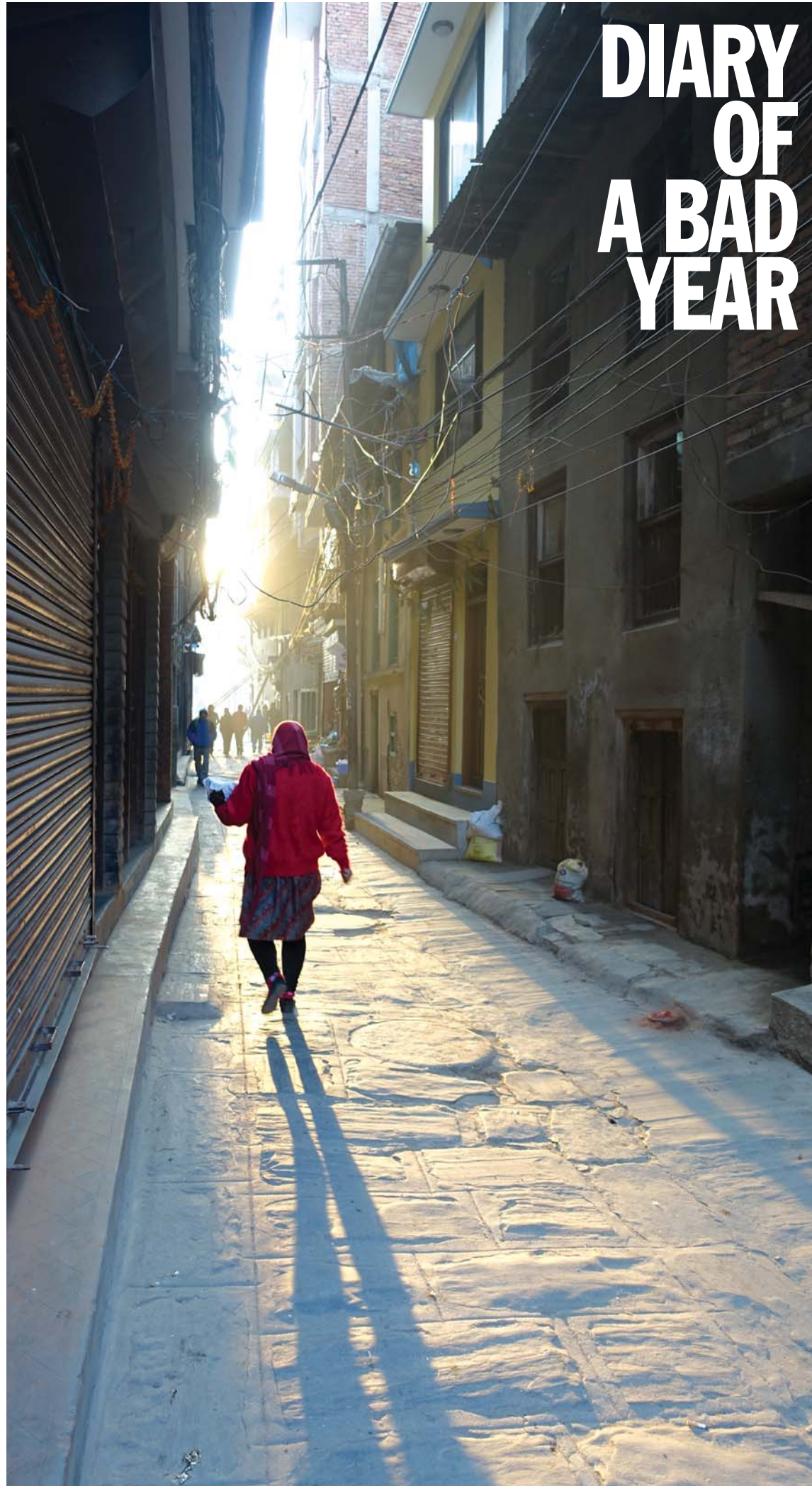
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DIARY OF A BAD YEAR



EELUM DIXIT

From runway blockage to Indian blockade, it has been a horrible year. In March, the country's only international airport was closed for four days by an airliner obstructing the runway.

That happened at the beginning of spring, dislocating the tourism industry. And at the peak of the trekking season on 25 April central Nepal was shaken by a devastating earthquake that killed nearly 9,000 people.

Then came the political disaster in the aftermath of a fast-track constitution that set the Tarai on fire. The violence has killed more than 60 people since August, and ended up being a border blockade supported by New Delhi.

NOTHING LEFT TO SAY EDITORIAL PAGE 2

all need a safe landing. India needs to show that it wasn't imposing a blockade, the Madhesi parties are under pressure from hardliners in the field and the Nepal government is being blamed for not sorting this out earlier.

Nepal is reeling under a humanitarian disaster that is surprisingly being ignored by the rest of the world. Nepal's 28 million people are affected, but the plight of two million homeless earthquake survivors is much worse.

There is hope that 2016 will be better, but the impact of the blockade on Nepal's economy and development process will take much longer than that to heal.

YEARS OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

BY THE WAY BY ANURAG ACHARYA PAGE 14

WORST YEAR EVER

ONE TO MANY BY BIDUSHI DHUNGEL PAGE 14

DECIDING TO DE-ESCALATE

COMMENT BY KANAK MANI DIXIT PAGE 15

SURVIVORS

Nepali Times goes back to meet some of the people it profiled in 2015

PAGE 10-11

Because of the holiday season this issue of *Nepali Times* does not include the weekly edition of *China Daily*.

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NOTHING LEFT TO SAY

Excerpts of selected editorials from 2015

JANUARY

In previous Himalmedia Public Opinion Surveys conducted annually for the past 12 years, respondents used to be hopeful about the future. This time, let down once more, they were uncharacteristically apathetic and despondent. Never has there been such a wide gap between what the politicians say they want and what the people are interested in. In fact, more than 40% of the people couldn't care less what kind of constitution is passed. More shockingly, an overwhelming 80% reject federalism based on ethnicity.

16-22 January 2015 #741

FEBRUARY

There were all kinds of predictions that if the deadline of 22 January for a new constitution was not met the country was doomed. Two weeks later we are still chugging along. Negotiations have come to a halt, the political discourse has got more belligerent, and each side is waiting for the other to blink first — but no one seems particularly bothered by it. The people, who didn't have much faith left in the leaders anyway, are struggling to survive amidst much more immediate concerns of shortages of gas, electricity, water, petrol. There is almost a sense of relief that a looming confrontation over a constitution that will satisfy nobody has once more been put off.

6-12 February 2015 #744

MARCH

Just like it took four days to get an Airbus out of the mud at Kathmandu airport last week, Nepal's constitution is also proving to be a difficult one to get unstuck. And just as the jet averted a bigger disaster, perhaps by holding back a fatally flawed constitution we may actually have avoided a major upheaval. After nearly two months of not being in speaking terms, the various political formations in the country are holding preliminary talks about resuming talks. All sides have now vented off steam, there has been a lot of chest-thumping, sabre-rattling and name-calling. All have been suitably chastised by public disgust, and our impatient southern neighbour also seems to be twisting some tails.

13-19 March 2015 #749

APRIL

The effort to complete the peace process by passing a new constitution and giving the country's economic development new balance and momentum is faltering. Some of the earlier goals of the revolution for a more inclusive democracy through 'ethnic liberation' have turned out to be empty



slogans. It's plain old vote-bank politics masquerading as ethnic and regional autonomy.

Most Nepalis have seen through this, but there are still some in the international community who hold on to the misconception that this is really a struggle for inclusion, identity and autonomy. Nothing could be further from the truth, and we can't wake up someone who is pretending to sleep. However, both our big neighbours seem to be perfectly aware of the prospect of Nepal becoming unstable and affecting their national interest if we adopt the current formula of federalism in the new constitution.

3-9 April 2015 #752

MAY

What undermined our ability to deal promptly and adequately with post-earthquake search, rescue and relief was first and foremost a failure of politics. Earthquakes have tectonic origins and we call them 'natural disasters', but the devastation and loss of life they cause are often man-made. And the primary reason for such lethal negligence lies in politics – too much of it, or too little. When you have too much politics, it means elected officials spend so much time clawing at each other to get to power and plunder resources. When there is too little politics in a democracy, it erodes the accountability of elected officials. Nepal currently suffers from both: too much politics at the national level, and too little politics at the grassroots where we haven't had local elections for 18 years.

1-7 May 2015 #756

JUNE

Like Krishna Mandir, Nepal is standing but needs more support. After speaking to officials and donors, we get the feeling money is not a problem as long as the government demonstrates the capacity for equitable, impartial and effective disbursement of housing grants and subsidies. Unfortunately, the government's track record on compensation for conflict victims doesn't bode well for post-quake reconstruction. Since perception is reality, and since trust in government's transparency and accountability is so low, it is all the more urgent and important that the reconstruction agency be headed by a credible team that is apolitical, competent and (above all) honest.

19-25 June 2015 #763

JULY

This was never a government that could multi-task. Now, three months on after the earthquake and one month after the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction, attention has shifted to getting a constitution over and done with. The reason for the rush is that the top four parties are in a hurry to get into government so (we presume) they can have their hands in the honeypot of the reconstruction budget. Earthquake relief has dropped off the media radar. Hundreds of thousands of people will require emergency food aid, medical attention and cash to rebuild in the coming months. All the government gives them now is assurances. The message seems to be: "Don't bother us, we have to get the constitution done."

24-30 July 2015 #768

AUGUST

The lesson from the Kailali killings on 24 August is never to leave maps in the hands of politicians. Never mix politics with boundaries. Demarcation is a technical subject with implications for viability that is best left to experts.

Politicians just mess it up with vote-bank politics and short-term time horizons. For immediate firefighting, top leaders from all parties and groups must find a way that doesn't involve more bloodshed.

28 Aug - 3 Sep 2015 #773

SEPTEMBER

Writing an inclusive, democratic constitution was supposed to be the final chapter in the country's peace process, which has now lasted nearly as long as the conflict. In the past decade, Nepal has gone from war to peace, from a monarchy to republic, the former guerrillas have been disarmed and demobilised and some integrated into the national army to serve in UN peacekeeping. Under fire for delayed earthquake relief, politicians in Kathmandu tried to redeem themselves by putting constitution-writing on a "fast track" to show voters that they were not completely feckless. However, the draft they rushed to the Assembly had major flaws: clauses treated women as second class citizens, it left loopholes to muzzle the media, and didn't satisfy the demands for greater autonomy from the leaders of the Madhesi and other marginalised ethnicities.

11-17 September 2015 #775

OCTOBER

It is surprising that the world's largest democracy and the United Nations have been so grudging in accepting this as a document that, while flawed, ended years of deadlock and can be the basis of an inclusive and durable constitution. To express its misgivings about the constitution, India has obstructed the flow of food, fuel and goods entering Nepal, hoping that the hardships the Nepali people are forced to suffer will compel Nepal's rulers to buckle. What is hard to understand is why all the needless lies and deception? How does a thinly veiled border blockade help India's national interest anyway? The move is foolish on so many levels that even sections of the international community, which had in recent years sub-contracted their Nepal policy to New Delhi, are aghast.

2-8 October 2015 #778

NOVEMBER

India expects us to wave the white flag. Our leaders are waving the national flag. Neither is a way out. Sooner or later (the sooner, the better) this blockade will come to an end. It must. It is aberrant, illegal, destabilising and detrimental to the longterm national interests of both India and Nepal. Of more immediate humanitarian concern is the effect that the blockade is having on the delivery of relief and construction material to nearly 2 million survivors of the earthquake so they can rebuild before a harsh Himalayan winter. This is an unfolding and ongoing disaster, and unlike the earthquake is completely human induced.

6-12 November 2015 #782

DECEMBER

One aspect of the 18-week-long Indian blockade of Nepal that has always baffled us is why New Delhi would want to inflict such harm on a little neighbour, and to a lesser degree, on itself. There are many theories about what 'India' really hopes to achieve with this siege, and it is unclear if India itself knows what India wants. Or maybe, as some have suggested, India is unwilling to divulge what it really wants. But we don't need India to wreck our country, Nepal's politicians are doing it just fine.

18-24 December 2015 #787

Times

THIS WEEK

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We don't need India to wreck our country, Nepal's politicians are doing it just fine.
(28 shares)

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Rough Guide to Nepal, Ass
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Most popular on Twitter
Bordering on helplessness by Xiaotong Xu and Siran Liang
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The enemy within, Editorial (3,940 views)


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Dousing the flames by Anurag Acharya (11 comments)

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From aid to investment

In the last 60 years South Korea has turned from a recipient of foreign aid to a donor. Today, bilateral cooperation between South Korea and Nepal involves overseas development assistance, growing tourism and the role of its migrant workers in Korea becoming a major source of remittances for Nepal.

KOICA (Korean International Cooperation Agency) has been extending its activities in Nepal in health, education and agriculture with an annual outlay of \$13 million, while trade has grown to \$50 million. With little geostrategic interest in Nepal, Korean overseas development assistance has been more altruistic than most other bilateral help to the country.



SEULKI LEE

Nepal, however, is slowly changing its image in Korea as an aid recipient country to a destination for Korean investment. Korean investors are literally testing the waters to tap

Nepal's potential for investment in hydropower first through aid credit and later with commercial investment.

Three examples of this experimental period are

NEW RELATIONS: Korean and Nepali participants at the 4th Nepal-Korea Business Night at Shanker Hotel earlier this month.

Chameliya Hydropower (30MW), Upper Trishuli I (216MW), and Upper Modi project (42MW). In an interview with *Nepali Times* South Korean Ambassador Choe Yong Jin (*below*) says, "We need one successful example to attract Korean investment to Nepal."

Among the three, Chameliya hydropower project in Nepal's far west follows the traditional 'aid credit assistance' category. Chameliya is a tributary of the Mahakali River on Nepal's western border with India and is expected to boost development in the neglected region. The Korea-

Nepal joint venture involves KHNP (Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power) that produces nearly one-third of Korea's total power supply. However, the project has been plagued by delays, allegations of corruption, mismanagement and lately by the fuel crisis.

Upper Trishuli 1 is a much bigger project and falls under the category of Korean 'commercial investment'. Located just 70km north of Kathmandu, the project will increase Nepal's current electricity capacity by 20 per cent. The Korean partner is KSEP (Korea South East Power) the largest shareholder with the participation of leading Korean construction companies and a local investor.  *Seulki Lee*

"Hope Nepal's difficulties end soon"

Korean ambassador to Nepal, Choe Yong Jin, spoke to *Nepali Times* about the potential for post-earthquake reconstruction, and the potential for tourism, trade and Korean investment in Nepal.



GOPEN RAI

Nepali Times: What is the priority in South Korean development assistance to Nepal?

Choe Yong Jin: The South Korean government has designated 24 overseas development assistance countries, and Nepal is one of them. Mainly the assistance is through KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency) and the priorities were set by the two governments in health, education and agriculture. The volume of assistance has been increasing continuously since 2010, and currently amounts to \$13 million a year. The Korean people feel more sympathy to the need of assistance to Nepal since the ties between Korea and Nepal has become stronger with more frequent people-to-people exchanges.

How is the South Korean government involved in post-quake reconstruction?

The Korean government immediately provided emergency relief supplies equivalent to \$650,000 dollars including 640 tents, 2,400 blankets and dispatched 48 members of the Korean Disaster Relief Team and a medical team to Nepal. It also provided emergency financial support worth \$500,000 dollars through the International Federation of Red Cross as well as UNOCHA.

Furthermore, the Korean government pledged \$10 million for post-earthquake rehabilitation of Nepal. It handed over 24 pieces of heavy equipment worth \$1.6 million for debris clearance. The remaining money will be utilised to help rebuild a district hospital and health posts. The construction has been delayed due to the

obstruction at the Nepal-India border and the delay in setting up the Reconstruction Authority.

The facilitated transportation in border areas as well as the early set-up of the Reconstruction Authority is important to expedite rebuilding. I hope the current difficulties will end soon with the wisdom of all stakeholders involved.

What has been the experience of Korean companies in hydropower projects in Nepal?

I believe that the participation of the Korean companies will make substantial contribution to coping with the shortage of electricity in Nepal. Currently, Korean companies have been engaged in Chameliya Hydropower project, Upper Trishuli I and Upper Modi Project. If these projects are completed successfully,

potential Korean investors will be more interested in investment in Nepal.

But Chameliya and Upper Trishuli 1 are delayed. What are the issues?

The big amount of electricity to be produced by Upper Trishuli I will benefit many Nepalis in future. The construction of the road leading up to the project will also give Rasuwa district access. It is now necessary to conclude the PDA as well as PPA as soon as possible to start construction. The negotiation between NEA and international consortium including KOSEP (Korea South East-Power Co) has lingered for a couple of years on the PPA rate. Given the urgency of the project and the international standard, it is high time for NEA to give more flexibility to the negotiation.

As far as Chameliya is concerned, it was suspended due to a corruption scandal and several variations by a Chinese company. It is again being delayed due to the shortage of fuel and cement from India in Nepal. I hope that the difficulties will end soon.

Are there plans to increase the number of Nepali workers in Korea?

At present, 15 countries including Nepal are sending workers under EPS System. Nepal started to send workers based on the MOU signed between government of South Korea and Nepal in 2007. In 2015, Nepal received a quota of 5,300 which ranks second.

Korean employers prefer Nepali workers, and if the rate of illegal stay is maintained at a low level more Nepali workers will get jobs in Korea.

What potential do you see for tourism growth?

There are 30,000 Korean tourists visiting Nepal every year, and this is increasing. The attraction for Koreans is not only because of Lumbini but also for trekking. Moreover, Korean Air offers direct flight between Seoul and Kathmandu twice a week. Koreans come here for pilgrimage and spiritual healing and they are drawn by Nepal's natural and pristine beauty.

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■ Video of interview



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The wreckage of 2015

The April earthquake was followed by an even more devastating economic upheaval



GOPEN RAI

SIRAN LIANG

For Nepal the past four months under the border blockade has been an economic earthquake, leaving most businesses and industries in ruins, consumers and investors reeling.

In September, the country was just beginning to recover from the earthquake, and indeed experts had forecast sharp growth as reconstruction money kick-started the economy, when the Madhes agitation and the Indian blockade dashed all hopes.

“It’s a totally disastrous situation,” says Saurabh Jyoti whose factories in the Simara-Birganj corridor have been shut since August. The Jyoti Group is into steel, oxygen, textiles and represents Honda and Phillips in the Nepal market. “The stock is zero and sales are nil,” Jyoti summed it up.

Prominent Nepali industrialists estimate that the blockade did not only ruin Nepal’s trade but lowered long-term confidence of both the consumers and investors home and abroad. Even more worrying is the rise in an

informal economy dominated by smuggling of fuel and essentials that will have far-reaching consequences for government revenue in future, they say.

The decrease in consumer sentiment has affected everything from services to manufacturing to media. The blockade has put nearly 200,000 people out of work, and the shortages of food fuel and price hikes even when they are available means that the middle class is spending all its disposable income on essentials.

“The mood of most businesses is very low, many are withholding new investment and are just trying to consolidate,” says industrialist Shekhar Golchha who is also vice-president of FNCCI.

The blockade hit hardest at a time when auto and consumer electronic companies used to do most of their sales during Dasain-Tihar festivals. Business this year was down by 60 per cent. The blockade has also seriously eroded the investment climate, which was already not in good shape because of the political instability.

In a meeting at the Finance Ministry last week, Nepal-based multinationals and business

chambers said consumer confidence was at an all-time low. In order to ride out this crisis and to just pay salaries, some are taking loans from the banks which happen to be flush with cash.

The tourism industry, which had taken a direct hit after the earthquake, has been further affected by the fuel crisis. Benasir Khan Shrestha of Turkish Airlines in Kathmandu said the operator was reducing its frequency from daily to four times a week. Other airlines make unscheduled refueling stops because their planes can’t tank up in Kathmandu.

“With this crisis, we’re not able to promote Nepal at all, we need this crisis to end,” Shrestha told *Nepali Times*.

The tourism slump has hit Pokhara hard with hotels, restaurants, adventure sports companies and everyone dependent on it affected badly. However, Biplob Paudel of Hotel Barahi sees the signs of hope: “The crisis has at least raised the awareness of the local people about standing up on our own feet. We have to be better prepared for tomorrow.”

The economic slump has affected the media industry as well. Although readership has gone up, advertising revenue has been wiped out, and media companies are taking a direct hit. Joydeb Charkavarty of J Walter Thomson Nepal told *Nepali Times* last week: “No one is buying non-essentials, if it is so difficult to find fuel for a motorbike why would you want to buy a new motorbike?”

Remittance earnings from Nepali migrant workers abroad is keeping the economy afloat for now, and there is a belief that Nepal can come out stronger if the government learns its lessons.

Says Shekhar Golchha: “We will probably recover faster from this crisis than we think because of the unbelievable strength of the Nepali people.”



5 more kgs

Shivam Cement has launched its new scheme ‘Pachaas kai daam ma pachanna kg’ under which buyers of the Cement will now get an additional 5kg cement in each 50kg sack at the initial price. The company has rolled out the scheme throughout the country for a limited time period.

Declaring dividends

After a recent board meeting, NIC ASIA Bank has decided to recommend a dividend of Rs 41.05 per share for the year 2014/15. The suggestion is subject to the approval of Nepal Rastra Bank and the Bank’s Annual General Meeting. The meeting also decided to issue 4:1 right share after obtaining approval from the Annual General Meeting.



Celebrating 21

Nabil Bank’s Employees’ Association held its 21st Annual Celebrations recently. The event was organised to honor retired employees and also included a community blood donation program.

It was attended by chairman of the Directors’ Committee, Shambhu Prasad Poudel and chairman of the Employees’ Association, Puran Bahadur Bhaat.

Murray wins trophy

Andrew Murray won the Surya Nepal Gokarna Monthly Medal at Gokarna Golf Club on Saturday. Ten handicap golfer Murray scored five-under 67 nett to win the trophy. Fourteen handicapper, Bejoy Moktan scored four-under 68 to finish second in the tournament while Gaurav Shah was third with two-under 70 nett.



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POKHARA LOOKS TO 2016

XIAOTONG XU and **SIRAN LIANG** in POKHARA

It is mid-afternoon here at Lakeside in Pokhara, but there is no hustle-bustle in the tourist strip that would have been crowded with visitors during this holiday season.

Tourist arrivals have dropped by more than 60 per cent compared to the previous year, and passenger arrivals at Pokhara airport also show a 32 per cent decrease.

Although it wasn't affected by the earthquake, the town saw a huge drop in arrivals and it was just beginning to recover when the blockade hit three months ago.

"Those who weren't scared by the earthquake have been put off by the current crisis," says Kiran Tuladhar of Atithi Resort.

The sharpest increase in tourist arrivals has been in visitors from China, but they have seen a drop as well.

Wenyu Gong who runs the Go to Nepal Travel Agency says even the clients who have come, mainly from South China, are not satisfied with the facilities and service.

To mark the winter solstice this week Gong wanted to prepare an elaborate meal for her clients, but was forced to cut down on the celebrations due to a scarcity of supplies. Most of her clients also express their disappointment with the quality of infrastructure, garbage and pollution.

Despite this, tourism entrepreneurs are hopeful about Pokhara's future and say they will ride out the crisis. Biplob Paudel of the Hotel Association of Nepal believes the key to Pokhara's future development is the new regional international airport. Pokhara's tourism industry has been lobbying hard for the construction of the new airport, languishing for 30 years, to be revived.

But work still hasn't started on the \$215 million project that has been contracted to a Chinese company.

"Once China and Nepal sign the final loan agreement, this project will be completed within four years," says Project Director Pradeep Adhikari.

Adhiraki sees a prosperous future not only for Pokhara but Nepal in general, and adds: "Direct air connectivity to Pokhara will definitely foster tourism with increased tourist arrivals to Nepal."

With the opening of the airport, more than 70 per cent of tourists who visit Nepal is expected to come to Pokhara. Mandarin-speaking tour guide Jiwan Giri shares the same expectations saying Pokhara has all the things Chinese tourists love: snow mountain, hills, lake, a pleasant climate, jungle, waterfall and river with dozens of outdoor adventures and recreational activities.

"People who love Pokhara will come despite all odds," says Giri whose company is one of few still receiving visitors from mainland China.

Despite the doom and gloom, Pokhara businessmen are optimistic. Proof of that is Biplob Paudel who owns Hotel Barahi and is planning to build another high-end hotel in Pokhara. He says: "I believe in the future of Pokhara."

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XIAOTONG XU

Up in the air

Twenty four-year-old Shiyu Liu fell in love with Pokhara after watching the Chinese film *Up in the Wind* that was largely shot in this lake town. Just as the lead actress in the movie, Liu dreams of soaring above Phewa Lake shoulder-to-shoulder with the Annapurnas.

However, the Chinese student who was planning to visit Nepal this winter has decided to put her trip on hold deterred by the earthquake and blockade.

Paragliding companies operated more than 100 flights daily before the earthquake, the number is down to 20. More than 30 companies offer paragliding in Pokhara, and competition to attract the fewer number of customers has resulted in undercutting. While the price for a person per tandem flight used to be fixed at Rs 8,500, some companies go down to as much as Rs 5,500, inviting disapproval from colleagues in the profession.

"You pay less, you play with life," warns one paragliding pilot, "we haven't lowered our price because we provide the

best service, have professional pilots, and reliable equipment."

To keep their businesses afloat, some have implemented pay cuts for staff. Paragliding companies have been forced to reduce staff salaries by 20 per cent, but say they will not let the downturn in business affect safety.

"The fuel crisis has definitely made the situation worse," admits Sabina Bastola of FlyNepal Paragliding as an unscheduled power cut shut down her computer while she was preparing video CDs for customers who had just completed their jump. She had to make them wait another 15 minutes after turning the generator on.

Despite the gloom and glitches, for Chinese tourist Winnie Wu (*pic, above*) who is visiting with her family, the trip has been worth it. She says: "When I saw Machapucchre up close and the deep blue sky, my trip to Nepal was worth all the trouble."

Xiaotong Xu and Siran Liang

Keep 'em coming



XIAOTONG XU

Chinese businessman Jiansong Zhan (*pic*) came to Pokhara 14 years ago, and never left. He runs a restaurant in the Lakeside area, and is also the president of Pokhara Overseas Chinese Association that was set up this year by fellow-Chinese entrepreneurs.

Along with tourists Pokhara has seen an increasing number of Chinese investors. Private investment from Chinese businesses has crossed over Rs 240 million, and most are in the hospitality business.

"To open a travel agency you require Rs 1.6 million, a restaurant would need Rs 6.4 million, a hotel could range from Rs 9.6 million to Rs 16 million," explains Zhan breaking down the capital requirement to start a new business in the city.

Like most Pokhara businesses, Zhan's restaurant has suffered huge losses this year. Business is down by 90 per cent, but he is already planning a new venture with few other interested investors.

"We plan to develop some new

business to stimulate the market," he says, "but our efforts will be futile if customers don't come at all." Like him, Zhan's friends in China are still interested in investing in Pokhara even after a disastrous year.

Many here say negative media coverage is to be blamed for keeping away investors. "When investors see a place in crisis, it's unlikely that they would take the risk to invest," says Wenyu Gong of Go to Nepal Travel Agency, "Businessmen go after high return on capitals."

Last September, the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents invited several overseas media including Hong Kong-based One TV Media Global, to visit Nepal and write stories about the country. The TV station has already broadcasted its special on Nepal, the impact of which is yet to be seen.

Xiaotong Xu and Siran Liang

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Live Music By : Special Guest
Date: 31st Dec 2015

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EVENTS



Holiday Specials

A selection of the choicest places in and around Kathmandu to celebrate your Christmas and New Year's:

Annapurna's Wonderland
Hotel Annapurna's carnival includes face painting, cookie decorations, bouncy castles and games for children.
24-25 December
Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg
Free entrance



Hyatt Regency
Options of New year's eve set dinner, dinner buffet and New year's day brunch at Rs 6,999, Rs 5,999 and Rs 2,999 respectively.
Hyatt Regency, Baudha, (01)4491234

Club Himalaya
Celebrate New Year's eve above the clouds in Nagarkot's most famous hotel. Package includes accommodation, appetisers, gala dinner, mid-night snacks, brunch and in-house DJ.
Rs 12,000 nett , 31 December,
Club Himalaya, Nagarkot, (01)4442726



Hotel Shangri-la
On Christmas Day, enjoy Shangri-la's Starry Night BBQ with live performance by Ciney Gurung.
25 December, 7pm onwards
Hotel Shangri la, Lajimpat
Rs 2,000, (01)4412999

North Face Kathmandu Ultra,
Challenging running events from 12km to 80km in the Shivapuri National Park.
2 January
Registration: North Face store (Sherpa Adventure Outlet), Tridevi Marg, (01)4445101

Dog on the ramp,
Nepal's first ever dog fashion show.
26 December, 12pm onwards,
Lainchaur Table Tennis Hall
Ticket charges from Rs 300 to Rs 1,000.
Registration: 9818279506

Discussing Karnali,
A discussion: are NGOs in Karnali a progenitor of progress or of dependency?
29 December, 3 to 4.30 pm
Martin Chautari, Thapathali, (01)4238050



Sekuwa fest,
Celebrate the new year's with delicious food and live music at Baje Ko Sekuwa
31 December to 1 January, 5pm onwards
Battisputali, Sorhakhutte and Lajimpat
(01)4492130, (01)4354105, (01)4441672

Donate a blanket,
Sasto Deal is collecting funds to buy blankets for people in Gorkha, Dhading and Sindhupalchok.
www.sastodeal.com/page/donate-a-blanket

Tansen Ultra 2015,
Don't miss the downhill, urban cross-country and trail running races for both amateurs and professionals
Registration: www.gnarlybiking.com/tansen/register
26 December



DINING



Chez Caroline,
Authentic ambience, exquisite French food, glorious sunshine and more.
Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4263070

Downtown,
Besides a not-to-forget biryani, this cafe offers excellent hot and sour soup in a pretty lengthy 'blockade menu'.
Pulchok Road, Patan, (01)5010751

Roadhouse Cafe,
For the best wood-fired pizzas in town.
Thamel, (01)4260187



Manny's,
Head down for some delicious Corn Fritters, Pad Thai Noodles, Crispy Crunch Potatoes and don't forget their signature Manny's Spicy Wings. All served with fine hospitality in an excellent space.
Jawalakhel, (01)5536919



Newa Lahana,
Authentic Newari flavours with killer views of surrounding Macchegaun and towering Chandragiri hill.
Kirtipur

MUSIC



Metal mania,
Metal Mania is back after a 10-year hiatus.
26 December, 12 pm to 6pm,
Avocado Restaurant and Bar, Pani pokhari



Guitar Fest 2016,
A guitar competition for all music lovers.
Auditions from 18 to 28 January,
Sushila Arts Academy, 9849040554

Music for change,
Singing for change in the streets of Basantapur.
25 December, 1pm onwards,
Contact: 9803751776

Underside,
Head-bang in this winter tour of the Underside.
Club 25 hours, Tangal,
2 January, 2pm onwards

GETAWAYS

Shangri-la Pokhara
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Barahi Jungle Lodge,
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Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01)4411113,
bjl@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com



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Thai Ghar

This week, as minimum temperature fell to low single digits in Kathmandu, we strolled through Jhamsikhel looking for a place that would serve us some delicious hot food and a menu not limited by the current blockade.

Tucked away in a dimly-lit backstreet, smack opposite the popular bar Moksh, Thai Ghar, is a two-storey modern restaurant offering some of the best Thai cuisine in town.

We chose to dine on the second floor from where we could overlook the band performing a floor below as we ate.

Asking the waiter for recommendations turned out to be futile as he began listing every



item on the menu. So we started safe with Som Tam Thai (Rs 275), the famous Thai-style papaya salad which is made from unripe, sliced green papaya mixed with fish sauce and lemon juice. The salad here was garnished with dry shrimp, peanuts and red chillies. The hot and sour flavour of the sauces worked beautifully with the crunch of the fresh papaya and the nuts provided a nice crispy texture to the dish.

Next, we ordered Koeyteow Tom Yam seafood soup noodles (Rs 575) which came red, steaming,



and looked appetising. We couldn't wait to take a sip. Its sour tastes did not cloy, and its key ingredients, lemon grass, galangal, kaffir lime leaves, dried chilies and lime juice, made for an excellent winter dish. We loved the fresh shrimps and rice noodles, but the dish would be even better if it were spicier.

After days of eating Indian curries, we wanted a different taste and ordered KaengKhiao Wan (Rs 475), a coconut green curry spiced with Thai basil. There are four choices for this



one: chicken, pork, tofu and buff. The light, sweet curry mixed with bamboo shoot, eggplant and potato gave the dish a delicious flavour. The coconut curry was excellent.

What was as impressive (or maybe more) as the food was the musical trio, Triples. From *Hey Jude* to *Rolling in the Deep*, the band with their remix of old and modern classics and experiments

with acoustic guitar, flute, and African drums provided good entertainment for its hungry clients.

It was clear that the restaurant paid attention to its ambience. The yellow light in the second floor was dim but pleasant and revealed the restaurant's concerns for privacy and intimacy for its customers. The first floor was lit deep blue, just as most bars are. Beside the bar are open spaces with cozy sofas and tables which seem to be ideal for small gatherings of friends. The service provided by the waiter and waitresses is a plus: they were keen to help and were quick and efficient.

For those craving for a hot meal and joyful music to stay warm in this biting winter, Thai Ghar is worth a visit. 

Xiaotong Xu and Siran Liang

How to get there: Thai Ghar is in Jhamsikhel, right opposite the entrance to Moksh.

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SURVIVORS

Nepali Times goes back to meet some of the people it profiled in 2015



GOPEN RAI

NOT SO LUCKY

The story of his miraculous survival made headlines in newspapers and magazines in Nepal and around the world. But global

attention hasn't brought in much help for the family of Sonish Awal, the baby who was rescued alive after 22 hours from the rubble of his house in Bhaktapur.

Eight months on since the earthquake, the Awal family is still homeless and living in a barely furnished one-room apartment



#764 26 JUNE - 2 JULY 2015


rented out by a friend. Six months ago when *Nepali Times* interviewed them, they were staying in the basement of the same house.

"Everyday has been a struggle," says Rasmila, the baby's mother. Due to the fuel crisis her husband Shyam has also been struggling to find work as a driver. He

spends most of his days queuing up for fuel.

"That's fewer working days and less money," says Rasmila. Without a steady income, the family is barely scraping by. Even though a benefactor has paid one year of school fees for Sonish's sister, Sonia, their mother is unsure if she'll be able to continue sending her daughter to school.

To add to the family's troubles, the land on which their house was built has been mapped out for a road expansion drive. "We are homeless now but once the road widening starts, we will be landless as well," says Rasmila.

Despite the hardship the family has been through, Rasmila repeats what she told us six months ago: "If I think of all the difficulties the family faces, I'll spend my days crying. I see my two children and realise how lucky I am that they are alive."  *Sahina Shrestha*



REVISITING TIKAPUR

"The images of violence and killings from that day still haunt me," says Bir Bahadur KC of Pashuhat Bazar in Tikapur, recalling the deadly clash between Tharuhat protesters and police on 24 August in which nine policemen were lynched and a two-year-old child shot dead.

Four months later, things look much calmer in the surface on the dirt lanes and farms of Tikapur, but there is still simmering resentment among the Tharu and Pahade residents of the area.

"We still can't move freely at night, and fear for our lives," admits a Tharuhat leader. After August, many Tharu families fled the area fearing reprisals from police and residents. Some including those of Resham Lal Chaudhary, Janak Raj Chaudhari and Tilak Chaudhari still haven't returned to their homes.

The families of police killed and the family which lost the child are also not satisfied with the government's response even



BACHU BK



#773 28 AUGUST - 3 SEPTEMBER 2015

though they got Rs 1 million for each deceased.

"What will I do with the money? It's not going to bring my son back," says Yashoda Saud, the mother of the two-year-old boy who was shot dead by protesters. "What I need is to see the person who killed my son go to jail."

Among the 58 people

who were charged with murder or abetting murder, 22 are in police custody while the rest are at large. Among those on the run are Dhaniram Chaudhary and Reshamlal Chaudhary of the Tharu Welfare Society who are said to have masterminded the attack.

However, lawyers representing those who have been imprisoned question the integrity of the police investigation. They claim that the police arrested random people without any evidence just to give the impression that they had done their job quickly.

"The police rounded up innocent people and presented false charge sheets," says defence lawyer Nathuram Mahato. After the incident, prosecutors presented affidavits at the district court, call details of those who were arrested, mobile phone videos and recorded conversations between Dhaniram Chaudhary and Reshamlal Chaudhary.

"We've left no stone unturned. It's a full and fair investigation," says Deputy Sub-Inspector Bishwaraj Khadka. "All 58 of the arrested are guilty and we are

trying to track down those who are at large."

But the parents of some of those who were arrested claim their children were wrongfully charged. "My son can't even speak properly, but the police took him in for questioning and filed a case against him," says Sonia Chaudhary. The wife of another arrested, Sundar Chaudhary, says her husband wasn't even in Tikapur on the day of the protest.

Another accused, a 14-year-old boy named Karan, is said to be mentally disabled. His parents admit he was present at the scene, but played no part in the violence. The people here have little trust in the police investigation.

Though a committee headed by the former chief of the National Investigation Department, Deviraj Chaudhary, submitted a report of the incident, it has still not been released.

Says Narendra Bista, brother of slain policeman Balram Bista: "All of the accused haven't been punished, but at least the report should be released."  *Bachu BK in Kailali*



SEULKI LEE

DYING FOR RIGHTS




4 SEPTEMBER 2015 E-SPECIAL

Sobiya Khatun is just 20 but is eight-month pregnant with her second child. An uneducated young Muslim woman from Gajwonapur of Bara district has been reminded of the meaning of the word 'rights' since her husband Hifajat Ansari was shot dead by police in Kailaya on 1 September. She was five-month pregnant at the time.

"He went out to buy medicines for his mother who had a fever, but there were rallies and tear gas so I told him to go later in the afternoon," says Khatun, holding on to her one-year-old daughter who is disabled.

Her husband repaired bikes and used to talk about the need to struggle for Madhesi rights so their children could have a brighter future. More than 1,000 people attended Ansari's funeral, but no one from the government or the police came to visit.

"He would still be alive if he didn't have to go to pharmacy that day," says Khatun who is trying to learn a skill so she can take care of her family. She knows it is dangerous but wants to join protest at least once in memory of her husband and his struggle for rights.  *Seulki Lee in Bara*



GOPEN RAI

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Just a day before the earthquake on 25 April, Jamuna Neupane and Kumar Rai decided that they would elope. The two had met two years ago when Jamuna was visiting her sister in Kathmandu. Kumar ran a handicraft workshop on the top floor of the same building.

The two fell in love, but kept their relationship a secret. Kumar finally told his parents, who were happy to hear the news. Jamuna was unsure if her parents would accept an inter-ethnic relationship. Afraid that they would get her married off to someone else if

they found out, the two decided to run away to Kumar's home in Sindhupalchok.

But the earthquake forced them to put their plans on hold. Jamuna returned to Dharan where her family found out and locked her up in a room. Worried, Kumar rushed to Dharan and rescued her. The couple headed to Sipaghat of Sindhupalchok where they hastily got married, and the photograph of



#761 5 - 11 JUNE 2015

their wedding procession amidst the rubble made it to the front page of *Nepali Times*.

They spent a month in Sindhupalchok and then moved to a rented apartment in Kapan in Kathmandu. Eight months after the earthquake, the two are happily married. Says Jamuna: "He is very hardworking and keeps at it even when faced with difficulties and that is what I like about him."

"She takes care of me and the house. If I make a mistake she corrects it. But sometimes she can

be a little strict," Kumar says, laughing.

Jamuna says her life has changed since they got married, and she is still getting used to sharing her life. "Before marriage all you had to do was think about yourself. Now I worry about whether or not our business will do well and how to run the household," she says.

Kumar has shifted his handicraft workshop to their current address and employs four others. Both say they don't regret the decision they made and are happy they found each other. Kumar is planning to finally meet his in-laws

soon, and hopes they will accept him.

The couple feels there is no such thing as caste or ethnicity when it comes to love, the main thing is to keep each other happy. "Before I met her, I didn't think I'd get married so soon," says Kumar smiling, "but I knew she was the one I'd marry." 🇳🇵

Sahina Shrestha

nepalitimes.com

■ Watch interview



SEULKI LEE

DASHED HOPES

Binita Devi Shah was widowed at 22 this year when police shot dead her husband, Sohan Sah Kalawar on 2 September during the Madhes agitation in Parsa district. Kalawar went out to the main street to buy medicine for his mother when he was caught up in the protests.

Kalawar had opened a tea shop to earn extra income to raise his two sons and take care of his 50-year-old mother. The plan was for Devi to run the teashop while he went to Malaysia to earn money. All those hopes have now been dashed.

Kalawar's mother Subira Devi wept as she showed her son's passport. "After he died I am out of my mind, I cannot stop thinking about him," she tells a visitor, "we need help, but so many people come, ask questions and just leave."

Since her husband died, Binita Devi has become more vocal about Madhesi rights. "My husband died for the cause, and that is why I must also know about it," she says. "If the government accepts the 11-point demand of the Madhesi Front there will be more opportunities for me and my children." 🇳🇵

Seulki Lee in Parsa



#786 11 - 17 DECEMBER 2015

PICKING UP THE PIECES

It took just one minute for Nirmala Maharjan's life to be turned upside down on 25 April. Her husband, Raju, brother-in-law and his family died when their home collapsed in Tuchigale of Patan.

"I will remember that day for as long as I live," says Maharjan, eyes downcast. She and her two sons and mother-in-law are staying in a flat provided by the local community of Khapinche.

Thanks to donations from overseas, Nirmala is busy these days in building a new house, but she is not sure whether it will survive a future quake. A heap of bricks from the collapsed building reminds her of the relatives she lost. She wishes she had a job so she can finish her house and take care of her sons and the rest of her family.

"I don't want to be a burden for the community so I hope we can move into the new house as soon as possible," says Maharjan who is grateful that a *Nepali Times* reporter visited her after the earthquake. "I'm grateful that you came back to see us again." 🇳🇵

Seulki Lee



SEULKI LEE



Nirmala Maharjan's collapsed home in Khapinche (above). Juju Kaji Awale's wife who died in the earthquake being cremated, along the Bagmati, at Bhokthoka on Sunday (below).



Microcosm of a calamity

CYNTHIA CHOO and SONIA AWALE

I was a typical Saturday for eight-year-old Nikesh Maharjan, who was playing in his room when his mother came calling for him. The next thing he knew, the floor below him caved in.

The earthquake that hit Kathmandu that morning caused his home in Khapinche of Patan to collapse on itself. When he finally emerged from the rubble a few hours later, he found out that half of his family had perished.

His older brother Rajesh, his mother, Nirmala Maharjan, himself and his elderly grandfather were the only members left in his original family of eight. The young boy lost his father, uncle, aunt and a seven-month-old niece.

Nirmala Maharjan was still in shock two days after the quake happened. "I want to talk but it is still very difficult for me to do so," she told us, her face swollen from weeping.

"There was an earthquake. My house collapsed. I got wounds on my face and shoulders, and it hurts," young Nikesh recounted. His mother also suffered cuts on her face and bruises to her body.

Testament of Youth



Vera Brittain's memoir of the First World War became the voice of a generation – the generation that lost so much in the war that changed the modern world. Today, all of the truths from Brittain's epoch-making work are taken in good faith as part of an important history.

So why make a film in 2015



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

about events that took place a century ago? The reason for the remaking of *Testament of Youth* (it was made into a five part BBC serial in 1979) is still a bit unclear to me, even though I enjoyed the film and continue to feel the

weightiness of the subject matter so many years later.

Perhaps this particular film is receiving so much attention because of the presence of one of the year's most exciting young faces, the Swedish Alicia Vikander (who plays Vera Brittain), a trained actor and dancer who has also starred in some of the past year's more interesting films (Guy Ritchie's latest highly enjoyable romp *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* is one of them). Brittain is joined by Kit Harington, Taron Egerton, and Colin Morgan, a trio of talented British actors, who play Brittain's fiancé Roland Leighton, her brother Edward Brittain, and her friend Victor Richardson respectively.

Supported by this strong ensemble cast – *Testament of Youth* already bolstered by very high production values (essential in a period film), is a deeply tragic tale of immense, senseless loss. It is

also the story of a young woman's struggle for equal opportunities, a commentary on social class in England, and finally a horrifying reminder of the naïveté that initially accompanied Britain's entry into the war in 1914 – a war, as pointed out earlier that changed the world as it was at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Perhaps some stories need to be retold every so often to remind us of the horrors of war, and also to acknowledge the fact that even a 100 years after Brittain's struggle to go to Oxford University (where women were allowed to read, but still not awarded degrees), we still do not (contrary to mainstream opinion) live in a post-feminist world. Equal rights still need to be a part of the dialogue, whether you are in Nepal or in England, and women still very much struggle against an entrenched patriarchy that chooses to nonchalantly dismiss issues such as equal pay, sexual harassment, reproductive rights, and abuse – a case in point is our gender biased citizenship provisions. Vera Brittain struggles to express herself, fight for her rights, and to live with her losses. Her story is a timeless, poignant reminder that life can be both hideously unfair, as well as transcendently sublime.

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer



RSS

COURTESY CALL: Indian Ambassador Ranjit Rae meets Speaker of the Parliament Onsari Gharti Magar at Singha Darbar on Tuesday.



UNICEF

BUILDING BETTER: UNICEF Deputy Representative in Nepal, Rownak Khan and Mahendra Prasad Shrestha of the Ministry of Health and Population sign an MoU to build disaster-resilient prefabricated health facilities in earthquake-affected districts on Wednesday.



RSS

CHINA CALLING: Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa and Law Minister Agni Kharel (second from left) speak to journalists at the Tribhuvan International Airport before their departure to China on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

TAN TUI: A wushu athlete competes in a selection match for the 12th South Asian Games at Dasrath Stadium on Monday.



RSS

LAUNCH TIME: Author Shiwani Neupane (centre) with guests at the launch of her new book *Crossing Shadows* at Hotel Annapurna on Wednesday.

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They call me Eve... because they think it is ok to tease

The acceptable culture of sexually harassing women in South Asia



Our country is used to the male species making supposedly innocent comments to obscene gestures, and whistling at women in public. Most women pretend like it never happened.

What may seem like a harmless act marks the beginning of a potentially dangerous series of harassment towards women.



ALL IN THE MIND
Anjana Rajbhandary

There are countless stories of girls and women who are horrified at the idea of passing by a certain street corner because of being gawked at by a group of men.

"When I was younger, I used to wear the tightest t-shirt underneath my baggy sweaters so people did not stare at my chest," says Rima.

Eve-teasing (or street harassment) is a term commonly used in South Asia for public harassment or molestation of women by men. It is a form of sexual aggression that ranges from catcalls, to suggestive sexual remarks to touching and groping in public.

A disturbing aspect of the term 'eve-teasing' is that it puts the blame on the women who are called 'eve' as the temptress. Some men might as well say, if

women did not exist, this would not happen therefore it is women's fault. These violations are very hard to prove and are difficult for most women to vocalise.

"When I was 15, my best friend and I were on our way to the movies when this well-dressed middle aged man passed by us and pinched her chest," recalls 23-year-old Rita. "She looked at my face, then looked down on the ground and shut her eyes as she squeezed my hand. We did not talk."

This is the truth that many women in South Asia live every day. Many cultures and societies believe that eve-teasing happens because of the women who tease and tempt men, because clearly men have no control over their desires.

Bollywood movies show eve teasing as a harmless beginning of a courtship or the moment before the woman gets raped. We all know of 'India's Daughter'- one incident that highlighted the extremes of sexual harassment women have to experience that may result in death.

This can be the story of any young girl or woman in South Asia, and perhaps anywhere in the world.

Sheetal, 24, was embarrassed of her growing body, "My shoulders started to hunch to hide my chest. My eyes did not have the strength to look at other people. My arms started to press against my stomach to protect my pride and my shame."

How many men who

participate in these twisted and sick behaviour ask- would my son do the same to another woman and make them cry? Would my daughter be the victim of someone's unwanted touch?

I ask every man before they think of calling or touching a female stranger on the street- would you want another man to grope your mother or your girlfriend? Would you want a smirking guy to touch your sister or your daughter inappropriately?

Women learn to live in fear of being touched. Women avoid

going to school, or walking down the streets- afraid of what await them. The silence must not be mistaken for weakness, it shows their strength and perseverance, and it is time women raised their voice to stop the injustice towards them.

I say this as a woman: "This is my body and I allow myself to wear what I want. What I wear, how I walk, what I say does not give you the right to treat me any way you want, call me any name or touch me as you please."

I repeat this as a woman:

"This is my body and no one is allowed to touch it without my consent. My body is not here to please and entertain others without my permission. My body is to be respected- my body is to be honored. My body gave you life- do not dishonor your essence. My body has gone through months and years of pain to create your existence. Learn to respect the body you came from. Respect the body that gave you life. But first learn to respect yourself so you know how to respect women." 🇳🇵

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Years of living dangerously

Despite challenges, we are a far better society than we were

When I started this column five years ago, the country was trapped in a transition between traditional power centres and emerging political forces. The Maoists had won a majority in the Constituent Assembly elections of 2008 and the Madhesi Front had emerged as a regional force to be reckoned with. But there was real angst and impatience with the status quo. One indication of that was the sight of an angry Dalit lawmaker throwing his chair in a constitutional committee meeting, calling it “250 years of accumulated rage”.



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

Growing up in a hill-Brahmin family in the Tarai, I am a first-hand witness to the benign racism against Madhesis, Muslims, Dalits and Tharus of this country. It came as a revelation to me that Prithvi Narayan Shah's garden of the commons did not exist beyond classroom walls. It hit home when some of my friends were served in paper plates in our homes, or when I saw an old Madhesi being humiliated and forced to give away his seat in a public bus.

It took me a while to realise why blacktop roads suddenly disappeared and the drainage lines ended when I cycled into a Madhesi or Muslim

COEXISTENCE: Madhesi, Pahade and Muslim Nepalis celebrating the Holi festival together in Biratnagar.



ANURAG ACHARYA

neighbourhood where many of my classmates lived.

Years later, when I traveled into remote and rural districts, learning about the best and the worst practices of development, the Orwellian tint of our democracy revealed itself. From the fisherfolk of Nawalparasi to Tharus living in buffer regions of Chitwan and Bardia National Park who were regularly tortured by security forces, or the victims of development in Chisapani along the Karnali River, people outside Kathmandu silently endured both the oppression and the neglect of the state. Little seems to have changed for the relatives of the

victims of the Maoist insurgency or the survivors of the earthquake living in tented camps.

This column, for the past five years, has been an attempt to explain what I have seen and believed growing up in this country. The political events offered new contexts, but it is the sociology of life in the transitional democracy that has fascinated me most, and following it so far has been an exciting journey. I am grateful to Editor Kunda Dixit for convincing me over a cup of coffee to write regularly and thank my readers for both positive and critical response.

On more than one occasion, I

have conceded that as journalists we can only offer a subjective view of events, and that there are no universally accepted criteria of truths to which we adhere to while documenting them. The most we can promise our readers is an honest perspective, and I would like to believe I have done that here.

Two years ago when Lok Man Singh Karki was appointed to head the CIAA, we had warned the constitutional body which is tasked to check abuse of authority could itself be misused for political witch-hunting. We had also been critical about political parties

gerrymandering contentious federal demarcation, clearly stating that it would create a problem of legitimacy for the constitution, if and when it is declared. Both have come to pass.

But in this last column, I would like to point out that large sections of our media have overlooked something profound happening in this country. They have failed to understand that eight years of transition was not all about regular political realignments in Singha Darbar. The Maoist conflict and the Madhes movement, for all the violence it inflicted, has shaken the nation's conscience to its core and there is a deeper social churning of aspirations that are redefining the power structure from villages to our homes.

Kathmandu's power centre is the final bastion of the old regime and it still refuses to fully accept this epochal change. For several years, it turned a blind eye to Janajatis' search for identity until the political parties tacitly agreed to their demands, reflected in current federal demarcation. Today, their insensitivity towards Madhesi demands for dignity and self-rule has forced Nepali state on a warpath against its own people. But, once again it is a losing battle.

In this great tectonic shift the Tarai towns I grew up in will never be the same. Those in the margins are beginning to find their voice. Today, they agitate in the streets, tomorrow they will give their verdict through the ballot. There is a victory for democracy in both. @Anurag_Acharya

Worst year ever

Possibly a whole lot more of the same to look forward to in 2016

2015 is coming to a close and it has been, without a doubt, the worst year ever. It all started with a Turkish Airways jet that got stuck on the only runway in March at Kathmandu Airport and caused all flights to be grounded for three days.

From there onward, we went on a downward spiral for the rest of the year. The big earthquake hit on 25 April, and then we had the big temblor on 12 May which



ONE TO MANY

Bidushi Dhungel

doubled the destruction of the first one. That was followed by an unkind monsoon with its floods and landslides on unstable slopes. The death toll continued to rise as packed buses were derailed and torrential rains filled the tents of those still homeless from the quakes.

In June came the constitution and that big donor conference, both the sum of empty promises for a better future and a Nepal that would be 'built back better' in every sense of the term. Instead, more destruction followed. Protests against the constitution in the plains intensified in August. Even before the constitution promulgation, a handful of people had already been killed, both protestors and



DIMAKAR CHETTRI

security forces and the statute was passed with some districts in the Tarai under curfew.

As if that wasn't bad enough there was the massacre at Tikapur, which killed 9, and heralded the beginning of what looks like a seemingly endless and violent impasse among the three major political

forces in Nepal: the NC-UML-UCPNM coalition, the Madhesi Front and India. But indeed matters worsened when Sushil Koirala's government came to an end and was replaced by Khadka Prasad Sharma Oli, smooth talker extraordinaire. After that, when people – Nepali citizens – were shot at and killed, it was summarised as bad mangoes falling off trees.

As such, the festive season ended up being not so festive after all as, by then, the 'unofficial blockade' had already begun. The position of every side in this three-sided showdown had hardened so much that one really began to understand that for more than a decade the Nepali people had been taken for a ride on the false promise of a constitution, which would at least usher in stability.

After the festivities, Bidya Bhandari was declared the country's second president and another woman, Onsari Gharti – a former gun-carrying Maoist rebel -- the Speaker of the House. The former has publicly spoken against women's rights and stands by unequal citizenship provisions, and the latter's appointment works to cement and legitimise the violence of the bygone conflict years. Both lack the charisma and

leadership acumen already so short in supply among the political elite.

The 'communist' president's visit to Janaki temple occurred under some seriously tight security as protests erupted against her visit. But perhaps worse is that a cleansing ritual upon her departure was undertaken, because Bhandari is a widow and that it is against the Hindu scriptures to allow a widow into the temple. There are so many things wrong with the entire event that one can do nothing but put it on the year itself, ladled as it has been, with out-of-this-world stupidity.

And here we are in Kathmandu, with no gas, lots of induction cookers and no electricity, smuggled petroleum, transformers blowing left, right and centre and the coldest winter in years. Elsewhere, the situation is worse: seven quake victims have already died this year from the cold and the Reconstruction Authority Bill has only just passed. A four-point agreement has been signed with India, but the unofficial nature of the blockade has meant that it is impossible to know when it will unofficially be called off. The protests in the Tarai are still intense and while the tripartite are all looking to save face, it is becoming increasingly clear that this impasse will linger and expose the true face of each element.

In the meantime, here is to a bad 2015, the harshest winter in years, and an impasse which will carry on to the next, rendering 2016 as possibly one of the unhappiest yet. Apologies if awful details or events from the year were left out: so many that it's hard to keep count.

Not to worry, a whole lot more of the same to look forward to. Cheers! @bidush

Deciding to de-escalate

A win-win can only happen with a halt to Indian micro- and macro-management

Much recrimination has roiled the waters of the Sirsiya stream dividing Raxaul and Birganj between September-December 2015, punctuated by three statements from New Delhi's Ministry of External Affairs. The latest note of 21 December indicates that, at long last, the Ministry may be coming to its senses on the senselessness of this economic blockade imposed on India's most steadfast neighbour.



COMMENT
Kanak Mani Dixit

The statements are themselves works of fine penmanship that allow little room for misinterpretation. Thus, the menacing tone of the 20 September note was lost on no one, released even as President Ram Baran Yadav was releasing the Constitution. It read: 'We note the promulgation in Nepal today of a Constitution.'

The wordsmiths at MEA-India thought fit merely to 'note' after seven years of effort, in the wake of a ten-year conflict, a decade of polarising transition, and an earthquake to boot. The scorn heaped on Nepal's constitutional process – history will regard it as such – was heightened by the precise employment of the article 'a' rather than 'the' in referring to the document adopted by an elected, inclusive Constituent Assembly.

A day later, on 21 September, came another press note, with suggestion of the blockade to come. The Tarai-Madhes had been in agitation for a month previously without obstruction of the border or highways, but MEA-India provided ample hint of its intentions with the sentence: 'Our freight companies and transporters have also voiced complaints about the difficulties they are facing in movement within Nepal and their security concerns, due to the prevailing unrest.'

Then came the blockade, with the Madhes-based parties as willing partners. Indian customs, Indian Oil Corporation and the Seema Suraksha Bal implemented an elaborate embargo under orders from New Delhi. For three months, there has been calibrated release of fuel and essential supplies to fulfill no more than 10 per cent of Nepal's needs, in fits and starts to keep the economy off-keel.

Nepalis swung between hope and despair, counting the tankers and 'bullets' coming in, hanging on imagined signals of New Delhi's magnanimity, applauding individual articles in the Indian press and speeches in the Rajya Sabha.

While the Kathmandu establishment and the Madhes-based politicians helped set the stage for this dangerous turn of constitutional politics, India's blockade widened the gap between hill and plain communities. Fortunately, the polarisation has not escalated to conflagration,

hence the urgency for New Delhi to stop adding fuel to the tinder.

Perhaps Nepal's resilience under the blockade, or some welcome circumspection about its own immaturity, made New Delhi come around to its 21 December statement. The note certainly points to a backtracking by India, even if the spinmeisters at MEA-India try to make it look like Kathmandu's surrender.

The statement on Monday points to a geopolitical gear-shift by India in welcoming the Nepal cabinet's decision of what has been the months-old negotiating plank of the big-three parties. These include, as stated in the Indian statement, 'proportionate inclusiveness and delineation of electoral constituencies on the basis of population' and the 'demarcation of provinces to be addressed through an appropriate arrangement in



the Constitution on the basis of political consensus'.

MEA-India 'welcomes' these 'important decisions' as 'positive steps that help create the basis for a resolution of the current impasse in Nepal'. Indicatively, the Ministry also saw fit to upgrade the title it gave the notes – from 'Statement on the Situation in Nepal' in September to 'Statement on Nepal' in December.

It does indeed look like India has decided to de-escalate, but why the blockade at all is the Mother of All Questions. While we work on that, this should be the start of a pushback to the southern interventionism that has dogged Nepal throughout its modern era since 1950.

New Delhi's appetite to intervene increased after 2006, as sycophantic Kathmandu politicians allowed the intelligence apparatchiks to run amok. Micro-management penetrated the government superstructure, going as far as the makeup of cabinets and appointment of officials high and low, including the head of the anti-corruption watchdog.

Nepal's socio-economic advance under the new Constitution is good for Big India, the pre-condition for this being a halt to India's micro- and macro-management.

New Delhi having flagged its step-back, the Kathmandu establishment must now move proactively to make amends for its own ills and malfeasance. As a start, Prime Minister KP Oli must stop spouting invectives against the plains movement and form a credible commission to investigate the death of Madhesi demonstrators in police firing.

The vital remaining task will be the demarcation of federal provinces in a way that does not cheat the citizens of plain, hill and mountain. Federalism must be win-win for all – or not at all. As for the blockade, even as it winds down we must seek accountability and reparation for the devastation wrought. The Indian side, meanwhile, must internalise the *Economic and Political Weekly* editorial of last week which termed the blockade 'unworkable, dangerous and unethical'.

@KanakManiDixit

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OM ASTHA RAI

Homeless in winter

Earthquake survivors are desperate, but the government is not

OM ASTHA RAI
in RASUWA

The sun is dazzlingly bright here in Dhunche of Rasuwa district but the air is crisp and cold. As soon as the sun dips behind the mountains to the west, the temperature plunges down to – 5 Celsius.

Surya Kumar Tamang blows into his hands as he enters the tin hut (*pic, above*) where his wife Chuchi is blowing into the fire to ready the evening meal. The couple moved down here from their village of Yarsa, that was devastated by the April

earthquake and have been living in this shelter for the past eight months.

“I thought I would live here for some weeks, or may be a few months,” Tamang told us, “but I am still not sure when I will go home.”

In November he returned to his village to rebuild his earthquake-damaged house with a loan from friends and relatives. But a local official warned him he may not be eligible for the Rs 200,000 grant to be distributed by the National Reconstruction Authority if he did that. So he dropped the idea, and decided to brave it out in the shelter.

This town at the gateway to Langtang

National Park was prospering due to the six new hydropower plants coming up on the Bhote Kosi, but with construction on hold due to the Indian blockade Dhunche has instead become a refuge for those displaced by the quake.

After months of political bickering over who should lead the Authority, parliament finally passed a bill last week to set it up. But the CEO has not been appointed yet, and this means more uncertainty for the Tamang family and hundreds of thousands like them all in the 14 affected districts who lost their homes.

Rani Mhendo Tamang, 29, from

Haku village also feels betrayed by the government and cannot hide her disappointment, but manages to keep her spirits up.

“Political leaders did not lose their houses, and they have their warm homes in Kathmandu,” she says, “only the poor like us suffer like this. They cannot feel our pain unless they spend a night in our shelter.”

Her home across the Bhote Kosi is deserted, it is now merely a cluster of ruined houses where there was once a bustling village of Tamang farmers. Haku is deserted not just because of the destroyed homes but also because of the continuous danger of rockslides from the mountains above.

“We probably cannot go back there, but the government needs to tell us where we can settle down,” she said. “We do not want to live like squatters forever.”

Rani Mhendo Tamang cannot go back to her village because the district administration has not assessed if it is now safe. Surya Kumar Tamang cannot rebuild his house because models of earthquake-resistant houses have not been finalised. The government is giving Rs 10,000 for families to buy warm clothes, but distribution has been slow. The homeless earthquake survivors are desperate, but the government is not.

“We are alive so far,” says Karbo Tamang, also from Haku village. “But I do not know if we will still be alive when it starts snowing after a few weeks.”

Like other homeless earthquake survivors, he is also living in a shelter built of bamboo poles, zinc sheets and tarp. His wife is in the corner attending to the kitchen fire, the inside of the shelter is filled with choking blue smoke. He says simply: “We have a choice to either suffocate in the smoke or freeze in the cold.”



School of hard knocks



PICS: WONG SHU YUN

Destroyed in the earthquake, a village school in ruins gives hope to orphans

WONG SHU YUN
in SINDHUPALCHOK

Gopal Lama wants to overturn traditional Nepali fatalism to rebuild the school that was destroyed twice – once during the conflict and again in the April 25 earthquake.

Lama, 48, firmly believed in

the power of education to stop the trafficking of children from the Helambu region and 25 years ago founded the Yangrima School (*pic, right*) in Sermathang village, 39km northeast of Kathmandu. During the conflict, the Maoists bombed the school, and Lama finally rebuilt it in 2009 only to have it destroyed again in the



Motherless Balgoan

Sixteen children who lost at least one of their parents from the village of Balgoan attend the Yangrima School. Most lost mothers who were preparing lunch when their homes collapsed in the earthquake. Balgoan is home to 140 Tamang families, all of whom lost their homes.

Dikshya Shah, 21, warden at Yangrima School's Hostel and Crisis Centre recalls that when the school restarted, there was a lot of crying: “They were still traumatised from the earthquake and aftershocks.”

Nine-year-old Yudhir Shyangbo was trapped in the rubble of his home after the quake. “I couldn't move and it hurt a lot,” he recalls. “I screamed for help. My father rescued me.” Yudhir lost his mother and sister, but now has a safe, temporary home at Yangrima.

Sukmaya Tamang, 13, grabbed her six-year-old sister, Budumaya, when the shaking started and ran out. Their mother was in the field and was killed by a landslide. Her body was never found.

“I want to be a nurse so that I can care for the injured,” says Sukmaya. Yangrima has started a sponsorship program for support of children like Yudhir and Sukmaya who now live in single-parent households.



GOPEN RAI

Multiple trouble

Families who survived the earthquake and the monsoon are now braving winter and the Indian fuel blockade

SAHINA SHRESTHA

After the earthquake in April severely damaged her rented room, three-month pregnant Laxmi Nepali, 27, moved to a tented camp in Chuchepati near Baudha with her family.

But life was hard in the tents and despite aftershocks she moved back to her room. But with the fuel crisis caused by the Indian blockade and the shortage of gas, the landlord refused to allow them to cook with firewood. Nepali and her new-born baby (*pic, above*) are back in the Chuchepati shelter.

“The dew seeps in through the tent and dampens the blankets and my baby is frequently sick,” she tells us, “all my belongings are here because we don’t know how long we will have to live like this.”

Kalpna Shakya, 33, also shifted to the shelter in April after the earthquake damaged her room. As it got colder, the Shakyas moved back to their rented room. However, the landlord refused to let them cook using firewood so they are also back in Chuchepati.

“The landlord told us he will rent out the room to only those who can cook using gas stoves, and we can’t afford it,” says Shakya who is from Udaypur. The landlord didn’t even reimburse the rent.

The Chuchepati Shelter, which was almost deserted in September, is now full again with families like the Nepalis and Shakyas. More than 100 new tents have sprung up in the last two months and there are nearly 500 families sharing them.

“Many families who returned to their homes have come back in recent months because their landlords don’t allow the use of firewood,” said Dawa Sherpa of Noble Compassionate Volunteer Group that supervises the camp. “Earlier they were quake victims, today they are blockade victims.”

Besides families who have returned, there are others who have camped out at the shelter in hopes of getting relief supplies.

When news of a Taiwanese monk distributing blankets in the shelter spread, dozens of new tents are said to have come up overnight. As elsewhere, it is hard to say how many families in Chuchepati are genuinely needy. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

 Watch interview

Helambu and the Yolmo



Sermathang at 2,700m is a scenic village in the Helambu region of Sindhupalchok of Tamang, Magar and Yolmo people. Helambu is steeped in the Tibetan Buddhist Yolmo culture and has many monasteries. The Yolmo may have migrated from Kerung in Tibet 300 years ago.

A popular Helambu trekking route begins from Shivapuri National Park continuing along Chisapani, Kutumsang, Tharepati and Sermathang, and then ending at Melamchi Bazar.

A five-hour hike from Tarke Ghyang is Ama Chomu Yangri (3,771m) with stunning views of Langtang and as far as Kanchenjunga in the east.

April earthquake.

“If we don’t educate our village children or put them in a safe place, I fear that they will be trafficked into brothels,” Lama tells us.

After the earthquake there has been an overwhelming outpouring of help from young, socially conscious Nepalis. One of them is Prabhat Khadka, 30, an IT professional from Kathmandu. Khadka and his friends were trekking in Helambu in 2014 and chanced upon Yangrima School.

“We saw children studying in a peaceful and natural environment amidst mountains, and that really appealed to us,” Khadka recalls. When the earthquake hit, he immediately contacted Lama to offer his help.

This month, Khadka’s group rigged up the school with wifi and trained students in data entry so they can generate income for their families.

After the earthquake, many older teachers decided not to return to remote schools in Sindhupalchok. Schools remained closed, but Yangrima could reopen thanks to young and committed volunteers from all parts of Nepal.

Social studies teacher Abin Rai, 24, is from Sankhuwasabha in eastern Nepal. He chose to stay and help because he couldn’t bear to see the children’s education disrupted. His friend, Amrit Maharjan, teaches science and says: “At our age, we have time and energy. We want to give back to society.”

Kishor Bhatta, 27, left his home district of Baitadi in the far west to teach Nepali here. “This area needs help and I feel that I can make an impact,” he says.

Dikshya Shah, 21, wanted to heal quake-affected children through her drama and psychosocial therapy skills.

In June she quit her job in Kathmandu and made her way to the Yangrima Hostel and Crisis Centre, where she currently works as a warden, looking after children who have lost parents in the earthquake.

“This has been the most challenging job I’ve had, I have so many kids to look after. But the smiles from the children make it all worth it,” she says.

The reconstruction of the school has been delayed by the Indian blockade and the lack of cement. The students attend classes in temporary plastic tents.

But Lama is used to overcoming challenges, and is upbeat: “My dream is that our students will be self-reliant. With young, innovative and motivated volunteers I believe this is possible.” 🇳🇵

Yangrima School
nhyolmo@gmail.com



Help wanted

Eight months after the earthquake it is hard not to be struck by the magnitude of the losses of people in the communities that were affected. Their stories are filled with sadness and loss.

The Jana Jagriti Higher Secondary School in Sangachok of Sindhupalchok was built in 2004. Nothing of the building remains, seven students perished during the second earthquake and many more have been bereaved of parents and grandparents. The school was closed for a month. When it reopened, the children were changed: less joyful and playful and sometimes confused and angry.

The school now has eight temporary classrooms made from corrugated sheets, windowless structures offering no protection from the elements. Teachers and parents work on supporting children as best as they can. The school now teaches children first aid, and encourages students to express their concerns about their loss and their future through artwork, discussions and song. Children also have earthquake drills.

Women survivors are struggling financially to rebuild their lives. Working the fields is essential if they are to feed their families, and doing this is not possible if they are also caring for their young children. The school therefore also supports families by providing much needed care for the children. Despite all these challenges, the school is a positive place, and the children are as they are elsewhere -- looking to the bright-side of life.

In the district headquarter of Chautara there is little evidence of any significant rebuilding. Many residents feel let down by the government as the promised relief materials and money has not arrived. The better off are able to bring in materials despite the blockade and are reconstructing, but these are mostly commercial properties or apartment blocks. Many families are living in tents and shacks.

The hospital in Chautara was destroyed and it is housed in tents supplied by the UN. The sick and injured patients and their families are spending these cold winter nights under canvas.

The Jana Jagriti Higher Secondary School like many other schools and communities in Sindhupalchok and other districts still need help to reconstruct and rebuild their lives. 🇳🇵
Orla Muldoon and Judith Pettigrew in Sindhupalchok







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2015 IN TOONS

A collection of cartoons printed in the Nepali press this year



DOOR: Constitution
FROM BOTH SIDES: "Open up, it's January 22"
कान्तिपुर
Batsayan in Kantipur, 15 January



Help!
My life is in danger.
Rabindra Manandhar on Twitter, 22 February



Fast Unto Death
EAR PLUG: {Medical} Mafia
कान्तिपुर
Batsayan in Kantipur, 16 March



Just got back from the Bagmati clean-up campaign.
नेपाल
Rabin Sayami in Nagarik, 13 April



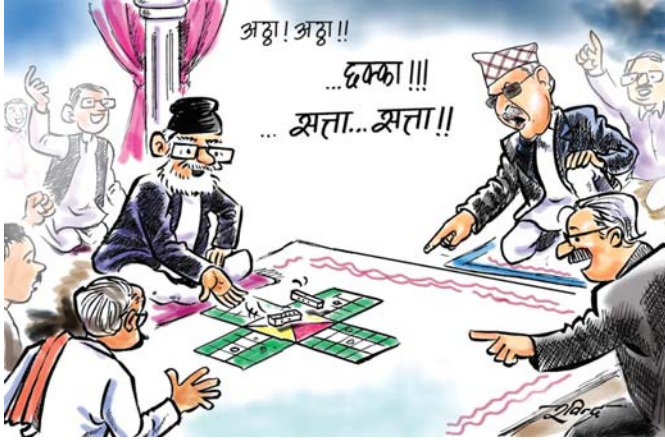
How can we sleep in the Constituent Assembly when people are sleeping in tents?
नेपाल
Rabin Sayami in Nagarik, 17 May



ROAD SIGN: Fast track
VEHICLE: 16-point agreement
कान्तिपुर
Batsayan in Kantipur, 22 June



SUITCASE: Foreign Aid
Bag: Reconstruction
नेपाल
Rabindra Manandhar in Nepal, 28 June



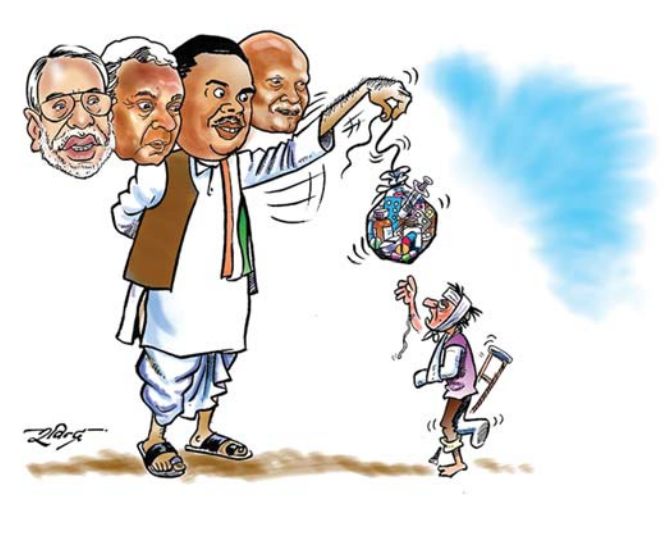
Eight! Eight!
Six!
Seven! Seven!
नेपाल
Rabindra Manandhar in Nepal, 23 August



Price of a martyr:
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Bhanu Bhattarai in
हिमाल
Himal Khabarpatrika,
30 August-5 September



ON VEST: Madhesi Morcha
नागरिक
Rabin Sayami in Nagarik, 29 September



Rabindra Manandhar on Twitter, 22 November



नेपाल
Rabindra Manandhar in Nepal, 29 November





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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

Touchy-feely bilateral relationship

The following Backside Column by Ass is regurgitated and adapted in the national interest from Issue #718 of 1-7 August 2014.

Now that Prime Minister Shri Modiiji has decided to do on to Shri KP Oliiji what Shri Rajiv Gandhiji did to Sri Punch Birendraji and brocade Nepal, advisers in both Balu Water and 7 Race Course Road are scratching their heads about what would be the appropriate way to extricate themselves from the cesspool they have landed themselves in.

But it is a good sign that the two sides are already thinking ahead to figure out how Modiiji and Oliiji should handle themselves when they see each other next in 2016 after physical intimacy returns to bilateral ties. Not that I have been asked, but the Ass would like to offer the PM's mandarins a menu of options:

1. Namaskar: This, of course, would be hugely symbolic since the greeting represents the age-old bonds of culture and vermiculture that

join our two great nations. It would also allow Nepal to keep India at arm's length. However, it is a bit impersonal and doesn't do enough to underline the tight embrace with which Indians keep Nepalis so they don't stray. I would suggest that Shri KPji wrap both his hands around Shri Modiiji's namaskar and oscillate it counter-clockwise for a mutually acceptable duration. However, our prime minister shouldn't get carried away, and should let go of Modiiji's hands after 7.5 seconds, unless he (Namo) lets go. Whichever happens first.

2. Hand-shake: If Shri KPO wants to show that Nepal would like to keep its distance from India, then a curt handshake would be the appropriate gesture. The question then arises, what should Nepal's response be if Modiiji uses both hands to immediately grab Oliiji's outstretched right hand and crush it in his vice-like grip? Our PM should be briefed that he should then use his left hand to cover both of Modiiji's hands and not let him

get away with what could be construed as high-handed behaviour.

3. Touching Feet: This is an absolute no-no. No one touches anyone's feet, but any part of the anatomy above the knee is OK.

4. Bear Hug: Before 1990, hugging His Majesty the King was out of the question for a visiting Indian PM. But since then, the leaders of secular republican Nepal and India are prone to hugging each other tight at the slightest provocation, probably to locate each others' soft spots. Hugging is fine, but keep it within the bounds of decency.

5. Bear Hug with Kiss: Ever since Brezhnev of USSR and Honecker of the GDR indulged in mouth-to-mouth resuscitation at the airport in Berlin in 1983, some world leaders of the leftist persuasion still French kiss one another from time to time. My view on the sensitive



topic of such shameless political osculation is that we must make a distinction between lip-service and tongue-lashing. And as long as kissing is taboo in Bollywood cinema, the leaders of our two countries should desist from smooching each other in public. (Kissing ass in private is allowed on a case-by-case basis.)

6. Holding Both Hands: This is the way Bhutan's leaders greet Indian leaders, and there is no reason we should emulate Jigme the Fifth unless we have run out of our own ideas, and want to be in the same category of bilateral relations as the Druks. But even here, the body language can be carefully calibrated to reflect the state of relations desired. In their next meeting, Modify and Oliiji could not

just hold both hands together but also intertwine each other's fingers.

7. Casually Holding Hands During State Banquet: Avoid.

8. Arm Around the Shoulder: What should Oliiji do if Modiiji puts his arm around his shoulder playing the part of Big Brother? Hopefully this situation won't arise, but if it does, it should be ok for Nepal's PM, if he feels up to it, to also put his arm around the Indian PM's shoulder to show that they have hard feelings towards each other.

9. High Five: This would be my personal recommendation because it does not break protocol, it is not all touchy-feely, and keeps a certain distance while at the same time show-casing the informal bonhomie between equals that has characterised Indo-Nepalian relations since age immemorial from even before India and Nepal existed.



The Ass

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