Indian PM Narendra Modi will spend most of his Nepali visit this weekend in prayer and worship, but his two stopovers in Kathmandu for political meetings will have long-term consequences for the two countries.

On Friday, after flying directly into Janakpur from New Delhi and offering prayers at Janaki Temple with Prime Minister K P Oli, Modi will fly to Kathmandu. Here, Nepali and Indian officials will exchange agreements on railways, inland waterway navigation and agriculture in the presence of the two PMs.

How strongly Oli, one of the strongest Nepali PMs ever, can safeguard the country's national interest in those deals will determine not just his own legacy but also Nepal's future.

Last month, when Oli visited New Delhi, he warned Modi of his support to launch Nepal's own merchant marine. But Modi automated Oli by offering more: connecting Sugar (Mid Everest) to Sagar (the ocean) through inland waterways.

With the blockade in 2015, Modi squandered the goodwill of most Nepalis that he had earned during his previous two visits to Kathmandu. He will be trying to rebuild that trust on this trip. But experts say the inland waterway proposal is just a code for pushing through controversial high-dam schemes on the Kosi and other Nepali rivers.

India is building national waterways that can take oceangoing barges to streamline transportation. Regulated water from Nepal's rivers is crucial for the 1,820km Mahliya-Alhabad stretch of the Ganga-Ganges-Mahao high river system. It can take barges only if the river's lean season flow is augmented, and for that large reservoirs have to be built on the tributaries of the Ganges, most of which flow down from Nepal.

The talk of inland water navigation is therefore a way to persuade Nepal to agree to dam its rivers. India has proposed a $2bn high dam on the Kosi which would create a reservoir 100km long. It could serve tourism, transport and hydropower, but there would be massive inundation of prime farmland, settlements and infrastructure. There is also the sedimentation and seismic risk.

Experts say Nepal need not reject outright India's proposal to build high dams, but Kathmandu must seek equitable benefit sharing and fair compensation.

Says water expert Dwarka Nath Dhusnimal: "If it is Modi's strategic move to connect Nepal with India's waterways, Oli should have his own strategy to ensure Nepal's share of benefits."

As a strong PM set to govern Nepal for the next five years, Oli is in a better position than most of his predecessors to drive a hard bargain on river sharing. If he cannot do it, no one else can.

Nonetheless, given how hard Oli appears to be trying to please Modi, analysts are not optimistic.

Analyst Shreeramshri Anant Das Gauri says: "Oli was perceived to be a rare Nepali leader who could stand up to India. But he is also willing,"

Om Astha Rai

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CAMPAIGNING IN NEPAL

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has arrived on his third visit to Nepal in five years. The first time he came to Kathmandu in 2014 shortly after being elected, it had been nearly two decades since an Indian leader had visited Nepal. Modi has not tried to hide his soft spot for Nepal. In 2015, he began his speech to the Constituent Assembly Parliament in Kathmandu four years ago in neutron Nepal, and recalled that he had come with a wish to help. Modi indeed spent 1968-70 touring Hindu holy places in north India, during which he is said to have visited Patan, Janakpur and meditated in Makhatih. Modi had wanted to turn his second visit to Kathmandu during the SAARC Summit in 2015 into a pilgrimage. In Janakpur he had wanted to address a mass meeting to be beamed live on Indian TV channels from the Charities of Shi. He would therefore have flown to Makhatih for prayers. However, the pilgrimage was cancelled since Prime Minister Sushil Koirala was against a regional summit being turned into a bilateral visit. The Nepalese government was in the throes of economic unrest at the time, and Koirala’s real worry was that Modi’s visit to Medhi would embolden Madhesi activists demanding greater autonomy for a plains-only Nepal. Modi is said to have taken the rejection as a personal affront. Being a man who does not forget slight, this set the stage for things to get much worse. The Nepalese Foreign Secretary Sujbankash’s wish that promulgation of the Constitution be delayed until the basic demands of the Madhesi was rejected by Kathmandu.

In Janakpur, he was afforded a five-month border blockade on earthquakes-ruined Nepal from September 2015 to January 2016. The visit was much more than a quid quo when it sent Nepal’s economy into negative growth and its political fallout is still much in evidence. Goli’s wishes to turn Nepal into a Davos against the Indian Goli during the SAARC Summit was challenged by nationalist trump card during last year’s elections to give himself and his Marxist partners a trumping moment in Parliament.

Modi’s visit this weekend is an effort to hit the clock back to 2016, and restore Nepal-India friendship and trust to the level that followed his first visit. But don’t expect Modi to make amends this time for the long years of hardships he unleashed on the Nepalese people. There are no such gifts, but much more than the spoils is driven by regional geopolitics and domestic electoral politics. In fact, going by social media reaction, one journal which Modi’s decision to go to Janakpur first has actually widened the cleavage between hills and plains. People in Province 2 overwhelmingly welcome the visit while the rest of Nepal is distraught.

In India itself, the prime minister has been under bitter attack in India for the failure of his ‘neighbourhood first’ policy allowing Chinese inroads into Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal. And even though news of the blockade was successfully suppressed in the Indian and international media, Modi came across in 2013 as a regional bully – creating some controversy in Western capitals which had besieged Nepal policy to New Delhi.

The third pilgrimage to Janakpur and Makhatih are photo-ops for domestic consumption to drive home the Hindu agenda in local assembly polls in Karnataka as well as national elections next year. The only problem is that Karnataka’s Muslims are Seringhy Shivs, whereas Makhatih is a Vishnu shrines. Even so, Modi seems to be redux in modi’s home state of Gujarat. The announcement of a Ramayana Circuit to link Janakpur with Ayodhya will have resonance among voters in India’s ‘Cow Belt’.


goodbye jan and christine

TROILLY BUSES

Electric vehicles certainly have a future and this trolley was a free gift from the Chinese that was never appreciated with maintenance and replacement. It was used for a week and then used to haul the local cabs to the bus station. The Chinese had to pay for the replacement.

Kathmandu-Bhaktapur Trolley

by Peter Frankl-Smith

I wanted to live my last among friends

New year’s resolution. I take this as a great start to the year. I have a lot of friends and I plan to see more of them this year. I will also spend more time with my loved ones. I will make sure to live the best of my life among friends.

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Wild and dangerous

The Mardi trek in the Annapurna region is one of the most accessible scenic wilderness areas. However, it is also deceptively dangerous. The trek follows a narrow ridge that is the southwestern spur of Machhapuchhre and its side peak, Mardi. People tend to get lost because of unmarked trails and the steep, slippery terrain.

At least three tourists have gone missing without a trace in the last two trekking seasons, and tourism entrepreneurs say many more have died and were injured since Mardi was opened up to tourists in 2011. Carries was Nepali, a 40-year-old Dutch woman, is the latest case on Mardi. After reaching the 4,500m Mardi Base Camp on 19 February, she took some souvenirs here and descended to High Camp at 3,500m and spent one night there. "It is a kind of lodge," she wrote in what turned out to be her last email to her daughter Reina.

She emailed her daughters a few photos, including one to which she is seen at the base Camp (see page), before heading further down to Pokhara. She had booked a place for a two-week course in April at Pokhara Vipassana Meditation Centre. Carries had told her family that she would be out of contact for two weeks once she started vipassana. Even so, she was expected to receive a phone call from her daughter about her safe arrival in Pokhara. But there was no more word from her. When Corrie’s daughter was informed by Pokhara Vipassana Meditation Centre that she was yet to enrol for the April course, the trek began for her.

Last month, Corrie’s mother, 70-year-old Jennie van Veggel spent three weeks on the Mardi trek, piecing together all information about her missing daughter. Police also accompanied her with sniffer dogs, but Corrie was nowhere to be found. Before leaving Pokhara for a further search for her missing daughter, Jennie told Nepali Times: “I don’t know what to tell her daughter and husband when I get back.”

Jennie thinks her daughter chose the shorter but more dangerous route back to Pokhara via Sidiling. This route cuts through a dense forest and is so steep that even yaks have fallen on the trail. Pokhara-based trekking guide Dilip Acharya says: “This route is so difficult that it would be almost impossible to rescue a person who falls off the cliff.”

The other route back to Pokhara is longer and relatively safe. But even that one is not completely without danger. In February, Biju Gupta, 21-year-old MBBS student at Manipal Teaching Hospital in Pokhara, lost her way around Phedi Deurali. She is still missing.

In October 2016, an Israeli tourist, 45-year-old Avi Rishel, went missing near the Mardi Base Camp and was never found.

What makes the Mardi trek such a draw is the wilderness, but trekking guides say it needs more signage, direction signs and warning signs for trekkers about the dangerous parts.

Love hate relations

During his visit to Nepal this weekend, Indian PM Narendra Modi raises some eyebrows as part of the Sugar Cubes, recently floated by the foundation stone of the 900MW Auli II project, and signs agreements on an agreement, railway and expressway connectivity with PM Oli. However, 11 tranches of India’s export credits have been blocked by Indian customs officers at Panjibari.

New lead

Tata Motors does the new World Bank Country Manager for Nepal, An American, The World Bank, who works with the Bank in Malaysia and is also in West Asia and North Africa.

Offer of 10

KFC has launched a special Wednesday Offer with 10 percent off ‘Hot and Crispy Chicken’ for only INR 99. The chain is also offering 10 percent off in Nepal and recently renovated in Durbar Marg restaurant.

Qatar in India

Qatar Airways is planning to start a full schedule of flights in India under its ownership with an Indian management team.

BIZ BRIEFS

QATAR AIRLINES

Qatar Airways’ first aircraft takes off at 12:37 AM, with 10 passengers from Kuwait, two from Qatar, one from India, four from Pakistan. The airline will operate three flights a day, six days a week, and is also looking to add the airline to its long-term plans.

Swanky studio

Hint: the Global Group has launched a new brand identity, covering 365 days a year, and is expected to be in full swing by late this month.

Alibaba in Nepal

The Chinese e-commerce giant has an office in Nepal, about 200 staff, and is looking to expand into the country. They aim to sell products across the country, including in the northeast and central parts of Nepal.
Johnnie Walker

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Keep walking
The Kathmandu crowd

The Valley in the 1970s was a haven for biologists, ethnologists and anthropologists.

I t still stands, a rather plain large brick house whose unostentatious garden has since sprouted several new residential cheques by order. Located on the corner of Sanata and Khan Bhawan, the so-called ‘staff house’ was where I lived after moving from Chitwan to work in the Durbarmarg office.

I would hesitate to call it ‘home’ due to the relentless intrusion of Tiger Tops company guests who came and went — Friends of Friends, intransigent staff and assorted hangers-on. There was always someone passing through who needed a bed or a piece to leave their bags. With the constant comings and goings, I was never sure whom I would meet at breakfast.

My favourite spot was the small square sitting room on the third floor with screened windows and floor-level seats, opening onto a big roof terrace from where the white peaks hovered across the rice terraces, mustard fields and forested ridges beyond (picturesque, light).

Seeming close enough to touch in the pristine mountain air, the crystal clarity that characterised three Himalayan hills has gone forever. In the dimly lit needle, the white statue of Swayambhunath floated on its sacred wood. But the Valley’s encircling hills were denuded and patched, less forested and densely verdant than today.

Jim’s big brown horse lived in the garage, rescued from the Tollygunge racecourse in Calcutta, looked after by heady-legged Ram Kaji whose other jobs were to tend the marigolds, grow vegetables and open the big clanging metal gates on demand. I used to ride sedately through the peddies and mud roads amidst the peace of Patan in the late 1970s — avoiding careful cyclists and avoiding the few cars, mostly painted in dinner colours.

Shelia Laing was one who came visiting her stepson; Nick and decided not to leave — an older lady in search of sanctity from a troubled marriage, I loved having her around. Short piled hair and sassy tinge with sadness, Sheila related her ecstatic collection of somewhat dubious Kathmandu friends, though they were a far cry from her colonial Caribbean home.

After work we could be found lolling on the cushions in our rooftop yurt. Sheila and I smoked and swapped art stories with antique collectors Mervyn, Andy and Dutch Bob, or lounged Addison regaled us with Hump-

-Yeti trekking tales to forbidden regions. Former army officer D-Boy traded duty-free whisky and entertained us with tales of illicit border escapades by elephant. His departure from the regiment had been hastened by his forgetting the General’s uniform on one crucial occasion.

Next door, the UN pilot Harry Fauster stayed on the top floor of an austere concrete house reached through a tumbled path past his parked powder-blue Mercedes, open music blaring from his open evening windows. At the top of the list, the genial General Kiron personified Rana splendour with his extended family in a crumbling white palace, the extensive garden reeking with lost elegance — overgrown weeds, box hedges and fountains that did not work.

Just down the hill, father and son doctors and craniologists Bob Fleming Senior and Junior lived in missionary simplicity, always welcoming with a cup of sweet milky tea in chunky china. Having founded Nepal’s first modern hospital in Shanti Bhawan, they were assembling watercolours to illustrate The first Birds of Nepal book.

Nepal in the 1970s was a haven for biologists, ethnologists and anthropologists, and many found their way to the Kathmandu staff house. American Jeff McNeely scored his trove of specimens from his Arab expedition in the bulging cupboard under the stairs, including one he showed me containing white plaster casts of alleged yeti footprints which have since been lost to science. Perching uncomfortably on the low seats of our top room, Austrian Professor von Furer-Haimendorf was a frequent visitor in tweed suit and endless anoraks, and Constantino jet from Paris charmed us with his ethnic pilgrimage in deepest Dolpo.

Around our heads, ethnologists David Snellgrove and Thaddeus Skorszki debated Buddhist and Jewish philosophy, whilst Gokul glassed down his fiery amber brew, the first samples of Marpha apple brandy.

The husband’s dalliance turned out to be temporary, to my chagrin but her relief, Sheila bid farewell to the Kathmandu crowd after a few months and headed home to married life. But she stayed in touch and our embrocated London marketing office later camped in her Fulham pied-a-terre with creaming wood floors, so cramped that meetings had to be held standing in the broom cupboard for privacy.

One day an intense young researcher dropped by the Sanata staff house bearing a small puppy he had rescued from a Ladakh garrison and named Hodgson after the second British Resident. Trysted Spike Smith was returning to Cambridge, his anthropological thesis on Nepal history and Newari family structures complete.

Hodgson grew into an unctuous and dishevelled liver-coloured street dog with a chronic skin condition that seldom healed. My companion for the next decade, together we weathered some major milestones. But Hodgson never lived up to his grand name — he took my marriage to his stride but disdained baby Sanjay as unclean, uncoordinated, and distinguished himself by sleeping undisturbed on his cane chair through that first earthquake that rocked the Valley.

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A
fter a string of nail-biting performances and momentous achievements in the past few years, Nepali cricketers expected more encouragement and support from the government. But they were in for a rude shock: heavy government interference in the cricket governing body prompted International Cricket Council (ICC) to suspend Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) in 2016.

The ICC has stated that CAN did not have the legitimacy and financial resources to organize domestic leagues and tournaments, which are vital for scouting new talent for the national team. The ban also delayed several sports infrastructure projects.

CAN’s General Secretary Ashok Nath Piyushwor says: “This has pushed Nepal’s cricket back by at least five years.”

Despite that and a difficult two years in which skipper Paras Khadka and his team pulled off an even more thrilling victories, ICC has finally lifted the suspension. After CAN agreed to endorse a statute approved by the ICC advisory board, the world cricket body has promised to revoke its decision under one condition: that CAN hold fresh elections under its new statutes, effectively ensuring that the government will have no say in its functioning anymore. If the ICC recognizes CAN again, Nepali cricket could enjoy what could be its golden age free from political interference. CAN’s former CEO Bhawana Chaudhary says: “The time is ripe for Nepali cricket to strike it big, and it is up to us to make it happen.”

Despite all odds, Nepali cricketers have in the last two years earned One Day Internationals (ODI) status with stellar performances, like in Namibia in February, which made headlines not just in Nepal but around the world.

To help promote Nepal in the ICC Division 3 status, all-rounder Keshav KC played an innings no cricketer had ever played before as he led his side to victory. Keshav smashed 42 runs unbeaten off 16 deliveries, securing a one-wicket victory against Ghana. Keshav was named as “one of the most miraculous endings to an ICC tournament at any level.”

The Cricnics Kids from Nepal, as Nepali cricketers were referred to by ESPN after the Namibia win, traveled to Zimbabwe in March, hoping to qualify for the ICC World Cup. They failed after narrowly falling behind Afghanistan in the run-rate. But they did achieve ODI status till 2022.

This international success and support seems to have put moral pressure on CAN’s political appointees to rethink and back off, paving the way for free and fair elections — a prerequisite for lifting the ICC suspension.

The success of Nepali cricketers has in fact spotlighted just how little the government had done to develop the sport. This bolstered the position of those in favor of amending the CAN statute and boosting the government’s grip.

CAN General Secretary Piyushwor says: “Even those advocating CAN now understand how important it is to have a strong governing body.”

With CAN out of the picture, the private sector had come forward to organize successful domestic tournaments like Dhankuta Premier League (DPL) and Everest Premier League (EPL). These channels now pay more than K16 million for broadcast rights for each tournament. And for the first time, Indian Premier League (IPL) has brought a Nepali spinner Sandeep Lamichhane. He is still struggling to make it in the playing set of the Delhi Daredevils, but he could open the doors for other Nepali players in the world’s biggest cricket league.

National cricket team coach Jagat Tripathi, however, warns that Nepal could easily lose it all again.

“We have a tendency to be overconfident and complacent after every major success. We have many more challenges to overcome.”

Tripathi thinks Nepali cricketers are still not experienced enough for international cricket due to the lack of strong opponents in domestic games.

He added: “If we want good results, there must be more tournaments so there is more choice. I am now mostly selecting the best from among the worst.”

Santa Gaha Magar

Despite government interference and neglect, Nepal’s cricketers are going places

Nepali cricket comes of age
Sewa Bhattarai

With its gentle inclines, convenient distances and scenery, Kathmandu has always been an ideal cycling city. Tourists to Nepal in the 1970s were ecstatic about pedalling past emerald green terraces to hilltop towns with ancient monuments.

But that was before cars drove bicycles off the roads. Bicycles made a comeback during the fuel crisis during the 1980s, but soon things went back to roads choked with cars and exhaust fumes.

There has been new interest in trail biking around the Valley rim and in the high mountains as an adventure sport, but commuting by bicycles is in steep decline because of pollution and the unkept promise of bicycle lanes.

Abhijit Shrestha, who runs Cycle Chain, a bicycle shop in Bhaisepati, was selling up to four bicycles every week till two years ago. Now, he hardly sells one a month.

"Without separate bicycle lanes, motor vehicles pose a great hazard for cyclists," says Shrestha. Ironically, however, the sale of face masks have shot up, indicating that pollution is a factor putting off cyclists.

The death of conservationist Dr. Prolad Yotoma is still fresh in the minds of people, though it happened in 2011. An avid environmentalist, Dr. Yotoma practised what he preached and committed on a bicycle. A truck rammed into his bicycle at Salkhu, leading to his death, and the need to continue to be as dangerous for cyclists.

Make sure bicycling is not injurious to health

Amir Neupane

Lately, many patients have been coming to my physiotherapy clinic complaining of pains in the elbow joint, neck, knee, back, tendinitis and nerve involvement. Most are bicycle enthusiasts who took up the sport to improve their health.

Indeed, bicycling can have many health benefits: increasing cardiovascular fitness, improving muscle strength and flexibility, greater joint mobility, better posture and coordination, and decreased body fat levels.

We need to understand the interface between the human musculoskeletal system and the mechanical laws of the bicycle to use it properly. The idea is to prevent common injuries while using bicycles for commuting, mountain biking, or in triathlons and extreme racing.

Muscles used during a pedal stroke

Cycling incorporates all main leg muscle groups during various phases of pedaling. This movement is ideal for strengthening muscles, but overuse may cause repetitive stress injury and pain (see box, right). A physiotherapist can pinpoint the problem and locate any strength deficits.

While physical activity is one of the keys to a healthy lifestyle, air pollution and exercise can be a harmful combination. This is especially true if you have asthma, diabetes, and heart or lung conditions. Young children, older people, and people who work or exercise outdoors are especially susceptible to the effects of outdoor air pollution. Street level suspended particulates and toxic emissions in Kathmandu are several times higher than the WHO’s safe threshold.

Health problems increase while exercising in polluted areas. During increased physical activity you usually inhale more air and breathe it more deeply into your lungs. The air also passes through the mouth, bypassing the nasal passage which normally filters airborne particles. What is not clear with air pollution and exercise is which types of air pollution are most harmful ever time. It is prudent to avoid cycling along Kathmandu’s main roads, especially in the mornings and evenings.

However, research has shown that the long-term benefits of regular exercise outweigh the risks associated with exposure to air pollution.

Healthy Exercise

- Monitor air pollution. Carry a mask when you feel an air pollution level in Kathmandu is too high.
- Timing workouts. Avoid outdoor physical activity and exercise when pollution levels are highest in the morning and evening, or rush hours.
- Avoid high-pollution areas. Pollution levels are highest within 10 kilometers of a busy road or road intersection.
- Exercise indoors. Exercise indoors when air quality is bad. Check out a local gym or rent a cycle on an indoor track.

Posture

Your bike must be adjusted to suit your body size and shape so you are more relaxed and can ride longer distances with less effort. However much you enjoy bicycling, don’t overdo it. If you get pains, visit a physiotherapist with a special interest in the neck or a cycling store professional.

Pick your bike — Do you want a road bike or a mountain bike? Pick the right type and size.

Reach — Have a comfortable reach with the handlebar far enough away and not too far away. Your arms should be 90 degrees to your torso.

Saddle — Saddle should not be tilted and its height should be adjusted so that when the pedals are horizontal you knee is straight over the spindle.

Riding above the haze

Mountain biking with a mask is better than no exercise at all

Tyler McMahon

I was only able to get the above Budhanilkhashi trail that took my mask off, as I jumped up the trail on Shivapuri. This is my morning routine: ride outside of the Ring Road until I reach an area with better air. Two hours later, I return down to the Valley floor where I put the mask back on and ride the last 7 km into the city centre. With Kathmandu’s air quality consistently at ‘Extremely Unhealthy’ levels there isn’t really another option.

Riding with a mask until reaching safer air and getting exercise is better than not exercising because of pollution. Some studies now show cyclists are potentially exposed to less pollution than people in vehicles, so wearing a mask that reduces pollution by 90% or more is worth the risk (see health tips, below).

Despite the pollution, the Valley rim is still a great place to stay in shape. The ridges surrounding the Valley offer trails ideal for running and cycling, extending from forested hills through the paddy terraces far above the pollution. One can easily ride 2 hours in the morning and get above the dirty air, and still make it back for work. Or there are 4-6 hour cycling trips on weekends. The rides with Himalayan views, clean air, good singletrack and tasty lunch at village te shops make for an excellent Saturday out on a bike.

Shivapuri Scar Route

Easily accessed by riding or driving to Kakani, enter the Shivapuri National Park (Rs1,565 for foreigners, Rs100 for Nepali). Continue on trail until a fork taking right and left contours around the peak. Left is more travelled by, with a technical singletrack and beautiful views for 10 km until Guri Bhanjyang. Drop back to Kathmandu via Tokha and Gande Hospital or continue on. The loop can have as much as 30km off-road singletrack. Multi-day adventures include Chisapani and/or Nagarkot (single 12-hour ride for extreme riders).

Up to Lamacho is also a very good ride inside the National Park. Around the perimeter of Nagarkot used to be good, but is now a dusty, muddy loop due to construction and traffic.

Best time to ride is October to May.

Despite the high mountain bike fees charged by the park, minimal maintenance is done and bees and stinging nettles are in abundance, along with landslide damage.

Shivapuri Helipad Route

This is a shorter morning ride, easily accessible from Budhanilkhashi. Take a right before the gate, take a right and head east. This road meanders, but follow the track up the ridge. This is a steep 2.5km climb which tops out onto an old helipad and continues up into the park. This downhill foot for beginners) is famous among Kathmandu mountain bikers and is one of the best. Continue to Kopan Monastery or take different trails back to Kathmandu.

Best time to ride is October to June, with some exceptions in April/May after heavy storms, but it remains rideable all year (no leeches).

Mudhku to Tokha Trail

Good ride for beginners and fun the whole year. Construction and bulldozers make conditions unpredictable, so be prepared for muddy conditions, even in winter.

Year Round Ride.

Lakhuri-Lele-Bungamati Ride

These are all scenic rides on the Valley’s outskirts suitable for families, fitness for climbing (Lakhuri: 55min, Bhalchok 1hr 15min) but all have easy access, are forested and away from the Kathmandu chaos. The loop times range from 2-7 hours depending on entry and exit points. The brick factories below Khokana emit a growing amount of pollution.

Mostly power road rides. Some of the forest singletracks are slippery in the monsoon.

DUSTMUNDI: A bicycle commuter on Tuesday on a road in Kathmandu that has been warmed without making space for a bicycle lane.

(Aged Conservative Prakash Paraj has been killed by a truck while riding his bicycle at the point on the Ring Road in 2011. The road requires does not have a bicycle lane, and Tonsa’s memorial is gone.

PEDALLING GOOD HEALTH

Follow Kathmandu’s bicycle commuters as they ride the health-regenerating traffic on dusty streets. Listen to why they do it.

nepalitimes.com

Cut into his market. "Only children’s bicycles are still selling well." With events like Mountain Bike Championships and Kera Cycling, there seems to be a recreational benefit of bicycling has grown. But sports cycling still has a long way to go.

"There is no end to road in Nepal for indoor track cycling, and cross-country cycling, it’s very simple, Sinos, really..." says Gopal Sunder Lal Kafle of the Nepal Cycling Association. "Activists lobby for years to make Kathmandu more cycle-friendly, and Kathmandu city’s Bicycles Shyam had a plan for a ‘Cycle City’ with bicycle lanes and parking areas in the famous list of 100 Things To Do Within the First 100 Days in office."

"The 100 days have long passed, and we are disappointed the new Ring Road does not have bicycle lanes," says Shalendra Dash of Cycle City Network of Nepal advocacy groups.

Nepal’s terrain is ideal for all kinds of cycling, but policies and plans actively discourage bicycling at a time when cities around the world are returning to this mode of transport.

nepalitimes.com
Sacred Survival
An exhibition of seven contemporary Thana and Pausha painters: Lek Chitkara, Musa Malik, Tadam Ravish, Amin Thiya, Surosita Dwina Tamung, Tularam Luma and Karma Risten Gausa.
17-21 May, 7-17pm, Siddharta Art Gallery, Barber House, (031) 4018484

Portraits & landscapes
Seven portraits and landscapes of Nepal shot by partisans of Eric Huyghe’s photography workshop in April.
17 May 29,6pm, Audition, Alliance Francaise de Kathmandu, Patan, (01) 5893027

Food tasting
Taste Japanese, Indian, Spanish and Sri Lankan cuisine prepared by culinary students at the International Food Tasting Events 2010.
12 May, 7pm, Hotel, Academy of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management, Khokana, (01) 58601040

Celebration of womanhood
Visual artist Licia Tamrakar’s collection of eight pieces on display at the restaurant.
11-31 May, 10am-11pm, GG Mouseon, Patan, (01) 5893027

Drisyanaah closing
A multimedia and photo exhibition closing.
31 May, 6pm onwards, Sonammon Theatre, Kolohastan, (01) 4011927

Town hall meeting
A discussion on ‘building a climate-enhanced city’.
17 May, 6pm onwards, Lalitpur Metropolitan City Office, Patan, (01) 5852563

The Thistlers
The Thistle’s photographers’ series brings Raj Bahadur, Khil Raj Tamang and Chandra Shrestha’s Kuki to tell stories behind the frames.
16 May, 5:30pm onwards, Royal Cultural Center, kathmandu, 0200 (Pаниею) Rs100/door sale, 881047038

Unlimited weekend fun
Enjoy Saturday with friends at the hotel’s swimming pool with servings of unlimited food and drinks.
12 May, 10am-7pm, Pool Side, Sooba Tower, Laskar, 02160, adult Rs1,000, child (below 10years), 0252259

Comedy circle
A dose of fresh stand-up comedy by Kishnu, Sajan, Jayudd and Rajan for the weekend.
12 May, 6:30pm, Beer ‘n’ Cheers, Jorpati, 9847316007

Byoga
An hour long session on experiential beer with yoga. Bridal, slim and stretch.
10 May, 6-9pm, Park Village Resort, Kathmandu, Rs1,000, 014813040, 9847392962

The Kathmandu Killers
The Kathmandu Killers playing a mix of punk, ska, hardcore and electro music, together with Dancescene. The band has recently released their first ever EP ‘Toreans of Kirtipur’ with songs like Dubai Gorkhali, Golden Star and Farakka Ghoda.
17 May, 7pm onwards, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, 0222967919

Jackowacko
Special summer 20-night with Jacko Wallace and great food and beer drinks.
17 May, 7-11pm, Places Restaurant and Bar, Soal Chand Marg, 014703413

Kathmandu June

The Knights

Kailash Restaurant
Frangi fine dining at the restaurant of the 50-year-old hotel. Serving continental, Chinese and Indian cuisine.
17 May, 11pm, Kailash Restaurant, (01) 4445151

Muse Restobar
A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar with sophisticated wooden interior, providing a complete family environment.
Letteneh Park, (01) 4446153

The Diplomat
Experience luxurious culinary delights at the hotel’s Indian and Continental restaurant, without compromising on comfort.
Jomhouryos, (01) 4140382

Kutumba
The popular Nepali fox instrument ensemble performing live at the restaurant.
17 May, 11pm, Jomhouryos, Swayambhunath Temple, (01) 4500620

The Kathmandu Chorale
Lift up your spirits! The Kathmandu Chorale’s new singing sensation: ‘Draw the Circle With Children’ from the ‘Balkhara School’, directed by Vka Kodali, 12pm, the British School, Jomhouryos
Kathmanduchorale@gmail.com

Hotel Kaize Darbar
Frangi Japanese delicacies and more at the boutique hotel. Not to miss is their pearl Monk! in Maiti palace.
Kamiskhola, 01 4492383

Lake View Resort
The resort’s private pools, featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exterior and a private veranda, offer a great weekend escape.
Lake Side, Pokhara (061) 46472/464254

Dahli Boutique Hotel
A luxury hotel at the Damak Prithivi path with 180 degree view and city view a great end to a memorable trip.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 482655

Bathali Village Resort
A small resort with a bird’s eye view of green tennis fields dotted with art painted houses.
Pokhara, 9847138112

Club Himalaya
Aaring mountain views through gips in marmosir clouds for refreshing weekend escapades.
Kathmandu, 9847600880

Shangri-La Village Resort
2 nights and 3 days special package at the village resort, let the marmos point out the madness in you.
11 May- 30 September. Shangrila Pothan, (061) 48260, get coupons worth Rs 5,000 loop, (061) 4826222

Chimainale Village Resort
Abode with pear trees, the Resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of kathmandu city.
Chimainale, (061) 4580271

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Sacred survival

Exhibition showcases contemporary Nepali Thangka and Paubha painters

Michael Gordon

Walk into most Paubha or Thangka shops in Thamel or Durbar Marg, and you will probably hear a story about Tibetan monks grinding stone pigments high in the Himalayas. "Boots" spirituality has become as much of a brand as belief used to Instagram it, but in reality most of these paints are produced by Tamangs, Gurungs, and Newars using inexpensive poster colors in warehouses around Boudha and Hilsapaur.

The painting factories may not seem "authentic", but for the artist it puts food on the table. The demands of economic survival and the need for cultural preservation create new terms of authenticity for paubha and thangka.

Thangka and paubha were originally ritual objects for Vajrayana Buddhists. Many would like to separate what is sacred and what is sold, but this is a false distinction. The paintings always involved financial transactions. However, as secular art collectors and tourists buy more of them, profit drives commodification.

Tularam Lama has been painting for over 20 years. Yet he is still at the mercy of gallery dealers who do not share their profits with artists.

"We are compelled to sell cheap," says Laxmi, who founded the Nepal Association of Thangka Artists. He still strives to maintain artistic integrity, teaching Tamang students to paint with inexpensive pigments as well as to understand the tradition's cultural heritage.

Some painters use the market to build connections. Bhim Thapa, manager of Tara Thangka Center in Thamel, donates 25% of his sales to his community in Kirtipur. Prior to the earthquake, Thapa's sales supported orphan children and women's education. Today he focuses on basic necessities like blankets and food. "Thangka is not about perfect iconography," says Thapa, "it's about children's welfare."

At the other end of the spectrum, internationally renowned Lek Chitrakar paints with traditional mineral colors and works with scholarly rigour. He will be the first to gently remind you that paubha and thangka are not the same thing.

Paubha was developed by the Newars of Kathmandu Valley in the 7th century. Nepali Princess Bhrikuti is said to have taken some of the images with her when she introduced Buddhism to Tibet in 1300 years ago. Over centuries, Thangka developed its own stylistic code known as thangka. After the exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959, Tibet and its people gained increasing global popularity. Today, many tourists flock to Nepal as a surrogate for Tibet, hoping to find the monasteries (and thangkas) they saw in Tibet in Tibet and National Geographic documentaries. But what they find may defy expectations.

Lek Chitrakar's use of Hindu gods like Ganesh as icons of Newari Buddhism is not just an artistic choice, but a testimony to Nepal's unique religious coexistence.

For many, however, maintaining these traditions is oppressive. Historically, thangka and paubha were made by men, but today the field is changing thanks to women artists like Mona Maktan. For her thangkas means not just employment but also empowerment. She supports her family and a school of aspiring Tamang artists (mostly girls) with her paintings.

"Women need to find a way to live on their own means, and I found it through thangka," says Maktan.

Sonam Delma guides (rather than teaches) students in ritual practice of perfection. Many painting production centers now use transparent plastic overlays to rapidly reproduce outlines. Sonam's students at the Teerth Art School use black wooden boards thinly coated with glue and dusted with white chalk to repeatedly draw until outlines are memorised, "by hand, mind, and heart." The painters begin and end each day with prayer, to remember the true purpose of their craft.

One of Sonam's top students, Karma Kunchen Gungpa, paints to strengthen his practice as a Buddhist monk. At 13, he entered Samten Ling Monastery and like his monastic vows, his painting brings him freedom through disciplines. He considers his practice meditation, focusing his mind and breath on a single point. People often ask if he paints to make money. He himself wonders: "Am I doing this for dharma or for economic reasons?" Many students at Teerth Art School, including monks, paint for private dealers to afford living in Kathmandu.

The foreign interest in thangka and paubha has also encouraged artistic individuality. Tenam Norbu comes from a 400 year old lineage of thangka painters. Each new generation breaks away from the stylistic trends of their predecessors. Norbu now illustrates modern Dolpo life and has shown around the world from the Rubin Museum in New York to Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. His ancestors never signed their paintings, believing in the collective accumulation of merit. Norbu now champions his distinct style as an emblem of personal entrepreneurship.

For some, the craft is a way of maintaining cultural and spiritual lineage. For others, redefining not only what is painted, but who gets to paint affirms the rapid democratisation of the art form. To all artists, the painting is a means of sacred survival, providing both sanctuary and subsistence.

Sacred Survival: an exhibition of seven contemporary thangka and paubha artists 11 to 27 May, Subharti Art Gallery, Better World Curated by Michael Gordon.
Recommended to me by a movie-loving friend who saw it when it came out in cinemas in France last year, right after it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival (outside of competition but winning an accolade nevertheless), Faces Places is a film worth chasing down. A documentary made by the legendary Agnès Varda – now in her late 80s. In collaboration with her friend, the 88-year-old French artist known only as JR, *Faces Places or Visages Villages* as it is titled in French, is the story of two artists, undaunted by their age differences, who decide to travel across France, meeting their fellow countrywomen and men, and creating art out of the faces and occupations of those quotidian but quietly extraordinary lives.

JR captures the photos of the people they meet, and with his skilled team, traveled over by Varda’s unerring cinematographer’s eye, these images are pasted onto the edifices of people’s lives, homes, monuments, and sometimes the abandoned places that used to house entire communities.

The project sounds simple, maybe even facile, but in the hands of more ambitious, less articulate, people (documentary makers are often ruthless in the manipulation of their subjects, but not these two young at heart, old souls) it could have gone wrong. Instead, the film meanders along at its own pace, the two friends converse over where to go, unafraid of boring the viewer, tease each other mercilessly, and together bring out the most tender and human aspect of themselves, and their subjects, resulting in breath-taking portraits of the people and the places they live in.

*Faces Places* was rightly nominated in the Best Documentary category this year, but this piece of information is only included in my review to convince the stoics who might be holding out till now. While it did not win, the film is such a piece of beauty in an ugly world that it is worth finding, and viewing. It is also a chance to see one of Agnès Varda’s films – her other films are not as accessible, even while *Cléo from 5 to 7 (1962)* is one of the great masterpieces of cinema, a dream of a film that follows the life of a woman, moment by moment, through her day: the kind of daring, immaculate, perfectly crafted film that every art-house filmmaker dreams of making.

Readers interested in Nepal and its issues, in print or online, perhaps may wonder at the point of watching a film about French Musée workers. I guess, I would say, the wider your viewing, the more you can enjoy your heart. So go out and seek.}

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**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pande

*MUST SEE* sophia.pande@nepaltimes.com

**HAPPENINGS**

11-17 MAY 2019 | Issue 909

**MONEY MATTERS**: Finance Minister Ybou Raj Mahato, addressing Parliament on Wednesday, says the new budget would give top priority to infrastructure and connectivity.

**EUROZONE**: German Ambassador Roland Sethner, Finnish Ambassador Jorma Suuranta, Dutch Ambassador Venton Creedy and British Ambassador Roland Morris (from left to right) at the Europe Day celebration at Hotel Festruparna on Wednesday.

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**: The UK Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, calls on Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali at Singha Durbar on Sunday.

**BEJEWLED**: Indian actress Karishma Kapoor during an inauguration of Marigold jewelers’ showroom in Durbar Marg on Monday. The company aims to promote traditional Nepali jewelry in India.

**BIG DAY**: Birders flocked for a group picture after Bird Conservation Nepal’s Global Big Day 2018 at Shiva Parbat National Park on Saturday.
Modi visit on Twittersphere

Selection of recent Tweets on the Nepalcybersphere about the Narendra Modi visit.

Bishal Silwal @BishalSilwal
10:12 hours ago
1. We needed Airways, they agreed to waterways. 2. Easier to import more from them on a ship. 3. They will help us with agriculture, but they move borderer pillars. You can very far if there is land.

Deepak Adhikari @DeepakAdk
Verified account @deepakadk
10:14 hours ago
A co-called national-level government turned out to be coarsely. This government is arranging trips to Janakpur and Mukristh for Modi, which even the Congress didn’t agree to.

Chandrashekhari @kshore_chandra
7:17 hours ago
Indian FM’s visit to Jaipur is attracting a lot of attention for political reasons, but for Nepal’s tourism industry the visit to Mukristh is even more important than Janakpur because of its religious and scenic significance.

Subash Adhikary @subhy2000
12:12 hours ago
The country is ours, but the guest chooses his destination. The sky is ours, but the plane is the guest’s own. Our guests, but in the security. We are victims, but it is the perpetrator who is being treated. There is a big difference between patriotism and nationalism.

Jhalak subed @Jhalakshile
5:15 minutes ago
The Modi visit is going to polarize Nepal polatics. On one side there is rejoice among some Hindu priests, on the other outrage among some mountain priests. Remember of the time the Constitution was promulgated. It was Nepal’s loss, India has not changed its course.

Shree Dju @ShreeDju
23 minutes ago
A co-called national-level government turned out to be coarsely. This government is arranging trips to Janakpur and Mukristh for Modi, which even the Congress didn’t agree to.

For full Nepali version of this piece, go to deshsanchar.com
nepalitimes.com
Modi’s Himalayan marathon

The Indian prime minister’s visit to Nepal sparks hope, dismay and speculation

Om Astha Rai

As the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi travels to Kathmandu between two political pilgrimages to Janakpur and Mukteshwar this weekend, there is hope, dismay and even confusion in Nepal. In Janakpur, where Modi will worship at Sita’s birthplace and be felicitated, there is unprecendented excitement. Not even Jawaharlal Nehru, who inaugurated the Kosi Barrage in 1961, has an Indian leader visited Nepal’s Terai. The citizens of Province 2 hope that Modi’s decision to take a direct flight from New Delhi to Janakpur on Friday says the Modi-Bihar demand for amendments to the Constitution.

In Kathmandu, where Modi will spend two nights and meet political figures, many are dismayed that their mayor is felicitating an Indian leader who blocked Nepal for five months in 2015. Angry posts on Nepali social networks (see page 20) have demanded that Modi apologises for what they call a crime against humanity. People are widely circulating an appeal on Twitter and Facebook to observe a 90-minute blackout in Kathmandu on Friday evening, as a symbolic protest to remind citizens of the dark days of the Blockade two years ago.

And there is confusion about whether the Modi visit reflects a course correction in India’s policy towards Nepal. Some think New Delhi realised it went too far, pushed Nepal closer to China, and is now trying to reset bilateral ties.

But others argue that Modi either doesn’t know about the level of anger in Nepal, or doesn’t care. He is more interested in using his pilgrimage to Kathmandu as an opportunity to curry political points with Indians who were alienated by his recent stand-off with Pakistan over the Doklam dispute. He is also hoping to use his visit to boost his party’s election chances.

MF Rabin Bhandari believes Modi’s visit indicates New Delhi’s realisation that the Blockade was a blunder. But analyst Surekha Krishna Anandhau says the two leaders are improving relations. He says a Modi visit is highly unlikely. Geetam says: “Modi’s visit is less about resetting diplomatic ties with Nepal and more about his own domestic electoral politics, and geopolitics.”

PM Anil Bajracharya of the Madhesh-based RJPN asks scathingly: “There was no course in Indian policy (towards Nepal), so how can there be a correction? Still, the visit has symbolic significance.”

Whether offering prayers at Janaki Temple in Janakpur, worshiping at Muktinath shrine near the China border or visiting Patan Durbar Square in Kathmandu, whatever good has been aimed at the heart of the Nepali audience. It will also be trying to lay the blame on the Chinese. New Delhi’s media will likely try to make a repeat performance of 2014 when he turned around Nepal’s public opinion with a strong statement to the Parliament. He will try to turn the charm offensive once again.

Nepal will flag off the Janakpur-Yadavindra bus service, unveil a plan to connect the birthplace of Sita with the Ramayana Circuit. It is also likely to announce a special package for Janakpur’s development.

In Kathmandu, Modi and PM KP Oli will remove the foundation stone of Arun II (see next page). The two leaders are also expected to sign agreements on railway, agriculture and inland waterway projects. But these will not be enough to heal the bitter memories of the Indian Blockade on the Nepal psyche. Nepal’s former ambassador to India Bishow Parajuli Thapa, who is a member of the Indra-Nepal Eminent Persons Group says: “The only way Modi can begin to build the confidence of Nepal is to deliver on his past promises.”

Dam it, it’s all about water

As the Kathmandu intelligence describes whether New Delhi has realised its mistake of blocking water to Nepal or not, there is a growing call for Nepal to correct its own past mistakes on hydropower projects. While in Kathmandu, Indian PM Narendra Modi will remotely lay the foundation stone of Arun II, a 900MW project being built by the Indian public sector firm Srisaila Jal Shakti Nigam in eastern Nepal. But experts say Nepal's first export-oriented electricity scheme could be a losing proposition for Nepal. They say it would benefit much more if it planned on meeting its own immense demand for electricity instead of exporting it. Studies have shown that the consumption of 1 kilowatt of electricity makes the GDP grow by Rs 93.

Water resource analyst Ramesh Shrestha extrapolates that this could benefit Nepal by more than Rs 9,100 billion in 45 years from the multiplier effect of domestic consumption of Arun III electricity. But Nepal will be exporting 78% of Arun energy production to India, and will therefore be deprived of downstream benefits of the energy on the economy.

As Modi and Oli patch up after three year’s elections in which Oli capitulated on the perception that he had stood up to India during the Blockade, there are also concerns about how Nepal will safeguard its national interest on water resources. Back in 1999, when it was Oli himself who persuaded his UML party to support the controversial Mahakali Treaty on the western border river which was said to have cheated Nepal of water rights.

Building high dams on the Kosi or Karnali can be a political hot potato in Nepal. Added to that, there is so much mistrust in Kathmandu that Modi and Oli are cleverly using the term ‘waterway’ as a code for ‘dem’. Reservoirs in Nepal would be useful for monsoon flood control and for augmenting flow of Indian rivers for irrigation and inland waterways in the lean season. This could be why Oli is suddenly obsessed about making river navigable, and Modi talks about connecting Sagar (M Vesuver) to Sagarmatha (Ocean) through inland waterways.

“Nepal will not benefit from making Indian rivers navigable”, Shrestha explains. “How Modi is trying to persuade Nepal with the possibility of access to the sea, promising that it will no longer be landlocked. But he is doing it so that Nepal will not drive a hard bargain when it comes to compensation for possible inundation.”
From the Indian media

Selection of curtain raiser opinion in the Indian media about the visit by Indian PM Narendra Modi to Nepal.

Indranil Bagchi in The Times of India, 10 May

Modi may find a little more difficult to charm everyone as he had done in his previous visit. The threat of the 2015 blockade hangs in the air, while Nepal’s resurgent nationalism is more often than not aired in India. Modi’s first visit elicited an ecstatic reception in Kathmandu. Greater scepticism may greet him this time. Instead India will try to keep the dialogue to development assistance — agriculture partnership where the first meetings have been held and pilot projects have been identified; inland waterways transport, where Kalyanpur in Bihar has been identified as the transhipment point.

The Wire, 8 May

According to sources, the quick reciprocal visit by the Indian PM is the result of PM Modi’s visit to India. When PM Modi had spoken to Xi to congratulate him on becoming PM, the latter had urged him to make an early return visit. The prime minister’s willingness to make this visit so soon shows a certain comfort level with the Nepali leadership and his keen interest in building trust,” the source said.

The emphasis on “trust” is a result of Oli’s antagonism towards India for a legacy being behind the 2015 blockade and keeping the Kathmandu-Srinagar civil aviation agreement intact. India had also been suspicious of Oli’s proclivity towards China, with talks of opening the border and transport links across the Tibetan plateau into Nepal.

Modi’s trip to Nepal this week would be the first time that he has touched the country to South Asian countries. Sources say that the main purpose of the visit is to build on Oli’s visit — “principally to carry forward the new initiatives and implement pending proposals”.

With a stable government in Kathmandu, India is hoping that the implementation of many development projects which were stuck due to issues from the Nepalese side will also start. And forest delimitation will be accelerated.

Dinesh Bhattacharya, former advisor to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala in The Hindu, 10 May

Imminently after the promulgation of Nepal’s constitution, India restored an undeclared economic blockade that caused unbelievable suffering to the people of Nepal who were also hit hard by the devastating earthquake of April 2015. This act ended trust and confidence in the eloquent words of the previous year. Had the then Prime Minister Sushil Koirala not taken a firm position amid last minute pressure from India, there would not have been the promulgation of the new constitution. Now, these lines of rhetoric have been held, the democratic process institutionalised, and the present leadership (insulted this February) Koirala followed courageous pragmatism in the conduct of foreign policy, respected India’s concerns and sensitivities when needed and asserted Nepal’s sovereignty when circumstances demanded... the Nepali people are not ready to better their plight and sovereignty for support and goodwill of any kind.

Suhasini Haider in The Hindu, 4 March

May (in Kathmandu), India accepts that restitution or foreign policy independence from India is easier said than done. A whopping 50 per cent of Nepal’s imports come from India, which has allowed Nepali citizens an open border, and quasi citizen rights for employment and property ownership on a reciprocal basis. India and Nepal give each other’s army chiefs honorary ranks, and have close security ties mandated by the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

nepalitimes.com

A memoir of a former military secretary, it takes us deep into the intrigues at the Narayanhiti Royal Palace and provide an inside-view into the momentous events of our times: the Royal Massacre, King Gyanendra’s wrestling of all executive powers, the Maoists’ armed rebellion and its genesis and the forces backing it, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between Nepal’s mainstream political parties and the Maoists, the end of monarchy, and the arrival of republicanism in Nepal. Written with courage and at great personal risk, the book is a must for anyone wanting to understand the contemporary history of Nepal.

nepalitimes.com

See online for a link to read complete article.
The Moody Visit

It is difficult to go anywhere these days without a politician, dip., fellow-backs, the family priest, and the friendly neighbourhood barber from Benkhamba asking me what I think about the visit to Nepal by @narendramodi.

My answer has always been: #KamalNadriNepal2018.

It is inappropriate that they decided to call it a ‘State Visit’ because he is beginning his tour in our State #2. The symbolism is not lost on anyone when they are rubbing it in so vigorously.

The Indian leader is journeying to Nepal for the first direct flight between the capital of India and the capital of Mithila since Ram made the journey in Pushpak Viman Airlines to ask for Sita’s hand in marriage. He was also not taking no for an answer.

However, after the original plan to drive overland across the border was shelved for security reasons, it would have been more appropriate for PM Modi to make the journey from Bihar Province to Province 2 by hovercraft so as to underscore the emphasis during this visit on promoting inland waterways.

Given the condition of the East-West Highway and other feeder roads in the Tarai during the monsoon, it wouldn’t have been easy to travel through and we already had inland waterways in Nepal.

However, this is not the time to split hairs. We should regard it as a positive development that Nepal will graduate from being land-locked to becoming fully India-locked by land, sea and air.

BIMSTEC has set a good example in giving S尻e Modi the keys to Janakpur Town, where we already have an open border. Anybody could just walk in.

Fearing black flags and protests in Kathmandu from people who want to remind us of the Great Blockage, Modi originally planned to fly straight from Province 2 to Province 4 and spend the night on the banks of the Modi River in Pokhara. However, the Government of Nepal astutely decided that he should at least make a trip to Kathmandu so that the Metropolitan City could fix what we euphemistically call ‘roads’ in these here parts.

Alert readers will not have to be reminded that Kathmandu has not been spruced up since the 2015 SAAARC Summit, and it was beginning to look rather shabby. Since no street repair ever gets done in Nepal unless we have a powerful foreign leader visiting, it was vital that Nartendr Uncle stop over in Kathmandu so the roads could be asphalted overnight.

The Chabahil Road which had more craters than the Jupiter moon, Gyanemda, feels like an Expressway after its makeover on Tuesday night. Thank you Mr Modi. However, GJINE should have insisted that the Indian PM nightstop in Gokarna Resort so that the Sanishu Road, which the Ass commutes on for his weekend golf run, could also have been patched up. Better still, instead of Pokhara, we should have sent the Visiting Dignitary to Sasaha so the Mogling Highway would be miraculously needed once and for all.

And we hope you loyal readers and royal leaders will take it as your personal sacrifice for the restoration of Nepal India relations to a state of ‘normalitude’ that you will willingly and happily sacrifice your Friday and Saturday being stuck in horrid jams on the roads and airways. If you are thinking of going anywhere, don’t.

If you are flying anywhere, drop it. It is not enough to declare Farda a holiday, the government should declare a 48-hour curfew before Conmei Biggby decides to declare a Two-day Bund.

The Ass