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We have ignition

Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi this week pre-empted opposition from the political parties, the Bar and civil society, by issuing a statement through the Supreme Court to say he was willing to take up the offer to lead an election government. But Regmi was himself slapped with a contempt of his own Supreme Court.

Another writ in the Supreme Court challenging Regmi's appointment will be decided on 7 March. That has bought the four-party negotiating task force some time to iron out the constitutional hurdles that need to be resolved, like amending the interim constitution, drawing up new voter lists, and a provision for photo ID to vote. If that wasn't complicated

enough, the ruling coalition is pushing a bitterly opposed 'package deal' that includes watered-down provisions on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill and an agreement on seniority for its ex-fighters in the Nepal Army.

Editorial
Stability at what cost?
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buzz



From this issue on, *Nepali Times* readers will get an expanded 20-page paper that includes the specially redesigned Buzz supplement for light weekend reading, adding to the world class coverage they have enjoyed in *Nepali Times* for the past 13 years.

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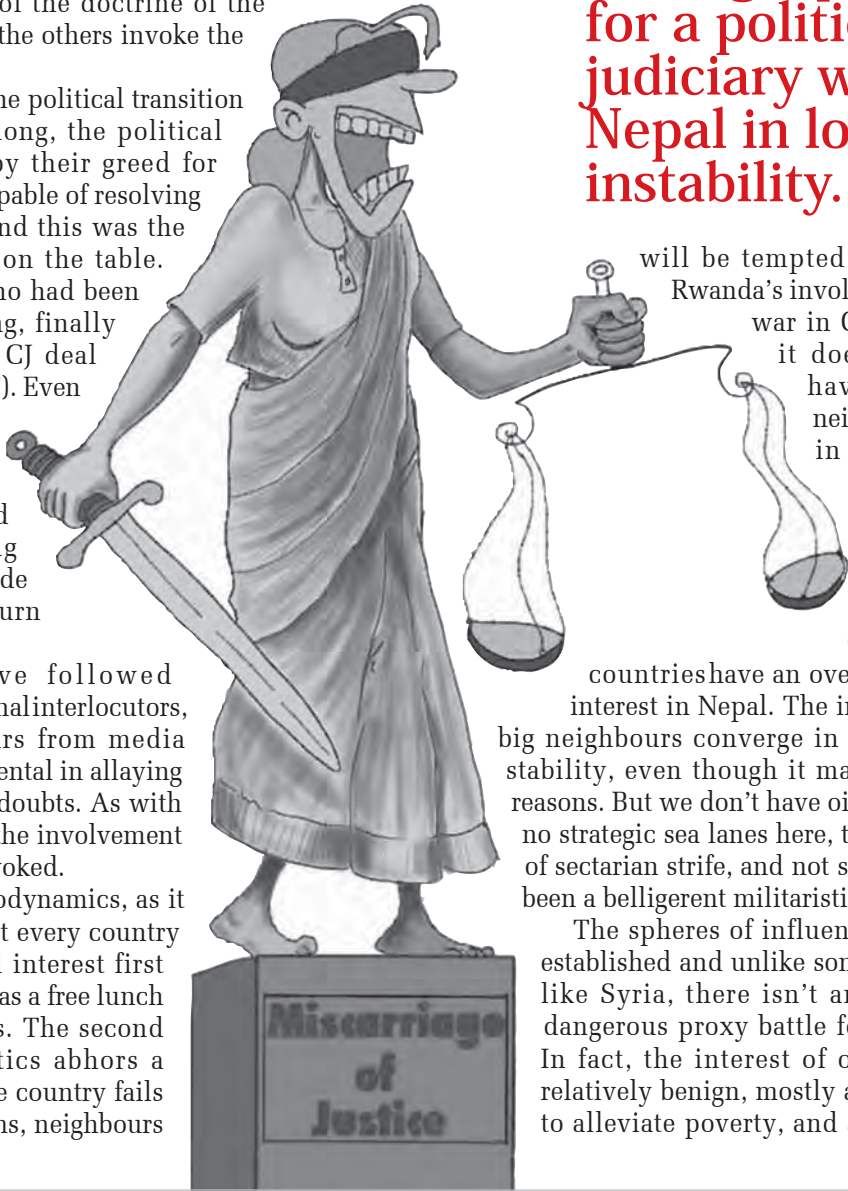
STABILITY AT WHAT COST?

The main philosophical argument between those who favour the CJ to lead the next government and those who don't is that one side thinks it is an unacceptable breach of the doctrine of the separation of powers and the others invoke the doctrine of necessity.

The reasoning is that the political transition has dragged on for too long, the political parties are so blinded by their greed for power that they were incapable of resolving a paralysing stalemate, and this was the best of the bad options on the table. Political party leaders who had been disagreeing on everything, finally seemed to agree on the CJ deal (except for some "spoilers"). Even politicians like Sushil Koirala of the NC and KP Oli of the UML who had vehemently opposed the CJ formula as being 'inspired by outsiders' made a sudden, overnight U-turn last week.

This seems to have followed interventions by international interlocutors, some of whom it appears from media reports, were also instrumental in allaying some of Khil Raj Regmi's doubts. As with everything else in Nepal, the involvement of a 'foreign hand' was invoked.

The first law of thermodynamics, as it were, in geopolitics is that every country looks at its own national interest first and there is no such thing as a free lunch in international relations. The second law states that geopolitics abhors a vacuum and if an unstable country fails to resolve its own problems, neighbours



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Setting a precedent for a politicised judiciary will mire Nepal in long-term instability.

will be tempted to intervene. As Rwanda's involvement in the civil war in Congo has shown, it doesn't necessarily have to be a bigger neighbour interceding in a smaller one, it can be the other way around. Except for India, and to a certain extent China, few other countries have an over-arching strategic interest in Nepal. The interests of our two big neighbours converge in Nepal: both want stability, even though it may be for different reasons. But we don't have oil and gas, there are no strategic sea lanes here, this is not a hotbed of sectarian strife, and not since 1816 have we been a belligerent militaristic neighbour.

The spheres of influence are fairly well-established and unlike some other countries, like Syria, there isn't among outsiders a dangerous proxy battle for influence here. In fact, the interest of outside powers is relatively benign, mostly an altruistic desire to alleviate poverty, and an obsession with

social justice that some say is patronising. If stability is indeed the main preoccupation of domestic and international actors, the question arises: is the dismantling of democratic institutions as is happening in Nepal now going to make the country more stable or less so? In the short-term, it could be convincingly argued that the political deadlock of the past year and the prolonged transition has been destabilising. The country has been flying on autopilot, without a constitution, without parliament, without budgets, without accountability, with no hope for local and general elections. The economy was a wreck, a kleptocratic coalition had surpassed all past records for plunder, and development had come to a standstill. When all other options failed, the idea of the chief justice to lead an election government became the only one that worked.

Those who crave stability in Nepal may one day regret their support for the systematic dismantling of the very institutions that their own founding fathers designed as the checks and balances to guarantee a secure democracy. Setting a precedent for a politicised judiciary will in fact mire Nepal in long-term instability.

The best alternative always was an all-party government led by Bhattarai. Teckless NC and UML leaders must be ruing the day they opposed the Prime Minister's offer to join an all-party coalition. By refusing, they paved the way for their own ultimate acceptance of the unconstitutional and risky CJ option. Bhattarai saw an opening and with one deft move, gained the moral upper hand, defanged a pesky Supreme Court, undermined an uncooperative President, and deflated a fledgling agitation in support for democracy.

We now have to wait until 7 March to hear the Supreme Court's own verdict on a writ against the appointment of the chief justice to lead the government. If the writ is quashed and the path is cleared for the CJ to take over, we have the whole other challenge of ensuring that elections, whenever they take place, are free and fair. More about that next time.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

ELECTIONS

One should praise the integrity of the chief justice as he didn't bow down in front of the original proposal - and a flawed one - that was forwarded to him ('Electing to go for elections', Editorial, #644). Those who are crying wolf should know that by condemning this solution they will just help to prolong this never-ending transition period once again. Only election is a way out of the current impasse. So it is the single most important duty of those who love Nepal to make polls happen. There can be no other man at the helm than the CJ.

Anonymous

● Separation of powers between the judiciary and executive should never be compromised. It is bad for democracy. It is a good sign that the UML and NC are having second thoughts and I hope they won't back these efforts by the Maoists to tarnish the judiciary which already doesn't have much faith among Nepalis due to rampant corruption. If the judiciary itself gets into the political fray then democracy is lost in Nepal.

Kamal Kishor

● The chief justice has shown guts not to obey the diktat of Baburam Bhattarai and PK Dahal. It shows he is a man of integrity. He did not fall into the Maoist trap, but the other parties did. This Indian proposal

is dead in the water, thanks to the opposition of civil society, Nepal Bar Association, and the media.

Jung

INNOVATING A NEW NEPAL

Mahabir Pun should know that real innovation can never be done by a government sanctioned innovation centre ('Innovating a new Nepal', Kunda Dixit, #644). He should instead push for the government to provide better education, healthcare, security, power, roads, and a fair environment for all to compete and generate innovation.

Jutali

● Building a hydropower project is doing business. Why should the government give money to anybody for such projects? Where is the innovation in this? If Pun has a good business plan, I am sure Nepalis will come together to support him. No need to lament the government's inaction on everything.

Bidur

● I'm really glad to read this story about Pun's initiative. Even if nothing happens here, it's good to hear that the prime minister is at least taking the initiative. The man has been a true inspiration to me and many other young Nepalis. Keep up the good work.

Vidhan Rana

● Through the Non-Resident Nepali Skill Knowledge and Innovation Task Force, NRNA has also taken

some flagship initiatives like the Open University and Mahabir ji is on the committee. Through the NRN Science Foundation we are also promoting Science Journalism. The frustration is obvious both at the individual as well as the institutional level, but NRNs can also play a meaningful role.

Raju Adhikari

● I accidentally met an Indian engineer friend at a hotel lobby in Kathmandu some time back. He said he had been to Nepal at least 20 times to make some headway into hydropower projects here. "Nothing moves in this b****y country of yours," he told me. Everyone talks sweet, but no one does a thing, just like what you describe about Pun's experience.

Armugam

CROWD-SOURCING

How in the world is digitising receipts of Americans and Canadians an example of social responsibility ('Crowd-sourcing in the cloud', Sulaiman Daud, #644)? I don't see any evidence of this in the article. This whole commotion about belonging to a community reeks of Evangelism and if this company is simply a facade for the intellectually-challenged Americans from the South to promote missionary activities in Nepal, then I would welcome Shiva Sena's hanumans at our doorstep.

Pragmatist007

IN THE MOUNTAIN OF THE SOUL

Tsum Valley is beautiful and my wife and

I (from Australia) have trekked there twice ('In the Mountain of the Soul', Sonam Lama, #644). A week is not enough, but even a day is a privilege.

Taghairm

INDECENT PROPOSAL

Excellent questions to the chief justice ('Indecent proposal, Kantipur', Binita Dahal, #643). But, my question is, will the CJ become PM and answer these questions or would he respond to these queries before embarking upon the 'throne'?

Rekha Karki

NO BIG DEAL

I fail to understand the logic behind the argument made in this article ('No big deal', Sunir Pandey, #644). So when someone, who used to make 350 a month now gets paid 900 and has to spend 100 on food and housing, isn't it (800) still more than a 50 per cent increase in salary?

Commando

TRILATERAL TRACK TWO

Arguments over values can easily devolve into absolutism ('Trilateral Track Two', Bhaskar Koirala, #642). Instead of wasting physical and intellectual resources in defining and debating values, non-government interactions between like-minded individuals from the three countries should focus on identifying common problems and ways in which the three sides can come together to ameliorate these problems. These could be

problems such as natural disasters (mainly earthquakes), illegal poaching and smuggling of animal products, and the need for improving and adding transit routes.

Anonymous

NOTE:

We encourage our readers to send us pictures of daily life in Nepal with a brief description (location, subject, and thoughts on the image). We will upload them onto our Facebook page and Twitter, and publish the best ones on our Happenings section.

The best photo will also receive a *Nepali Times* cap and two courtesy issues. Pictures should be in hi-res (300dpi), horizontal, full colour, unedited, and maximum 2MB. E-mail to juanita@nepalitimes.com

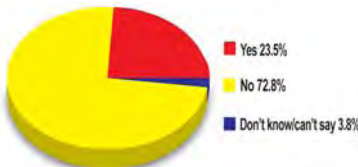


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Weekly Internet Poll #645

Q. Do you think elections will take place on 5 June once the parties agree on who should head the next government?

Total votes: 639



Weekly Internet Poll # 646. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Is it acceptable for the police to apprehend people based on how they look?



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BIKRAM RAI



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

A string of investigative reports published in various mainstream and regional newspapers and magazines in recent months indicates that corruption is deeply embedded in Nepal's public institutions and

has actually gained social acceptance.

The magnitude of malfeasance has surpassed all norms and has become standard operating procedure for citizens when they interface with the state. Nepal has earned the notoriety of being the most corrupt nation in South Asia, we have overtaken Bangladesh and only Afghanistan is worse.

One of the investigative reports concerns a 'blind' war victim riding a motorbike

Rotten to the core

Nepal's legal system has been too kind to those at the top who have presided over the plunder of the state

to the VDC office to claim compensation. Another is about the government paying for the reconstruction of infrastructure supposedly destroyed during the conflict, but that never really existed.

Last week, *Paschim Nepal Daily* in Dhangadi published Trishna Kunwar's investigative story exposing how local strongmen have been plundering community forests in the Chure hills of Dadeldhura and Kanchanpur districts for the last two decades in active collusion with the officials at the Department of Forests, protected by lawmakers and ministers in subsequent governments.

The story did not get much attention in Kathmandu, partly because the far-west may as well be on another planet. That the story was ignored by the Kathmandu mainstream press, is a reminder that power of the media lies not just in what it seeks to investigate, but also what it chooses not to.

"There has been no illegal logging in the district in the last one and half year," claims director Braj Kishore Yadav at the Forest Department. Yadav also maintains that those found to be involved in illegal logging

have already faced unspecified departmental action. This is an eye wash to let the big fish off the hook. Even in cases where the corrupt are actually convicted, Nepal's legal system has been too kind towards those at the top who have presided over the plunder of state resources.

Despite being charged with embezzling over Rs 30 million, NC leader Chiranjivi Wagle who was serving jail term since March 2011, was granted 20 per cent waiver in jail term and fine. He was released in April last year. In the Sudan APC scam, the court sentenced three former police chiefs who were holding office during that period, while their political bosses who gave the orders went scot free.

Of the 32 investigative stories commissioned by the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) this year, 23 were on corruption in state institutions at various levels, three of them published in the last six days. Almost all the stories point towards organised corruption with local strongmen colluding with government officials and party leaders. Journalists who have reported them have got death threats.

Often, the rise in corruption is attributed to ineffective laws to curb it. However, this traditional notion fails to explain why nations that punish corruption with stringent laws are also among the most corrupt.

At Ratna Park, Sharada Jha Bhusal (*pictured*) has been on a hunger strike for the past week protesting corruption in Mahottari. She is getting weaker and weaker, but no government official or politician has been there to see her. Few journalists have reported on the protest. Bhusal says she is on strike because all other attempts to curb the state's theft of citizens failed. Bhusal is doubly disadvantaged, she is from a neglected district and she is a woman.

Part of the reason Bhusal's crusade is such a lonely one is because corruption has become so accepted in Nepali society. The state of impunity means no one is punished and there is no deterrence - individuals exhibit dishonest behaviour without experiencing any guilt or remorse. 🇳🇵

Anurag Acharya is the Program Manager at the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ).

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Ashes to ashes

HARI DEVI ROKAYA

It's 9AM in Ratna Park. Street vendors have neatly laid out packets of cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and beetle nuts on the sidewalk. A group of men puffs away, discussing politics. At the microbus stand, drivers gesture to passengers with one hand and drag on a cigarette with the other.

Almost two years after the government introduced the Tobacco Product Control and Regulatory Bill, it finally banned smoking in public places including offices, schools, libraries, airports, public lavatories, cinema halls, hotels, restaurants, buses, and even in the sports stadium in August last year. If caught, smokers are fined Rs 100 and repeat offenders have to dole out up to Rs 100,000.

"I know we are not supposed to smoke in public, but I've already lit my cigarette, I will smoke with one hand and drive with the other," says a microbus driver as he blows out a puff of smoke, "I've heard people are being fined, but I can't stop smoking, what can I do?"

The Bill requires cigarette and tobacco companies to cover 75 per cent of the packet or box and print a public health message in Nepali on the back accompanied by a colour image of the effects

of tobacco consumption. Advertisement of products and sponsorship of programs in the media by tobacco companies have been prohibited as well. Owners of tobacco industry, however, have filed a case in the Supreme Court against these two clauses and both remain in limbo.

"Yes, smokers are at risk of cancer and respiratory problems like asthma and bronchitis, but these numbers fail to tell us the damage caused to passive smokers," explains cancer specialist Arti Shah.

Until the bill was introduced, regulation and control were almost non-existent and even a 10-year-old child could buy cigarettes or chewing tobacco from the corner shop. The government had hoped to lessen exposure to second-hand smoking, stem the astonishing rate of lung cancer, and boost life expectancy of Nepalis, yet its commitment towards enforcing the bill is questionable.

"The government banned smoking in public, but I don't understand why street vendors are still allowed to sell cigarettes freely in the open. It should outlaw the sale of cigarettes in public as well, otherwise people won't follow this new rule," a father who was smoking while waiting for a bus at Ratna Park



SOURCE: WORLD BANK AND WHO DATA

INFOGRAPHIC: BILASH RAI

The proportion of women who smoke in Nepal is higher than most countries in the region

with a toddler in tow told *Nepali Times*. "If they sell outside, we will smoke outside."

Initially, the police caught hundreds of offenders, but like most other issues in Nepal, the ban seems to have fallen off the police's priority list. Kathmandu CDO Chuda Mani Sharma admits the government's focus at the moment is to make the public more aware and stricter enforcement will follow in the coming months.

Praveen Mishra, secretary

at the Ministry of Health and Population, who currently heads a committee to tighten regulations, says: "We can't achieve 100 per cent success within a few days, it's a long process. At least Nepalis now have an understanding that there will be rules to control smoking and tobacco consumption in public. Putting the bill into action is our next step."

Jyoti Baniya, general secretary of the Consumers' Rights Protection Forum, however,

blames the tobacco industry lobby for bullying and not letting the authorities execute the act properly. He says: "The tobacco industry in Nepal is pretty powerful, so unless there is strong political will, business owners will continue to arm twist the state and the bill will only remain on paper."

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Puffing away, #586
Should we ban cigarettes, #578

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Killing you softly

Interestingly, Nepal has a much higher rate of smoking among women (18 per cent) than neighbouring India (five per cent) or Thailand (2.1 per cent). The consumption of chewing tobacco is equally rampant, especially among men, with almost one-fifth using khaini.

Smoking has been linked to an increased risk in a number of diseases including lung and throat cancers, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and stroke. Although thought to be less harmful than cigarettes, chewing tobacco can also lead to throat and mouth cancers. Tobacco use is the single biggest cause of preventable death in the world, whether smoked or consumed orally. A Nepali dies every half-an-hour due to smoking-related ailments.


Rubika Waiba, a physician at Capital Hospital in Putali Sadak says: "I have seen a steep rise in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and bronchial asthma." She attributes this to smoking combined with pollution and dust in the city air.

One of the most effective ways to curb tobacco abuse is

by limiting or outright banning of advertisement of cigarettes and other products. As a signatory of the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control in 2006, Nepal has tried to enact bans through the Supreme Court verdicts in 2006 and 2009 and also an Executive Order in 2010.

A more comprehensive policy was introduced through the Tobacco Product Control and Regulatory Bill in 2010. The bill proposed a complete ban on smoking in public places and workplaces, ban on cigarette advertisements, and made it mandatory for tobacco companies to cover 75 per cent of cigarette packets or other tobacco products with health warnings.

With 1.5 billion cigarettes produced annually, the tobacco industry in Nepal is a big provider of jobs and some argue that targeting it will only hurt the economy and make thousands unemployed. In the long-term, however, reducing morbidity and mortality by discouraging smoking may turn out to be better for Nepal's economy.

Can the police do to smoking in public places what it did to drinking and driving? 
Sulaiman Daud

Even you give up smoking in Kathmandu, the choking air pollution is the equivalent to smoking two packs a day. Doctors say the risk of lung cancer is 20 per cent greater for those living in polluted cities like Beijing, Mexico City or Kathmandu. Add smoking to this and you are liable to stop breathing very soon.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), over a quarter of Nepal's 26 million people smoke regularly. The number is much higher for those who have ever smoked.

BIZ BRIEFS



Spreading wings

Qatar Airways has extended its reach in the Asia Pacific region with the inaugural flight to Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh on Thursday. With the launch of daily scheduled services, Qatar Airways becomes the only Middle Eastern airline flying to the South East Asian nation and it is the 125th destination served worldwide.

Mind boggling offer

Nepal General Marketing's the sole authorised distributor of Hero MotoCorp has announced winners of its 'Dimag Kharab' scheme. Basti Yadav from Janakpur, Manoj Sherchan from Nepalganj, and Gajdhar Bhandari from Butwal will receive 100, 75, and 50 per cent cash refund, respectively, on their purchases.



Sleek ride

Sipradi Trading, the sole authorised distributor of Tata in Nepal, launched the Tata Manza Club Class sedan. It has set a new benchmark for sedan buyers in the mid-sized car segment with its plush interiors and state-of-the-art technology features.



Rapid rise

SKODA MAW has introduced the diesel version of Rapid in Nepal. According to its press release the new variants Active Plus, Ambition Plus, and Elegance will have diesel engines with 1.6 litre capacities, which is the highest in its particular price segment.



Sealing the deal

Etihad Airways paid \$70 million to buy Jet Airways' slots at London's Heathrow airport. Etihad said the deal to buy slots was a part of a sale and lease-back agreement and Jet would continue to operate flights to London using those slots.



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Can Rahul revive the Congress?

The NC and UML in Nepal may want to look at how Rahul Gandhi confronts the challenges of the Indian National Congress



GUEST COLUMN
Ajaz Ashraf

For all the fanfare of the formal anointing of Rahul Gandhi as the new, young leader of the Congress in India, the party faces challenges dating back to more than two decades when his father, Rajiv, was alive. Can Rahul's Congress retrieve the party's social base which various groups have cannibalised in Uttar Pradesh

and Bihar bordering Nepal?

In many ways, the challenge the Indian National Congress faces echoes that of the Nepali Congress and UML in Nepal because of the rise of new social forces and emergence of new political groups. There might be a lesson for the NC and UML to learn how the Indian National Congress under Rahul confronts the challenges.

The decline of Congress in India was because it failed to evolve to the issues of OBC ('Other Backward Castes', or middle castes) reservation and the Ram Janmabhoomi

movement 20 years ago. It did not stridently support reservation, fearing it would alienate the upper castes and middle class. Nor did it demonstrate an appreciable resolve to counter Hindutva forces that challenged secularism.

Consequently, the social alliance of upper castes, Muslims, and Dalits that the Congress had assiduously forged over the decades splintered overnight. Broadly, the upper castes in the two states embraced the BJP, the Muslims opted for the different

variants of the OBC-dominated Janata Dal, and the Dalits flocked to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

The Congress did not take countervailing measures, believing the allure of the politics of identity would diminish over time. Yet the waning of the politics of identity and the rhetorical shift to development haven't triggered a Congress revival in the Hindi heartland. It is a riddle to many why the Congress in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar has failed to reap electoral dividends from its wide array of social welfare measures.

This failure arises from the inability of the Congress to identify and court a dominant caste or social group, numerically significant and economically powerful, which could become the nucleus of its new social alliance. Such a dominant caste could help knit together a network of social groups deriving benefits from government schemes and harness it to the party apparatus.

Predominantly upper caste, the propensity of the Congress is not to think of any other social groups as a possible nucleus. The upper castes in Bihar have coalesced around the BJP and in Uttar Pradesh they have tended to swing between the BSP and the Samajwadi Party (SP), depending on who promises to protect their interests before every election.

The challenge before Rahul's Congress, therefore, is which of the dominant social groups it should latch on to. This is a complex task in a society that has been increasingly radicalised: to continue with the upper castes as the nucleus runs the risk of alienating

a mass of people who are opposed to the perpetuation of the status quo. The history of the Congress forecloses for it the option of explicitly invoking religion to consolidate the Hindus.

The other option is to adopt one of the numerically significant OBC or Dalit castes as the pivot of its grassroots alliance. But then it doesn't have a leader who has an appeal among these social groups across the Hindi heartland. Theoretically, the Congress can overcome this by two possible methods. One, it can bring in OBC and Dalit leaders through the merger of their outfits with the Congress. For instance, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan can bring with them the social groups they represent into the Congress.

Two, Rahul's Congress can consciously opt for a model in which the Congress accepts the preeminence of its allies in the state in return for ruling at the Centre. Such a formal arrangement, too, has its pitfalls. For one, the possibility of rebuilding the party at the state-level will shrink and make it susceptible to the demands of its allies.

But contradictory pulls and pressures are built into any coalition. In fact, it can be argued, that its debilitating impact can be limited through a formal, enduring arrangement between the Congress and its allies. Symbiotic relationships, after all, tend to check brinkmanship.

Ultimately, Rahul has to ensure that the aspirations of the rising social classes are met and power is widely dispersed which is also the challenge of the NC and UML in Nepal. ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

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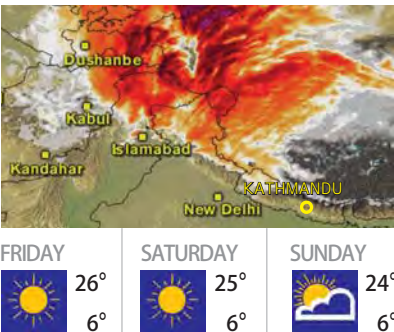
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The weatherperson finally declares winter over. The temperature on Friday will climb above 25 degrees for the first time because of the high pressure over Northern India and Nepal and the lack of haze means unfiltered bright sunshine all day. Minimum temperature is still in the single digits, though so evenings and nights will still be chilly. Light mist in the mornings in Kathmandu Valley. Sunday will see some cloud cover and slight dip in maxima.



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Relentless coverage of the political deadlock has made most Nepalis cynical about the future. Power cuts get worse, there are few jobs, and those who want to migrate to work get cheated by recruiters, the dusty, and polluted cities have no water. The list of woes is long.

Yet, despite a violent conflict, mismanagement and corruption over the past 20 years, Nepal has taken surprising strides in health and education. In fact, the rate of improvement in Nepal's Human Development Index has been cited by

the UN as being the most rapid among developing countries.

Now, Nepal is poised for a 'great leap forward' in infrastructure. There is a highway-building spree and in the next 10 years many of these will be black-topped and upgraded. This week, the track for the future Kathmandu-Nijgad expressway was opened, a consortium of private sector and overseas Nepalis will soon begin construction of a tunnel road to Hetauda that will reduce travel time to less than one hour. The East-West Highway will be turned into a six-lane

expressway and work will begin on a parallel railway artery of which the Bardibas-Simara-Birganj section will be completed by 2022.

The energy crisis has at last prompted the government to act, and hydropower projects are either under construction or planned that will generate up to 10,000MW in the next ten years. It is hard today to image Nepal without power cuts, but that day may be here sooner than we think.

All this will need political stability, streamlining of government policy on investment and its continuity no matter

which government is in power. And if this week's political consensus on elections this year goes through, even stable politics may be within reach.



More on p10-11

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EVENTS



HIMALAYAN RUSH, run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake.
30 March, Pokhara, 9851021852/9851102046

Documentary film-making workshop, explore principles and components of social-issue documentaries with Czech-Canadian film-maker Kristyna Balaban.
Rs 2,500, 20 February to 6 March, Sattya Media Arts, Jawalakhel, www.sattya.org/2013/02/socialissuedoc

The play of plays, watch this humorous play to understand how frantic it gets during a theatre production.
Rs 100 and Rs 200, runs till 2 March, Sarwanam Theatre, Kalikasthan



SUSTAINABLE WORKSHOPS, learn how to make briquettes and a recycled roof so that you can cut down on your electricity bill.
Rs 150 per day, 28 February to 3 March, 10am to 4pm, Hariyo Chowk, www.hariyochowk.sattya.org/2twodayworkshop/

Mustang trail race 2013, be part of a group of athletes and get the experience of a lifetime by running through the roof of the world.
27 April to 10 May, info@mustangtrailrace.com

sharing their poems with each other.
2 March, Sanepa, 3 pm.

Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival, the seventh edition of the annual NIIFF will explore issues related to Nepal's minority.
25 to 28 April, City Hall, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, (01)4102577, ifa_festivals@yahoo.com, www.ifanepal.org.np



PRANAMAYA YOGA, a yoga and Buddhism weekend in the hills of Pharping.
Rs 9,750, 2 to 3 March, Neydo Tashi Monastery, 9802045484, info@pranamaya-yoga.com

Donate a book for Karnali, help the campaigners collect 15,000 books for students of remote Kalikot district who do not have access to any reading material.
1 to 5 March, 9841379246, 9841342768, 9841379246, 9849038889, www.facebook.com/DonateABookCampaign

With love from Paris, an exhibition of the works of two French photographers Nicolas Henry and Floriane de Lassee.
3 March, 5.30pm, Image Ark, (01)5006665, www.imageark.com



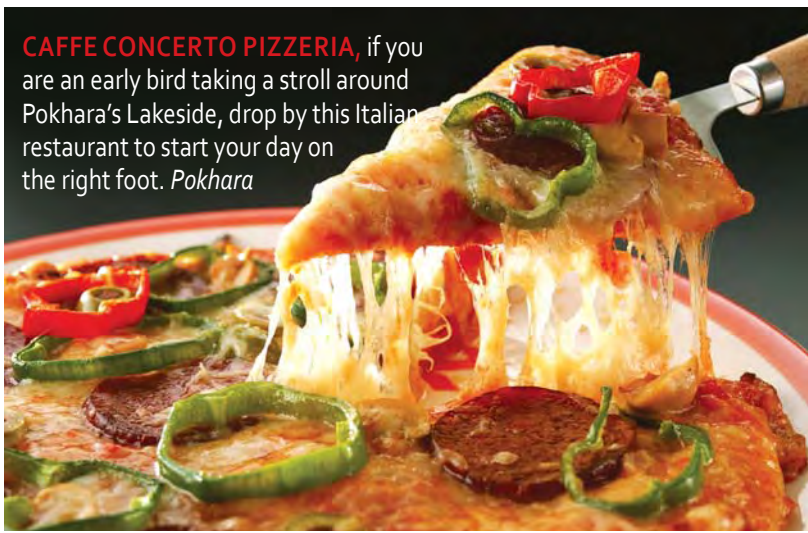
CHAKATI GUFF, Dutch art promoter Beata Wiggen will give a presentation on how to promote your artwork in the Netherlands and Germany.
8 March, 3 to 5pm, Gallery MCube, Chakupat, (01)5260110

Saturday readings, poet Bishma Upreti will read his work, but the audience can join in as well by



MUSTANG, a spiritual odyssey, an exhibition that showcases thangkas, photographs, sand mandala, installations, and dance from Mustang.
Runs till 13 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery

DINING



CAFFE CONCERTO PIZZERIA, if you are an early bird taking a stroll around Pokhara's Lakeside, drop by this Italian restaurant to start your day on the right foot. *Pokhara*

Falcha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.
Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur

Bombay Masala, transcend the limits of geography with a wide variety of cuisine. *Pulchok*

Bagaicha, serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental, and Thai dishes. *Jawalakhel*

Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake.
Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)463614/463163



SARANGKOT FORDAYS RESTAURANT, have a Sarangkot special breakfast while enjoying spectacular views of the mountain ranges.
Sarangkot, Pokhara, (061)696920, 9817136896



STRAWBERRY DELIGHTS, pop up at The Pastry Shop for varieties of strawberry delights.
Rs 125, Runs till 14 March, Radisson Hotel, Lajimpat, (01)4411818 (ext. 1370)

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Cafe, bide your time in the free wi-fi zone as you enjoy wood-fired pizzas, home-made pastas, and the Tibetan gyakok. *Boudha, (01)4485585*



TIAN RUI, if you're looking for genuinely good Chinese food this restaurant is the place to go.
Thapathali

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak, a sanctuary for meat lovers.
Thamel, Chhetrapati Chok, (01)4260471

Noyoz, this tiny little joint serves food that tastes like your mother's home-cooking. *Bhatbhateni*

Little Italy, go vegetarian at this new Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special chocolate bomb.
Darbar Marg

The Heritage, escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta. *Thamel*

Mulchowk, a blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era, enjoy a wholesome meal in a beautiful setting. *Babarmahal*

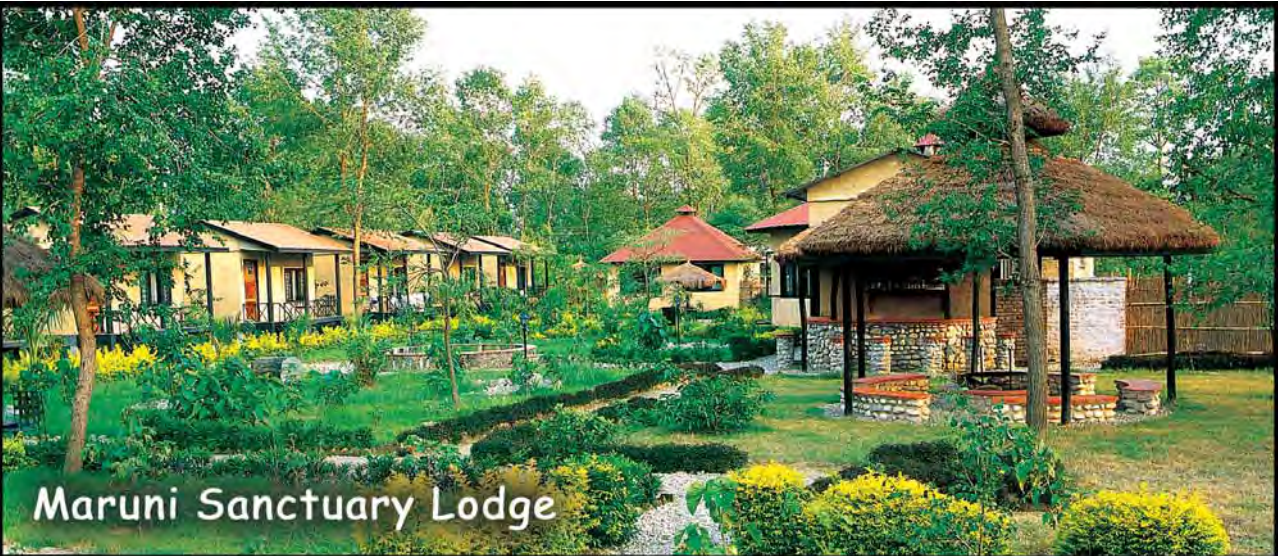
Dragon Chinese Restaurant, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company.
Lakeside, Pokhara



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MUSIC



SHASTRIYA SANGEET, dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music every new moon evening.
11 March, 3 to 6pm, Ram Mandir, Battisputali

Live at Cafe 32, live music and delicious food every Friday.
6pm onwards, Cafe 32, Battisputali, (01)4244231

Sundance music festival, celebrate the arrival of the summer with great musicians from around the world and dance the night away.
Rs 4000, 16 to 17 March, The Last Resort, Sindhupalchok

GETAWAYS



RANIBAN RETREAT, situated at the other end of the Valley, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range, Phewa lake, and Pokhara.
World Peace Pagoda, Pokhara, (061)692136, 9841382053

Mum's Garden Resort, head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range.
Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com

Mango Tree Lodge, culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park. *Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com*

Shivapuri Village, eco-tourism close to the Shivapuri National Park replete with a charm of bygone days.
Patiswara, Shivapuri National Park, (01)4017725, 9851034141, info@shivapuri.com

Grand Norling Hotel, countryside weekend package offering suite room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities.
Gokarna, (01)4910193

POKHARA

Zip, strap, go!

The darling of honeymooners and the gateway to Annapurna, Pokhara is now also a hub for adrenaline junkies. Those of you who have already felt the thrill of paragliding across Phewa lake, buzzed past the gleaming Peace pagoda in ultralight flights, and tried canyoning down steep, slippery waterfalls, can now add zip-line on your to-do-list.

The first of its kind and the longest in South Asia, zip-line looks similar to a cable car from afar, but unlike cable cars, it uses gravity to pull you forward on an inclined rope. You are securely strapped on a seat which is attached onto the cable. Then on the count of five, you will find yourself whizzing past the raging Seti River with the wind gushing against your face.

As you inch closer to Hyamja in less than two minutes, the magnetic breaking system brings the seat to a halt. Make sure you listen to the safety instructions properly to avoid a bumpy landing.



"It was the most exhilarating two minutes of my life so far and I will definitely come again," said an exuberant Saurav Rai moments after landing.

Constructed by HighGround Adventures, zip-line was introduced under the name SkyZip last summer. In the past 10 months more than 3,000 people have experienced the 2,000 feet drop from Sarangkot to Hyamja at speeds of over 140km per hour.

The equipment was designed and fitted by an American company named Zip-flyer who also trained the staff. "We conducted many successful test rides before opening it for the public because we did not want to compromise on safety," informs operations manager Santosh Shrestha.

Brace yourself for a speedy ride, screaming at the top of your lungs is encouraged!

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Deep in 'mandu

Every rock music fan knows this story. In December 1971, Deep Purple are parked at a hotel on the shores of Lake Geneva to record their fifth album. One night the members of the band look out the window of their hotel and see an adjoining casino in flames. The rest, as they say, is history.

Smoke on the Water is to this day the most recognisable rock song, and one of the first tunes young rock'n'rollers learn to play. "The first time I heard *Smoke on the Water*, it was like love at first listen," says 24-year-old entrepreneur Avash Ghimire. Like many of his friends, he first heard the band from an elder brother's cassette. "You'll see me at the front row at Rangasala because who knows when I'll get to see them again," Ghimire adds.

45 years since the release of their first album, after many lineup changes, and the death of their inspirational keyboardist Jon Lord, the band is still going strong. After touring throughout the last decade, this year will see the release of their 19th studio album *Now What?!* And as the last concert venue before the album releases in April, Kathmandu will get the rare privilege of hearing songs from the new album before many others in the world.

Not many years ago, music lovers in Nepal were limited to hearing their favourite songs on tapes and cds. The nearest venue big enough to attract such big names were Delhi and Mumbai and they would be lucky if they got tickets for that after going through all the travel and accommodation hassles.

The Valley saw Canadian singer Bryan Adams perform at a sold-out concert in 2011, while Danish band Michael Learns to Rock also entertained the concert-starved Kathmandu crowd the same year. With the arrival of rock legends Deep Purple in 15 days, Kathmandu will be host to another rocking night.

15 March, 3pm onwards, Dasrath Stadium, Tripureswor
Rs 500, 1000, 2000, tickets available at Bhatbhateni, Bakery Cafe, and Adidas outlets, (01)4226939

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A great leap forward

In the next 10 years, if existing hydropower, highway, mass transit, and airport projects are completed, Nepal could make a great leap forward. A better investment climate could make double digit economic growth possible, which in turn would create jobs so Nepalis wouldn't have to migrate to work in such large numbers. There is only one catch: there should be political stability.



ENERGY
The biggest growth will be in infrastructure to meet a huge pent-up demand for energy and transportation. It may seem like a pipe dream in a country suffering 12 hours of power cuts a day, but hydropower projects already under construction would generate up to 2,000MW in the next five years. If politics stabilises and as more roads are built, a further 7,000-10,000MW could be added in 10 years. But this

would need predictable government policy and the Nepal Investment Board to be given a free hand. Jobs would be created during the simultaneous construction of hydropower projects, and once completed, cheap and reliable power could attract more downstream industries like aluminium, cement, agro-processing, and information technology.



TRAINS
The detailed project report of the first stage of the East-West railway artery from Bardibas to Simara and

Birganj has already been completed, and it is possible to operate the nearly 1,000km track under the BOOT mechanism in 10 years. As hydropower projects come on line, the surplus electricity can be put to use to also operate a Kathmandu-Pokhara railway. A 70km mass rail transit network is also being surveyed of which the 27km first phase could be built in ten years.



HIGHWAYS
The Kathmandu-Tarai expressway is immediately feasible

because it would save billions in fuel cost every year, and three Indian companies have proposed to build it under the BOOT scheme. The Kathmandu-Hetauda fast-track highway with two tunnels has also got investment from the private sector and a consortium of overseas Nepalis. The East-West Midhill Highway as well as the Indian-assisted Tarai Highway will be completely operational and blacktopped within 10 years. Four new North-South highways will link China and India through Nepal, and the existing Kathmandu Ring Road will be widened to eight lanes.



International ports

and international terminals will be upgraded with ADB funds. A new international airport in Pokhara with help from the Exim Bank. Plans will also be for the construction of a new international airport at Nijgad to be connected to Kathmandu by an expressway and high speed train.



Roads

- Two new fast track highways will link Kathmandu to the Tarai (1) and to Hetauda (2). There will be tunnel bypasses from Nagdhunga to Dhara, Shivapuri-Nuwakot, and Sankhu-Melamchi.
- The existing East-West Highway will be upgraded to an expressway (3). Remaining portions of the 1,700km Midhill East-West Highway will be completed (4).
- Five new highways will link China and India: Mechi Corridor (5) Kosi Corridor (6), RasuwaGadi-Birganj (7) Gandaki Corridor (8) Mahakali Corridor (9)



Midhill East-West Highway

1765 km

Trains



- The feasibility study for the 987km East-West Rail Artery has been done, and will be partially finished in 10 years. (1)
- Feeder trains will join this line with the Indian border at Biratnagar, Bhairawa and Nepalganj. (2)
- The construction of the Kathmandu-Pokhara 187km rail track will start. (3)
- Part of the Kathmandu Valley mass rail transit system will be completed in 10 years.

Kathmandu Valley mass rail transit

75 km

To be completed in 10 years

20 km



Communications

will number through use doing so



Internet penetration **60%** by 2022

Kathmandu

Birgunj

- Existing Road
- New Highways
- New Expressways
- New Railway



Water

The much-delayed Melamchi Water Supply Project will finally be completed by 2019, bringing 170 million litres water from a snow-fed river to Kathmandu.



TELECOMMUNICATION

The explosive growth in internet and mobile penetration rates will gather pace, with more than 60 per cent of the population accessing the net, up from the present 20 per cent. The mobile penetration rate will also rise to saturation, and more and more users will switch to smart phones and more people will access the net through hand-held devices than PCs or laptops.



HEALTH-EDUCATION

The reason for optimism is the progress Nepal has made in improving its Human Development Index in the past 15 years despite a ruinous 10-year war, corruption, poor governance, and instability. With more accountability and more efficient service delivery, the progress could be better. The 2011 census also gives reason for hope, Nepal has effectively defused the

population bomb with the growth rate down to a much more manageable 1.6 per cent. This does create a challenging demographic transition with a huge youth bulge, but experts say this should also be seen as an opportunity.

At present rate of growth in primary school enrollment, Nepal could achieve near-100 per cent literacy in 10 years, then the goal will be to improve quality and invest in higher education.



WATER

The much-delayed Melamchi Water Supply project will finally be completed, augmenting water supply of Kathmandu Valley which will have a population of four million by 2022. A new water supply and drainage system in Kathmandu Valley will mean that the Bagmati will no longer be the sewer it is.



And the winners are...



Every year I watch the Oscars ceremony with trepidation, excitement, and sheer boredom. This is because the host or hosts (this year Seth MacFarlane) are inevitably lumped with the lamest jokes on the planet, the deserving don't always win, and the winner of the 'Best Actress' category inevitably makes a soggy mess of herself on stage, crying, thanking people, and going on much too long (kudos to Jennifer Lawrence this year who kept her cool despite her fall).

Also, inevitably, even the actresses with the best taste end up wearing puffy prom type dresses, people sing and dance in homage to dreadful old musicals, and yet none of this seems to take away from the glamour and the weight of this now 85-year-old Hollywood tradition.

This year, there were nine films in the 'Best Picture' category, the result of a very complicated voting system thought up by the Academy in order to be more inclusive.

Six of the nine films were reviewed here in *Nepali Times* (*Argo*, *Amour*, *Life of Pi*, *Lincoln*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, and *Zero Dark Thirty*). Of the remaining three, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* will be reviewed next week, *Django Unchained* will not be reviewed because it is terribly boring, and *Les Misérables* I turned off 10 minutes into the film when I realised to my horror and consternation that the entire film was in song and not just people strategically bursting into song at key melodramatic moments.

The winner among these nine, unfortunately, was not *Amour* (though it won in the 'Best Foreign Language Film' category), nor *Lincoln*, and not even *Zero Dark Thirty*. Hollywood punished Ben Affleck by snubbing him in the 'Best Director' category (he wasn't even nominated), and rewarded George Clooney, Affleck and a few others for producing *Argo*. It must be said, for those who don't already know, that in Hollywood, the producers



collect the 'Best Picture' Oscar. Sometimes the director is not even on stage.

Argo is a good film, but not a great one. It is also Affleck's least memorable film. Both of his former films *The Town* (2010), and *Gone Baby Gone* (2007) are much more searing and much less self-important. It is with disappointment and dismay that I watched it win, chagrined at the caprice of the Academy and irritated that once again, lightness was rewarded over true gravitas.

There were a few good surprises though: Ang Lee's unexpected win for 'Best Director' (*Life of Pi*) cheated poor Steven Spielberg (nominated for *Lincoln*) of his turn this year, yet Lee's innate soft spoken charm, undeniable talent, and gracious speech left everyone smiling and immediately yearning for his next film.

Lincoln was not entirely disregarded luckily, with Daniel Day-Lewis winning for his remarkable role playing the noble president, and while Jessica Chastain (as Maya for *Zero Dark Thirty*) has to wait her turn yet another year, Jennifer Lawrence was deserving enough of the 'Best Actress' win, her role as Tiffany in *Silver Linings Playbook* being a lovely blend of strength and vulnerability.

As for the 'Best Supporting' categories, Christoph Waltz won, very deservedly for his role as Dr King Schultz in *Django Unchained* (he was the only reason for watching that film), and Anne Hathaway did not surprise anyone in winning for her role as Fantine in *Les Misérables*, a win that goes a long way in illustrating the convention of actresses either having to wear prosthetics or cut their hair very short in order to receive that hallowed statue. 🇳🇵

GIZMO by YANTRICK

Not smart enough

BlackBerry loyalists have stayed faithful to the classic Canadian-designed handhelds mainly because of their mechanical keyboards and the ease of browsing and downloading emails on the go.

BB was still doing this well until two years ago, but failed to gauge the shift in consumer mood towards touch-screen androids and iPhones which also have browsers and tons of apps. The global market share for smart phones of BB-maker, Research in Motion (RIM), fell from 20 per cent to merely 3.4 per cent this year. Last year, Samsung and Apple made up more than half the market share for smart phones.

RIM watched itself becoming a dinosaur, and this year it released the BlackBerry 10 the new handheld on which it is betting its future comeback. The phone was launched last month, but won't be available in Nepal till mid-year. Service provider Ncell says new BB10 features such as free video chats on BB messenger won't be available locally for sometime.

For those of us in Nepal who have handled the new phone, the conclusion is that this gadget is too little too late to rescue BlackBerry. New features such as The Hub unified message system, navigation gestures and limited apps don't really make you go "wow". While BB may be able to retain some users and even woo back some who have defected to Androids and iPhones with its slick ultra high-res touch screen, the conclusion is that the rivals are way ahead. And for old fogeys like Yantrick, who are still attached to the mechanical keyboard, I think I'll wait till the Z10 comes out later this year.



But yours truly tested a sample block of text on the virtual keyboard on the BB10 with the phone horizontal and compared it to the mechanical keyboard on his classic BB Bold. And surprise! I could actually type marginally faster on the BB10 with fewer typos because of the unique feature of predictive word completion (New!) on the 10. If this proves that BB can get people to switch from physical keyboards to virtual, then it will be a major coup. Still, will it make me shell out Rs 60,000 when the phones hit the market in Kathmandu? Hmmmm (scratch, scratch) have to think.

That said, the BB10 is a beauty to behold and hold. Although it is plastic, it doesn't feel like a Made in China Khasa knockoff, although many parts of the BB are actually made in China. Since size matters, the 10 fits snugly between the iPhone 5 which is thinner and smaller, and the Samsung Galaxy which has girth and is a bit too bulky for the front pocket. But more importantly, the 356 ppi pixel makes the screen look brighter and sharper than rivals. The 8 megapixel camera is adequate for home use, but isn't much better or worse than Samsung or Apple.

Yantrick's Verdict: BlackBerry loyalists will be happy to upgrade to a 10 and the machine may stem the haemorrhage of users, but it is just not new enough to woo back traitors who have deserted BB for Samsung Galaxy.

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Missing the action

Gerry Virtue is a New Zealander living in Australia with a long attachment to Nepal. He started life as a pharmacist, but moved on to become a trek and adventure travel operator and ran a ballooning company in Kathmandu Valley.

With his business partner Chris Dewhurst and filmed by Leo Dickinson, they ballooned over Everest in 1987 from Gokyo lake to Tibet, a feat so amazingly daring that they were lucky to survive.

Kathmandu's congestion put an end to ballooning, and Virtue moved to Australia. But he obviously misses the action, so he has written a thriller novel set in Kathmandu.

Kathmandu, the Novel was launched last week and is the first of a two part series that gallops through a rip-roaring story of adventure and intrigue in the Himalaya. There are almost-believable conspiracies,



larger-than-life characters who will be familiar to anyone who knows the Valley: the bemused newly-arrived aid worker, vulnerable blond backpacker, charming kitchen boy, devastatingly attractive Khampa shopkeeper, menacing Englishman with sinister intent, double dealing Maoist insurgent, and a sage fatherly sadhu with unusual links to military intelligence.

These engaging individuals get themselves caught up in all kinds of trouble. The plot involves South Asian geopolitics, Pakistani snipers, girl trafficking, drugs and bogus work-permits, as well as capturing tourism life in Thamel and Basantapur, the Tibetan world of Boudhnath and the complex reality of modern business relationships in South Asia. It is all good fun despite the shady subject matter, and there is seldom a dull moment.

What works particularly well for me are

the flashback tales from Nepal's mythological history, narrated by the holy man to give context to the chaos of today's predicaments for our confused 21st century protagonists.

Gerry Virtue has not lost his taste for adventure in Nepal. This is an engrossing story and a spellbinding read. Can't wait for the sequel to find out what happens next.

Lila Choden



Kathmandu, the Novel
Book One
Gerry Virtue
Inspiring Publishers, 2013
Pages:262
Price:



SOMEPLACE ELSE

Almost every house on Pokhara's Lakeside has a restaurant. Sometimes there are two or more in the same building. The abundance of eateries was killing our appetite, so we settled for the closest one which happened to be Lemon Tree at Central Lakeside.

The two storey restaurant,

which was recently renovated, has bright orange walls, a spacious sitting area on the top floor with the bustling lakeside below and fragmented view of the Phewa lake across.

Like most restaurants in Lakeside, the four page menu offers everything from Chinese to Indian to Continental, Italian and Newari delicacies.

Since we dropped by for a quick afternoon bite, we first ordered chips chili (Rs 160). Although the thick wedges of potatoes with few capsicums thrown over didn't look tempting, it turned out to be surprisingly good. Unlike most places the potatoes are just perfectly crispy and the red chili sauce isn't too overpowering. The large pieces make it enough for two to get the appetite rolling.

After the spicy starter we



Lemon Tree

ordered vegetable mushroom enchilada (Rs 230, *pic right*). Covered generously with mozzarella cheese, the enchilada tasted every bit good as it looked. As you bite into the crispy corn tortilla, the sauteed mushroom and beans with melted cheese burst with flavours in your mouth. Even the most hardcore meat and potato lovers wouldn't mind turning vegetarian for this cheesy delight.

Hoping to end our meal

on a sweet note, we ordered chocolate cake (Rs 150) that was encased in a glass right at the entrance. The fluffy white cream whipped only made it further tempting. However, what came on our table was a major disappointment. Instead of light buttery texture, the cream on top was too sweet and tasted rather soapy. Despite a lackluster start, I dug into it only to be further disappointed. The pastry had a coconut flavour

with excessive sugar oozing in every bite. There was no freshness whatsoever and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find a trace of anything close to a chocolate cake.

While the meal started on tasty note the end was a bit tragic. But you can always skip the dessert and try Lemon's mind boggling variety of delicacies while admiring the lake outside and the traditional Newari style decor inside. 🇳🇵

Biruwa

How to get there: a few steps from Hotel Mountain Top at centre point in Lakeside you will find Lemon Tree on your left.



Plumbing the heart



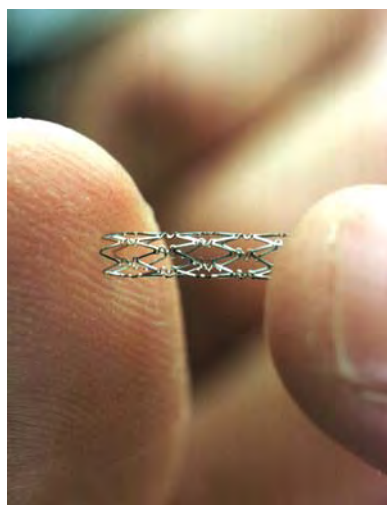
DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Hear attack or angina (heart pain) patients in Nepal today are more fortunate than their parents' generation because state-of-the-art, life saving treatments like angioplasty in the country are available in the country. Although expensive, angioplasty is fairly common and regularly carried out at both government and private hospitals. However, very few patients and their families are aware of the intricacies of the procedure.

Heart attack and angina are usually caused by blockage (which consists of an atherosclerotic plaque) in the arteries of the heart. By using a dye and taking a special picture of the heart and its arteries (a cardiac angiogram), the location and extent of blockage (plaque) is determined.

During the angioplasty, a cardiologist (heart doctor) basically performs a plumbing procedure. She uses a deflated balloon at the end of a thin

tube (catheter) which is threaded into a peripheral blood vessel and made to reach the coronary artery where the blockage is located. The balloon is inflated at the blockage site which compresses the plaque against the wall, which restores circulation of blood into the artery and blood flow into vital



heart muscles. Without proper supply of blood the heart muscles cannot pump blood into different parts of the body.

The balloon is then deflated and withdrawn together with the catheter. However, when this procedure was first started, the artery narrowed down for a short time without a 'scaffolding' in place. Hence

stents (*pic, centre*), which are basically scaffolds, were developed.

These stents, introduced into the same catheter through which the balloon was threaded, were at first bare-metal stents (BMS). But these metals caused a tissue reaction inside the heart artery and re-blocked it. To avoid this problem, entrepreneurs made drug-eluting stents (DES). The same metal stents were now coated with drugs which inhibit the tissue reaction the BMS elicited.

DES is much more expensive than BMS. However, since using DES leads to far less complications it is definitely a better investment in the long-term. DES placement in angioplasty procedures is now a standard procedure in parts of the world where people can afford the treatment.

Cardiac surgeons still perform the more invasive coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery by taking a graft from a peripheral blood vessel and bypassing the diseased segment in the heart arteries. But if the technology is available, most doctors prefer the less invasive angioplasty with stent placement. 🇳🇵

HAPPENINGS

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BIKRAM RAI

PARTY OF FIVE: Leaders of four major parties discuss the formation of an election government under the leadership of chief justice at New Baneswor on Monday afternoon.



BIKRAM RAI

TOUGH CLIMB: Chhurim Sherpa of Taplejung was recognised by Guinness World Records on Monday as the first woman to climb Mount Everest twice in the same season.



RABINDRA MISHRA

YES I CAN: Sharada Bhusal who has been fasting in protest against corruption for the past one week at Shanti Batika in Ratnapark lays down to rest.

READERS' PHOTO



TONE DRABLOS

NO DISCOUNT: A woman bargains with a street vendor in Lukla for the price of chilies.



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Can or cannot Kenya?

Kenya’s upcoming politically charged election campaign may hold lessons for Nepal

JULIET TOROME in NAIROBI

As Kenya approaches its general election on 4 March, memories of the bloodshed that marred the controversial 2007 presidential election remain fresh. The vote ended in a standoff between the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki, who declared himself the winner, and the opposition candidate, Raila Odinga, who dismissed the vote as rigged. The ensuing ethnic clashes claimed more than 1,200 lives, and displaced another 250,000.

The violence ended only after former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan helped to broker a power-sharing agreement in which Kibaki retained the presidency and Odinga became prime minister. When the agreement was signed, many Kenyans declared that such politically charged ethnic violence would ‘never again’ consume Kenya. But less than four days before the next election, few remain confident that such violence will not recur – especially given that Kenya’s government has taken no measures to prevent it.

This is not surprising, given the country’s poor record of prosecuting war crimes. In the run-up to Kenya’s first multi-party election in 1992, ethnic clashes caused hundreds of deaths, and displaced an estimated 300,000 people. Ethnic violence marred the 1997 election as well. Yet, while few dispute that politicians incited and even coordinated the violence, none was ever brought to justice.

The 2007 violence was unique in the sense that it did not begin in smaller cities, towns, or rural areas, but in the capital, Nairobi, bringing Kenya to a standstill and turning it into a focus of international attention. But it is increasingly clear that Kenyans’ pronouncements of ‘never again’ were little more than an expression of relief. Now, action must be taken to avoid renewed violence; the politicians who incited and funded the bloodshed must be held accountable.

Despite its failure to investigate the conflict’s root causes, the International Criminal Court has charged four senior Kenyan officials with crimes against humanity: Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, the former cabinet secretary Francis Muthaura, the former education minister William Ruto, and the radio executive Joshua arap Sang. Charges against two other officials, former Police Commissioner Mohammed Hussein Ali, and Minister for Industrialisation Henry Kosgey were dropped with the

remaining four to face trial beginning in April 2013. Until then, however, it is business as usual – which includes one of the accused, Kenyatta, vying for the presidency.

Given that Kenya’s previous constitution was considered partly responsible for the violence, a new constitution was adopted in 2010, with the support of 67 per cent of the population. But an updated constitution cannot instantly transform a country’s politics or society.

More than two years since the new constitution was adopted, little has changed. The root causes of the 2007 violence – rampant poverty, significant income inequality, pervasive corruption, inadequate internal security, and an unemployment

rate exceeding 40 per cent – remain.

Moreover, Kenyans have made little effort to mend relations between ethnic groups. Last year alone, ethnic clashes in the Tana River District killed more than 100 people. And the level and tone of political debate – for example, within Facebook groups created by presidential candidates or their supporters – are worrying. Many participants make simplistic, ethnocentric statements like, “Kikuyus should never rule Kenya again,” (the deputy prime minister is a member of the dominant Kikuyu tribe).

The only part of the new constitution that Kenyans have been quick to implement directly pertains to elections. This year, in addition to electing



a president and members of parliament, voters will elect senators, county governors, and other political leaders.

While such reforms – which give citizens more power by establishing semi-autonomous local governments – are crucial, the underlying motivation is the creation of more legislative positions. In Kenya, such offices translate into instant wealth for the winners. Indeed, given that lawmakers here are some of the world’s highest-paid politicians, earning many times the salary of counterparts in much wealthier countries, they are willing to do

anything – even incite violence – to be elected.

Meanwhile, nothing has been done to appease the millions of poor Kenyans who are likely to heed a politician’s exhortation to kill. With Election Day less than a week away, citizens can only hope that the new constitution created enough electoral vacancies to satisfy their politicians’ bloody lust for power. www.project-syndicate.org

Juliet Torome is an award-winning writer and documentary filmmaker.

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BHRIKUTI RAI

The accelerated melting of the Himalaya has often been blamed on the greenhouse effect caused by the historical emissions of carbon dioxide by rich countries. And this has been used as an excuse by developing countries to blame the west and do nothing to control their own emissions.

They can't do that any longer. There is growing evidence that glacial retreat in the Himalaya is caused by tiny particles of wind-blown soot and dust generated in cities like Kathmandu and deposited on the mountains. Last month, scientists for the first time quantified the role that this 'black carbon' plays in melting the snow faster.

This winter, the pollution haze and smog trapped under an inversion layer in Kathmandu Valley was the worst ever. Added to this was the region-wide pall of dust and soot over the Indo-Gangetic plains, all of which was wafted by prevailing westerly winds into the mountains.

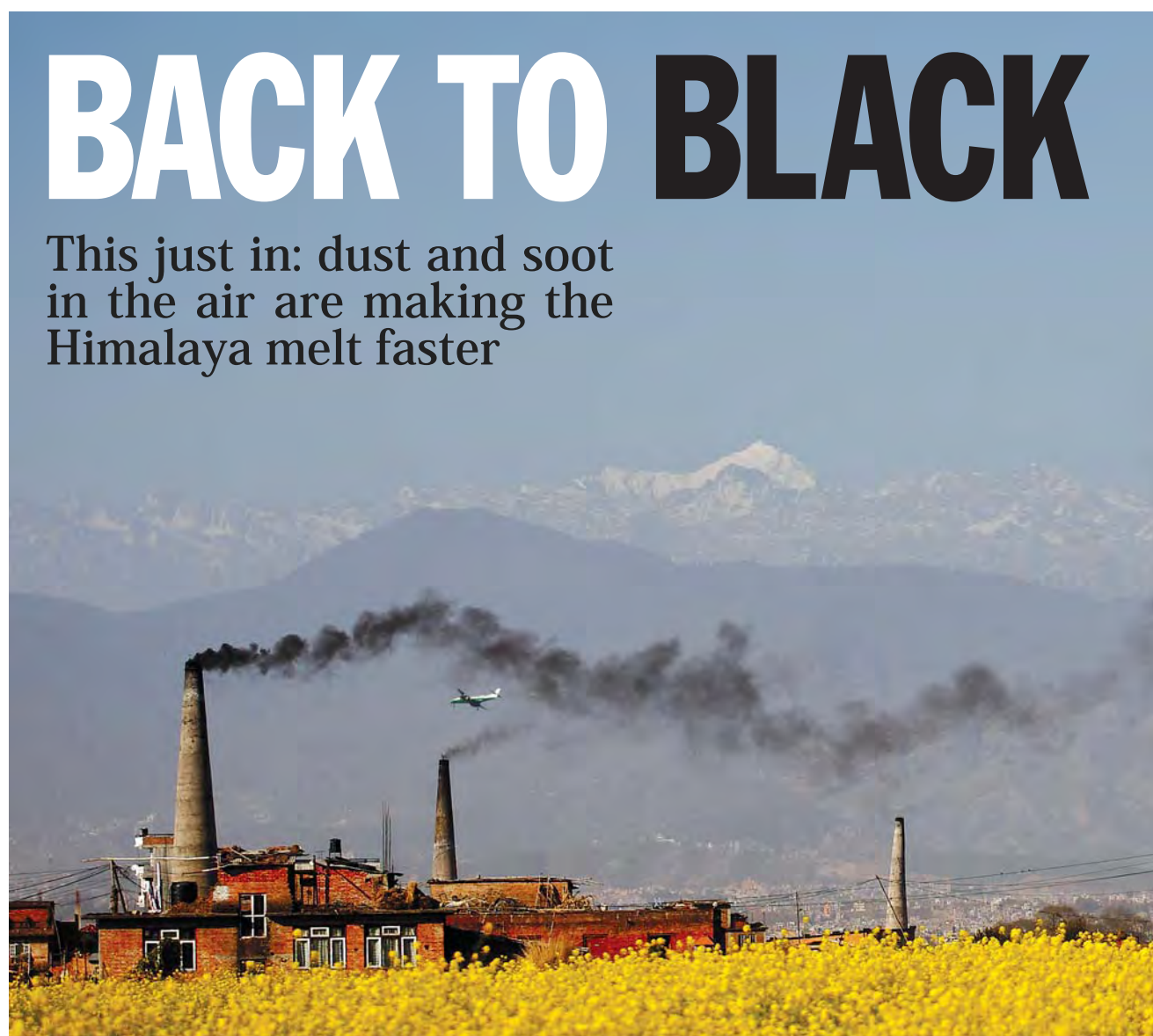
Tiny soot particles emitted

from the exhaust of diesel vehicles, thermal power plants, firewood, and dung cooking stoves have long been known to cause lung disease, but a new study has shown that they also have a profound role in heating the earth's surface.

The most comprehensive study of black carbon yet conducted was published in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* in January and concludes that the heat-trapping property of black carbon was double of previous estimates and combined with other effects was three times worse for the climate as had been thought until now.

"Finally the study has cleared the doubts of many who for years played down the role of pollutants such as black carbon in global warming," says Mark Lawrence, director of the Germany-based Institute for Advanced Sustainable Studies. Lawrence was in Kathmandu with his team of experts to oversee the Sustainable Atmosphere for the Kathmandu Valley project which has begun measuring the valley's air pollutants, including black carbon.

However, a NASA project to fly over the Himalaya to do a 'curtain study' of air samples last year had to be cancelled because of Thailand's refusal to grant stopover rights for its research aircraft at Utapao Air Base. The study would have mapped black carbon suspended in the atmosphere above the Himalaya and the Indian Ocean



BACK TO BLACK

This just in: dust and soot in the air are making the Himalaya melt faster

that are spewed out in China, India, and other countries in the region called the Asian Brown Cloud (ABC).

Soot particles are called 'short-lived climate pollutants' in scientific jargon, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is taking

the lead in getting governments in the region to clean up their air. Ministers from 19 Asian countries, including Nepal's Minister for Science, Technology, and Environment Keshab Man Shakya, got together for a meeting organised by UNEP's Climate and Clean

Air Coalition (CCAC).

Gokarna Mani Duwadi, joint secretary at the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment who attended the meet said participants agreed to share technology and data on black carbon and other greenhouse gases. "Nepal's

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एस् एस् सेडाई: बसुन्धारा, ४३५६४७५ । सिस्टम फोटोकपी: पाटनढोका, ५५५०९७९ । न्यू लालिच प्रिन्टर्स: लननलेल, ५५३३५८२ । निसा बुक्स: लननलेल, ५५३९६५७ । अंकुर ट्याभर्न: नवठाघर, ६६३३५८ । भण्डारी साईबर: नैतीदेवी, ४४९८४९४ । किपु बुक्स: कीर्तिपुर, ४३३९७७५
न्यू पि. पि. बुक्स: कलकी, ४२८०६७३, ४२८२४५९ । दीपसेवा कम्प्युनिकेशन: कोटेश्वर, ४६०००७० । सुमिता क्लासिफाईड: नयाँ बानेश्वर, ४९०४२३७ । साई न्यूजिक: बापामार्ग, ४४६९३५५, ४४६३५९२

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*शर्तहरू लागूहुनेछन् ।



BIKRAM RAI

failure to implement the ban on old vehicles to control emission was also discussed,” Duwadi told us.

Arnico Panday, lead atmospheric scientist at the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), is

conducting a study of the impact of air pollutants including black carbon in the Jomsom area. Unlike carbon dioxide gas that remains in the atmosphere for centuries, solid soot particles stay suspended only for a few weeks before settling or being washed down by rain.

“The *Journal of Geophysical Research* study has provided a better understanding of how black carbon affects the climate by quantifying its effect,” Panday explains.

While reducing carbon dioxide emission is a long-term global challenge, controlling pollution can be carried out locally and faster. For example, the promotion of improved cooking stoves in rural Nepal has not just reduced respiratory diseases caused by indoor pollution, but also decreased the amount of soot in the atmosphere. Other measures Nepal can take immediately are to have stricter controls on vehicular emissions, cleaner brick kilns, and controlling wind-blown dust which are directly upwind from Himalayan glaciers.

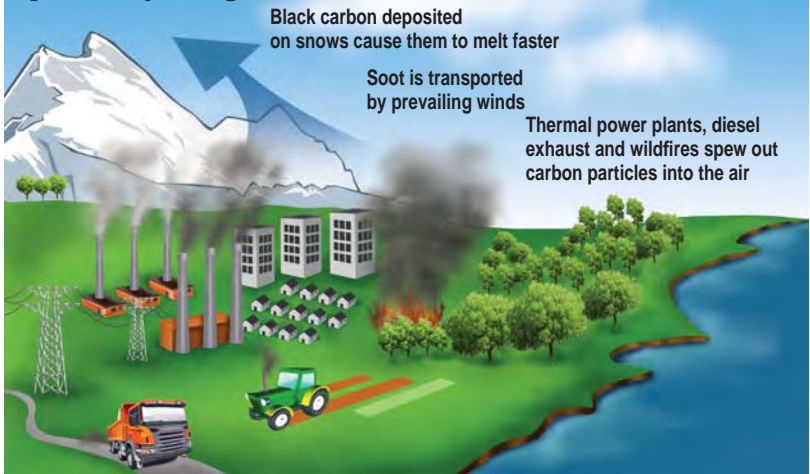
“Reducing soot and dust from the atmosphere is easier and gives us some more time to address the larger global issue of carbon dioxide emissions,” says Maheswar Rupakheti of the Institute for Advanced Sustainable Studies. “We have to control pollution in our own backyard if we are to save our mountains from melting, instead of just blaming industrialised nations for their greenhouse gas emissions.”

nepalitimes.com

Sick City, #639
Dirty snow melting our Himalayas faster, # 584
Lost in the smog, #500

THE GREAT THAW

Himalayan snow and ice are melting three times faster than previously thought



Green partnership



An automobile company partnering with a scientific research centre to improve air quality? Yes, that is exactly what the Czech car-maker Skoda is doing with the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to raise awareness among the public about the impact of black carbon

and its negative health and environmental impacts. The one year partnership will complement ICIMOD's own research, and help install improved cooking stoves in 300 rural homes in Makwanpur district south-west of Kathmandu. The improved stoves are more fuel-efficient and smokeless, reducing lung infections inside homes and reducing the emission of soot particles into the atmosphere. The Patan Academy of Health Sciences is also involved and is conducting a health impact study in the homes where the stoves are installed.

“This is a small start, but we must all do our bit to clean up the air and protect our mountains,” says Skoda's Vishnu Kumar Agarwal (*pictured above left with ICIMOD's David Muldoon*), “we cannot endanger the environment and community for growth.”

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Plundering the peace

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 24 February

कान्तिपुर

A Centre for Investigative Journalism report in this newspaper has noted that the state has so far spent Rs 29 billion on reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed during the war and that the total will reach Rs 37 billion. Aside from this huge amount allocated for reconstruction, the report bares blatant irregularities in spending the amount, including in rebuilding facilities that were never destroyed. A Peace Ministry task force has shown that the amounts have been spent on the recommendation of district peace committees to reconstruct physical infrastructure that weren't destroyed during the war. This has exposed the lack of transparency and unaccountable decision-making among politicians and the bureaucracy.

The government has so far funded the reconstruction of 2,890 facilities that were destroyed during the war, or were destroyed only in paper. Another 6,026 facilities are yet to be rebuilt or repaired. The task force set up by the government to make an inventory of individuals, families, and infrastructure affected by the war had drawn up a list of only 3,647 damaged facilities. But this task force was accused of not having done its job properly and another task force drew up a total of 8,916 facilities damaged and destroyed during the war. The fact that this new tally was approved and money released without double-checking hints at collusion of everyone from the local level to the ministry, and a 'I-scratch-your-back-you-scratch-mine' tendency.

There is an even more sensitive revelation in the report about the state of damaged police buildings. During the war, 768 police stations were blown up or damaged and the government has repaired only about 100 of them. It is unacceptable that while actually damaged police stations haven't yet been repaired and rebuilt, money has been stolen to rebuild buildings that didn't even exist.

During the conflict, the Maoists were often criticised for looting banks and terrorising the people. But their lack of transparency with regards to money has continued into peacetime. In fact, the financial irregularities have got worse and Maoists ministers themselves are responsible. There have been public exposes of massive fraud and corruption in the integration and rehabilitation of former guerrillas, but there has been no investigation. Voices have been raised even by Maoist cadre themselves, but the leadership has no credible explanation as to where all that money went. The billions that have been embezzled in the name of peace must be investigated.

Conditions apply

Bimal Gautam interviews Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi, *BBC Nepali Service*, 25 February



BBC Nepali: Are you ready to lead the electoral government?
Khil Raj Regmi: I took the decision for the greater good of the country, to help solve the political deadlock, and guide the country towards a solution. I did not decide to agree with the parties' proposal because I have personal ambitions to become prime minister.



BIKASH DWARE

applies to everyone and there can't be a difference of opinion about this.

People say you are an upright and wise man. If the SC removes obstacles through this writ will you agree to head the government?
My neutrality, honesty, and commitment towards an independent judiciary are more important when people raise questions about the independence of the judiciary. When I work at the PMO, it will be different and I won't be involved in the day-to-day activities of the SC.

Does that mean you will not be involved with the SC?
Yes, I will not authorise court proceedings at the SC. I will not do so and I must not do so, that is what separation of powers means.

There is a writ filed in the Supreme Court demanding your resignation before you head the government. Did you tell the parties that you will not agree to anything until the SC decides on this case?
I have made my views clear in the press statement where I have said that whatever happens from here on will be based on political consensus, clearing constitutional obstacles, and respecting the rule of law.

If the SC decides that a CJ can't be prime minister, will you rethink your decision?
I have complete respect for the judiciary and I won't go against it. So I think I have already answered your question. The supremacy of law

WEEKLY BAZAR POLL #2

Himal Khabarpatrika asks 375 respondents in 14 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on contemporary issues. This week's result:

1. Is it acceptable for the parties to seek an independent candidate for the Prime minister's post?

No: 54.4%
Yes: 26.4%
Don't know: 18.7%
Won't say: 0.5%

2. What should be the next government's main priority?

New polls: 47.2%
Address inflation: 18.4%
Improve security: 16%
Create jobs: 8.3%
Vitalise economy: 6.9%
Don't know: 2.1%
Don't want to say: 1.1%



नेपाल Rabindra in *Nepal*, 24 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Political consensus is more important than the rule of law. ”

UCPN(M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal talking to reporters in Kaski, *Naya Patrika*, 28 February

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Because they are there

Nepali mountain guides finally get international recognition

KANAK MANI DIXIT

After a decade of struggle and perseverance, the Nepal National Mountain Guide Association (NNMGA) has finally been certified by the International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations (IFMGA). What makes this award special is that Nepal is the only other country in Asia besides Japan to be recognised by the IFMGA and it means our mountaineering guides are now part of an elite rank and can display skills and expertise from the Alps to the Andes and the Himalaya.

The journey to the top took more than three decades. In 1982, guides Tashi Jangbu Sherpa, Jimpa Jangbu Sherpa, and Padam Ghale became the first Nepali guides to receive instructor training at Chamonix in the French Alps. Ghale along with former and current directors of NNMGA, the late Iman Gurung, Pemba Gyalje Sherpa, and member Prem Gurung have been at the forefront of improving guiding standards.

The Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) started in 1973, too, played a key role. For the last 20 years it has been offering basic and advanced training courses producing a pool of well-qualified, professional Nepali mountaineers. However, politicisation and over-commercialisation have tarnished the institution's value. Enrolling trainees based on political influence or bribes instead of ability has become common practice. But now that climbers can get certified directly through IFMGA, this will hopefully push NMA to become a more professional organisation on par with European and other counterparts.

A group of Nepali guides who received trainee diplomas from IFMGA in 2006 completed their final round of examinations in the Annapurna region last May. They were tested in ice and rock climbing, mountain medicine, meteorology, and rescue. This pioneer group was awarded certificates recently at a function at Shanker Hotel and NNMGA was formally welcomed to the international fold.

The final push for IFMGA membership came from an unexpected quarter: Chief Secretary Lila Mani Poudel got a first-hand understanding of the challenges faced by Nepal's mountain guides when he led a team of 15 government employees on an Everest expedition in 2011.

For far too long Nepali guides have been regarded with suspicion and used only as porters or helpers on foreign-led expeditions. However, experience shows that they are better at acclimatisation, can carry heavier loads, identify alternative routes, and lead rescue efforts as well as their Western counterparts. They have even conquered technical peaks like Ama Dablam.

Full membership of IFMGA means new avenues for mountaineering in Nepal will open up, providing jobs to thousands. Most importantly, people across the country will be encouraged to take up climbing as a profession. Nepali mountaineering has finally arrived.

www.nnmga.org.np
www.nepalmountaineering.org
www.ivbv.info

nepalitimes.com

Nepali women climbers set the pace, #590
Trained to climb, #198
Way to the top, #151



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Hair today gone tomorrow



The Story of the Week isn't, as many of you may suppose, to CJ or not to CJ. It is actually the breaking news that the ever-alert police at our one and only interdenominational airport nearly arrested Sri Sri Ravi Shankar because he had shoulder-length hair and may have been sporting a hidden ear-ring when he arrived in K-Town on Tuesday.

Kathmandu's Finest have been notching up one success after another ever since they started enforcing the mandatory seatbelt rule on vehicles

stuck in traffic jams and arresting anyone found endangering the health of passersby with second-hand smoke by lighting up a cigarette next to a truck belching thick black diesel smoke. The Top Cop believes in setting the right example himself and works on the principle that everyone is innocent even if proven guilty. Which is why he is often seen in the company of illustrious war criminals and sharing podia with gangsters who have warrants out for their arrest. Just to prove that they are on their toes and will leave no stone overturned in nabbing absconding miscreants they will also sometimes beat a dog to death in broad daylight as one did the other day, or shoot at a dog that strayed into the departure area parking lot as another vigilant security officer did last year.



DIVAKAR CHETTRI

go about their daily business. If the Nepal Police had been present in LA during the Oscar ceremony this week, they'd have detained without trial half the nominees in the Best Editing in the Short Animated Film Category. So folks, if you need a free haircut contact the police hotline on 100. And we hear from unusually reliable sources that the next target of the police vigilance squad will be hardcore criminals who flout the law by piercing belly buttons, wearing tattoos on their butts, and dyeing their hair with henna.

Don't know what all the brouhaha is about Comrade Prakash sending

premature condolences through FB on exaggerated reports of the demise of the ex-CP. The two share similar habits, both are estranged from their Daddies and living in exile. So when he heard the rumour on social media that Paras was no more, the Dear Leader commiserated and passed a snide aside. What's wrong with that? And he was doing this from Moscow where he was being escorted by none other than Tovarisch Upadro. Funny, though, that Comrade Light closed his newest FB account yet again as soon as he realised his mistake.

If Hizzoner the Sitting Chief Justice can be turned into a prime minister, then anything is possible in this country, even a return of the monarchy. Royalist parties are doing well in popularity ratings and the Maobaddies are cosying up to the Rajabaddies so it wouldn't be a surprise if Comrade Napoleon decides to reinstate Farmer Jones in Naryanhiti. Gyan could become regent and they could skip a generation to put Hridayendra back on the throne. Good thing we haven't changed the name of the airport and university, Birendra's statue still stands on Darbar Marg, and the word 'Royal' can easily be painted on the planes. However, we can't call him 'Baby King' anymore we'll have to call him 'Adolescent King'. But the young lad better start polishing up his spoken Nepali.



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