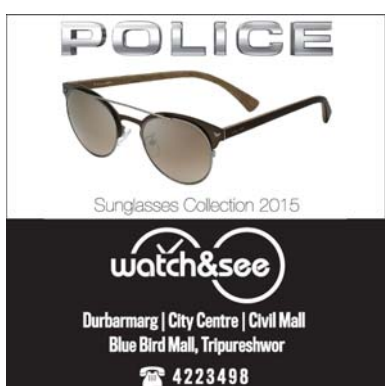


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**Let's talk**

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

"Rather than signing new deals, the PM will push for implementation of past

lifted. Oli wants to set up the body be  
he leaves for New Delhi so he can tel

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Explains Gyawali: “Our Madhesi leaders raised the people’s expectations so high that they now find it difficult to agree on anything short of the demand for two Madhes provinces covering the whole Tarai. So they will try to gain political mileage for now, but eventually they will support this mechanism.” 🇳🇵

*Om Astha Rai*

THIS IS IT  
BY RUBEENA MAHATO  
PAGE 3

BY **KUNDA DIXIT**  
PAGE **8-9**

Despite the timing, the visit is going to be largely symbolic, a chance for both sides to mend fences, do some damage control and save face.



A close confidante of the prime minister, Gyawali says bilateral ties had sunk so low they can now only go up. "It is New Delhi rather than Kathmandu that realised things went too far and reconciliation was needed," he said, "we tried to normalise relations but it happened only after New Delhi felt the need."

Oli assured parliament this week he would not sign any anti-national treaties during his India visit. The fact that he even had to say such a thing points to the sensitivities involved. On Thursday, he called a cabinet meeting and reiterated the promise to ministers. However, Oli may not be content with having stood his nationalist ground for so long against India, but return with substantial goodies.

The cabinet decided to form an all-party mechanism to review federal boundaries, part of the proposal Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa agreed to in New Delhi in December to get the blockade

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# OUR REMIT

Until it is possible to create jobs for them at home, make it as easy as possible for Nepali migrant workers to earn more overseas.

It is by now a fairly well-established fact that the remittances Nepali migrant workers abroad send home prop up Nepal's economy, and very likely saved it from collapse during the five-month Indian blockade. The annual \$5 billion from overseas workers and another \$2.5 billion from India help pay for Nepal's imports, 60 per cent of which is petroleum products. We barter sweat for oil.

What is less well known empirically is that remittances have reduced Nepal's poverty rate, and spurred development. In the past seven years, Nepal has improved its Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) from 65 per cent of the population to 44 per cent.

This has been achieved despite conflict, instability, corruption and greed, and remittances played a large part. We can only imagine just how much further ahead we would be if Nepal were better governed, and if we had been able to reap the peace dividend after the war ended ten years ago.

Remittances help pay for better health care, reducing the country's maternal and infant mortality rates by more than half in the last decade. Most families pay for their children's school fees from money sent home by relatives. There is therefore an indirect correlation between migration and health as well as literacy, and even in lowering Nepal's average fertility rate.

As elsewhere among labour-supplying countries, there are social downsides to labour migration and relocation. In an ideal world with statesmen for leaders, we would have a clear longterm strategy to wean Nepal away from being a remittance-driven economy. Attracting investors, and creating jobs through a concerted push to build infrastructure would keep young men at home while fostering economic growth and development.

Given the current instability such a strategy will take time to yield tangible results. What should we do in the meantime? There is only one answer: make it as easy and



as cheap as possible for Nepali migrant workers to leave for work, reduce the fees for official money transfers, crack down on bribery and exploitation of workers by recruiters and immigration officials, and maximise the earnings of overseas contract workers.

Unfortunately, the government's zero-cost migration initiative has been sabotaged by recruiting agencies. Workers were still paying up to Rs 70,000 each to manpower agencies when they should be paying nominal fees. Exploitation of workers, breach of contract, abandonment of workers who are left stranded in Malaysia and the Gulf are as rife as ever. The earthquake offered a big opportunity for reconstruction money to be spent on creating jobs at home for overseas Nepalis, but that chance has been recklessly wasted.

As Sangita Thebe Limbu points out in this issue (*page 14*) the proportion of unemployed graduates in Nepal is at an unusually high 26 per cent. That is one reason

for the proliferation of education consultancies which specialise in sending young Nepalis overseas on student visas to work. Many other desperate graduates migrate to the Gulf or Malaysia where they do menial, low-paying, life-threatening jobs.

Our reportage on page 14-15 shows that one way to immediately boost the income of overseas contract workers as well as increase national remittance inflow is to impart skills to Nepali workers who would earn twice as much if they had some training in masonry, plumbing or as electricians before they go. Even those who join language classes and learn Arabic or English have better jobs and higher salaries.

A Swiss-supported project to provide vocational training to prospective Nepali workers was nearly shot down by the current Labour

Minister reportedly because he said Nepal should try to keep workers at home. It is such short-sightedness that has resulted in Nepal not being able to tap the full potential of its migration economy. We need coherent medium and longterm strategies to maximise the benefits of current migration and create jobs at home. Governments may come and go, but a national policy on vocational training should have continuity well into the future.

The other way to channel remittance money directly into investment is to set up a Labour Bank, which would have deposits from migrant workers, topped up with government capital, to provide returnees with soft loans to start small- and medium-scale enterprises. That idea has come to a grinding halt in the Finance Ministry due to bureaucratic red tape.

Nepal is not poor, just poorly governed. It is not that we don't have good ideas on reaping the benefits of overseas labour migration, but we lack the capacity to implement them honestly and effectively.

Times

## THIS WEEK



MICHAEL NISHIMURA



## Most reached on Facebook

Syrian Bassel Shreiqi and Nepali Sangita Lama find that love is more powerful than war. (13,198 people reached)



## Most shared on Facebook

Autopsy of a blockade, *Editorial* (53 shares)



## Most popular on Twitter

Surviving the fall by *Smriti Basnet* (87 retweets, 168 favourites)



## Most visited online page

Between Syria and Nepal by *Michael Nishimura* (4,179 views)



## Most commented

Autopsy of a blockade, *Editorial* (11 comments)

## YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

## AUTOPSY OF A BLOCKADE

The first lesson for Nepalis should be that the ruling class and the majority of the population in the north should not view a significant portion of its own citizens in the south with suspicion, but treat them fairly and with respect ('Autopsy of a blockade', Editorial, #795). We cannot just blame India, much that needs to be done at home.

Shrestha

A few hundred protesters did not blockade Nepal. Madhesi were/are just pawns in this 'great game'.

Namah

Playing the hapless victim may be convenient for your egos but the reality is that this was the Nepali pahadi nationalists' own making. Moral of the story: Don't try to play games with India and take India's friendship for granted.

IAF 101

A very well written editorial. I hope the international donor community in Nepal, particularly those who talk about doing good rather than actually doing it, reads it line by line.

Dhan Raj Ghale Tamang

## WHAT'S NEXT IN THE MADHES?

According to a conscientious Madhesi author, Prof. Ram Narayan Dev 'most of the land in the Tarai is occupied by high caste people'-- who account for only 4.2 percent of the 5.3 million Madhesi population -- rendering the lower caste people 'virtually landless', and 'oppressed and exploited' by the former ('What's next in the Madhes', Navin Jha, #795).

Although traditionally considered 'untouchable' Chamar women are involved in assisting the high caste women during pre-natal, delivery and post-natal services. These women are often victims of sexual harassment but are forced to maintain silence because of their financial status. Since this is the current fate of most Chamars and Mushahars, two numerically predominant but impoverished Madhesi caste groups, executing Navin Jha's suggestion of 'building confidence among the Madhesi public' would require vastly different measures than his prescription of 'meeting the rest of their (Madhesi Morcha's) demands'. As things stand, the centerpiece of Morcha's demands is to have the whole of Tarai declared one or two provinces.

But given the fact that the Tarai's development is irrevocably tied to progress in the hill regions--mainly for water and power supply --this demand makes absolutely no sense socially, economically, politically, or ecologically. Given the frequent embargo that India is in the habit of imposing against Nepal, the latest one clamped with some Madhesi politicians working as India's front men, such demarcation would only be useful for choking the rest of Nepal in future blockades.

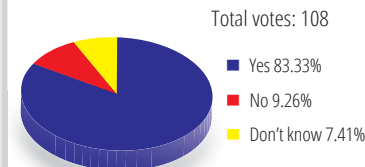
Bihari Shrestha

Times

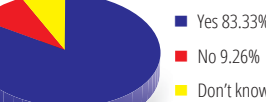
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Weekly Internet Poll #796

Do you think the black market is being supported by the State?



Total votes: 108



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Q. Will PM Oli's Delhi visit improve Nepal-India ties?

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# Open and shut case

Nepal must protect its democracy in a region where freedom and tolerance are under threat

The Indian government's crackdown on Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students is only the latest among a series of attacks by the Modi government against free thought and speech. From the way in which writers, journalists, scholars and activists



THIS IS IT  
Rubeena Mahato

are being punished in India for holding opinions different from the ruling BJP party, it seems the biggest democracy in the world is fast losing its liberal character. A government that is so intolerant towards its own people can hardly be expected to be generous towards its neighbours. And indeed in the last few months, Nepal has experienced the full scale of India's coercive and belligerent diplomacy in the form of a five-month border blockade. It must be sufficiently clear by now that the blockade was not India's stance for inclusion and democracy in Nepal as some tried to portray it. The New Delhi establishment doesn't really protect those values inside its own borders, couldn't care less if it is nurtured in other countries. But the Modi administration appears to have realised it bit off more than it could chew, and wants to reset ties during Prime Minister Oli's visit.

In reality, contrary to its image as a vibrant democracy with space for diverse views and ideologies, today's India has become an inhospitable place for dissidents and minorities where even harmless criticism can invite the wrath of the government and a radicalised fringe. NGOs are strictly controlled, human rights workers are denied visas and movements for autonomy and self-rule are brutally suppressed. Politics in India today is a volatile mix of religious fanaticism and ultra-nationalism. So, we can only speculate what

led Nepali progressives to support Modi and his troupe as they imposed an illegal, inhuman and morally deplorable blockade against Nepal. If anything, the growing intolerance in India should be worrying for smaller countries in the region that are still learning the ropes of democratic governance. As India becomes less and less free, its foreign policy will become more and more restrictive with repercussions for regional security and stability. The shrinking liberal space in the region and erosion of political

freedoms should ring alarm bells for us in Nepal, especially with political extremism taking root in the country once again. Open societies with diversity of opinion, protection of minorities and democratic accountability can only exist with constant citizen vigilance and effective resistance of extremist ideologies. We only need to look at our recent past to remember how easily hard-won freedoms can be lost to despots, demagogues and populist leaders. This time around, we also witnessed how despite the trillions of dollars invested

on 'Democracy Promotion' every year, the international community can conveniently close its eyes to injustice when the rights of smaller, less consequential countries are throttled by a strategic ally. Across the world, we are witnessing a wave of democratic reversals. In Europe, that bastion of political liberalism, right wing parties with conservative views on immigration and religious freedom are gaining popularity. Secular bloggers are being killed one by one in Bangladesh, while the government is harassing respected editors like Mahfuz Anam of the *Daily Star*. War crimes in Sri Lanka and Nepal have gone unpunished. Maldives has seen a democratic rollback, ignoring polls to imprison elected President Mohamed Nasheed. Nepalis have fought to retain democratic freedoms whenever they have been threatened. Despite setbacks and flaws, political freedoms are still intact: citizens can freely express opinions, some of which would be considered subversive elsewhere, organise peaceful protests, and civil society has an influential presence. We must do all we can as citizens to preserve this liberal space and promote an open society in Nepal, not just for us but for other South Asians denied freedom of expression in their own countries. We should remain a country where diverse opinion, peoples and viewpoints can co-exist. 🇳🇵



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# Water brings life

How a small investment in irrigation was all it took to raise incomes of farmers and curb migration

SAHINA SHRESTHA  
IN DOTI



**HAPPY FARMERS:** An irrigation canal built by the Thulo Khola Irrigation Project in Setigaun has benefitted farmers like Bhagrati Kunjeda (*pic, in blue*) who now grows enough vegetables to sell in the market.

PICS: SAHINA SHRESTHA

At the age of 60, Bhagrati Kunjeda (*pic, above*) did something she had never done in her life – made pickles from the tomatoes from her garden. She couldn't afford vegetables before and grew up on a diet of rice, salt, chillies, and cooked mustard seeds.

Vegetables are now a part of her daily diet, and she grows enough to sell some in the nearby market.

All this was possible because of irrigation in these arid mountains of western Nepal. Before an irrigation canal came to Kunjeda's village of Setigaun, eating vegetables was a luxury, now it not only provides vitamin and mineral-rich food but also augments incomes of villagers.

Across western Nepal, most farmers still depend on rain-fed agriculture and can grow only enough food to last them half a year. Most migrate to India and earn enough to feed their families.

The snow-fed West Seti River and other streams have water, but even along

their banks only a third of the farms are irrigated. This year, a winter drought has made matters worse.

"With no rain and no irrigation, there is little we can do to save the crops," says Dal Bahadur Kunjeda who spent three years in India to pay off debts, "when crops fail, we have to borrow money to buy food and other basic requirements."

It is a sign of how a little investment in irrigation can go a long way that many villagers here didn't have to migrate this year because a canal that brought water to their fields allowed them to grow vegetables.

The Thulo Khola Irrigation Project cost just Rs 3.5 million to lay a 2km canal to bring water to 15 hectares of farms belonging to 400 families. If projects like this, supported by Korean aid and the UN's World Food Programme could be scaled up and replicated, it is clear that the far west of Nepal would not be food deficit.

"When I was young, rain came on time," says 81-year-old Hari Singh

Kundeja. "Nowadays, rains are irregular, but with this canal we don't have to depend on the sky anymore."

Hari Kunjeda earned Rs 1,200 selling tomatoes last month, and says he doesn't have to buy rice anymore either. He says: "If we had these opportunities back then, we wouldn't have had to migrate for work."

Families in Setigaun now earn close to Rs 10,000 a month selling chillies, potatoes, tomatoes, onions and other vegetables, which is enough to send children to school and meet household expenses.

"I don't have to go to India anymore," he says, "the number of people going to India from our village has gone down by half."

Having worked on and off in India for the past nine years, Ramesh Kunjeda is happy he doesn't have to go this year because of earnings from selling vegetables. He says: "I only had to go to pay off my debts, but no one wants to be away from their families." 🇳🇵

## Hope flows

Bhagrati Kunjeda, 40, no longer has to walk down the mountain to the river to fetch water anymore. She saves one hour and a lot of drudgery because there is now a tap that she and her neighbours put up in her village.

The tap also irrigates her farm where she grows greens, which in turn generates income for the family.

Kunjeda and many others in Ladagada and Pokhari VDCs have benefitted from the Saemaul Zero Hunger Communities (SZHC) project initiated by Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), World Food Programme (WFP) and Good Neighbour International. The three-year project completed last year had enabled 1,772 households to irrigate 217 hectares of farms.

## Waiting for rain

Durga Devi BK, 35, is landless and has relied on sharecropping to feed her family in Dipayal of Doti. But for the past three years she has not been able to work because there was no water in the landlord's farm.

Dhan Bahadur BK (*pic*), 65, also doesn't have regular work to feed his family of four because the fields are too dry to farm due to the drought and the lack of irrigation.



Landless farmers like Dhan Bahadur and Durga Devi are particularly badly hit by the drought. The landlord says no crops were grown so he can't pay them.

Meanwhile, there is abundant water flowing in the nearby West Seti River. All it needs is for a small investment to build an irrigation canal like the one upstream in Setigaun.

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# The energy to do it ourselves



BHOLA SHRESTHA

Power for Nepal describes the pioneering work by a Norwegian missionary engineer in launching the hydropower industry in Nepal since the 1960s. The translation of a biography tells the inspiring story of an idealistic visionary who felt a compelling desire to raise living standards in a faraway land, and was probably way ahead of his time.

The young Odd Hoftun found himself in a character in an Ibsen play who felt he had 'God's seal on his forehead'. He felt it was his destiny and let his missionary zeal take him to Nepal, which at that time was a remote Himalayan kingdom just opening up to the outside world.

The author points out that the 'combination of place, culture and time constituted the background for Hoftun's extraordinary life'. Born to an engineer father in 1927 in rural Norway, where his home was a centre for progress, the young Hoftun was inculcated early on in caring for the underprivileged.

Aged 31, Hoftun left his comfortable career as electrical engineer in Norway in 1958 and with his wife Tullis came to Nepal to help build Tansen Mission Hospital. After it was built, he stayed on in Nepal for another five decades establishing over a dozen institutions and companies from scratch, like Butwal Technical Institute (1964), Tinau Hydropower (1966), Butwal Power Company (1965), Development and

Consulting Services (1972), Gobar Gas Company (1978), Andhikhola Hydropower and Rural Electrification (1982), Himal Hydro (1978), Jhimruk Hydropower (1992), Hydro Lab, Himal Power (1992).


Hoftun was building capacity long before that became a development buzzword, and put Nepal on track towards energy self-reliance. With his north European Christian work ethic, and people-centred decentralised approach which empowered citizens and the state to be less dependent on the outside. Hoftun's mantra of self-reliance is more relevant today than ever before.

It appears that Hoftun's pioneering work in creating a hydropower industry for energy self-sufficiency was far too visionary to draw the attention of Nepal's policy-makers and planners which was locked in an aid-seeking development model. Reading *Power for Nepal* during the Indian blockade was a poignant reminder to work towards energy self-sufficiency. Still, it is because of Hoftun that Nepal has developed the capability to design and construct hydropower projects and manufacture some of the electro-mechanical and hydro mechanical components to world standard.

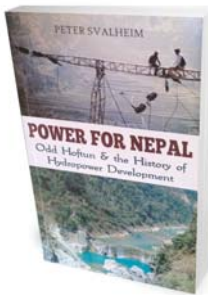
Butwal Technical Institute should have been a model for vocational training in Nepal, imparting practical skills for young Nepalis so they wouldn't have to migrate for work, and even if they did, could earn more.

Hoftun was a pioneer and overcame many obstacles: his own colleagues had a different development philosophy,

Nepali trainees misunderstood him, there were many technical challenges in building the first hydropower tunnel in Nepal, and the chronic lack of funds. The Hoftuns also raised a family without the facilities and comforts of home. Their second child Martin, was born in Tansen and after a complication in delivery later developed a physical disability. Martin died in 1992 in a plane crash while flying into Kathmandu, and it is fitting that his father's book is published by a thinktank that bears his name, Martin Chautari.

The elder Hoftun was able to overcome obstacles and thrived in meeting challenges possibly with inspiration and guidance he found in his strong Christian faith. The central motivation for Hoftun in his lifetime in Nepal was a kind of 'society construction' to build up proficiencies and attitudes, which led to the creation of a vibrant hydropower industry in Nepal. The book is a wonderful testimony of an extraordinary life of Odd Hoftun, the pioneer of hydropower industry in Nepal. If only we had built on what he build. 

*Bhola Shrestha is a mechanical engineer who has managed energy projects in Nepal and Africa as an independent consultant.*



**Power for Nepal**  
*Odd Hoftun & the History of Hydropower Development*  
by Peter Svalheim,  
translated by  
Katherine M Parent  
Martin Chautari, 2015  
NRs 700  
289 pages

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

## Brand value

Qatar Airways has been listed in the 2016 Global 500 list by Brand Finance, a UK-based independent brand valuation consultancy. The international airline is the only Qatari company to be included in the list.



## Affordable Intex

CG | EOL, an authorised distributor of Intex Mobile, launched Intex Aqua Air and Aqua Play in Nepal recently. The Aqua Air is priced at Rs 7777 and Aqua Play 3G is priced at Rs 5666. Both phones come with dual SIM slots.



## Old is Gold

Authorised distributor of Suzuki Motorcycle Bishal Group's V.G. Automobiles Company has

introduced 'Lets and Gixxer Exchange Camp'. Customers can

exchange any old motorcycle or scooter of the brand for a Lets or Gixxer with guaranteed finance and gift hampers. It has also introduced an EMI payment option on four models of the Gixxer with a down payment of 19.99%.



## Energy efficient

G.P. Trading Concern in association with Triveni Group hosted its Annual Dealer Meet program for Crompton Fans and Lighting division. During the event, a new range of cost efficient and energy efficient ceiling, pedestal, wall and other fans targetting the Nepali market was introduced. A new line of Crompton LED Lighting with product category of B22 and E27 utility LED bulbs and LED tubes along with industrial and commercial ranges of LED lighting were also launched.



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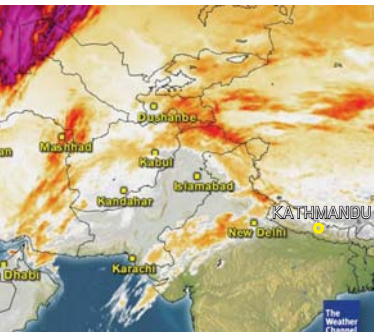


The TRC's first report expresses deep frustration at the lack of cooperation from those in power

One way or another, the many victims of conflict era crimes deserve justice, but are unlikely to get it until the TRC is empowered by the government and allowed to fulfill its mandate. We wish them luck. 

काठमाडौं: अन्नत (९८५१११११५१), दिवज (९८४४८८८७२), ब्रजेश (९८५१००४५४७), दिलिप (९८४९११७२७८९), पोखरा: शिवहरि (९८५३०५५१२९), इटहरी: नरेश (९८५२०५७६१४), विराटनगर: रोशन (९८५२०३२१७३), वटवल: अनिल (९८५१०५०२२३), नारायणघाट: युधिष्ठिर (९८४५००४४४०)





The slight change in wind direction to north-northwest was all it took to drive the Indo-Gangetic pollution haze away and offer spectacular views of the mountains this week. But what we saw was not encouraging. In Pokhara, old timers don't remember Machapuchhre being as black as it is this year. From Kathmandu the Gosainkunda mountains to the north are rocky and snowless. Global warming and erratic precipitation are taking their toll, it seems. However, some snow is coming from a westerly and our mountains will be white again this weekend, before it all melts again. There will be some passing cloud cover in Kathmandu on Friday and Saturday, but not much precipitation.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
25° 10°	24° 10°	25° 7°

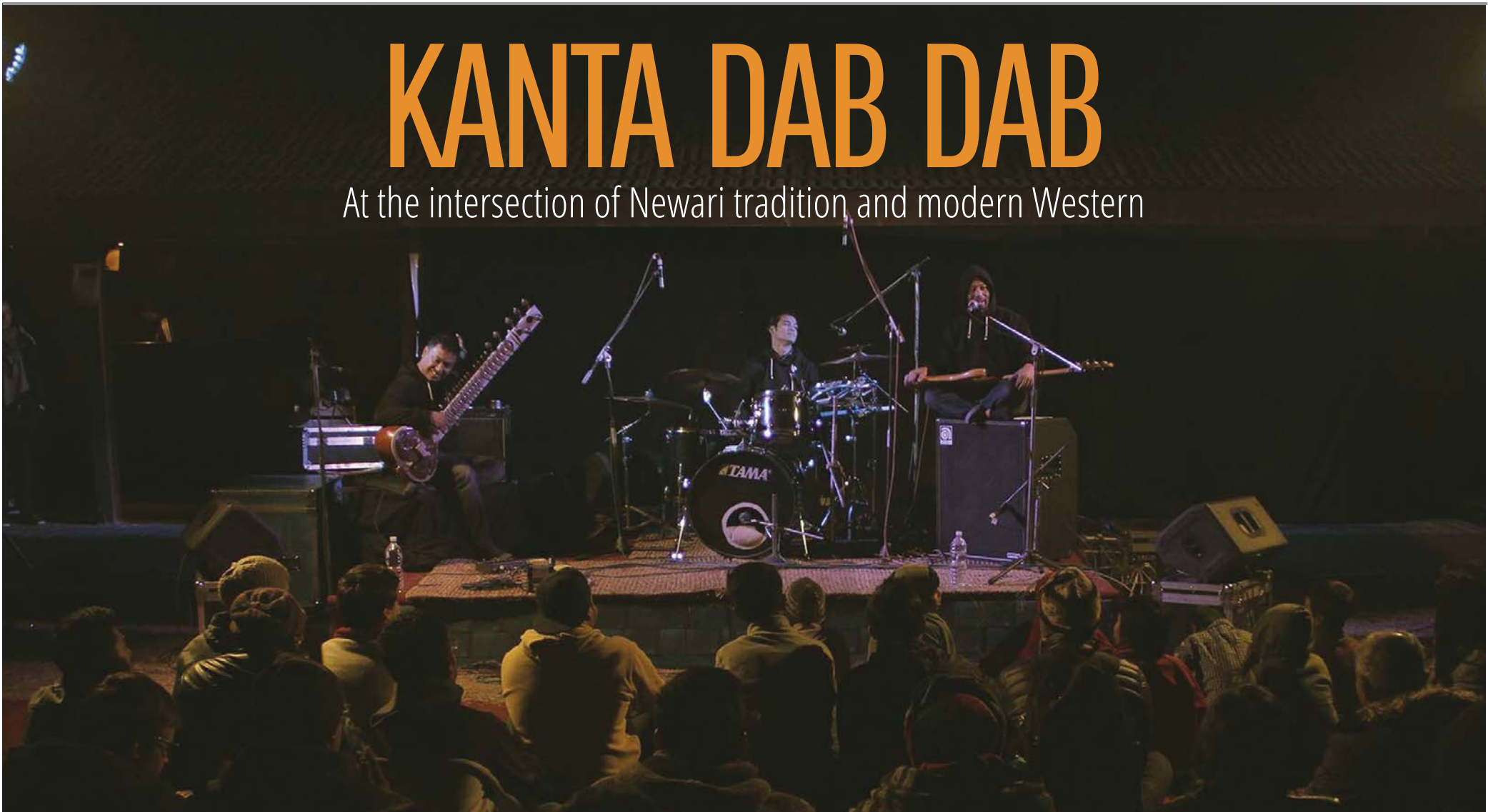
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Sitarist Sunit Kansakar



Drummer Nikhil Tuladhar



Bassist Rizu Tuladhar

## SEULKI LEE

In the debut album of Nepali fusion trio Kanta dAb dAb, the band explores youth and a hybrid sense of spirituality. The self-titled *Kanta dAb dAb* was launched two weeks ago, in tandem with a kickoff concert at Alliance Francaise in Kathmandu (*pic*). The band locates itself at the intersection between Newari tradition and influences of Western modernity. Bassist Rizu Tuladhar, drummer Nikhil Tuladhar and sitarist Sunit Kansakar grew up together in a Newari neighbourhood, playing gigs amongst Thamel's live performance circles. Their mutual experiences of growing

up and sharing two decades of their musical careers together are the foundations of what they explore through the nine tracks in *Kanta dAb dAb*. The name of the band and album stems from the mythical traditions its members grew up with. "We have one character called 'kanta dab dab' in our Newar community. It used to emerge during festival times, dressed up in red. But it never spoke a word. It was quite fascinating for us - very mystical," recalls Rizu Tuladhar. The signature tracks of the debut album are 'Escapade', 'Aatman' and 'Kelikula'. Crafting a new form of soulful fusion grooves, 'Escapade' ebbs and flows on a mystical line where Eastern and Western melodies meet. With the sitar's leading melody and a restrained bass and drum,

the track makes for an unexpected musical journey. 'Aatman' and 'Kelikula' both draw on nostalgic images of boyhood. While the former harkens back to sentimental flashbacks over a slow bass line, the latter evokes the image of a typical day for the three boys in their youth, freely running through narrow alleyways in Kathmandu Valley. Moreover, the jazz-inspired track 'Dab Dab' carries a sophisticated flow; opening with bass and drum, and later joined by sitar, it slowly builds into a trance to the listener. The album's final track, 'Malshree', is the band's rearrangement of a famous Newari traditional song played during the Dasain festival. A more simplified version

of the original, it pays homage to the characteristics of the famous song by not fiddling with the main melody and rhythmic groove. In addition to its impressive first album, Kanta dAb dAb has also launched a 'Musicians for Musicians' project to promote and preserve the traditional musical heritage of Nepal. Teaming up with earthquake-affected Nepali musicians, this social-cultural project will conduct workshops and hold performances, leading up to the 2017 World Folk Music Festival in Kathmandu.

nepalitimes.com

Watch 'Aatman' video



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**KUNDA DIXIT**  
IN DOLPO

A red sun rose through the mist as a Twin Otter of Tara Air taxied out for takeoff at Nepalganj airport one morning this week. Inside, the seats were all folded up to fit 1.5 tons of cargo bound for Dolpo: cement, sacks of rice, a water tank with pipes and even a large steel cabinet.

Twenty minutes later, the plane was flying up the narrow Bheri Valley into shadows cast by towering mountains. A sharp right turn, wingtips

skimming the icy slopes, and the plane landed on the gravel runway, braking dramatically in a cloud of dust. The only other way to get here is by weeks of walking.

But times are changing as new roads reach remote districts. Of the 20 mountain airfields west of Pokhara that used to be regularly served by air, only nine are in operation today (*see map*). Among those, only Dolpo, Jumla, Rara and Simikot have daily flights from Nepalganj or Surkhet. The rest have become pastures for cattle.

Ironically, while the volume of air traffic is falling, the government has invested in

upgrading remote area airfields, lengthening runways and asphaltting them. Jumla airport, which used to be the busiest in northwestern Nepal with up to 10 flights a day now gets only three.

“Jumla used to make up 80 per cent of our traffic among airfields in the western mountains, now it is less than 10 per cent,” says Umesh Rai, CEO of Yeti Airlines, “but you can’t stop progress, the people of Jumla want roads.”

Indeed, even though trunk routes have enough passengers the challenge for Nepal’s domestic airlines will be to diversify passenger profiles

# FLY or

Domestic airlines compete with new roads to service Nepal’s remote mountain airfields

to remote airfields newly accessible by road, develop new tourist destinations with modern facilities and offer smoother and more reliable services.

Even Jomsom, which has a captive tourist and pilgrim market, suffered a drop in passenger volume after the road to Pokhara was completed. The map of Nepal is littered with airfields that are disused or have been abandoned: Doti, Sanfe, Dang, Baglung. Other airfields like Salle, Chaurjhari and Bajura are only serviced by state-owned Nepal Airlines once a week due to political pressure. By contrast, local politicals in Eastern Nepal are competing to build new airfields that no airline wants to fly to.

Dolpo used to be the trickiest airfield in Nepal, but a mountain has been sliced to make approach safer, the runway levelled and lengthened. The airfield will be closed for a month from next week as the runway is paved.

“The road is now one day’s walk away, and once it gets here

people will prefer to take the bus,” predicts Krishna Chhetri, station manager here of Tara Air. Cargo by air costs Rs 85/kg to Nepalganj, while mules cost Rs 30/kg to the roadhead at Triveni, and it is only Rs 10/kg from there by pickup.

Dolpo gets sizeable tourist traffic during the trekking season, and with the premium fare of \$160 one way to Nepalganj (compared to Rs 4,500 for Nepalis) the airfield will still see business. Simikot of Humla is the only other district capital without a road yet, and its recently upgraded airfield is busy, servicing 15 flights a day.

Rara airfield’s much-delayed improvement was completed recently just as the road arrived. Although a drop in flights is expected, Rara’s location could make it the gateway for Nepali and foreign tourists visiting the scenic lake.

“Tourism is the way forward for domestic aviation,” Rai told *Nepali Times* in an interview, “but airlines can only take you there, others need to followup with hotels, trails, tourism



**ONE FOR THE ROAD:** (*Clockwise from top left*)  
● Rara's airfield upgrade coincided with the arrival of the road  
● A Tara Air plane unloads cargo at roadless Dolpo this week  
● Simikot airport is busy because it has no road yet  
● Rush hour at the newly-paved Rara airfield



# RIDE?



facilities." Rara, for instance, could have direct flights from Pokhara too, but only has a rudimentary lodge with six rooms run by the National Park.

Which must be why Yeti Airlines is getting into the hotel industry, and developing chains of high-end lodges along trekking trails in Khumbu, Kaski and Mustang for premium tourism. With the earthquake fading from memory, and the blockade over there is cautious optimism in the industry about the future.

The other factor negatively impacting on domestic air travel was safety, and the EU's blacklisting of all Nepali airlines. But even here, there is progress

with Yeti Airlines and Tara Air recently getting the ISSA Certification (*see sidebar*) from the IATA. However, even though fixed wing safety has improved, helicopter services are lagging behind.

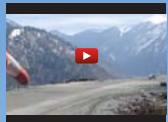
"Air traffic to remote mountain destinations will pick up if the economy picks up," explains Rai, "it is the classic gold fish bowl syndrome, the size of the fish is determined by the size of the economy." 📺



[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Watch landing at Rara

Photo Gallery



## Safety first

Nepal's aviation safety record has been appalling with nine crashes involving more than 120 fatalities in the last ten years. The causes were pilot error with the plane hitting mountains in cloud, by overloading, or a combination of weather and mechanical issues.

Air safety investigators have cited lack of terrain awareness due to over-confidence or carelessness on the part of the crew as the reason for most of the crashes. Since some of the crashes were on tourist routes, the European Union blacklisted Nepal's airlines in 2013, requiring travel agents to inform passengers and raising insurance premiums. The EU Air Safety Committee has kept Nepal on the blacklist despite a marked improvement in aviation safety in the past three years.

Last week, Yeti Airlines and Tara Air got the IATA Standard Safety Assessment (ISSA) certification, which is awarded to smaller operators after audits find that they comply with global safety standards.

Yeti's CEO Umesh Rai credits private airlines and the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) jointly for making safety their number one priority, and hopes that this will go some way to mitigate the negative publicity.

"This certification was a recognition of our serious effort to improve safety, and can be like a torchbearer for other domestic airlines, and help to improve Nepal's image," he said.

One factor pushing airlines to get serious was that insurance premiums had doubled, making it unviable to operate in Nepal. Airlines hope that the ISSA certification will help get Nepal off the EU blacklist, and boost the industry.

Nepal is still in the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) list of countries with 'significant safety concern', and audits have shown that airport perimeter barriers, animals on runway, bird activity, and insufficient navigational aids need to be addressed. CAAN's air traffic controllers are also much stricter than before in closing airfields if wind, visibility or en route weather deteriorate.



## RUN WAY

Western Nepal airfields





EVENTS



**Word Warriors,**  
Learn about the art of slam poetry from this prominent spoken word group.  
19 February, 3pm, Chamber of Commerce, Narayanghat, Chitwan

**Gypsy Swing,**  
Groove to the rhythms of gypsy swing with Hari Maharjan and friends.  
19 February, 7 to 9.30 pm, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chok, 9841226397

**Canvas art,**  
Canadian artist Robin Luoma's exhibition of silkscreen prints on canvas alongside live art in collaboration with Artlab.  
19 February, 5.30 pm, Image Ark Gallery, Patan Darbar Square, (01)5006665, contact@image-ark.com

**Run to Unite,**  
Join the fun and participate in the Kantipur Hero Half Marathon.  
19 February, 7am onwards, Kantipur Publication Premises, Tinkune



**Asian Enduro Series,**  
An opportunity to ride on exciting terrains with the first Asian Enduro Series.  
5 to 10 April, Kathmandu, Tickets available at [www.enduro.asia](http://www.enduro.asia)

**Master trumpet,**  
Master classes with trumpet player, arranger and composer from Germany, Jonas Winterhalter. Group workshop Rs 200, private class Rs 900 per hour  
26 February, 11am, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01)5013554, info@katjazz.com.np

**Cosplay contest,**  
Compete at Otaku Next's cosplay competition.  
5 March, 10.30 am to 4.30 pm, Chhahari Services, Baluwatar, (01)4424692, rhea.chhahari@gmail.com



**BAC Mela,**  
Local products, foodstuff and a second-hand garage sale plus entertainment for the whole family in BAC'S second monthly mela.  
27 February, 2pm, BAC Art Café, Pulchok, [www.bikaplaartcenter.org](http://www.bikaplaartcenter.org)



**Miniature Composite,**  
Learn how to plan, shoot and edit miniature composites with Sattya Media Arts Collective.  
27 February to 29 February, 11am to 3pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, Course Fee: Rs 1700

**Shahid Mallya Live,**  
Enjoy soulful sufi and electronic music with Shahid Mallya and Elektro Sufi.  
4 March, 7pm onwards, The Malla Hotel, Lainchaur, Kathmandu, 9813089163

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



**Sports Films,**  
The second edition of the sports and tourism film festival organised by Nepal Tourism Board.  
19 to 20 February, 11am to 5pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, (01)4256909

**Diwas Gurung Live,**  
Acclaimed song writer and guitarist Diwas Gurung is back in K-town.  
19 February, 6pm onwards, Moksh, Rs 300



**Himalayan Rush,**  
Gear up for the fifth edition of the Himalayan Rush triathlon series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming.  
26 March, Begnas, Pokhara, (01)5550758/ (01)5550759



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Rupakot Resort offers the perfect getaway spot, pampering guests in the lap of luxury amid stunning views of the Annapurnas. The sprawling estate sits on top of Rupakot Hill, 1,100m above sea level, giving guests a sweeping view of Lake Begnas and Rupa in the valley below.

The spectacular view is reason enough to wake up early to catch the sunrise, though the lavish rooms may persuade you otherwise. With queen-sized beds, an en-suite bathroom and private balcony, you may find yourself perfectly content with staying in the room all day.

Start your day right with a meal at Panorama Restaurant. Executive Chef Raj Lama whips up a variety of delicious fare, from traditional Nepali dishes to continental classics.

The newly-opened 42-room resort

grows its own organic greens and root vegetables and has a small dairy farm. It also uses biogas to power its facility.

Rupakot's environmental ethos makes it an ideal place for nature lovers, with ample hiking and mountain biking trails, and plenty of opportunities for bird watching. Take a 30-minute walk up to the nearby temple, or take the path less travelled and follow in Prince Charles' footsteps along the Royal Trek route.

Whether you are looking for adventure or some peace and quiet, Rupakot Resort is the perfect place for a weekend getaway.

Yuwei Liew

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## REVIEW

# Pokhara's Caffé Italiano

**W**earied after a long seven-hour journey from Kathmandu, my friend and I yearned for a quiet dinner away from the bustle of Pokhara city on a Saturday night. Tucked away between hotels in a secluded alleyway, we stumbled upon Caffé Italiano. On par with the many eclectic restaurants on Pokhara's lakeside, the charm and hospitality of this establishment was even more than we could have expected.

Spacious, well-lit and spruced up with wooden furniture, the restaurant offers ample choice of seating arrangements: by the fireplace, in the garden, indoor on the ground level and elevated outdoor seating. We opted for the first floor and were promptly escorted to a table overlooking the alleyway.

The café boasts an elaborate menu of appetisers, soups, pizzas, pastas, and desserts. Overwhelmed by the variety, we finally decided upon the Insalata Caprese (Rs 350): an Italian salad with slices of mozzarella, tomato and basil, made to resemble the Italian flag. Within minutes of having placed the order, the salad was laid out in front of us. Although the presentation left much to be desired, the fresh tomatoes and basil bursting with brightness more than compensated for it.


Having cleansed our palates to start the evening, for the main course we chose the Oven Baked Beef Lasagna (Rs 600), the quintessential Italian dish made with

tomato sauce and meat stuffed within stacked layers of pasta sheets. This version was smothered in béchamel, a classic cream-based sauce originating from French cuisine. Thick and seasoned to perfection, the béchamel complemented the flavours of the pasta while also balancing the succulence of the ground meat, tying the whole dish together.

Two samplings down, we found ourselves craving a traditional Italian dessert, Tiramisu, to round off the evening. But to our dismay, it was not available

due to the blockade and frequent power cuts. Our server graciously suggested that we go for the Chocolate Brownie (Rs 280) instead. Minutes later, a sizeable piece of warm chocolate brownie topped with vanilla ice cream dripping down its sides was placed in front of us. As we sunk our teeth into it, we could feel the moistness of the luscious brownie. It was the perfect ending to a satisfying meal.

Caffé Italiano is a must try for those who want to enjoy a relaxing meal in the lake city, slightly off the beaten path. Although

the prices are a bit steep, a well-rounded meal at this restaurant is money well spent. Prompt service, a friendly smile from your server and an inviting ambiance will definitely have you coming back to this food haven for more. 

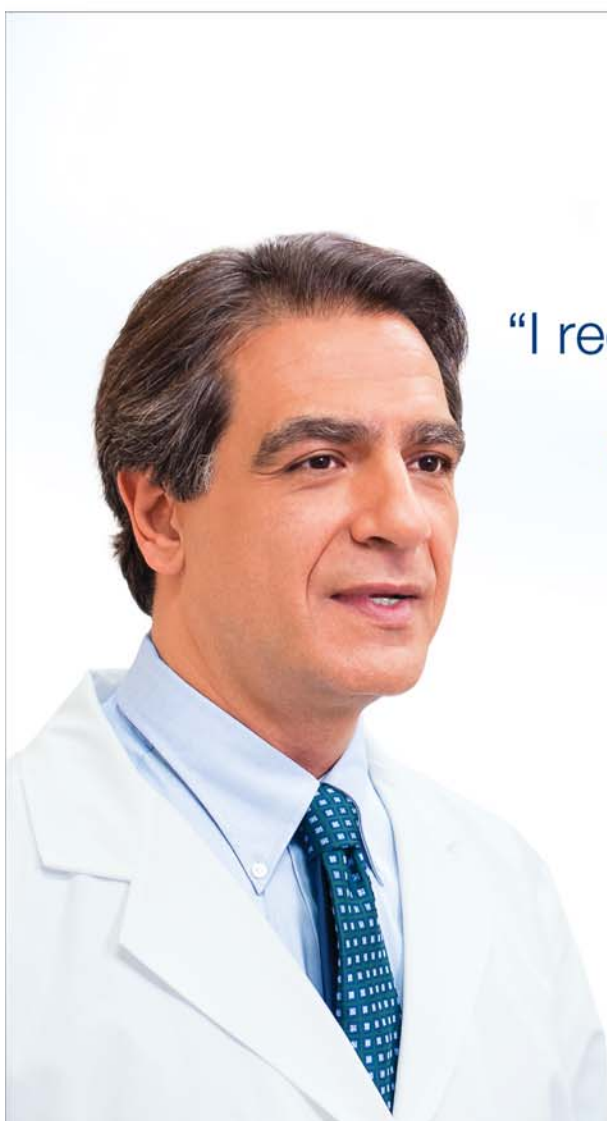
*Snriti Basnet*

*How to get there: Head straight towards Phewa Lake from the junction between Miteri Park and Basundhara Park, follow the Lakeside Road and take the second right.*



PICS: YUWEI LIEW

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TO  
10PM

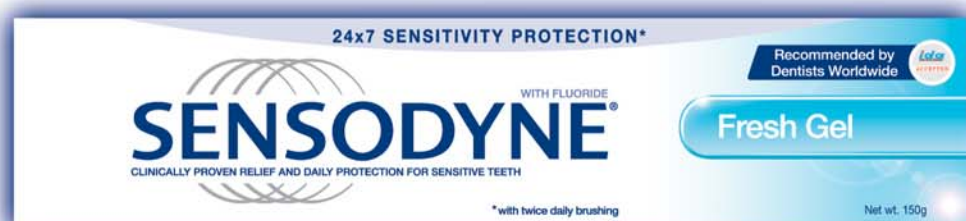


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# MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

About a quarter of the way into watching George Miller's fourth installment of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, I began to realise with a growing sense of horror, what a crazy, over the top, endlessly painful journey I was in for. Wanting to kick myself for not having realised earlier on why it was titled "Fury Road", I heard a friend's voice in my head, saying



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

"That film is not one you want to journey through again. "Well, now I know what she meant.

A very liberal take on the post-apocalyptic world that Mel Gibson, the original 'Mad Max', battled in, this desert-like landscape in the 2015 iteration takes an enormous

amount of inspiration, knowingly or not, from David Lynch's much loved (and much vilified) film *Dune* (1984), adapted from the seminal 1964 Frank Herbert science fiction novel of the same name.

As with Lynch's villains, the men here are monstrous, both morally as well as in form, thriving on their deformities (caused by nuclear fallout) just as the women are beautiful, almost mythical creatures who wield enormous power - in this case, the ability to give birth and to nurture a fast-dying, hideously sickened human race.

This sandy realm has no respite; there are no oases, only power that comes from controlling water, gasoline, and the women. It is in this grim, terrifying world run by the grotesque Immortan Joe (played ferociously by Hugh Keays-Byrne) and his legion of half

crazed offspring, that Emperor Furiosa (Charliz Theron) stages a daring revolt, diverting one of the precious, coveted 'war rigs' on a trip to pick up gasoline, helping Joe's five young, beautiful, tough as nails wives (played by the likes of Zoë Kravitz, Rosie Huntington-Whitely, Riley Keough, Courtney Eaton, and Abbey Lee) to escape the heinous baby factory that their bodies (and minds) have been subjected to.

Chased by Joe's entire army and compounded by his equally bellicose allies, Furiosa and Max (the brilliant Tom Hardy), who was a captive at Joe's citadel, embark upon a blood and death filled ride, which is embellished with the most over the top accoutrements you can imagine, including a pursuit vehicle in Joe's army mounted with a ghoulish, electric guitar playing creature that provides the raucous soundtrack to this nightmarish film.

*Mad Max: Fury Road* is Hollywood's paean to set design, and a continuation of the subliminal horror that has always been a part of the Mad Max films, amplified by a thousand writers and creative directors possibly on acid or perhaps just high on the hubris from having \$150 million to spend on a road film where warped human beings brutally murder each other with glee - accompanied by an oversized electric guitar. 🎸

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Trailer

## HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

**JUBILANT:** Nepal's football team which won gold medal at the 12th South Asian Games at a victory rally in Kathmandu on Wednesday. Nepal defeated India by 2-1 in its home ground in the finals.



GOPEN RAI

**DEM DEBATE:** Nepal's top political leaders attended the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) Special Workshop on 'Democratic Transition in Nepal' at Yak & Yeti Hotel on Monday.



GOPEN RAI

**REBUILDING DHARARA:** Prime Minister Oli and other leaders at the launch of 'I Will Rebuild Dharara' campaign in Kathmandu on Tuesday to reconstruct the tower that collapsed in last April's earthquake, killing 70 people.



KUNDA DIXIT

**THE NEW NORMAL:** A Tara Air Twin Otter being refuelled in Nepalgunj airport on Saturday as Nepal Oil Corporation resumed normal supplies of aviation turbine fuel to domestic and international airlines after the blockade was lifted.



GOPEN RAI

**DADDY'S GIRL:** Nima Gharti Magar, who won the gold medal in wushu at the South Asian Games is greeted by her father on arrival at Kathmandu airport on Saturday.

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# Turning the tide

Santa Gaha Magar in *himalkhabar.com*, 17 February

हिमाल

Until Nawayug Shrestha scored his maiden international goal against the Maldives in Bangabandhu Gold Cup last month, many had not even heard of his name. That underdog Nepal took the lead against the tournament favourite Maldives was equally unexpected.

There were many reasons why Nepali football fans were unfamiliar with Nawayug and why they underestimated their team's strength.

Nepal was participating in the Bangabandhu in the worst phase of its football history. Only three weeks earlier, Nepal had crashed out of the group stage of the 2015 SAFF Championship without earning a single point. As a result, Nepal was dropped to the lowest ranking among South Asian countries by FIFA, world football's governing body.

A few months earlier, five Nepali footballers, including Captain Sagar Thapa and Vice Captain Sandip Rai, were arrested on charges of match-fixing. Last year FIFA imposed a 10-year ban on the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA)'s powerful President Ganesh Thapa for bribery.

Since the 1999 South Asian Games (SAG) Nepal had not reached the final of any international tournament. Nawayug, a high scorer in domestic league matches, was nowhere to be seen in the tournament's opening round.

However, by the time the Nepal vs Maldives match was over, Nawayug had turned into a star. He scored his first hat-trick in the match, going onto score the crucial goal against Bahrain in the finals that led to the team's victory. Rightly so, he was declared the most valuable player of the tournament.

But some called Nawayug's performance a fluke and doubted that he would be able to play that well in future. A month later, he has critics eating their words. The new Nepali football star pulled off two hat-tricks in the 2016 SAG and scored the decisive goal against India in the final match, helping end Nepal's 23-year wait for an international victory.

How did the Nepal team, demoralised by match-fixing and Ganesh Thapa scandals, suddenly do so well? It looks like corruption was holding back our players. The recent scandals were a blessing in disguise as they ended the sports mafia that was run by Thapa and his coterie for years.

"When the mafia collapsed, new talents like Nawayug got opportunities and coaches were free to make creative decisions," says football analyst Nabin Pandey.

Nawayug was ignored by ANFA until last year. He had been first picked by Belgian coach Patrick Assems for a friendly match last September. Pandey asserts that the ANFA used to select national players based on personal relations rather than merit. British coach Graham Roberts had also publicly spoken out against the interference of ANFA officials in the selection process.

Balgopal Maharjan, who was the head coach of the team that won the Bangabandhu game, says Nepal now has a strong football squad but it needs to be supported by an equally effective management. "We need to convince players that they have a future in football," he says. "If the government and the ANFA provide necessary support, Nepal will certainly be the regional football powerhouse."

## Fighting for foreigners

Editorial in *Kantipur*,  
14 February  
कान्तिपुर

Earlier this month India and Brunei signed a defense pact during a visit by Indian Vice President Mohammed Hamid Ansari to the Southeast Asian state. During the meeting, India reportedly offered the services of its Gorkha soldiers to Brunei.

Ansari's proposal goes against the spirit of the 1947 tripartite treaty between Nepal, India and the UK concerning the deployment of Gurkha soldiers which allows the soliders from Nepal to be integrated into the Indian and British armies, but not to be treated as mercenaries. Doing so without Nepal's consent is condemnable.

Even so, the UK has been using Gurkha soldiers as mercenaries for decades. The Sultan of Brunei has deployed soldiers of the British Royal Gurkha Rifles as palace guards since the 1960s. The UK also sends Gurkha soldiers to serve in the Singapore Police Force. The British government thus acts as a middle man, reaping most of the fees. Now, India is trying to emulate that.

Irrespective of which countries they are serving, Gurkha soldiers are Nepalis first and the Nepali state should be responsible for their welfare. It would be against our national interest to remain silent about this breach of the treaty.

The failure to raise a voice against the use of Gurkha soldiers as mercenaries could also

Border's open!  
ON TRUCK: Black market  
Batsayan in *Kantipur*,  
18 February



### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We are happy that Prime Minister KP Oli has chosen India as his first official visit abroad.”

Indian ambassador Ranjit Rae  
in *Nagarik*, 18 February

jeopardise Nepal's diplomatic ties with friendly countries. For example future tension between Brunei and China in the South China Sea could drag Nepali soldiers into the territorial dispute. If that happens, it could strain Nepal's relations with its northern neighbour. Prime Minister KP Oli should raise this issue with his Indian counterpart during his visit to New Delhi this week.

India's proposal has once again highlighted the need to review the 1947 treaty, which was signed

by Rana rulers. Nepali soldiers have also been recruited by other countries including the US and France, but neither have a formal agreement with Nepal. There are also an increasing number of young Nepalis being recruited by private security companies to serve in war-torn Gulf states.

While the state earns remittances from its soldiers in foreign armies, it should take note of the harm this will have on Nepal's long-term strategic interest.

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# LEARN TO EARN

More Nepali overseas workers want to acquire skills before they go abroad

OM ASTHA RAI



A few days after celebrating Maghi festival last month, Prakash Tharu, 22, packed his bag and boarded a bus to Kathmandu. Like most young men from his village of Nawalparasi district in the plains, he was off to the Gulf as an unskilled construction worker.

But a relative persuaded him to join a plumbing course before leaving. After failing his high school exam three years ago, he had been working as a plumber.

“At first, I didn’t like the idea because it would cost me more money and time,” he said. “But when I learnt I could earn more if I went abroad as a skilled worker, I changed my mind because I could pay my loan off faster.”

His course is now over, and he is set to fly to Qatar next week to work as a

plumber. He says he can now earn \$108 more than what he would have earned as a construction worker.

Like Tharu, an increasing number of Nepalis are now learning vocational skills before migrating to the Gulf and Malaysia.

Narayan Pradhan, Managing Director of Nikhil Multi Services, a vocational training institute where Tharu studied, says: “Migrant workers are increasingly becoming aware of the benefits of having skills.”

When he worked as a mechanical engineer in Qatar in 2004, Pradhan witnessed the suffering and exploitation of Nepali migrant workers. “They were forced to do dirty, dangerous and demeaning work – not because they were Nepalis, but because they did not have the skills to take up better jobs,” he recalls.

After returning from Qatar, Pradhan set up his vocational training school in 2007, where more than 60 young men are learning plumbing, carpentry, masonry

and electrician skills. “For more than half a year, I did not find a single student,” he says. “No one wanted to spend money and time in learning a skill. They just wanted to go abroad.”

Pradhan then remodelled his classes to attract students with cheaper and shorter courses. “Still a large number of Nepalis leave to work without any skills,” he says.

A study by the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) in 2014 showed that more than

# Young, educated and unemployed

Youth unemployment among university graduates in Nepal is three times higher than among those without education

Access to and participation in higher education has increased rapidly, particularly in urban areas of Nepal, yet whether educated young people can achieve or create productive employment that is meaningful to them and to the country’s development remains unclear and uncertain.

A study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on



GUEST COLUMN

Sangita Thebe Limbu



Nepali youth between 15-29 reveals the youth unemployment rate among university graduates is at 26.1 per cent, which is three times higher than those with ‘no education at all’. Nepal’s youth unemployment rate is 19.2 per cent, compared to the national unemployment rate of 2.7 per cent, which appears to be low. But this is because of labour migration, expansion of the service sector and the dominance of subsistence agriculture. Majority of young people who work (92.2 per cent) are engaged in informal employment with no entitlements like basic wages, paid annual and sick leave, etc.

Graduates in Nepal also face a higher unemployment rate than their counterparts without degrees. Educated young people

could be more selective about jobs, considering the amount of investment that has gone into their education, but it also highlights chronic shortages of salaried employment opportunities and a disjuncture between higher education and demands of labour market.

There is also a skills mismatch whereby jobs are available, but the skills required by the employers are different from what is acquired through higher education. Career support and guidance for students remain minimal, and very little information on employability and career pathways are available.

There continues to be an experience bias whereby most of the formal employment advertised demand certain years on-the-job,

yet the availability of entry level posts and internships required to build that level of experience remains low. Many vacancy ads specify the degree courses required, which is understandable for specialised or technical professions. However, for many other jobs, the focus should shift towards transferrable skills rather than specific degree courses.

For instance, the notion is if you study business, you have to go into the business sector, whereas the project management and innovation skills acquired is just as relevant in other areas. Critical thinking and analytical skills developed through a politics degree can also be relevant to marketing and strategic thinking in the business sector.

This is based on an assumption that education is geared towards developing skills and making students independent and lifelong learners, which is not always the case in the Nepali education system where the emphasis is still on yearly exams rather than holistic assessment.

This is why there are so many inactive young people encouraged from a very early age to focus only on exams instead of balancing it out with their hobbies, volunteering and part time jobs. So when they eventually enter the job market, they begin from a disadvantaged position of having little or no experience at all.

The ILO report further shows only 10 per cent of vacancies are filled through advertisements and private recruitment companies, while acquaintance and relatives still play an important role in the hiring process which re-affirms pervasive nepotism in Nepal. This finding highlights two issues – first, information on available vacancies are not easily available, this could also be because Nepal’s economy is predominantly based on informal sector. The second is the importance of connection and networks in breaking into the job market, which proves difficult particularly for youth who come from communities that have been historically underrepresented in political, social and economic spheres. Prevailing socio-political exclusion is reflected and

reinforced in the labour market.

However, it would be wrong to assume that young people are just passive spectators without any agency. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, young Nepalis mobilised to help. Many have also been returning from abroad to put their acquired skills to good use back home as successful examples of ‘brain circulation’.

Applauding individual success stories is important, but it is vital not to lose sight of the wider structural barriers that have resulted in large scale emigration and increased reliance on remittances to keep the national economy afloat.

What Nepal needs most now is an economic transformation. The tunnel vision of politics before economics misses the point that political rights are meaningless unless people can exercise their economic and social rights.

Creating a ‘New Nepal’ has been the driving rhetoric of politicians, but the ‘new’ is still constituted by the ‘old’ – in leadership, and the hierarchical, paternalistic mode of governance. Nepal must recognise the aspirations of its younger citizens and give them a chance to discover, develop and utilise their potential.

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PICS: OM ASTHARAI

half the Nepali migrants who went overseas were unskilled labourers. Only 16 per cent of them were skilled, and 32 per cent were semi-skilled.

In 2004, Ganesh Gurung, an expert on labour migration, conducted a study which showed that 69 per cent of Nepali migrant workers were unskilled, 27 per cent were semi-skilled, and only four per cent were skilled.

“The number of skilled Nepalis going abroad is increasing, but at a very slow

pace,” explains Manoj Sharma, Deputy Director of the Research Division at the CTEVT. “The jobs requiring skills are not exclusively reserved for Filipinos or Sri Lankans, but Nepali migrant workers just lack the skills for better-paid jobs.”

In 2014, Nepal received more than Rs 560 billion (29 per cent of the GDP) from remittances. Sharma says Nepal could double its remittance earnings by sending skilled workers abroad. “A skilled worker earns at least 40 per cent more than an

unskilled labourer,” he says.

Experts say Nepal cannot stop the outmigration of youth for at least another 20 years, and that the best option would be to train workers before sending them abroad.

The government has taken some donor-funded initiatives to reverse the pattern of migration. This year, some 10,000 youth are learning vocational skills before migrating under a Swiss-funded project, but this represents a small portion of the 600,000 young men who migrated for work last year.

**SKILL SELLS:** Twenty-year-old Bishnu Kumar Thakur from Mahottari is one of the 10,000 youths learning vocational skills before migrating under the Swiss-funded Safe Migration (SaMi) project (*overleaf*).

Prakash Tharu, 22, (*pictured, left*) recently completed his plumbing course and is set to fly to Qatar next week. He can now earn \$108 more than what he would have as an unskilled construction worker.

Bishnu Kumar Thakur, a 20-year-old from Mahottari, is one of them. His father was a self-trained carpenter but went to the Gulf as an unskilled worker. “From my father’s experience, I know what happens when you migrate without skills,” he says.

Thakur is now taking a 45-day plumbing course in Kathmandu under the Swiss-funded Safe Migration (SaMi) project. “Even if we have skills, we cannot get jobs here,” he says, “so I must work abroad for a few years at least.”

Bharat Pokharel, Country Director of the HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, says: “We neither encourage nor discourage Nepali youth to migrate. But when they decide to migrate, it is important to ensure that they have skills and will get better opportunities abroad.”

He says Nepali migrant workers are known for honesty and hard work but lack job skills. “We are trying to fill this gap,” he says. “We also teach them safety measures to follow abroad and basic English and Urdu to communicate with employers.”

Former Labour Minister Tek Bahadur Gurung says the reason for sending skilled workers is not just for getting more remittance but also to encourage entrepreneurship among Nepali youth.

“Skilled workers not only earn more but also learn entrepreneurial skills and start enterprises when they return,” he says. “But unskilled workers tend to migrate over and again because they never earn enough and lack skills to start their own ventures.”

# HONEY - ONE TEASPOON DAILY FOR A FITTER YOU.

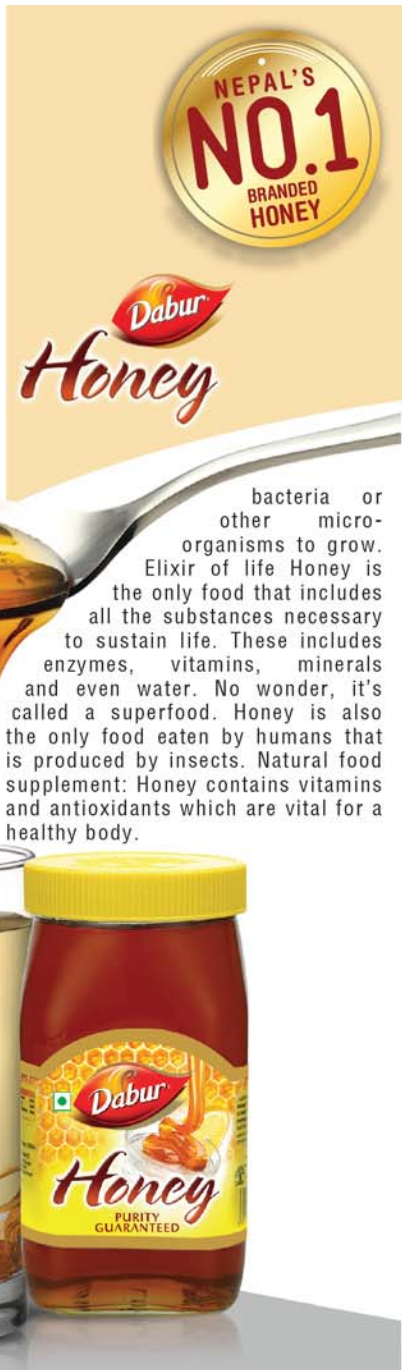
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Deemed as a top health food across the globe, honey is a wonderful creation. The health properties of this thick golden liquid have been valued since ages. For anyone who wishes to lead a healthy lifestyle, honey must become an important component of their diet. The most convenient way to do that is starting your day with a warm glass of water and mixing Dabur Honey in it. As per Ayurveda, honey is known to increase metabolism and if consumed with lemon in the morning before breakfast it helps to manage weight. Honey is also known to be a natural healer, as it fights infection and aids tissue healing. It is also known

for their day breaks. It will enable them to stay energetic and active 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, to increasing your metabolic system, and even working as an antioxidant. Love honey in all its glory and imbibe it as a part of your daily lifestyle for a healthy life. If old is gold, then honey is the treasure we've 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 more to it than just a diet-friendly ingredient.  
What people are not aware of is that it is an important ingredient for preventing illnesses and remedial for other health/medical conditions. Honey is a natural ingredient that possesses anti-bodies properties unlike sugar. While it has been recommended to stay away from sugar for patients, one must not stay sugar free. Hence, a honey diet is recommended. There are studies that suggest regarding the treatment of various organs honey is a good agent that aids patient's

non-cytotoxic to normal cells. Honey aids in combatting common ailments like headaches, cuts and bruises, burns, acne and pimples, dry skin, nausea, dizziness and more. For instance, one must chew honeycomb to calm down a severe hay fever. The Chinese believe that consuming honey drink helps reduce

the heat in the body. Honey and lemon juice is considered beneficial to battle obesity. It is so, because honey mobilises extra deposited fat, and the body utilizes it as energy. Honey is your best friend, especially if you are a foodie! A spoonful of this tasty golden liquid after a heavy and oily meal will do wonders for your digestive system. It also works as a great detox tonic. Honey does not go bad. Yes, it's true! Honey is probably the only food that does not get spoilt over time. The unique chemical composition of low water content and relatively high acid level in honey creates an unfavourable environment for



bacteria or other micro-organisms to grow. Elixir of life Honey is the only food that includes all the substances necessary to sustain life. These includes enzymes, vitamins, minerals and even water. No wonder, it's called a superfood. Honey is also the only food eaten by humans that is produced by insects. Natural food supplement: Honey contains vitamins and antioxidants which are vital for a healthy body.

to reduce inflammation and scarring. If you're feeling sleeplessness, then mix honey with warm milk and have it before sleeping. It is known to make you feel relaxed and rested, and get you a good night's sleep. It's not just the adults who benefit from these golden drops. If your kids seem to feel lethargic throughout the day, or lack energy, then give them toasts with honey

recovery. It appears that honey is an intelligent food item that is selectively toxic to weak or harmful cells and



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# PM Oli's to-do list in Delhi

I agree with those who are lambasting Prime Minister Oli for taking a 92-member delegation to New Delhi. The size of his entourage is an outrage. It should be much bigger.

After all, the more the merrier and there is strength in numbers. If we are trying to have a show of force, then this scraggly team is not going to impress anyone in Delhi. The PMO should have taken along everyone in government who needed a medical checkup, or needed to have their heads examined, or both.

But hope is at hand. Under the new constitution amendment all official delegations should be on the basis of population density which means when Madhesi politicians are added to the entourage, it will cross 200. The Nepali invasion of India on Friday, therefore, will not be called a 'jumbo delegation', but an Airbus 380 delegation.

Full disclosure: the Ass is angry because yours truly was left out of an entourage that is made up of so many illustrious asses from all sectors of Nepal's national firmament. If other donkeys can go, why can't me?

Yes, you by the window, louder I can't hear you. It should be 'why can't I', not 'why can't me'? OK, wiseguy, it's because of nitpickers like you that this country isn't moving ahead. Here we are trying to discuss a matter of great national importance that will have far-reaching repercussions and concussions into the future viz, and to wit, PM Oli's visit to New Delhi, and you want to quibble about grammar and syntax?

Sorry for that rude interruption from a member of the audience, ladies and gentlemen, we can now get back to this



week's subject which is gravity waves from colliding black holes and how it affects Nepal's Tenth Five Year Plan. Um ... wrong page again.

We cannot stress enough how important the timing is for the epic meeting between Oli and Modi this weekend. After all, he is meeting the guy who till just a week ago was trying to throttle our collective windpipes. Just as well he stopped trying to strangle us because we would have breathed our last as a nation state if he had kept it up a while longer. I don't believe it was India's intention to actually send us to kingdom come, but they do seem to want the monarchy back.

It is important for Oli to go and pay his respects to the Delhi Durbar and thank the Bad Shah for giving us the opportunity to be his punching bag, and allowing us the chance to help him let off some steam. We should also quote him some Shakespeare: "O mighty Caesar! dost thou lie so low? Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, Shrunk to this little measure?"

Before his trip, the Prime Minister has been seeking advice of all and sundry,

mostly sundry, about what he should take up with Modi Sir. Unfortunately the Ass wasn't invited to provide suggestions, but in the longterm national interest, I am offering him some useful talking points:

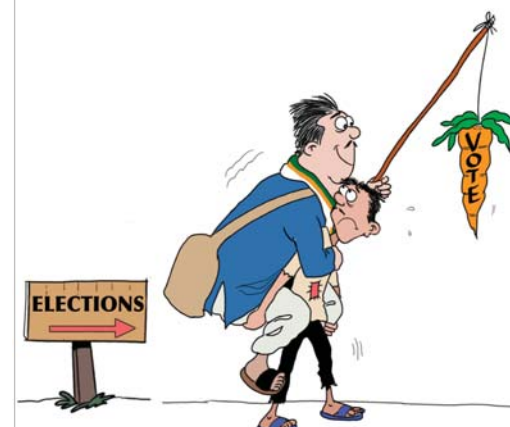
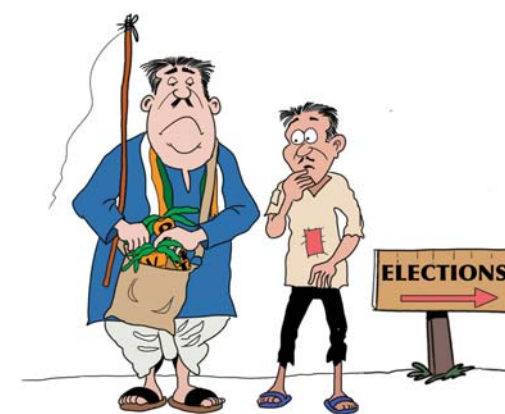
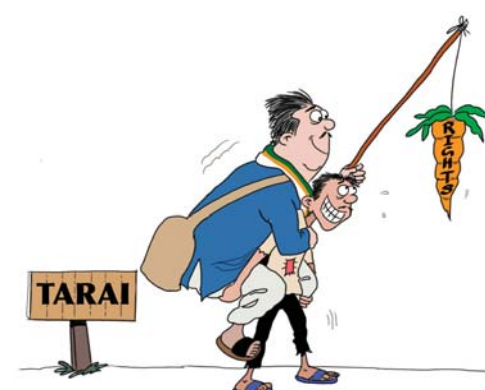
- KPO should apologise profusely to NaMo for the defeat of the Indian football team at the South Asian Games, and assure the Indian establishmentarians that it won't happen again.
- As a former Naxalite himself, Comrade Oli should thank Modi for the 'red' carpet welcome befitting of an ex-underground insurgent. He should offer help in dealing with those pesky JNU commies, and from his recent experience in Nepal offer lessons on just how potent ultra-nationalism can be as a weapon for political survival.
- There isn't much time, but the Prime Minister should practice some Hindi so that the punch line in some of his jokes will not be lost in translation, be misconstrued and ultimately lead to another blockade. For example, he should refrain from calling the Aam Aadmi Party the "Mango Party". However tempting, KPO should also refrain from cracking non-veg jokes during the state banquet. Instead, he should politely thank the host for the sumptuous meal and say the food was very "fulfilling" and that he is "fed up".
- Get some tips from Modi about how to clock frequent flier miles and visit his own country from time to time.
- Get himself a pin stripe suit too.
- Promise earthquake survivors in Bhuj that he will visit shelters in Bhaktapur when he gets back to Nepal.
- Oli has promised he will not agree to any deals that go "against the national interest". What he didn't spell out is whose national interest: India's, or Nepal's.



The Ass

## PAST PRESENT FUTURE

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