Lila Jirel (pic, above) is an engineer who used to work for the Dolakha District Development Committee (DDC). Restructuring in the new Constitution means his office is now called the District Coordination Committee (DCC) but he still has to oversee rehabilitation of this footbridge in the village of Phansu.

“Maybe if we have elected local leaders development will move faster,” Jirel says, a view echoed by villagers here.

The prospect of local elections has raised hopes that projects like this will benefit from enhanced accountability and speedier grassroots development. Just like this half-built footbridge, local democracy is a work in progress, and we will see if the new DCCs live up to the promise.

However, in Kathmandu, there is considerable confusion about elections, and preparations have been overshadowed by uncertainty over the longevity of the coalition in the aftermath of the impeachment move by Parliament against Chief Justice Sushila Karki.

Binitendra Nidhi has withdrawn his resignation and is again Home Minister, but Kamal Thapa’s RPP has quit the coalition and Biju Gyawali’s Nepal Loktantrik Party (NLP) is threatening to do the same.

“The government has our support, but it is ignoring us on major issues, including impeachment and Constitution amendment,” says Shiva Lal Thapa of the NLP. “If the Prime Minister does not take us into confidence, we will withdraw our support to him.”

With the 37-MP RPP already out, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal government may fall if the 17-MP NLP also quits the coalition. The newly unified RJP Nepal, with 25 MPs, has promised to back the government if it is likely to fall, but only if the Constitution amendment bill is passed.

The governing Maoist-NC coalition and RJP Nepal have already agreed to fast-track the amendment bill, but still lack the numbers to do so. The RPP is divided, with its pro-monarchy faction pressing for rejection. Gehuchharya’s party also opposes the bill but is present now.

So, staying in power with the support of Madhesi parties will not be a cakewalk for Dahal.

This week, nearly 66,000 people nominated themselves for 13,000 posts (mayor, deputy mayor, village council chief and ward committee members) that will be elected on 14 May in provinces 3, 4 and 6. But the government is on the brink of falling into a minority just when it needs to focus on one agenda making elections a success.

And the second round of local elections on 14 June - that is still a huge question mark.
T
he impeachment process against Chief Justice Sushila Karki by the governing coalition this week has plunged Nepal into another political crisis, threw impending elections into doubt, and could even lead to a constitutional void in January 2018 if those polls cannot be held.

The main responsibility for this act of utter irresponsibility lies with the Nepali Congress under the leadership of its three-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba who wants to be prime minister again when (or, if Pushpa Kamal Dahal steps down, Deuba has no love lost for Chief Justice Karki despite the fact that she was close to the CPIM clan while growing up in Biratnagar. In fact, Karki’s husband Durga Subedi was a member of the team that hijacked a Royal Nepal Airlines plane carrying a stash of cash to Kathmandu, landing it in India to save the money to fund the party’s pro-democracy campaign.

It is indeed this country’s sad misfortune that a party that was once a respected member of the international social democratic movement, led several successful pro-democracy campaigns, one whose leaders have sacrificed their lives for an open society, the rule of law and the separation of powers, should be the one that is dealing this unprecedented and possibly fatal blow to Nepal’s democracy.

The latest sign that the NC has abandoned its remit was that party General Secretary Sushil Koirala (one of the top 10) said last month that “the judiciary should be answerable to parliament.”

A cabal within the NC was getting increasingly irritated by the fact that one of their own was, as Chief Justice, passing judgments in the Supreme Court against the party’s interests.

The NC was conspicuously muted in its criticism of Lokman Singh Karki’s abuse of authority after his appointment in 2013. It was only when the former GANDA chief started bouding the top political

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Exit, the crusader

Sushila Karki is forced out of the Supreme Court, not in disgrace but in a blaze of glory

For weighing the value of one lone woman to the Nepali nation, you just have to reach back half a year ago, when the national prospects looked bleak. Lokman Singh Karki had managed to cow down the political class, compromise of the judiciary was further exacerbated when the Maoists entered the state structure as part of the peace process, and the lack of dignity and circumspection displayed by the present (Maoist) attorney general is a case in point. The result of the overall atmosphere has been the ‘settling’ of court procedure, with collusion in the assignment of judges to particular cases. While individual judges sought to fight the tide, the courts lost their lustre to such an extent that the Nepal Police would not act on Supreme Court directives, as shown in its refusal to arrest the murder convict (Manit) Bal Krishna Dhungel.

It required the advocate-turned-judge Sushila Karki, following up on her predecessor Kalyan Shrestha as chief justice, to try to jump start the judiciary again, acting within the year that she had just retired. She dispatched CAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki, declaring his 2013 appointment null and void when even the politicians who had appointed him didn’t dare to impeach him. Now, it is the same politicians who are trying to impeach her. Chief Justice Karki had just a month more to go before retirement, but the Maoist and Nepali Congress leaders wanted to publicly prove that they were far above the law. Indeed, having ruled for a decade of the peace process under the faux democracy defined by ‘consensus politics’ these leaders had developed a sense of invincibility. They saw Chief Justice’s personal austerity and public probity as a threat. By compromising the Supreme Court through such intertemporal action, they hoped to get the entire state superstructure, including important constitutional commissions, to submit to their diktat.

A whole array of people were unhappy with the Chief Justice, including those enmeshed in long-pending corruption cases that she was committed to bringing up for decision. Congress Chair Dahal, of course, wanted his choice of police chief put in place, and was enraged that she stood in the way. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal would have wanted to punish the Chief Justice for ordering the arrest of the murder convict Dhungel.

Chief Justice Karki was simply trying to leave the judiciary in a better state than she found it at her oat-taking. The edifice of justice had to be reconstructed brick-by-brick, but she had too little time, which is why she may have seemed to some to be an activist judge in a hurry. Sushila Karki has not been disgraced by the impeachment motion, it is the political class led by Deuba and Dahal that is emitting bad odour, even as the country goes into local elections. They have created conditions where Chief Justice Karki will have retired while still in suspension, before the impeachment motion fails in Parliament, as it will. The impeachment process is more of the contempt the top political leadership has for representative politics, constitutionalism and separation of powers. Indeed, not since the fall of King Gyendendra has there been such a unified voice across the spectrum of civil society, from nationalists to liberals and the royalist right, all expressing outrage at the impeachment motion. The Acting Chief Justice Gopal Parjuli himself told the Nagarkot newspaper the impeachment process was unfortunate, and a whole slew of former chief justices, judges and civil society leaders have condemned the procedure.

Some may have expected a modest people’s movement to protest the impeachment action, but the public is focused on ensuring that local government elections are held after a hiatus of 19 years, knowing that any changes we may force would have to scuttle the exercise.

It would be good to see Chief Justice Karki back at the bench and retiring from the chair rather than with her credibility compromised. We know that Sushila Karki is not one to sit back and watch the judiciary day by day compromised. Deuba and Dahal will live to rue the day they forced her out.

Unimpeachable evidence

The coalition doesn’t want to impeach Sushila Karki, just suspend her so she can’t hear high-profile corruption cases

Whether she is right or wrong in her judgement, the case was decided through a full bench. It is clear this decision is not the only reason political leaders wanted to suspend Karki. It was to prevent her from passing judgement on several high-profile corruption cases that she was going to clear before stepping down next month. Otherwise, why the hurry to impeach someone whose term was expiring in 40 days?

Now that the fourth largest party in parliament, MWP, Nepal, has withdrawn from the coalition, the impeachment motion will not be passed by the required two-thirds majority.

The principle of separation of powers has once more been blunted, just as it was when the four-party cabal made Chief Justice Kati Raj Regmi the chief executive in 2012.

The former chief justices rarely speak publicly on decisions by the government or Parliament. This time, some prominent figures from the judiciary have said that if the motion against Karki is not withdrawn, the Supreme Court will lose its independence. Parliament has not been transparent about the impeachment motion against the suspended chief of the CAA, Lokman Singh Karki, either. The NC and CPN-Maoist also seem to have given any response to its reluctance to pursue the case. This time, their motive is transparent: not to impeach Karki, but just to suspend her so that she will not be allowed to hear the corruption cases.

The legislature should immediately reject the untenable, irrelevant and unprecedented impeachment motion against Karki because it will not only deny the independence of the judiciary to crisis but also threaten the rule of law and democracy in Nepal.
Free in Doha
Qatar Airways has launched a new stopover package for its passengers in Doha that includes a one-night free stay in a luxury hotel and complimentary transit visa. The package, which will be valid throughout the summer, is part of Qatar Airways’ efforts to promote and market Qatar among international travelers.

Free air time
Ncell prepaid users can now take more credit without paying service charges under its Giga facility. Once users’ balances go down to Rs 5 or less, customers can get credit of up to Rs 30 by dialing *9989# followed by the instructions. The credited balance will be deducted once the customers top up their balance. The offer is valid only for users who have been using an Ncell SIM for at least two months.

Flight food fast
LSG Flight Solutions, the flight catering unit of Soutier Creative Plaza, has been awarded for “excellent on time performance” in 2016 by Malaysian Airlines. The Kuala Lumpur based caterer praised LSG for its 100 percent on-time performance serving the carrier in the companies’ first year of business together.

China to Mexico
China Southern Airlines, the first Chinese carrier to operate a route to Latin America, has started a new flight route, Guangzhou-Mexico-Guadalajara. This route will operate every Sunday.

FlyDubai holidays
Dubai-based airline flyDubai has introduced holidays by flyDubai. The feature allows passengers to customize packages, including their flights, hotel bookings, airport transfers, car rental and more via a new portal. It will also allow travel agents, distributors and flyDubai authorized travel agents to design and book tailor-made packages, flyDubai operates to 63 destinations in 44 countries, with flights to Batumi in Georgia, Qabala (Azerbaijan) and Tian (Kunming) starting from June 2017.

Seamless connection
Copa Airlines and Turkish Airlines have agreed to begin code-sharing flights between Europe and Latin America, allowing passengers to enjoy seamless air connections. The strategic hubs of Copa, in Panama City and of Turkish in (Istanbul) will permit travelers to connect efficiently to more destinations.

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A shadow descended on Nepal’s Spring 2017 climbing season this week after the death of Swiss mountaineer Ueli Steck on Nuptse on 31 April.

Steck, 40, who was known as the ‘Swiss Machine’ for numerous record-setting climbs in the Alps and beyond. He died after falling more than 1,000m as he was ascending Mt Nuptse. He was reportedly acclimatizing for a summit of neighbouring Mt Everest to be followed by a traverse to adjacent Mt Lhotse, all without supplemental oxygen. In 2012, Steck climbed Mt Everest without oxygen. Steck’s death casts a pall over other notable expeditions this climbing season, which has a record number of climbers challenging Mt Everest. Among these is an attempt to reach the top of Mt Kanchenjunga, the world’s third highest mountain, by three Nepali women: Maya Sherpa, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa Akita and Dawa Yangzum Sherpa.

The three previously climbed Mt Everest and K2 in Pakistan, the world’s second-highest peak. “Steck was climbing alone, so we don’t know what happened,” Ang Tshering Sherpa of the Nepal Mountaineering Association told Nepali Times. “Perhaps he slipped on the ice, or there was a rock fall.”

Noted mountaineering chronicler Elizabeth Hawley of the Himalayan Database (see box) said Steck always climbed alone, which led to some questions about his claimed achievements. This included his solo summit of the south face of Annapurna I in 2014, for which he was awarded his second Piolet d’Or (Golden Ice Axe award) for mountaineering. “He said he didn’t give a damn if anybody believed him or not, and I think that was true: he climbed for himself,” said Hawley, who had interviewed Steck many times. “He was mild-mannered and pleasant, and being alone on the mountain wasn’t an unreasonable risk for someone of his skills. It’s possible that something fell and knocked him off the mountain: we’ll probably never know,” she added.

Hawley’s colleague, and climber herself, Billi Bierling, was working on a translation of Steck’s latest book when she heard the news, and wrote in a tribute to her friend: “What I liked about Steck was his modesty and the fact that despite his amazing achievements he was down to earth – never arrogant.”

2017 could be a record climbing year because expeditions scheduled for 2014 and 2015, which were cancelled because of an avalanche on Mt Everest and the earthquakes, respectively, have been rescheduled.

Other notable climbs this year include an attempt by David Goettler of Germany and Italian Hervé Barmasse on the south face of Mt Nixgapunga, just north of the border in China and the 14th highest peak in the world. Bad weather forced them to abandon the route last year. Nepal’s Min Bahadur Sherchan, 85, will be making another attempt to break the record as the oldest man on Everest. Blind Austrian climber Andy Holdrin is back on Everest after turning back after the 2014 and 2015 disasters. Also, Spanish ultra-marathoner Kilian Jornet will be making a second try at setting a new speed record for climbing Mt Everest from the Chinese side. But Hawley said she had little time for speed records, which are made to be broken. “The first one to set a record is a pioneer. The next ones are succeeding based on his experience, his successes.”

**LAST ADVENTURE**

Steck was in Nepal for an attempt to climb Nangapangma and to set a new altitude record in the Himalayas.
20 years and 2 brands later, businessman Pradip Man Shakya is still going strong

SMRITI BASNET

BUSINESSMEN Pradip Man Shakya has always trusted his instincts. Although he graduated in Fine Arts from Lalti Kalai Campus, he was sure he was destined for something else. He went on to launch Shruma Apparel, a garment business, in 1990. Shakya's instincts served him well. In over two decades the company has diversified and span off two popular clothing lines: Karuna Natural Wears and Jaju Wears. This year Shruma celebrates its 27th anniversary and the man behind it could not be more elated.

"I always felt the urge to make something out of my life," said Shakya. "Once I found it, I didn't let go."

When the entrepreneur established Karuna in 2006, he hoped to encourage Nepal to try to produce something in the style of the traditional Himalayan kurtas. Karuna uses natural fibres like hemp, bamboo andnettle to make tops, pants, shirts and T-shirts. Today, the line has expanded to include leather belts, wallets and even bamboo underwear.

Shakya founded his recent endeavour, Jaju, in 2013. The T-shirt company banks on Nepal's vast cultural heritage and its famous adages for its designs. Priced lower than its sister brand, the T-shirt features global personalities like Albert Einstein and Abraham Lincoln wearing Dhaka topis, colourful re-creations of Thariar and Machhindranath, pop culture references and quotations.

"A T-shirt is a statement, it inspires not only those who wear it but those who see it too," said Shakya.

The businessman ran a factory in the 1990s with 500 workers, exporting to GAP and Walmart. "I knew nothing then, it was all learning by doing," said Shakya.

By 1995, he felt the urge to promote clothes made in Nepal. He flew to Japan with some samples and came back with an order worth $9,000. There was no looking back. In 1997, Shakya created Karuna and started exporting to countries like France and Japan. By 2006, he opened his first store in Darbar Marg under the same label. By then, most of his garment contemporaries had closed shop following the political turmoil and moved on. But Shakya stood his ground. "I couldn't jump to another business, I kept on with it," said the 56-year-old who, with the support of his export business, found it easier to sustain his venture.

He still remembers how those entering his Darbar Marg store grinned, mumbling grunts about how expensive the Nepali brand was. Disregarding them, Shakya adamantly continued.

He sees a stark contrast between then and today, when demand for products made in Nepal is growing. The driving factor, Shakya feels, is consistency. "They valued our quality, and kept coming back for it," said the entrepreneur, who sees to it personally that quality is not compromised. He is involved in every stage, from creation of the designs to release of the final product. Shakya sources fabric from South American, Bhaktapur and a vegetable dyeing venture in Kakani, and raw fabrics and threads from India and China.

Following the success of his Karuna store in Kathmandu, he recently opened an outlet in Pokhara. Jaju already has two stores in the capital, and Shakya says sales are increasing 30-35 per cent a year. Recently, the company opened a Karuna showroom in Canada, and sent 200 pieces of Jaju T-shirts to Australia and Hong Kong.

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Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) is one of the most popular trekking destinations in the world, but limited hotels and lodges on the hiking trail has left visitors sleeping in dining rooms and storage areas. Tight quarters during spring season get even worse in autumn when trekker arrivals double. The number of international visitors to the Annapurna Conservation Area, most destined for the ABC and Chandraktreks, has increased three-fold in the last 20 years, but the number of hotels remains the same, thanks to the rigid policy of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), which has barred locals from opening new hotels or expanding to existing ones. As visitor numbers continue to surge after the earthquake, the situation is becoming critical. “I tried my best to add rooms to adjust for the growing number of tourists but ACAP never allowed me to,” says Ram Gurung, whose father started New Panorama Guest House, maximum occupancy 25, in Deurali three decades ago. “I receive more than 250 guests a day in peak season and accommodate them in dining and store rooms or wherever possible,” he adds. According to ACAP’s Pokhara office, 200-250 foreigners a day are taking permits for the ABC trek this spring season. This figure usually doubles in the autumn. There are no figures for domestic tourists. Although there are limited hotels after Chhomrong point, ACAP doesn’t cap the number of permits. More than 19,029 foreigners trekked to ABC in 2016. “We feel really bad when our guests complain about poor accommodation services,” says Amit Gurung of Polar Trekking and Expedition in Pokhara. “ACAP needs to understand the growing popularity of ABC trekking and act

Fully booked in the s
accompanying. The only solution is to build new lodges along the trail." There are four hotels in ABC, five in Machhapuchhre Base Camp, four in Deurali, two in Himalaya, three in Dovan, five in Bamboo, three in Upper Sinuwa and three in Lower Sinuwa. New lodges are essential if Nepal is to sustain its most popular trekking route, says Deepak Raj Adhikari of the Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN), Western Region Association, in Pokhara. "It’s our responsibility to accommodate tourists comfortably during their treks, but we have failed to do so," he explains. "ACAP should either develop a mechanism to issue limited trekking permits or allow locals to build new hotels."

ACAP is making plans to allow more hotels, says Rashmi Acharya of ACAP, Pokhara, but it must proceed cautiously before giving the green light to more development on the conservation area’s public land. The organisation is finalising a policy that will allow locals to build new hotels on the trail, she adds. Once it is approved, ACAP will form a committee, including locals along the ABC trail, and start consultations.

Currently, ACAP is guided by the Conservation Area Management Regulation (CAMR), 1997. Acharya refused to speculate on the number and locations of new hotels. Of the 35 popular trekking routes in Nepal, only three, Langtang, Manaslu and Rolwaling, were disturbed by the quake. ABC trekking was unaffected and has continued growing in popularity.

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GETAWAY

**Tranquility Spa**
De-stress, relax and pamper yourself with a wide range of massages at any of the spa's nine branches in Nepal. www.tranquilityspa.com.np

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**Neydo Monastery**
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**Hotel Landmark Pokhara**
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**Milla Guesthouse**
If you enjoy the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet miles apart. Bhaktapur, 9810545157

EVENTS

**Poetry with Alokh**
Join a night of poetry, comedy and performance with gender sensitive performer and entertainer Alokh Was-Maran.
8th May, 6pm onwards. Nepal Tourism Board, Pragati Bhawan, Kathmandu. For more information: alokhsravina@gmail.com

**Bird counting**
Make a day out of bird watching and be part of the Urban-Rural Bird Count Phase II, organised by Bird Conservation Nepal. Registration required.
1 st to 10 May, for more information: (01) 4417905, 4800710

**Film opportunity**
A chance for independent young filmmakers with projects to apply for the Writing Prague and Asia Themes organised by TshoKaO.
For more information: docsakharin@gmail.com, www.docsko.org/home

**Short story contest**
Let the writer in you emerge. Apply for Writing Nepal 2017: A Short Story Contest, organised by a Lith in partnership with writer Samuel Uppadhyay and Indiana Review.
Deadline: 15 August. For more information: facebook.com/bhutang.com

**Click away**
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6 to 15 May, 7:30 am & 7 pm, Articula, Chitwan Hospital Road. Rs. 5,500.
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**FRAME OF REFERENCE**
A group exhibition of art from all corners of the world. 14 to 30 May, 9 am to 6 pm, Uttam Hotel, Thamel. For more information: 9810169992, uttahotel1966@gmail.com

**Dhokaima Café**
Try indigenous cocktails at the Rickshah Bar. Peters Dowle, (01) 5102117, dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com

**1905**
Heritage boutique suites with garden dining, 1905 suites and restaurants is now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bookings open for four boutique suites with promotional rates and offers all June. Bagghalpur, Kathmandu. For more information: 9810741148

**Barista Lavazza**
The valley's best European inspired coffee culture cafe serves excellent coffees and lattes. Don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. Jawalakhel, (01) 4450173, daniel.nepal@gmail.com

**Kathmandu Chorale**
Hear Hannah Thoomer direct the choir as it performs classics and pieces from the music’s ‘Sister Act’. The choir will be performing pieces by notable composers like Edith Whart, René Clauss and Thomas Tallis.
6 May, 3 to 6 pm, FSC, Hotel Sankalp. For more information: www.kathmanduchorale.wordpress.com

**Fusion Night**
Enjoy your weekend with the fruits of fusion made by Kritika and Friends.
8 May, 11 am, Al’s Lounge and Restaurant, Kanti Ghat, free entry.
(01) 5098667, aishahroo@gmail.com

**Kantha d’Ab d’Ab live**
A musical evening with this star, percussional and bass tick. It plays as they entice you to groove with their fusion tunes.
6 May, 8 pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, Rs. 400, 9810575277

**Flow live**
Book your seats to enjoy live music by The Flow Band.
5 May, 7 pm onwards, Sky lounge, Hotel Rastor, For details: 9849552347

**Drum circle**
Groove to the rhythms of a drum circle this weekend. Bring along your own drums or just sit back and enjoy the music.
10 May, 6 to 8 pm, House of Music, Thamel, Rs. 400, 9810575277

**Pop-up bazaar**
Discover varieties of high-quality products made in Nepal. Unique selection of clothing, jewelry, books and home decor will be displayed after the organic vegetable market.
6 May, 1 to 5 pm, Le Sampa restaurant, Lalitpur, 9810233045, aravwarkhanda@gmail.com

**Photo Nepal**
Great setuors by Thai photographers will be displayed in the May session of Photo Nepal. The photos are based on the nature, culture and people of Nepal.
5 or 10 May, 11 am to 4 pm, Bhaktapur, Kathmandu. For more information: mediacentre@kathmandu.org

**Bloggers networking**
Sign up for a free networking event for Rising unknoks. aspiring bloggers and writers can participate too.
16 June, 7 to 9 pm, Green Kathmandu, Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg. Admission: Free for members; non-members will be solicited. For more details: rinjongun@gmail.com

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MUSIC

**Times**

DINING

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CRUMBLING HISTORY

The quake-damaged Nuwakot Darbar is unlikely to survive another monsoon if it is not protected

O

n 25 April 2015, Govinda Baniya, office staff at the Department of Archaeology (DoA), had just taken a break from his museum duties when the earthquake struck. As the temples and monuments in Nuwakot Darbar Square swayed and parts of dust covered the area, around 30 people visiting the palace-turned-museum ran for cover.

Sitting calmly over the Trisuli River, the Nuwakot Darbar was probably the best preserved and impressive palace complex outside the Kathmandu Valley. Built by Prithvi Narayan Shah as his forces attacked Kathmandu, in the late 18th century, it was nine storeys high before the 1934 earthquake reduced it to seven.

The 2015 quake damaged the south and west sides of the palace. Pillars developed cracks and the roof came unglued. After shocks and the subsequent monsoons caused further damage. “The only reason the building is still standing is because it has a strong foundation and was periodically maintained before the earthquake,” says Baniya.

Before King Prithvi Narayan unified Nepal, Nuwakot served as a colony of Kantipur (Kathmandu), and was regarded as the main western gateway to the valley. It was the central trade point between Tibet and Nepal, and the three Malla kingdoms of the valley had constructed palaces to house their representatives. It’s believed that King Prithivi Narayan brought architects from the valley to build the Darbar, and influences of Kathmandu can be clearly seen in the intricate wooden carvings as well as in local place names, like Indra Chok. Talk to any local here and you will be proudly guided through the historic importance of the place, but frustrations over stalled rebuilding are bound to surface.

“The Director General of DoA has visited this place a number of times and every time he promises to expedite the reconstruction, but nothing has happened yet,” says local resident Bijendra Kumar Shahi.

The Chinese government has signed a MoU with the DoA to rebuild the main palace and smaller buildings in the Nuwakot Darbar Square, while the DoA is responsible for rebuilding the temples.

According to DoA Director General Ishbar Dahal, work in Nuwakot will start as soon as rebuilding of the frontar Darbar in Basantapur ends. It is also being reconstructed with help from China.

Two years after the earthquake, it is clear that nothing has been done to protect the monuments, let alone start reconstruction or renovation. There is neither scaffolding to support the monuments nor tarp to cover the roof, whose leeking caused further damage to the interior. The south and west walls are supported by metal rods.

Stone statues and pillars are being housed on the ground floor of the palace, along with the museum’s artefacts, including the bronze statue of King Prithivi Narayan and his two queens. But many of the stone statues have been marked with numbers and they, along with exquisitely carved pillars, lay unprotected on the floor.

The Nuwakot Darbar complex is on UNESCO’s world heritage tentative list and Christian Manhart, UNESCO country representative, says the government should at least work to protect the monuments. “I am not talking about the overall reconstruction: I am talking about covering the roofs with tarpaulins and supporting the structures with scaffolding. It must be protected to prevent collapse. In its present condition, the palace will not survive another monsoon,” warns Manhart, who visited Nuwakot last month.

Temples and monuments too

The temples and monuments surrounding the Nuwakot Darbar, including the Garadgahr with its unique soldiers’ frieze, are in no better shape than the palace. The roof of the Garadgahr has completely collapsed and the structure may have to be completely rebuilt. A section of the exquisite soldiers’ frieze – carvings of Gorkha soldiers who took Kathmandu – lies buried under salvaged timber, which sits outdoors, unprotected.

The Taraju Bhagwati temple to the north was also ravaged by the earthquake and the idol has been moved to a makeshift structure. After the quake, the 400-year-old Bhaisahi temple tilted slightly to the left, but because it was neglected during the monsoon, the temple collapsed.

Locals worry that the palace complex may face the same fate as the rest house built during the time of Rana Bahadur Shah, grandson of King Prithvi Narayan. Says local Surendra Kumar Shahi: “When the rest house started deteriorating, our fathers and grandfathers requested King Mahendra to restore it although he gave the orders it was never restored. Given the government’s apathy, it will not be surprising if the palace complex vanished just like the rest house, creating another part of history forever.”

SAHINA SHRESTHA

in NUWAKOT

HERITAGE LIVE!

Series coordinated by Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

CULTURE

360

ALMOST GONE

Severely damaged after the earthquake, the iconic roof of Nuwakot’s Bhaisahi temple has collapsed. The building’s structure is a picture of the collapse that occurred at Nuwakot Darbar Square.

Picture: Keshav Shrestha
Captain Fantastic

Veteran actor Matt Ross has written and directed a film that is fresh, engaging, entertaining and infuriating. Captain Fantastic is a heavy-hitting independent film, which screened for the first time at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2016 and a few months later at the Cannes Film Festival in the “Un Certain Regard” category reserved for young seavants. Surprisingly, the film broke out of the cavet reserved for such free-spirited, arty films, earning a Best Actor nomination for Viggo Mortensen, who is at the helm of this unusual family drama. Mortensen plays Ben Cash, a determined father of six whose outlook on American life embodies the slightly nauseating trope that people spout when evocating the evils of capitalism and espousing on the importance of human freedom and individualism. If you consider that in all of that matters in this complex, deeply stratified, often difficult to navigate modern world—carved away by grand notions of how they should live (like noble savages), the Cash family has removed to the woods where the children learn survival skills and are homeschooled in philosophy, literature, quantum physics and other impressive topics. Noah Chomsky is their hero.

At some point, watching this beautifully shot, wonderfully written film, every alarm bell starts to go off in your head as you begin to gauge the exceptional but also possibly damaging effects this kind of rigorous parenting can have on young minds. Spouting liberty and freedom and forsaking consumer capitalism is all very well, just as anarchy seems fun when you’re young, until you realise that isolation is as harmful to the psyche as video games are to the imagination.

and simple living is a choice made only by the highly privileged.

Luckily, this is not a film that tries to indoctrinate. Instead, it is a portrait of some wonderful but flawed human beings who deeply believe in a certain way of life, and are brought into direct confrontation with the defects in their ideology. When I was training for my Masters in Fine Arts, specifically film-making, one of my most impressively academic professors gave me some invaluable advice: when you are making a film about ideas, make sure you include a voice somewhere that argues against the holes in your model so that the people watching know that you don’t think you are infallible. Captain Fantastic follows that advice, and succeeds because of it.

Watching this film gave me a funny feeling: a mixture of deep concern along with moments of delight, hilarity and sadness. Until I went away for higher studies I was raised in Nepal, where the teacher’s words are (still) law; having been muffled for so long I can testify that there is much to be said for giving growing minds the freedom to really explore. But, as this film ultimately recognises, almost everything is okay as long as it is not over the top.

Visit trailer online nepatimes.com

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ON THE MOVE: Devotees pull the chariot of Rato Machindranath in Patan, Lalitpur, on the first day of the festival on Sunday.

REMEMBERING HEROES: Australian Ambassador Peter Budd with New Zealand Consul General Lisa Choegyal at the ANZAC Day ceremony at the Australian Embassy in Mahabandipur on 25 April.

ELECTION WHEELS: Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Satwinder Singh Puri, hands over vehicles to the Election Commission on Monday.

BANISHA

SHIVRAJ

YOUNG GUN: Bipasha Rai, Nepali’s Ranju Tamang registers her candidacy for the post of Kathmandu mayor at the National Assembly Hall on Sunday.
Deuba’s fall from grace

The kakistocracy

Shiva Gauntle in Kathmandu, 5 May

The new ruling coalition MPs have defended the impeachment motion against Chief Justice Sushila Karki, and the kind of charges levied against her, show just how ridiculous those in power can become.

The legislature is empowered to use the impeachment process against judicial and constitutional bodies as a last resort, if they cause demonstrable harm to the nation by overstepping their mandate or abusing their authority. But it is imperative that an informed debate take place before the legislature does so.

An impeachment motion was also filed against ex-CAG chief Lalman Singh Karki last year. In his case, the motion was protected by adequate information about his involvement in the abuse of authority and whether he should be stripped of power.

The media had exposed a slew of evidence about the CMA’s chief of power to ruin a parallel government in violation of the Constitution. When the impeachment motion was finally filed against him, it was justified, but not approved by the public.

In Chief Justice Karki’s case, necessary public debate was missing. While some people have doubted her legal and constitutional expertise, no one has ever questioned her integrity.

The charge levied against the Chief Justice is no barometer and framework that they only expose the malicious intent of the government. The prime accusation is that she interfered in the executive’s right to choose the police chief. But he verdict clearly states that the government can appoint the police chief only if it follows its own guidelines. It is the court’s duty to judge whether the executive’s decisions are in tune with the Constitution and other laws.

In her verdict on the petition against the Malalai NC government’s decision to appoint Jaya Bahadur Pandit, who had lower preference scores than his competitor as police chief, Karki was merely fulfilling her duty as Chief Justice. She also noted that the NC had never seen the Chief Justice’s admirer. But he has publicly defended her verdict against the Chief Justice’s appointee, arguing that either the best-performing officer must be appointed as police chief or the guidelines must be revised.

How did that verdict infringe on the rights of the executive? None of the MPs who signed the impeachment motion have come up to explain it in public. And I was a bunch of five justices that unanimously nullified Chand’s appointment. Why was the impeachment motion not filed against four other justices? What allegations against the Chief Justice are weak and ridiculous.

For example, she has been accused of discriminating against justices while assigning them responsibilities. It is a Chief Justice’s basic right to decide which justices will hear which cases. He does not need to consult the government for that. Neither Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal nor NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba has the right to refight Chief Justice Karki about this.

Why did Dahal and Deuba gang up on her? Details of their joint company will surely come out. At the moment, it looks like they were afraid that the Chief Justice could also nullify Prakash Aryal’s appointment (as the new police chief after Chand’s pronouncement was overturned by the apex court).

In his second tenure as Prime Minister, Deuba has partially restored his reputation. But he has now lost it all in one fell swoop, the conspiracy to impeach the Chief Justice will be even more counter-productive for Deuba. In his last three tenures as Prime Minister, he has digressed himself and his party many a time. This will be his biggest blunder.

Now the question: how will the NC shed the atmosphere brought upon it by Deuba? Two-thirds of the MPs who signed the impeachment against the Chief Justice are from that party, so the NC will have to bear the biggest share of the blame. This impeachment motion is bound to fail, but it has already suspended the Chief Justice. Deuba has deliberately misused his constitutional provision of impeachment and it has set a seriously bad precedent.

The earthquake damaged the roof of the Supreme Court building. The Prime Minister did not repair it. He instead took aim at the judiciary.

Ex-Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha in Annapurna Post Daily, 4 May

Counseling Session: (8 am to 3 pm, Sunday to Friday)

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Malpi Institute

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Here is a model for connecting villages, creating jobs and boosting local economies after a disaster

SONIA AWALE
IN DOLAKHA

Six decades ago, Swiss geologist Toni Hagen walked across Nepal asking locals what they needed the most. They asked him for bridges to connect them to neighboring villages and markets. There are now a lot more motorable roads, but even then, many remote valleys of Nepal the demand is still for bridges.

When the two big earthquakes of April-May 2015 struck Dolakha, 10 trail bridges were either damaged or destroyed, cutting villages off from medical help and relief supplies. Bridges that were built after the 25 April quake fell into rivers in the 12 May aftershock, which had its epicenter only 5 km from the town of Singal.

“This bridge was badly damaged in the first quake, but people made temporary repairs using wood, and they used it to construct this new one,” said Lila Jirel, sub-engineer at the Dolakha district Coordination Committee (DCC), pointing out the rusted wires of the old bridge dangling across the river.

Jirel opted for the suspension type construction with sturdy galvanized iron decks and wire mesh for protection. The foundation of the towers and the walls is reinforced concrete to prevent damage in future earthquakes.

The Bhargali bridge near Singal was built by the local community with help from Trail Bridge Support Unit (TB SU), which is a project of the Swiss aid agency, Helvetas. The Swiss have been building foot bridges across Nepal ever since Hagen’s days (see box). They had built nearly all the 79 bridges that were damaged in the earthquake in the 14 worst-affected districts, and in two years Helvetas has already reached 100.

TB SU uses the community model for rebuilding, which is why reconstruction has been swift. A committee is set up to manage construction, and members are provided with technical support for building and maintenance. Once complete, a Bridge Maintenance Committee is formed with the DCC and Bridge Wardens appointed and trained for routine maintenance.

“Trail bridge rebuilding is one of the fastest sectors to recover post-quake because of the decentralised way in which communities themselves were involved in reconstruction,” said Man Jechibi at Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). And now with unprecedented rights installed by the new constitution at the local level, trail bridges will be built even faster after the local elections.”

[Read full interview online.]

Subasi Tamang, 64, owns a farm on the other side of the road, but could not travel to meet relatives after the earthquake. Nor could relief material be taken to villages up the mountains and there was no access to the market for her produce. So she decided to donate a part of her land for one of the bridge towers.

"Since the bridge collapsed in the earthquake, people in all nine villages on this side were having a hard time. After talking it over with my family I decided to give away my land,” she said, having a large bundle of hay across the bridge. “I feel good about it because what is there to take with us when we die? It is best to make our lives easier while we live.”

Bike Tamang, there are about 7,000 people who have benefited from the 88m long bridge. Construction started in December 2015 and was completed in nine months at a cost of Rs 5.7 million. Naseraj Moktan of TB SU said trail-bridge building in Nepal has been a Swiss speciality and Nepali engineers have amassed a lot of experience in design and construction in difficult terrain.

Moktan has trained bridge-builders in Laos and others have shared their expertise with engineers in Bhutan, Tanzania and Bangladesh.

There is high demand for bridges in Nepal, so TB SU selects them on the basis of the population that will benefit, prioritizing areas where there is a detour of more than one hour in the absence of a bridge, the presence of disadvantaged communities, and access to market through roads on the other side of the river.
“From the very early days the philosophy has been to involve local communities in building bridges, and we are still using that model,” Makkar explained as he hiked down from the road in the village of Jaronwa. He remembers building the bridge over the Chorang Khola in 1995 after floods and landslides ravaged Dolakha and Sindupalchok, isolating hundreds of villages from health posts, schools and jobs. He is back to supervise the reconstruction after the earthquake.

“We stopped farming for a year because the bridge used to be our only route to take the oxen to plough our fields on the other side,” said Kamala Nepali, secretary of the Bridge Management Committee. “Now that the bridge is being rebuilt, we are all so relieved. We couldn’t farm and many of us actually went hungry.”

When it is completed in July, the 86m long, Rs 5.3 million bridge will connect 528 households to the highway to Chharkot. But construction has been delayed because of the lack of workers. So the bridge is being built by workers from Bardiya.

One of them is Rabu Kaji, who used to go to India to find work every winter. This year, he came to Dolakha because he heard there were well-paying jobs in post-earthquake reconstruction. He doesn’t regret it. “Why go to India when there is work in our own country,” he asked, tightening the steel suspension cable over the river.

But not everywhere has it been easy to set up local communities to help build and maintain bridges. There are disagreements about the site, costs and wages, and local rivalries sometimes make it complicated.

Bimal Tamang, secretary of the committee managing the Tangallang bridge, had to work hard and use all his diplomatic skills to get the communities to work together. The bridge committee has served as the responsible agency in the absence of elected village councils.

“People had immersed local bodies, they would have understood our situation and problem. But we are all excited about local elections.”

**Building Bridges**

The Swiss involvement with building foot bridges in Nepal began with geologist Parag Jagat, who supervised the first hand of the difficulties of traveling in the mountains. The first foot bridge was built in Nepal in 1953 and over the next 20 years, 120km across the country.

He helped launch the Pedestrian Bridge Project in 1980, and the first foot bridge was built over the Marsyangdi a year later. The Suspension Bridge Project started in 1973 and continued until 2001 with help from the Swiss Association for Technical Assistance (SNAB), later known as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Another Swiss aid agency, Helvetas, started the Bridge Building at Local Level project in 1998, involving local communities to use a flexible design. Today, 395 new bridges are being built each year and there are more than 6,000 across Nepal, and not just in the mountains.

RISING FROM THE RUBBLE: The bridge over the Tamakoshi in Singal in May 2013 (top) and new construction along the basin this week.

**Rising from the rubble**

Very few people had heard of Singal before the earthquakes of April-May 2015. Today, this settlement in Dolakha district is seared in the national memory because of the images of death and destruction two years ago.

Dozens were buried under the rubble when the 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck on 25 April, and the 7.3 aftershock on 12 May brought rockslides on hundreds of survivors queuing up for food and relief supplies. In all, it is estimated that 200 people lost their lives here in the two quakes.

No one used to live here because Singal was a cremation ground at the confluence of the Tamakoshi and Bhote Kosi and people thought it was haunted. But when the road was built to service several planned hydropower projects on the rivers, Singal grew quickly and had the look of the wild west. The flimsy concrete buildings collapsed like houses of cards when the earthquake struck, the weakened structures sustained the first quake and went down in the second. Others were buried as the mountains came crashing down onto the roads and villages along the river.

Today, Singal has the look of a boomtown again. There is concrete being laid, houses are being rebuilt, carpenters are busy. “We never imagined Singal would grow into a city like this,” says Bimal Tamang, who is only 28 but still remembers Singal consisting of a few timber buildings.

There are at least four new hydropower plants coming up, with the 465MW Tama Kosi III slated for completion next year after delays caused by the earthquake and Indian blockade. Further upstream is the site of the 900MW Upper Tama Kosi dam which will inundate a part of the Valley. There are four other projects on other rivers in Dolakha.

The trail to Ramechhap is being repaired, and when it opens for trekking the region is expected to rival the Annapurna. Singal will benefit because of its market. Further into the future, if the Lamjung route to Tibet is made motorable, Singal would be along a new transit route between Nepal and China.

The biggest obstacle to speedy reconstruction, as elsewhere, is the delay in disbursement of housing grants. “The Rs 300,000 is only enough for a stop-gap house, so they should just give that out and let people build sturdier temporary shelters,” says Tamang.

The other reason for the delay is that even if people have money, there aren’t enough masons, carpenters and construction workers. There are so few young men in the surrounding villages that workers are not available even if the daily wage is Rs 1,000 with food.

Every household here in Singal has someone working in Malaysia or the Gulf, and the remittance they send home is what is paying for the rebuilding, not the government grant. “I don’t know why people are migrating to Malaysia they can easily earn as much here on reconstruction,” says Dolakha District Coordination Committee sub-engineer, Lilu Jeste.

**Ilustration:** Building bridges. In Singal, one of the most heavily damaged villages in the April 25 earthquake, the new bridge is just one of many being built on the river. The bridge is to be ready very soon, to ease the lives of locals who have been without one for so long.
Who shrank Mt Everest?

A s if all the attacks on Nepal’s national symbols were not enough, there is now international conspiracy to prove that Mt Everest has shrunk. In the normal order of things this would be a matter of celebration since it would make the mountain easier to climb and we could give permits to another 1000+ expeditions, rake in injury fees, and put it all together to replace the National Animal, Cow with the Stag Bear, and the National Bird Darjeel with the Tahr. (Don’t these Indians know that bears are mammal?) They even want to turn our double triangle flag into a hexagon, and move border plans to the north of Lumbini. This nefarious international conspiracy is giving me sleepless nights. On a matter as serious as this, the whole nation should be getting sleepless nights. Wake up, yes you, there is the dream we are.

What if the geologists find out that after the last earthquake, Mt Everest has not just become shorter, but it has moved entirely over to the Chinese side if Mt Everest is no longer the highest mountain, and it isn’t even ours, how can we hold our heads high again as Nepalis among the community of nations? I imagine our grammar and structure.

And, more importantly, what will all those proud owners of Mt Everest Restaurant and Bar (cred: ‘Get High here’) do? Everest Bank (Our Interest Rates is high) will have to change its name to KB Bank, Mt Everest Hotel must alter its credo from Nepal’s Top Hotel to ‘We Were Great Once’.

Then there is the Everest Herald Daily which could come up with a new slogan: ‘We Won’t Ever Rest: We’ll Get Our Mountain Back!’ Everest Insurance could tell it like it is and say ‘If Everest’s Lost, Our Premiums are Higher!’, Mt Everest Mom’s mantra needs to change if they are to continue to home deliver to Base Camp by helicopter: ‘Three-thousand Duffelings Without Oxygen’ Everest Carriage (Get Sheets) will need to change to ‘The Heart of the World to the Gnome of the World’. Everest Rubber Flip Flops (First To Summit in Chappals)’

Sir Edmund Hillary’s family will be in the hands of a climate to return his knighthood to. They will have to rewrite all their art books and NBBS’s promo brochures will have to be replaced with ones that say ‘The Land of Everest, Being Second is Not So Bad.

It is an unthinkable, nightmarish scenario. And what I want to know is why CNN had to be such a smart ass and give permission to an expedition whose discovery would be potentially disastrous for our national morale. If it fails.

So therefore our national interest to safeguard Nepal’s vertical integrity and territoriality to pre-empt any potential attempt to recalibrate Mt Everest’s height and ensure that Gomukhlingma (Tibetan for Goddess Mother of the Earth) and Sagarmatha (Nepal for The Prow Barking One) Bides the White One with the Flat Top that is third from right if you are looking counter clockwise remains the last one in the world. There are several stops that Nepal’s Bureau of Standards and Metrology can start taking right away if we can get them to wake up:

1. Every expedition climbing Mt Everest henceforth must ensure that team members who reach the top carry at least 15 kg of rock in their backpacks to deposit at the summit. With 525 people expected on the summit every season, we can add 100 meters to Mt Everest in just a few years and achieve our goal.
2. All cleanup expeditions that used to bring trash back from the South Col and dump it on the larches of the Sagarmatha will now be required to take it on to the summit instead. Let me just get my calculations right here, by 2025 Mt Everest will cross the 5000 m mark.
3. Discuss a bus tour and upper truck from Lhasa to the summit ridge and start plywood and gravel on top.