Leaving footprints

One of the highlights of Prime Minister KP Oli’s meeting with his counterpart Narendra Modi in New Delhi this week was the inauguration of the 140km cross border transmission line. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is already importing 200 MW from India, and the new power line will make it possible to immediately add another 80MW, which can be increased to 600MW by 2017. The additional power will reduce electricity rationing in Nepal, but experts say that since the imported power is thermal it will increase Nepal’s carbon footprint and that it is not in its national interest.

It is unfortunate that a country like Nepal, with a huge potential in renewable energy, has to import dirty energy from a country that relies mainly on coal-burning thermal power,” says water resource analyst Rauta Sunaru Shrestha. Climate change expert Manjeet Dhakal agrees that even if the electricity is generated from burning coal in India, it could be counted as Nepal’s greenhouse gas emission. “It shows that the government and its advisors are not well versed in what is going on in the world,” says Dhakal.

Nepal’s present carbon footprint of 0.2 tons per capita is one of the lowest in the world. By next year one-third of Nepal’s national grid will be from imported thermal energy.

Environmentalist Rhusan Tuladhar says that the decision to import power may reduce Nepal’s diesel consumption, which has tripled in the last five years because of generators, but warns that it may ultimately reduce the urgency to invest in renewable hydroelectricity. “Within we can import power so easily, the government may get complacent,” says Tuladhar. “We have to aim for energy security and to generate enough renewable energy for our own need and for export. Energy economist and former water resource minister Dipak Gyawali says that the new transmission line comes from an area of power deficit in Bihar, and India could turn it off anytime it wants when it needs the electricity to meet its own domestic demand. Gyawali added: “The transmission line is treasonous. It is an attempt to push Nepal into a neo-colonial development path.”

Sabina Shrestha
Wired

It is one of the supreme ironies of our times that a country endowed with such rich hydropower potential has to import dirty energy from a neighbouring country.

Besides attempting to normalise bilateral relations with New Delhi, the other big highlight of Prime Minister K P Oli’s India visit this week was the inauguration of the much-delayed Muzaffarpur-Dhalkebar electricity transmission line. The agreement was greeted with applause from industry and individuals reeling from this winter from daily 14-hour power cuts. So desperate are Nepalis to have adequate supplies of electricity, diesel, petrol and gas restored that we will welcome any deal that will partly alleviate our suffering. Which is why the transmission line agreement was greeted within the larger framework of improvements in India-Nepal relations and the lifting of the blockade.

We did have an ‘oh-oh’ moment, though, when we found out that the extra 80MW that will be added to the national grid will only reduce the load-shedding by two hours at the most. By next year when Nepal can import 600MW from the crossborder power line, however, it will represent one-third of Nepal’s total winter demand of electricity.

It is one of the supreme ironies of our times that a country endowed with such rich hydropower potential has been driven to the point where it has to import dirty energy from coal-fired plants from a neighbouring country. Eighty per cent of Nepalis still depend on biomass for energy, yet as this blockade showed, the country can be brought to a standstill if petroleum supplies are stopped.

Petroleum now makes up more than 60 per cent of our total imports, and together it is worth more than all our exports put together. The import of diesel alone grew three fold in the last five years, mainly due to the increased use of generators. One calculation shows that all the generators in Nepal put together feed some 600MW of captive power to households, offices and factories. The only reason we can continue to be able to pay for our rising fuel bill is because of remittances from Nepalis working abroad — the ‘sweat for oil’ barter arrangement.

The reason Nepalis have one of the lowest per capita footprints among low-income countries of 0.6 tons per capita is not just because our grid used to be entirely unrenewable, hydroelectricity-based, but also because most Nepalis still use woodfuel for fuel. This will change as coal-based electricity is going to make such a big chunk of our national energy consumption.

Because we are starting from almost zero in fossil fuel use, this will still mean that Nepal’s carbon footprint will be negligible. The larger issue is one of the political failure that forced us to become dependent on India not just for petroleum but also for electricity. The power shortage was a blessing in disguise because it fostered domestic entrepreneurship and allowed developers to build new mini-hydropower plants in the 2-5MW range. Other larger projects with private investment got underway. There is now a crop of young Nepali engineers who have acquired experience and skills. But even if Nepal manages to generate more hydropower, the bottleneck has been transmission lines. Two transmission lines, one inside Kathmandu Valley and the other connecting Tansa Kosi to Dhalkebar have been delayed for years due to local extortion.

The Muzaffarpur-Dhalkebar transmission line may bring us temporary and partial respite from power cuts, but it is the wrong power line in the wrong place. The argument given is that it will allow Nepal to import power for now, and we can expect power to India through it when we have a surplus. This argument has two flaws: firstly the transmission lines link Nepal to the most power-deficient region of India. Which means whenever they have a shortage, which is often in the hot season, they are going to switch off those precious 60MW. And by next year when we are importing 600MW on that line, it is going to make Nepal even more vulnerable. Exporting power to India is a pipe dream, we must first plug our domestic energy deficit, address suppressed demand and then catch up with the 300MW that will be added to the demand every year for five to five years.

One of the silver linings of this blockade, we had argued back in September, was that it could force Nepal’s politicians to think about energy self-reliance and make an aggressive campaign to switch to renewable energy. Well, guess what, not only will we now be even less soil reliant, we will be dependent on India not just for all but also for electricity. And by being so dependent on fossil energy we will have lost our moral high ground at international fora to lobby for funds for climate change adaptation.

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

OUR REMIT

Our leaders have made a lot of personal sacrifices to bring about the great political changes in the country. (Our remit). Editorial, #707.

Now it is the responsibility of younger generations to bring about an economic revolution.

Sarah Shrestha

LEARN TO EARN

I would personally love to see these men acquire construction skills and put them to practice at home instead of losing abroad and become part of the 21st century slave trade. (Learn to earn). Om Kheti Rai, #707.

With the destruction caused by the recent earthquake, I think there are enough job opportunities for those workers in Nepal. While they want to go to the Gulf, Indian missions from across the border want to come to Nepal.

Hrjay

I am delighted to learn that positive things are happening in Nepal despite so many problems. I appreciate Mr Bharat P Pokhrel’s view. 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 get better opportunities abroad.

R Rai

YOUNG, EDUCATED & UNEMPLOYED

This is a disgrace to all those non-work-all-talk politicians. ‘Young, educated and unemployed,’ Sargaj (Shobha Lekhu, #707)

Why are the youths so silent? They should gang up and demand facilities from those who promise but never deliver.

Hugh

Even those jobs which are obtained through nepotism are hardly what they are made out to be. It is really wrong in Nepal? It is basically an extremely funded economy – NGOs, Contracts, Remittance, etc. Very few Nepali companies want to modernise (which would have a trickle down effect on the selected IT, Business consultancy) and the GoN is really dependent on consultants telling them how to run the show.

Namah
Restless radicals

There are too many groups dissatisfied with the way the agitation in the Madhes has been called off.

Here in Janakpur, the epicenter of the Madhes agitation, Dhanusha district police charged three people with the murder of Nepali Congress member Rajendra Yadav earlier this month.

Three other NC members had been injured the same day, and the three announced they were acting on behalf of a newly set-up armed group, and killing Yadav was their first direct action. Police here fear that the recent Madhes agitation and its partial resolution have led to dissatisfied radicals taking to violent politics.

A month ago, a police officer was gunned down by an assailant belonging to the Jai Krishna Gol group in Saptari, and the same group also tried to set off an explosion there which was defused by the police. These and other incidents show that the plains may be headed to another period of violence and instability after six months of strikes and blockade.

People in the plains are weary of strikes and want to get on with their lives, but political activists are competing to be more radical. With more than half the population of the Tarai aged under 20, it is difficult for political parties led by older leaders to keep control.

Younger Madhesis have been radicalised by the heavy-handed response of the security forces during the agitation in which nearly 60 demonstrators, many of them innocent bystanders, were killed. The youth are also angry at the Madhes Front leaders who, led them with slogans like ‘Aabhi Nahi To Kavi Nahi’ (Now, or Never) and then struck a deal with Kathmandu to call off the blockade.

Jani Khan, one of the protesters on the streets, said: “One group of Madhesi youth is not happy with the agreement and think that the Madhesi people will never get their rights unless they raise the gun.”

Khan says the people in the Tarai feel the reason the first Madhes Movement in 2007 was successful was because Jai Krishna Gol and Jowa Singh had gone underground with arms.

“No we only have a non-violent track, that is why Kathmandu is not listening,” Khan said, referring to the Madhesi demand for the demarcation of the two provinces in the plains.

This week I also visited Birganj and Kaliya which also saw demonstrations in the past few months. Sadbhavanna leader Shiva Patel admitted to me that he was under pressure from young turks to have an armed wing, “I already rejected this proposal,” Patel told me, “but that is the general mood here. And some people are ready to restart protests in the spring.”

Youth leader Shyam Gupta told me in Kaliya that young activists like him are not expecting much from the high-level mechanism set up to find a compromise on the provincial demarcation. It is probably because of the radicalisation of the Tarai that the Front refused to join the mechanism.

The general feeling among people in Parsa and Dhanusha is that Kathmandu would be well-advised to agree to the moderate demands of the Madhes Front, otherwise the leaders of the plains may have the rug pulled from under them by young radicals itching to take up arms.

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The fine print
The Muzaffarpur-Dhalkebar transmission line inaugurated this week in Delhi has questionable benefits for Nepal

On 20 February Nepal’s visiting Prime Minister Oli and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi (pic) inaugurated the much-delayed 400kV transmission line linking Nepal and India. The 140km crossborder link joins the Indian grid from Muzaffarpur in Bihar with Dhalkebar in Bhairahawa in Rautahat in export electricity to ease the acute shortage in Nepal.

Nepal’s chronic power shortage has been made worse because of the scarcity of diesel for generators due to the closure of the Birganj border for five months by Madhesi protesters allegedly abetted by India.

Prime Minister Oli has vowed to end electricity rationing within a year, and Deputy Prime Minister and Energy Minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi last week declared an “energy emergency” to cope with the crisis. He also endorsed a National Energy Crisis Reduction and Electricity Development Decade Plan which includes the import of 560 MW from India.

The Nepal portion of the transmission line was constructed at a cost of $35 million and is already feeding 46 MW of power to Nepal from India. This will be augmented to 200 MW at 220kV in October 2016, and eventually to 600 MW at 400kV by December 2017.

Although Oli received wide acclamations in the media for the deal that could reduce power shortage, the project was actually initiated and developed by erstwhile Minister of Water Resources Gyansudra Bahadur Karki of the NC as far back as 2006.

A staunch nationalist, Oli vowed not to sign any national agreement during his visit, but the transmission line he inaugurated paves Nepal’s hydro-electricity market at a disadvantage. A pre-condition for this deal was that Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) signs a 150 MW Power Purchasing Agreement (PPA) for at least 25 years with Power Trading Corporation (PTC) of India.

In other words, the fine print requires Nepal to purchase 150 MW power from India for at least 25 years and take $13.5 million in loan to construct the transmission line at a cost of $20 million. Nepal awarded the contract for construction of 40km of Nepal portion to an Indian company, Tata Projects Ltd. Such a disadvantageous world $100 million on Indian work and Modi discourages domestic investment for hydroelectricity generation and transmission in Nepal.

The cost of the 40km Nepal portion of the transmission line is $20 million while the 100km Indian section costs only $33 million. Experts have calculated that the Nepal part of the transmission line costs $180,000 per km.

Although the agreement mentions the word ‘flow’, the transmission line was constructed for the uni-directional import of power from India, not export from Nepal. The leaders in Kathmandu talk endlessly about Nepal’s huge hydroelectric potential and make grand plans for energy independence, but their actions tell a different story.

In its 2015 annual report, the NEA reported a loss of Rs 7 billion. It may be prudent to ask how importing 600 MW from India would improve its balance sheet. Furthermore, accepting a foreign loan to invest in power import infrastructure and sign a 25 year long PPA in US dollars instead of investing in domestic generation capacity is against the national interest.

On a typical day, domestic generation meets roughly 500 MW of 1,292 MW peak at 6.10 pm. NEA can supply only 39 per cent of this peak demand with total domestic capacity. It has two options: either shed load until demand meets supply or import additional power. NEA imported about 250 MW from India but it was still insufficient to meet the peak demand. The deficit in 2014 is big, but it has become much worse and hence, the need for declaration of energy emergency.

The 400 kV transmission line would have been a matter of national pride if it were constructed with immediate or long-term plans to export surplus power by harnessing Nepal’s theoretically high hydroelectric potential.

Puru Shah is an electrical engineer based in the United States, and founder of Madhesi Youth.
A collective crusade

There can be no justice for recent atrocities so long as past atrocities remain shrouded in a cloud of impunity.

O n Democracy Day on 19 February, the day that Prime Minister KP Oli left for India, the usual state procession of marching soldiers, gun salutes and on-lookng politicians and bureaucrats took place at Tundikhel in the early morning. The streets were swarmed with all kinds of police: security, traffic, armed, and riot. The procession, meant to be a public affair, garnered little public interest. The streets around Tundikhel were crowded and yet people did not stop even to peer through the fence on to the marching horses and cavalry, or to listen to KP Oli’s fiery speech on pathetantra and jokbuddha.

The indifference is testament to the progressive and intentional hollowing of democracy by successive governments that have been in power in the past decades. It was not just the absence of the public inside Tundikhel that was worrying that Friday, but perhaps worse was the lack of any agitation against what was going on outside.

Even as Oli was speaking inside, the state arrested a small group of conflict victims and activists and took them to Singha Darbar Police Station where they were kept until the Tundikhel function was over. They were people whose families members had been brutally slaughtered, disappeared or tortured during the conflict, but their arrest seemed to garner little attention.

Democracy is perpetually undermined by the fact that the basic and fundamental rights of people are trampled on every day – in the courts, on the streets, in parliament and in communities, and across the geographical terrain – while a small ruling elite perpetuates violence, obstructs justice and profits from the delirious and opaque instability they cause. Over the years the members of the elite have diversified, but it remains aloof and far from representative. They have been on a collective crusade to divide up vote banks over a variety of important issues, which in fact, they have little regard for, whether it is ethnic inclusion or economic development.

The case of conflict-era killings is just an example. The victims today are not only denied justice but even the hope for it. Their cause has been one that instead of uniting the people in favour of reformed society and rule of law, has divided and demoralized it. Instead of seeing their decades-long struggle for accountability as a demand for the deepening of democracy, it is being understood as the sole agenda of a political interest group. The discourse has been cleverly morphed into one that seeks to divide the public into those that believe in ‘progress’, and those that do not, somehow establishing that all those in favour of justice for conflict-era human rights abuses are pro-establishment and against ‘progress’. People no longer see this as a standalone issue, and are erroneously linking human rights during the conflict years to the personal politics of a handful of activists.

There is no doubt that many of the older generation activists have made an industry out of narrow and are often directly financing political parties. They must be called out. Indeed, there is also a case to be made for calling out those that seek to highlight one injustice over another – say, for example, the lack of interest in killings in the Terai. But the divisions which have manifested are so deep, and egged on by opinion makers, that people are compelled to choose which atrocities are ‘theirs’ and which are ‘ours’. Taking again the example of conflict rights abuses, those that are hesitant to condemn and act against these killings must surely realize that there can be no justice for recent atrocities so long as past atrocities remain shrouded in a cloud of impunity. And for those that are men on state atrocities in recent times, hypocrisy and ill intent are the only justifications.

But by keeping quiet we do collective harm to ourselves and the institutionalisation of democracy. Unlike the people, the ruling elite are not divided. KP Oli stays quiet over conflict-era crimes in his heart for the sake of PK Dahal’s interests, and in return the latter stays quiet over the former’s larger share in the loot of state coffers, for example.

The establishment

- comprised of a group of politicians across the parties with members of the business mafia and media fraternity
- work hand-in-glove to thwart genuine progress.
- They work together to shape political, economic and social discourses in their favor – not one particular ideology or party – in a combined effort to systematically undermine democracy, rule of law and the very idea of ‘progress’.

Jet, set, go

Turkish Airlines celebrated the addition of its 300th aircraft, an Airbus A330-300, recently. Powered by CF6-80C2 engines, the new aircraft will be deployed on existing medium and long-haul routes from the Turkish Airlines Istanbul hub.

New Gionee

Chinese mobile phone manufacturer Gionee revealed its new flagship and a new tagline “Make Smiles” at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona recently. It also introduced its latest smartphone, Gionee Elife S8, at the event. Powered by an Octa-core 1.9 GHz Cortex A6 processor, the phone has a fingerprint scanner, introduces 3D touch and an innovative side bar.

Easy banking

Mega Bank has opened a new branch in Jodha, Dadeldhura, one of the new 30 branches of the bank. Claiming to be the first private commercial bank in the area, it aims to provide accessible and easy banking facilities to people in the region.

Discounts galore

Ethiad Airways recently announced its Global Sale and is offering discounts to travelers from Nepal. Guests flying both business and economy class can avail of the offer for destinations across North America, Europe and the Middle East for a travel period until December. Business Class all-inclusive return fares to London start at Rs 191,978 and New York at Rs 239,144, while for economy class, all-inclusive fares to London start at Rs 76,673 and New York at Rs 89,460.

BOK goes rural

Bank of Kathmandu recently inaugurated two new branches at Rajalpur of Bardiya District and Lambi of Kailali District. This initiative is part of the Bank’s plan to expand its reach to rural and semi-urban market segments. Done in partnership with Sahayak Gramin Aisak program, the newly opened branches will provide deposit, loan, remittance and other services offered by the Bank.

Football mania

Sagarmatha Cement announced its sponsorship for the Chhangal Cricket League organised by Shanghai Cricket Academy recently. It has offered a total of Rs 1 million for the championship titled Sagarmath Cement ODI 3, which will produce a total of five local teams from Kailali district. The winning team of the championship will be awarded Rs 300,000 and the runner up will be given Rs 150,000 in addition to trophies.

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26 FEBRUARY - 3 MARCH 2016 #797
CAPTURING THE CITY

SMRITI BASNET

Walking through the streets of Asan with Min Ratta Bajracharya gives one an idea of how well this legendary photographer (who knows the streetscape of Kathmandu) seems to know everyone and everyone seems to know him. It is this intimate knowledge of his neighbourhood and city that gives Bajracharya his unique access to photo opportunities.

“Tours’s story behind everything, the success of a photographer lies in recognising these stories and capturing the essence of it in a single shot,” he says.

As one of Nepal’s pioneer photographers, Bajracharya has been on the front lines of various political movements and economic developments in the country. His image of student activist Durga Thapa smeared in varnish is regarded as the most iconic image of the 1990 People’s Uprising.

After his father’s sudden death, Bajracharya started working at a printing press to earn money for his family. It was there that he fell in love with photography stills.

Growing up, he would rent a camera from his school and spend most of his earnings on his newfound interest. “If I had Rs 400 with me, I would spend Rs 200 on film rolls,” recalls Bajracharya, whose first camera was an automatic single lens Minolta gifted to him by an Australian friend.

What started out as a hobby capturing iconic landscapes and portraits quickly evolved into a career covering dramatic events. “During the stampede of 1988 in Dasrath Stadium, I raced to the site. They would not allow me inside because I was not from a newspaper.” He shrugs. “But that did not stop me from taking pictures.”

Bajracharya credits his continued success to his strong work ethic and his eye for opportunities. “I made it as a photo journalist because I was proactive,” says the man who has photographed dignitaries and personalities like Ganesh Mun Singhe, Chandra Shekhar Singh, and Manisha Koirala.

Always wanting to improve his craft, Bajracharya has had to adapt to changing technologies over the years. “Processing pictures then took a longer time which elongated the process of transforming information visually. Now, you click a picture and send it over the internet,” says Bajracharya.

Throughout all his accomplishments, Bajracharya never forgets the basics that got him to where he is now. “More than the lens is the sense of photography that matters.”

Min Ratta Bajracharya’s photo exhibition on tourism in Nepal titled Nepaphoto, in association with School of Creative Communication and Nepal Tourism Board, will be held on the NTA premises from 4-6 March, 2016.
Nepal’s trekking companies have been waiting for a year for a turnaround in visitor numbers but battered by an earthquake, followed by a blockade, the industry is taking a long time to recover.

The warmer weather is here, and rhododendron buds have started blooming along some of the trails already, but bookings from overseas hikers are still half the normal numbers. Last year hikers were spooked by the earthquake, this year it is the Nepali trekking agencies which have had to cancel many bookings because of the unavailability of diesel.

“We had zero traffic last autumn and this spring,” says a dejected Padam Ghale, 65, of Shambhala Trekking. When the earthquake struck last April, Ghale’s clients were already in Bangkok, so he flew over and took them on a tour of Vietnam instead. This spring, although individual trekkers are still coming to Nepal, most groups have relocated their treks to Bougain, Thailand, Ladakh or Tibet.

Raj Tamang, 50, of Responsible Adventure, who just guided an all-female group of Singaporean trekkers on the Mardi Himal trail, says the negative publicity on the Internet about the earthquake and blockade have scared first-time trekkers.

“They were still nervous, but we convinced them the trail was safe and transportation wouldn’t be a problem,” Tamang said.

Ghale and Tamang agree that the message should go out that Nepal is open for trekking, and conditions are now back to the pre-earthquake situation. Most popular trekking trails were not damaged in the quake, and those that were have largely been repaired. The only trails that still need repairs are in Langtang and Manaslu.

The Manaslu Conservation Area trails below Phu Lam in Nubri Valley still have a risk of rock fall and there are massive landslides downstream along the Budhi Gandaki gorge. Damaged trails in the Manaslu circuit are being repaired by local communities, volunteers and international aid programs like ‘Food for Work’ of WFP to revive trekking and livelihoods of survivors.

Langtang village was buried in an avalanche with a heavy loss of life, but the trails in the Langtang National Park are not dangerous now. In fact, volunteers and locals and even some trekkers are regularly visiting Langtang.

“Nepal is not just Annapurna, Everest, Manaslu and Langtang – there are so many unspoiled new places to explore,” says Tamang whose agency promotes lesser-known treks that combine scenery with cultural immersion.

Ghale’s Shambala specialises in treks to remote destinations like Kangchenjunga, Delpo and Rara. In fact, he was in Humla with a French group on 25 April last year when the earthquake struck.

Thanks to the new motorable roads, these once difficult-to-reach places are now accessible and the treks are not as long as before, says Ghale: “Our message is that Nepal is back to normal, and you can help generate jobs and income by coming to Nepal for a trek.”

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6 TREK TIPS

If you want to avoid the crowds on the Everest Trek or the Annapurna Circuit, then there are plenty of other places to hike in Nepal. Even at the best of times, these destinations are so pristine you can walk for days without seeing another trekker. Some of them are also earthquake-affected areas that need added income from homestays. Nepal Times consulted the experts and presents a list of six can-do treks for this spring.

Kangchenjunga
If you are looking for wild camping treks amidst lush forests and stunning scenery, then eastern Nepal is the place to be. Long shunned by mainstream agencies because of its remoteness, Kangchenjunga is now much more accessible because a road has reached Tappejung which is also connected by air from Kathmandu.
*Time: Two weeks*

Tamang Heritage Trail
Located between Lamjung and Ganesh Himal, this trail offers scenery plus homestays with the Tamang people and their vibrant Tibetan traditions and rituals. The Tamang Heritage Trail is proof that it is not just mountains that draw tourists to Nepal, but also the people.
*Time: One week*

Rara
This spectacular lake is one of the jewels in Nepal’s crown. Situated in remote Magu district, visitors can reach the shores after a three-hour walk from the airfield which itself is only a 40-minute flight from Nepalgunj. Accommodation is limited at the Dangkhe Lodge inside Rara National Park, but the scenery compensates for all the hardships.
*Time: One week*

Gurung Heritage Trail
This new could be a popular trail in the near future in Annapurna Conservation Area and starts from Ghaulega in Lamjung and traverses Barpak in Gorkha, Siklis then down to Pokhara. The trail is already popular among Nepali trekkers and offers rich local culture and lively ethnic Gurung heritage with well developed lodges. You would also be helping families who survived the earthquake to rebuild by staying with them, and maybe even helping out to rebuild schools and homes.
*Time: 10 days*

Manang
This famous resting point before crossing the world’s highest pass Thorong La (5,416m) is now accessible by jeep from Besishahar which makes it possible to acclimatise and explore the side valleys like Tilicho, Nar Flap, Gangapurna, Hidden Lake and Kangla Pass. Manang is in the rainshadow behind the Annapurnas, but has lush green forests and mountains close enough to touch.
*Time: Two weeks*

Khopra
Now that the road has nearly encircled the Annapurna Trail, one has to venture forth to places like Khopra which are protected by their remoteness. Mardi Peak and the ridge walk to Khopra from Ghorepani or Chandrakeshi is a memorable trek with scenery that is out of this world.
*Time: One week*
**EVENTS**

**KJC for Women**
Special discounts for women on KJC’s music workshop this Women’s Day. Offer valid till 15 March. Kathmandu, Jai Lamsingh Residency, Jom rolek, (01) 5305634. info@kjc.com.np

**Himalayan Rush**
Gear up for the first edition of the Himalayan Rush mountain series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming. 26 March, Kathmandu. (01) 5305634. info@kjc.com.np

**Master trumpet**
Master classes with trumpet player, arranger and composer from Germany, Jonas Winembach, Group workshop Rs 20, private class Rs 900 per hour. 26 February, 11am, Kathmandu, Jai Lamsingh Residency, Jom rolek, (01) 5305634. info@kjc.com.np

**Asian Enduro Series**
An opportunity to ride on existing terrains with the first Asian Enduro Series. 5 to 10 April, Kathmandu. Tickets available at www.ndtara.com

**Japanese art**
Paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs and more by 17 Japanese artists exploring Japanese art and culture. 27 February to 8 March, 9.30am to 8.30pm. Nepal Art Council, Boudhanath, (01) 4227735

**Tribute to Linkin Park**
Lift your spirits with friends by paying a tribute to Linkin Park as part of Phase X of the Tribute Nepal Series. Tickets: Rs 400, child tickets Rs 250. 5 March, 7pm onwards. Purple, Hotel Radha Bazar, Thamel

**Himalay Art Photo**
A photo exhibition on tourism in Nepal by Mr Bhaga Bajracharya. (See page 7) 4 to 5 March, 10am to 5pm. Nepal Art Council, Boudha, (01) 4227735

**Miss Moti-Vation**
Kripa Joshi

Some days you have to create your own sunshine

**Syndicate star**
Ham to the tunes of Syndicate with singing sensation Bipul Chettri. 5 March, 7pm onwards. The Nicky Lounge, Durbarmarg. For bookings: 9807332727, 8802667530, 9801322727, 9801444055, 9810103771

**DINING**

**Leap day dinner**
Celebrate the leap year’s day at Hotel Yak & Yeti. Lagnepangs will enjoy a 50% discount on the leap day buffet dinner. 29 February, 6:30pm onwards. Hotel Yak & Yeti, Lagnepang, (01) 4248999

**The Terrace Garden**
A BBQ-filled Friday and Saturday overlooking the cityscape only at Radisson Hotel. Enjoy the meal with a selection of desserts. 6 to 10pm. Radisson Hotel, Lagnepang, (01) 4224899, Rs 590 plus taxes per person including a 50ml can of Corbarge beer

**Shambhala Garden Café**
Unwind with Hotel Shangri-La and enjoy a live performance by City City Gardens every Friday. 7pm onwards. Hotel Shangri-La, Lagnepang, (01) 4224899, Rs 400 per person

**MUSIC**

**Rohit John Chhetri Live**
Rohit John Chhetri of the Bista Rai fame performs live with Kiran Shahi, Subash Siva, Supaj Gulung, and Prakash Sanjya. Tickets: Rs 500 (excluding Chhetri’s album Bista Rai and a bottle of beer) 28 February, 7:30pm, Madhik, Kathmandu, (01) 5304362

**Atithi Resort**
A perfect place to stay, newly pool, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice. Shambhala, Lakeside, Pokhara. ph 0694277361, 870320320, info@atithiresort.com

**Weekend BBO**
TG opens its 7th ramacing tournament for businessmen starting 30 March.

**MISS MOTI-VATION**
Kripa Joshi

Some days you have to create your own sunshine

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**EVENTS**

**KJC for Women**
Special discounts for women on KJC’s music workshop this Women’s Day. Offer valid till 15 March. Kathmandu, Jai Lamsingh Residency, Jom rolek, (01) 5305634. info@kjc.com.np

**Himalayan Rush**
Gear up for the first edition of the Himalayan Rush mountain series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming. 26 March, Kathmandu. (01) 5305634. info@kjc.com.np

**Master trumpet**
Master classes with trumpet player, arranger and composer from Germany, Jonas Winembach, Group workshop Rs 20, private class Rs 900 per hour. 26 February, 11am, Kathmandu, Jai Lamsingh Residency, Jom rolek, (01) 5305634. info@kjc.com.np

**Asian Enduro Series**
An opportunity to ride on existing terrains with the first Asian Enduro Series. 5 to 10 April, Kathmandu. Tickets available at www.ndtara.com

**Japanese art**
Paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs and more by 17 Japanese artists exploring Japanese art and culture. 27 February to 8 March, 9.30am to 8.30pm. Nepal Art Council, Boudhanath, (01) 4227735

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Lessons for the future

YUWEI LIEW

In last April’s 7.8 magnitude earthquake that shook Nepal, Sindhupalchok was one of the worst hit areas, with the highest number of casualties reported in a single district. There were 3,557 deaths and an estimated 66,636 houses were destroyed or damaged, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, landslides blocked off the narrow roads leading to villages in the hills, hampering relief efforts.

However, some organisations have been working tirelessly to help the villagers rebuild their lives. Childreach Nepal and the Ministry of Education have teamed up to build a total of 100 earthquake-resistant classrooms in Sindhupalchok, sealed by a letter of agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding. Childreach Nepal has also been working with a local Japanese company, Kogyo, to construct the classrooms.

On 4 February, their collective efforts across seven districts will come into fruition with the ceremonial handover of the first 20 completed classrooms to three schools in Banskarka VDC: Shree Bhim Bikash Secondary School, Shree Bal Bikash Primary School and Shree Janath Lower Secondary School.

Each classroom can accommodate 60-80 students and has a lightweight steel framework designed to withstand shaking in the event of another earthquake. The exterior cladding of PVC coated steel has a minimum lifespan of 30 years, and is insulated to be moisture-resistant, making it suitable for Nepal’s climate even during the monsoon season.

Already, attendance rates are picking up. Immediately after the earthquake, dropout rates soared to 37 per cent across the three schools, as securing access to food and water took precedence over attending lessons. Now, 400 out of the 500 students enrolled are back in the classrooms, with numbers expected to rise with the start of the new academic term in April.

The day after the handover ceremony, a 5.5 magnitude aftershock swept through the Valley, with the epicenter in Sindhupalchok. But the newly built classrooms passed their first test and remained standing, a testament to their sturdy design. Earthquake rebuilding efforts should take a leaf from this successful collaboration, as it finds long lasting solutions in a region that is consistently hit hard by disasters. Because of the use of durable materials and the sharing of strategies with experienced counterparts, international cooperation has proved to be a boon in getting children in Sindhupalchok back to school.
In the opening scene of Steve Jobs - Danny Boyle’s unexpected, restrained, yet dynamic latest film, Arthur C. Clarke tells us in a black and white film reel that by 2001, computers will have evolved so much that we will be able to book our theatre tickets, speak to our families, and access our bank statement from our screens. Listening to him tell this to a bemused technician sounds so much like science fiction that we almost disbelieve the breadth and scope of his prediction - the computer has evolved in such leaps and bounds over the last three decades that even though everything that Clarke has said has indeed come to pass, we cannot quite believe it.

The personal computer, or PC, was already very much in the picture when this film about the visionary who created the Mac, Steve Jobs (Michael Fassbender), begins. Structured in a tightly written three act screenplay by none other than Aaron Sorkin, a brilliant screenwriter who is now Hollywood’s go-to-person for biopics about famous personalities in the technological field (Sorkin also wrote The Social Network in 2010 about Mark Zuckerberg and the beginnings of Facebook), Steve Jobs begins in 1984, with Apple’s first launch of the highly anticipated Macintosh computer. Riding on the swell of a hard won spot during the Superbowl, in a commercial that was the then equivalent of a million likes on Facebook, Jobs is struggling with Andy Hertzfeld, an engineer who has just informed him that the new, cutting edge operating system will not be able to say ‘Hello’ to the crowd because it has unexpectedly crashed after a number of test runs.

The film follows Jobs in scene after scene as he moves through the minutes before the launch, dealing with his closest colleagues, allies, his little daughter Lisa, whose paternity he refuses to acknowledge, guided ceaselessly by his marketing executive at Apple, and self-admitted work-wife, Joanna Hoffman (Kate Winslet) in an incessantly revealing film that exposes the very worst, and occasional best, behaviour of a brilliant but difficult man.

While you may not be a part of the cult of Steve Jobs, and you may not even use a Mac, this film is more than just a biopic; it is a powerful, unflinching, and perhaps unnecessarily harsh character study of man who was instrumental in the evolution of the personal computer, remaining relevant, hated, and admired for over thirty years, until his tragic and untimely death in 2011 at the age of 56. Boyle, the incredible ensemble cast, and a tight, vibrant narrative that reveals without gimmicks make for a riveting, clever, and penetrating film about a visionary who left this world too soon at the height of his abilities.

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Why did the Madhes movement fail?

www.eosmeta.com, 22 February

A fter six months of an indefinite strike in Nepal's southern plains, five months in a sit-in at Birgunj- Raxaul trade point and the deaths of more than 50 people, the Madhes movement seems to have died down without any substantial outcome. Though the movement was led by the Madhes Front, there were other Madhes-based parties that were also on the streets protesting the new constitution. Madhes leader Jaya Praksh Caudle's journalist at the Front made that to the failure of the movement.

1) Madhesi people wanted to see all Madhesi parties fighting together for their cause, but the Front did not want to join hands with other political forces, including the Tarai Madhes National Campaign.

2) Even when Madhesi protesters were being killed, the Front leaders were more interested in joining the government rather than pressing for the demands raised by Madhesi people.

3) The Front was late to announce the strike. It should have hit the streets right after the signing of the 16-point agreement.

4) Legislators belonging to the Front walked out of the house when the constitution was passed. But they rejected the idea of resigning en masse to create more pressure on the new Tarai.

5) The Front rejected the constitution, but ended up taking part in the voting of the new Prime Minister, which was the first step towards implementing the constitution.

6) The Front wanted to restrict its agitation to the area between Raxaul and Saptari districts, fearing that other forces might receive credit if it upstaged the movement across the Tarai.

7) India has always been a key player in the movement, but the Front failed to reach out to New Delhi for help at the exact of the agitation.

8) The Front leaders were self-centered and constantly tried to oust each other to take full credit for the uprising.

9) The Front leaders tried to cash in on the rivalry between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bihar leader Lalu Prasad Yadav. Taking part in anti-Modi programs organized by Yadav's party would have helped the Front.

10) The Front tried to suppress other Madhesi forces, which did not help the agitation.

Tatopani dries up

www.onlinekhabar.com, 23 February

Tatopani, a major financial hub near the border crossing between Nepal and China, still remains closed 10 months after the April 2015 earthquake. Nepal has already removed its customs office from Khasa because of geological instability stemming from the earthquake.

“We have requested our Indian counterparts several times to open the customs at Tatopani,” says Director General of Department of Customs Surendra Khanal. “When the custom office of Jalsa came to Kathmandu, we had agreed on initiating the reopening of Tatopani. But there has been no progress.”

Dhungana says that unless a seismological study of Khasa is conducted, there is no chance that China will reopen the area for business. Chinese officials have indicated that if their anticipated study finds that the region is vulnerable to earthquakes, the area might be shut down permanently.

However, till date, the Nepalese government has not been notified of any study being carried out by China in the region. In response to the delay, Nepal has also shut down its customs office following China’s withdrawal. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has appointed a committee to discuss this critical issue with China at a diplomatic level. "When the Minister of Foreign Affairs visited China, there had been an agreement to open Tatopani," says spokesman Ram Prasad Pokharel.

According to customs officials, Tatopani has been operating regularly, it would have collected Rs 1 billion in revenue in the past 10 months. Dhungana states that Tatopani, another border point with China, has benefited from Tatopani’s closure. Nonetheless, couriers are reluctant to use this route as an alternative for imports due to poor road conditions.

Rimjhim Mecklai was lifted, most imports from China have now been routed through Kolkata in India.
THE VERTICAL

From Koshi Tappu to Kangchenjunga, this unique biodiversity conservation and learning region will stretch 8km into the sky

RAJEEV GOYAL AND PRIYANKA BISTA

Two years ago, we proposed the Koshi Tappu to Kangchenjunga Belt (KTK-BELT) to provide a continuous forest corridor in a ‘vertical university’ to conserve Eastern Nepal’s rich biodiversity. The region rises from Koshi Tappu (671m), Nepal’s first RAMSAR site and largest aquatic bird reserve, to Mt Kangchenjunga (8,586m), the third tallest peak in the world and home to more than 6,600 flowering plants, 1,200 gymnosperms, 800 bird species and 180 kinds of mammals. The goal is to help restore the ecological connectivity between the mountains and plains.

The eastern region of Nepal comprises one of the world’s 34 biodiversity hotspots, with more species than most places in the world – a physical heterogeneity associated with the Himalayan range which has 116 forest types and 27 important bird areas (IBAs).

The ‘vertical university’ was born out of the simple proposition that with Nepal’s exceptional diversity from the plains to the Himalaya, conventional education where students sit behind the four walls of a classroom, disconnected from their surroundings, make little sense.

The ‘teachers’ in the vertical university may not hold a Masters degree or even have set foot in school, but as local farmers, they possess intricate, intergenerational knowledge about local fauna and flora.

A greener world

It was always important for Nepal to have environmentally sustainable development, but there is an added sense of urgency because of the earthquake and blockade as the country rebuilds. Which is why self-reliance and renewable energy development were key themes of the ‘Make Nepal Green’ conference in Kathmandu this week.

The conference piggybacked on a reunion of recipients of the The Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize) that recognises individuals who have pioneered groundbreaking solutions to national problems. It was first presented in Sweden in 1980, with subsequent awards in fields such as environmental protection, human rights, sustainable development, education and health.

Shrilchandra Upadhyay, himself the first Nepali recipient of the award in 2010, hosted the event. He was honoured for a lifetime of work on micro-credit and rural development through his NGO, Support Activities for Poor Producers of Nepal (SAPPROS).

“It is a great honour for us to be holding this conference, and our Kathmandu Declaration will send out a strong message that being green is not an alternative anymore, it is a mainstream concept,” Upadhyay said.

Also present was noted Chinese solar entrepreneur, Huang Ming (pic. above) who won the Right Livelihood Award in 2011. Recipients like the Ladakh Ecological Development Group and the Sekisui Club Consumer’s Cooperative of Japan were also represented.

“If China develops with the same energy-intensive economic model as the West, we would need the natural resources of five planets to sustain it,” Huang told Nepal Times in an interview at the sidelines of the conference.

“The future is in decentralised solar systems that address wastage of energy as well as renewable energy generation.”

Huang Ming’s Hi-emin Company manufactures and promotes stand-alone solar systems for homes, hotels, businesses with the motto ‘Blue Sky for Our Children’. He is worried about deteriorating air quality in cities across Asia, including Kathmandu and says this calls for a paradigm shift in government policy for economic growth.

“Energy saving is not about saving money, it is about saving lives,” Huang Ming said.

Also attending the conference was Monica Griehl, former member of the German parliament from the Green Party and currently Chair of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation. She said she was very happy to bring Right Livelihood laureates to Kathmandu.

“The key to self-reliance is participation of people in decision-making in a democracy,” Griehl said, “and that can only happen when the public puts pressure on government and parliament to implement green policies that benefit communities in the longterm.”

The conference also heard success stories of community-based efforts, like those introduced by SAPPROS in Nepal, to achieve sustainable infrastructure development, employment, income generation and public awareness, keeping hundreds of thousands of people in rural Nepal gainfully employed.

On the second day of the conference, Huang revealed upcoming plans for solar projects in Nepal. The entrepreneur, who showcased innovative solar products during the seminar, said the plans would serve the needs of the rural poor and social entrepreneurs.

Liew Yu Wei
UNIVERSITY

KTK BELT: Kungkharjunga from the north.
A view of Bponsa community forest in upper belt, one of the many large community forests safeguarded in ‘Kungkharjunga’ by village ancestors.
A farmer in Bponsa on the far left.

The vertical university will deepen skills in sustainable technology, craft, and medicinal plants, and seeks to conserve and activate local knowledge while also creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. It does this through ‘learning grounds’, which are micro-conservation hubs and the ‘classrooms’ of the university at different elevations in the landscape.

With public attention focused on post-earthquake reconstruction, crippling fuel shortages, border strikes, the hills and the Terai are being torn apart, why should anyone care about deforestation? With the huge demand for wood, one could even contend that without cutting millions of additional trees, those rural farmers at the bottom of the economic ladder will remain hungry and homeless. To understand why deforestation lies at the heart of Nepal’s current social, political and economic challenges, one must look towards what caused it in the first place.

The absence of sustainable economic alternatives has led to ‘land plotting’, where large swaths of forested land are purchased, divided up and sold as smaller plots for a profit. Inadequate material and financial support for farmers has resulted in people having no choice but to turn towards logging, sand mining, rock excavation and other unsustainable practices for survival. The lack of pragmatic, land-based education for Nepali children and youth has resulted in a lack of awareness about the place-based livelihood opportunities inherent in the forest. And the lack of support for agro-forestry has resulted in conversion of forest into agriculture or built settlement.

Even as Nepal loses its forest cover, however, between 1998-2008, 353 new species were discovered in the Himalayas. The tragedy of this is that some species will go extinct without having been discovered.

The vertical university could be replicated also in earthquake affected districts, and serve as a model for a new approach in post-disaster regeneration and resilience by linking habitats and people place-based education, conservation and livelihood hubs.

Former Peace Corps Volunteer Rajeev Goyal and Canadian Architect Priyanka

KICKSTARTING V.U
The prototype Vertical University Kickstarter was started last month to raise $100,000. Funds will support the creation of an educational plant trail where more than 600 local species will be tagged, an agrodiversity seed bank, and a bird conservation zone. More than 240 people from around the world have since joined the campaign and contributed $101,693.
www.theverticaluniversity.org

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Mao chic

Even as we mark the 70th anniversary of the start of the Mao Mao war and the 16th anniversary of its end last month, there is a sense of nostalgia among some that we as a nation couldn’t even blockade the country ourselves anymore, we needed the Indians to do it for us.

Gone are the glory days when Kathmandu Valley would be under a Maoist siege for weeks on end. There were highway ambushes, skirmishes, petrol tanker blown up with landmines and nothing got through. This gave the citizens of the capital really good rehearsal in coping with shortages, which is why we were well prepared for the Bhanu Thoteli blockade when it happened. We’ve seen it all before.

Speaking of which, it looks like the Indians have learnt well from our Buddhists how to organize blockades. The agitators in Haryana who are blockading the Indian capital and the SSB which blockaded Nepal for five months just borrowed from Mao’s book on how to turn the screws. Which is why it is so painful for Nepali nationalists to witness the downfall of the once-feared guerillas who fought ruthlessly for the liberation of our people.

Today, Nepalis are forced to be underwhelmed by a feeling of nostalgia for the halcyon days when the end justified the means. When the Mao Maoists furthered the cause of the proletariat by purging the bourgeoisie and working for the downfall of running dog capitalists and their imperialist henchmen and henchwomen.

The comrades followed Mao by the book in those days, taking very seriously his famous dictum that “you can’t make an emollient without first counting the chickens before they are hatched”. No revolution can be brought to its logical conclusion without the assaying of the Great Helmsman, which is why the comrades took very seriously other Mao dicta as follows:

- “A revolution is not a dinner party, it is an orgy”
- “Political power flows out of double barrel of whiskey”
- “War is politics with the bloodshed of the toiling masses”
- “Let a hundred flowers bloom before we pluck them”
- “The people are the sea, and revolutionaries are fishy”
- “The party can’t advance without making mistakes, and we intend to make many more of them”
- “All reactionsaries are paper tiger with aphrodisiac properties”
- “A thousand mile journey begins with the first national shutdown”

Mao must be turning in his grave and shaking his head looking at how we have abandoned the Great Leap Forward into the Deep Abyss as his Nepali protégés walk away into the sunset. The Asa has just begun, traffic The Collected Works of Mao Zedong (4th Volume, Foreign Language

Press, Peking, 1970. 155 pages) where the Great Helmsman reiterates the Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention. For anyone who wants to know when our own Buddhists deviated from Mao’s straight and narrow, they just have to read this section (with Asa’s aside in brackets):

Instruction of the General Headquarters of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army October 19, 1947

The Three Main Rules of Discipline are as follows:

1. Doy order in all your actions (except when there are exceptions)
2. Don’t take a single needle from the masses (poke it with your in the haystack)
3. Turn in everything captured (you mean even these cool Nikes?)

The Eight Points for Attention are as follows:

1. Speak politely (yeah, sure, thank you)
2. Pay for what you buy (in kind?)
3. Return everything you borrow (don’t steal, just “borrow”)
4. Pay for anything you damage (yeah, whatever)
5. Don’t hit or swear at people (take that, you royal reactionary mongol)
6. Don’t damage crops (loot them)
7. Don’t take liberties with women (liberate ‘em)
8. Don’t ill treat captives (eliminate them)

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