When Narendra Modi became India’s Prime Minister in 2014, monarchists in Nepal hoped he would help roll back secularism and restore their Hindu kingdom. This week, after Modi’s sweep of state elections and the installation of Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, that hope has been revived.

Modi has so far carefully refrained from pushing for a restoration of Nepal’s Hindu monarchy, abolished by the Constituent Assembly in 2008. But Adityanath wants Nepal’s secular and republican constitution scrapped, and even demanded the restoration of the Shah monarchy during a Hindu jamboree in Kathmandu last year.

The fact that Adityanath is the head priest of the Gorakhpur Peeth, the patron deity of the Shah dynasty, has emboldened the newly resurgent RSS.

It staged a protest this week against the Election Commission’s removal of ‘monarchy’ and ‘Hindu nation’ from its statute (pic, above).

Not everyone is convinced that India’s policy will change. Says UML MP Rajan Bhattarai, member of the Eminent Persons Group on Nepal-India relations: “What India wants in Nepal is guided by foreign policy that supports secularism, federalism and republicanism. The rise of Adityanath will not change that.”

Journalist Yubraj Ghimire, who covered India’s Hindu-friendly movement during the Babri Masjid Demolition in 1992, disagrees.

“Chief Minister Adityanath may not have the power to restore Nepal’s Hindu monarchy, but he can use his political clout in New Delhi to reshape India’s foreign policy vis-a-vis Nepal,” says Ghimire, now editor of Annapurna Post.

He sees the beginning of the end of the Shyam Saran Doctrine that laid out India’s strategy on Nepal. The former Indian ambassador and foreign secretary was the architect of the 12-point deal signed in New Delhi in 2005 between Nepal’s mainstream parties and rebels against the monarchy.

“That doctrine is failing because Beijing believes India’s influence in Kathmandu would decline once the monarchy was gone, but the opposite happened,” Ghimire adds.

Meanwhile, Nepal’s secularist politicians are now getting nervous: India will do a U-turn.

Says Ghimire: “Signatories of the 12-point deal are scared, more so after the rise of Adityanath. They were wrong to seek India’s help in defeating Nepal’s secular republic. It will be wrong again if India tries to turn Nepal into a Hindu kingdom.”
GUEST EDITORIAL
PUJA SEN

Modi’s India

India’s democratic fortunes have taken another freefall, this time to the right with the results of recent state assembly elections. The ruling BJP made significant gains in four crucial states: Uttarakhand, Goa, Manipur, and most significantly, Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Overwhelmingly the mandate seems to have been for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who reports say, commands mesmerising amnesia about what India Gandhi enjoyed when in power. Prime Minister Modi has declared that this was the “new India” and that “we are all part of Modi’s nation.” On one level, that statement is absurd. It signals how the liberal establishment itself has lost grip on the very definition of democracy.

The nation cares not to belong to one man, or a people who have elected him, and importantly also, to those who do not, democracy is not reducible to a formulation that the majority wins, but the highest ideal of the nation’s environment safeguarding its minorities. If anything, Modi’s India, since we must call it that, represents a profound crisis of the country and the country’s constitutional values. The BJP’s choice of chief minister for UP – Yogi Adityanath – represents another grotesque subversion of these principles.

Adityanath has made incendiary speeches inciting open violence towards Muslims. “For every Hindu woman that is raped, we will rape hundreds of their widows,” contending a ban on cow slaughter, and declaring that the freedom of women need to be cut lest they become unnatural. Since his assuming office, the UP (Moraima) police has already arrested 366 “sacred sources” to seemingly curb harassment against women but more likely to shame and silence young couples.

The 2014 elevation of Narendra Modi to the highest seat of power had already signaled these shifts. Representing the rise of cultural-religious chauvinism backed by corporate power, and a general public willingness to disregard communal violence for the promise of development, the BJP mandate might well rottonise the country’s new mood. But this is a process that has been patiently engineered through the decades. The BJP, powered as it is by the radical Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has been making its long march through the institutions, giving the lie to the claim that once parties (left or right) came to power they automatically shift to the liberal centre. While they arrogate and mobilise violence socially, actually communalise the caste, discard and clamp down on criticism in the university and the media, their rise to power has been through democracy and electoral means. As the scholar Ajay Kumar once put it, “every country gets the fascism that it deserves.”

Puja Sen is a Kathmandu-based writer.
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The post-development era

The donor downturn in Nepal comes as ‘development’ re-orientates towards self-generated ‘progress’

Swiss Ambassador Jörg Frieden, launching the Nepali translation of Tocci Hagen’s work ‘Decentralisation and Development’ (Bikendrikaran ra Bikas, Himal Books, BS 2073) on Tuesday (see photo), remarked that international donors had lately lost leverage and influence in Nepal. He ascribed this to the reduction of donor budgets and the rise in remittances from migrant labour.

Indeed, the waning influence of the Western donors in Nepal is noticeable, and it is not only because of the reduced kitty, which itself has been the result of a string of factors including the rise of the xenophobic right-wing in the metropolitan North, allocations for West Asian refugees, and sheer donor fatigue. One can expect Donald Trump’s ‘hard power budget’, which proposes nearly 30 percent cuts in UN and USAID spending, will drastically reduce US relevance in a country where it has been ‘doing development’ since the 1960s. The donors have brought the escalating irrelevance upon themselves. For long, the aid organisations have stood as imperious citadels of dollar/euro disbursement, with Nepal’s politicians, bureaucrats, and civil society scurrying about like chickens before the farmer scattering grain.

It is the rare donor who has not succumbed to the obsequiousness of the Nepali ‘counterparts’, or the ability to play politics. A Danish diplomat told a friend in Africa a few years ago that he was seeking a posting in Nepal, “because you can be politically engaged there like nowhere else”. The Danish embassy having closed down, the gentleman is unlikely to find another country to fulfil his activist streak.

Ultimately, the interventionist anthropologist-backed social engineering projects during the decade of state restructuring and constitution writing had donors acting like weighty bulks in a china shop. The new-found disdain of Western donors and diplomats to India when it comes to Nepal affairs, evidently due to Asian geopolitics in relation to China, has also contributed to reduced influence in Kathmandu corridors.

Where it hurts

The donor pullback, interestingly, comes at a time when ‘development’ as a term and an activity is itself losing traction after half a century at centre stage, as we revert towards self-generated ‘progress’. This theme is picked up well in another new book, ‘Aid, Technology and Development: The Lessons from Nepal’ (Olivier Goyvaerts et al editors, Earthscan/Routledge, 2017).

At the heart of the weakness of international aid is Kathmandu’s inability to pick between projects. The rot set in towards the end of the Panchayat era when the then His Majesty’s Government started taking everything and anything on offer. Donor influence soared from the 1970s through the 2000s, but we now seem to be approaching the end of a cycle.

We must also consider donor money in relation to the huge amount that the Nepal Government itself spends through the regular and development budget with a significant portion allocated to local government bodies. The problem is that much remains unspent due to political skullduggery and various inefficiencies, while huge amounts are siphoned off through patronage networks.

Where the dip in donor funding is hurting the most is the arena of social and cultural activism, and academia. The related NGOs rely overwhelmingly on donor funding because no private or government...
sources are forthcoming, with cash philanthropy yet to strike root in the society.

Fud aid
There have been two major failings of donors over the years: a) pushing developmental aid on an unsuspecting land, where government departments tend to slavishly follow whatever is introduced; b) the high-and mighty approach of donor agency staff, especially the heads, who are not in Nepal long enough to understand the society, and who enjoy clout without accountability.

One could of course defend the donor industry from various standpoint, eg, how it got socio-political ‘inclusion’ into the agenda of the Nepali state. Over the decades, certainly, there have been instances of success, from rural roads and suspension bridges to community forestry, but the question is whether there has been bang for the buck. And whether the indigenous can do attitude of our communities was compromised.

Donor involvement during the post-conflict transition and constitution-writing was, on the whole, a negative — exemplified by the high salaries and perks provided to grey eminences and self-serving obstructionists masquerading as peace and democracy activists. Then there is the donor agency head who had the temerity to publicly announce that food aid support after the April 2015 earthquake could be diverted

to Yemen or Syria if Nepalis did not like what they got.

The education sector has for decades been controlled by multiple donors through a ‘basket fund’ that denies the Ministry of Education on a project-by-project basis, which has kept the bureaucracy from ownership and from developing programmatic continuity. And yet, there is not a whiff of retribution or accountability among the donor agencies for the disaster of public education we have on our hands.

Decentralisation
Tomi Hagen’s book on decentralisation, development and democratic practice could not have come at a better time. As local government elections become a certainty we seem to have finally got over our fear of the populism that had condemned ‘decentralisation’ to be IMG. BRIEFS. The populist propaganda had that decentralisation would undercut ‘federalism’, and civil society and donor organisations all ran for cover. You even had the International Crisis Group set year recommending to development partners: “refuse to support local elections if a roadmap agreed with uplifting groups is not in place.” But, finally, it seems once again kosher to define ‘decentralisation’ and speak up for local governance elections.

The Kathmandu intelligentsia may be steeped in self-destructive cynicism, the donors may be bewildered at their reduced role, but as the decades of ‘development’ come to a close, we will hopefully move towards a true era of ‘progress’.

There is much remaining to be done to end exclusion, and place egalitarianism and equity at the soul of the democratic republic. And the energy will come from within, because the people at large have not lost heart.
ARTAVAGANZA

SMRITI BASNET

For past weeks a colourful mural has come up on the wall of the Lalitpur District Post Office in Patan Dhoka (above) depicting a combination of lions and humans to illustrate the characteristic they share: pride, one of seven deadly sins. Created by street artist Kiran Maharjan, the three-storey painting is one of many works of art that will adorn the streets of Patan and Kathmandu for the next 17 days – part of an international festival called the Kathmandu Triennale. Maharjan’s mural encapsulates what the festival hopes to promote: the existence of art beyond the confines of a gallery space.

“We see Kathmandu Triennale 2017 as an opportunity to develop newer audiences while bringing art lovers deeper into the passion for art,” said festival manager Nischal Oli. With the theme “The City: My Studio/My City: My Life,” the festival is expecting over 70 artists from 25 countries from 24 March - 8 April.

“The focus is on the city because cities all around the world are changing and are in a constant state of flux. The festival will look at how changes or the status quo affect us as individuals, as citizens or as artists,” said festival director Sangeeta Thapa.

The Triennale will be centred in four venues: Patan Museum, Nepal Art Council, Taragan Museum and Siddhartha Art Gallery, as well as other galleries. But the whole city is the venue.

“We should not focus on the effect of art, we should...
Gayan O’Flynn hosted an interactive art show in the earthquake-damaged Hanuman Square on the evening of 22 March where the audience were asked to make a pledge for preservation while O’Flynn projected their voices on the physical space.

Some exhibitors will focus on Kathmandu’s positive aspects, like Dutch artist Henk Visch. “Art is a mentally free space,” says the artist who has chosen to depict the body, and the pleasure we derive from it, in his works. Visch stumbled on the idea after discovering a book on the Kama Sutra and says he was particularly fascinated with the respect given to the body in Nepal.

Anne Marie, a fourth-year student of St. John’s College of Art, is helping build the sand sculpture of a sleeping figure outside the Taragau Museum. “Nepalis usually think that anything beautiful is art. Working with him I have come to learn that there is much more than just the finish or beauty,” said Marie.

Festival organiser plan to include child-friendly spaces, art workshops for the community, a book launch, screening of films and art talks.

Brian Hodgson’s Story Birds of Nepal, containing bird paintings of 19th-century Nepali artist Rajman Chitrakar, will also be displayed. A treasured book, it is being specially flown in from the Natural History Museum in London for the duration of the festival.

But Oli has faced challenges: “The most difficult were shortages of time and money. There is little state support and private patrons are still not interested in contemporary art.”
What's the buzz?

Bees are disappearing and need protection, not just for the good of the honey industry but also to pollinate our food.

SONIA AWALE

Pesticide use, disease and climate change are taking their toll on Nepal's bee populations, threatening not just harvests of fruit, vegetables and grain, but also hurting the country's indigenous honey industry.

Honeybee colonies in the US are dying at a rate of 30 per cent or more a year, and although the situation in Nepal is not as critical, apiculturists here are ringing alarm bells. Of the 11 types of honeybees found in nature, four are native to the Himalayas, and Nepal also has colonies of European bees - all are being depleted.

Aside from affecting honey production, this has also drastically reduced the benefits to agriculture from cross-pollination. For instance, a survey in eastern Nepal showed that after beehives were introduced, production of cardamom rose by 45 per cent.

“There are crops that can self-pollinate and those that need a pollinating agent and bees are the best pollinating agents,” explains Nepal's foremost beekeeping expert, Gopal Prasad Kafle. But the increasing use of agro-chemicals, infections, extreme weather events, practice of monoculture farming, and some say even the spread of mobile phone towers, have lead to the dieback in Nepal's bee populations.

In the early 1980s, there was an epidemic of TSBV (Thai SacBrood Virus) in Nepal, which nearly wiped out the population of Apis cerana indigenous honeybees, but it rebounded within a few years. Today, the threat is more from pesticides, loss of biodiversity and global warming.

“Climate change is among the environmental factors responsible for bee decline, so we have to find ways to cool the earth to save bees. Also, diseases like TSBV have no treatment. We have to keep bees strong biologically and pay special attention to their needs,” adds Kafle.

Nepal is known internationally for its wild hives, and the villagers in Lamjung who hang alongside cliffs to tap honey were made famous by Eric Valli's
Domesticated Nepali honeybees

Apis cerana
Indigenous to Nepal. Found in the hills.
30,000 bees/hive
25kg honey/year

Apis mellifera
This European bee thrives in the Tarai. There are 5,000 bees/hive.
50kg honey/year

Winghooks combine fore- and hind-wings so they are synchronized in flight.

Mandibles are the bee’s biting tool used to kill enemies or cut honeycombs.

Flowers need bees to reproduce by pollinating them, and grow for bees needed in exchange. Bees gather the nectar in tiny 40mg loads and carry them to the hives in special stomachs, to make honey. Without flowers, bees convert the nectar into honey in a slow process which makes bees swarming and regurgitating the nectar. They are of many kinds of honey, but they all have one ingredient in common: sugar.

Proboscis is the bee’s tongue and used to get at the flower’s nectar.

HIVE ALIVE

One of every three bites of food we take can be traced to bee pollination. It is not just the honey industry that depends on bees, but all our grain, vegetable and fruit production. But bees are disappearing around the world, including Nepal, due to disease and pesticides. Go online to watch video of bees in action in Godavari.

nepaltimes.com

TO BE OR NOT TO BEE

Bee populations around the world have decreased between 20-30%, and scientists say the reasons are:

- Decreasing abundance and diversity of flowers
- Increasing use of pesticides
- Spread of parasites by humans
- Climate change

In Nepal, the decrease of bees is not as severe as in other parts of the world, but there are warning signs it could be serious. Bees here mostly die due to pesticide poisoning, but also because farmers are switching to monoculture crops.

Recent research shows that same bees may be developing an immunity to chemicals and adapting to a rise in global temperatures. This could be good news, but scientists say counting on nature to take care of itself is not a solution. Evolution may be too slow to match the speed at which bees are disappearing.

Bees have a well-organised and complex social life. There are three bee types in a hive: the queen bee, the worker bee and the drone. The workers are female, the smallest and most numerous and are involved in cleaning, building, caring for the young, foraging to gather and guarding the hive entrance. Drones are male bees whose main job is to mate with the queen after which they die. The queen lays about 1,500 eggs a day and controls workers using pheromones.

Claudia Bullock

20-30 decline in bee population worldwide

15-20% increase in crop production due to bee pollination

45% increase in cardamom production in Eastern Nepal after bee hives were introduced

3,500 metric tons of honey produced in Nepal in 2015/2016. The production is growing at 20% per year

5 out of 11 honeybee species are found in Nepal, 4 of which are indigenous to the Himalaya

90% of bees in Nepal were wiped out in early 1980s due to an epidemic of TSBV but the bee population revived after few years

15-25 kg of honey per hive per year by Apis cerana, and as much as 50 kg/hive/year in case of Apis mellifera.

documentary. The Honey Hunters of Nepal. Dutch aid agency SNV started helping Nepal with a Beekeeping Development project in 1990 after King Birendra’s visit to The Netherlands, and a research centre in Godavari is involved in training beekeepers.

Dhan Bahadur Rawat, apiculturist at the Beekeeping Development Division in Godavari set up by SNV, says the government should encourage support for beekeepers and spread public awareness about the role of bees in pollination.

“If farmers knew they should place bee hives close to their fruit farms, they could double their production and at the same time make money selling honey,” he said.

However, it is because farmers now understand the importance of beekeeping that there have been incidents involving competition for bee grazing. Last November, farmers in Dang destroyed 75 beehives worth Rs 1.8 million by spraying pesticides when farmers from Bharatpur brought their hives to graze there.

Every season beehives load their beehives and trucks and take them to different locations to make specialty honey in return for pollinating farmers’ crops. Sometimes, as in Dang, there is disagreement over compensation.

“Apart from obvious factors affecting the bee population, government negligence in training beekeepers and a lack of interest in the well-being of bees has played a significant role in their decline,” says Samu Rimal Basai of The Beekeeping Workshop in Godavari.

To conserve bee populations, scientists are trying to come up with solutions like hybridisation between different types of honeybees. Nepali farmers could also diversify cropping and switch back to organic pesticides and homemade fertilisers.
Kathmandu Triennale,
Turn yourself around the city through art works of local and international artists and learn about Nepal’s art history in the year edition of the heart international art festival. More on page 6-7.

24 March to 21 April. Multiple venues. For more information: kathmandutriennale.org

KLC for kids,
A 10-day camp for 8-12 years old children to learn about music, musical instruments, vocal work shop, song writing, drama and more fun activities. For children 5 to 13 years.

3 to 4 April, 9 to 11 April, 10 to 13 April. Kathmandu, Webinar, Kora. For more information: ktc.ch@gmail.com

Bungamati and Khokha tour, Participate in traditional Newari villages on the fringes of Kathmandu Valley.

25 to 26 March. Rs. 5500 per person. For more information: 9819247372/7980308452

Mobile Monday, A panel discussion on mobile marketing with panelists from around the world. 25 March, 9:30 am-12:30 pm, 3rd floor, TU. For more information: mobilemonday.org

All about French, French Immersion in Mumbai. 24 March, Alliance Francaise de New Delhi, 11th floor, for more information: www.alliancetogo.in

Miss Motivation
Kripa Joshi
Your best teacher is your last mistake.

Morning Coffee Queries
For interesting business ideas and experiences, entrepreneurs, students and start ups can participate in Morning coffee queries. 20 March, 10 am, Both Book and Bakes, Mahendrung, Sankata. For more information: http://www.closure.com/events/67

Run for Parkinson’s
Mark your calendars for this run organized by Parkinson’s Support Nepal and help raise awareness about Parkinson’s. 1 April, 7 to 9 am, Nepal Tourism Board, Laxmi Chowk, Rs. 500 per person. (01) 4253229

Self defence, Participate in self defence classes for women with Pamela Giri, founder and national referee of sakikawa. 29 April, 8 am to 11 am, lipati, Sankata. Tickets: from 3000 to 5000. Rs. 2500 per person. For more information: 9819965682

Heritage dance, Mark your calendars for a live performance by Rishi Jha. 24 March, 11.30 am, TU. FOR: more information: erica@thevalley.com

Tap to the beats, Mark your calendars for a live performance by Bhala Jha. 24 March, 7.30 am, TU. FOR: more information: 9819965682

Coffee Pasal, A chance to win on a good cup of coffee while looking at the Morangini museum. Daroh Bung, (01) 4484445

Hyatt Regency, The cafe is looking out a Punjabi food festival and a happy punjabi delicacies like lachha paratha, sambha kale, makai choka, etc.

Until 31 March, 10.30 am, 3 pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. (01) 5177224, Rs 2000 plus taxes per person.

Gokarna Forest Resort
A luxurious paradise that renews you and encourages meditation. Just a 20 minute drive away from Kathmandu. Gokarna, (01) 5405172, info@gokarna.com

Hotel Shangri-La
Make the most out of your weekends and enjoy a relaxing Saturday brunch with live showtimes and pastries across.
Every Saturday, 11 am to 3 pm, Shangri-La Garden and Odd Sundhara. Hotel Shangri-La, Laxmi, (01) 4873990, 4873999, 752675268, Rs 1500 per person

Piyano B&B
Enjoy a comfortable stay, sumptuous Italian food and great hospitality at Piyano B&B in Harkakuwa. Harkakuwa, (01) 5883245

Pataleban Vineyard Resort
Just 16 km west of Kathmandu city, this resort is a perfect place to spend your weekends with food and wine. The resort offers astounding views of sunset and Himalayan range of Langtang, Ganesau, Manaslu and Annapurna. Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9846167636, pataleban@gmail.com

Last Resort
Cycling, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping - test your limits at the Last Resort, Butwal. (01) 4717437/4395230, info@heretoresort.com

Hotel Shangri-La, Laxmi
Make the most out of your weekends and enjoy a relaxing Saturday brunch with live showtimes and pastries across.

Downtown, Ga Indian at this restaurant, although it serves Chinese and Continental food too. Don’t miss out on the briyani. Pulchowk Road. (01) 5077757

Pauline’s Garden, British French and Italian cuisine as you enjoy a traditional South concert at Pauline’s Garden. 23 March, 4 pm onwards, Pauline’s Garden, Kirtipur, Rs 700. For more information: 9819795175

Into the night, Spend a night with Nepali bands Mukti & Revival and Assampatra. 23 March, 3 am onwards, Reggae Rock, Thamel.

1905, Heritage boutique suites with garden dining. 1905 Suites and Restaurant is now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bookings open for four suite boutique suites with national rates and offers open till June. Bagmati, Kirtipur, For more information: 9860534400

Live Musical Era,
Listen to live by lyricist and musician Kali Prasad Baskota with friends and family. 23 March, 6 pm onwards, the Victory Lounge, Daroh Bung, www.jifen nepale.com, 9806370172

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ON GUARD: Nepali soldiers on sentry duty as UN peacekeepers in Juba say they worry about being perceived as a force not wanted by the two warring South Sudanese factions. Special Representative of the Secretary General, David Shearer of New Zealand, with Captain Pratik, Head of the NepaL Army unit posted in Juba (right). The UN is full praise for NepaL blue helmets, wrap have served in South Sudan since 2013. More pictures on www.nepaltimes.com

SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudanese are separated six years after a brutal civil war, but independence did not bring peace. Today, the world’s youngest country is a failed state mired in ethnic conflict and haunted by famine. United Nations peacekeepers from Nepal have had many lessons for their own country.

More than two million people have been killed and millions displaced in the last 20 years and millions more internally displaced. There is no end in sight to human rights violations, which the United Nations described as “the most horrifying” in the world today. People like 32-year-old Moses Baker are fed up with the violence, repression and famine that stalk his land. He says: “This war has cost us everything, we have nothing left to lose.”

Nepali blue helmets with the United Nations Mission for South Sudan (UNMISS) have been praised for keeping the peace in camps for internally displaced and guarding food convoys to famine-hit areas.

There are 12,500 UN peacekeepers in South Sudan, 1,300 from Nepal. Last year, when Kenya abruptly pulled out troops after its Force Commander was sacked, no other country was willing to take its place in Juba. Nepal immediately dispatched 200 of its peacekeepers to the region to ensure food supply.

The head of the UNMISS Field Office in Rumbek, Kwame Kwame Abasagye from Ghana, was full of praise for Nepali peacekeepers. He said: “Nepal’s soldiers have gone out of their way to protect UN staff, escort food and material, and even protect security personnel of other countries.”

UNMISS Force Commander Lt Gen Julius Musinga told The Times. “The peacekeepers from Nepal are competent, responsible and have high integrity. They are always willing to be deployed wherever and whatever the circumstances. They can be deployed to go to areas where others hesitate to go.”

Besides security, Nepal Army soldiers in South Sudan are also involved in education and health and are known for their easy-going nature and ability to win the hearts and minds of locals.

In the evening, after a day of patrolling and sentry duty, however, Nepali soldiers open up about their frustrations. They are not complaining about the personal hardships of a famine-stricken conflict zone, they are more worried about their own country being engulfed in similar lethal, ethnic-separatist strife.

Nepali peacekeepers here keep in touch with home through the Internet and social media, where they learned about the police firing in Saptari two weeks ago that killed five people. Said one Nepal Army officer in Juba: “This place is an example of what can happen when you mix ethnicity with politics. There is a lesson here for Nepal, I just hope that we are never engulfed in a similar ethnic war.”

South Sudan’s civil war started in 2013 after the Muslim-dominated government in Khartoum refused to grant autonomy to the mainly Christian South Sudan. More than 1.5 million people were killed and 4 million displaced before oil-rich South Sudan finally became independent in 2011. But since a brutal multi-ethnic conflict broke out again in 2013, millions of people have been displaced again and a severe famine threatens millions. There are now 40,000 refugees in two camps alone adjacent to the UNMISS office in Juba.

About 80 per cent of South Sudanese’s population of 10 million are pastoralists with the Dinka and Nuer being the two largest among many smaller ethnic groups which are fighting each other in inter-tribal conflicts. Only last July, while peace talks were being held in Juba between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar, 200 people were killed in gunfights between their armies.

The South Sudan Liberation Army (SPLA) now literally calls the shots; most provincial governors are generals. They are above the law, and were implicated in the abduction and rape of four American women last July. The SPLA has the right of way, even shooting at the US Ambassador’s car last year when it did not yield.

What started out as a liberation war has now degenerated into open multi-tribal warfare. Cattle rustling, which used to be a marriage-related practice, is now rampant. The Dinka have split into sub-ethnicities killing each other, and the Nuer, who were rebels fighting the government in Khartoum, are now rebels again, fighting Juba.

High on a rotunda box, as a red sun sets behind red hills, a Nepali soldier in a blue helmet says: “I have seen massacres, lootings and famine. We should bring Nepal’s leaders here to show them what happens when personal greed and hunger for power takes over the national interest.”
Hell or High Water

It’s hard to come by a good western these days but *Hell or High Water* is one of them. It’s easy to see why it was one of the nine “Best Picture” nominees at this year’s Academy Awards (it didn’t win); it has the gravitas that the Academy tends to reward. Luckily, it also has an original mind behind it, that of Taylor Sheridan, the actor turned screenwriter who was also nominated for “Best Original Screenplay”.

While Sheridan may not have won an Oscar for his writing, he certainly deserves immense recognition for having written, original source material that is insightful, surprising, brutal with reason, and a poignant, unusual hybrid of family drama, a gripping cops and cowboys chase, a heist film, and a brotherly romance without the usual nausea-inducing maudlin aspects.

The film tells the story of two brothers, Toby and Tanner Howard (Chris Pine and Ben Foster) who decide to rob the entity that did them in, systematically holding up branches of the Texas Midland Bank across the state to get what they need to settle their mortgage and stop their ranch from being seized, after an unfair loan was foisted on their ill mother when she needed money most.

The brothers are polar opposites. Toby is a family man estranged from his sullen wife who takes care of his two boys and holds years of unpaid child support against him. Tanner is the Falcon, a crazy, happy-go-lucky sceptic whose only saving grace is that he loves his brother. On their trail are Texas Rangers Marcus Hamilton (Jeff Bridges) and Alberto Parker (Gill Kimberlin), an odd couple that give an insight into ingrained, casual southern racism, and the continuing plight of Native Americans (Alberto is a Comanche).

As the brothers rob bank after bank, Marcus Hamilton figures out their game (somewhat) making things more interesting. But just when you think you know what’s going to happen, things take unexpected turns, keeping everyone riveted in a beautifully shot film that shows so much more heart than the usual mainstream drama.

I cannot elaborate more on this fine film without giving away the story, but I will say that *Hell or High Water* justly joins the ranks of eight other excellent films that were nominated for “Best Picture” this year. This is a promising turn given the dismal pickings from the past couple of years; deadly dull, derivative films have ruled in an industry where making money is the primary goal.

*Hell or High Water* was made for $12 million; it made $37.6 million at the box office to date and will certainly make more as it reaches DVD and other methods of home distribution. Not bad for a film that is original and full of interesting characters that actually seem like real people.

**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pande

**HAPPENINGS**

**CHINA CHAT**

Prime Minister Jhupga Dhalu returns from China before leaving for the annual conference of the Gadda Forum for Asia to be held in Hainan Province from March 25-26.

**LOOKING AT NEPAL**

Chinese Defense Minister General Chao Yangzhen arrives in Kathmandu on Thursday for an official three-day visit to Nepal.

**PRESENT ARMS**

The Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris cancelled his visit to Nepal on Wednesday by inspecting a guard of honour at the Nepal Army headquarters in Kathmandu.

**HEALTHY ENTHUSIASM**

The Nick Simms Institute recognised six rural health care workers on Sunday with the Nick Simms Award going to Dr. Bal Gopal Shrestha (second from left) of Bajura Health Post in Pyuthan.

**LIVING MEMORY**

A candlelight vigil at Ratra Park on Wednesday in memory of Govinda Gautam, who was killed by Indian border security personnel in Kanchanpur on 9 March.
After Adityanath

Saugat, 20 March

The naming of a Chief Minister in India is of little importance to Nepal. But Yogi Adityanath’s appointment as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh has shaken up Nepal’s political sphere.

While securitists are suspicious, proponents of a Hindu monarchy are in high spirits. Adityanath, a firebrand Hindu cleric, shared a very close relationship with the Shah monarchy in the past, and has been advocating for the restoration of a Hindu monarchy in Nepal. Hindu royals are hopeful that the rise of Adityanath will help their cause.

Previously, a special committee of the head priest of Gorkha’s Math, the deity of the Shah dynasty, must have reassured him that he will reclaim his throne.

Not just the securitists, some leaders of the NC, which backs republicanism and secularism, are also excited about Adityanath’s triumph. NC General Secretary Shashank Koirala is happy. So are Khem Bahadur Khadka and Laxman Chhimire.

Old NC leaders like Ramchandra Prasad, PI Singh, Prakash Koirala and Dehendra Nepal were preparing to launch a campaign for restoration of a Hindu monarchy. They are now more confident about the success of their yet-to-be-launched campaign.

Keshab Bahadur Bista and other nationalists who feel that Kamal Thapa’s RPP use the agenda of Hinduism only for electoral gains are now on cloud nine. The RPP, too, feels emboldened now.
SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
IN BIHAR

When a rescue team from Nepal descended on Darbhanga Children’s Home in Bihār looking for trafficked children they found grimy bedrooms, a filthy kitchen, the pent-up smell of toilets and children who hadn’t bathed in months.

In-charge at the Home, Govinda Kumar, offered this excuse: “Today is an exception. We ran out of water and haven’t been able to clean the house.”

At another location, Nirdesh Rai Giri in Munaulipur, most of the 13 children had skin problems and complained of physical abuse. Another child, Parvati Kumari Paswan, 16, from Malottai, was confined for three years at Sewa Sankalpa Girls Home in Munaulipur. In total, 39 Nepali children were rescued by Chhetra Chetan Nepal and the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) Nepal from Munaulipur and Darbhanga. Twenty-seven of them are from Tarai districts, mainly Siraha.

The Tanai has been engulfed in political turmoil for almost a decade. The current dispute over Province 2 has brought even more instability, causing people to lose jobs because of prolonged political unrest and schools to be disrupted so that students quit studies to become child workers in Indian cities.

Raja Ram Sada was just four years old during the first Madhes Movement in 2007. He brought power Upendra Yadav of the Madhesi Janadhirak Forum, now the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal, who went on to become Foreign Minister, Sada became a child worker in India. His school remained shut for almost a year after the 2007 agitation, and he never returned to class. He is now 14, and occupied with earning money to support his family, whose situation has worsened with the unrest.

“Education is not my priority anymore but work is,” says Sada, adding, “I saved Rs 6,000 in a few years by working in the fields with my parents, and left my hometown to work in Ahmedabad without telling anyone.”

Sada was only 13 when he crossed the border to work in India, taking a train from Jaisnagar to Darbhanga to go to the western state of Gujarat. But he was caught by police in Darbhanga before he could change trains and was handed over to the government-run shelter.

“My parents had no source of income. So, I went to India to earn money to build a house for them. I was convinced my parents wouldn’t be able to do that,” says Sada, who was kept at the Children’s Home for six months. Sada shares his border with 12 Tarai districts. While children like Sada voluntarily cross the porous border, traffickers take advantage of widespread poverty to lure others into India. In fiscal year 2015-16, 3,502 Nepali

Economic and political instability in the Tanai is pushing children south of the border to a life of abuse.
GOING SOUTH

Arun Kumar Saha, 15, and seven others from Jharkhand were travelling to work in a pizzaiolo in Delhi when one and a half months ago. All of them were arrested at Darburga train station and sent to Darburga Children’s Home. Most of them are below 16.

Arun Kumar had already worked in India before he was detained. He left for studies following Grade 5 because of financial difficulties after his father lost his job as a result of the tea unions. Father and son travelled together to India to find work.

“My house has a lowered roof and my parents can’t afford to build a stronger one,” says Arun, who is now at Chocochit Nepal’s Rescue Centre in Chitwan. “I want to be like other men in my village who work abroad and come back to build a nice house.”

Chocochit Nepal has traced the families of both father Ham (see main story) and Arun Kumar, who will be repatriated soon, but the boys don’t want to go back to school or stay in the village. They say they have to support their family financially. Many children from going back, but Harish Prasad Dnmia is very excited about returning home. Having worked in Delhi, in India for months and been certified at Darburga Children’s Home for five months, he has now reached the value of studies and family. “I will never run away from home now. I want to go back and continue my studies,” says 14-year-old Harish, smiling.

The rescue of 33 Nepali children from various shelter houses in Bihar, India, got all the media attention last week, but very few people know about Shajula CM, the hero behind the scenes. This is the biggest rescue CM has done in her 17-year career, yet she remains extremely humble.

“The children were successfully brought to Nepal and I wouldn’t be happier,” says CM Chocochit Nepal, with a contented smile. “Children are like butterflies, they shouldn’t be locked up.”

Born as the sixth daughter in a lower-middle-class family of 11 in Trivendrum, Kerala, CM left nine years of religious life as a nun to move in Nepal, after dreaming of working for trapped children. Arriving here in 1998, she has never returned, and has already rescued more than 300 trapped children from Indian shelter houses and circuses.

CM recalls the rescue of 23 girls from a Christian organisation in Tamil Nadu in 2011 as one of the most challenging operations in her life. “The Tamil Nadu government put me under house arrest for two days and I didn’t receive support from the government in Nepal either,” says the 45-year-old. She even got death threats once the children were brought to Nepal.

Despite this experience, her fight for child rights continued. Working in collaboration with police, she has been able to send 16 child traffickers behind bars.

Rescuing Nepali children from Indian shelter houses and circuses is not easy because of a lack of coordination between the governments of Nepal and India. Before rescuing the children languishing in shelter homes in Bihar, CM held rounds of meetings with local child welfare councils and brought the CCWB of Nepal on board.

Her dedication has given many children new starts. They have been able to return to school and many have been repatriated with families after years. “I can go to any extreme to rescue children locked up inside high walls,” says CM, who has adopted two children who were abandoned by their parents and wishes to acquire Nepali citizenship for their sake.
Clashing cymbals

The good news is that we are finally going to have local elections. The bad news is that the Election Commission has run out of party symbols for its ballot papers. Since symbols like Sun, Moon, Tree, Cow are reserved for the 4-Party Cartel, there aren’t enough signs for the other 100 or so political parties contesting local elections.

The Ass has had to rush to the rescue once more to sneak new symbols onto the ballot papers just in the nick of time before they went off to the press this week. Voters can now go boldly forth on 14 May and confidently stamp the swastika on the Hammer and Sickle.

In order to enlarge the pool of election symbols, the Ass had to take full advantage of Nepal’s biodiversity to include the country’s flora, fauna and fauna. The Uncastrated Ille-goat, Bull, Water Buffalo and Yak already adorn the existing ballot papers. To accommodate the political parties that are missed out, we have assigned them the Scorpion, Yeti, Vulture, Perecunio, Snake, Snail and (the Donkey is pleased to announce) a Jack Ass. No prizes for guessing where the Don’s swastika is landing.

Since the Hammer and/or Sickle is now such a discredited election symbol, we have replaced it with Handcuffs. The disgruntled Big Foot faction of the Mubuddles get to keep the Grenade if they change their mind and decide not to sabotage elections by burning tyres. Speaking of which the Burning Tym symbol is up for grabs and will go to any party that organises the most showdowns this year. My guess is that one of the Madhes-centric parties will qualify.

The Family Party which seems to always get a membership even though it never wins a single seat in parliament must have the Condorn as its election symbol. The New Force Party had been assigned the Shakti Wheel, but adopted an AK-47 instead. Bishnupur gets a Dust Mask and Salha Party is assigned a Bus. Here is the final Ballot Paper. Memorise the symbols and what they stand for before you vote. May the best ass win.