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Year of lost opportunities

JANUARY: The Indian Blockade was into its fourth month at the start of 2016, and Nepalis were still reeling under crippling shortages of fuel, medicines and essential commodities.

FEBRUARY: The Blockade was finally lifted, and Prime Minister KP Oli made a symbolic visit to India.

MARCH: Oli visited Beijing and signed a historic trade and transit treaty with China to reduce landlocked Nepal's dependence on India.

APRIL: As Nepal marked the first anniversary of the April 2015 earthquake, nearly two million Nepalis were still living under tarps as the National Reconstruction Authority continued to be mired in politics and mismanagement.

MAY: The NC tried to stage a coup against the UML-Maoist coalition by persuading the Maoists to oust Oli, who survived the coup by striking a new deal with the Maoists.

A HAPPIER NEW YEAR EDITORIAL PAGE 2

JUNE: 12 Nepalis hired by a British security firm to guard the Canadian embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan were killed in a deadly attack.

JULY: Govinda KC went on yet another hunger strike, this

time demanding the impeachment of the CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki, accusing him of abusing his authority.

AUGUST: The Maoists finally succeeded in pulling the rug out from under the Oli government, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal became the new Prime Minister.

SEPTEMBER: Dahal visited New Delhi, and laid the groundwork for Indian President Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Nepal.

OCTOBER: Load-shedding ended in Kathmandu Valley after a decade, as the new management of the Nepal Electricity Authority put an end to blackmarketeering of power.

NOVEMBER: The Dahal government tabled the Second Amendment to the Constitution, prompting the opposition UML to disrupt House proceedings and spearhead street protests.

DECEMBER: Two of the three sections of the 27 km Melamchi tunnel bringing water to a parched capital were finally completed.



FEELING GROOVY Finding rare images of Kathmandu's colourful hippie era
BY LUCIA DE VRIES

PAGES 8-9



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A HAPPIER NEW YEAR

2015 was a year of disasters. 2016 was a year of lost opportunities. What will 2017 bring?

On social networking sites, many people around the world are saying 'good riddance' to 2016 but there isn't much optimism about 2017 either. Even as the US President Elect fills his cabinet with climate-deniers and oil tycoons, the world has seen the warmest year in history with record depletion of Arctic Ice.

Here in Nepal, we breathed a sigh of relief to say goodbye to 2015 — the year of geotectonic and geopolitical earthquakes. We thought the earthquake was bad until the blockade hit. We waited in vain for the whole of 2016 for the politics to stabilise, but despite regime change we seem no closer to a resolution to the constitutional crisis caused by the deadlock over the Second Amendment.

2017 is going to be even critical because unless this stalemate is solved and we are able to hold local, provincial and parliamentary elections by 21 January 2018, the political vacuum will have unprecedented and unpredictable consequences for Nepal.

Parliament has now been deadlocked for more than three weeks as the opposition UML invokes Article 274 of the Constitution to step up pressure for a rollback of the proposed amendment. A substantive portion in that amendment would chop off the hill districts of Province 5 and graft them into Province 4. To be sure, there is vocal opposition to the move even among leaders belonging to the Nepali Congress and Maoist Centre in the ruling coalition, and the mid-western hills and plains have been reeling under long-running protests.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his establishment colleagues are seen to be under pressure from outside (read: India) to push through the amendment. In response, the UML has been waving the nationalist flag by describing Province 5 as a dress rehearsal for the real goal: to



KUNDA DIXIT

incise the three eastern-most districts of Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari as well as Kailali and Kanchanpur in the far-west so that the two proposed Madhes provinces encompass all the Tarai districts.

The Madhesi parties have portrayed this as a last-ditch constitutional attempt to resolve the issue of federal autonomy for the plains. They argue that they have climbed down from their original demand of a single Madhes state for a two-province model, but insist that all the plains districts should be included in those two states.

This is an electoral issue of vote banks and politics, which is what makes it so complicated. There is no way Nepali Congress and Maoist leaders will give up Kailali and Kanchanpur, and the UML sees Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari as its heartland. Even though all five districts are in the plains, they have seen a vast influx of hill settlers in the past

50 years due to state-sponsored transmigration.

With passions running so high, and politics getting mixed up with ethnicity, territoriality and boundary disputes, it may be prudent to shelve any rejigging of federal provinces for now. Senior political leaders from across the political spectrum, some of them architects of constitution framing since 2006, have even been thinking the previously unthinkable: put federalism itself in the back burner for now.

Seeing that the amendment bill will face a parliamentary deadlock, some in the three parties are proposing that elections be held first. The knotty question is whether those elections should be held under the current political structure or the new federal one. As that debate delays a decision, time is running out for the Election Commission to ready for the mammoth task of holding three elections in one year.

From the outside it does look like the three main parties are, in the traditional style of Nepali politics, just buying time and letting things sort themselves out. The tragedy is that on elections, on future boundaries of provinces, on proposals for changing electrical constituencies and on citizenship none of the parties and their leaders are thinking beyond their vote banks. Day-to-day politics and long-term national interest do not mix.

Besides elections, the ruling coalition and some Madhesi parties are pushing for the amendment, while the UML is holding the impeachment of CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki as another demand on which it wants a package agreement.

Allowing that stalemate to prolong any further will make elections uncertain and threaten a Constitution that was finally drafted by a democratically-elected Constitution Assembly after seven decades.

2015 was a year of disasters. 2016 was a year of lost opportunities. We will have to see what 2017 will bring.

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

DO-GOODERS

Police officer Sarbendra Khanal continues to inspire us ('Doing good by being good', SahinaShrestha, #838). He should be transferred to the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division to improve traffic management. If his dedication and hard work can expose a sickening match-fixing scandal, he can easily improve Kathmandu's chaotic traffic system.

Soniya Malla

■ Greed is the source of fear ('A man of conscience', Om Astha Rai, #838). Advocate Om Aryal has internalised this philosophy, and he is able to take on powerful men like Khila Raj Regmi and Lokman Singh Karki. Unfortunately, we have very few people who listen to their conscience.

Yam Gurung

AJUDYO

Why can't the model of the AjuDyo reconstruction be replicated elsewhere ('By locals, for locals', Monalisa Maharjan, #838)? Look at the sorry state of Rani Pokhari and Kathmandu Darbar Square. It is now apparent that the government or the KMC cannot do anything beyond this. Community-led rebuilding would mean a stronger sense of ownership, which

may lead to a much better method of reconstruction. Shoddy work, halfheartedly done, will not get us through the next Big One.

YashTuladhar

HUMLA

I cannot imagine life without road connectivity ('Remote corner of Nepal's remote district', Bharat BandhuThapa, #838). Instead of wasting money to expand roads in Kathmandu Valley, the government should link Humla to the national road network.

BikramMagar

GARY WORNELL

People like Gary Wornell come all the way from abroad to help preserve our heritage, but our own government seems least bothered about it ('The art of preservation', SmritiBasnet, #838). For these craft and craftspersons to prosper, there needs to be an industry that regulates and promotes these items. But the government is bent on encouraging only cheap Chinese/Indian plastic products. One can already envision Nepal's future, and it does not look that great.

Sarswati Thapa



Anthony Costello@globalhthtwt
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Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Staffing rural hospitals with MDs with c-section training is vital in saving more Nepali mothers



Kashish Das Shrestha@kashishds
Has China imposed a travel restriction imposed? No short answer. (India of course maintains there was no blockade)

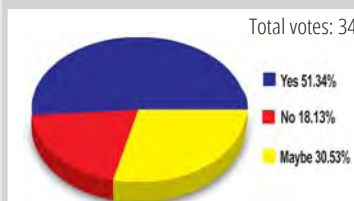


Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Chinese embassy in Kathmandu has denied rumours of official restrictions on the travel of Chinese tourists to #Nepal



nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #839

Q. Do you think 2016 will be better than 2017 for Nepal?



Weekly Internet Poll #840
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Q. Why is the Prime Minister reluctant to accept the report of the Local Government Body Restructuring Commission?

Times

THIS WEEK



Most reached on Facebook

Doing good by being good by Om Astha Rai, Sahina Shrestha and Smriti Basnet
Individual Nepalis who have shown through dedication and determination that it is possible to build a better future for this country



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Doing good by being good by Om Astha Rai, Sahina Shrestha and Smriti Basnet (1,809 views)



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Doing good by being good by Om Astha Rai, Sahina Shrestha and Smriti Basnet (71 retweets, 169 likes)



Most commented

Remote corner of Nepal's remotest district by Bharat Bandhu Thapa



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Publisher and Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
Associate Editor: Om Astha Rai | Design: Kiran Maharjan
Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
Marketing: Arjun Karki, Surendra Sharma rachanas@himalmedia.com | Advertisers: Ram Krishna Banjara | Subscriptions: Santosh Aryal santosha@himalmedia.com
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A Himalayan mess

Turbulent times for Nepal-China joint venture airline

OM ASTHA RAI

When Himalaya Airlines, a Nepal-China joint venture, operated its first flight to Beijing in March 2016 with Prime Minister KP Oli on board (*pictured, below*), there was hope that Nepal would finally be struck off the European safety blacklist.

However, the European Union (EU) Air Safety List was updated early this month, and Nepal is still on it.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) had seen Himalaya Airlines as an opportunity to demonstrate that Nepal meets the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards. Indeed, there was an expectation that a new airline with new Airbus 320s would set new safety standards for Nepal.

But Himalaya Airlines seems to have run into considerable turbulence soon after takeoff. There have been resignations or termination of key technical staff, and accusations that it is ignoring safety measures.

Himalaya Airlines asked its Director of Flight Operations, Gabriele Ascenzo, to resign in November, apparently after he criticised management for not following safety guidelines. A veteran pilot with expertise in airline safety, Ascenzo had been hired by the Airlines to ensure compliance with ICAO procedures.

Vijay Shrestha, Vice President of Himalaya Airlines, declined to comment on Ascenzo's exit, saying only that his contract was "terminated by mutual agreement".

Ascenzo had helped



PIC: HIMALAYA-AIRLINES.COM



establish Himalaya's Flight Operations Department, hiring flight managers and pilots, and preparing flight training standards. At least six other pilots and one performance engineer

have also quit the airline in the past month. Some of them were sacked and have filed a case at the labour court in Kathmandu, accusing the airline of violating employment contracts.

Tension between management and staff grew when Zhao Guo Quiang of Tibet Airlines— which holds 49% share in Himalaya Airlines (with 51% share owned by Nepal's Yeti World Investment Pvt. Ltd.) — became the new president three months ago. He was also declared the Accountable Manager, but Ascenzo argued that the appointments to the posts vital for air safety were subject to CAAN's approval.

Ascenzo paid the price for drawing the company's attention to ICAO requirements. He did not receive his salary for two

months, and his contract was finally terminated. It has been learned that the airline sacked him on the ground that he was above 65 — the age limit for pilots. But he had crossed that limit a year before joining Himalaya Airlines, and was not a crew member.

After Zhao's arrival, the airline also slashed allowances for pilots, who were already angry over not being given insurance coverage for medical expenses and loss of licence.

After several pilots quit, the airline apparently cancelled the leave of some of the remaining pilots. Some disgruntled staffers also said the airline was reducing the number of hours that co-pilots need to fly the planes in order to be promoted as pilots.

Another crew member told *Nepali Times* that training protocols for first officers were shortened, to enable them to be upgraded more quickly, at the expense of safety.

"Co-pilots need to fly for 4,000 hours to become pilots as per the original training manual of Himalaya Airlines. Reducing that number without proper assessment compromises aviation safety," said a senior pilot.

Vijay Shrestha, who represents the Yeti group in Himalaya Airlines, dismissed the allegation. "We are revising the manual so Nepali co-pilots can become pilots sooner," he said. "And we are doing this only after assessing that the 4,000-hour requirement was not necessary."

Himalaya Airlines is also accused of operating without a qualified safety manager, but Shrestha said that an experienced Chinese pilot who previously worked for the Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC) has been appointed as a safety manager and his name has been forwarded to CAAN for approval.

CAAN spokesperson Birendra Shrestha said: "We have received documents about his appointment, but need time to review them and decide whether the Chinese candidate is qualified for this job." 🇳🇵

Geopolitics at play?

Himalaya Airlines was aiming to add a second aircraft to its fleet in September, targeting new destinations like New Delhi. But it failed to secure the lease of another Airbus 320, and India is delaying the approval for such an aircraft to fly to New Delhi.

Indian officials seem to believe that Himalaya Airlines is essentially a Chinese venture, and that China is trying to capitalise on it to spread its influence in Nepal.

"Nepal is a low-hanging fruit in the international aviation industry," said an Indian national working for Himalaya Airlines. "But the way this airline is being run shows that the Chinese do not want to turn it into a successful business."

There are allegations that Tibet Airlines will bring in planes on wet leases and use Nepal's traffic rights on lucrative routes with Nepali migrant workers.

"Bringing in an aircraft on a wet lease will not generate employment for Nepalis," the pilot said. "It will just be a way for Tibet Airlines to suck the profits out of Nepal."

However, some Nepali aviation sources said the Indians are just envious that the Chinese were first with an airline joint venture. Himalaya Airlines's Vice President Vijay Shrestha is hopeful that his company will be allowed to fly to New Delhi when the second Airbus 320 finally arrives in January.

"We will bring in three new aircraft next year, and the first two will be under dry leases," he clarified. "Only the third aircraft will be on a wet lease."

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JOHNNIE WALKER
KEEP WALKING

Strawberry story

QIU TIAN
in NUWAKOT

While Japan’s high-profile highway projects in Nepal get all the attention, less well known is the work Japanese social entrepreneurs are doing with Nepali farmers to transform livelihoods in an earthquake-hit region of the Himalaya.

A tasty variety of Japanese strawberry ideally suited for the soil and climate at 2,500m in the villages surrounding Kakani 25 km from Kathmandu, has become a rewarding cash crop and job generator for local villages.

“Nepal is blessed with rich nature but lacks scientific planting methods, which led to the inefficient strawberry farming in the past decades,” says Nanami Wakayama, co-founder of Himeberry, which is a unique Japan-Nepal agriculture joint venture.

The Japanese first saw the potential for strawberry farming in Kakani 25 years ago when agronomist Matsuura Hiroshi brought six sample plants which flourished and spread among farmers who till then had been growing radish for the Kathmandu market.

But the project fizzled out when Nepal was engulfed in conflict. Now, Nanami Wakayama and her husband are back to continue the work of growing and selling the lucrative cash crop.

This time, the business is even more systematic: the farmers are learning to build greenhouses, use drip irrigation in the arid slopes, and use an advanced business concept to sell the organic pesticide-free fruits in nearby Kathmandu.

When they first came to Nepal in 2014, the Wakayamas

Unique cooperative brings together Japanese entrepreneurship and hardworking Nepali farmers



PICS: KRISTINA SHPERLIK



discovered that strawberry not only made business sense but would also benefit local farmers if they got a fair price for their product. Using Nepal’s natural resource and Japanese farming technology to grow a top-quality product while creating jobs was a win-win situation.

Growing strawberry in open sloping terraces did not ensure steady harvests, so Himeberry imported the sweeter, juicier and more shapely ‘Aiberry’ and ‘Akihime’ and ‘Tochifome’

varieties to replace the original ‘Nyoho’ strawberries. They are now grown in 40 new greenhouses in which temperature is not allowed to dip below 5 degrees at night.

Kakani has always had a water shortage, so Himeberry uses drip irrigation technology from Israel to save water and more efficient use of fertiliser. But soil quality is a problem. “We need to do soil tests and produce specific fertilisers for strawberry,” explains Himeberry’s technical

instructor, Shiva Raj Pokhrel, adding that the company will set up its own bio-fertiliser factory next year.

Wakayama’s team also brought a new business model that works with a farmer cooperative. “Our first goal is to create jobs,” Nanami Wakayama explained to *Nepali Times*. “It is not a handout, so it gives farmers dignity and satisfaction.”

The company offers loans, training, free seeds, fertilisers, and greenhouses and then buys the produce at a fair price, and adheres to its company motto of ‘More jobs, better lives’. Among 23 Himeberry contracted farmers, Ram Kumar Tamang (*pictured, above*) has the biggest strawberry patches and most greenhouses. He is retired from the Ministry of Agriculture and says he wanted to not just make money but to help villagers.

“I want to learn more

professional farming technology from the Japanese, since advanced business concepts are what exactly we Nepali farmers lack now,” he said.

Shiva Kumar Lama is also growing strawberries in Kakani, and says going organic is a huge advantage. “We used chemicals to grow strawberries even though we knew it was harmful, but there was no other way,” Lama said. “But now I see how to use organic fertilisers to produce healthy strawberries.”

Himeberry has a strict code of conduct that binds farmers not to sell to other middlemen, not mix the plants with other species, and to follow the Japanese methods of cultivation. In return the Japanese have learnt from Nepali farmers the need to respect tradition and family, although the Japanese have also had to get used to the slow pace of work in Nepal.

“It takes a long time to complete even simple tasks here, and we have learnt to be patient,” said Wakayama.

Himeberry sells organic strawberry in packs of 300g in Kathmandu with a delivery service for homes, hotels and supermarkets. The positive response from market gives the Wakayamas confidence to expand the business and create 200 more jobs next year.

Back in 2001 when the war ended strawberry farming, 700 people were involved in the business and that figure has dropped by half, but if things go according to plan that number should increase.

Says Shree Bahadur KC of JAITI Nepal, which first started strawberry farming in Kakani 25 years ago: “I think with modern farming technology young Nepalis will return to do business in their own land, which can definitely contribute to Nepal’s economic recovery.” 🇳🇵

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Walker is back

Scotch whisky brand Johnnie Walker is reintroducing its blended malt Scotch whisky, Johnnie Walker Green Label in Nepal following its popular demand. The whisky will be available in select stores in Nepal at Rs 8,000 for 1l and Rs 6,150 for 750 ml.



Japan and Nepal

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Nepal, the governments of the two countries signed a bilateral agreement to improve medical equipment in Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Japan is extending a grant assistance of about Rs 692.9 million for the implementation of the project.




Relaxing start

Tranquility Spa has announced special offers for its customers to celebrate New Year 2017. The customers are guaranteed a free service after purchase of any one of the services the spa offers. All branches of the spa will have this offer throughout the month of January.



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LOW HANGING FRUIT



The history of strawberry farming in Kakani

1991

Agronomist Matsuura Hiroshi of JAITI Nepal brings just six strawberry plants to Kakani and the plant flourish.

1993

Plastic cups were introduced to propagate plants for more efficient strawberry farming.

1995

Strawberry nurseries started distributing plants to local farmers who were trained to grow the fruits.

2001

Over 700 farmers in Kakani were involved in strawberry farming, but the conflict made it difficult to sustain the business.

2015

Himeberry continued strawberry farming with new technologies and a new business model.

1997

Harvests were good, and Kakani strawberries found a ready market in Kathmandu.

Compared with other crops, strawberry is delicate, doesn't travel easily and is prone to disease. It grows best in the Himalaya between 1,500–2,500m with a temperature range of 4-25 Celsius and up to 4000 ml of annual rainfall. And that is what makes Kakani an ideal location.



This is a winter in which the Arctic stayed above freezing, there were waterfalls on Uluru and snow fell in the Sahara Desert. Don't be surprised by anything anymore. Western Nepal got a respite from a long dry spell with the first snowfall of the season in the higher reaches. Some of that moisture is headed towards Kathmandu and may lead to some precipitation over the weekend. Increased cloud cover will raise the minimum temperature a bit and lead to a dip in the maximum temperature.

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HOMEMAKER and BODYBUILDER

As soon as she became the first Nepali woman to win a medal in an international bodybuilding competition last month, Nanita Maharjan has learnt an important lesson: being a champion wouldn't have been possible without support from her family.

Although passionate about bodybuilding, the 31-year-old mother had never imagined that she would win the bronze medal at the World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championship in Thailand earlier this month - turning her into a celebrity overnight and bringing prestige to Nepal.

"There is nothing a woman can't do and all I needed was my family's support," said Maharjan in her three-storey house in Kirtipur, "my husband has been very supportive and my mother-in-law has helped by taking care of my son and managing household chores."

Maharjan got married at 23 and had her child a year later. After putting on a lot of weight post delivery, she joined a gym to maintain her physical fitness and brought down her weight from 75kg to 53kg.

After she toned her body, Maharjan's trainer noticed that she had great potential to be a bodybuilder. Her husband and mother-in-law encouraged her to



participate in a national-level bodybuilding championship even though both knew she had to don a bikini on stage, and Maharjan says that was the turning point in her career.

Nanita's passion seems to have rubbed off on husband Rujan Bajracharya, who is also training to participate in a bodybuilding championship next year. "I realised that the scope of bodybuilding was wider for Nanita than it is for me," he said, "what she wears during the competition wasn't as important as the game itself."

After four months of rigorous training and proper diet, Nanita won the Mrs Kathmandu and first ladies fitness championship early this year. She went on to win the bronze in the Women's Athletic

Physique category (up to 165 cm) of the World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championship in the first week of December in Pattaya, Thailand on 4 December.

Maharjan's mother-in-law remembers being overwhelmed with joy when she heard the news. "Nanita's success is a matter of national pride and I will continue to support her in future, and it is important to show that daughters-in-law should not be confined to the home, everyone of us has the right to be free."

Trainer Ruzesh Shahi is also excited about her medal, and confirms that the win was the culmination of Maharjan's hard work, dedication and family support. He explains: "It can take bodybuilders years to train their bodies, but Nanita is blessed with strong physique that came into form in no time."

Maharjan has now set her sights to win the gold medal in next year's bodybuilding championship in Mongolia, and wants to open her own gym for bodybuilders. 🇳🇵
Shreejana Shrestha



nepalitimes.com
Watch video

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LUCIA DE VRIES

Relics of the hippie era in Kathmandu have been slowly erased by the passage of time, and whatever remained in Jochhen from that psychedelic period was brought down by last year's earthquake.

One of the few hippie hangouts that is still intact on what used to be called Freak Street is Snowman Café. On a recent afternoon, it was packed with Nepali youngsters but none of them had any idea how the street got its name.

Freak Street is an integral part of Nepal's modern history, and indeed of a global youth culture of the late 1960s, but the hippie period is yet to be formally documented - especially in pictures. The 'flower children' were essentially refugees from a materialistic and militarist culture and represented a unique global movement that transcended physical and mental boundaries. It coincided with an eruption of anti-establishment protests across Europe and the United States.

In Nepal it was the precursor of the country's tourism industry, and is worthy of preservation even for historical reasons. But there are not many western Bohemians left among those who stayed behind in Kathmandu. Their Nepali counterparts are getting on in age too.

I went to meet the gifted artist,

Jimmy Thapa, who used to run a dope outlet on Freak Street called Jimmy's Wagon. "Meet Billy," Jimmy told me, "he'll tell you all."

Billy is William Forbes, better known as 'Swayambhu Billy' and his wife Susan Burns. They have lived at the base of Swayambhu Hill on and off since the early 1970s. Their present house in Kimdol is guarded by a larger than life Chow Chow, the walls are festooned with artwork by renowned 'real' hippies and beatniks they befriended in Kathmandu: Ira Cohen, Petra Vogt and Hetty McGee.

Forbes and Burns were both born in 1943 to Communist parents with no interest in spirituality. But while growing up in New York, Forbes met people who had returned from India with tales of inner discovery. He booked a flight to Europe and travelled overland to India. It was 1970 and he "fell into a groove".

Burns followed him two years later, and remembers: "We were riding rickety buses, touching some holy stone. I felt definitely at home. It seemed this was it for me."

Their photographs of the late 1960s and early 1970s show a largely empty city with few cars and few people. Majestic bulls had the right of way. Life seemed to flow according to astrologers' calendars from one festival to the next. Swayambhunath was untouched, and Boudhanath was just a cluster of houses in the middle paddy fields.

Into this largely pristine valley with the Himalaya beckoning to the north and Goa to the south, travelers from all over the world converged, smoked, danced and ruminated about Rumi. It was the first time a generation



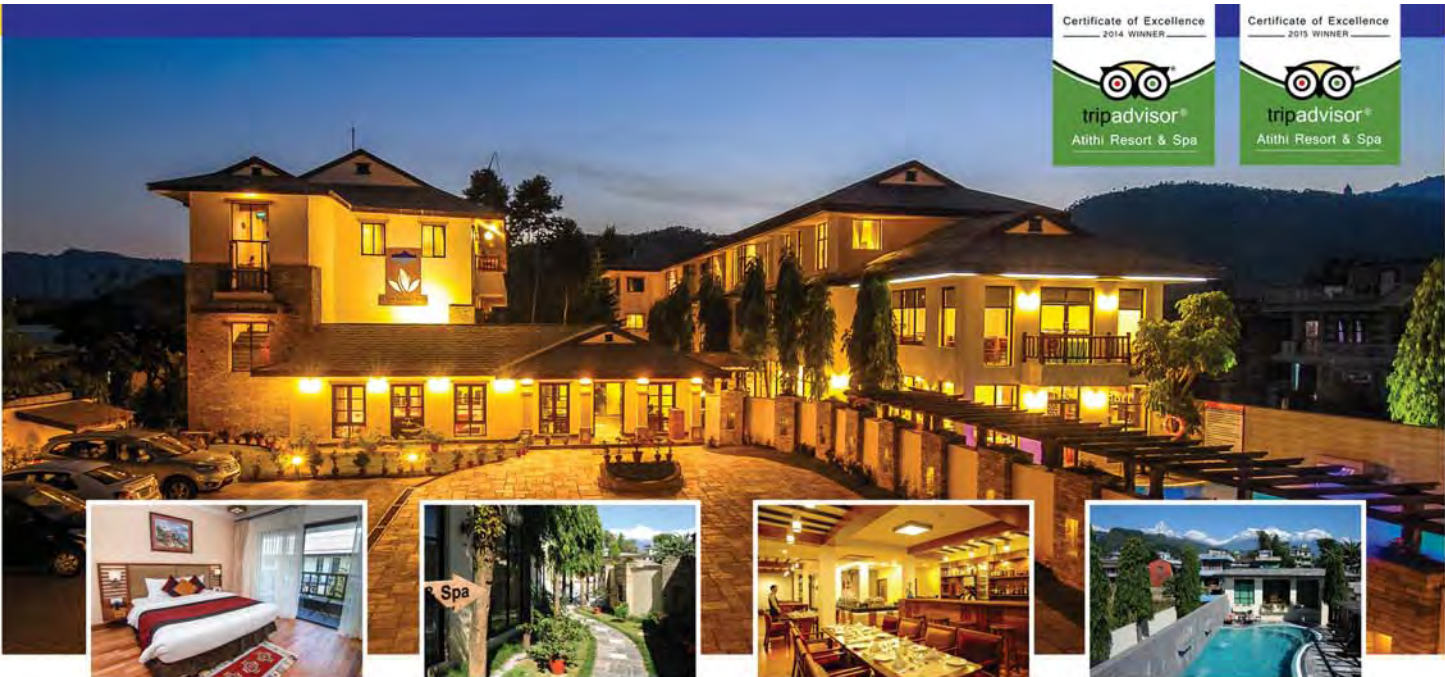
of youth could simply drop out and be who they wanted to be, without the pressures of parents and society.

"It was a chaotic but also highly creative scene," remembers Forbes. "Everyone was on their own trip."

Besides Freak Street there were Swayambhunath and Boudhanath -- two outposts representing distinct groups of hippie expats. Boudhanath specialised in Tibetan Buddhism, antiques and carpet businesses. It had Shiva's Slaves, riding

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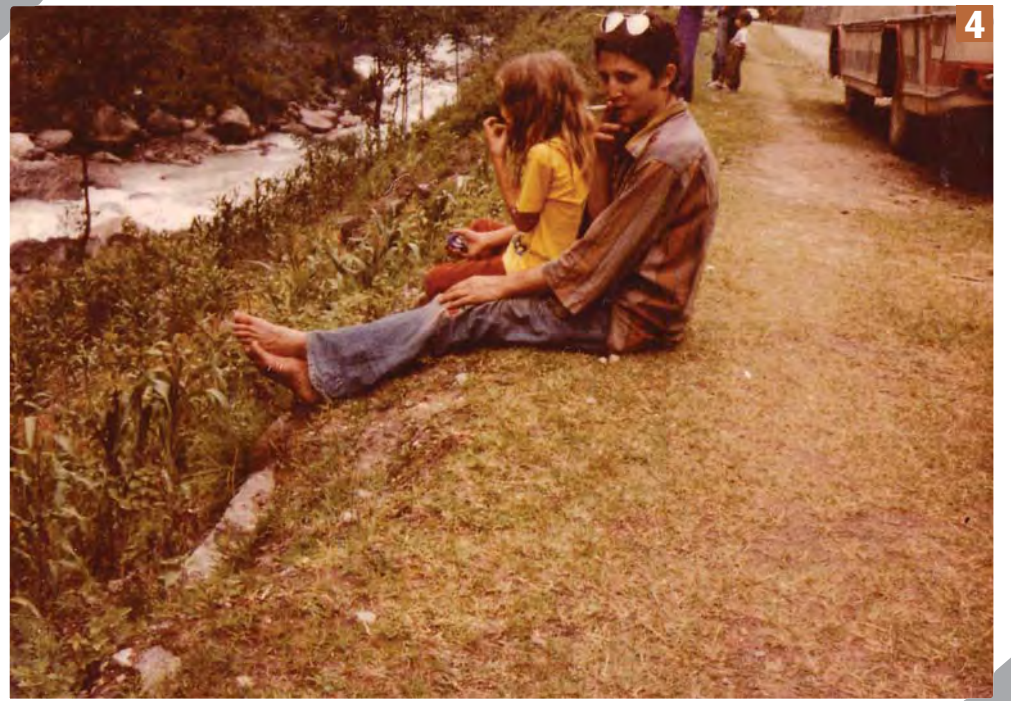
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3



4

ING OVY

mandu's colourful hippie era



6

classic bikes such as BSA, Triumph and Royal Enfield. Swayambhunath was more of a trippie area, easier on the budget, suitable for those who preferred tea over beer and chillums over other drugs.

But hippies from both places inevitably ended up on Freak Street. By the mid-70s, this narrow side street was the hot spot to get the latest tapes and books. Restaurants with funky names like Don't Pass Me By, The Hungry Eye, and Lost Horizon, had good stereo sets and the latest Beatles and Santana

songs seeped out of the open windows to the street below.

Few places matched Trilochan Shrestha's Ying Yang restaurant on the square opposite Hanuman Dhoka Palace. Here one could dance any time of the day because the place never really seemed to close. "Trilochan had all of us trapped in there," Burns recalls.

Freak Street became a thriving artistic hub. Ira Cohen published poetry on hand-crafted paper, Angus MacLise created books from tree bark, Keith Redman taught the Secret Yogas of Naropa to a growing following and everyone visited the Spirit Catcher Bookshop to listen to poetry or some jamming. There were also cremations, after someone OD-ed and died. "It was a world in which death was always a possibility," Burns says. But mostly it was tea and a smoke and someone always strumming a guitar in the background.

Quality photos of this era are rare. Cameras got stolen and others got swapped for hand-knotted carpets. But even those who had cameras didn't like snapping personal pictures. "The whole scene was a kind of underground," Forbes explained, "no one liked to have their pictures taken. There was this privacy thing. You thought of the people you left behind. They might not like seeing you stoned or doing crazy things." 🇳🇵

Nepal Picture Library aims to set up a hippie archive and recently published Magic Days, featuring photographs by William Forbes and Susan Burns, and a portrait series by Ira Cohen. Available at Kathmandu bookshops Rs 200

1 William smoking bong

"I brought this bong from Kathmandu and used it for a while. It is basically a bamboo water pipe. It got me so stoned that I forgot what day of the week it was. So I gave it up."

2 William and Susan in a marijuana patch

"We got marihuana seeds from a friend and for a while we grew weed. But then the landlord requested us to stop. Not because he didn't like it but because there is this law in Nepal that says if you grow crops on a piece of land for more than two years you can claim it."

3 4 5 Trip to Tatopani

"One day we took this bus to Tatopani and stayed there for a few days. We made good use of the hot bath, stepped on Tibetan soil and smoked chillums."

6 William and Susan at Swayambhu

"For karmic reasons we felt attracted to the energy of a power place like Swayambhu."

7 William in the sky with diamonds

"I thought I was going to return to the US. Come for a few years, get all the wisdom and share it. But I am a slow learner so I never got to the point where I can say, now I got the message and I can share it."





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EVENTS



NEW YEAR SPECIALS

A selection of the choicest places and activities in, around and outside Kathmandu to celebrate your New Year's Eve and Day.

Give away,

On the occasion of New Year's Eve give away old clothes, shoes, food, chocolates and more to street children to keep them warm this winter.
31 December, 5 pm onwards, Bag Packers In Nepal, Manamaiju, 9843640127, smaharjan9997@yahoo.com

Movie screening,

Attend the screening of The Legend of Shankhadhar, the first animated feature film in Newari and Nepali with English subtitles on New Year's Eve. All proceeds will go towards the education of children.
31 December, 1 to 2.15 pm, 2.30 to 3.45 pm, 4 to 5.15 pm, Microsoft Innovation Center Nepal, Khichapokhari, (01) 4259309, 9813043484/9851127460, Rs 100



Nagarjun hike,

End 2016 with a scenic six to seven hour hike through forests of Nagarjun.
31 December, 7 am onwards, Meeting point: Balaju bypass, 9841326364, 9841326364, 9808799589

Green 2017,

Celebrate the New Year responsibly. Get together with Nepal Connection and brainstorm with the team on how to make your parties fun and environment friendly.
31 December, 4 pm onwards, Nepal Connection, Mandala Street, Thamel, 9817192766, info@nepalconnection.org.np



KJC Winter camp,

A fun filled winter camp with various activities and a field trip for your children. For children between 5 to 11 years.
2 to 13 January, 10 am to 4 pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554, Rs 1,500 (Registration), Rs 9,500 (package fee), www.katjazz.com.np

Korean classes,

Enroll for Korean language classes and start your New Year on a good note. Special discounts till 15 January.
1 January (Classes start), Hangkuk Education, Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, 9841974281



Critical mass,

Ride with fellow bike enthusiasts in the last Critical Mass Kathmandu event for this year. Make it even more special by decorating your rides with lights and reflectors.
30 December, 5.30 pm onwards, Basantapur Darbar Square, http://Cyclecity.org.np/

Film screening,

Sit back and enjoy the screening of The Blue Space Between the Clouds, a film by François Gremaud this New Year's Eve.
31 December, 5 to 6 pm, Café Aamu, Krishna Galli, (01) 5520886

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Arbitrary Experience,

Spend a musical New Year's eve with 1974 AD, Nattu Shah, Prayatna Shrestha, Swoopna Suman, Neetesh Jung Kunwar, Alpha Bhattarai, Shweta Singh Hamal, SOS Band and DJ RedMus.
31 December, 3 pm onwards, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg, 9863636300, Rs 1,000 (Tickets available in The Cake Shop Annapurna or Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Mar, Vespa Showroom, Lajimpat, Renault Showroom, Thapathali or www.sastodeal.com)

Lively New Year,

Enjoy live music featuring artists Ananda Karki, Anil Shahi and Sapna Rani and celebrate the last day of 2016.
31 December, 6 pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs 2,500 only (Including a buffet dinner with a drink and snacks)

Musical evening,

Mark your calendar for the New Year's celebration at Paradiso featuring live band music by Mysterious Groovers.
31 December, 7 pm onwards, Paradiso Sports Bar & Grill, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 461675



Mukti & Revival live,

Tap to the groovy beats of the popular Nepali band, Mukti & Revival, to mark New Year's Eve. The event will also feature Deeksha Thapa and DJ Haan.
31 December, 6 pm onwards, Summit Hotel, Kupondole Heights, Rs 2,000 (Including a buffet dinner, unlimited domestic liquor and snacks)

DINING



Highland Food,

Celebrate this New Year's eve with some lip smacking Nepali, Newari and Indian delicacies.
31 December, 5 pm onwards, Highland Food, Newari Restaurant & Bar, Lajimpat, (01) 4441672

Shangrila Village,

Enjoy unlimited snacks followed by a lavish gala dinner with complimentary drinks. Also stand a chance to win air tickets to Hong Kong.
31 December, 8 pm onwards, Shangrila Village, Pokhara, 9856022272/9846020123, Single: Rs 3,000, Couple: Rs 5,000



Le Sherpa,

Dine and wine at Le Sherpa this New Year's eve.
31 December, 6pm onwards, Le Sherpa, Lajimpat, For reservation: (01)4428604/9802028777

Hyatt Regency,

Head to The Cafe for a specially prepared dinner or enjoy a four course meal at the Rox Restaurant with a glass of champagne, dessert wine or Coca-Cola.
31 December, 7 pm onwards, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 5171234, The Cafe: Rs 5,000 plus, Rox Restaurant: Rs 5,600 plus

Soaltee Crowne Plaza,

Take your pick from Garden Terrace, The Chinese Restaurant or Kakori and enjoy a hearty meal with your loved ones on New Year's Eve.
31 December, 7 pm onwards, Rs 5,000 (Single), Rs 9,000 (Couple) Garden Terrace buffet dinner; Rs 6,000 Chinese Restaurant four course meal; Rs 6,000 Kakori buffet (Price exclusive of taxes)

GETAWAY



Hotel Shambala,

Take off to Hotel Shambala this New Year's Eve and relish a lavish buffet dinner with friends and family.
31 December, Hotel Shambala, Bansbari Road, (01) 4650251, Rs 3000 including one complimentary drink (Only for dinner) Package with room and dinner: Rs10,000 (Single), Rs 13,000 (Couple)



Om Adhyay Retreat,

Escape Kathmandu's New Year traffic and spend one-night at the Adhyay Retreat Resort.
Om Adhyay Retreat, Thaha, Tribhuwan Highway, 9841297946

Dwarika's Resort,

Relax and unwind in Dwarika's with a two-night one-day package including food and live music on New Year's eve.
31 December, Dwarika's Resort, Dhulikhel, Rs 69,800 (Couple)



The Last Resort,

Spend your New Year's Eve away from the bustle of the city with friends, family, live music and food at Last Resort. Package includes three meals and transportation.
31 December, 2 pm (Departure from Kathmandu), 1 January, 3 pm (Departure from resort), (01) 4700525/4701247, info@thelastresort.com.np, Rs 4100 per person (Nepali), Euro 50 per person (Foreigners)



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No restrictions on Chinese tourists

China in Nepal didn't receive any relevant notice neither, according to a consulate official.

Ironically, Kathmandu and Chengdu signed a sister-city agreement two days after the

supposed ban on travel. Online travel bookings for the Chinese New Year holiday next month are open as normal. Tuniu, one of the most popular online travel booking platforms in China, directs visitors to nearly 100

package tours in Nepal.

However, there seem to be some restrictions on Chinese nationals entering Nepal overland from Tibet. According to a Chinese tourist Mo Mo who wanted to travel to Kathmandu

from Lhasa two days ago, the Kerung (Geelong) checkpoint is closed for Chinese citizens, and the only way to go to Nepal is by flight from Lhasa, Chengdu or other Chinese cities.

Qiu Tian and Pan Lan

The Chinese embassy in Kathmandu has denied rumours of official restrictions on the travel of Chinese tourists to Nepal, refuting media reports that the Chengdu Tourism Bureau had suspended group tours to Nepal and India.

An informal message about the supposed ban was quoted by some Nepali media, but it turns out no such order was issued either by the Chengdu Tourism Bureau or any other agency in China.

"Everything is normal," a customer service staff of China International Travel Service (CTIS) told *Nepali Times* over the phone from Chengdu.

The rumours that China has imposed restrictions on tourists travelling from Tibet to Nepal may have been triggered by speculation that they may be en route to Bodh Gaya where the Dalai Lama is supposed to be speaking at the Kalchakra Ceremony next week.

The Nepal Embassy in Beijing as well as the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu both denied there was any official restriction on Chinese visitors to Nepal.

No formal notice has been released by Chengdu Tourism Bureau so far. And embassy of



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EVENT	VENUE	DATE	RATE
New Year's Eve Set Dinner	Rox Restaurant	31 December	5600
New Year's Eve Buffet Dinner	The Cafe	31 December	5000
New Year's Day Brunch with kid's activity	The Cafe	01 January	2500

*Grand dessert buffet will be laid out in the lobby on New Year's eve with a live band in the Lobby Lounge.
*Complimentary glass of Jacob's Creek Chardonnay Pinot Noir or a Coca-Cola product at The Cafe.
*Complimentary glass of GH Mumm and a glass of Jacob's Creek Moscato wine or a Coca-Cola product at Rox restaurant.
*The rates are exclusive of applicable service charge and government taxes.
*All prices quoted are in local currency

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SULLY

Clint Eastwood, the prolific director who is now 86-year-old, tells the most measured, well calibrated story of his career with *Sully*. This is a film about the extraordinary events of 15 January, 2009, when US



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Airways Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger (Tom Hanks) was able to make a forced landing onto the Hudson River in the event of his Airbus A320 experiencing double engine failure as it was hit by a flock of birds three minutes after it took off from LaGuardia Airport in New York.

Often, this kind of film

indulges in the cheapest possible thrills by dwelling and hyperbolising the particulars of the plane crash and all of the possible, most gruesome scenarios surrounding it. *Sully* instead, is a methodical but far from plodding procedural that examines the mechanics behind the event, but also subtly surveys the emotional fallout of having experienced such a deeply dramatic life and death situation in which you are the person who holds the lives of one hundred and fifty five souls, quite literally, in your hands.

Hanks, with his usual unerring skill, plays the everyman who finds himself in a very peculiar circumstance where one is viewed as a hero by the public, even while he is being examined closely by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which is trying to determine whether he made the right choice in landing on the Hudson instead of trying to return to LaGuardia as he was directed.

The film flashes between Sully dealing with the days and nights immediately after the crash, cutting back and forth to the moments leading up to the plane landing in the Hudson - scenes which are shot so viscerally that you will find yourself frantically gripping whichever surface you are currently sitting on as the passengers themselves brace for impact.

The stories of the people on the plane, Sully himself, his wife Lorraine (played the absolutely wonderful Laura Linney) as she struggles to help him from miles away on the phone, and the reactions of the people around the world who are moved to tears by Sully’s actions are portrayed through a particularly sensitive lense, guided by Eastwood’s unerring sense for quiet drama.

This is a film about a man who did his job quietly but exceptionally, day after day for forty-two years until an instance forced him to concentrate all of his skills into a few seconds of absolute precision, moments highlighted by the talents of an actor like Hanks, really the only person who could have done justice to Sully’s dignity and grace.

Before watching the film I thought I knew exactly what I was in for. Instead, I came away with a newfound understanding of how to make good, quiet cinema, along with an inkling about the character of a good man.

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

NATIONAL DISCORD: Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar holds a meeting with major political parties on Monday in yet another unsuccessful attempt to break the political stalemate.



RSS

EX-COMRADES: CPN (Maoist-Centre) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal shares a light moment with his ex-comrade Baburam Bhattarai at an event in Kathmandu on Monday.



KENICHI YOKOYAMA

TUNNEL OF HOPE: Two of the three sections of the 27km Melamchi tunnel bringing water to a parched capital are finally completed on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

ADIEU: Senior littérateur and Chairman of Madan Puraskar Guthi Kamal Mani Dixit has passed away at the age of 87. He was cremated at the electronic crematorium in Pashupati on Thursday morning.



GOPEN RAI

AFTER THE FIRE: A man ruefully surveys his fire-damaged clothing store in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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Swimming out of the rubble

Girish Giri in www.setopati.com, 23 December

सेतोपाटी

When the earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015, Ramesh Khatri was having lunch at a Gongabu guest house where he was a waiter for two years.

Unhappy with his meagre income and burdened with the responsibility to look after younger siblings back home, Khatri, who was just 16 then, had quit his job, and bought a bus ticket to return to his village in Dailekh. He had bought new clothes for his mother, brother and sisters.

Khatri had just begun eating when the narrow eight-storey building started shaking violently. Before he could figure out what was happening, a huge concrete pillar fell, and he was trapped under the rubble.

He cried for help, spitting out

remembered fondly how he used to swim in the river near his home when he was a child. The club authorities initially did not allow an amputee to swim, but they finally gave in.

“When I jumped off the wheel chair into the swimming pool, I found it difficult to float without legs, and nearly drowned,” he recalls. ‘But it did not take me long to learn to swim with just my hands.’

Back in the wheel chair, he realised that the earth’s gravity discriminates against amputees, but because of the buoyancy water does not. “You cannot walk if you lack legs, but you can float even if you do not have them,” he says.

One year after the earthquake, Khatri enrolled in Khagendra Nawajiban Kendra, a school in Kathmandu for physically disabled students. When Spinal Cord



the food that was stuffed in his mouth. He realised two of his friends were also trapped there. One of them, 14-year-old Pemba Lama, was miraculously rescued alive after six days. The other was rescued four days later, but died soon afterwards.

Khatri was lucky to be rescued after 24 hours, but both his legs were amputated at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. “When I regained consciousness, I felt my feet were itchy,” he says. “I had no idea they were no longer with me.”

When his aging father and mother came to see him, he did not cry and tried to be strong so they would not lose hope, but he was worried about his younger siblings.

Five months later, while attending a training program conducted by the National Disabled Fund (NDF) in Bhrikuti Mandap, he befriended Sandesh Basnet, who had also lost his legs in the earthquake. Basnet’s father, a policeman, was killed by the Maoists. He took Khatri to Mahendra Police Club, which lies just across the Bhrikuti Mandap road.

When Khatri saw the blue water in the swimming pool of Mahendra Police Club, he

Injury Sports Association announced the fourth national swimming competition for physically disabled persons in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Nepal Paralympic Committee, he signed up.

After one month of training, Khatri was ready for the championship on 17 June. He came first by crossing 25 m in just 23 seconds, much ahead of other contestants. President Bidya Bhandari handed over the prize to him.

Khatri’s life changed after becoming the champion, and he spent one week in December in Japan where he took more swimming training. Before the earthquake, he had no goal, and was only worried about future of his younger siblings. He now has a goal – a reason to live: he wants to win the gold medal in the next Paralympics in Japan.

Khatri is aware of the bitter truth that Nepal lags far behind other countries in infrastructure. In Japan, he could swim in warm water even when it was cold outside. In Nepal, all swimming pools remain shut in winter, and he can practice only in summer.



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Federalism is the talk of the

KRISTINA SHPERLIK
in JANAKPUR

Last winter this city that serves as the defacto capital of the Madhes was reeling from violence, and shortages created by the five-month border blockade. There is little in Janakpur today to remind visitors of those terrifying times: the streets are calm and busy.

But listen in on men wrapped in blankets sipping tea in the feeble morning sun on the sidewalks, and the conversation is all centred on negotiations in Kathmandu about the future of federalism under the Second Amendment to the new Constitution. Although there is still simmering anger over last year's violent suppression of protests, there is no stomach here for another prolonged agitation and accompanying hardships.

"There was not one sector that did not go down -- education, businesses, industries, health, transportation, trade, agriculture -- everything was seriously affected," economics professor Surendra Labh remembers the trying months last year.

The violence started with the lynching of nine policemen by protesters in Kailali, and more



PICS: KRISTINA SHPERLIK

than 55 people were killed as the agitation spread across the Tarai. Police conducted house-to-house searches and beat people randomly on the streets. Social worker Anuj Mishra remembers two children who were beaten up so badly they had to be hospitalised.

"One evening, we heard the noise from the street and

saw the police attacking some motorcyclists who were not even taking part in the protests, they took away their bikes and declared a curfew," Mishra recalls.

As the violence escalated, the India-Nepal border was blocked with New Delhi's tacit support, devastating the economy of not just border cities like

Janakpur, but the whole country. Economist Vogendra Jha, who is also a former member of the State Restructuring Committee, says: "The official GDP growth is 0.77% but in reality it is minus, population is growing at 1.3 to 1.5% and inflation is at 9.5%. It is not hard to see that Nepal's economy is in serious trouble."

Across the Tarai, it is clear

that what is sustaining people's livelihoods is remittances from young men working in the Gulf, Malaysia or India. It is the money they send home that gives families here an income, and keeps the small businesses and shops afloat. However, the demonetisation of Indian notes has once more impacted the local economy, with many losing their savings.

Surendra Labh says the blockade was a result of the Madhes Movement, which in turn was caused by the slow economic development of the plains, and the failure of the central government in Kathmandu to address Madhesi concerns.

Although Parliament has been stalled over a dispute over the transfer of five hill districts from Province 5 to Province 4, the real concern in Janakpur is about whether or not the easternmost Tarai districts of Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari will be included in Province 2. The demand here is for all plains districts to be a part of the two Madhes provinces.

"Our geography and identity are not taken into account, and this Amendment is a ruse to perpetuate the internal colonization of the Madhes and to exploit our resources. The government caused deforestation and dehydration and ruined our environment," says Vijay Kumar



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town in the Tarai

A year after the blockade, Janakpur seethes silently as Kathmandu debates constitutional amendments

Green Janakpur

Accustomed to Kathmandu’s apathy, civic groups in Janakpur are trying to find a new identity and help clean up the city. The ‘Clean Janakpur Green Janakpur’ campaign is partly inspired by Narendra Modi’s ‘Clean India’ mission and was started by social activist Ram Ashish Yadav two years ago.

People thought he was mad when Yadav took three months to clean up the sacred Ganga Sagar pond in the city all by himself. But soon, others joined him, and they included students, businessmen and the local wings of political parties. In nine months the task was done, and Ganga Sagar is now the second main attraction after Janaki Temple and the must-see place for pilgrims.

Inspired by the success, Yadav is moving on to clean Janakpur’s other ponds, and is planning a program to recycle waste and distribute mango trees to the poor.

“One mango tree provides two kilograms of oxygen per day which costs Rs 100, so in 70 years these trees can give the city Rs 51 million. It also gives the poor mangos to eat,” says Yadav, who has already distributed 12,300 trees and will soon triple that figure.

With Nepal and India building five cross-border train links, including one in Janakpur, the heart of the ancient Mithila kingdom is expected to have more tourists from India in future.



Singh, an MP from the Tarai Madhes Democratic Party.

Singh and others complain of government neglect and the lack of investment in infrastructure and industries. People here see Kathmandu more concerned about the development of Pokhara, for instance, than Janakpur. The local economy was badly hit after the closure of the Janakpur Cigarette Factory three years ago (*see box*).

“This city has a lot of tourism potential, there are great prospects for rice and fisheries. Janakpur could be a business hub if it was given the priority,” says Vijay K Jhunjunwala of Hotel Welcome. Other Janakpur citizens who were interviewed concurred, and added that the city’s economy could take off with investment in manufacturing, irrigation, construction of feeder roads.

As Sita’s birthplace, Janakpur is already a destination for pilgrims visiting the Janaki Temple, but better transportation links and hotels could boost its popularity. In addition there are holy sites like the Dhanushadham Forest, 17 km from Janakpur which could be a draw.

Says Raaj Kishor Yadav of the opposition UML’s district chapter: “The budget should be implemented properly, not like now when 10-20% is frozen by the main parties.” 🇳🇵

Soviet legacy

The Cold War was at its most frigid in the 1960s when King Mahendra, who had just ousted an elected government in a coup, went on a nation-building spree, playing off regional and global powers to industrialise Nepal and improve infrastructure.

Starting the mid-1960s, the Soviet Union provided thousands of Nepali students with scholarships to go to university, started work on the Janakpur Cigarette Factory and the Pathlaiya-Dhalkebar section of the East-West Highway.

The factory made popular Nepali cigarette brands like Yak and Deurali, but has been derelict since it closed down three years ago. The closure cost 4,000 jobs, a popular Janakpur football club as well as a hospital, bank and school that the factory supported. Thousands of farmers in surrounding districts who supplied the factory with tobacco lost their cash crop.

The factory was built by Soviet engineers in 1965, and in the 1980s was upgraded by Indian technicians. Today, rusting machinery, abandoned warehouses and dilapidated buildings are all that remain of the premises in the heart of Janakpur.

“All significant things in Janakpur, the temple, railway, university campus, were built

by foreign governments, mostly Indian or Soviet. All Kathmandu ever did was open a tax office and police department here,” says economics professor Surendra Labh.

The factory used to hum with activity producing around 20 million cigarettes a day in three shifts. Seth Sah operated the power house and fondly recalls the friendly atmosphere in the factory. “We did not need any trade union, our Russian Chief Engineer was a very honest man and hardworking person, he united the employees by joining us in our work and being our role model,” recalls Sah, who looks after the electric supply in the factory premises.

“The government milked it and let it close, and it never discussed the closure with the local people,” says Vijay Kumar Singh of the Terai Madhesh Democratic Party.

The other soviet project was the 109 km section of the East-West Highway in the eastern Tarai. There are still signs that say ‘Soviet Nepal Cooperation’ along the highway from 45 years ago.

Although the highway improved connectivity and made it possible for people of Janakpur to go to other parts of Nepal without having to cross into India, it is also blamed for deforestation and destruction of wildlife habitat.

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Swimming out of the rubble

Girish Giri in www.setopati.com, 23 December

सेतोपाटी

When the earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015, Ramesh Khatri was having lunch at a Gongabu guest house where he was a waiter for two years.

Unhappy with his meagre income and burdened with the responsibility to look after younger siblings back home, Khatri, who was just 16 then, had quit his job, and bought a bus ticket to return to his village in Dailekh. He had bought new clothes for his mother, brother and sisters.

Khatri had just begun eating when the narrow eight-storey building started shaking violently. Before he could figure out what was happening, a huge concrete pillar fell, and he was trapped under the rubble.

He cried for help, spitting out

remembered fondly how he used to swim in the river near his home when he was a child. The club authorities initially did not allow an amputee to swim, but they finally gave in.

“When I jumped off the wheel chair into the swimming pool, I found it difficult to float without legs, and nearly drowned,” he recalls. ‘But it did not take me long to learn to swim with just my hands.’

Back in the wheel chair, he realised that the earth’s gravity discriminates against amputees, but because of the buoyancy water does not. “You cannot walk if you lack legs, but you can float even if you do not have them,” he says.

One year after the earthquake, Khatri enrolled in Khagendra Nawajiban Kendra, a school in Kathmandu for physically disabled students. When Spinal Cord



the food that was stuffed in his mouth. He realised two of his friends were also trapped there. One of them, 14-year-old Pemba Lama, was miraculously rescued alive after six days. The other was rescued four days later, but died soon afterwards.

Khatri was lucky to be rescued after 24 hours, but both his legs were amputated at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. “When I regained consciousness, I felt my feet were itchy,” he says. “I had no idea they were no longer with me.”

When his aging father and mother came to see him, he did not cry and tried to be strong so they would not lose hope, but he was worried about his younger siblings.

Five months later, while attending a training program conducted by the National Disabled Fund (NDF) in Bhrikuti Mandap, he befriended Sandesh Basnet, who had also lost his legs in the earthquake. Basnet’s father, a policeman, was killed by the Maoists. He took Khatri to Mahendra Police Club, which lies just across the Bhrikuti Mandap road.

When Khatri saw the blue water in the swimming pool of Mahendra Police Club, he

Injury Sports Association announced the fourth national swimming competition for physically disabled persons in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Nepal Paralympic Committee, he signed up.

After one month of training, Khatri was ready for the championship on 17 June. He came first by crossing 25 m in just 23 seconds, much ahead of other contestants. President Bidya Bhandari handed over the prize to him.

Khatri’s life changed after becoming the champion, and he spent one week in December in Japan where he took more swimming training. Before the earthquake, he had no goal, and was only worried about future of his younger siblings. He now has a goal – a reason to live: he wants to win the gold medal in the next Paralympics in Japan.

Khatri is aware of the bitter truth that Nepal lags far behind other countries in infrastructure. In Japan, he could swim in warm water even when it was cold outside. In Nepal, all swimming pools remain shut in winter, and he can practice only in summer.



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