A 2-party state

This is what the results of recently-held local elections for mayors of Municipalities and heads of Village Councils would look like if the UML and Maoist Centre merged (red) and the Nepali Congress united with the Madhes-based parties as well as the two RPPs (green). As Nepal prepares for parliamentary and provincial polls in November, it looks like the country may be divided down the middle into a two-party state.

The surprise announcement of unification of the main left parties (UML, Maoists and New Force) and the subsequent creation of a counter-‘democratic alliance’ of the NC, Madhes-based parties and RPPs signals the making of a two-party state in Nepal.

Although some are arguing that two strong political blocs could usher in long-awaited stability in a country mired in an endless transition, others are not so sure, noting that the main political actors have not changed: they are still mostly conservative, ‘higher’ caste men.

Regardless, this week’s historic shift in Nepali politics is certainly a defining moment: it will either put the country on the path to prosperity, or push it into another cycle of instability. The outcome will largely depend on the results of federal-parliamentary polls in November, and how the parties react to their electoral performances.

As things stand now, and based on results for the UML and Maoists in the second CA elections in 2013 and this year’s local polls, the unified left may win a majority and rule the country for the next five years – a political feat never before achieved in Nepal’s democracy. The UML, Maoists and New Force (top photo) also agreed to unite after the polls and rebrand as the Nepal Communist Party.

But if the poll results do not meet their expectations, cracks will appear, and they may split once again. The so-called democratic alliance (photo below), left, looks weaker now, but it has an incumbent advantage for November.

Whichever alliance wins, there will no longer be an opportunity for a third king-maker party to oscillate between the two poles, allowing the government every nine months like the Maoists are doing now.

Economist Binwo Poudel is hopeful there will be political stability, a prerequisite for economic growth, under this two-party state. But he warns stability alone would mean nothing without investment in human capital and institutions.

Poudel argues that stability existed even during the Rana oligarchy and Panchayat, but that it did not actually translate into Nepal’s development. “Political stability is necessary but not sufficient for growth,” he told Nepal Times.

Nepal’s Communist history is replete with splits, and the UML and Maoists have deep ideological differences. Besides, dividing up election tickets and creating space for the leaders of the two largest communist parties will only be the first of many challenges for a unified left.

Political scientist Lok Raj Basnet says announcement of the left alliance is just electoral politics, and is unlikely to result in a unified left, let alone a two-party state and political stability. “Look at our communist history, have these leftist forces ever stayed together?” he asks. “They unite only to split up again.”

Om Ascha Rai

Raze, retrofit or rebuild?

Instead of tearing down damaged Rana-era buildings, turn them into heritage hotels to give tourism a boost

TWO-HORSE RACE

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

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In Nepal’s ever-politicised and polarised national politics, it can only be a good thing that there will be fewer political parties – especially those of the Communist persuasions. At one point after 1990, there were 17 registred Communist factions: from adherents of bunteuro European philosophers of the 19th century, disciples of Pradeep Krishna Koirala, to those who admired Mao Zedong so much that they didn’t just emulate his justification of mass murder but even copied his hair style, and those who still swear by Kim Il-Sung.

After an ill-conceived war that left at least 70,000 Nepalis dead and devastated the country and its economy, the main Maoist faction has decided to form an electoral alliance with a party that, despite the ongoing Communist-Party of Nepal-Maoist-Leninist name, is supposedly left-leaning, contrary to the usual tendency of Communist factions to prefer alliances with the far-right rather than to a party immediately to the right of them, the communists have decided to work together.

Into this grand alliance, they have also invited the chief Maoist ideologue, Baburam Bhattarai, who had been in the wilderness after having left the parent party. It has become a habit here to be cynical about politicians, and that is because they have disappointed us so badly since the restoration of democracy in 1990, and more so after the collapse in 2006. The fact that many of the main players are Brahmin men and relics from a generation doesn’t help in according them more public respect and credibility. Don’t expect any progress on transitional justice from this lot.

Nepal is now effectively going to be a bi-party state and elections will be a two-horse race.

In spite of all that, we still believe the left alliance of the UML, Maoist Centre and the New Force is a positive step. If it can withstand greed and ambition after the November elections, and if it has visionary and cooperative leadership, there is chance that this could indeed lead to the greater political stability that is needed for Nepal’s long-awaited great leap forward. That is a lot of ifs.

In their recent pact-signing on Tuesday evening at the Nepali Academy, the three parties agreed to first join hands in dividing up tickets for election candidates on a rough 60/40 ratio, and ultimately to unite the three parties. The aim seems to be to ensure a

the UML, the Maoists and the NC to the last man, from the current coalition with its mammoth 56-member council of ministers. The left alliance may also press some rethinking within the NC, which has lost its way from its founding egalitarian cause. The three parties have said they will pursue social justice and a socialista path to prosperity. We will have to wait and see if this semi-merger is indeed ‘historic’, or just an opportunistic electoral pact.

Dahal and Oli have justified the new alliance as a partnership between ‘nationalist’ forces. Waving the flag against perceived external enemies has always been a good electoral strategy. But the Nepali people are tired of hollow nationalism and empty slogans: the New Nepal has last chance to convince voters it can actually deliver.

ONLINE PACKAGES

OLD GLORY

It was a brutal and bloody affair that became a turning point in 1948. After the earthquake, as the debate raged on whether to demand a referendum or keep the monarchy, Prime Minister Siddharat Dahal took the reins of the NC and tried to push for a referendum on the local government. But the NC never went through with it, and the all-powerful king remained in power.

JAZZMANDU

Go online to check out what’s in store in this year’s edition of Jazzmandu.

DIVIDED OPINION

Thanks to Nepal Times for publishing a well balanced assessment of this health care crisis [Assaulting the caregivers]. I agree that the NC has to be held accountable because basic health care is available to all Nepalis. However, there are issues with the efficiency and the professional potential of the providers.

Wilde Campbell

As long as poorly trained, untrained, arrogant and condescending upper class, upper caste doctors and other health care workers provide substandard service and expect fees not commensurate, and there is no recourse to the courts for legal remedies, incidents such as this will occur. Rather than going on strike, doctors need to examine their own behaviour.

Kanchog Dorje

I agree that there can be malpractice, but blaming the doctors without changing the system is not the solution. All medical colleges should re-examine their curriculum to mitigate these incidents.

Joe Nimercura

As long as private medical colleges demand I demand I to produce doctors who can never fail, we will have malpractice and commercialisation of health care. Assault on doctors is a backlash from a public fed-up with inescapable and unsustainable treatment.

Dr No

NEPAL AND CORRUPTION

Since when [Who teaches us democracy?]. Can an NC leader be a result of an NC and Prachanda? It is not the country that should be coming from within each society as a basic value for a just and equitable society.

Mr Panwa

The entire article is based on a single, simple premise that the current head of the US is reckless and lacks moral character to be held as an example of the corruption-free democracy. This article is an epitome of why Nepal has not managed to mark its stamp on the world stage: we are reluctant to learn from the experiences of others.

WHAT’S TRENDING

Hagen’s Kathmandu

by Khadga Rana

These of a guy who posted the photo exhibition showing how to protect your children from the dangers of Kathmandu in the 1990s, can still feel some of his nepali Times online. This was the most shared item on social media ever before.

Most popular on Instagram (326 comments, 30 likes)
Most shared on Facebook
Most visited online page

This Dasain, vegetarian

Our video of a recipe for a popular Nepali dish, Gunda ko tama, and Rasgullas that’s mouth-watering is available on the Times.

Most reached on Facebook (11,370 people reach)

Assaulting the caregivers

In an interview with an anti-corruption group, the NC has been implicated in an attack on a health care provider.

Most commented on (87 comments, 31 likes)

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times (@nepalitimes) Just made a new blog post about an Islamic movement’s protest against a new constitution.

Serai Vizual (@SeraiVizual) Congratulations to Serai Vizual, the first Nepali newspaper to start selling its services to other publishers. Let us hope this trend continues.

Nepali Times (@nepalitimes) "Don’t touch our clinic..." The NC has apologized for the recent attack on a medical clinic.

Ishwar Dahal (@IshwarDahal) More than a month of unrest, let the 206-D go to the NC and Prachanda.

Times (@TimesNepal) Weekly internet hits: 43,017

Times (@TimesNepal) Weekly internet hits: 43,017

9. Should Nepal restore the monarchy?

Total votes: 541

10. What do you think of the US President’s state visit?

Total votes: 541

11. Will the upcoming elections of Nepal’s communist parties be good for the country?

Total votes: 541
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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER
Alan Root 1937-2017
Innovative wildlife filmmaker and inventor of Root’s Ruin

SEASON IN THE SUN: Alan Root (left with grandmother) or Photographed in 1967, with Nichola A. Spenser, watching a big-belled gazelle and elephant being driven on a farm by Alan J. Edwards of Tiger Tops and tiger ecologist Chuck McDougall.

Bhuwon Ratna Sthapit

Bhuwon Ratna Sthapit did not believe in telling farmers what to do with their seeds; his laboratory was the terrace farmland around Pokhara where he let the local villagers guide him.

Sthapit’s ideas changed the way agricultural scientists had been working in Nepal, inspiring a whole new generation to involve farmers in their research.

“Farmers possess valuable knowledge, and agriculture scientists can benefit a lot from it,” he told me last year.

Sthapit’s participatory agriculture research and in-situ and ex-farm conservation of agriculture biodiversity are now internationally recognised. The rice biodiversity that he helped conserve and develop are not just popular in Nepal’s mid-hills, but in many countries around the world.

Sthapit started out at the Agriculture Research Centre in Lamjung, which the British set up to inspire Gurkha veterans to return to their land after World War II. But the soldiers had lost interest in farming, and were happy living off their pensions.

In Chhomrong, Sthapit got to know the wide variety of indigenous seeds adapted to the micro-climate and soil of the mountains, and he learnt from farmers about the characteristics of each of them. At altitudes of 1,000-2,600m, he discovered a nutrient-rich breed of rice that resisted extreme cold and diseases. He named this breed after the village Chhomrong.

The seed’s popularity transcend Nepal’s mid-hills, and reached Bhutan, Bangladesh and Africa as well. It has also been introduced into the United Kingdom, and is now the most popular rice variety in the country.

Nepalis were more used to polished white rice by then.

So Sthapit crossed Chhomrong with a Japanese breed, and developed Machhapuchhare 3 and 9, which looked white, but were as nutritious-rich as Chhomrong. Besides these two, RZ 36 and Lamjung 2 developed by him are also popular.

In 1996, the British government handed over the Lamjung to the Nepalese Government, which could not retain breed and committed scientists like Sthapit. Many of them left the country for greener pastures, but Sthapit stayed in his beloved Nepal and founded Li-Bird, the pioneering Pokhara-based agricultural research centre.

In the 20 years since its foundation, Li-Bird has developed 13 new varieties of rice, more than the number developed by the state-owned NARC. It has done more for agriculture in Nepal than the Government ever did.

Sthapit passed away last month in a US hospital, where he had been admitted for the treatment of cancer. He was just 63.
Sky is the limit for Sano Babu

The dream of holding the 2020 Paragliding World Cup in Nepal resonates with emergent global Nepalis

Sky is the limit for Sano Babu

The dream of holding the 2020 Paragliding World Cup in Nepal resonates with emergent global Nepalis

The World Cup is a cross-country flying competition for paraglider pilots, organised by the Paragliding World Cup Association, based in Marles, France. The first of these competitions will be held in November.

"Adventure tourism is a major contributor to tourism worldwide. We have the best natural setting for that. All we need is to take the initiative now," says Krishna Jung KC, a paragliding pilot and president of the Babu Adventure Club, the main organiser of the International Open Paragliding Competition that will take place in the Andhikhola Valley, 1-5 November this year.

It is hoped that this series of international competitions will prove that Syangja has the ideal paragliding competition terrain, and that Nepal has the organisational capability to hold the World Cup in 2020. This is a sport where Nepal could easily repeat the international success they’ve had in mountain climbing and ultra-marathons.

"A Nepali team winning a World Cup is a dream of many of us. I think this is the best opportunity to turn that dream into a reality. If we can hold a world cup, we can very well win it," says Sunwar, who is realistic enough to point out that Nepal needs to show it has adequate infrastructure.

"To dream is not enough," he adds wistfully. "Just like you can’t dream of making a football team without a football stadium, you need an aerial stadium for aerobatics."

Sunwar has launched a campaign to declare the Andhikhola Valley an ‘aviation sports zone’ because the region is ideal for paragliding competitions. While Pokhara is restricted to 5 km flights because of air traffic, Andhikhola has a flight radius of more than 16km.

Dilip Bagale, Deputy Chairperson of the District Coordination Committee of Syangja, has lent his support to Sunwar’s ventures, and local politicians, businessmen and social leaders are rallying behind the cause.

Megh Raj, a tourism veteran and river conservation activist who is doing work for Nepal’s reeling what Sunwar is trying to do for its sky, has also lent his support to Sunwar’s idea of developing adventure sports tourism.

“In Nepal we have to pursue tourism as an ‘ism’, just like a religion,” Ali says. “We have the highest peaks, the best rivers and the deepest gorges. We should take the lead to make Nepal an international venue for adventure sports.”

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**BIZ BRIEFS**

**World Bank training**

The World Bank has approved a $30 million credit to support a second phase of the Enhanced Vocational Education and Training (EVET) Project in Nepal. The initiative is designed to upgrade the quality and strengthen the delivery of technical education and vocational training (TVT), as well as improve access for disadvantaged groups.

**Five-star Turkish**

Turkish Airlines, which flies to more countries than any other airline, has been named a Five-Star Global Airline by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX). The APEX awards ceremony was held at Expo 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

**Qatar’s young talents**

Qatar Airways and Bulat-Taype, one of the airline’s major strategic partners, have successfully hosted a training program as part of the award-winning airline’s Dart Competition initiative. Famed young talent becomes future leaders at the Gulf-based carrier.

**New Mango drink**

Good离开leave Indian beverage, under Asian Biscuit and Confectionary and royal Thai, has launched Good’un Mango Juice in Nepal. Available in 200ml packets, the product is priced at Rs5.
Raze, retrofit or rebuild?

Instead of tearing down damaged Rana-era buildings, turn them into heritage hotels to give tourism a boost

Earlier this year, the government’s decision to reconstruct Singh Durbar drew widespread opposition from archaeologists, conservationists and culture experts. Following intervention from the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), a seven-member committee was formed and in September, the NRA called for expressions of interest from Nepali firms to retrofit the imposing main façade of the enormous complex completed by Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana in 1908.

“We are trying our best to save the old palaces as they are an integral part of our heritage,” said the Thapathali Durbar and Lalita Niwas, which housed the head office of Nepal Rastriya Bank and were badly damaged, were demolished two years after the 2015 earthquake.

NRA chief Govind Raj Pokharel told *Nepali Times*. “As far as possible, we will try to retrofit the buildings instead of demolishing them.”

While Singh Durbar was saved, the Thapathali Durbar and Lalita Niwas, which housed the head office of Nepal Rastriya Bank and were badly damaged, were demolished two years after the 2015 earthquake.

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While efforts have focused on saving Kathmandu Valley’s Mallu-era monuments, the palace’s visitor centers, palaces, built by the Ranas copying the style of Victorian England more than 100 years ago, have been neglected. Critics say the government’s motivation is to let the damaged buildings crumble so that they can be torn down and replaced with concrete blocks.

“It was a mistake on the part of the government to demolish the buildings and reconstruct them from the ground up,” says Chandra Rana, an environmentalist turned heritage conservation activist, who has been working to save the palaces of her ancestors. “They should have at least tried to save whatever was salvageable from...”
LEADING THE WAY

Go online to watch a video of how Shanker Hotel is accurately restoring its Rana-era heritage property after the earthquake.

Bikapur Mata, which houses the Department of Roads, will be restored. Although the department moved to Chabahil, Latipur, the building in Bikapur Mata was only recently covered with a tarp.

Hotel Shanker is an example for others

Shanker Hotel in Lalitpur is an example of a palaces-turned-hotel, and conservationists say the model can be replicated. Shanker was converted into a luxury hotel in the 1960s, keeping the facade intact and redesigning the interior to match visitors’ needs and retaining other spaces in their original form.

The 2015 earthquake damaged Hotel Shanker’s facade and roof, and the proprietors entrusted the rebuilding to the grandsons of the workers who had done the original conversion. To retain the originality, the workers used old photographs as reference. Most of the repairs are now complete. “Heritage hotels have more value. People came to Nepal to see the local heritage and experience the local culture, so keeping heritage alive is a big plus point in the business,” says Prabhu Shanker Shrestha, executive manager at Hotel Shanker (sent in)

LEADING THE WAY

Go online to watch a video of how Shanker Hotel is accurately restoring its Rana-era heritage property after the earthquake.
Nepal just celebrated their biggest festival, Dashain. As they wait for Tihar, they can revel in the annual jazz festival, Surya Nepal Jazzmandu, an event that has put Kathmandu on the international jazz map. Since the first jazz festival in 2002, the event has redefined Nepal’s local music scene and fostered artistic encounters between international bands and homegrown artists. Jazzmandu will take over the city from 12 to 14 October, marking its 15th birthday.

The festival’s Samir Ghetti says Jazzmandu’s recipe for success is simple: “We try to bring the best international artists to perform in the festival every year, where they get to collaborate with fantastic local talent.”

The festival will start with a special “Concert for School Students” at Alliance Française de Katmandou (AFK) in Thamel and end with artists bringing all their energy to a single stage on 18 October (see box, right).

As always, organizers have lined up a diverse collection of bands from around the world to play in the 7-day event, including Filter M NepaMali (Switzerland/Mali/Nepal/USA), Julian Sarr Quartet (Senegal/France), Samuel Woolfson Toy Story (Germany), EleKrit (France), Teerapoj Plitakul Trio feat. David Parente (Thailand/USA) and Palouse Jazz Project (USA). They will be accompanied by home-grown artists Cadence Collective, Rohini Lal Tri and KANTA dAb dAb and Gandharvies.

Jazzmandu’s first-timer Alan Gemberling, of Palouse Jazz Project, says he’s excited to be included among such a diverse group of musicians. “This is an opportunity to learn more about...”

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**Jazz Comes Home**

15 years of bringing people together

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**SHREEJANA SHRESTHA**

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**Julia Sarr Quartet**

(Senegal / France)

Born in Dakar and now living in Paris, acclaimed singer and songwriter Julia Sarr is adept at drawing on Senegalese and jazz traditions. Her voice, known for its fluid timbre, has drawn praise from some of the biggest names in contemporary music: Lijako Kana, Richard Bona, Youssou N’Dour, Saif Kela, Oumou Sangaré, Mali Solo, Alpha Blondy and MC Solaar. Her 2014 solo album, Duvalikel Souwe gave Sarr wide recognition.

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**Teerapoj Plitakul Trio, featuring David Parente**

(Thailand / USA)

This band is a rare combination of talents on the Thai jazz scene. All three members, pianist Teerapoj Plitakul, US-born drummer David Parente and bassist Nathupon Chaiwaiwong, are renowned in Asia, and beyond. Parente’s style has been honed through collaborations with an array of Thai and international artists, and his leadership of the groove and funk ensemble Rootman.

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**Rabin Lal Trio**

(Nepal)

Tabla maestro Rabin Lal Shrestha has teamed up with Skrow Josh and Jonatha Paudel to reinvent the Srijna this year. Srijna has played with world-renowned Tausti Pi. He praised Chaukasi, and has released four albums since 2012.

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**KANTA dAb dAb**

(Nepa)

This power trio from Kathmandu combines star, bass and percussion to create a unique fusion of traditional melodies, KANTA dAb dAb blend, Carnatic classical tones, and rhythms from Kathmandu and various Western influences to create a contemporary sound. The trio has toured Europe and performed at numerous venues in Nepal, where members have worked with many of the country’s best-known musicians.
the culture in Nepal,” he adds.
APR has been supporting the festival for many years, and this year is bringing in a band, ElektrïP, for the first time.
“Not only does the festival bring international artists to Kathmandu, it also nurtures and encourages young Nepali musicians in their careers,” says APR Director Véronique Bouché.
“We are looking forward to sharing an energetic performance and a great time with the audience discovering French fusion and grooving jazz,” she adds.
Thailand’s Teppejap Filharmon performed at Jazzaheadz in 2012 with his popular project Rootman and returns this year with his new lineup, Temppa Pianika Trio. He told Nepali Times: “I fell in love with Nepal when I performed here in 2012. Jazzaheadz is one of the greatest festivals in Asia where people can listen to real music.”

**Filtron M (NepaMali)**
**(Switzerland / Mali / Nepal / USA)**

New York-based, Swiss pianist and composer Manu Kesh started Filtron M in 2012, as a project to combine the genres he encountered in his music career. NepaMali, a distinct instrumentation of Filtron M, brings Manu together with several of his friends and collaborators from over the years.

**ElektrïP** *(France)*

The members of ElektrïP have played on many of Europe’s most prominent stages. The bold quartet, named in jazz fusion, was formed in 2015 to play original compositions by guitarist Benjamin Guermoune, and also covers tunes by pioneers such as Gil Cobham and Miles Davis.

**Samuel Wootton Toy Story** *(Germany)*

All four musicians of Toy Story are avid or containing the improvisational freedom of jazz, the groove of hip-hop, the intimacy of chamber music and aesthetics from a range of musical cultures to create a sound that defies categorization.

**Cadenza Collective** *(Nepal)*

As the first Nepali jazz band, the members of Cadenza Collective combine jazz, Afro-Latin and Nepali folk music, creating an irresistible blend of pitch and rhythm. Led by drummer and composer Nazir Chhetri, the group has already released five albums of original music, claims to be Nepal’s leading music awards and performed in Austria, India and Europe.

**Gandharvas** *(Nepal)*

The Gandharvas represent a long tradition of traveling folk musicians who once roamed widely among Nepal’s villages bringing music and entertainment. The group will deliver a medley of Nepali folk songs, accompanied by sarings and traditional percussion instruments. Led by Saro Kuntha Gandharva, the band focuses on keeping Gandharva music and culture alive in Nepal.

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**WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN**

1. **Concert for School Students**
   **Date:** 12 October, Thursday
   **Time:** 12:30pm to 1:30pm
   **Venue:** Alliance Française, Kathmandu
   **Tickets:** Rs. 500

2. **Grooving at Upstairs**
   **Date:** 12 October, Thursday
   **Time:** 7:00pm to 9:00pm
   **Venue:** Jan Uptown, Imrati
   **Tickets:** Rs. 500

3. **Valley Jams**
   **Date:** 13 October, Friday
   **Time:** 7:00pm to 9:00pm
   **Venue:** Jazz Uptown, Imrati
   **Tickets:** Rs. 500

4. **Jazz at the Temple House**
   **Date:** 17 October, Tuesday
   **Time:** 7:30pm to 9:30pm
   **Venue:** Kathmandu Temple House, Kathmandu
   **Tickets:** Rs. 500

5. **Jazzandu Finale**
   **Date:** 18 October, Wednesday
   **Time:** 7:30pm to 9:30pm
   **Venue:** Kathmandu Temple House, Kathmandu
   **Tickets:** Rs. 500
30

GETAWAY

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stunning views of the Annapurnas, Mallan, 2075, Bivalent, (01) 529380 - (01) 5293819
www.rupakotresort.com

Baitaul Village Resort
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green terrace fields dotted with orange
colored houses.
Baitaul, Khani, 8965735161

The Yellow House
Bed and breakfast for the light traveler.
Somewhere, (01) 5338991-5339000, www.theyellowhouse.com

Club Himalaya
For amazing mountain views and
refreshing weekend excursions.
Nagarkot, (01) 5606900

Milla Guesthouse
You, choose the quiet, and admire a mix
of art and new; this is the perfect place
to stay. Not too far away from the city, it's
miles away.
Shikharpur, 9865415911

Gorkana Forest Resort
Complete your wilderness getaway with a
round of golf or a day of camping at the
spa, away from the hustle and bustle of
the city. Don't forget to join the Dine-in.
Gokarna, (01) 4435272, www.gokarna.com

Fulbari Resort
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pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks,
and dinners.
Green Waves, Kathmandu, (01) 424661

MISS MOTIVATION

KRIKHA JOSHI
Wherever you go, go with all your heart.

EVENTS

Jazzmandu, The
Kathmandu jazz festival turns 15 this year. The annual Jazzmandu will take over the
city as various artists play their sets at intimate venues across the city. Take your pick
from a wide range of musical offerings. See page B9 for details.
22-28 October, Kathmandu, 9892319625, info@jazzmandu.org

Photowalk
Participate in the Workshop Square's
photography program to train your
photography skills. Those willing to
meet photographers and learn about
photography techniques can take part too.
1 October, 9am, meeting point: Sattar Bazaar, Kathmandu.
www.facebook.com/Photowalkers/

Photo contest
Submit your three best pictures to
participate in a contest organized by the
Nepal Tourism Board and the World Tourism Day. Send your photos to d.chitrak@yahoo.com
Deadline: 31 October, (01) 5543466
www.facebook.com/PhotoContest

Guitar workshop
Register to participate in a free guitar
workshop by famous Polish clarinetist
Krisztian Cseh.
6 October, 8pm onwards, Kathmandu, Jazz
Cafe/kathmandu, Darbar, Trivendra, (01) 5387355,
9892038495, krzysztofcz@math.com

Morning Coffee Queries
To discuss interesting business ideas and
experiences, entrepreneurs, students and
start-ups are invited to participate in
Monday morning coffee queries.
9 October, 9 to 11 am, Botha’s and Black, Mohanbuzz,

Gypsy Jazz
Up to the thicks of jazz with Von Moharjan.
7 October, 8pm onwards,
Aagnes. Mohanbuzz,
(01) 4412733

Multi & Revival,
Book your tickets to watch Multi & Revival perform live.
C. Camps only drink provided.
5 October, 7pm; Charis, School of Cook,
Nanakpur, 9892837993/7992

Chez Caroline,
Authentic ambiance, exquisite French food,
glorious sunshine and more.
10 October, 7pm, Bistrot Miholy.
(01) 4462720

Embassy,
Away from the hustle-bustle of the streets,
enjoy the variety of multi-cuisine dishes
at a place ideal for business meets and casual
rendezvous.
Pashupatinath, (01) 4224149

Manny’s,
Kicks off your Fridays with a selection of
mouth-watering tapas, paired with red or
white wine or a non-alcoholic choice
of sumptuous meal for Rs 999.
Jawalnagar, (01) 5539191

Fire & Ice Pizzeria,
For the best Italian pizzas in town.
Rameau, (01) 4202719

Saigon Pho
Succulent interior with authentic Vietnamese
5596,
Campbell, (01) 4444390

The Vesper House,
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Going rogue in Nepal

As a wise Ass once said: when in a foreign land, it is best to try to blend in. Try to be as inconspicuous as possible even if you are 6’3”, have bailt the colour of King Goud dust, and have cultivated the habit of frequently saying “Namaste” and “Bhanyabah” to perfect strangers.

Just like the Romans, when in Nepal behave like the Nepalis. And throw away those tourist guidebooks that mislead visitors by inventing words like “Sulka Phoolbad” when we had perfectly useful morning greetings like “Did you empty your bowels today?”

To do as Nepalis do, you have to start with bodily functions like eating and attending to calls from nature:
- If your host invites you for tea, try your best to emulate the loud slurping sound that not only draws attention to the fact that you are taking pleasure from the offering but also helps cool the tea as it enters your gullet.
- It is considered polite in our society to hug loudly and loudly while partaking of a family meal in order to complement the hosts on the repast. If it is exceptionally extravagant, and just basic decency does it justice, you may want more well-deserved accolades and audibly pass wind at the table.
- Visitors will have noticed that there are no toilets on Nepal’s highways. This is deliberate. The driver will usually stop at a scenic spot and encourage passengers to lime up and take a collective whizz while admiring the best of what Nepal has to offer in terms of flora and fauna.

Expats who have successfully gone native advise newcomers to take on local habits in order to make themselves indistinguishable from Nepalis.

If you have stayed long enough you are bound to have a colony of lice in your scalp, armpit and possibly even cockpit. Nit-picking is therefore a perfectly accepted and hygienic past-time. After necessary introductions, feel free to offer passengers seated next to you an arm to engage in some mutual nit-picking.

- The reason many foreigners decide to retire in Nepal is because we have no rules governing how people with advanced calculi should pick their teeth in public. There is complete freedom within Nepal’s territorial waters as far as self-exploration of the oral cavity is concerned.
- The nose is another orifice that we Nepalis are proud to call our own. As a foreigner, there is no better complement you can pay your host than picking your nose while engaging in conversation. It will prove that you respect our cultural traditions, while at the same time ensuring that your nasal passage is properly cleared.
- Because of space constraints we cannot go into Nepal’s laissez-faire attitudes about mining our war, clearing the threat and springing in public. Suffice it is to say that engaging in these activities will prove to all and sundry that you have gone rogue.

The Ass

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In a disaster-prone state

ASHUTOSH TIWARI


But you would be mistaken to think that the government learnt its lessons and put in substantial measures to save lives and property before, during and after the floods. This August 2016's floods submerged almost all of the eastern Tarai — affecting 20% of the country's population.

Why is it that even when we know Nepal as a country vulnerable to disasters, we consistently fail to mitigate their effects?

This is the question Ayako Ueda sets out to answer in her book, Nepal: A Bilad of Disasters (Chisar in Nepal).

Ueda discusses various types of disasters common to Nepal, with recent examples: avalanches, landslides, floods, blizzards, hailstorms, infectious diseases and even aircraft accidents.

Fourteen monasteries were buried alive on the Khumbu Himal in 2014. The same year, a drunk of a mountain in June fell into the Bhote Khol, isolating the river, uprooting villages along its path, killing 145 people and closing the Araniko highway for weeks.

Nepal gets 80% of its rains in the monsoon, but both the frequency and the intensity of cloudbursts are increasing, and the heavy downpours twist to landslides and floods. Current disasters have become the new normal in the mountains, as fierce cyclones from the Bay of Bengal batter the Himalayas. They cause glaciers to lose their way, let disoriented trekkers and guides, and destroy tourist trails, as they did in 2014 in the Annapurna.

Jakar's epidemic of cholera in 2005 and swine flu in 2015 exposed the pathetic state of health services, made worse by the central government's slow response. And when an Airbus 330 veered off the runway at Kathmandu airport in 2013, it cut Nepal off from the outside world for four days. Diast estimates that disaster-related response is mostly confined to short-term rescue and relief, while long-term pre-emptiveness, prevention, recovery and reconstruction gets short shrift. Sporadic and uneven data collection makes it difficult to identify and help the victims. A lack of clarity about who makes what decisions during emergencies, and with what discretionary power, delays government response. Amidst these symptomatic shortcomings, Diast finds the increasing use of information technology, for example in some flood warning systems, as a positive development.

The book details 14 specific lessons, each of which challenges us to think beyond rescue and relief, which usually mark the beginning and the end of most post-disaster activities. It also needs the need for better data and information dissemination at all levels. It argues that the mass media needs to play a more assertive role in risk reduction, and that more needs to be invested in training health workers, insurance and micro-credit to help reduce health, income and livelihood-related vulnerabilities.

Diast points out that our approach to development — digging roads in villages — increases the likelihood of landslides. The habit of constructing houses, health posts and schools without the enforcement of building codes increases vulnerability. He calls for participatory local governance that is sensitive, proactive and responsive, not only to the nature of disasters but also to likely contributors such as climate change, lack of accountability and social exclusion.

My pleasure with the book is that it leaves out two disasters common in Nepal — frequent highway crashes, and the internal displacement of the poor due to conflict, natural calamity, financial ruin and lack of access to land and water.

Nepal: A Bilad of Disasters needs a cross between a set of finely argued short essays and a reference book reporting the time of Nepal's build-and-grow linear development and pointing to models that put people's welfare at the center. The country's newly elected local officials will do their constituents a big favor if they need this book and make disaster risk reduction a key part of all their governance and development activities.

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PLEASE RELEASE ME: A rally in Kathmandu on Tuesday demanded the release of Dy. Narayan Subedi, who was arrested by Indian Police on trumped-up charges this week for opposing the construction of an embankment across the border in Bihar.

POET LAUREATE: Officers of the Sahitya Chetnaa of Jhapa honour Nepal's National Poet Madhav Prasad Gimire at his home in Kathmandu on Thursday.

A NEW GODDESS: Three-year-old Tishtha Shrestha, the new Kathmandu Living Goddess is carried by her father from their residence to Kumari House on Thursday.
Shock wave from the Left

Editorial in Kathmandu, 5 October

Two of the biggest Communist parties, UML and the Maoist Centre, have forged an unexpected electoral alliance, leading to ultimate party unity. The New Force Party has also joined the alliance. Talk of left parties uniting is not new. But the expectation was that the Maoists and the Nepali Congress partners in the ruling coalition would be the ones to make an alliance for the November parliamentary and federal elections. The Maoists have assured the NC that they will not break up the coalition before elections, however their continued participation in the government is now in the air. Electoral alliances and parties merger are part of the democratic process, especially if their vision and ideology coincide. Since the root cause of chronic political instability is seen as the plethora of parties, the unity of parties should be seen as a positive move. The fact that proportional representation in forthcoming elections will mean that there will be no party with a clear majority must have prompted this alliance – reinforced by results from the recently concluded local elections.

Although they share a Communist ideology, the UML and the Maoists are far apart. One of them waged an armed struggle for 10 years and has been in parliamentary politics for only 15 years since the ceasefire. The UML has 26 years of experience of parliamentary democracy. Even Babaram Bhattarai, who declared that he had abandoned Communism to set up New Force, is now part of the alliance. A big test of the alliance and a future unified party will be how flexible they show each other to be during the elections, we have seen before that national unity can impact on national politics. Some have raised fears about the future of democracy after the clarification of the two big Communist parties. The UML and the Maoists should dispel these fears, and reassure us that even if they unite they will implement the Constitution to build the federal democratic republic. The UML-Maoist alliance has understandably put pressure on the NC to try to forge its own alliance. In fact, this can be an opportunity for the NC to reform and restructure itself. Having strong political parties will strengthen the nation, it will reduce foreign intervention and will ensure greater stability. Ultimately, having parties that can command a majority and establish sustainable alliances can allow the country to leap forward in terms of economic prosperity.

However, it is important that the Maoists, as members of the ruling coalition, should be forging an alliance with the main opposition UML. It is therefore incumbent on the Maoists to prove that the alliance is not for elections and that it will not break up the coalition. The main national priority now is provincial and parliamentary elections. We should not have a situation where an election government has to be changed.
In the shadows

Panic spreads on the sidewalks of the Kotayya area of the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur as immigration police sweep in during one of their raids on undocumented migrant workers. There is a palpable fear in the air as these without documents attempt to flee, and are whisked away. But there is also a sense of solidarity among migrant workers as they urgently call out, warning others to run.

Mahesh worked as a security guard doing 12-hour shifts, but after passing out a few times due to the heat, he decided to quit. His employer refused him treatment, or to give him his passport so he could return to Nepal. Instead, he was locked up and abused. It got so unbearable that one day Mahesh jumped out of the second-floor window. By the time he landed on his feet, his status had changed to ‘undocumented’.

There are thousands of Nepalis like Mahesh in Malaysia. Like him, they prefer to be undocumented than be exploited and mistreated by their official employers. They enter Malaysia legally, but prefer to quit difficult, low-paying jobs and leave their passports behind, even though they know the risks of being undocumented.

When Ram realised that the ‘company job’ he had signed up for was a disaster, dangerous and demeaning, and required heavy lifting in front of a furnace 12 hours a day, he asked his boss to let him go. The employer demanded $1,500 which Ram could not pay. Then there is Amam, who asked to go home after he heard that his father had died. His boss refused, even when he offered a month’s salary as guarantee.

The push to become undocumented starts in Nepal, with recruiters who shape the expectations of the foreign dream among desperate seaports. They lure workers with company names like Samsung, Panasonic and McDonald’s, but send them to manpower supply companies. They exaggerate overtime earnings, which migrants rely on because this can sometimes add up to 80% of their base salary. But cost migrants find themselves trapped when they land jobs with lower salaries than promised and no overtime. On

Staying on

Bhurur owns a manpower company that sources Nepali workers, and says recruiting a foreign worker legally involves multiple trips to the immigration office for permits and fees. The whole process can be expensive, costing employers up to $1,200 per worker, and there is much uncertainty about what type of worker they will get in return.

“So, employers and recruiters just hire undocumented workers locally and insulate themselves from all legal responsibilities,” explains Bhurur. “Plus, language skills and familiarity with Malaysian among undocumented migrants can also be a plus point.”

However, undocumented workers are vulnerable to exploitation. Tika has had eight jobs in the last five years because of unpaid wages and abuse. But he still prefers this to his legal employer, who made him work 18 hours a day for just $150 a month, locking him in his apartment during off-duty hours. He says: “At least I know I have nothing to lose because if the next employer becomes abusive or unfair, I can just leave.”

Realizing that workers like Tika without passports can be flight risks, employers often keep a couple of months’ salary as a

Going home

With crackdowns on undocumented workers and the deterioration of the ringgit, many Nepalis have decided to return to Nepal. They can exit Malaysia without a passport if they have temporary travel documents, but will be slapped a five-year entry ban. The documents are supposed to cost only $300, but an agent will charge $800. Even going home costs three months of income on average. “We took a big loan to come here thinking we could send money home, but instead are having to ask our families to send us money so we can return,” says Mahendra.

A less common alternative for undocumented migrants wanting to leave is to pay for a ‘counter-setting,’ which entails bribing an airport immigration officer, also facilitated by agents for over $500. But Bhurur, a Nepali restaurant owner who moonlights as an agent helping returnees, says the number of counter settings have decreased after authorities tightened up.

Using the first option, five undocumented Nepali security guards were on a recent flight to Kathmandu after not being paid for four months by a fellow-Nepali employer. “Living without money despite working hard got unbearable so we left,” says Ramesh, showing a timesheet with over 100 hours a week clocked in. Adda Krishna: “We consider ourselves lucky because at least we could leave.”

Sural was undocumented for two months before being caught in an immigration raid then locked up with 90 inmates in a small room. “There wasn’t enough food and we got skin rashes.” Adda Reina, who spent nearly four months in prison before being deported: “I won’t ever forget 1329, my jail number. I was so excited to go home we walked out of Kathmandu airport barefoot, but it did not matter because we were home and free.”

At Kathmandu airport, workers repatriated from Malaysian detention centres stand out among other returning migrant workers because they are shabbily dressed, in flipflops or barefoot, and are not pushing trolleys with tv sets.

The Nepali Embassy and family members help immigration databases to be repatriated, but there are 1,000 others in Malaysian jails who do not have the
OF BEING ILLEGAL

When migrants run away from their employers leaving their passports behind, many workers are sent back to their villages. Their original dream was to earn enough to buy new clothes and shoes, says a Nepali worker (left, below). Immigration police raided their houses on a Sunday evening. If migrants are able to show required documents during a raid, "OK" is screwed on their hands (right).

top of that, they are also expected to pay part of the rent, food, levy and utilities from their earnings.

Rika, a recent runaway, found out she would not get the promised overtime and had to pay other fees as well. For every small mistake at her job in a fish factory, her employer deducted $15-30 from her salary. She escaped before her contract ended and joined the ranks of the undocumented.

With loans piling up back in Nepal, returning prematurely is not an option for many migrants. There is also the pressure of expectations from family, who collectively decide to send members abroad by selling assets or taking loans.

"My family does not know about my situation. Returning to Nepal early can be an embarrassment and you are seen as a failure in the community, so I wanted to stay longer even if it meant being undocumented," says Gautam.

Even when bosses are kind and jobs decent, some migrants prefer to be undocumented. Rati works in a security company and knows of a Nepali who recently fled to avoid being warned several times for showing up late and for his drinking habits. Rati explains: "When a worker doesn't perform well at work despite warnings he can be sent back, and he knew he was getting close to that point. So he escaped."

Rati admits he left his official job as a cleaner after he heard he could earn more as a security guard. On the other hand, Nisha quit her job in Juhu Bazaar so she could be with her husband in Kuala Lumpur: both now work in neighbouring restaurants run by Nepalis.

In the monopsony of the labour market, employers wield significant power over migrant workers who lack safety nets and are unaware of their legal rights. Documented migrant workers have "OK" screwed on their hands by police, while undocumented ones are handcuffed and taken away.

Migrants at a hotel in Kathmandu (left): waiting for papers from their agent. "It can be today, tomorrow or next week... who knows?"

Undocumented workers arrive in Kathmandu (right) where they will stay for a couple of nights before they go to their destinations. They are banned from Malaysia for two years, but have no mention of going back.

connections to be rescued, and 238 more are waiting for support to get air tickets home.

Back in Kathmandu there is no help to reintegrate these former migrant workers into society and deal with the trauma of forced deportation. Left on their own, returns are disconnected and demoralised. Names have been changed.
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