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"Nepal has more self-respect"

Interview with Minister of Foreign Affairs **Pradeep Gyawali** on Thursday touched on a broad range of topics including Prime Minister K P Oli's forthcoming visit to India, relations with New Delhi and the international community.

Nepali Times: Do you think it is appropriate for the Prime Minister to visit India less than two months after assuming office?

Pradeep Gyawali: Nepal-India relations were frayed during the Constitution-writing process and the Blockade. We took a firm stand, which had the support of the Nepali people as seen in last year's elections. So, India now seems ready to review and correct its course. And it is keen to welcome Prime Minister Oli sooner rather than later.

Do you have concrete indication that New Delhi is ready for a course correction on Nepal?

So far, just some symbolic indications. But in diplomacy, fence-mending is always about symbols first. We are receiving positive signals, and this is exactly what we want. We do not want animosity with any country. But we want to tell the world that we are capable of sorting out our own domestic issues, and all we want from them is goodwill and support.

Are you planning any new agreements with India?

Prime Minister Oli is not going to sign any new treaty or agreement. We will just follow up on past agreements. But India might announce a special package of support for Nepal.

We have heard about a new MoU on water navigation?

That is our priority rather than India's. We are trying to diversify connectivity for trade and prosperity. Our prime minister has a dream to have a merchant marine flying the Nepali flag in the Indian Ocean. But we have yet to find out if it will be viable. We are not yet ready to sign an agreement on this.

If Prime Minister Oli visits India on the dates (6-8 April) proposed by New Delhi, he will miss the



BIKRAM RAI

Boao Forum for Asia 2018.

The prime minister has not yet received a formal invitation for the Boao Forum yet.

Stepping back, do you think the Blockade fundamentally changed Nepal's foreign policy?

The Blockade made us realise that we have not diversified our trade, we have not built infrastructure to store essential supplies and we have never exercised the rights of a landlocked country for access to the sea. The blockade instilled confidence in us that we can overcome any challenge. It also dismissed the narrative that Nepal must tolerate a degree of foreign interference

because it is small and poor. Post-blockade Nepal is no longer afraid of any foreign country. It has more confidence and self-respect.

Nepal reached out to China during the Blockade, but it did not follow up on the effort.

The previous two governments either reversed or did not make any progress on the agreements signed between Nepal and China during Prime Minister Oli's first tenure in 2016. We are back in power now, and we will implement all the past agreements including the trade and transit treaty with China. We will soon finalise projects under China's Belt and Road initiative.

What message do you have for foreign diplomatic missions in Nepal?

They have to mend their ways. We have to address three issues: First, we unnecessarily involved foreigners in our domestic affairs in the past, second, we accepted too much foreign aid in unproductive areas like awareness raising, third, we ourselves must follow guidelines in meeting foreign diplomats.

nepalitimes.com

Go online to listen to full interview in Nepali



FREE FOR ALL CARE

Free world-class medical care in rural Nepal? It sounds too good to be true, but hospitals in remote Achham and Dolakha show it is possible. Go online to see video and for field reports of unique public-private health partnerships. **Page 14-15**

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Right of passage

There are more facilities for the visually impaired, but it is still a long way to full mobility

PAGE 8-9



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POOR HEALTH

For many decades it was an accepted truth that Nepal’s main public health threat was from infectious diseases, and the most cost-effective way to address that was through prevention. In other words, the first line of defence against communicable diseases was communication. Whether it was gastric infections caused by contaminated water, respiratory ailments due to cold and pollution, or diseases spread by insect vectors like malaria – the goal was to spread public awareness about prevention. Radio jingles about oral rehydration salts or acute respiratory infections in children indirectly helped save millions of lives over the years.

Many of these challenges remain. Despite dramatic progress, many Nepalis still lack safe drinking water – not just in the roadless hinterland but right here in the heart of the capital. There are frequent cholera epidemics. Children’s lungs are still affected by indoor smoke from wood fires. Malaria is on the comeback due to resistance and there is an annual epidemic of dengue and encephalitis.

Yet, compounding these endemic infections, there is now an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases and injuries (NCDI). New lifestyle-related cardio-vascular afflictions, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) caused by pollution, or mental health disorders have added to the burden of disease and disability. South Asians are already genetically susceptible to diabetes, and now there are new risk factors due to migration to urban centres. While the world average for prevalence of both types of diabetes is 8%, more than 14% of people in urban centres like Dharan have diabetes – even though the prevalence for rural Taplejung, for instance, is only 1%.

A study by The Nepal NCDI Poverty Commission released this week shows that the burden of NCDIs has doubled in the last 25 years. More than half of all death and disability today are caused by NCDIs, with nearly 15% caused by injuries in conflict, natural disasters or highway accidents.

Being afflicted with an NCDI (or chronic disease) is more fatal in Nepal

than in developed countries because of affordability and restricted accessibility to adequate medical treatment. The poor are disproportionately vulnerable. The NCDI burden in Nepal is also different than in other parts of the world – there is a higher incidence of ischemic cardiac conditions, asthma, neurological disorders, cancers caused by untreated infections and injuries, for instance.

For us, the report’s main finding, and most damning inference, is about how treatment of NCDIs is driving Nepalis into indebtedness and penury. The survey shows that half of all medical expenditure of families is out-of-pocket, and 60% of that is for treatment of NCDIs. This is because the government spends only 11% of its budget on health care, and only 6.4% of that is for treatment of non-communicable diseases. Despite the proven link between chronic ailments and poverty, donors still allocate only 1% of their development assistance for NCDIs.

Treatment of injuries, gastro-intestinal infections, heart diseases, cancers, kidney and liver diseases are the most impoverishing NCDs for households. The report’s main conclusions are corroborated by our field report from Achham and Kavre this week (page 14-15) about how the lack of even basic surgical facilities in district hospitals and health posts is forcing Nepalis to undertake expensive and extended trips to private hospitals in the cities.

Another recent study of 39 government hospitals commissioned by the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) showed a huge unmet need in remote areas for basic surgery like caesarians, orthopaedics, and abdominal operations. Nepal’s surgery rate is well below the Lancet Commission’s target of 5,000 operations per 100,000 population. Only one-third of patients currently can reach an orthopedic surgeon within two hours of travel.

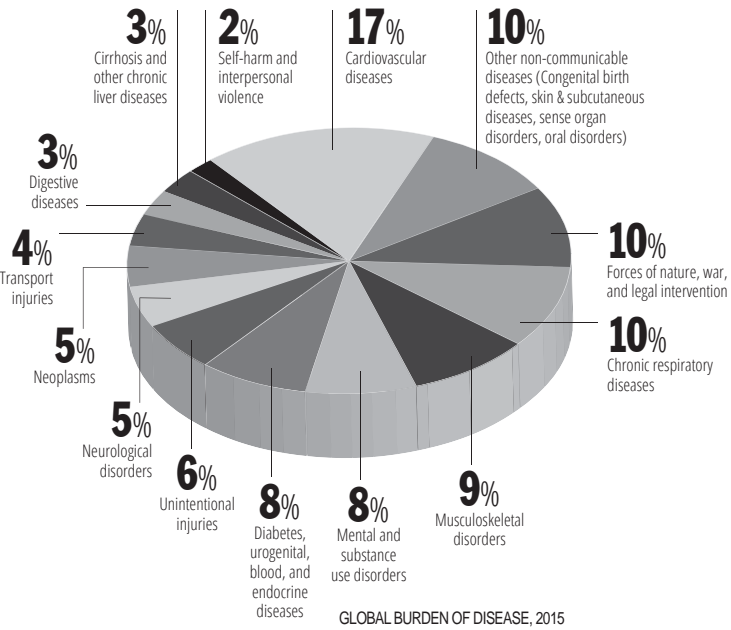
The public-private partnership models that NSI and Possible are carrying out in remote government hospitals are ways to plug this gap: ensuring minimum staffing of a MDGP physician, anaesthesia assistant, staff nurse and biomedical technician in each

hospital can offer basic treatment and surgery in remote areas, reduce the need for referrals, and save household income. At present Nepal’s density of hospitals with such staffing and equipment is at 0.4 per 100,000 population, as against the Lancet Commission’s recommendation of 20/100,000.

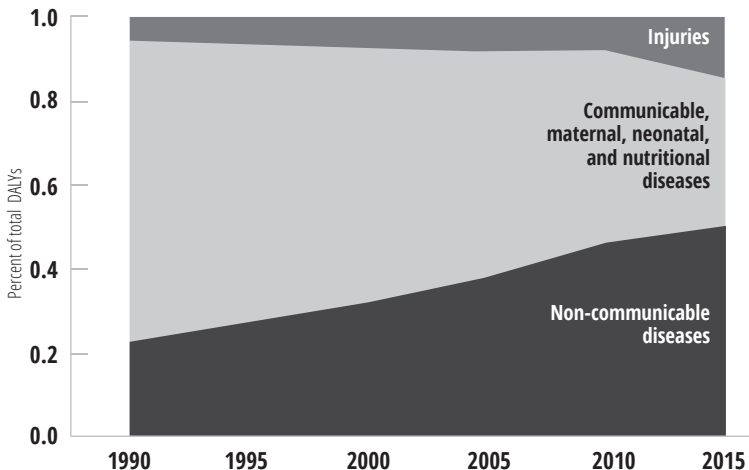
The Nepal NCDI Poverty Commission report suggests additional measures: national health care delivery should respond to the increasing burden of NCDIs by decentralising. Impoverishment of households due to the high cost of treatment should be addressed through disease-specific policies for high-cost conditions and expansion of insurance coverage.

It is often said that health is wealth, but in Nepal wealth is health. That can only be changed by making treatment of chronic conditions and injuries accessible, affordable, inclusive and equitable.

Major causes of non-communicable diseases and injuries



Share of burden of NCDs and injuries, 1990-2015



ONLINE PACKAGES



BLIND SPOT

Navigating through Kathmandu’s potholes and craters is a hassle even for every day commuters – for the visually impaired it is the thing of nightmares. Watch this GoPro video to experience what it is like for blind people to walk on the streets of Kathmandu, with its horrendous traffic and dug-up roads.

Story page 8-9.



FREE FOR ALL CARE

Free world-class medical care in rural Nepal? It sounds too good to be true, but the group Possible is doing just that by bridging the gap in access to basic medical treatment in a remote area. Government hospitals in Achham and Dolakha have reduced patient referrals to the city through this unique public-private partnership. See how it works in this video.

Story page 14-15.

TRUE, BUT HOW?

Good point, and why the hell not? (‘Minting money by minting money at home’, Anil Chitrakar, #902). But who can we trust to actually operate these where every government official is so corrupt?

Man Pun

Contractors representing foreign firms doing jobs for Nepal will make sure that this never happens to ensure their kickbacks. Unfortunate reality in the country.

Ramesh Shrestha

MEDICAL DRONES

Can someone ask our Pun ji how this drone is different from those already available in the market? (‘Drones to the rescue, Lucia de Vries, #902) Low cost? Any other benefits?

Basant Giri

ILLOGICAL

I really don’t understand how Bhattarai is held up as some kind of great intellectual (‘Baburam’s U-turn’, Om Astha Rai, #902). Making statements like this clearly shows that he is unable to ‘tell sugar from bullshit’. How can anyone rationally think that the Khas-Arya ruling elite are marginalised?

Alex Ferguson

PRESERVING HERITAGE

Development is substantial but preserving heritage is immensely important (‘Water of the ages’, Alok Siddhi Tuladhar, #902).

Ashim Raj Mktan

U.S. EM-POWERMENT

Isn’t the US just in the process of cutting trade agreements with other countries? (‘Em-powering South Asia, Alaina B Teplitz, #902).

Stewie McLean

LOL

As a resident of Gwarko, this gave me the laugh of the day (‘Broken news’, Backside, #902)! Long live Nepali times! My favourite newspaper ever!

Karen Ale

Excellent , The Ass deserves 90/100!

Rajendra Dahal

WHAT'S TRENDING



Drones to the rescue

by Lucia de Vries

Our coverage of Magsaysay Prize Winner Mahabir Pun’s National Innovation Centre testing drones to deliver medicines to patients in remote areas of Nepal was shared widely on the social web. Go online to read how the project can help rural communities, prevent the brain drain of Nepali youth, and watch young Nepali engineers build a medicopter and test fly it. This was the most watched video last week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter



5 ‘funny’ things about Nepal

by Sumana Shrestha

‘As long as not-for-profit crowds out the employment sector by paying more, for-profit can never compete or really develop. After all, who can compete with what looks like a never-ending supply of free money?’ This satirical piece generated vigorous debate online and was the most read story last week.

Most visited online page

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Nepal’s fertility rate has been going down despite contraceptive prevalence rate remaining low. Read more to find out why

bharat koirala @lampuchhre
Interesting and convincing perspective! Though low in number, females are also migrating.

Kunda Dixit @kundadixit
Medical drone test flights at @MahabirPun’s National Innovation Centre lab. For @nepalitimes video and story click here: <https://bit.ly/2pJ0I65>

Bhushan Tuladhar @BhushanTuladhar
I am glad to see @MahabirPun’s new lab coming up at the scrap yard of Research Centre for Applied Science & Technology (RECAST) of TU. Hope this will reactivate #RECAST & allow more Nepali innovators to work on their dreams and make them fly.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Considered one of the greatest technological achievements of the #Kathmandu Valley civilisation, hiti have dried out due to underground waterways being blocked by rampant construction & other infrastructure, writes Alok Siddhi Tuladhar.

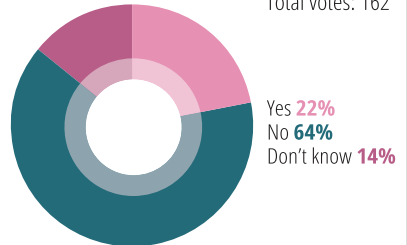
Prakash Mktan @PRAMOK
In Nepal even the technology of any standards seem to fail miserably...because of high standards of destruction...ill planning and no moral values...



Weekly Internet Poll #903

Q. Should Prime Minister Oli expand the Cabinet further to accommodate the RJP-N and FSP-N?

Total votes: 162



Weekly Internet Poll #904
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Is Prime Minister K P Oli’s planned visit to India necessary at this point?

GLOBAL BURDEN OF DISEASE 2015



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Why the

The market has gone into a tailspin as the private sector awaits the Communist government’s economic roadmap



Chandra Dhakal
Vice Chair, FNCCI

When Malaysian ex-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad visited Kathmandu in 2014, I asked him about the essence of the Malaysian model of development. His reply: “The State acted as a facilitator, encouraging the private sector to accelerate economic growth.” In Nepal, I was given the runaround for four months to have approvals for an investment. We must end this rent-seeking culture.



Hari Bhakta Sharma,
Chair, Confederation of Nepalese Industries

There are as many as 26 laws that regulate Nepali industries and businesses. Can we not just have one integrated law? The private sector is often accused of running cartels to earn more profits, which may be true to some extent. The government must do away with syndicates, but the entire private sector should not be painted with the same brush.



Pashupati Murarka,
Ex-Chair, FNCCI

The end of the political transition is encouraging, but the new government must clearly tell us what role it expects from us, how it intends to partner with us and what it will do to remove policy hurdles. We are in a state of wait and see. Now we hear that some local governments are imposing more taxes on local industries and even shutting down some banks. That only increases our fear.

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BIZ BRIEFS

Extra luggage

Turkish Airlines is offering special fares and extra baggage allowance to students travelling from Kathmandu to Europe, USA

and Canada via its hub in Istanbul. The airlines announced baggage allowance of three pieces of 23 kg each for students travelling to US and Canada, and a total of 40 kg for those travelling to Europe. Call (01) 4438363

Honda lubrication

Sykar Trading has launched new packs of environment friendly engine oil, ensuring better lubricity, wear protection, longer engine life and clutch performance for bikes and scooters.

Y9 in town

Huawei Y9 is hitting shops in Nepal in first week of April with features like split screen and expandable memory up to 256GB. The

Y9 2018

smartphone has dual rear cameras with 13 MP and 2 MP and an aperture of F/2.0, and 2 front cameras with 16 MP and 2 MP with an aperture of F/2.2 as well as a selfie toning flash.

Index furniture

Index furniture is back with its annual discount of upto 40% till 23 April 2018 for its sofas, chairs, beds, cabinets, wardrobes, tables, bookshelves and more

items. Customers can visit its showrooms at Steel Tower, Jawalakhel or Metro Park, Uttar Dhoka, Lazimpat or order online at www.indexfurniture.com.np.

Greeting Greeks

Qatar Airways launched a four times weekly flight service to Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece. Committing to connect travellers from Nepal and Greece.

private sector is spooked

Ramesh Kumar

The Rastra Bank has injected Rs15 billion in new currency notes since mid-February, which is the highest amount ever pumped into the economy in just one month. The share market has hit a new low, remittance is down to alarmingly low levels despite migrant workers earning more overseas, and despite the promise of economic upturn.

At the core of the crisis is the new united Communist government's inability to clearly state what its economic policy is. There is hope for growth and development, but there is also fear for tighter regulations.

On 15 February, when UML Chair KP Oli was sworn in as new prime minister, there was Rs461 billion in circulation, and the Rastra Bank topped it up. But where has the money vanished?

The NRB officials say businessmen and traders here are hoarding currency, because they still don't trust Indian

currency after India's demonetisation drive in 2016. The demand for Indian bills has plummeted -- from INR500 million to INR150 million a day.

But that is not the only reason. Nepali businessmen and traders are dealing more in the informal economy, and even channeling funds into India fearing tighter measures at home.

After the Left Alliance won a landslide in last year's elections, the share market has crashed 300 points. Big players in this sector are fast divesting, and mutual funds are stagnant.

A trader told Nepali Times: "Those who had been simultaneously running businesses in Nepal and India are slowly withdrawing from here."

The number of outbound migrant workers has declined, but it is still higher than returnees. Their salaries have increased in most countries in recent months, but remittance inflows have been going down except for a slight growth in January.

Analysts suspect migrant workers' earnings are coming through illegal channels like 'hundi' paying their families here in Nepali currency. Hundi operators are abetting capital flight, and aggravating the credit crunch.

Prime Minister Oli's party won a landslide in last year's elections on the promise of economic growth. But he is finding it difficult to reassure investors. At a South Asian business conclave in Kathmandu last week, Oli said his government will partner with the private sector, but looks like there is a lot of nervousness.

Oli's selection of Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatriwada and Industry Minister Matrika Yadav did not reassure the private sector. Both are considered market unfriendly. Khatriwada has already upset businessmen by introducing a new measure to fix customs duties to supposedly discourage tax evasion.

Shekhar Golchha, Vice Chair of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), says: "The private sector is suspicious of the Communist government because of its political ideology, but we should wait until it unveils its economic roadmap." ■



Saurabh Jyoti,
Jyoti Group

More than 500,000 Nepali youth enter the labour market every year. Only 20% of them get jobs within the country, only 7% them in the formal sector. The base of a digital economy has been created in Nepal, and the government must capitalise on it. It must promote e-commerce to control tax evasion and reduce the size of information economy.



Anjan Shrestha,
Laxmi Group

If the government views the private sector as an engine of economic growth, it must trust us. The government should facilitate business, not get into it itself. That is our job. We finally have a stable government, and many industrialists and businessmen are encouraged to invest more. But a lot will depend on what the new government's economic policy will be, and how it will engage us.

PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI AND GOPEN RAI

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Gyaneshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal

Infectious enthusiasm for travel

There is never a good moment to contract typhoid, and I’ve had it three times in Nepal. With a two-week incubation period, many different strains, and highly contagious through shit and spit, I never did work out where I picked it up each time.



The first was on a 1985 recce, a trek that turned out to be the nascence of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP). It is humbling to find that you cannot put one foot in front of another, especially when hiking with super-scientists Roger Payne (whales), Iain Douglas Hamilton (elephants) and Bruce Bunting (WWFUS).

We had been despatched on our mission by Nepali conservationist Hemanta Mishra who went on with others to push through the ground-breaking ACAP idea. Nepal’s conservation areas and especially Annapurna are still cited as a world model of how a nationally protected park managed by local communities can become self-supporting through tourism.

Iain and I were climbing the Landrung hill through sunny terraced fields when the fever hit. One minute I was fine, and the next I was shuddering with sweat and dazed with weakness. Every step was an effort and the afternoon sun sheered into my eyes.

“If this was Kenya I would

Typhoid is just another part of Nepal’s adventure tourism package



suspect bilharzia or yellow fever,” Iain declared unhelpfully. He supported me safely home, peering with puzzled concern through heavy horn-rimmed glasses. Despite a variety of antibiotics the fever lasted 16 days, debilitating limbs, sapping the soul, the mind teetering on the edge of delirium. It took me weeks to find the strength to walk across my tiny garden, and many months before I recovered normal

energy levels. Nearly ten years later I caught a lighter bout in Kathmandu and lay shivering in our Maharajganj house trying to get better quicker by enforced rest, gripped by the first Poldark video series about glamorous smugglers along the Cornish coast. It was 1994 and I needed to regain my strength fast as I was due in Kyrgyzstan -- tourism colleague Oliver Bennett of Deloittes was relying on me for a government tourism marketing strategy. Oliver was an old school consultant, always dressing as though in his native city of London -- to my certain knowledge wearing pinstriped suits on every mountain, lake and beach assignments.

The shortage of fuel in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan meant the Bishkek airport was closed. Instead, battling weakness, I flew to Tashkent and was driven 12 hours through breathtakingly remote country by a couple of nuclear physicists who needed to make a buck – the economy was a shambles and I never met a single Kyrgyz who did not long to be back in the USSR.

Nurturing my strength and thanks to Oliver’s protection, I

managed to struggle through. Part of our brief was ecotourism training sessions with the budding Kyrgyz private sector. Emerging from the Soviet system, they had trouble with the concept of capitalism, enquiring with all seriousness whether their companies were permitted to make a profit.

Exploring the historic Silk Route attractions of Kyrgyzstan, the hooves of Genghis Khan’s invaders could be readily imagined hammering across the open grasslands. We sampled Issikul Lake mineral treatments, formerly reserved for the communist elite, pummelled by fierce ladies in white coats with strong fingers. In woodland *dachas*, as guests of friendly mountaineers trying to start adventure travel businesses, we drank vodka in fragrant saunas.

We marvelled at ancient engraved marker stones and discussed snow leopard viewing with Elburz mountain smugglers. I galloped knee to knee down a verdant valley with the gallant EBRD client Khalid after milking mares with yurt-dwelling nomads. At the evening feast Oliver, squatting in his crumpled suit, had to cope with the prized sheep’s eyes. I was disdained having asked one brightly clad nomad lady how long her child had been riding horses -- since birth, of course.

By the third attack I thought I was getting used to typhoid. This time was in Mustang with a group of down-under friends on a 2008 circuit of the trans-Himalayan high spots around Lo Manthang. We had hoped to circumambulate Mount Kailash so it was a compromise,

defeated by the fluctuating vagaries of Tibetan visa policy.

They were an experienced bunch, and loved the rugged walking and splashed ochres of Mustang’s grandiose scenery (*photo, left*). We had happily negotiated sheer drops to view prehistoric paintings, explored ancient stupas within a cliff-face cave, avoided charging *thar* on a steep hillside, and even glimpsed a pair of snow leopards on a distant ridge – or so the excited horsemen assured us.

I was zigzagging up the dusty trail to Tsarang, having linked arms to cross the flooded river in our boots, and couldn’t understand why my unwilling feet suddenly had no energy. Highland Doctor Jamie was waiting for me at the top. “I’m all right,” I protested.

“No you’re not.” Jamie’s Scottish lilt was emphatic. “Looks like typhoid to me and we can’t risk waiting for a helicopter.” For the next three days back to Jomosom he followed my pony closely as I swayed precariously in the saddle, helping me stagger into my tent at night. Haggard, dusty and sweat stained I remember little of the flight to Kathmandu, and this time was hospitalised on a drip, and instructed to stay in bed for days. I did not demur, and can confirm first hand that compulsory rest is the best road to recovery. 🇳🇵



How To Get Things Done in Nepal

Replacing polluting three-wheelers in Kathmandu with electric vehicles was a lesson in why money can’t buy you everything

Most discussions about development and entrepreneurship revolves around money, how much, where it will come from, and how cheaply it can be obtained.

If money alone could ensure development and prosperity, this country would have gone far already. Nepal isn’t poor, its resources are poorly managed. Besides, if we were really short of money, the government could easily print more.



Many years ago, Kathmandu valley replaced its smoke belching diesel powered three wheelers by converting them into clean electric three-wheel public transport. Revisiting the process and the steps may help us better understand the true nature of change and how things actually happen.

First, the public has to be outraged enough to take action. There have to be protests about bad air that sting the eyes, and the toxins in the pollution. Second, there has to be a viable alternative technology along with people who know how to build and operate it. These knowledgeable people have to convene and take the lead, often by setting up a company or another legal entity. Then we have to do the math so that we know the costs, benefits and the level of support equired.

The next set of steps involves politics. There are votes to be won, then there are the bureaucrats who always seem to have a thousand reasons why something cannot be done, except when it involves a junket to a foreign country with attractive perks. They are often suspicious of the private sector,



BIKRAM RAI

except when they have someone who needs a job there.

Then comes the really difficult task of selling the idea to the Super Ministry – the Ministry of Finance to waive taxes and for tax holidays for a few years so the investors can reduce their risk by recovering some of the cost. It was easier to do this in the Panchayat days as long as the inauguration

of the venture was around the three days of celebration of the kings’ birthday. In a multi party democracy, who you tag along, who makes the introductions and who has several rain checks to cash can be very handy.

Next is the really difficult task of telling the public that the cost of the ride is going to go up because clean air costs more than polluted air. The print media

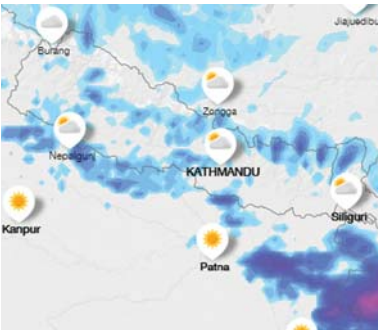
and radio played a big part in the Safa Tempo introduction. If people sense that individuals are going to benefit more than the public, conspiracy theories will appear and rumours will replace information. Once the public is on your side, there is nothing in Nepal that succeeds like people power. Next, the most difficult part was to get the profitable route numbers for the electric vehicles.

So we had the entrepreneurs, the enterprise, the policies, the price, and the clients on board. The electric vehicles have done well so far, and during the Indian Blockade, people demanded more.

It is important to understand that the Indian Blockade is a good excuse to provide even more support to the electric three wheelers and expand the fleet across the country. With much cheaper hydropower coming on line, the NEA will do well to set up a differential tariff so that charging these vehicles at night will be affordable. Electric charging stations could very well be the next line of business for differently able Nepalis, and can contribute towards a more inclusive Nepal. Next time you pass a Safa Tempo remind yourself that Kathmandu achieved what most cities have failed to do.

Having money is well and good, but it is the other intangibles that are more important. Often, the conversation does not go beyond money and that is why we see so many failures, so many frustrated people who are cynical and give up. The electric three wheelers of Kathmandu can be a good case study that ought to be written up to be taught in business schools as a model for How To Get Things Done in Nepal – a crash course for those who think money can buy everything. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc.



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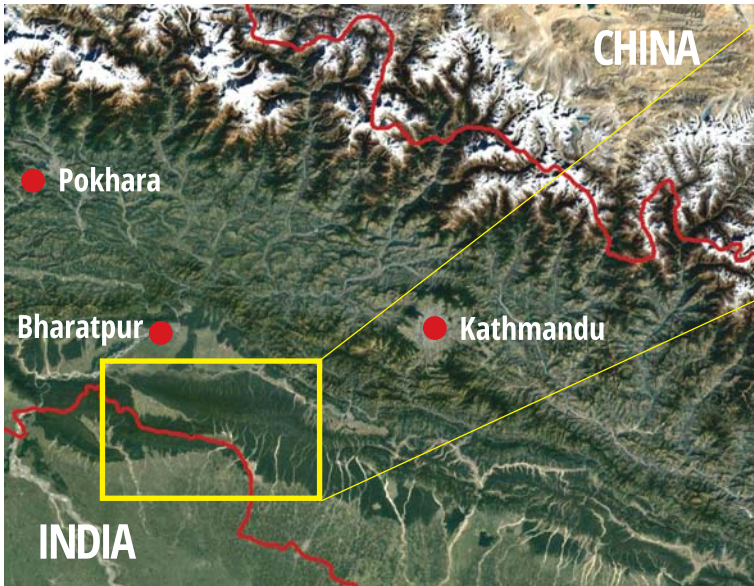
Going places together - qatarairways.com



MANMADE: The border between India and Nepal in Parsa District is clearly visible as a straight line in these two pictures taken in 2009 (*left*) and this month (*right*). The forested Balmiki Nature Reserve in India is on left, and the rice fields of Nirmal Basti in Nepal on right.



PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT



The Nepal-India border showing Chitwan National Park and location of Nirmal Basti in satellite images in 1984, 2006 and 2016.

GOOGLE EARTH

Borderline

Google Earth image of Central Nepal showing location (*yellow rectangle*) of the border region in the aerial photographs (*above*) and magnified in satellite images (*right*).

National boundaries are usually not visible from the air. They are just lines on a map, and you can cross entire continents without knowing which country you are flying over. Exceptions are the bright halogen lamps on the tightly-guarded border fence in the desert between India and Pakistan which can be clearly seen from an airliner

flying overhead at 11,000m. Even from the Space Shuttle, the Koreas appear in sharp contrast: bright on the south and completely dark north of the DMZ. However, the Nepal-India border is open and is not even noticeable from ground level. One side of a tea shop is in India, and on the other side is in Nepal, where you have to reset your watch 15

minutes ahead. Many visitors who have strayed into India and unknowingly taken pictures with their mobiles have been detained by Indian BSF. But there are some sections of the Nepal-India border that can be detected from the air, and one such is a straight line in Parsa district where a forested patch of the Balmiki Nature Reserve in India

is separated from the rice fields of Nirmal Basti on the Nepal side (*see pictures, above*). Google Earth satellite images show the border visible even in 1984, and the steady deforestation on the Nepal side by 2016. The frontier is visible from the left side of planes as they begin their descent into Kathmandu. The other section of the India-

Nepal border that can also be seen on satellite image is in Dang, where the slopes of the Chure Range north of the border are severely denuded. **Kunda Dixit** nepalitimes.com Go online for more satellite images and photographs.

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The right of pa

There are more facilities for the visually impaired, but there is a

Sahina Shrestha

On a recent morning as Nabina Gyawali and her husband Arjun Paudel make their way home to Balkhu, they hit their first snag: the tactile guiding pavement supposed to help them navigate lead them straight into a concrete electricity pole.

The guiding blocks run along the bus park sidewalk which are a favourite spot for people to urinate. Some bystanders stare and others trip on the white cane as the two make their way through the crowd. Rude street vendors spreading their wares on the guiding blocks ask them to move away.

“Half my disability is due to the lack of infrastructure. In America, I was not blind for even a moment, here in Nepal I am blind at every moment,” says Gyawali, who visited the US three years ago on an exchange program.

The streets of Kathmandu are bad enough for the sighted, but for the blind it is a nightmare of reckless drivers, haphazard parking, piles of boulders, water pipes, open drainage and potholes.

The 2011 census showed there are 96,000 visually impaired -- 0.5% of the population. Nepal introduced the Disability Act 35 years ago, it is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in 2012, the government approved accessibility



guidelines. All this doesn't mean much here at street level.

“On paper Nepal has the best policies in South Asia but there is no implementation,” laments Ramesh Pokharel, President of Nepal Association of the Blind (NAB) who fractured his left arm and tore an ankle ligament when he fell 3m down an open drain on his way to school in Pokhara. He

was hospitalised for 45 days after which he went to the municipality to ask it to cover the drain. Nothing happened.

One of the major challenges these days is to navigate the city where streets are being dug up everywhere. “It is really difficult because the road is not the same as when we passed through in the morning and there is no

information to guide us,” says Ikchya KC, 29, who started losing her vision gradually over the years.

Another challenge is while crossing roads. Says KC: “There are no indicators, whether tactile or audio, at zebra crossings, and motorbikes rarely stop. They try to drive around us and that gets dangerous.”

Sita Subedi was crossing the

road at Lagankhel recently when a traffic police pulled her up for not using the zebra. “I had to explain that I am partially sighted and that I cannot see the crossing,” recalls Subedi, the chair of Nepal Blind Women Association.

Stray cattle and dogs are also serious hazards. Arjun Paudel was walking down Rato Pul a few years ago when a bull charged at him. “I was scared and nearly jumped off the bridge. Passersby saved me,” he remembers.

Most visually impaired rely on public transportation to go around the city and although there are reserved seats for them, during rush hour it is difficult to enforce the rule. “There are people who willingly leave seats for us and go out of their way to help, but others don't give up seats reserved for those with disabilities,” says Gyawali.

While it is easier for white cane users to be identified and assisted, those with partial or low visual ability have a much more difficult time. Parwati Shrestha, 23, has partial sight and does not usually ask for the reserved seat or discounts on buses. “My disability is invisible and it is just tedious having to explain myself over and over again,” she says.

Blind women have another problem: gropers on buses. Gyawali says she once pushed a middle-aged man off the seat for making an unwanted advance.

Despite their challenges, the blind say there are signs of improvement and society is more aware of their special needs. “Public attitude has changed a lot, there was a time when the buses wouldn't stop for us but these days

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Passage

A long way for full mobility

both the driver and conductor help us get on and off and ensure we have a seat,” says KC.

Rajita Regmi finds people in Kathmandu more helpful than those in Butwal, where she is from: “I have limited mobility so I find it difficult to use public transportation. At home my father drops me and picks me up from school, but here in Kathmandu I found people were more willing to help.”

Apart from increasing awareness and changing attitude of the people, adopting universal design and mobility friendly technologies is necessary to make the roads safer for persons with disabilities.

Nara Bahadur Limbu of NBA has some more suggestions: “There need to be proper tactile pavements as well as audio and indicators at traffic lights, more accessible public toilets and public buildings. Buses should have audio announcements and tactile indicators to indicate stops.” 📺

BLIND SPOT



Navigating through Kathmandu's potholes and craters is a hassle even for every day commuters – for the visually impaired it is the thing of nightmares. Watch this GoPro video to experience what it is like for blind people to walk on the streets of Kathmandu, with its horrendous traffic and dug-up roads.

nepalitimes.com



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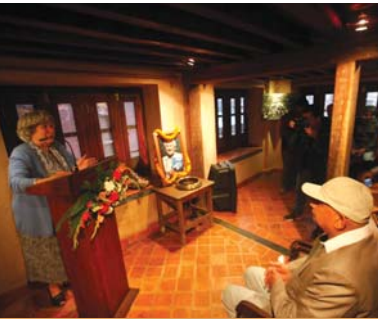
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EVENTS



Toni Hagen's photos
50 photos of Kathmandu Valley and its surroundings taken during the 1950s by Swiss geologist Toni Hagen on display.
30 March-1 April, Ganchhe, Bhaktapur

Organic agro fair
A fair hosting more than 40 stalls of organic tea, coffee, vegetables, juice, herbs, spices and more from all over the country.
30 March-2 April, Patan Museum, 9851082828, 9869525545

Night market
Celebrating women from around the world with screening of the movie, *Emerging Women of Burma*. Join in for a relaxing night of art, music, performances, food, and a unique variety of handcrafted items.
30 March, 5-9pm, NexUs Culture Café, Maitri Marg, Patan, (01) 5522393

Symphonic existence
An exhibition of traditional, contemporary, landscape and surreal paintings by seven artists from Pagoda Group.
30 March- 5 April, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal



KJC spring camp
Spring camp for children aged 5-12 to explore musical instruments and learn the basics of music and movement. Classes on jumba, self defence, acting, drama, personality development, wall climbing, field trip, arts and crafts.
2-6 April, 10am-4pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5543554, 9813556945

Standup comedy
Book your seat for a comedy ride with standup comedians from Funny Side up & Cactus Comedy Club.
31 March, 5:30-9pm, Around the Corner, Bansbari, Rs200, 9851027062



Greasy Laundry
Greasy Laundry, a funky clothing store inspired by Nepali lifestyle and rock n' roll, invites everyone for its grand opening. Performances by Phatcowlee, The Author and Flekke to pump up the event.
31 March, 12pm onwards, Greasy Laundry, Tangelwood, Tangel

Indie visuals
A call by Jazz Productions to all filmmakers and film enthusiasts to participate in the screening of independent short films.
31 March, 5pm onwards, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5531354



Storytelling workshop
An intensive 2 week workshop for photographers with DSLR, who want to upgrade from technical base of digital photography to mastering in digital storytelling: application to be filled by 5 April.
13 - 26 April, 2-6pm (weekdays), 10am-4pm (Saturdays), photo.circle HQ, Jhamsikhel, Rs8,500, 9808380219

Photowalk
Photowalk for a cause: inviting amateur and professional photographers for a meet up at Mangal Bazar, to take pictures of the heritage site, to raise funds for an orphanage.
31 March, 8:30am onwards, Rotaract Club of Lalitpur, Pulchok, Rs50, 9810220220

MUSIC



Pandora's Jukebox
Tumbleweed Inc., Kramasha Nepal, Deplore, The Mellow Malady and ASM sharing the stage to perform their original music scores.
30 March, 6pm onwards, Club 25 Hours, Tangelwood, Tangel, 9801057602

Gazal & Sufi night
Enjoy the weekend with beautiful Sufi and Ghazal in the restaurant's garden along with a drink, dinner and full moon.
31 March, 6:30-9:30pm, Pauline's Garden, Aaneek Marg, (01) 4221537

Flekkie ft. Marta
Irine Giri, who goes by the name Flekkie, blends poems and electronic music to express her thoughts and emotions. Marta del Grandi mixes pop, jazz and electronics with influences of the '90s and sounds of nature. Enjoy the music of these artists with Prazada's selection of chilled draught beers and special pizzas.
30 March, Prazada, Baluwater, (01) 4410473



JFA+Vital
As a part of the Base Camp Music Festival Finale, Joint Family Internationale will be playing some Reggae, followed by DJ Vital.
30 March, 8pm-12am, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs300, 9851075172

Farhan Akhtar
The versatile Bollywood artist Farhan Akhtar, who made his singing debut in the movie *Rock On*, will be playing hit songs for the Kathmandu crowd.
7 April, 3-9pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs2,000 (gold), Rs4,000 (platinum), For Tickets: 9851104277

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 30 March

The award winning movie, *The Shape of Water* is set in Baltimore 1962, at the height of the Cold War. The story follows a mute cleaner, Elisa (Sally Hawkins) who works at a secret government laboratory. Life is lonesome for Elisa until the research facility captures a humanoid amphibian creature. As a result of her curiosity, Elisa starts visiting the creature and eventually forms a unique relationship with it. What happens afterwards is an adventurous fairytale story. The 2017 American fantasy film is directed by Guillermo del Toro and written by del Toro and Vanessa Taylor.

DINING



Bricks Café
A multi cuisine restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu offering flavourful dishes in a pleasant surrounding.
Kupondole, (01) 5521756

The Café
Experience authentic Asian cuisine prepared by the hotel's chefs.
30 March, 6:30-10:00pm, The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs2,200, (01) 5171234



Le Sherpa
With a focus on seasonal and local vegetables and fruits, Chef Ram Hari and Canadian Chef Emily jointly create a new menu for Summer.
Maharajunj, (01) 4428604

Embers
A spacious yet cosy place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites. Try their traditional marinated boneless chicken kebab served with vegetable, rice and chutney.
Krishna Galli, Pulchok, (01) 5555306

New Orleans
Offering a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. Rosemary chicken and hamburgers will make you return back for more.
Jhamel, (01) 5522708

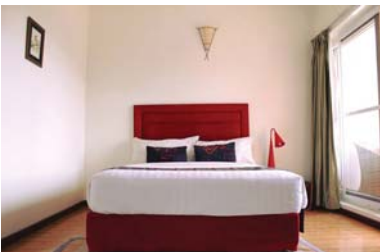


Evoke Café & Bistro
Juicy and tender paneer, chicken and pork skewers served with green salad on the side to go with 'Comedy Tuk Tuk', an April fool's special.
Jhamsikhel, 9851111051

GETAWAY



Royal Singi Hotel
The distinctive and symbolic art elements of Tibetan culture, made by local artisans add to the serenity and charm of the Potala suite at Royal Singi hotel.
Lal Durbar, Kamaladi, (01) 4424190/ 4424191



Shaligram Hotel
The boutique hotel inside the Shaligram Village provides simplistic living and comfort. Their rooftop standard room in the residence wing is perfect even for longer stays.
Jawalakhel, (01) 5554558

Yatri Suites and Spa
Pamper yourself with a relaxing spa treatment which includes full body massage, body scrub, sauna and steam.
Amrit Marg, Thamel, Reservation: 9802063086

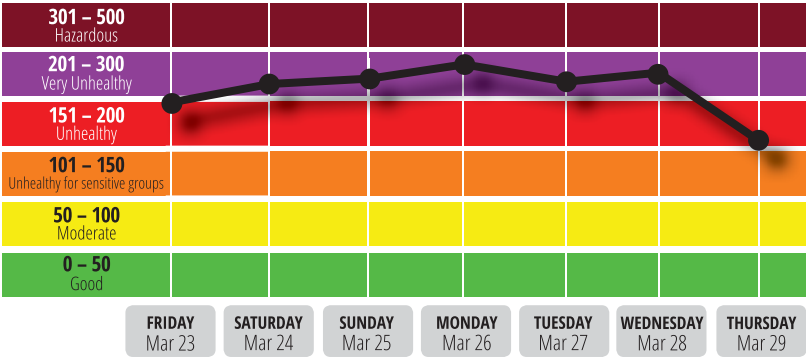


Hotel Barahi
Enjoy a great view of Phewa Lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 460617/463526

Retreat at Damaar
A retreat for contemplators and creators in an undisturbed sanctuary to enrich and enlighten your inner self.
Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 23-29 March



Thanks to the thunderstorm and rain over Kathmandu Valley on Wednesday night, the Air Quality Index for Thursday morning was 'only' at the Unhealthy Red Band in measurements taken at the Phora Darbar Monitoring Station. The rest of the week (even Saturday) was in the Very Unhealthy Purple Level. These are daily averages for air quality, visit www.nepalitimes.com for live hourly updates of AQI in Kathmandu. On Thursday, US Ambassador Alaina B Teplitz and the Minister for Forests and Environment launched the US Embassy sponsored 'Safa Hawa' app for Android and iPhones that gives up to the minute AQI data in both English and Nepali.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

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The insect that changed Nepal's history

Our sense of the country's history expands when we think beyond the political

Tom Robertson

Since 1900, who has most significantly changed the flow of events? Many people would point to influential political actors like Chandra Shumshere or King Mahendra, even Prachanda.

My answer: the *Anopheles minimus* mosquito.

Although mountains loom large on Nepal's horizon, much of the country's history has been shaped by a lowland disease: malaria. One visitor to Nepal in the 1920s (somewhat dramatically) called malaria 'a name which hums an undertone of death throughout the chronicles of Nepal'.

Malaria has long plagued the Tarai, but also, places like Pokhara in the hills. Just as malaria shaped Nepal's past, its almost complete removal in the 1960s and 1970s has shaped Nepal's present, launching vast demographic, environmental, and political changes that are still playing out.

Anopheles minimus was a central actor in these stories. It carried the country's most dangerous malaria and its susceptibility to chemical spraying hastened the decline of the disease. Had this little mosquito possessed different habits, Nepal's history would have unfolded very differently: malaria would have killed fewer people, and its removal would not have been so quick and complete.

Many people think of malaria as a Tarai disease that originates in dirty, stagnant water during the monsoon. In fact, Nepal's malaria was several different diseases, came mostly from clean water, declined during the height of the monsoon, plagued the hills as well as the Tarai, and affected various parts of the Tarai differently. 'The whole of the Tarai,' one scholar has noted, 'was not equally malarious.'

Malaria is not just one disease, but 'a kaleidoscope of different infections'. Nepal had two types of malaria: vivax ('the great debilitator') and falciparum ('the deadly killer'). Falciparum often caused anemia, and if untreated, brought epilepsy, blindness, brain misfunctions—and even coma and death.

It was most likely *falciparum* that Father Giuseppe de Rovato described in 1868: 'At the foot of the hills, the country is called "Teriani"; and there the air is very unwholesome from the middle of March to the middle of November: and people in their passage catch a disorder called in the language of that country *Aul*, which is a putrid fever, and of which the generality of people, who are attacked with it, die in a few days.'

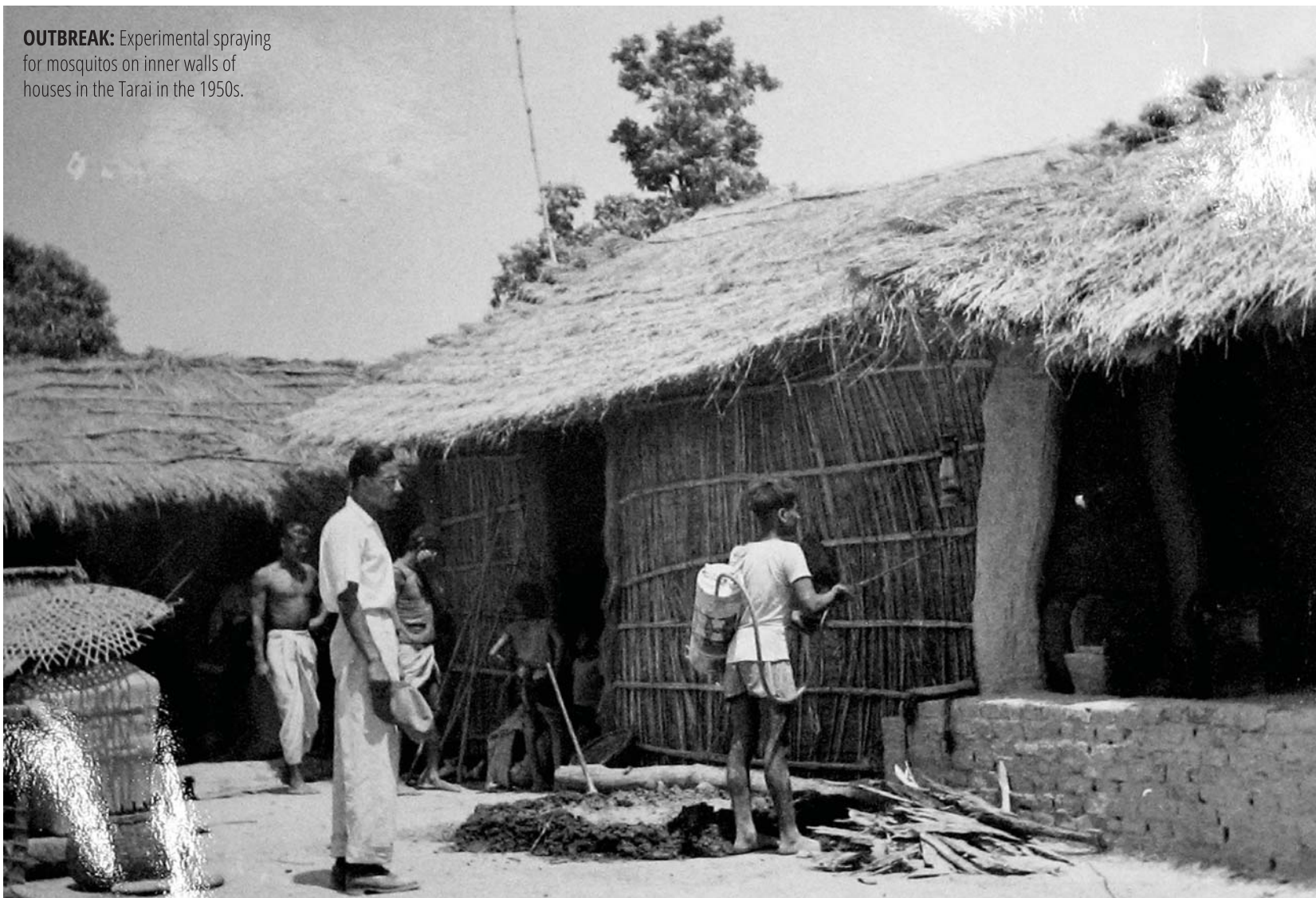
Two mosquito species carried malaria in Nepal: *Anopheles fluviatilis* and *Anopheles minimus*. Both preferred to breed near clean water in Nepal's two main malarial zones: hill valleys, and the forest belt on either side of the Chure Range.

'No elevation short of 3,000 to 4,000 feet above the sea,' British resident Brian Hodgson noted in the mid nineteenth century, 'suffices to rid the atmosphere of the low Himalaya from malaria.'

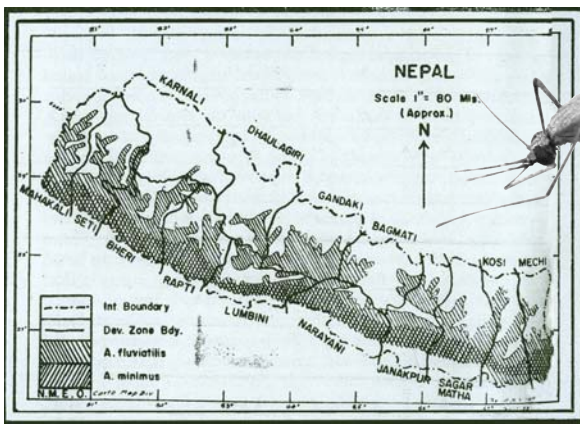
This was mostly vivax, not falciparum, but it still had big impact: hill communities generally placed their settlements above 3-4,000 ft and only partially cultivated the fertile land of valley floors.

Another surprise: not all of

OUTBREAK: Experimental spraying for mosquitos on inner walls of houses in the Tarai in the 1950s.



USOM RECORDS, US NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND



JOURNAL OF THE NEPAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, 1966

The *Anopheles minimus* mosquito and a contemporary map of the two main malaria areas in Nepal before the 1950s: the forest belt and the hill valleys.

carriers proved hard to eliminate or they developed resistance to insecticides and medicines.

In Nepal, however, despite manpower shortages and a daunting geography, eliminating the *Anopheles minimus* proved relatively easy. Although never reaching complete eradication, Nepal's program proved far more successful than most.

The near complete removal of malaria in a country whose history had been moulded by the disease brought dramatic changes: vast movements of people from the hill ridges to valley floors and to the Tarai, as well as movement north from the plains. There was large-scale deforestation and habitat loss, and tumultuous social and political reconfigurations. Almost everyone was affected, but especially the

Tharu, one of Nepal's largest ethnic groups, who lived primarily in or near the forest belt.

These changes would probably never have come, at least not in exactly the same form, had the *Anopheles minimus* possessed slightly different habits. Indeed, if it had not liked resting exactly where DDT was sprayed, malaria might still be a dominant force in Nepali life.

This little non-human actor deserves a big place in Nepal's history books alongside the much better known political movers and shakers. 🇳🇵

Tom Robertson is an environmental historian and Executive Director of Fulbright Nepal. A longer version of this article will appear in this month's *Journal of American History*.

the Tarai had bad malaria. Indeed, by the 1960s, the southern belt along the Indian border between Nepal and Biratnagar had very little malaria. This shocked government entomologists who searched for malaria-carrying mosquitoes but found neither *An. minimus* nor *An. fluviatilis*.

It was the forest belt that harboured the country's most dangerous malaria. Straddling the Chure hills, this strip included Inner Tarai valleys like Chitwan, Sindhuli and the undisturbed northern parts of the Tarai.

Here, the main carrier of the most lethal form of malaria (falciparum) was the *Anopheles minimus*. Because it was very small and bit softly and mostly at night, it often went undetected, making it particularly dangerous. Shirtless men sitting in the evening air for an hour or two could get 25-30 bites.

But the *minimus* was easily wiped out by insecticides like DDT. This was because, as a Nepali entomologist once told me, *minimus* acted 'like a king'. It had refined tastes. Unlike other mosquitos, it preferred not animal but human blood, and after feasting sought out comfortable accommodations — resting inside houses, not outside. DDT was easiest to spray on walls inside houses, exactly where *minimus* liked to hang out.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the World Health Organisation



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Tomb Raider

As a lapsed filmmaker, it is hard to trash a movie, knowing how much sweat, hard-work and sleepless nights go into the making of any film, good or bad. This year's *Tomb*



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Raider reboot though, starring the young, lovely Alicia Vikander, falls short of the original iterations that starred Angelina Jolie, those past ones having a verve and sassy insouciance (stemming mostly from Jolie's tongue in cheek performance)

that is sadly lacking in this new, dim, woefully boring adaptation. Roar Uthang's formulaic adaptation is hard to watch, it is that uninteresting. Meant as an origin story that describes Lara Croft's (Alicia Vikander) evolution into the highly trained explorer of the beloved video games from where her character originates, the script lacks originality, taking from hackneyed tropes like a missing father figure, a surly child that suffers from a peripatetic parent, and a lost treasure on a hard to reach island. Lara Croft's overall charm has always been tied, in addition to her bold and sexy persona, to the extreme charm of Croft Manor, a

beautiful English Country house that is rigged out with the latest gadgets to support her roving adventures. Few of these elements appear in the film aside from redundant flash backs where Lara is remembering her father showing his affection by way of first kissing his fore and middle fingers, and then touching her forehead (a gesture so often repeated, that it will make you want to scream towards the end of the film) in front of Croft Manor.

As Lara sets off to find her father who was last heard of on a small island in the Japanese territories, she takes the help of a fisherman Lu Ren (played with charisma by Daniel Wu) who reluctantly agrees to take her to the island on his beat up boat. Disaster follows along with terrible choices by the evil guys, all of whom are as flat as comic book characters, or video game avatars. To say that this film is a snooze is to be kind, I found myself often wanting to either doze off or walk out. Vikander is a talented actress. Her success as a rising star is probably unhindered by this film, which she agreed to do because she was promised a "gritty, realistic" origin story. But unfortunately, this film is a waste of talent and time, a project doomed from the start of its dreary, insipid script.



Watch trailer online
nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RSS

FOREIGN TIES: Prime Minister KP Oli and UML leaders met diplomats and heads of aid agencies at Baluwatar on Tuesday, where he told them Nepal wanted good relations with all countries, but was united against interference.



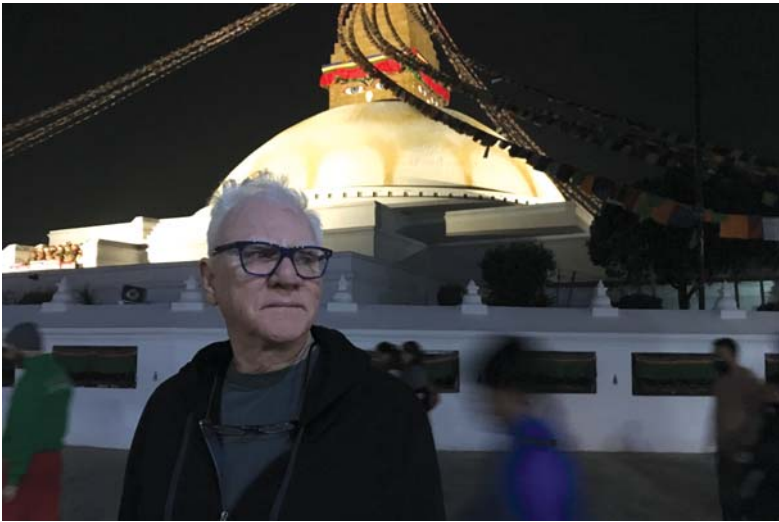
GOPEN RAI

DIRTY AIR: American Ambassador to Nepal Alaina B Teplitz and Director General of Department of Population and Environment Durga Prasad Dawadi launch the Safa Hawa app in Kathmandu on Thursday for live Air Quality Index.



NEPALI TIMES

WATER TREATMENT: Police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse protesters on the Maitighar-Baneswor road on Wednesday. The protesters said road expansion and expressway construction was destroying their heritage.



MICHAEL KOBOLD

"COOLEST CITY IN ASIA": British actor Malcom McDowell at Boudha on Wednesday at the end of a two-week trip to promote a firetruck expedition and to appear in a tourism promotion film about Nepal.



QATAR AIRWAYS

HAVING HIS CAKE: Honorary Consul General of Greece Bikram Pandey (left) and Qatar Airways Nepal Country Manager Jayaprakash Nair celebrate the launch of the airline's inaugural flight to Thessaloniki on Monday in Kathmandu.

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Buddha in suburbia

Basanta Maharjan in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 18-24 March

हिमाल

Last month, over 75,000 Nepalis gathered at Tundikhel of Kathmandu to recite a few verses of the Dhammapada – a collection of the Buddha’s teachings. Prime Minister KP Oli and some Buddhist monks were also there, reciting Dhammapada in between racy songs and loud slogans of ‘Buddha was born in Nepal’.

The event was organised by the World Record Holders’ Association-Nepal to enter the Guinness Book of World Record for the biggest crowd ever gathered to recite Dhammapad. The organiser wanted to prove through the world record that the Buddha was indeed born in Nepal.

To gather that many people, fake news spread through social media that the Indians had organised a similar huge gathering to claim that the Buddha was born in India, and that Nepalis had to step up to counter the claim.

The All Nepal Buddhist Monks’ Association also endorsed the gathering, probably concluding that such a huge gathering would help spread Buddhism.



Monks are highly respected, and it is debatable whether they should have participated in such an event that essentially spreads hatred instead of harmony.

‘Buddha was born in Nepal’ has emerged as one of the most ubiquitous slogans of Nepali nationalism in the last

few years, and it is largely directed against the perception that India wants to claim the Buddha’s nativity site.

But archeologists have already proven that the Buddha was born in 563 BC in the ancient kingdom of Lumbini, which now falls in the west-central Terai plains of Nepal. No one has refuted this historical fact. So, shouting repeatedly that the ‘Buddha was born in Nepal’ only spreads hatred and exposes our own insecurity. And the Tundikhel gathering just did that: it spread intolerance and spite. It was as far removed from Buddhist philosophy as it could be.

Imagine how the Buddha would have reacted to such an absurd event. Those

who are quick to jump on the ‘Buddha was born in Nepal’ bandwagon but have never contributed to Lumbini’s development must understand how the Buddha discouraged his disciples from debating irrelevant issues.

The Buddha in his lifetime liked to debate issues, he was fond of convincing his disciples through the force of argument and logic. Yet, if anyone had asked how the universe was created or whether god exists, the Buddha preferred to remain silent. The Buddha believed that was an irrelevant concern for ordinary people and their lives. So he encouraged his disciples to rise above mundane concerns and focus more on the philosophical underpinnings of human existence.

Social media and democracy

Jiwan Chhetri, *Setopati*, 27 March

सेतोपाटी

Politicians have found a new way of reaching out to large numbers of people, which is more effective, easy and absolutely free of cost — social media. They can freely share and express anything they want. And since its a virtual world, they can sit in the comfort of their homes and create groups to mobilise people for real world action. Because of its minimum cost for maximum efficiency, social media has now become an integral part of the modern day electoral system. Similarly, social media has also given voters a platform to voice out their opinion. All it takes to reach out to millions is a simple post, share and like. Although social media seems to be strengthening people’s participation by allowing people to express their views freely, is it really helping democracy?

Aleksandr Kogan, a researcher from Cambridge University, developed a personality quiz app which was used by 270,000 Americans on Facebook. While, it is not unusual for people on social media to use such apps, what users did not know was that it had a hidden feature that could access data, not only from the app user’s Facebook profile, but also access data of all their Facebook friends. It allowed Kogan to collect, analyse and understand the user’s personality, while at the same time distracted users from being able to see the hidden feature. This is how he harvested the personal data of over 50 million American Facebook users which he then sold to a company called Cambridge Analytica which used the data to push Donald Trump’s election campaign.

Managing director of Cambridge Analytica, Mark Turnbull was caught on hidden camera saying that fact based election is useless because elections are all about playing with people’s emotions. The two fundamental human emotions are hope and fear, from which most of human actions are consciously or unconsciously motivated.

Kogan played with these emotions by collecting data on users’ personalities: for example unemployed white Americans. When they repeatedly saw Facebook posts about the border and Trump’s commitment to build a wall, it slowly turned them into a devout Trump supporters.

Such is the power of social media, it can manipulate and change your way of thinking by carefully designing what we consume. The end result of which is that Trump eventually won even though it seemed Hillary would.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal has spawned a #DeleteFacebook campaign. Users are angry that Facebook did not do anything to reassure them their safety, except for asking Cambridge Analytica to delete the stolen data.

Meanwhile, Cambridge Analytica is now fast approaching clients world over, boasting how it manipulated voters in the US elections. We will still have elections, and we will still be electing leaders, but in today’s world of digital dominance, democracy will no longer be a system that elects the best candidates.

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State of the art rural hospital

Marty Logan
in Achham

Rounding a steep curve on the road to the district capital of Mangalsen a startling set of modular structures comes into view. The modern buildings look out of place in this scenic, but underserved, region of western Nepal.

The construction is part of a \$4 million expansion of Bayalpata Hospital, a unique medical facility that is a model for public-private partnership to improve medical care in Nepal's remote interior.

Inside the ward, orthopaedic surgeon Mandeep Pathak is examining an elderly man with a swollen knee. Clearly visible on an x-ray monitor is a short pin inserted by a general practitioner a few weeks ago, after the patient fell and broke his kneecap.

In the same room with the surgeon today is Community Medical Assistant (CMA) Khagendra Pant, who is wrapping plaster around the arm of a small boy. Thanks to training at the hospital, Pant was able to diagnose the boy's injury as a clean fracture that did not require an operation.

Such training means Bayalpata now has to refer just 10-20% of orthopaedic cases to hospitals in Dhangadi and Nepalganj, compared to nearly 70% two years ago.

"I am proud to say that all the basic trauma care can now be done by general practitioners. Plus they can diagnose cases and decide which need to be referred to outside centres," says Pathak.

Training is integral to Bayalpata's mission, says

Director of Medical Education Bikash Gauchan: his hospital has continuing medical education for clinicians, and on the job training for future nurses and other staff. General practitioners from various centres learn rural surgery at Bayalpata while mid-level staff come to improve their clinical knowledge.

For some patients who travel many days to reach Bayalpata, access to basic surgery here means avoiding an expensive trip to the city. People whose limbs were fractured as long as three years ago delayed treatment until surgery was available at the hospital because they couldn't afford the trip to a city hospital.

Treatment at Bayalpata and at another hospital in Dolakha run by the non-profit Possible, is free. The group believes healthcare is a fundamental human right protected by Nepal's Constitution, and should have no cost at point of delivery.

Possible is funded by donations and Nepal government grants, which will grow as its hospitals attain clinical targets, such as the percentage of women who give birth in a facility with a trained clinician. Operating expenses last year were \$4.8 million, of which 9% came from the government.

Arrivals are registered in the hospital's Electronic Health Record (EHR), which puts patients' information at the fingertips of clinicians throughout the hospital, and eliminates bulky paper records.

One patient already on the EHR is Namsara Tamrakar. Sitting



PHOTOS: MARTY LOGAN AND SRAWAN SHRESTHA

IN GOOD HANDS (Clockwise from top): Community Health Worker Bhajan Kunwar checks patient Namsara Tamrakar at her home in Chandika village of Achham.

Orthopaedic surgeon Mandeep Pathak talks with a patient recovering from a knee surgery whose x-ray is on the monitor.

A girl and her mother arrive for treatment at Bayalpata Hospital.

Patients and families wait outside the new administration building made from rammed earth.

Community spirit

In 2011, Bhajan Kunwar (pictured above) was living an "Ok" life with her husband Purna and children in Bhageswor village of Achham when her sister-in-law Shavitra asked for a favour.

Shavitra had been hearing rumours that her husband, who was working in India, was having an affair or had even remarried. Would Purna take her to India to find out? Purna agreed, and brother and sister set off with a friend. En route, Purna received a phone call from Shavitra's husband warning them not to come, or there would be trouble.

They continued anyway, and after crossing the border got on a train. That night, a group of men, perhaps including police, boarded the train and took Purna away. He later called Shavitra's husband to say he had been kidnapped and would be killed unless help came quickly.

Police found Purna's body the next morning, on the roadside in Ahmednagar, east of Mumbai. It looked like he had been run over, but Bhajan believes he was murdered.

Widowed at 25 and with two small children, Bhajan spent the mourning period worrying about how she would afford to send the children to school, and if her mother-in-law and community would accept her becoming the breadwinner for her husband's four younger brothers and sisters and their families. (Her father-in-law had died earlier).

That month, Bayalpata Hospital had a vacancy for a community health worker for the area. Bhajan was hired and six years later, still visits on foot the more than 700 households in her catchment area, checking that patients are taking their medicines, and much more (see main article).

"This hospital made me strong," she tells us. "Before I didn't know anyone in my village and I didn't know so many things." Now with a college certificate, Bhajan advises young women to get educated before they get married. "I tell them 'if I can do it, you can do it too'. I believe in myself and don't care what others say about me. If you are true and honest, no harm will come to you."

Bhajan says she will never forget her husband. "But I have to live for my children, and control my mind and my heart. If I am strong, they can have a regular life. The hospital is now my husband, I cannot imagine leaving it."

Marty Logan in Achham





Operating remotely

When nine-year-old Samir Tamang was bitten by a dog on his way to school in Rayale village of Kavre last week, he had to take a two-and-a-half hour long bus ride to Kathmandu with his grandfather Suk Bahadur Tamang, for a rabies vaccination at Teku Hospital.

Samir missed school and his grandfather, who works as a driver in Kathmandu, had to ask for leave from his employers.

“We are relatively close to the capital, but imagine what it must be like for people living in remote parts of Nepal where there are no roads,” says Suk Bahadur.

Indeed, despite the spread of basic health care in Nepal, emergency treatment and procedures like mending broken bones or caesarean sections are not yet available in rural areas. This means families have to sell property or borrow from moneylenders to be able to afford treatment in the cities. Studies have shown that many Nepali families are driven to poverty if relatives are referred to private hospitals.

Unmet surgical needs in remote districts remain a major public health issue in Nepal, according to a recent study in 39 remote area hospitals commissioned by the Nick Simons Institute (NSI).

One day this week, an informal survey of patients at the government-run Bir and Teaching Hospitals in Kathmandu showed that a majority of the patients were from remote districts, some as far away as Piuthan and Jajarkot.

The NSI study shows that except for caesarean sections in Dolakha, Lamjung and Panchthar, very few government hospitals elsewhere were able to do simple operations of the abdominal cavity, or even mend broken bones.

Nepal’s surgery rate falls well below the Lancet Commission target of 5,000 operations per 100,000 population. If the goal is to have a surgical facility within two-hour travel distance for patients, at present only a third of the population can reach an orthopaedic surgeon, and only 22% have access to abdominal surgery.

However, the survey reaffirms that the presence of a medical general practitioner (MDGPs who can perform caesarean sections and other relatively simple surgical procedures) can change this. District hospitals with resident MDGPs can eliminate the need for patients to make expensive and extended trips to the cities for treatment.

The minimum personnel at a district hospital should include an MDGP, obstetrics doctor, anaesthesia assistant, staff nurse and biomedical technician. However, Nepal’s density of hospitals with such staffing is very low (0.4-3.1 per 100,000) as against the Lancet Commission target of 20 per 100,000 population.

“In the long run we need specialists but placing three of them in each district hospital will take a long time. For the next 5-10 years, MDGPs will be the answer to solve surgical problems throughout the country,” explains Anil Shrestha, NSI’s Executive Director.

The study recommends an MDGP-led generalist surgical team with proper staff, drugs and equipment to upgrade emergency surgical care in all district hospitals.

Adds Shrestha: “The government has to strengthen strategically located district hospitals and make them functional to take care of surgical needs throughout the year. It is entirely possible to do.”

Sonia Awale in Kavre



cross-legged on a raised, wooden platform outside her home in Chandika village (*left*), the elderly woman shows visiting hospital staff that she knows how to use her inhaler, but it is empty.

Three years ago, a doctor at Bayalpata diagnosed her with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and prescribed medicine via inhaler. Now Community Health Worker Bhajan Kunwar (*see box, left*) visits regularly to follow up. Like others, Tamrakar’s house has a small blue metal tag on an outside wall with a unique household ID. The houses are also geo-tagged.

Kunwar’s visit is guided by CommCare, a software developed by Possible that includes counselling information and checklists for each patient. Plans are to integrate CommCare with the EHR so that field followups are immediately reflected in the hospital’s system. Eventually, Bayalpata’s EHR will be linked to a national data system.

Kunwar takes Tamrakar’s blood pressure: 120 by 80. The woman is happy to hear the news and to see Kunwar again: “She comes, does a check-up, and tells me what sickness I have, and if it is getting

better or worse. She insists I go to Bayalpata for a follow-up.”

The hospital’s community health program focuses on maternal and child health as well as non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and respiratory ailments. Possible employs 56 community health workers looking after more than 80,000 people in Achham and Dolakha. It is planning to more than quadruple that number next year.

Bayalpata Hospital started in 2009, when the group Nyaya Health (now Possible) took over an abandoned government facility. Then it had five beds and treated up to 12,000 patients a year. Last year, Possible saw 86,000 patients at Bayalpata: the goal is to treat 150,000 people annually after the new wards, emergency room, administration building, a dormitory and remaining small houses for on-call staff are added.

“Our integrated, hospital-to-home approach will be a model for Nepal, and beyond,” explains Gauchan, “and we will be proving that in a resource-limited setting,

health care expansion, providing universal health coverage to people is possible.”

But is the Bayalpata model really replicable? Skeptics say that two hospitals could have been built for the cost of the new buildings, which feature rammed earth technology, solar energy and rainwater collection, and that only substantial donor support made the expansion possible.

Gauchan admits that the initial investment may seem high but says it will be more cost-effective in the long run.

He adds: “The existing infrastructure for rural health care is way less than the minimum needed to address the emerging burden of non-communicable diseases and road accidents as well as infectious diseases. That is why we are investing in a very robust infrastructure.”



Free world-class medical care in rural Nepal? It sounds too good to be true, but the group Possible is doing just that in government hospitals in Achham and Dolakha through a unique public-private partnership. See for yourself in this video.



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Diplomatic offensive

The present Communist Coalition of the United States of Nepal is the most powerful this country has ever seen since the Jung Bahadur, and it could be said with some historical accuracy that both relied effectively on decapitating rivals to introduce crony capitalism as the system of governance in this country. His Fearsomeness Comrade Awe-Inspiring has quite a few human skeletons still rattling away in his closet, while in his prime Prime Minister Oli himself is said to have persuaded zamindars to agree to have their heads detached from their torsos during the Jhapa Uprising.

Which is why it is no surprise that this can-do Oligarki has hit the ground running. Its ministers are not just sitting around giving speeches, they are staying on afterwards for tea and samosas. The United Unified Marxist-Leninists and Maoists had a shotgun wedding, and they are on the verge of divorce even before the honeymoon because of a hitch in their prenup before getting hitched. That is how seriously they take their role as our rulers.

It will take time for the Ass to draw up a comprehensive list of the accomplishments of the Communard Cabinet since it took office, and this is just the first of many instalments. Ready or not, here they come:

1 When the Prime Minister said he would turn Nepal into Singapore in five years, he actually meant all Nepalis would have the same annual per capita income as the inhabitants of the village of Singhapur in Taplejung. And when Comrade Awestruck predicted that Nepal could soon have the same living standard as Switzerland, we misheard. He had meant to say Nepal would be as prosperous as Swaziland. Both goals have already been achieved within weeks of the new government coming to office.

2 The Left Front has shown it is not a pushover, has the cojones to take on powerful foes, and has put relations with the EU on a war-footing. The new national slogan in the corridors of the powerful in Kathmandu is: 'Europeans Go Home, And Take Us With You on Junkets'.

3 The Ministry of Foreigners has put donor governments on notice that Nepal will not take international interference lying down anymore — it will take it standing up with hands outstretched. In fact, it can be said that Nepalis have chosen to be beggars out of their own free will, and that choice should be universally respected. Also, we do not want any more advice on the Constitution, just cough up your money.

4 Let this serve as a warning: GONE is on a diplomatic offensive, which

means we are being as offensive as possible to diplomats.

5 The Firanghi Ministry has also issued a 1-point guideline about Chief Ministers and provincial officials meeting dips. In summary, it says: "Don't" since international affairs is a national affair. Officials of ministerial rank and above can meet foreign intelligence operatives from neighbouring countries, but only in Bangkok or Singapore during routine health checkups.

6 It is something to be proud of that as soon as this government came to power, it solved one of the most intractable problems this country has faced since the early-Licchavi Era: it got the New Baneswor intersection traffic lights fixed. Who said such feats could not be accomplished in our lifetime?

7 To reassure the business community and foreign investors, the Under-Financed Ministry is preparing an Economic White Paper, so called because it is completely blank.

8 The Ministry of Miscommunication and Disinformation has banned analogue tv with immediate effect, and the government will now enforce the rule that every household must watch a minimum of 5 hours of digital tv every day to ensure stability and prosperity.

Karnali Province to ban Facebook during working hours

NAGENDRA UPADHYAY
SUKHET, March 25
As the officials of various ministries of the provincial government seemed too busy using Facebook instead of development works, Karnali Province has announced to ban Facebook during the working hours from Tuesday onward.

Chief Minister (CM) Mahendra Bahadur Shahi, adding, "We will soon implement this decision in the whole province." Once the decision is implemented, CM Shahi hopes that officials will dedicate their time and energy working for the welfare of people and the province. "This was necessary," added Shahi. On Sunday, the provincial government will be sending an

9 The new Federal Government of Province 6 has banned Facebook from 9AM-5PM. It said anyone swiping through FB during office hours would be unfriended and their browsing history put on public display.

10 Home Minister Comrade Cloudy (long time no see!) went on a surprise inspection of Kathmandu Airport and caught everyone napping — including smugglers, human traffickers, wildlife contrabandists, drug pedlars and gold runners. He has directed the airport henceforth remain open night-and-day to double the income of the underground economy (Motto: "Everybody Gets His Share")

11 The Ministry of Education and Commerce has declared that walls of all school buildings all over the country will have to be painted yellow, their roofs have to be red. Several officials in the Ministry have been caught red-handed.

12 [Points 8-11 are only partly made up. -Ed.]



The Ass

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