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GOPEN RAI

TAKING ITS TOLL

The blockade has a death toll, just like the earthquake did. Medical services have been crippled by the shortage of critical drugs and the inability of patients to get to hospital in time. A nurse at the Paropkar Maternity Hospital in Kathmandu shows an empty chiller for vaccines (above).

WHO, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UKaid KOICA, GIZ and other humanitarian agencies supporting Nepal's health sector warned this week: "The reduced ability to access health services is already affecting the vulnerable, and disruption to immunisation and other programs will have an extremely serious and lasting impact on children." UNICEF said last week up to 3 million Nepali children were now at risk.

But there are signs that the blockade imposed by India in support of Madhesi activists at some border points could be lifted soon. Indian leaders are

known to have advised Madhesi leaders in New Delhi this week to consider a roadmap from the Kathmandu establishment: amending the constitution to meet demands for proportional representation and constituency delimitation right away, and forming an all-party committee to resolve the proposed demarcation of provinces within three months.

Upon his arrival in Kathmandu late Wednesday night, Upendra Yadav of the MJF said: "We will not call off our agitation." Analysts say this could be posturing to avoid being accused by radicals within the movement of having sold out.

There is speculation that since tinkering with boundaries of two proposed plains provinces is so fraught, the Madhesi parties will allow their border sit-ins to fizzle out after a few rounds of talks with the NC-UML-Maoist in Kathmandu. India will then have a face-saver to quietly ease the siege.

Om Astha Rai

MOPPING UP EDITORIAL PAGE 2



WHEN THE BLOCKADE ENDS AS IT HAPPENS BY OM ASTHA RAI PAGE 3

KUL GAUTAM'S WAY FORWARD THIS IS IT BY RUBEENA MAHATO PAGE 6



FACES OF MADHES

BY JAYDEV POUDEL
PAGE 8-9



FLY TO ATLANTA WITH TURKISH AIRLINES STARTING FROM THE 16TH OF MAY 2016. DISCOVER HARMONY IN DIVERSITY.



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MOPPING UP

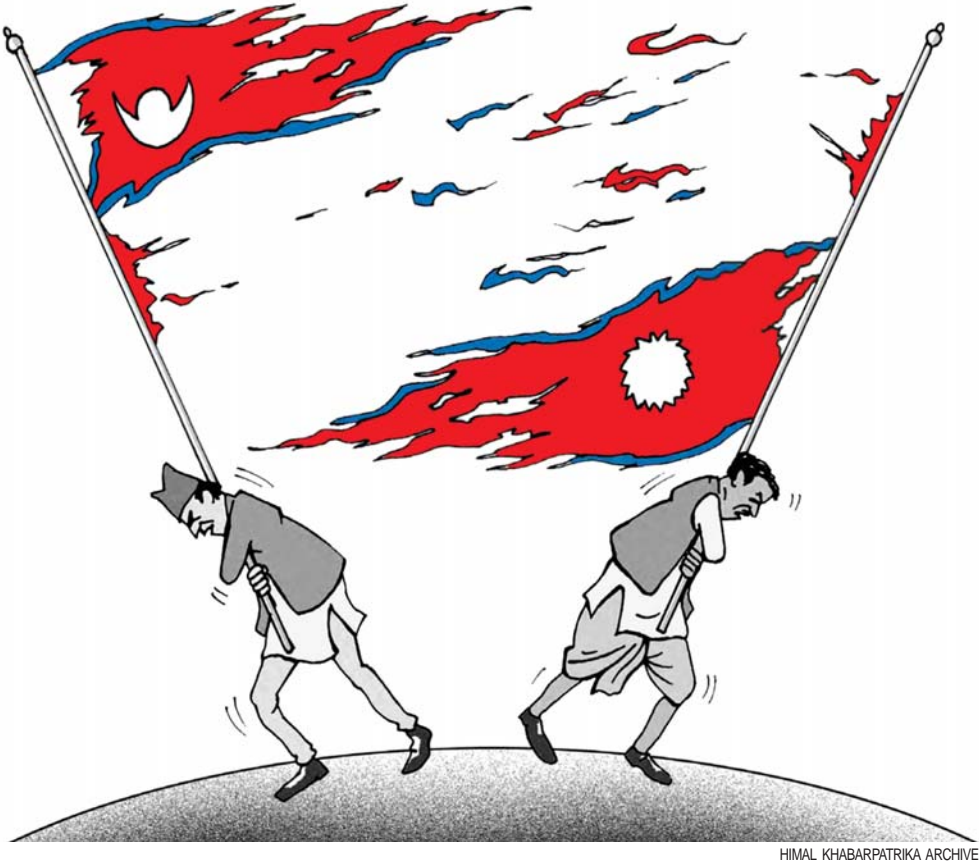
Once the nightmare of the Indian blockade is over, we must restitch the fabric of our nation.

When the nightmare of this Indian blockade is finally over, there will be a lot of mopping up to do. The repair of bilateral relations between India and Nepal must command the most urgent attention. There has been collateral damage on the historically robust people-to-people relations, spreading and entrenching mistrust between Indians and Nepalis. Due to adverse public opinion, it will be even more difficult than before for future governments to push through mutually beneficial investments and water projects. Fortunately, the cultural and economic bonds across the open border are too indispensable, so the psychological impact of this siege will no doubt wear off with time.

Almost as difficult to mend will be the scars in hills-plains relations within Nepal. The Madhes agitation and often-brutal crackdowns by the Armed Police Force in the Tarai in the past four months have turned even generally apathetic Madhesis against Kathmandu. On the other hand, the lynching of policemen and the use of human shields by Madhesi protesters turned the hill-dominated bureaucracy and state security hostile to plains-dwellers. India’s open intervention on behalf of Madhesi political parties boosted bigots in Kathmandu, who had always treated them as ‘Indians’. Restoring unity and restitching the fabric of our nation will be an urgent priority.

However, it is proof of the Nepali culture of forbearance and co-existence that there has been virtually no racist violence at the community level. Our reporters have sometimes been asked “Are you Chinese?” while on assignment in Janakpur, and there is the odd abuse hurled at vegetable vendors in Kathmandu, but by and large, it is positive that our tolerance is largely intact.

Even so, we should not take the lack of discord for granted. Racial harmony is fragile, it is not a default setting. It has to be actively nurtured and protected. Hill-plains relations will be severely tested by how we handle the issue of delineation of future Tarai provinces, and



especially the question of the five disputed districts in the western and eastern Tarai which have hill majorities. Sections of the Indian establishment and their allies among the Madhesi leadership, for whatever reason, want the two plains provinces to cover the whole Tarai. The NC-UML-Maoist combine wants them to be part of adjoining hill provinces because of vote bank politics. This has been the main sticking point in talks between Kathmandu and the plains parties. Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa’s compromise proposal to push through amendments on Madhesi demands and defer delineation appears to have been broadly accepted by the Indian establishment, and that is the real reason Madhesi chiefs were summoned to New Delhi this week. This is the wrong time to be tinkering

with borders. The economy, already battered by the earthquake, has taken a direct hit. Multinational investors are bearing colossal losses, some are thinking of closing down, many domestic industries may never recover. Hydropower and infrastructure projects nationwide are at a standstill. Tourism is down by 60 per cent. The government’s revenue collection has been so badly hit, the Finance Ministry isn’t even putting a rupee figure to it. All this has impacted on employment and government services, GDP growth this year has been scaled back to negative. If it were New Delhi’s intention to punish Nepal, it has done a brilliant job. But it is hard to see how that helps India.

Development has probably been pushed back a decade. Medical services, even emergency care, have been crippled by the shortage of critical drugs and the inability of patients to get to hospital in time. The blockade has a death toll, just like the earthquake did. Schools in the plains have been closed for more than five months, elsewhere they are just keeping classes going till winter break. Facing a harsh winter with no shelter, the situation for the two million people still homeless after the earthquake is dire.

After this crisis is over, Nepalis and the Nepal government must not fall into the trap of wallowing in victimhood. The Indians don’t need to ruin our country, we have been doing that pretty effectively ourselves since the 1990s. Lazy nationalism does not get us anywhere, as this crisis has proven. We have to be deliberate and systematic in reviving the economy, build self-reliance in energy, kickstart development, and steer our democracy back on track by ensuring that it involves all Nepalis fairly in decision-making.

If we can achieve just some of those goals we will have turned this paralysing crisis into a chance to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

CALLING A BLOCKADE A SPADE

This isn’t new for India, same economic tactics have been used in Kashmir, Manipur too (‘Calling a blockade a spade’, Editorial, #785). The situation now demands intervention of the world community, but that is unlikely given the countries’ own national interests and the market India offers for them.

Qazi Zaid

LOSE-LOSE

Now you see why Pakistanis have always fiercely resisted any Indian attempts to forge closer economic ties with the country (‘Lose-Lose’, Editorial, #784). We don’t want to be put in a situation where a gigantic next door neighbour has so much power over us that they can crush us. Nepal’s best bet is to simply open up to China. China doesn’t strong-arm its neighbours as India does. China is awash in cash and is looking for allies too. India, on the other hand, has a history of interfering in the internal matters of all its neighbours.

Ghulam Lone

TEA AND BISCUITS

Bending over intervention is invitation to another intervention (‘Tea and biscuits’,

Anurag Acharya, #785). Solution should be searched behind the border.

Anil Karki

■ Do you really believe that in the 21st century, segregating communities is the only way we can make things work? While equal rights for women, special quotas for underrepresented communities are understandable, isn’t demanding for a special state which encompasses majority areas to ensure poll victory a slap in the face of democracy?

Namah

OVER THE HUMP

Hope the state of infrastructure in the North adds some realism to our collective wisdom and restraint us from getting carried away by the rhetoric of the hawkers of both extreme left and right selling utopia (‘Over the hump’, Dambar K Shrestha, #785).

Bishu Nepal

INVEST, INCLUDE, IMPROVE

Could it be that Madhesi leaders are really not looked up to by anyone (‘Invest, include, improve’, Tsering Dolker Gurung, #785)? I wish they

had a saner voice to forward their agenda. Madhesiyouth.com does a bit, but they have a limited audience. Need someone of the stature of Dr Ram Baran Yadav, someone with gravitas.

Nam

■ Journalism is a noble job if and when it is done with honesty and integrity. But in Nepal most journalists would rather churn than seek the whole truth behind issues that affect the populace.

Whatever



PHOTO: SHANKAR DAHAL (4,391 PEOPLE REACHED)

Most reached on Facebook
Trekking loots by Lokmani Rai
TAAN has misused millions of rupees collected from tourists visiting Nepal that was supposed to be set aside for rescue and medical treatment of trekking guides and porters.

Most shared on Facebook
Health crisis by Om Astha Rai
(24 shares)

Most visited online page
Calling a blockade a spade,
Editorial (1,491 views)

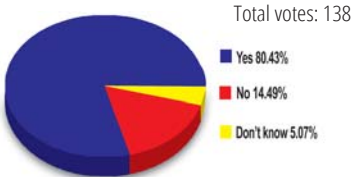
Most popular on Twitter
Bending the truth Om Astha Rai (55 retweets, 19 favourites)

Most commented
Calling a blockade a spade,
Editorial (20 comments)

Times nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #785

Q. Do you think the Nepali media is biased?



Weekly Internet Poll #786
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who should be more responsible for ending the blockade?

When the blockade ends

This is neither the first nor could it be the last, we must start seeking alternatives

India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stirred a debate this week over her Nepal remarks in India's Upper House. Her comments were widely criticised for being misleading.

To those who missed her speech, you can watch it in the online version of this column on the *Nepali Times* website.



AS IT HAPPENS
Om Astha Rai

The operative paragraph was: "The interim constitution ensured naturalised citizenship to Indian women married to Nepali men, but this provision is missing in the new constitution."

The truth is that the new constitution has retained the provision about naturalised citizenship through matrimony. Why did Swaraj have to propagate that falsehood? Did she deliberately distort the truth to justify the Madhesi protests which in turn is used to justify the Indian blockade of our borders to pressure Kathmandu on the constitution?

These are important questions, but what is even more crucial is: why does she – or the Madhesi people – believe that Indian women married to Nepali men will be deprived of naturalised citizenship under the new constitution?

This misunderstanding appears to have stemmed from the alteration of just one word: 'existing' to 'federal'. The interim constitution stipulated that foreign women married to Nepali men can apply for naturalised Nepali citizenship as per 'existing' laws. The same line has been repeated in the new constitution, but 'existing' has been replaced with 'federal'. Will this minor alteration have big implications? Not really. Laws in a federal Nepal will be known as 'federal' laws.

But leaders of the Madhesi parties have misinterpreted this change and been able to convince many in the Indian establishment that this is discrimination and reduces the Madhesi people to second-class citizenship. Swaraj seems to have bought that.

Madhesis want deletion of the word 'federal' and more clarity in the clause of naturalised citizenship through matrimony. They believe 'federal' is a semantic ploy and they are not ready to trust the state that this word will never be used to pass discriminatory laws against them in future.

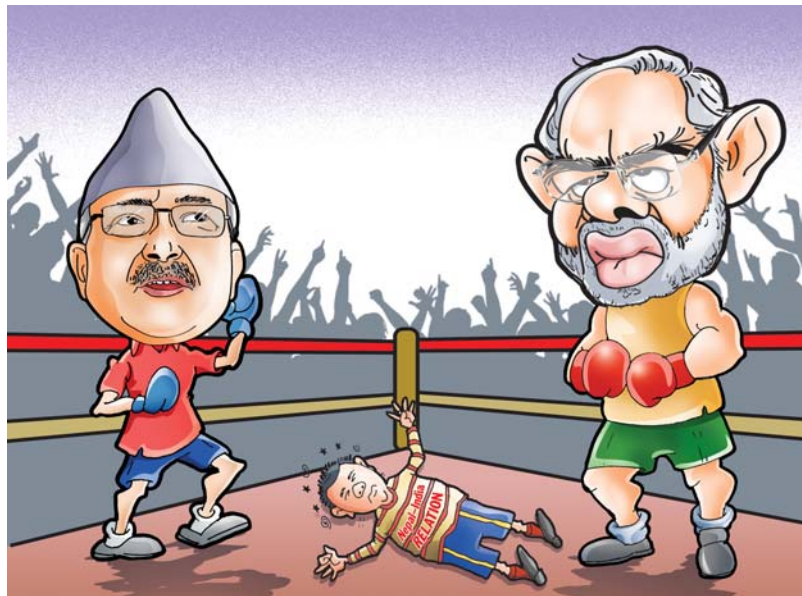
Why do only Madhesis want clarity in the citizenship clause? Why do non-Madhesis not see it as a ploy? These questions are important to make sense of the Madhes unrest.

It is true that the state has in the past doubted the Madhesi people's allegiance to Nepal, and Madhesis are suspicious of the state. Their perception of constitutional clauses is guided

by this very distrust of the state. So building trust between Kathmandu and Madhes is probably more important than tweaking the statute.

Leaders of the big parties must show that they truly believe in diversity and inclusion. They must go beyond the constitution to prove it. But this is sadly where the problem lies. For example, Prime Minister KP Oli, an upper-caste Hill Brahmin, has appointed 10 advisers so far. None of them is a Madhesi, Janajati or Dalit.

There are now signs that the blockade will be lifted. The whole exercise has been damaging not just for Nepal, but it has backfired on India as well. New Delhi is looking for a face-saving device to lift the siege quietly. Top Madhesi leaders in the Indian capital this week were asked to consider a four-point proposal floated by Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa so that border obstructions can be removed and India can justify ending the blockade.



The Madhesi leaders are not happy, fearing a backlash back home. But they have got the message that redrawing federal boundaries right away is not possible. So even if it rejects the deal, it will alter the form of its agitation and stay off the

border. The first amendment to the constitution, agreed upon by the major parties last week, will also serve as a face-saver for the Madhesi Front to scale down its agitation.

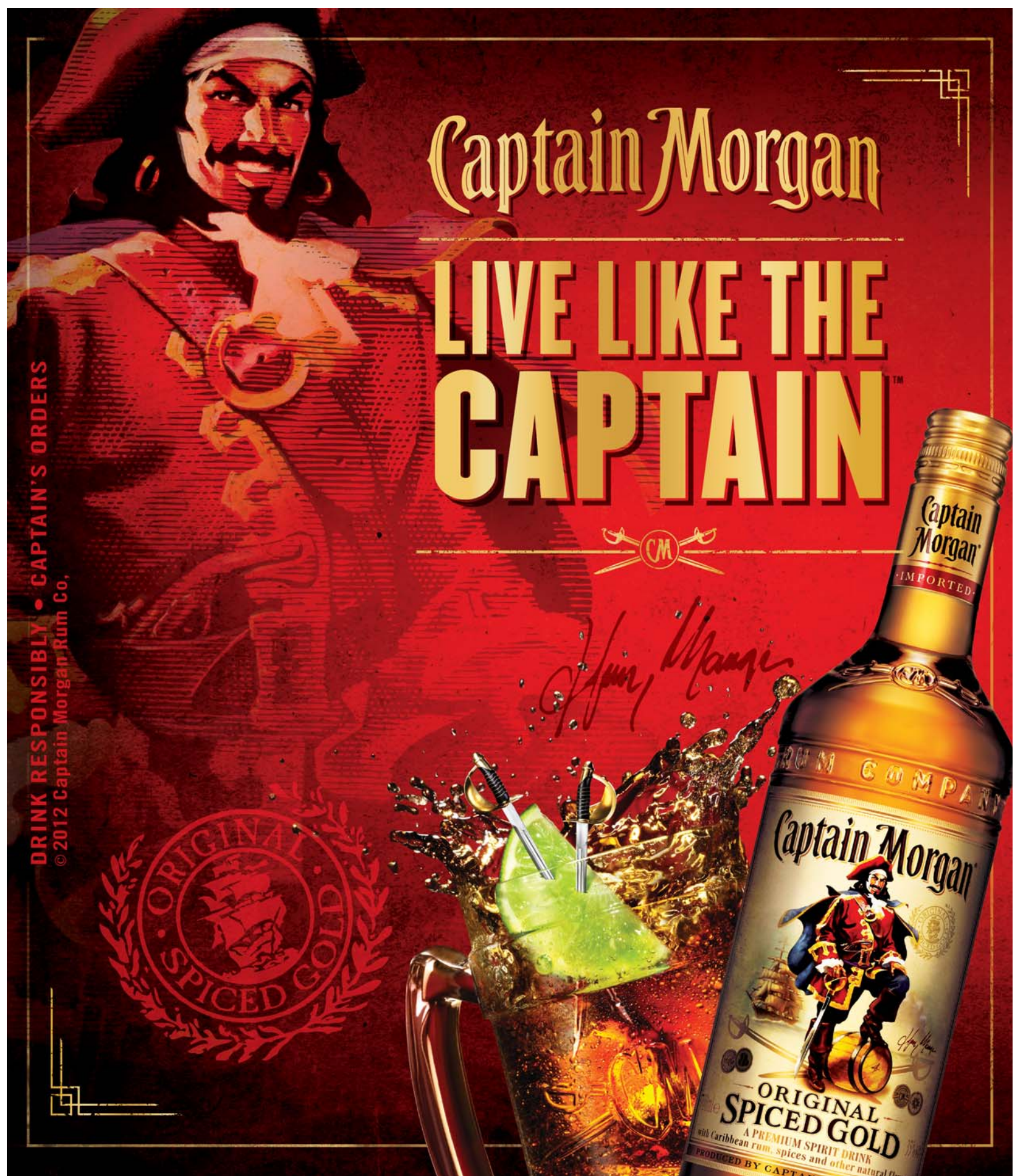
But this doesn't mean the crisis will end, it will just be

postponed. In three months when the term of an all-party committee to be formed for redrawing federal boundaries ends, the issue is bound to come up again. The main parties must therefore show flexibility in demarcation of the two proposed Tarai provinces. All five disputed districts cannot be gifted to Madhesis, but dividing one or two of them in a way that Madhesi people will not be under-represented is necessary.

It is also important to mend the trust deficit between Madhesi and non-Madhesi Nepalis. The main hill-dominated parties must try to convince Madhesis that they now live in an inclusive and multi-cultural society. Ensuring proportional representation of Madhesis, Janajatis, Dalits, Muslims and women in all party committees could be the starting point.

When the blockade ends, Nepal also must embark on a journey towards reducing dependency on fuel and diversifying imports. We all ridiculed Prime Minister Oli's unrealistic dreams, but those should be our longterm goals.

The ongoing blockade is not the first, and there may be more in future. We have to be better prepared next time. [@omastharai](#)



Every breath we take

Despite the drop in emission due to the blockade, pollution chokes Kathmandu Valley this winter

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Nepal's petroleum imports are down to 20 per cent of normal due to the Indian blockade, yet Kathmandu's legendary winter smog is as bad as ever.

The reasons include prevailing winds from the southwest blowing in transboundary pollution from the Indo-Gangetic plains, the increase in households burning firewood due to the gas shortage, and dust particles from unfinished road construction in the capital.

The worsening air pollution in northern India this winter is partly the result of burning of crop residue in Punjab and Haryana from late October to November. Coupled with the increase in vehicular traffic this has made pollution so bad that New Delhi imposed odd-even number plate traffic restrictions this week.

"Satellite images show agricultural burning in Northern India and computer models indicate the smoke is transported all over the Indo-Gangetic plains including the Himalaya contributing to regional haze," said Bhupesh Adhikary, air quality specialist at ICIMOD (International

Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) in Kathmandu.

Kathmandu's bowl shaped topography exacerbates the problem in winter by trapping warmer polluted air near the ground in a phenomenon known as inversion. The pollution is composed of dust particles, vehicular exhaust and brick kiln emissions.

The fuel crisis caused by the Indian blockade has brought down the level of vehicular pollution, and the earthquake damaged 80 per cent of the brick kilns. However, experts say the smog is almost as bad as last winter because of smog from the Indian plains and the dust from Kathmandu Valley roads that are half-complete because of the fuel crisis.

In October-November farmers in Punjab and Haryana in India burn their fields to clear paddy stubble after harvest to plant winter wheat. Farmers in the Nepal Tarai have also started to burn crop residue because of the spread of mechanisation. In recent year's crop fires in Northern India are so extensive that they are visible on NASA satellites images.

The air pollution problem in the region can get worse as reports suggest India is building 297 and planning to build 149 coal-fired power stations by 2030. Add that to the already existing power

plants, vehicles and brick kilns and we are in for compromised lungs not just in India but across the region.

"Since we cannot build a 3km tall wall along our border, we have to tackle cross border pollution by working with other governments," says Arnico Panday, senior atmospheric scientist at ICIMOD. "Global climate change may be beyond our control because it requires all the countries to work together especially the large ones. Regional air pollution control requires strong action especially in India."

The fuel crisis has also forced households in the Valley and even restaurants and offices to burn firewood for cooking. Since it is a temporary measure, most don't have proper chimneys or ventilation. Smoke from firewood has made morning smog worse, and also increased the risk of indoor pollution.

Household pollution was ranked number one risk factor for the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death in 2010 according to The Global Burden of Disease: Generating, Guiding Policy, a study conducted by Institution for Health Metric and Evaluation, University of Washington, Human Development Network and The World Bank.

During a recent media training workshop on Air Pollution Arjun Karki of Patan Institute of Health Sciences said: "Inhaling various pollutants increases the risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, respiratory tract infections, asthma, throat and lung cancer and pulmonary TB among others."

Filthy clouds

Besides better known, and more notorious air pollutants like diesel exhaust and roadside dust, there is emerging evidence that contrails of aircraft flying at high altitude could have localised effect on temperature and weather on the ground.

On the one hand this could prolong winter inversion fog over northern India and Kathmandu Valley, and on the other it could warm the upper atmosphere by trapping solar reflection.

"There has been no definitive research on this, but theoretically we can say that as air traffic grows over northern India, the cumulative effect of contrail clouds blown over Nepal by the jetstream could affect local weather here," says climate change expert Ngamindra Dahal at the South Asian Institute of Advanced Studies in Kathmandu.

Indeed, at the rate air traffic within India and transcontinental overflights between Asia and Europe is growing, the impact could also be greater in coming years. At present, there are few flights over Nepal airspace that create contrails, but this could grow if the proposed Himalaya 1 air route to cut flying time between East Asia and India become operational.

Contrails are wisps of ice particles formed by aircraft flying at high altitude and form under the right combination of temperature and humidity. Besides the carbon dioxide emitted by aircraft engines which contribute about 12 per cent of global warming from the transportation sector worldwide, contrails have not been studied as closely.

The impact of contrails on the temperature of the earth's surface is hard to measure. But after the 9/11 attacks when all airliners were grounded over the continental US for three days, scientists got a rare chance to study what happens when there are no contrails. They found evidence of the heat-trapping effect of these artificial clouds, as well as reflection and blockage of the sun's rays.

Given the right conditions and with heavy traffic along air corridors over northern India, contrails can expand into bands of high-altitude cirrus clouds blocking the sun and preventing winter fog in the Indo-Gangetic plains from being burnt off by the sun's warmth.

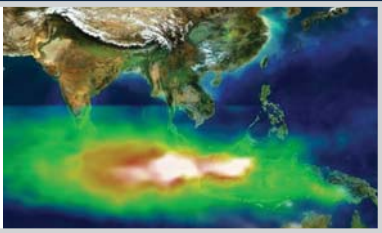
India's domestic aviation market is expected to grow 10 per cent annually in the next decade, which is double the growth rate of the global aviation industry, and airlines plan to add 600 business jets and small aircraft by 2020. Indian airlines already carry nine times as many passengers as they did 20 years ago. In addition, the volume of flights between Southeast Asia and Europe flying over India is also growing.

Aviation emissions haven't got as much attention as other fossil fuels as a contributor to global warming in climate change negotiations including the ongoing talks in Paris. Contrails have received even less attention.

Sarthak Mani Sharma

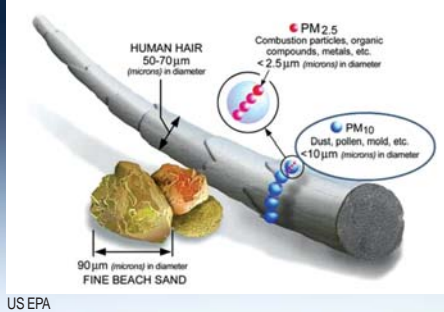
ASH IN THE SKY

Indonesian forest fires and pollution from the Asian mainland are transported by prevailing winds and concentrated over the Indian Ocean in what is called Atmospheric Brown Cloud.

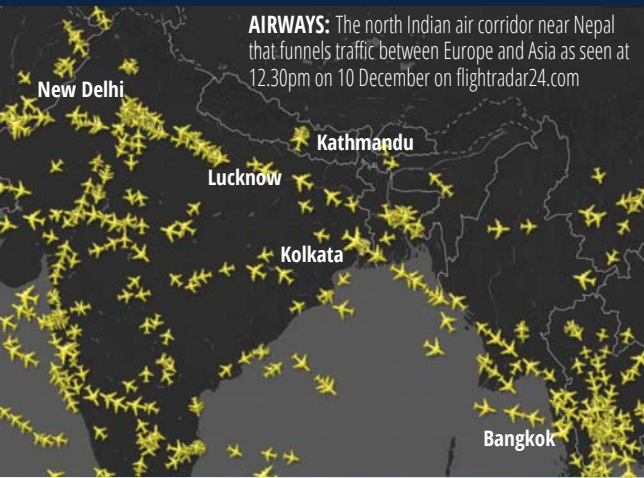


SEOS-PROJECT.EU

HAIR RAISING



US EPA



BLACK CARBON: Deposition of soot particles hastens glacial retreat in the Himalaya caused by global warming.



FARM SMOKE

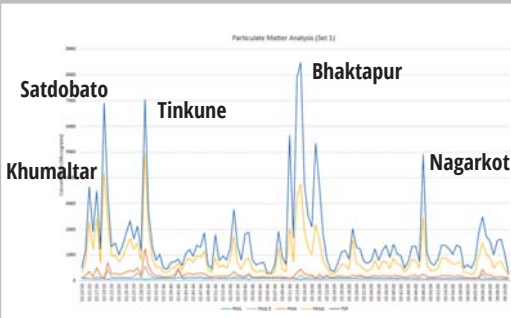
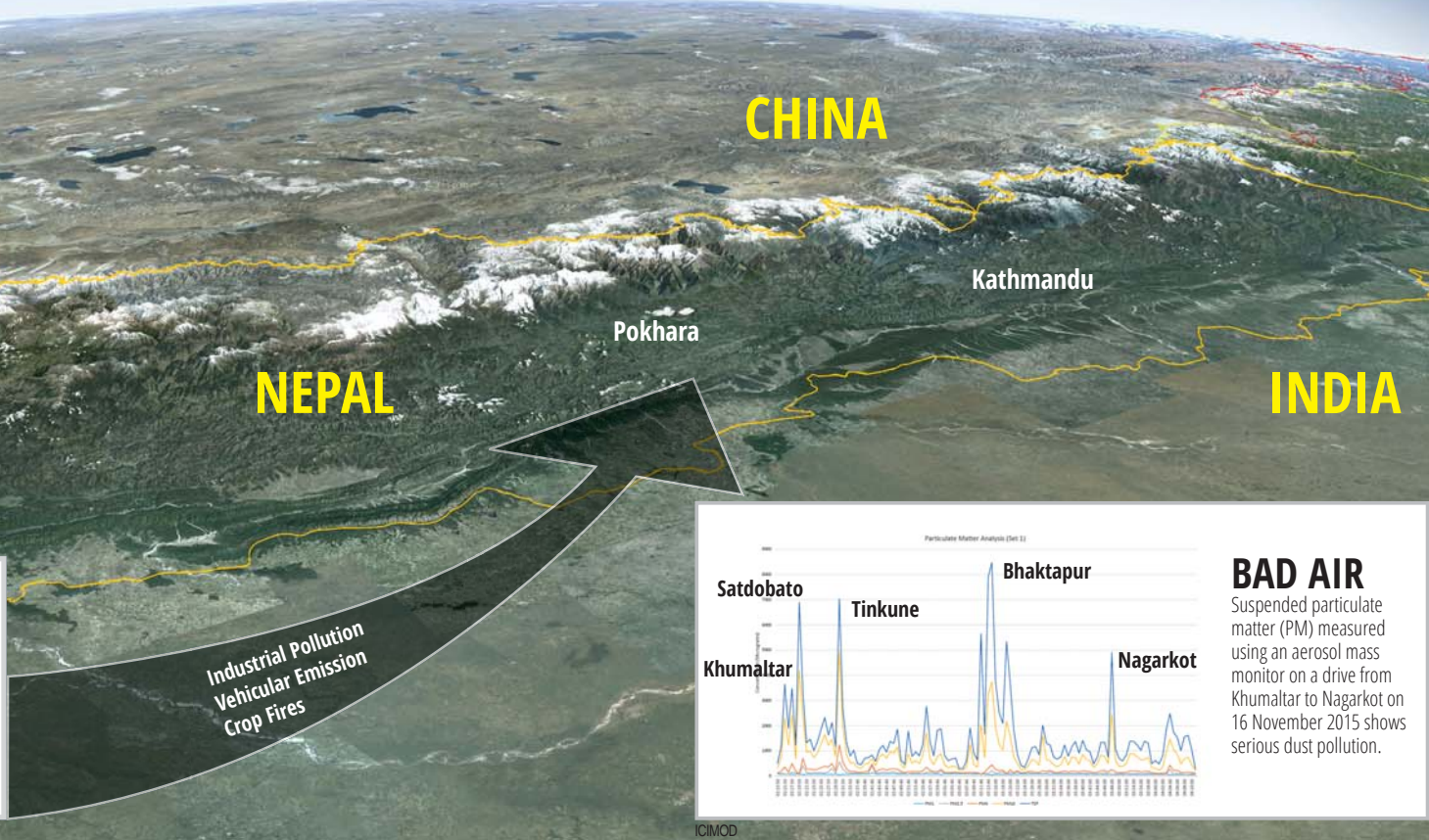
In October-November farmers in Punjab and Haryana in India burn fields to clear paddy stubble after harvest to plant winter wheat. In recent years agricultural fires in Northern India have been so extensive they can be seen on NASA satellites images (left).

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BAD AIR

Suspended particulate matter (PM) measured using an aerosol mass monitor on a drive from Khumaltar to Nagarkot on 16 November 2015 shows serious dust pollution.

ICIMOD



Kathmandu Witch Trials

Under the guise of corruption the CIAA is targeting those with whom its puppeteers and their puppets do not agree

In 1692, Salem in Massachusetts of the United States saw the beginning of what was a series of hearings and prosecutions of people – mostly women -- accused of witchcraft. Although the trials went on for less than a year, they are still studied in history as an example of ‘mass hysteria’, religious extremism and in highlighting the dangers associated with the abuse of authority, in this case of the justice system.



ONE TO MANY
Bidushi Dhungel

In under a year, 20 people were killed on these false charges. The trials stand as a reminder of the way in which people, or groups of people, can be ‘legally’ and ‘legitimately’ targeted as a means to push through various religious or political ends.

The Salem Trials came to mind almost immediately upon reading the headlines last week on the activities of our own beacon of justice, the Commission on Investigation on the Abuse of Authority (CIAA). It doesn’t take a genius to connect the dots.

It is not new news that Nepal’s CIAA is but a mere tool of the powerful. It is rather ironic that the body given charge of checking the abuse of authority for economic gain abuses its own authority for political ends. In a sack of rotten apples that is Nepal, it is of great significance

which apples one handpicks for scrutiny. Are some apples, perhaps rotten, being scrutinised scandalously while fruit so rotten they have begun to decompose fully are left alone? It sure seems that way.

One doesn’t have to go back too far in time to recall the last rampage the Authority went on ‘against corruption’, between 2000 and 2006. A cursory look at those who were implicated and even sentenced to jail – Khum Bahadur Khadka, Chiranjivi Wagle, JP Gupta etc – shows that the water in which the CIAA wades is bloody muddy. You, me and the next average Gita could, within a few spare minutes, list at least another 10 equally if not more ‘corrupt’ individuals who made their fortunes in the heydays of Nepali Congress politics and yet continue to rule the roost over at the party office in Sanepa.

Some of those guys – K P Sitaula, who was given a clean chit after just one calling and Govinda Raj Joshi, whose case hasn’t even moved to the SC after the Special Court convicted him of corruption – have managed to maneuver so well as to keep out of jail. And anyway, the UML was also already claiming its space in the state coffers in the 1990s, so one cannot help but wonder why on earth they would be spared from the ‘zero tolerance’ on corruption these CIAA bigwigs hammer on about.

That error seems to have been corrected this time around as almost all of those implicated are either close to the UML, or the ruling establishment. In addition, one cannot help but

notice that some of the list have in recent days and years spoken out against Indian intervention in Nepal – whatever their personal motivations for doing so may have been. One doesn’t have to like or agree with those being ‘investigated’ to acknowledge that they are being targeted for reasons which span beyond possible financial irregularities and into their political bearings.

Of all the nonsensical, and often outright dangerous, maneuvers that the CIAA has made, perhaps none is as foolish as going after Sajha Yatayat. It was a dead initiative that was brought back to life for public good, and anyone who has experienced a Sajha bus ride must acknowledge that it is pretty much the only public transport worth keeping or scaling up in Kathmandu. The irony is that no one was around to investigate it when it was government owned and as politicians sold it off piece by piece, filling their pockets and accounts, without even leaving so much as flat tyres to spare.

The CIAA is not a public good that is working to curb the corrupt activities of political leaders, civil society and bureaucrats. Instead, under the guise of corruption, it is targeting those with whom its puppeteers and their puppets do not agree. The puppeteers and puppets will change, as has happened in the past, and yet the body’s utility remains the same. The abuse of authority of the CIAA is a political corruption, which must be investigated and remedied at once, lest we begin another series of the Kathmandu Witch Trials. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS



Award for Etihad

Etihad Airways has been named ‘Airline of the Year 2016’ by the American aviation industry publication Air Transport World (ATW). There were entries from more than 100 airlines in the contest. ATW noted Etihad’s growth and partnership strategies when it announced the award.

Jet Spray launched

Chaudhary Group has launched its fully automatic Jet Spray washing machine. Its main features include a water spray that washes off dirt and excess detergent.



BOK’s new branch

Bank of Kathmandu has recently opened its new branch in Bellauri, Kanchanpur. The branch was inaugurated by Deputy Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, Maha Prasad Adhikari. With this, Bank of Kathmandu now has 51 branches. The inauguration is part of the bank’s aim of opening more branches in mid and far-western Nepal.



New flight for Turkish

Turkish Airlines has inaugurated its first flight to Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine. It has become the sixth destination that Turkish flies to in Ukraine.



TURKISH AIRLINES

Starting from 28 December, Zaporizhzhia flights will be operated 4 times weekly and for the first six months, there will be a special offer for its Miles&Smiles members.

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Kul Gautam's way forward

If the earthquake in April was not enough, Nepalis are now suffering the catastrophe of the blockade imposed by India and enforced by agitating Madhesi parties in the central and eastern Tarai.



THIS IS IT
Rubeena Mahato

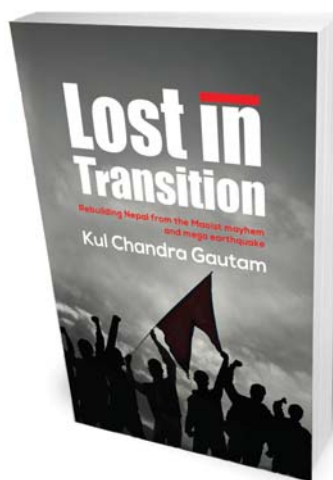
Retired Assistant Secretary General at the UN and one of the most senior Nepalis in the international civil service, Kul Chandra Gautam, takes a retrospective look at events in Nepal's recent history leading up to this crisis in his book *Lost in Transition: Rebuilding Nepal from the Maoist mayhem and mega earthquake*. In a brilliant counter-narrative, Gautam destroys the dominant discourse that eulogises the Maoist war as a natural and inevitable uprising of the oppressed, arguing instead that the conflict cut short Nepal's march towards democracy and development.

He argues that the Maoist movement used grievances of the oppressed and the marginalised to launch a power grab, and in doing so derailed democratic consolidation and state-building

at a crucial point in our history -- pushing the country into a needless and ruinous war and disempowering the state. Gautam challenges the root causes theory for the Maoist war and argues that it was more an instrument for state capture than a genuine desire to liberate the oppressed who in reality have been the biggest victims of the violence.

More significantly, he argues that the Maoist war established political violence as a legitimate instrument to gain power and institutionalised the culture of impunity with repercussions far into the future. Indeed, in many ways, our current problems are tied to our uncritical acceptance of the use of violence by the Maoists and our inability to challenge them on their decision to bypass legal, constitutional and democratic means to achieve political goals and setting a dangerous precedent for other political groups. The Maoists chose to wage guerilla warfare against a young democracy that was only beginning to free itself from the shackles of an autocratic monarchy.

At a time when the state should be building institutions, ours was embroiled in fighting an insurgency. In essence, that has been the story of the Nepali state post democracy: a continued fight for survival with domestic and external forces while never having the opportunity to



Lost in Transition:
Rebuilding Nepal from the Maoist mayhem and mega earthquake
By Kul Chandra Gautam
Paperback: Rs 675
Hardbound: Rs 950

consolidate and strengthen itself. This continued erosion of state capacity, abetted by glorification of destabilising forces, militant rhetoric and political adventurism is what is at the source of our problems. Moving forward from this mayhem, Gautam argues will require discarding all outdated, parochial and extremist ideologies, embracing democratic values and prioritising economic development, inclusion and good governance.

This book is also notable for its strong and detailed criticism

of the international community's role in Nepal's peace process, in particular its willingness to compromise on accepted principles of human rights, rule of law and democracy in Nepal to appease radical factions. Gautam fiercely criticises the internationals for coddling the Maoists and ethnic extremists, and for falling to their doublespeak.

He describes how UNMIN misreported events in Nepal with its visible bias for the Maoists despite frequent breaches of the CPA, how UNMIN treated Maoists at par with the state while displaying a complete distrust of democratic parties. Gautam notes how Ian Martin and Karin Landgrin's disdain for NC and UML as 'thoroughly corrupt, Bahun-led, status-quoists parties' while considering Maoists to be the exception to the rule, reminded him of King Gyanendra and his father Mahendra's dislike for democratic parties, both of whom ended up suspending democracy and ruling as absolute monarchs.

This book is a refreshing change from the established discourse on Nepal shaped by a narrow group of elite, English-speaking writers who fail to look beyond empty sloganeering and rhetoric. Their division of Nepalis into monolithic categories of us vs them, 'progressive' vs 'regressive', 'Pahades' vs 'Madhesi' and

'Hill Bahun Chettri' vs the 'rest' ignores the complex and contradictory realities of Nepali society. For international experts that parachute into Nepal, this is a convenient framework to work with, one that fits nicely with their worldviews, but does little to explain our issues, let alone find solutions. Gautam's book is a must-read for an understanding of contemporary Nepal without the dogma of radical posturing.

Lost in Transition attempts to dig deeper and presents a more nuanced and sensible understanding of our problems with clear and detailed way-forwards. Despite the heaviness of the subject matter, it is a tremendously hopeful book, laying in concrete terms a roadmap with which Nepal can prosper and achieve stability. The epilogue discusses the Indian blockade and what Nepal can do to initiate negotiations and secure its interests against larger and hostile neighbours.

What carries the book beyond its rigour is its sincerity and impassionate defense of democratic values and principles. With an earnestness that comes from his humble beginnings in Gulmi, Gautam speaks of an identity that binds all Nepalis, a pursuit of shared prosperity for themselves and their children. And it is this desire to leave a better Nepal behind for future generations, that resonates throughout the book.

nepalitimes.com

■ Read excerpts

“Noble ends need noble means”

Nepali Times: Your book goes against the dominant narrative that the Maoists are a force for change. Aren't you being unfair in your negative assessment of the Maoist movement in Nepal?

Kul Chandra Gautam: Yes, the Maoists have certainly been a force for change. But much of the change they advocate has been negative – glorification of so-called revolutionary violence, inciting people to destroy democratic institutions, fomenting communal discord, disrupting children's education -- all in pursuit of a globally failed and discredited ideology. The Maoists raised issues of entrenched inequity, injustice, discrimination and exploitation in Nepali society, as I write in my book, but the solutions they proposed were mostly arbitrary, coercive, divisive, violent and undemocratic. The solutions required kangaroo courts, physical threats, and even elimination of opponents or those who disagreed with them. The book documents how the many progressive-sounding slogans used by the Maoists were deeply deceptive and concludes that, on balance, the so-called people's war was perhaps 10 per cent blessing and 90 per cent curse for the people of Nepal.

You are critical of the role of international community, particularly the UN in Nepal's constitution-building and peace process. But you were among the first people to propose a UN involvement.

I remain a strong believer of the UN and enlightened multilateralism in international relations. I am proud of my advocacy for UN's support for Nepal's peace process, consolidation of democracy, development and human rights. Indeed, the UN played a very constructive role in highlighting and preventing violations of human rights by both government security forces and by the Maoists in the early years of the peace process. The presence of UNMIN was very reassuring to the people of Nepal that the Comprehensive Peace Accord would be honoured by all sides, and that the UN would be an honest broker if the parties to the conflict violated it.

The UN and other international donors to Nepal were keen to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of the poor, vulnerable and historically marginalised. I strongly share and support this laudable objective. Where many of my former UN colleagues and European donors and diplomats erred was in their inability to distinguish between progressive-sounding slogans of certain groups like the



Maoists and activists of various ethnic and regional groups whose analysis was often convincing, but whose policy prescriptions were deeply flawed. Many Western diplomats were swayed by the views of some articulate columnists, writers and analysts who presented Nepali society as sharply divided between progressive and regressive camps. Naturally, they wanted to be on the side of the so-called progressives and gave them undue benefit of doubt.

In the 'Deception and delusion of the international community' I give examples of how the international community misjudged Nepal's complex social dynamics and ended up unwittingly supporting certain policies in Nepal that they would not accept or apply in their own countries.

Do you think your being seen as anti-Maoist undermined your credibility as a mediator during the peace process?

I never pretended to be a mediator, but wanted to play a constructive role in the peace process, and more importantly in post-conflict reconstruction and development. Perhaps

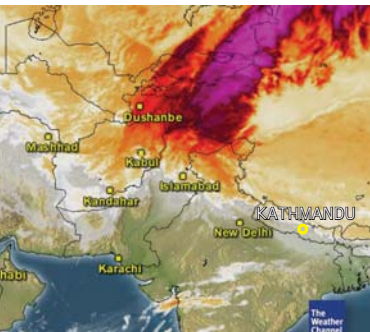
my candid views were seen as partisan by some, but I know many considered them principled. My public criticism of the Maoists helped restrain them from some adventurism, and alerted others, including the UN and some donors, to be more circumspect in not subscribing to the simplistic characterisation of Nepali society as sharply polarised between the Kathmandu elite and the oppressed.

Yet you maintain a positive outlook on Nepal's future. Given the current context, how realistic are those hopes?

Nepal has all the ingredients needed to become a just and prosperous nation. It is endowed with natural resources, spectacular beauty, a hard-working people, a strategic location between two of the world's largest economies, and very supportive development partners. Holding us back has been the excessive focus on political experiments of various types, and the neglect of economic issues. Most Nepalis no longer believe that discredited ideologies offer any magic solution to their problems. They want pragmatic policies, good governance, rule of law and encouragement of entrepreneurship. With the exposure and better education, I see Nepal getting ready for economic takeoff. Ultra-nationalism hinders development, and distortions created by cartels and syndicates discourage competition, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Why couldn't our media or public intellectuals challenge a harmful discourse that endorsed violence and helped impunity?

The Maoists were very clever in projecting themselves as the champions of the poor and the marginalised. They portrayed all those who disagreed with them as feudal elites. They said revolutionary violence was necessary to fight what they considered structural violence of the state. They were able to persuade Dalits, certain Janajatis, Madhesi, and even some leftist intellectuals that their noble ends justified violent means. Curiously, even some members of the international community bought this argument. Nepal's moderate media and public intellectuals were unable to counter this narrative for fear of being portrayed as politically incorrect. I happen to believe that all noble objectives should be pursued using noble means. Violence can bring temporary change, but in a democracy lasting change can only happen through peaceful means. I believe Nepalis have also come to that conclusion.



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SHARE A SEAT

Sumana Shrestha's Facebook groups help Valley residents find rides and source medicines

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Thirty one-year-old Sumana Shrestha was in America, planning a backpacking trip to Europe, when Nepal was hit by the devastating April earthquake. The financial analyst from Boston put all her plans on hold, and jumped into action.

For the first month of the disaster, Shrestha worked through Facebook, coordinating relief supplies donated by friends in the US to be sent to quake-affected villages. In May, Shrestha was sent by her company, Boston Consulting Group to work with the World Food Programme for three months and decided to stay on.

An MBA graduate from the

MIT Sloan School of Management, Shrestha was amazed at how little was being done to deal with the fuel crisis.

"I asked my friends if we had a platform in Nepal where people can share and get free rides. They said no and that was my cue," says the Kathmandu native.

Shrestha got on her laptop, worked out of a café and created a Facebook group 'Carpool Kathmandu'. The idea was simple. People who had extra seats in their vehicles could offer the same to those looking for a ride.

Within the first four days, 25,000 people had joined the group. The story of how people

were carpooling in the face of the fuel crisis was picked up by newspapers and bloggers helped spread the word about the group.

Today, Carpool Kathmandu has over 110,000 members and an app for Android devices. With users having to add their phone numbers, the app provides an extra layer of security. Like in the Facebook group, users can ask and offer rides using #ASK and #OFFER, as well as share their experiences.

What started as a short-term measure to cope with fuel shortage is now beginning to be seen by many as an eco-friendly way to travel. Most members admitted they would like to

continue carpooling even after the crisis ends.

"Carpool Kathmandu has not only helped bring the community together but also build a culture offline where people give and take lifts," says Shrestha.

Shrestha has also created another Facebook group 'Medication for Nepal'. As with its predecessor, this group helps match people who need medication with others who are flying into Nepal and are willing to carry them.

People offering to bring medication use #CTN (Coming to Nepal), #CountryOfOrigin #LandingDateinNepal and

people in need of medication use #MedicationForWhat #EstimatedWeight. To make it easier, users upload a photo of the prescription and others in the group help locate the medicines.

Shrestha is now working with the Department of Drug Administration to coordinate and create a database structure to help ease the supply of medications.

Says Shrestha: "Yes, there are problems. But, we need to get beyond the concept of simply complaining and thinking somebody else is going to solve them. We need to ask ourselves what we can do to solve them." 🇳🇵

NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.

Times

in your **lap** or **palm**.

www.nepalitimes.com

Awdhesh Prasad Kurmi
and Anita Devi Kurmi,
Parsa

He would follow me to the door every time I left for work and when I returned he would always come and hug me. I had to feed him or else he wouldn't eat. I still remember that day very clearly. I was at work and saw my wife come running towards me, screaming with our son in her arms. His hands were suspended in the air, he had been shot in the head and was covered in blood. I rode as fast as I could to take our dying son to the hospital, the police were still firing indiscriminately. When we finally reached, the doctor declared him dead. We are all mourning his loss but she has taken this sorrow to her soul, and won't talk to us much. Yesterday, our two other children came to her and said, "Ama, we are here for you." And we all broke down.



FACES OF MADHES

Stories of Nepal creator **Jaydev Paudel** recently travelled to the Tarai in search of tales of how people in the plains are coping with the crisis. His popular Facebook page has now been liked by over 175,000 people. Here are some of the stories.



ALL PICS: JAYDEV PAUDEL

Rabindra Kumar Dwivedi, **Birganj**

I am a simple farmer. I received the most basic education, and I do not understand the current situation of the country. The government and the big politicians say that they have given equal rights to the people of Madhes. The Madhesi leaders tell us that the government has given us no rights at all. And I sit here and wonder, where did all the rights disappear along the way? Who kidnapped the rights? But then again, I am a simple farmer.





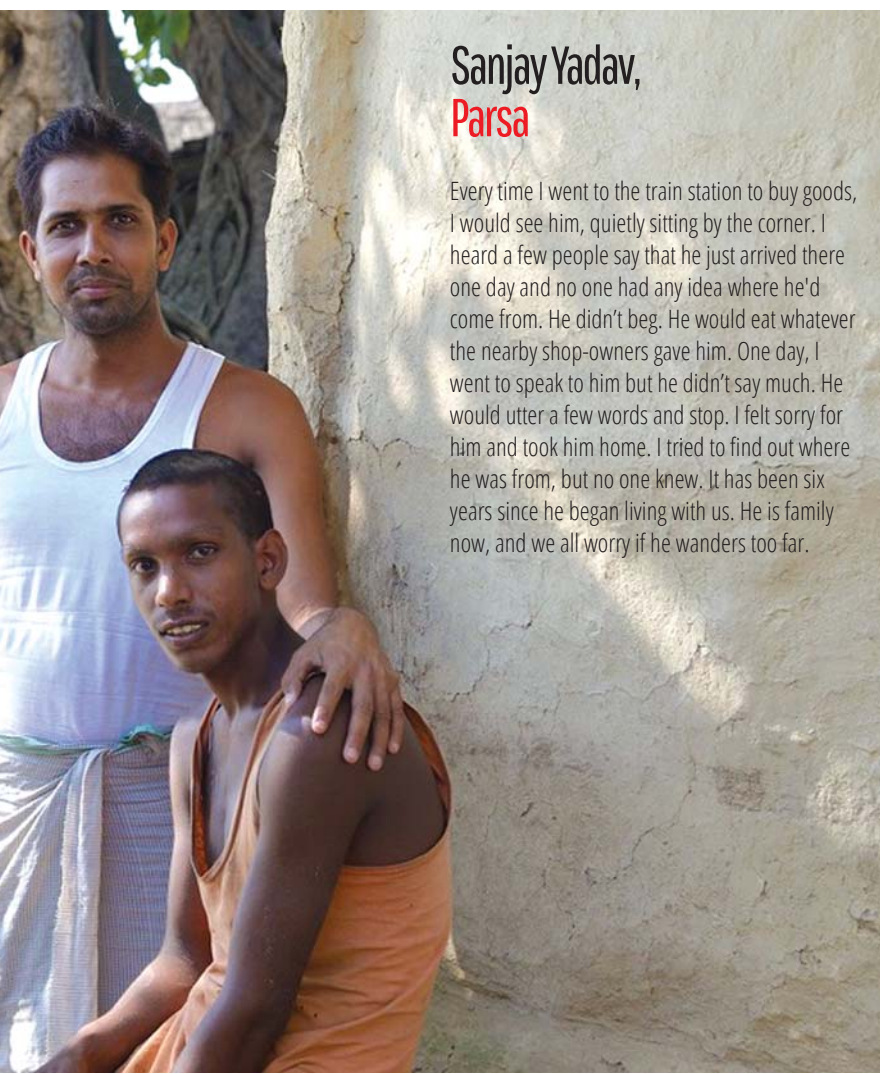
Binita Devi Shah, Birganj

People used to say we were the best couple in town. He loved teasing me. He was young, only 25. When our second child was born, he was so happy. He would say, "We will sell tea, eat only one meal a day, but we will make sure to send these two to the best schools and make one a doctor and the other an engineer. We will do everything for them." Now, my elder son questions me, "Why did father sleep on top of those logs?"



Binita Devi Shah, Birganj

I told him not to go to the protests but he wouldn't listen. He used to say, "If I don't go and fight for our rights, then who will?" That day, after lunch, he left without telling me. Shortly after I got a call from the hospital saying that he had been shot. I ran to see him but they wouldn't let me enter. I cried and told them that he was my husband. As the nurse lifted the cover from his body I saw that half his head was missing. I fainted.



Sanjay Yadav, Parsa

Every time I went to the train station to buy goods, I would see him, quietly sitting by the corner. I heard a few people say that he just arrived there one day and no one had any idea where he'd come from. He didn't beg. He would eat whatever the nearby shop-owners gave him. One day, I went to speak to him but he didn't say much. He would utter a few words and stop. I felt sorry for him and took him home. I tried to find out where he was from, but no one knew. It has been six years since he began living with us. He is family now, and we all worry if he wanders too far.



Majir Miya, Birganj

I can only use these paddy stalks to seal my leaking roof, the crop is ruined.

EVENTS



Heroes of the Himalaya,

A talk by Snow Yak Foundation on developing Upper Dolpo.
11am to 1 pm, 11 December , Café Cheeno, Patandhoka



KIMFF 2015,

Over 80 films from 25 countries will be shown at this year's Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival.
10 to 14 December, Kumari Hall, Kamalpokhari, (01)4440635, kimff.org

Help rebuild,

A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT).
www.photoktm.com/#support

Christmas Bazaar,

Shop for gifts from local artisans, enjoy traditional festive biscuits, and mulled wine.
13 December, 11am to 6pm, Bikalpa Art Centre, Pulchok, Lalitpur



Nepali drama,

A new Nepali play, *Katha Sarangi Gau ko* (The story of Sarangi Village) by Kishor Anurag.
Until 12 December, show starts at 4.45pm everyday (except Wednesdays), Theatre Mall, Sundhara, 9841595956

Farmers' market,

Local producers gather to sell organic vegetables, dairy products, artisanal bread and pastries and home-made goodies.
8am to 1pm, Le Sherpa, Lajimpat, every Saturday, (01)4006587, 9802028777

French cinema,

Screening of the film *Une vie de chat* (A Cat in Paris) by Alain Gagnol
17 December, 5.30pm, Alliance Francaise, Teku Road, (01)4242832, alliancefrancaise.org.np



Photography workshop,

Level 1 workshop for aspiring photographers, organised by Artudio.
13 December, 7am to 9am, Rs 4000, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, Swayambhu, register: 9851182100/9803779777

Creative Rendezvous,

Workshop on 3D artwork using papier mache, clay and cloth with Rajesh Yadav.
Rs 3,600, sattiya.org

Art festival,

Submit your piece of art for this open-roof art exhibition.
Exhibition: 10 am to 12 pm, 12 December, Patan Darbar Square, 9808350593

DINING

Dan Ran,

The best Japanese food this side of Bagmati. Try one of the bento boxes with a fresh lemonade.
Jhamsikhel, (01)5521027

Fire & Ice Pizzeria,

For the best Italian pizzas in town.
Thamel, (01)4250210

Quiz Night,

Sal's Pizza hosts weekly quiz contests.
Every Monday, 7pm, Lajimpat (behind the Indian Embassy), 9813570076

Maan Nam,

Enjoy a nice cuppa coffee in the lush garden or try out your golfing skills.
Naxal (across the road from Bhatbhateni Supermarket), (01)4427055



Trisara,

With dishes like flambeed prawns, crispy chicken, and khao soi, it would be a folly to ignore its aromas.
Lazimpat, (01)4410200



The Vesper House

Stop by for the best in Italian and other local favourites, in their breezy outdoor seating. Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs.
Jhamsikhel, (01)5548179
www.vespercafe.com



The Village Cafe,

Authentic Newari food that comes straight from the heart.
Pulchok Road, (01)5540712

MUSIC



Bipul Chhetri Live,

Celebrated singer Bipul Chhetri will perform for the third time in Kathmandu.
19 December, 2pm onwards, Sano Gaucharan Ground, Gyaneshwor



KANTA dAbdAb,

This musical trio combines sitar, percussion and bass to create a soulful fusion groove.
19 December, 6pm, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, Rs 300



Guitar Fest 2016,

A guitar competition for all music lovers.
Auditions from 18 to 28 January, Sushila Arts Academy, 9849040554

GETAWAYS



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Pharping, Kathmandu, www.neydohotel.com

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SEAGRAM'S



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Inside corridors of power

S*ingha Durbar*, the new political drama being aired on Nepal Television, is not a racy story of deceitful politicians trying to plot each other's downfall. It isn't Nepal's version of *Yes, Prime Minister*. It is a sober screen adaptation of political leadership beset by familiar problems of corruption, food insecurity and migration that plague the country today.

Much of the attention surrounding the series has come from the casting of ace actor Gauri Malla in the lead role of a woman prime minister. But, *Singha Durbar* is more than just a story about women empowerment. While Malla's character is often snubbed by her male counterparts, sexism is not depicted blatantly, so viewers are left to wonder if these men simply envy her in the same way they would another successful man.

Each episode explores a new challenge faced by her government. In one installment, a rebellion in the fictional country of Subaha threatens the safety of Nepali migrant labourers working there, inciting riots back home. Though only four of the 13 episodes have been released so far, it is safe to say that the entire series will be about how a government under the premiership of a woman confronts crises case-by-case.

Singha Durbar is both a powerful commentary on Nepal's politics as well as an infotainment manual for effective governance. The birth pangs of Asha's new government include clashes over ministerial berths. Initially she makes compromises. But over time she learns to appoint ministers



based on their competence, and not connections. She is also quick to respond to protests and upheavals, becoming more media savvy as she goes along.

Singha Durbar strikes home in reminding us that the onscreen problems are our own. Even with its sanitised image of politics, free as it is of large-scale corruption, political lies and betrayal, *Singha Durbar* makes a powerful case for improving our governance system and making it more inclusive and accountable.

"*Singha Durbar* showcases positive

role models," says Ineke Stoneham of USAID, which funded the show. "It is about democratic government that protects the rights of everyone."

Gauri Malla exudes both poise and panache, and the other impressive cast members include the seasoned Pramod Agrahari, who is great as the rival politician and former RJ Alok Thapa, who fittingly plays a journalist.

But at times the dialogues feel stiff, spoken as they are in an unnaturally high level of grammatical correctness. It is also

hard to imagine that politicians would speak so formally, using development jargon inside their homes and meeting rooms. Besides, *Singha Durbar* would also do well to take its viewers deeper into the actions of its prime minister in solving the countless problems. In the fourth episode, for instance, the crisis ends as soon as it erupts and we do not see enough of how the prime minister maneuvers to end that crisis.

Otherwise *Singha Durbar* is an unprecedented and powerful political drama. With overtones of social justice and explorations of accountability, sustainability, healthcare, it is definitely, as Stoneham says, a "show for everyone".

Singha Durbar offers in these troubled times hope of a more equal and brighter future. 🇳🇵

Sarthak Mani Sharma

Singha Durbar airs on Nepal Television on Sundays at 8:45 pm and can also be viewed on Youtube. It is directed by Tsering Rhitar Sherpa, produced by Search for Common Ground and funded by USAID.

nepalitimes.com
 Watch episodes

In two states of mind

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness in which there is an unusual shift in mood, energy, and ability to function. The extreme shifts in mood range from a manic to depressive state. To improve the accuracy of diagnosis, the primary criteria for manic and hypomanic episodes highlight changes in activity and energy, not just mood.



ALL IN THE MIND
 Anjana Rajbhandary

A person in manic state will feel impulsive, euphoric and full of energy, possibly engaging in risky, unhealthy behaviour. The depressive state causes a loss of energy and interest in activities once enjoyed by the individual, accompanied by extreme sadness and hopelessness. This deep depression may cause thoughts or attempts of suicide.

The management of personal relationships, school, work, and other aspects of everyday life may be troublesome. Bipolar disorder is a long-lasting illness that would benefit from support and supervision throughout the individual's life.

According to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5),

there are five types of bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder I: Characterised by the following three episodes.

Manic episode: when an individual is impulsive, euphoric and full of energy with the likelihood of engaging in risky and unhealthy behaviour for at least a week.

Hypomanic episode: similar to manic episode for at least four consecutive days.

Major depressive episode: when an individual feels extreme hopelessness, sadness, suffers from insomnia, lacks energy and has suicide ideation for a two-week period.

Bipolar disorder II: When an individual has both conditions of hypomanic episode (previous or current) and major depressive episode.

Cyclothymic disorder: When an individual has experienced symptoms of hypomania and depression in the last two years for at least half the time and has not

been symptom-free for more than two months at a time.

Substance/medication induced bipolar and related disorder:

When an individual uses substances or medication that causes symptoms similar to bipolar disorder, in which shifts between manic and depressive episodes within a month of substance abuse or use of medication.

Bipolar and related disorder due to another medical condition:

When an individual experiences symptoms of hypomanic and depressive episode due to a medical condition such as Cushing's disease, multiple sclerosis or stroke.

Due to the mood swings of extreme euphoria to the depths of despair, daily life is difficult for the individual and associated loved ones. Depending on the

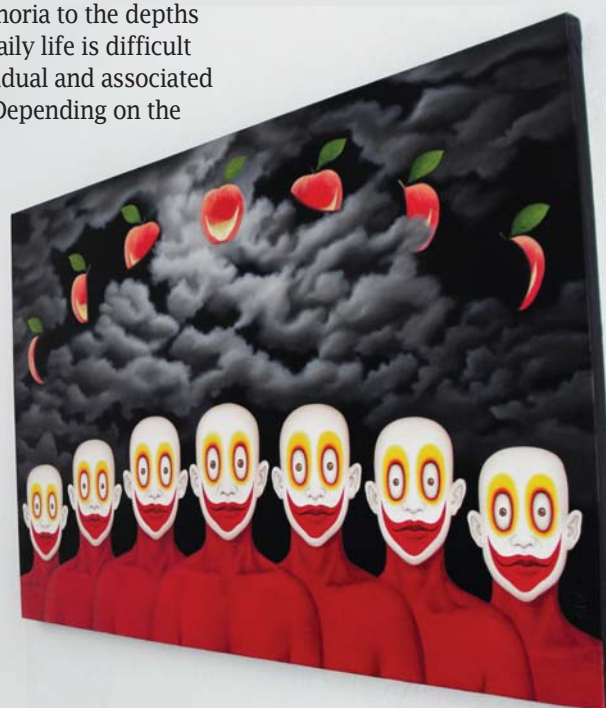
severity of bipolar disorder, an inpatient treatment could be the best environment towards the road to recovery. Certified psychiatrists and medical professionals can work with the individuals and make customised plans to fit their specific needs with the right medications and therapies.

An inpatient treatment for bipolar disorder is one of the safest and most guaranteed roads to full recovery. The combination of monitored medication and evidence-based customised therapies at an inpatient treatment can help stabilise and reduce both manic and depressive episodes for the long-term, under the proper care and supervision of qualified professionals.

Some probable causes of bipolar disorder are genetic factors, stress, changes in brain activity, problems with brain structure, prenatal and perinatal factors, and environmental and lifestyle of family.

Bipolar disorder is a chronic mental illness. Unpredictable mood swings are the most common indication of the disorder. The symptoms vary between the two states of the manic and depressive episodes.

With effective and proper treatments, most people with bipolar disorder live happy and healthy lives. Bipolar disorder is a long-term, recurring illness, but the right combination of medications and psychosocial treatment can help manage the disorder by stabilising mood swings and other related symptoms. It is recommended that bipolar disorder is treated consistently over time, with no breaks, in order to maintain the well-being of the individual. Other treatments for bipolar disorder include electroconvulsive therapy (for extreme cases), and natural supplements, although little is known about natural supplement's effects on the disorder. Under the monitoring and supervision of a qualified medical professional, and use of right medication in conjunction with psychosocial therapy, bipolar disorder can be well-managed by the individual. 🇳🇵



The Kathmandu International Film Festival 2015

This year, the Kathmandu International Film Festival (KIMFF) may have surpassed itself, at least based on the films this reviewer was given access to.

Serdhak - a Nepali feature film set in Jomsom, is a folksy, funny, tender tale about a young man, Lhakpa (Tsewang Rinzin Gurung) who returns to his village after studying in Kathmandu. Village life sucks him in, and he quickly falls into a rhythm, teasing his sister, providing emotional and physical



Slowly, along with Lhakpa we rediscover the simple pleasures and the real hardships of life in Upper Mustang, even as we are smitten by the beauty of the landscape which has been captured to perfection.

Directed by Rajan Kathet, *Serdhak* - The Golden Hill conveys, without histrionics, the very real bind that almost every Nepali is facing today -- to stay, and struggle against the odds or to leave and try to find a better life elsewhere, even if it means losing your culture and being separated, indefinitely, from your family.

Serdhak is a sensitive, thoughtful film, and while the acting is not always up to par, the actors (all of whom faced cameras for the first time) are so charming in their portrayal of the characters that one feels compelled to stick with them.

Often, films press for drama and story, with twists and turns that

are too absurd to take seriously. This is not one of those. *Serdhak* affects you with its quiet attempt at neo-realism, in my mind the right step in the direction towards creating true independent cinema.

Tashi and the Monk - a documentary by Johnny Burke and Andrew Hinton is another charming, but also heart-wrenching film showing at KIMFF this year. It chronicles the valiant attempts of Lobsang Phuntsok, a Buddhist monk who has returned to the hills of Northern India to open Jhamtse Gatsal - The Garden of Love and Compassion, a children's home that hopes to help and rehabilitate those children who are either unwanted or cannot be taken care of by their families.

Phuntsok, his team, and the children they care for in the setting of the green Indian foothills make for a strikingly unforgettable series of vignettes that outline the extraordinarily difficult task that is helping emotionally vulnerable children - a little girl named Tashi in particular being the subject here.

The makers are able to give us an unaffected account of the inner lives of the children at Jhamtse Gatsal - a testament to their skill and patience, and while Phuntsok is clearly a profoundly compassionate man, he still remains a bit of a cipher to this viewer at least - adding a layer of complexity to this must-see film.

nepalitimes.com

Trailer

HAPPENINGS



SOUTH CONNECT: Leaders of Madhesi Morcha meet with India's Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on Monday.



DIPLOMATIC DUTY: Indonesian Ambassador to Nepal Iwan Wiranata-atmadja (centre) pays a courtesy call to Vice President Nanda Kishore Pun at his office on Sunday.



ACCIDENTAL EXPLOSION: South Korean ambassador to Nepal Choi Yong-Jin (third from left) and Minister of Industry Som Prasad Pandey attend the 4th Nepal-Korea Business Night at Shanker Hotel on Wednesday.



OPENING DAY: Journalist Ed Douglas inaugurates the Kathmandu International Film Festival at Kumari Hall on Thursday. Also pictured (l to r) are Indian editor Namrata Rao, Korean film producer Kim Eun-Young and KIMFF Chair Basanta Thapa.



BOOK SHOPPING: Tourism entrepreneur Basanta Raj Mishra checks out secondhand books on sale at New Road Gate on Sunday.

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Dang : 082-561022, Dhangadhi : 091-523601, Dhangadhi : 091-521392
Jorakpur : 041-525565, Lahan : 033-561205, Mahendranagar : 099-523872
Nepalgunj : 081-527092, Pokhara : 061-525300, Surkhet : 083-522488
Tulsipur : 082-562575

Trekking loots

Lokmani Rai in
Himal Khabarpatrika,
6-12 December

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

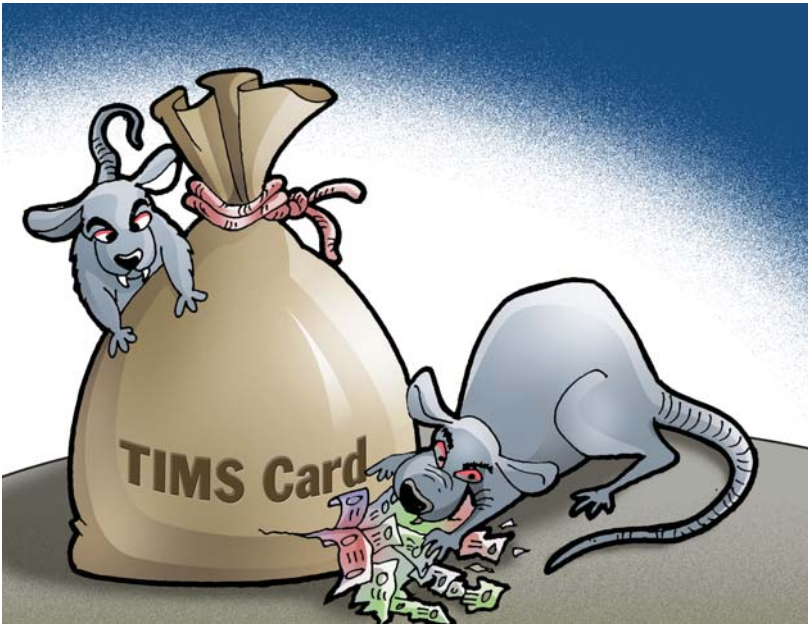
Investigations have revealed that the Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal (TAAN) has misused millions of rupees collected from tourists visiting Nepal that was supposed to be set aside for rescue and medical treatment of trekking guides and porters.

Two separate audit reports show TAAN officials misappropriated over Rs 60 million between 2009 and 2015. The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament initially

showed some interest in investigating the irregularities, but did not follow up.

Every trekker in Nepal pays \$10 (if hiking individually) and \$20 (in groups) to the Trekkers' Information Management System (TIMS) administered by TAAN and the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). The association had collected over Rs 170 million since 2009 through TIMS cards which all trekkers must fill up and submit before their trips. Audits reveal that TAAN officials spent over Rs 120 million, but more than half the money is unaccounted for.

As per its agreement with the NTB, TAAN can spend the TIMS revenue only for administrative costs and rescue



BHANU BHATTARAI

and medical treatment of guides and porters. Investigations show that TAAN officials squandered the money on foreign tours and snacks.

"Money meant for workers in the trekking industry, was

shamelessly spent on private junkets," said one NTB official. The audits show that TAAN officials did not even bother to produce bills of expenses which they claimed in many cases.

Two years ago, the PAC

instructed the NTB to stop the TAAN from collecting the TIMS revenue from trekkers and it is NTB which prints TIMS cards. Following parliament's intervention, NTB stopped giving TIMS cards but TAAN printed its own cards and is collecting fees from trekkers.

TAAN President Chandra Prasad Rijal says the newly-elected executive committee is ready to investigate any irregularities, but says the TAAN should not be punished for crimes committed by its past office-bearers. "Chop off the infected finger, not the hand," he says.

The NTB signed another agreement last year allowing the TAAN to spend the TIMS revenue in exploring and promoting trekking routes. Trekking agencies not involved in the TAAN say the new agreement is just a cover up of irregularities.

Tired and demoralised

Kranti Shah in *Annapurna Post*, 10 December

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

After more than two months of staging sit-ins at the Birganj-Raxaul border, and with no political solution in sight, Madhesi demonstrators in this area are beginning to lose enthusiasm.

The number of protesters which earlier measured around hundreds has taken a sharp dip in recent days.

"When we first began blocking the border, there would be around 300-400 people participating, even during the night," says a Madhesi leader, "Now, it's difficult to get even 20-25 people to camp out." During the day time too participation is low.

When the protests first began three months ago, hundreds of demonstrators from Parsa and Bara districts regularly travelled to the protest site. Various organisations also took out rallies, calling for participation in enforcing blockade.

Protesters here express disappointment over the government's apathetic attitude towards their cause despite over three months of campaigning for the movement.

"We are not allowed to say this openly, but



even the leaders are starting to get demoralised," says a central member of a Madhes party who asked not to be named.

A central member of Nepal Sadbhavana Party Shiv Patel says, "Even at border posts where there are protests, large amounts of fuel and essential supplies continue to get smuggled regularly. The people who are smuggling in goods are also Madhesis, this has made demonstrators question their motives."

However Samajwadi Forum Nepal General Secretary Ramsahay Yadav says the blockade is still in full swing. "It is the planting season, so this is why the numbers have decreased. We will continue to close the border until our demands are fulfilled."



"Won't let black marketers get away."

Shirt: Black market

नेपाल

Rabindra Manandhar in *Nepal*, 6-13 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“New Delhi has not convinced us. We have convinced New Delhi.”

Nepal Sadbhavana Party Chair Rajendra Mahato in *Kantipur*, 10 December



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STICKS AND STONES:

A mason takes a break from building a traditional stone house.

A woman crushes stones at a reconstruction site in Barpak. (below, left)

Scenic Barpak with Bauddha Himal in the background. (below, right)

BACK IN BARPAK

At the epicenter eight months after the earthquake



AYESHA SHAKYA
in GORKHA

Perched on top of terraced slopes and commanding a stunning view of Bauddha Himal, Barpak was once famous for its bucolic setting popular with homestay backpackers,

relatively good infrastructure and round-the-clock electricity.

All of that was destroyed in the 25 April earthquake. Now, eight months later, as the temperature dips to minus at night most of the town's 15,000 residents continue to live in flimsy makeshift shelters. With remittance from Gurkha soldiers,



Barpak is better off than most other villages in northern Gorkha, it got a lot of media attention and emergency relief in the weeks after the quake.

But even here rebuilding houses has been agonisingly slow. Rubble from collapsed structures still lay strewn across the village and only a handful of houses have



**REBUILDING
OURSELVES**

been rebuilt. If this is the situation in Barpak, one can imagine what it is like in remoter settlements like Uiya and Keraunja.

"We believed the government would help build our homes, but after waiting and waiting we have realised that we have to rebuild our village on our own and not rely on others for help," says

Information to rebuild

In the immediate aftermath of the April earthquake, information technology played a crucial role in disseminating information, mapping affected areas and helping coordinate relief efforts. StoryCycle's 'Impact Stories' is one such digital initiative that highlight stories and data from earthquake affected areas to direct support for projects and enable rebuilding.

"Technology on its own does not work, it is the emotional connection you create through it that will help in the rebuilding process," says Saurav Dhakal of StoryCycle.

Highlighting villages like Barpak, Rautatar and Thame, users can start their own campaign by creating a profile for a village and listing funding needed. StoryCycle has also started 'BuildCamp' in which the building process of an area is facilitated by a mixed group of architects, engineers and storytellers who contribute their expertise to design the ideal community.

The first BuildCamp in Barpak involved community leader Bir Bahadur Ghale and documented stories with community mapping which increased the town's digital footprint.

Also helping out in Barpak is Nepal's rural internet maverick, Mahabir Pun, who is replicating his work in establishing wireless connectivity in Kaski and Myagdi in the earthquake affected districts of Gorkha and Lamjung. Eight schools and three health posts will be connected with up to six hotspots allowing classes to have e-learning and providing health posts access to tele-medicine.



BUILDING BETTER: Community leader Bir Bahadur Ghale speaks about earthquake-resistant building techniques in Barpak last week.

"The connectivity allows villages to benefit from many services and does not require them to come all the way to the cities. The need to connect is not just after natural disasters, it has become an everyday necessity," Pun told us.

After receiving a grant of \$80,000 from the Internet Society's Wireless for Community Program (W4C), Pun was visiting Gorkha this week to establish internet connectivity and get communities involved in its long-term use and maintenance.

Pun says: "Local communities need to be involved and committed to using the service, if no fees are paid to maintain the system it will be a waste of money."

Gorkha's wireless network will run on solar electricity from Gham Power and will be ready in a month. After Lamjung and Gorkha, Pun plans to expand the program to schools in Sindhupalchok and Kavre.

"Food for Assets enables people to be actively involved in urban renewal, but such efforts are needed from the government's side as well," says pioneer community leader Bir Bahadur Ghale who put up a microhydro plant here in the 1990s, long before the rest of the district was electrified. The 130 kilowatt plant was destroyed in the earthquake, and is being rebuilt.

With support from the US-based Gorkhali Foundation, a diesel generator used to provide power four hours every evening, but that has been reduced to two because of the fuel shortage.

Says Bir Bahadur Ghale: "Electricity is necessary to power tools in reconstruction, and people here are used to electricity so we have to restore the service as soon as possible."

Barpak Rural Electrification won the National Geographic Society Great Energy Challenge grant of \$70,000 recently to rehabilitate the 133 kW micro-hydro project and use the electricity to help with reconstruction. With work in full swing, 24-hour electricity should be back in Barpak by February.



Overseas Nepalis donate \$1 million

Among the many Nepali individuals and groups that galvanised relief to survivors of the April earthquake, the one that stands out is the organisation of overseas Nepalis, Help Nepal Network (HeNN) which has raised more than \$1 million mainly for housing, health and rebuilding schools.

Although HeNN has been active since 1999 to fundraise among the Nepali diaspora for development projects in Nepal, it has been after the earthquake that HeNN has really grown and spread its activities.

"We are really proud to have crossed the one million dollar milestone in our fundraising effort for earthquake relief and reconstruction in Nepal," says Abhay Shrestha of the US Chapter of HeNN who says nearly half the money has already been disbursed to build 2,000 temporary shelters and running over 60 health camps in the affected districts.

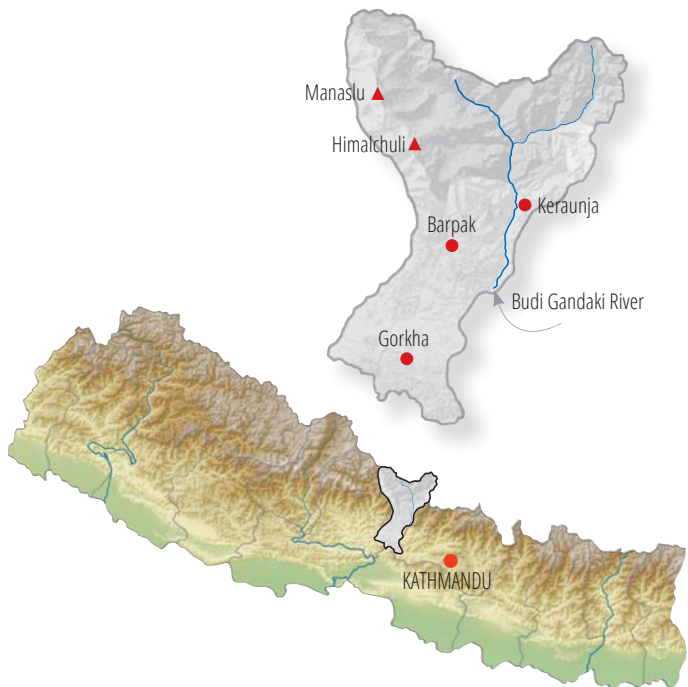
HeNN partners with nearly 100 community organisations across 18 districts to provide food, medicines, construction materials, set up temporary learning centres, and latrines in schools.

In the next phase of its activities, HeNN is working with the Department of Education to redesign schools affected by the earthquake, and some pilot schools have been selected in Sindhupalchok and Nuwakot. Says Shrestha: "In 2016, we plan to focus primarily on rebuilding schools."

Some 700,000 homes and 8,000 schools were destroyed in the earthquake and aftershocks in April and May. More than 2 million people are facing winter in temporary shelters, and the work of HeNN and other volunteer and private groups have filled the gap left by the government's late and inadequate response.

HeNN is the largest charitable network of Nepalis around the world.

PICS: AYESHA SHAKYA



mason Durga Bahadur Ghale.

Local families are reluctant to build for fear that they may fail to comply with earthquake-resistant building codes and not be eligible for the government's promised Rs 200,000. Regardless of this, the commitment to rebuild the town far outweighs the uncertainty and this is reflected in the collective effort of townspeople to widening the narrow cobblestone alleys.

"There were plans to widen roads before the earthquake but it was not possible without demolishing many houses.

However, the earthquake reminded us about the importance of wider roads for safety and emergency services," explains Yam Bahadur Ghale of the Boudh Himal Academic Boarding School.

Along with fostering strong community values, the reconstruction has also become an opportunity for locals to earn food rations. Every fortnight, the World Food Programme (WFP) and its Food for Assets initiative distributes rice and lentils to those involved in reconstruction.

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Half-Ass column

We begin today's news bulletin with the main headlines:

**Khadga Slams Basnet
Thapa Blasts Swaraj
Swaraj Smacks Thapa
Karki Kicks Ass
Nepal Pokes India
India Whacks Nepal**

Now that we have that over and done with, there is really not much to add. That's it for today, folks, go home to Mama. Scat. You are still hanging around, go away, show's over. What's that, again? You are insisting that you paid for a full column and feel you are being cheated that this week's Backside is only 10% its normal word length? What do you expect, don't you know there is a Blockade on? But if you still want to argue about it, meet me outside in 5 minutes and I'll show you who's boss around here. As Nepalis we are being short-changed everywhere, it's the name of the game. Only 10% of fuel trucks are getting through. You wait 3 days for 4 litres of petrol and the gas station wallah



has tampered with the pump and you only get 3.8. The LPG cylinder is always less than half full. So, this is a half-Ass column, what's the big deal? Besides, we Nepalis have to learn to have a more positive mental attitude. Stop complaining, na. When you get a half-empty gas cylinder, isn't it much better to regard it as being half-full? Be optimistic, look at the brighter side. Just see all the opportunities that this crisis has presented us with. All we have to do is grab what we can, which is exactly

what everyone is doing. There is so much going for us that the Oli Gobarment should now send an envoy to New Delhi to request the Indian authoritarians not to lift the blockade. So much money is being made on both sides of the open-ended border by everyone up and down the food chain that it would be foolish and against the national interest to lift the siege.

This seize is good for the economy, it is creating wealth, raising Nepal's GDP per capita and we have empirical evidence of parameter stability in particular caused by breaks in the stochastic performance of exogenous variables and disturbances attested by the Reverse Kuznetz Curve and other hyperbolic discounting formulae in order to ensure that everyone dead,

alive, and yet to be born receives benefits that will accrue in the forthcoming fiscal cycle from this so-called blockade. Besides the economic advantages of the blockade, there are also political, cultural, zoological and astrological benefits. We list some of them here in no particular order: ■ Now that Bihar is going dry, it makes sense for Nepal to keep the border closed so that smuggling can be reversed and we make up for paying through our noses for Rs 350/l of diluted petrol by spiriting across Khukuri Rum and selling it at double markup to thirsty Biharis. ■ India started building a crossborder petroleum pipeline from Raxaul to Amlekhganj, but cunningly turned off the supply of petroleum. This National Prestige Project symbolising India-Nepal Friendship and Cooperation can still be salvaged if instead of pumping diesel, we reverse the flow and employ the force of gravity to pipe rum, gin, ayla and raxi down to Bihar much more efficiently than in gas bullets.

■ We now know it for a fact that Nepal is in a mess mainly because of the Raxaul Mess that fed hundreds of blockheads for three months and was funded by the BJP and a couple of NRNs. It would be wise to keep this Mess running as long as God wants it since everything in our secular republic is in God's hands anyway. ■ Considering the importance smuggling is to the national economy, the Oli Gravelment would be wise to allow smugglers ply their trade without let or hindrance and set up a Ministry of Black Market and Black Magic, and have as its terms of reference the smooth flow of contraband pomegranates across the border to meet Nepal's basic necessities. More importantly it should shortlist professional faith healers who can use voodoo and occult rituals to cast a spell on the ViceRae.



The Ass

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DIWAKAR CHETTRI

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...but if God wishes the embargo can be lifted in 6 or 7 days!



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