Vox Madhes

When parliament in Kathmandu passed an amendment to the constitution granting better representation and adjusting electoral constituencies to reflect population, many here thought the blockade at the Indian border would finally be lifted after five months. But Madhesi leaders say the amendments do not go far enough, and they have continued their sit-in at no-man’s land. However, cold and fatigue have taken their toll and the presence of the protesters is visibly reduced.

Madhesi leaders also seem to be divided over whether to continue with the border obstruction, or to change their tactics. Mahendra Raja Yadav of the Madhesi Front appeared to sense that the public mood in the plains is changing and people are fed up with the disruptions. But hardline Madhesi leaders feel the blockade is working and it should continue until the Big Three in Kathmandu agree to re-demarcate provincial borders.

The gulf between Madhesi leaders and the Madhesi public about the border obstruction seems to be widening. Till a month ago, most people on the streets of this border town that depends on trade with India would not speak out for fear of repercussion, particularly from Madhesi parties. But they are now so fed up, they are more than willing to speak on camera.

Suresh Bidari in Birganj

Amar Kishor Yadav, sidewalk vendor
Everything has its limit, but the protest has no limit at all. It has dragged on for too long, and I will not serve if this goes on. Madhesi leaders do not care about people like me. And is there even a government here?

Bindeshwor Das, cart puller
These protesters say they are fighting for our rights. Are they? Why are they preventing me from pulling a cart? How will I survive? Political leaders only use us to get to power, then they forget us.

Ajaj Dewan, driver
Do our leaders care if we live or die? Ordinary people like us are made to suffer every time there is a strike. I sometimes feel like defying the strike and chasing away the protesters, but I can’t risk my family’s wellbeing.

Hemanta Patel, trader
This is the third time the Madhesi people have risen up against Kathmandu. But what did ordinary Madhesis like me get? Nothing. I wonder if we made a mistake by getting rid of the monarchy. Instead of one king, we now have many kings fighting each other.
BORDER CONTROL

What is blocking the blockade from being lifted in Birganj?

Tired of pundits pontificating from the pulpit here in Kathmandu, we tried to find out the real ground situation in the Birganj-Raxaul border this week. Why is this checkpoint still closed, and how is the blockade affecting people in the plains five months on?

Despite assurances that Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa got in New Delhi last month that the siege would be lifted once the amendment to the constitution was passed, the Raxaul border is still sealed even though traffic is almost back to normal at other border crossings. Madhesi leaders walked out of the parliament on Saturday during the vote on the amendment, and have since said that it does not satisfy their demands.

The amendment addresses the Madhes demand for proportional representation in all sectors of government as well as demarcating electoral constituencies on the basis of population as the first criterion. Some Madhesi parties say there is no guarantee that the provisions in the amendment will be implemented. They point out that their other two demands on citizenship and marking out the boundaries of the two proposed Tarai provinces have not yet been addressed.

There is obviously a wide trust deficit here. Just as the government, and especially Prime Minister K P Oli are being obdurate and disparaging about Madhesi demands, the Madhesi Front is disunited and keeps shifting the goalposts. Lately, it is becoming apparent that the tail is wagging the dog and the most radical faction is setting the agenda. And, there is the belief in Kathmandu that the blockade has nothing to do with Madhesi demands at all. It was concocted by New Delhi and as long as the bureaucrats continue to see it as the outside political game they want from Kathmandu, the blockade will not be lifted.

Down at the Miteri bazar on the Indo-Nepal border there is a surreal air as a transboundary fog envelops everything. The sun blazes its brightness here after days. The air is choking with dust, and the smell of horse manure, smoke from smouldering cow dung fires mingling with a fog. The thin bamboo road barrier is a symbolic rather than a real obstruction representing the Indian blockade. Porters and pedestrians carrying luggage walk across no man’s land from Raxaul, emerging from the mist to negotiate with rickshaws and horse-drawn tansgas to get to their destinations.

Some Madhesi leaders do stop by later in the day. Shiv Patel of the Sadbhavana Party says: “The amendments do not meet our demands. We will lift the blockade only after they are met.” We asked Bashan Pandit, a sole blockade enforcer in one of the tents, why he was there. “To demand Madhesi rights,” he answered, but was unclear about what exactly those demands were. Pandit is quite lonely here these days because his comrades have been beaten and periodically chased away by Indian traders who have suffered a huge loss of business.

In Birganj, we found a chasm between what the Madhesi leaders say and what the Madhesi people want. In the bazar, people were more than willing to talk and share their story. “No one cares about us.”

“We are blockaded, but they [the leaders] are moving back and forth freely.” “The banks are asking for loan repayment. Will the Madhesi leader pay that for us?”

“We trust neither the government nor the Madhesi leaders.”

This week it will be 130 days since the border was blockaded. Not a single cargo truck has entered Birganj from Raxaul in that period. Eighty per cent of Nepal’s trade, including petroleum imports, come through this border and although the whole country is under siege it is the traders and ordinary people of Birganj who are hurt the most. No one here understands why India is even doing this, or how it would benefit from “strangling Nepal.”

Bystander Sanjay Mahaseth doesn’t even have to be asked a question, he launches into a long tirade against the government in Kathmandu and against Madhesi leaders. “Most of us do not grasp what the Madhesi leaders want to achieve by punishing our own people for so long. What is the inside political game? And what is the government doing?” he asks.

Sam Alam is a trader, and says he hasn’t sold anything for months. “First, they have to lift the blockade, how long can we go on like this?”

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THE NEW FACE:

Baburam will be remembered as the perpetual revolutionary who waged a needless war and did everything to foil Nepal’s democratic gains since 1990. The New Face, Foreign Hand, #792.

Bihar Shrestha:
Baburam’s history does not support him. The next generation of Nepalis will reject BRB.

Bhairab Prasad Khanal:
The last time he was the premier he did nothing good for Nepal. All his government’s efforts were spent trying to set his comrades free from judicial cases.

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HAVE BOLD TASTE AND INTENSE CHARACTER

KEEP WALKING
Unsafe workplaces

The life line of Nepal’s economy is threatened by conflict in West Asia and weak currencies

OM ASTHA RAI

A s Saudi Arabia began bombing Yemen last year, the situation now not only in the Gulf but also in the Nepal Embassy in Riyadh. Reports started pouring in that Nepali migrant workers were trapped in the deadly conflict.

The embassy cautioned Nepali workers against visiting the Najran region of the Kingdom where Yemeni forces had launched a counter-offensive. As it turned out, the Saudi military forced the Yemenis back, and an evacuation of migrant workers was not required.

"Nepali workers are safe so far in Saudi Arabia, and there is absolutely no need to worry," Labour Secretary Ram Kumar Acharya told Nepal Times. However, the war in Yemen is not over. In fact it is getting more brutal with daily air strikes by the Saudi Air Forces.

Indeed, the situation in West Asia with multiple conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, and terrorist attacks in Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have raised fears not only about the safety of migrant workers but also about what would happen to a major job market for Nepalis if conflict in the region spread.

Saudi Arabia is not just involved in Yemen, but is fighting several proxy wars across the Middle East – from Iraq to Syria. There is simmering tension with Iran, which has more or less annexed Iraq. The falling price of crude oil, as well as cost of waging conflict has meant that in 2015, Saudi Arabia recorded its largest budget deficit since the Gulf War.

Udaya Rai Pandey, Nepal’s former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, rules out the possibility of a full-blown war in West Asia involving Saudi Arabia, but says the threats to the kingdom’s economy from falling crude oil prices are real.

"If oil prices continue to slide like this, the Saudi economy could suffer badly and that in turn could affect Nepali workers there," he says. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the two main destinations for Nepali workers in the Gulf, and together have more than one million migrant contract workers. The remittances from them and another 750,000 Nepali workers in Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE prop up Nepal’s economy.

The other big destination for Nepalis, Malaysia, is also facing political and economic crises. Being a major exporter of crude oil, the Malaysian economy has taken a hard knock with the Ringgit having tumbled 30 per cent in a year.

Bimal Bhakal of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies says Nepali workers are not willing to go to Malaysia anymore because of the weak Ringgit. Only 30,414 Nepalis left for Malaysia between August 2015-January 2016, whereas more than 152,453 left during the same period the previous year, according to figures from the Department of Foreign Employment.

Ram Kubal, a 32-year-old security guard in Malaysia, used to earn Rs 60,000 in 2013. He is now earning less than Rs 40,000. "My salary has not decreased, but I am earning less because of the weak Ringgit. My family believes I should be earning more because I am more experienced now, and it is really difficult to explain it to them," he says.

Overseas remittances pumped in nearly $6 billion into Nepal last year, and this inflow of cash is what is propelling up the economy by helping us pay for imports. Remittances make up more than a quarter of Nepal’s GDP.

The nightmare scenario is if the Syrian war spreads to the rest of West Asia, pitting Ottawa against Sunni Muslim states and dragging Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain into the conflict. When asked about whether Nepal has at the very least a contingency plan for evacuation if not for alternative destinations for migrant workers, government officials tried to play down the threat.

"I don’t think we will have to face this situation in near future," said a diplomat in Syria or Iraq. "Labour Minister Deepak Bohara told us. He admitted that it would be better for Nepal to minimise the push factor of migration by creating more jobs at home.

"To begin with, I am introducing some schemes to encourage the youth to stay back," he said. “Part-earthquake reconstruction could be another area where more jobs can be created.”

However, a work-plan unveiled by Bohara last month contains programs aimed at promoting out-migration - than encouraging the youth to work within the country. He is exploring new labour destinations, but instead of choosing safer destinations, he is looking at Lebanon and Jordan which are also in the throes of simmering conflict.

New migrant workers have had to flee wars several times since 1990 during the first and second Gulf wars. More recently in 2011, hundreds had to be evacuated. A future war in the Gulf, however, could be much more violent and disruptive, experts say.

Nepal’s economy has survived the Maoli's insurgency, a decade-long protracted political transition, the recent earthquake and the Indian blockade solely because of remittances. In fact, soaring inflation back home means that overseas workers now have to send more money to their families. A Nepal Rupee Bank report shows the flow of remittances in the first five months of this fiscal year was 20 per cent higher than in the corresponding period last year.

"The blockade could have..."
caused much more trouble if it was not for compensation,” says Dibendra Bahadur Chalati, former Vice-chair of the National Planning Commission. “But this is only a temporary solution. It is going to go down if there is instability in the destination countries. We must be prepared to act immediately.”

Labour migration expert Ganesh Gurung criticises the government for not trying to minimise out-migration of able-bodied men. He says: “We have a foreign employment promotion board, but not a board that aims to create employment opportunities within the country. It seems the government believes that the youth will always keep migrating, earning and sending money.”

Gurung is convinced that it won’t even take a full scale war in the Gulf to bring the Nepali economy to its knees. A prolonged economic downturn in the Gulf or Malaysia would have the same effect.

As Nepal lacks capacity to absorb hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in case of an emergency in the Gulf or provide employment for them within the country, it would be wise to identify safe destinations and avoid unsafe ones, according to experts.

Says Bhusar Koirala of the Nepal Institute for International and Strategic Studies: “It is not that the whole Middle East region is volatile and unsafe, there still are pockets in the region that are safe. We need to assess which countries are more suitable and secure to send our workforce.”

Momo and Fizz

Global beverage maker Coca Cola has partnered with leading restaurants and eating joints to launch the Coca Cola Momo Fizz campaign. Models

Piyanka Karle and Shristi Shrestha will be seen different appointed to sample a combination of momos and Coca Cola till the end of February in Kathmandu.

Fare sale

Eth Airways is offering a six day sale on all domestic and economy air fares for guests travelling from Kathmandu to destinations across Europe, Middle East, Africa and North America. The sale is until 31 January for travel dates between 1 February to 31 December 2016.

Winter relief

Everest Bank has distributed warm clothes and food to six schools in the earthquake affected areas of Nuwakot and Gorkha. This initiative is a continuation of the relief package announced by the Bank after the April 2015 earthquake.

Clean energy loans

The Alternative Energy Promotion Center, the Government of Nepal and Himalayan Bank recently partnered to avail loans for solar power plants used in homes and offices in urban areas. The bank will be giving a maximum NPK 700,000 per household, and will be charging households an interest rate of 2.5% and offers 4.5% for power plants having a capacity of 50000W to 500MW.
Not their battle
Cadre, voters and supporters of the Big Three are turning against them in the Tarai

When I travelled to the Tarai recently, I met many people who had been spearheading what has now become the latest political struggle in Nepal’s history. One of them was Rudra Sah. An influential political activist based in the eastern Tarai town of Lahan,

he has been at the forefront of protests since the Madhes unrest began nearly six months ago. While it is common to find a Madhesi party supporter
protecting on the streets these days, what is surprising is that Sah belongs to the leading party of the ruling coalition. “My political affiliation aside, I am a Madhesi first and I cannot stand aside when people from my community are fighting for a cause,” he said, exuding confidence that victory for the Madhes movement was only a matter of time.

The Madhesi Front is believed to be at the helm of the Madhes movement. But in reality, the Front is just a brittle coalition of four fringe parties that faced a humiliating defeat at the hands of the ruling UML and the main opposition NC in the 2013 elections. The Madhes movement that began in August last year has been sustained so far only because the cadre of the Big Three parties have also thrown their weight behind it.

As I travelled across the eight districts from Saptar to Parsa, the proposed area carved out for the Madhes province in the new Constitution, I met many local leaders and activists of the NC, the UML and the UCPN (M). Not only did they vote for the Big Three parties in the last election, but also expounded all measures to ensure the root of Madhesi parties. Three years later, the tide is turning, and those who previously sought the demise of Madhesi parties are now turning their backs on the Big Three.

Arbind Singh is a UML supporter, but he is now splitting against his own party. He blames the UML leader and PM KP Oli for fueling the fire in the Tarai. “Every time he speaks about us, it seems he is just spreading revenge,” he says.

The Big Three, particularly the ruling UML, seem to be playing in their own make-believe world. They think the Madhesi parties have manipulated their people in the Tarai regarding the content of the constitution. This led the UML to carry out a campaign to raise awareness about the constitution in the Madhes, which manifested into confrontations with Madhes cadres that only further fuelled tension. The deadly clash in which three Madhesi people, including an elderly woman, were shot dead in Sengdi of Morang last week took place during one of the UML’s ‘awareness’ campaigns.

Contrary to what the UML and other major parties claim, their own local leaders, cadre, and supporters are now hand-in-hand with their erstwhile political rivals. And they say that the Big Three will pay an even bigger price for their mishandling of the Tarai unrest in the next elections. No wonder the NC is pleading with Madhesi parties to not disrupt its district conventions in the Tarai.

In Janakpur, lecturer Badri Narayan Yadav told me the Big Three were never serious about addressing the sentiments of the Madhesi people and their hardline approach does not bode well for upholding the integrity of the country. He feared that the mishandling of the Tarai crisis would radicalise the youth and bolster a separatist movement.

This is turning out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy — negotiations have stalled, the Big Three have pushed through an amendment bill that the Front has rejected, and protests that had started to subside are now flaring up again.
The current no-sun, no-snow scenario is expected to change but not till Sunday. Moisture from this disturbed westerly frontal has affected the region, with overcast afternoons and snow flurries in the upper Himalayan valleys. However, the precipitation has been negligible, disproportionate to the cloud cover. This doesn’t bode well for farmers and also to raise the levels of rivers for electricity generation since most of the snow in the mountains is locked in as snow and ice. Things will change slightly for the better next week, but there will no respite from the pollution haze.

KATHMANDU

SEULKI LEE

THE NEW NORMAL

With the use of satire and powerful imagery, two artists turn ordinary scenes of contemporary society into extraordinary art

SEULKI LEE

The only clue given about the curatorial theme of the on-going art exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery was an image of an empty petrol pump printed on the invitation. Curious to see what this unnamed exhibition had to offer, I paid it a visit.

On the first floor, five works by Nepali visual artist Laxman Bazra Lama depict the reality of Nepali society in a satirical way. An oil painting of seven nude figures wearing Topi on their heads, entitled ‘World of Pregnant Men’, uses rough red brush strokes to portray the dominance of male wealth in Nepal. Lama says in his note that “the nude figure represents the shameless character of person and big belly represents the wealth.” For the artist, this type of inequality is both “a fact we hide within and live by.”

His next piece ‘Installation’ captures 33 images of how ordinary citizens are suffering from the fuel crisis and is inspired from his own struggles with commuting across the city. The series shows the artist carrying boards reading: “Petrol is easily available”, “I don’t need cooking gas/I don’t get hungry”, or “The journey is really easy” as he commutes on the crowded rooftop of a city bus. He then catalogued fellow commuters, who agreed to pose for a photo with one of those boards – creating a powerful juxtaposition of words and feeling.

In good company with Robin’s three month engagement in Patan is visualised in drawings, videos, and the animation of a woman sweeping. ‘Sweeping Waltz’ captures the daily ritual every morning and evening of women sweeping the dust out from courtyards, courts and roads - a never-ending dance. “I shot her for the first time before the earthquake, before the cloudy dusts. She is an icon of the Nepali situation,” Robin commented on the piece.

Robin’s works are focused on capturing complex ideas and concepts. A grouping of sketches, ‘Concepts’ represents nebulous subjects like anxiety, mindful, instability, goal, science, movement, and obsession through abstract images. ‘Trying to make simple things, Trying to make things simple’ and ‘Collaboration with Narayan’ depict the process of creation in the relationship between the artist and the craftsmen, which evokes the question, ‘What is the process of creation and production?’

Robin’s works succeed in provoking meaningful questions, from both Nepali and foreign perspectives, to all the interplaying parts that make contemporary Nepal tick.
When American researcher William Forbes recently surveyed some of the temples and ghats along the Bagmati River to see if they survived the earthquake, he was greeted with much enthusiasm at a small tirtha just north of Pashupatinath called Hatymochan.

The smiling face was of social worker Rohit Limbu, who has made it his personal mission to preserve the temple. Limbu led restoration of an old well which is now being used as a sacred bathing spot for women during Rishi Panchami. "I dreamt about you the other night," Limbu told Forbes. "You were one of the few people who believed in my dream, and look what happened."

Like Limbu, Forbes’ relationship with the Bagmati is one of preservation and appreciation. In 2013, when various social organisations launched the Bagmati Clean Up Campaign, Forbes embarked on a challenging mission of his own: to trace the 160 or so traditional bathing places along the now-polluted river.

Better known as ‘Swayambhu Billy’, the longterm Kathmandu resident till then had been translating ninth-century Sanskrit
texts called Nepala-Mahatmya and Himavatkhanda into English. Forbes’ first translation, published as The Glory of Nepal in 2000, focused on the mythology of the Kathmandu Valley that retraced an ancient pilgrimage route.

For his second book, Forbes sought to translate Sanskrit and Nepali sources describing Nepal’s holiest river. The translations include the geo-mythological origins of the Bagmati traced to Shiva’s laughter. ‘That booming laughter rolled out of his mouth took the forms of an unsullied river, swirling with sacred water, and whitened by foamy waves,’ the text reads, clarifying the meaning of Bagmati: ‘Replete with the Voice’. Forbes also painstakingly noted the 1,000 names of the goddess Bagmati, chanted during special worships.

The text goes on to translate an account of the annual nine-day Bagmati pilgrimage conducted in Baishak (April-May), written by Damodara Paikurel from Naxal in the 1950s. “It describes a verdant valley, much of it forested, with arteries of crystal clear water flowing through it,” says Forbes. However, since the passing of Tirtha Guru of Pashupatinath, who used to guide devotees, the Bagmati pilgrimage seems to have become a thing of the past.

“Before he passed away in 1999, the guru told me no one came to him for guidance on the Kathmandu pilgrimage, but he still instructed five to six people on the Bagmati Yatra each year. After his death no one has taken over his role and I am under the impression no one walked the Bagmati since,” says Forbes. Without a guide, finding the holy places along the river proved a challenge for the American translator. The starting point at Katuval Daha, below Chobar, proved inaccessible. “The river there is very polluted and full of industrial foam. During the annual festival, people no longer bathe in the river.”

Between Guheshwori and Khokana again it was difficult to walk along the river. However, from Khokana till Bagdwar inside the Shivapuri National Park, conditions were much better as the source appeared as clean as it was during the times when Shiva laughed. As the river has become a symbol for everything that went wrong in modern Nepal, it is the work of such activists and that of social workers like Limbu that give hope for Bagmati. Last August during Rishi Panchami, Limbu counted over 7,000 women bathing at Hatyamochan. Although few people still bathe in the river and many temples were badly damaged by the earthquake, the religious and cultural significance of the Bagmati River is being kept alive.

Forbes’ book, The Holy Bagmati River, might play an important role in the preservation of its spiritual heritage.

GUARDIANS OF GHATS: Rohit Limbu (left) and William Forbes are among few working to preserve the Bagmati ghats.

GUARDIANS OF GHATS: Rohit Limbu (left) and William Forbes are among few working to preserve the Bagmati ghats.
**Lit at the Lake city**

Head down to Palokha for the 5th edition of Nepal Literature Festival organized by Bookworm Foundation. The four-day festival has lots of interesting interactive sessions lined up for its audience with some of India and Nepal’s finest journalists and writers. Be on the lookout for an interaction between Nepal’s Times Editor Kunda Dixit and Indian journalist Barkha Dutt on Day Three. Don’t miss out on sessions with authors Thomas Bell, Pranaya Rana, Pravin Adhikari, Rabi Thapa, Subhas Neparkar and Ira Trivedi.

31 January, 9am to 3pm, 29 January on 3 February
Nepal Tourism Board, Palokha
www.nepalliteraturefestival.com

**Art exhibition,**

Exhibition of works by Belgian artist Yoan Bekti, Norwegian Salmon, cold water fish menu for the first time in Nepal. Tickets for the show will be available at Bhikraft coffee and Manny Tapas and Eatery Bar.

20 January, 6pm to 7.30pm
Kamalmani Theatre, Rato Bangala School
Ticket price: Rs 500

**Embassy Restaurant and Bar,**

Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and sourced menu.

Lajimpat, (01)4424044

**Himalayan Rush,**

Gear up for the fifth edition of Himalayan Rush triathlon series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming.

26 March, Begnas, Pokhara
(01)5527059 / (01)5505079

**Meet with Dr Mahabir Pun,**

Interact with and learn more about social entrepreneur from Magwaya winner Mahabir Pun. 6 February, 11am on 2 pm, Kathmandu
For booking: 9803572752, 9849788675, 9844050877

**El Mediterraneo,**

Visit not only for the full fledged Mediterranean experience but also for the authentic Spanish and Nepali fusion dishes it has to offer.

Jhamsikhel, (01)5527059

**Dechenling,**

The place to head to for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, pleasant and spacious garden is also ideal for big gatherings.

Thamel, (01)4412158

**Embassy Restaurant and Bar,**

Enjoy a musical evening with Sabin Rai and The Electric, 6 February, 5.45pm onwards, Porto 747, Boudha

**Sabin Rai and The Electric,**

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6 February, 5.45pm onwards, Porto 747, Boudha

**Just Fish,**

Your choice of Norwegian Salmon, Cold Water Tuna, Himalayan Trout, Vietnamese Bass and Arabian Bekki ... made to order!

Throughout the months of January 6. February, at Olive Garden. Daily 5-8pm - 10.30pm

**BAC Mela,**

Local products, foodstuffs and second-hand garage sale plus entertainment for the whole family in BAC’S first monthly mela.

30 January, 2 to 7pm, BAC Art Café, Pulchok
www.bacartscentre.org

**Dining**

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**Himalayan Wellness Centre,**

A one-stop centre for a relaxed mind and healthy body inside the Fork Village Hotel, Budhanilkantha. open all week, 9801066661, www.himalayancentreforspa.com

**Mango Tree Lodge,**

Culture walks, rafting in the Kamali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.

Bhram, Bardia, 844020608, sylfox@mangotreelodge.com

**Gokarna Forest Resort,**

A luxurious paradise that relents you and encourages meditation, just a 20-minute drive away from Kathmandu.
Gokarna, (01)4451212, info@gokarna.net

**Neydo Monastery,**

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

**Jhule mountain resort,**

Resting 2650m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic home stay experience.
Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, jhule, (01)6212399, jhuleresort.com.np

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Losing paradise

The Maldives, and the world, need more leaders like Mohamed Nasheed

KUNDA DIXIT

The Maldives: Islamic Republic, Tropical Autocracy

by J J Robinson

Hurst, 2015

336 pages

The Maldives, and the world, need more leaders like Mohamed Nasheed

HAPPIER TIMES: President Mohamed Nasheed (right) at a climate change conference just before he was seized in the 2012 coup and replaced by Mohammed Waheed Hassan (left). Nasheed restored democracy in the Maldives and lobbied internationally to save his archipelago nation from sea level rise.

The Maldives, and the world, need more leaders like Mohamed Nasheed

Honey

One teaspoon daily for a fitter you.

STAY TALK FEEL

Goodness of Honey

Dozens as a top health food across the globe, honey is a wonderful creation. The health properties of this thick golden liquid have been valued since ancient times. For anyone who wishes to find a healthy lifestyle, honey becomes an essential ingredient.

Love honey is all the glory and imbibe it as a part of your daily lifestyle for a healthy life. If it is golden, then honey is the treasure we have been handed over for generations. For anyone who wishes to lead a healthy lifestyle, honey must become an important component of their diet. There’s really none to it than just a drizzle-friendly ingredient.

What people are not aware of is that it is an important ingredient for preventing diseases and remedial for other health-related conditions. Honey is a natural ingredient that possesses antioxidant properties unlike sugar. While it has been recommended to stay away from sugar for patients, one must not stay away from honey. A fuzzy diet is recommended. There are studies that suggest regarding the treatment of various organ diseases there is a good agent that adds in patients’ non-cytotoxic metabolism.

Honey for their day breaks. It will enable them to stay active and alert throughout the day. So honey has all the goodness in the world from being a healthy addition to your diet. To providing energy to the body, by increasing your metabolic system, and so on. An antioxidant. Love honey is all its glory and imbibe it as a part of your daily lifestyle for a healthy life. If it is golden, then honey is the treasure we have been handed over for generations. For anyone who wishes to lead a healthy lifestyle, honey must become an important component of their diet. There’s really none to it than just a drizzle-friendly ingredient.

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As usual, the Academy, in an extension of last year’s egregious lapses, has nominated yet another round of completely homogenous films for the Oscars. The main complaint is that these films are peopled only by white stars and that the Academy’s main voter base, which consists also of mostly 60-year-old white males, is completely tone deaf about diversity, leaving out important films and performances by non-white actors year after year.

Spotlight is one of those all white films that has been nominated this year. While I acknowledge that this is a film about a certain white, majority Catholic population in Boston, that fact ought not to negate its very important story - namely the massive, landmark exposé of the extent of paedophilia that was (and is) rampant within the Catholic Church, the hundreds of priests who are guilty of these transgressions, and most importantly, the Church’s active cover up of these crimes that has affected thousands of people.

‘Spotlight’ is the name of the deep investigative arm of the Boston Globe - a department that I am happy to report still exists. The film is set in 2001 when the Globe was in transition; lay-offs seemed imminent as the new editor Marty Baron, played by the wonderful Liev Schreiber, both a non-Bostonian and a Jew, is assessing the Globe’s efficiency. Astonishingly, it is this taciturn outsider who suggests that Spotlight should start looking into the Church’s alleged cover ups, sparking consternation even within Spotlight’s hard core four person team - most of whom grew up Catholic, and some of whom still harbour much affection for the church.

This is a profound, methodical, procedural about investigative journalism that outlines every rigorous step that the team takes as they struggle with the terrible fallout of child molestation, perpetrated by individuals, with seeming impunity, and with growing horror the extent of real life abuse over decades.

The ensemble cast consisting of Michael Keaton, Rachel McAdams, Mark Ruffalo, Stanley Tucci, and John Slattery play their characters without histrionics, holding to the ethos of a film that is made to serve the story and not the drama, a discipline often lacking in Hollywood films.

Spotlight is riveting, important, extremely relevant and it will make you gasp. This is a film about the story that finally got told, and now thanks to the writer and director, Tom McCarthy, it is getting the continuing attention it deserves. If only all mainstream films vying for awards could be as rigorous as Spotlight, without the self-righteousness that sometimes comes from trying to be ‘profound’. 

HAPPILY INDEPENDENT: Indian Ambassador Ranjit Rae at his country’s Republic Day celebrations at the Indian Embassy in Lajimpat on Tuesday.

EMBASSY OF ISRAEL

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EMBASSY OF ISRAEL

IN MEMORY: Representatives from the United Nations and the National Human Rights Commission, and the ambassadors of Israel and Germany observe a minute of silence to mark International Holocaust Day on Wednesday at Rato Bangala School.

nepaltimes.com
Political analyst Nilambar Acharya in an interview with Himal Khabarpatrika (17-23 January)

Himal: After struggling to pass a new constitution through an elected assembly, declaring Nepal a republic, have we, as a country, really moved forward?

Nilambar Acharya: No country moves forward as smoothly as it wants. The way forward is always punctuated with difficulties and challenges, which are magnified by the lack of a far-sighted leadership, India, South Africa and Eastern Europe, which are now stable and prosperous, all faced obstacles. But they had capable statesmen able to overcome the challenges. Countries that lack strong leadership during transition periods are still unstable.

So, we lack a strong leadership? Yes. We launched several people’s movements, but a leader who could end the prolonged transition and take us on the path of prosperity was never born.

The political transition that began in 2006 is a case in point. After the monarchy was overthrown, the parties that led the Jana Andolan II and the rebels who fought a war tried to outsmart each other to take the credit of the new political achievements. They ended up agreeing on a dual leadership of transition, which has not ended yet.

Why haven’t we seen a strong leader yet?

When we fall sick, we go to India. When our children cannot go to schools, we send them to India. If we fail to find jobs, we go to India. We are heavily dependent on India because we have never tried to solve our problems within. India, for its part, seems to care for Nepal, but is always looking to micromanage us.

Our economy is collapsing, but our political parties look indifferent. Why?

The crisis is not about the constitution. It is about leadership. Our leaders have failed to manage the political change. The problem lies in their attitude but we are blaming the system.

India’s blockade has prompted people to give the benefit of the doubt to the government. How long will that support last?

The government claims to have given priority to earthquake survivors, but that is just a vague promise. How can the government reach out to them when the blockade is on and the supply of essentials has not been eased? The government must stop delivering hollow promises, and start real work.

“No country moves forward as smoothly as it wants.”
Sister and brother gaze out of their tent.

A family sit huddled in their tent. Kajri (lying down) rescued fed bail burns in a recent accident, and is recovering slowly.
Last but not least

Nepal’s remaining Raute nomads are in a race against time to keep their old ways

When this generation passes on, the way of life of one of the last nomadic hunter-gatherers of the Himalayan foothills will disappear forever. And with them will go a distinct language, culture and a system of beliefs.

There are only 156 Rautes still carrying on their nomadic lifestyle in the remote mountains of western Nepal, and they are under increasing pressure to assimilate with settled villagers at the edge of the forest.

They call themselves the ‘Kings of Forests’ and eat langur and macaque monkeys, wild yam and forest fruits. They carve wooden bowls out of teak trunks and trade them for cloth and rice. They are constantly on the move through the forested mountains of Arhiam, and live in temporary settlements hidden away from habitation.

Rautes belong to nowhere and everywhere, and minimize their interaction with the outside world. They are a proud and dignified lot, with a slapstick sense of humour, and although they shun what goes for modern civilisation, their way of life is now threatened by it.

Jan Møller Hansen is a senior development specialist and former diplomat.

janmha36@gmail.com
WANTED: Prime Minister (1)

The Landlocked Federal Kleptocratic Oligarchy of Nepal recently hit by an unnatural disaster and on the verge of being declared a failing state has urgent vacancy for a tall, pot-bellied, hemispherical, conventionally testotteral, fair-skinned vegetarian WV-eligible upper caste Prime Minister to replace incumbent who is getting a bit long in the tooth, and to prevent another dude in a desperate hurry to get the job, from pulling a fast one.

Age, disabilities, gender if any, marital status, eating habits, insolvency and incompentence no bar. The post-holder ideally should be octogenarian or above, and have served multiple previous tenures as prime minister wherein he/she/it should have paid ample lip-service to “people’s democracy”, exercised the freedom to execute class enemies following torture, including in bombing passenger buses, wasted and arsons. Candidate should have a demonstrated talent for coercive fun-raising (known in some dialects as ‘extortion’), shown a can-do attitude towards backbenchers, and exhibited decisiveness when it comes to bandh and bhagbanda.

The prospective prime minister must have a proven ability to obstruct parliamentary proceedings for up to, but not exceeding, three months at a stretch. Should have blocked off the entire country and parts thereof for a cumulative period of at least 36 days in any given year. Candidate should also submit signed affidavits from international contractors to attest for experience in delaying projects of national prestige through wheeling and dealing. Must have recommendations in writing from at least three referrees from the country’s leading business houses to guarantee the capacity to amass ill-gotten wealth.

Candidate should be of sound mind and body, and be in possession of at least one kidney and/or a functioning heart. Should have wife to assist with creative account-keeping. Should have wide, but understandable, grief.

DUTIES INCLUDE:
- Dating through Cabinet meetings and taking cat-naps in parliament.
- Build personal rapport with leaders of a certain neighbouring country to the south whose capital is made of two words that begin with ‘N’ and ‘D’ so that no decision, however small, is taken without their nod.
- Wear out-sized badges, cut ribbons, and blather inanities from the podium for live nationwide broadcasts on state tv after awarding plaques and shields to victors in inter-service tussles and tournaments.
- Keep a collection of well-preserved skeletons in the cabinet.

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED:
- Should have stamina and endurance to wear 23-kg marigold garlands, have at least 20-year experience in lamp lighting, khada wearing and bouquet accepting with flair and upmph befitting of the prime minister of a Least Developed Country.
- Must have obstructed constitution-writing, refused to extend the tenure of local bodies, and sent goons to beat up journalists during past tenures.
- Must have a Masters in Horse-riding and a PhD in Scoiopancy from an unrecognised university.
- Must have made an Ass of himself/herself at least once in career.

SALARY: Negotiable but has in-built perks, lifetime medical treatment including lip protection, eligibility for maternity allowance if male.
- Apply with brain scan and fully body MRI showing recent abdominal contours to Singh Durbar West Gate.
- Mark envelope: ‘Hare-been Wannabe’.
- GUNs is an equal opportunities employer. Everybody deserves a fifth chance.

Rosaassociated after popular demand from #770