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HOPES DASHED

Once more Nepal has hit the international headlines for all the wrong reasons. The tragic crash of a Bangladeshi airliner on Monday that killed 51 people has been trending worldwide. It was all the more devastating because of the loss of a dozen soon-to-be doctors. Most of them were young women whose families had invested heavily in the medical education of their children. The hopes of many of them, and indeed the nation, went up in flames this week. The tragedy was an uncanny repeat of an Indian Airlines DC-3 crash in 1956 in which 20 Nepali students returning home from boarding school were killed very close to where the Bangladeshi plane came down on Monday.

Amidst the debris at the airport were medical text books (*see photograph*). The bodies of dead MBBS students were taken to the very hospitals where they would have soon started work. A prominent Nepali surgeon, a noted Bangladeshi photographer, successful travel agents, and returning migrant workers were among the dead.

Like many accidents, this one need not have happened. Much larger wide-body jetliners had been landing at Kathmandu airport all day, and in fact surface visibility had actually improved when US-Bangla BS211 started its approach into Kathmandu after an 80-minute flight from Dhaka.

As our transcript of the tape of the conversation between the Captain and air

eyewitness reported seeing the plane flying unusually low and close to Kapan Monastery to the north of the airport. Another aviation expert who was driving along the Ring Road towards the airport witnessed the last 360 degree turn the plane made, and remembers watching in horror as the Dash 8 nearly clipped the top of the hangars near the domestic apron in a tight left turn. With landing gear down and full flaps, the plane then flew level past the control tower, over two domestic flights waiting at Taxiway E, overflew the runway, impacted and skidded across a football field used by airport security, broke apart and burst into flames.

The Fire Station had held a drill at the exact spot when the plane came down, and rescue teams were quickly on hand. But the wreckage was too mangled and the fire too fierce for them to bring out many of the passengers trapped in their seats.

Nepali Times spoke to many aviation experts who were in agreement that based on available evidence, the lack of familiarity with approach procedures contributed to confusion and distraction in the cockpit leading to the plane to stall and crash.

However, this does not absolve Kathmandu airport management from blame as noted in another report in this issue (*page 14-15*). Although rescuers were promptly at the scene, videos show utter chaos at the crash site. Ground staff, airside ramp



traffic controllers show, (*page 14-15*) the pilots made a routine straight-in approach into runway 02 but then pulled up, probably because of misalignment with the threshold. Thereafter, there are indications that Capt Abid Sultan had poor situational awareness, and was confused about the direction of the two ends of the runway. His transmissions from the cockpit are slurred, unintelligible and contradictory.

We will have to await the final verdict of the investigation panel, and the testimony of Capt Sultan who survived. But what we do know so far is that after his missed approach, the Bombardier Dash 8 turboprop made three orbits over the airport to allow another aircraft to land from runway 02.

Throughout those nine minutes between 0824 and 0833 UTC, there is confusion between the air traffic controller and the captain about which runway to use, where to hold, and whether the runway is visible or not. Other pilots flying in the vicinity comment in Nepali that the Bangladeshi plane appeared to be disoriented, and advise the tower to help it safely fly out.

While the plane was holding, one

drivers, even baggage handlers can be seen running across an active taxiway and runway to the site.

The gawkers were joined by the Prime Minister and his entourage which worsened the traffic jam and delayed ambulances. Passengers on other planes that landed just before the crash had to wait three hours for their luggage because the loaders had gone off to take pictures of the crash.

It is clear why some people want it to be 'top secret' because it exposes flaws in the air traffic controller's handling of the incident. Not only are they not equipped with adequate English, there is a lack of clear, sharp instructions, and decisiveness to help an obviously befuddled crew.

Nepal has a bad international reputation for air safety. Kathmandu always tops the list of ten worst airports in the world. Even though the accident was not so much the airport's fault, Monday's tragic loss of life once more highlighted how much further we have to go to revive confidence in Nepal's aviation sector.

WHAT'S TRENDING

It is very sad for this to happen. I travel frequently to Kathmandu, normally the airport is safe. I respectfully want to say my thoughts go out to all the families of the lost people. God bless

Renee Webster

Very sad. Let's not accuse each other. Pray for the quick recovery of the injured. Let the investigations find out roots of this fatal incident and corrective measures should be in place to avoid recurrence.

Mokbular Rahman Panu

It must be so traumatic to be involved in such a catastrophe - victims, survivors, rescuers - for the latter a protocol must be at hand to hang on to - and probably often they must improvise as well because a disaster is never predictable - How brave they are! How fragile we are.

Renate Schwarz

OMG! This is so sad. May all who perished RIP and all the injured survive. No clear instructions to land safe.

EveCalmasKitchen

Horrible confusion between runway 02 and 20! Costly mistake!

Omar Faruq

This sort of mistake costs lives of innocent people! This is unacceptable.

Tonima islam

I think it's the airport that needs improvement. Government should either upgrade it or think of alternatives like place it outside the main residential area or make a bigger international airport with more capacity.

Melina Thapa

Everyone - this is a tragic event but I urge people to avoid amateur speculation and wait, hard though it is, for the investigation report.

Marcus Cotton



GOPEN RAI



Nepali Times @nepalitimes

A turbo-prop passenger aircraft of the US-Bangla airline has crashed upon landing at Tribhuvan International Airport this afternoon at 2:18 pm. <http://bit.ly/2FCYVrm>

immerzeel @immerzeel

Very sad to hear about the airplane crash in Kathmandu. A first reconstruction by @nepalitimes

Arunabh Hazarika @ArunabhHazarik1

Condole the Death of the Unfortunate Nepal Air Crash.. Hope the Injured recovers soon.. #Nepal_Plane_Crash@nepalitimes

Suhail Mehraj @SuhailKmr

Just heard, about the plane crash at Nepal's Kathmandu airport. I wish for the people boarded on the plane. Sympathy with the family of victims @MofaNepal @nepalitimes

Prabin @basnetkajee

Heart goes out to those who lost their lives, godspeed to those who were lucky to survive.

ONLINE PACKAGES

DECODING VITAMIN D

Nepalis are falling victim to a nationwide epidemic of Vitamin D deficiency as they adopt an urban life-style, stay indoors more and do not work or stay outdoors under the sun. Diabetes, asthma, cardiac arrest, paralysis, thyroid, dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cancer and depression are some of the effects, but very few are aware of this. Watch video for prevention and treatment. Story on page 8-9.

CLEAN TRAIL

I walked from Jiri four years ago, and I was amazed by how much cleaner the trail got once we reached Lukla and beyond ('Everest garbage caravan', Sonia Awale, #900)! Before Lukla, there were quite a lot of garbage and it seemed like the local communities had no way of dealing with it.

Aslak Ljone

ENJOYABLE NAMCHE

Have trekked through here and agree Namche is a panoply of enjoyable adventures, even if it's just on your acclimatisation day enroute to the EBC ('Capital of Sherpaland gets a makeover', Duksangh Sherpa, #900).

Charles Herbek

QUOTE TWEETS

Utsav Shakya @utsavshakya

Really clean design on the new @nepalitimes website. Congratulations also on issue #900 @kundadixit & team!

Aakar Anil @aakarpost

Congratulations @nepalitimes for the 900th edition. The new site looks good, however, I would suggest conducting a UI/UX audit of the website. :)

Bhagirath Yogi @BhagirathYogi

Congratulations to @nepalitimes for bringing out its #900th print edition this week. It was great to be part of its editorial team under the guidance of @kundadixit more than a decade ago. Keep going!

Sonam Tashi Lama @SonamTaC

Happy 900th Week to the family of @nepalitimes & the captain @kundadixit. Best wishes for the future journey.

Arpan Shrestha @arpanshr

Congratulations @nepalitimes for the #900th issue. One paper in Nepal that inspired me to pursue journalism and think visually. It's also spearheading the multimedia content today. Cheers.

Chandra Shekhar Adhi @Nepalidiplomacy

A big congratulations to Nepal Times Weekly team on its 900th print edition! I've been a reader of the Weekly since its very first issue, hope NTW keeps going for thousands more issues!! cheers.....

Weekly Internet Poll #901

Q. Should Bidya Bhandari remain as President?

Total votes: 105

Yes **38%**
No **42%**
Don't know **20%**

Weekly Internet Poll #902
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Has the Chief Justice controversy dented your faith in the judiciary?

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The bumpy road to federalism

Democracy will not deliver unless political power is devolved and people are put at the centre

The road in front of the house I live in Sanepa, and one next to the school my six-year-old son goes to, was dug up for expansion two months ago. It has not been repaired yet.



CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

In Kathmandu, it has become the new normal to turn a busy road into a dusty construction site for months, causing traffic snarls and sandstorms. It is dusty in the dry season and muddy after rains.

It will not come as a surprise if authorities say they have run out of budget midway, and the dug up road remains left open for more than a year. It would be too much to expect for only a 50m stretch of the road to be expanded a day, and that another section would be dug up only after the previous stretch is repaired. We do not have a culture of keeping people at the centre of planning.

The new Constitution, promulgated two years ago after decades of conflict, redefined the state-people relationship: from centralisation to decentralisation. But that has not changed anything in how authorities treat people. They still behave like rulers, not as service providers.

Federalism was supposed to



DIPENDRA BHANDARI

shake up this status quo, but it did so only on paper. In reality, the bureaucracy is too obsessed with preserving its power, and is fighting hard to not let go of it.

As is clear, having a constitution promulgated by an elected assembly of the people is not enough to sort out the issues of governance. The near future is going to be a steep learning curve for politicians, bureaucracy and people alike. The course Nepal

takes from here on will be defined by how the governments, people, the media and the party systems conduct themselves.

During the three tiers of elections last year, the main pitch of the NC against the Left Alliance was scaremongering. The spectre of autocratic communist rule was their only political agenda. People did not subscribe to the NC's election propaganda, and it failed miserably. But the current state of

politics gives us a lot of reasons to worry.

The first set of challenges comes from the federal system itself. The unique three tiers of federalism entrusts a lot of power to local governments, and they are already being assertive. But provincial governments are yet to take full shape, and they lack prior infrastructure and legal instruments. Everything has to be built from scratch. However, when

they come into full form, they will certainly begin to look for their space, possibly clashing with the Centre and local governments on many fronts.

The tussle will rattle the federal system, and a strong central government may complicate the matter.

Another challenge is to prepare the people for the radical democracy we have embraced. Unless the system of governance learns to keep the people at the centre of decision-making and policy planning, and unless the people at the grassroots learn to demand that attention, democracy will not deliver.

The bridge between government authorities and people are the political parties and the media. And in a democracy, where public opinion should matter the most, this ecosystem becomes most vital for a healthy system to evolve.

So another set of challenges for Nepal's democracy, as Princeton University professor Jan Werner Mueller puts it, lies with politics and the press. 'It is media and party systems that are visibly failing in many countries and require systematic re-building,' he writes in a Project Syndicate article.

Rebuilding Nepal is a daunting challenge. And unless we start demanding that our roads be built with people's concerns at the centre, the road ahead leading to a better democracy is perilous. 🇳🇵

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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Fly high

More than 5 million people travelled via Turkish Airlines last month, setting the record for the highest number of



passengers for the airline. The world's largest airline reached the strongest load factor in February with 79.7% while the number of international passengers went up by 27%.

Tea time

Nepal will bring into force its own Nepal Tea trademark and logo 54 years after it started producing the brew. The National



Tea and Coffee Development Board will announce the new brand at the International Tea Festival to be held in Kathmandu 6-8 April. The move is expected to boost Nepal's tea exports and give it a unified branding.

CelerioX in Nepal

CG Motocorp, the authorised distributor of Suzuki Four wheelers in Nepal has introduced what it calls 'bold, sporty and trendy' CelerioX



in Paprika Orange, Arctic White, Glistening Grey, Caffeine Brown and Torque Blue. Priced at Rs 2,699,000, CelerioX comes with dual airbag and keyless entry.

Smart communication

Samsung Galaxy S9 and S9+ smartphones have been launched in Nepal. Equipped with advanced camera, powerful



stereo speakers, expandable memory of up to 400GB, improved optical sensor and Samsung's latest defense-grade security platform. Pre-booking available for the phones priced at Rs92,900 and Rs104,900.

Best technology

OnePlus, Shenzhen-based producer of smartphones has recently updated to Oreo



system in all its products, keeping up with its commitment to share best-advanced technology with the world. OnePlus' custom operating system, OxygenOS, is designed to refine stock Android's core functionalities.

prabhu BANK

Dolpo’s Dorje Dolma

Dorje Dolma was ten when her mother detected a lump in her back. Her father was a Tibetan healer, and took her to Kathmandu where her condition was diagnosed as advanced scoliosis.

That month-long journey on foot from her remote village in Karang of Dolpo to Kathmandu across treacherous mountain trails and blizzards is still vivid in Dorje’s mind.

When they got to Kathmandu, there was little food and money and few to help them. People did not want to rent rooms to a family from Dolpo, and little Dorje ended up begging in Boudha.

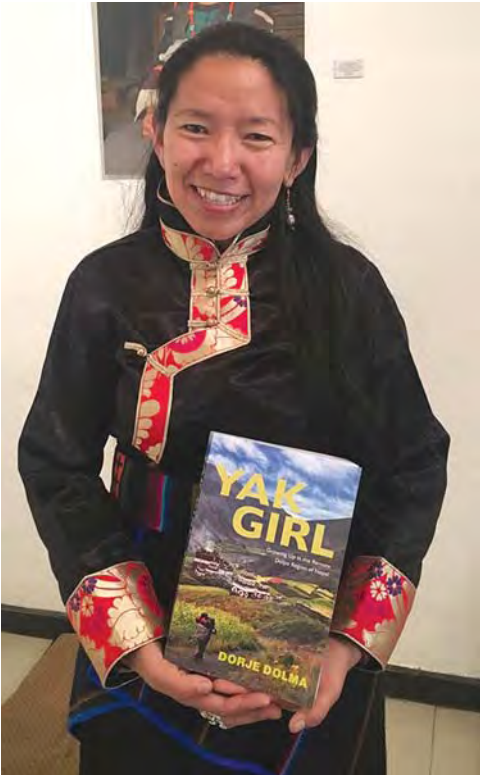
As fate would have it, Dorje (*right*) landed up at Rokpa House in Boudha where the founder, Lea Wyler, helped her go to school. Even as a child, she instinctively knew the importance of education. Dorje was soon adopted by an American family and taken to the US for four operations to correct her spine.

It was while in the US, at age 15, when her German grandmother strongly encouraged her to start writing a book. It was this belief that has made her the woman she is today: an artist, author, teacher, and above all, a humanitarian.

Dorje Dolma’s book *YAK GIRL: Growing Up in the Remote Dolpo Region of Nepal* is a memoir of her early childhood in Upper Dolpo. She remembers growing up amidst snow capped peaks, tending yaks in the high pastures and taking care of her siblings.

In her book, Dorje takes us to Dolpo’s otherworldly setting with a deeply personal insight into the culture and daily life of a place that is the farthest you could be from the modern world: no electricity, no cars, no schools or hospitals.

She recounts encounters with the wild wolves and snow leopards while protecting her yaks. Laced with humour, beauty, depth, sorrow, pain, courage and strength, Dorje’s



PROUD FAMILY: Dorje Dolma (*far right*) with her sisters Dolma Lhamo, Sumchog Kersbergen, mother Dolma Tsering and father Karma Drundul

PHOTO: DUKSANGH SHERPA

book is a testament to the indomitable human spirit. Her resilience and gentle approach towards life despite its crude challenges, reminds us of the importance of never losing hope.

Dorje graduated in Fine Arts from the University of Colorado and worked as a teacher before taking up where she had left off at age 15 with her book. Writing the stories has helped Dorje process her experiences of the remarkable blend of multiple cultures. She belongs to two different worlds, and being a daughter of completely different sets of parents, writing has helped her balance the polarities and

has allowed her to meld the two distinct worlds to come together to form her own unique world.

It has been 20 years since Dorje left Dolpo for medical treatment, but very little has changed in her homeland. Dolpo still does not have proper health facilities and people have to travel long distances to go to school.

"People in Dolpo don't want to leave, the land is majestically beautiful, but they need to get out for education or health," says Dorje, who plans to build a clinic in her village. Part of the proceeds of her book will go towards the Dolpo Tulku

Foundation. *Yak Girl* was released in the US in January and will soon be available in Nepal this month at Pilgrims Bookshop.

Dorje spoke of her life and book at the Siddhartha Art Gallery last week, followed by the screening of a Dutch documentary *The Only Son* which is about Dorje's family and the challenges of modern and traditional ways of life.

The book launch was followed by a three-day exhibition of artwork by Dorje, her sister Sumchog Kersbergen and her uncle Tenzin Norbu, a celebrated Dolpo artist. **Duksangh Sherpa**

Inadequate documentation and land title : Road block in reconstruction

Acquiring land title certificate, Housing blueprint approval, Land Plotting document and meeting the Mandatory Reconstruction standards are some of the procedure that the earthquake hit families need to fulfill. Most of the land are ancestral heritage without proper documentation and do not fit in the required standard. Looking at the current progress, it is easy to assume that thousands of affected would still be ignored in Build-Back-Better movement in several years to come.

Till date, only 5% or 1,023 families have received the third installment of grants for the reconstruction of the quake hit houses in Lalitpur district out of genuine reconstruction grant entitled 23,285 families.

Bhai Krishna Maharjan (39), took a whole year to complete constructing his three floor house in Thecho, Godawari Municipality. Though, he received the first installment of grant before the initiating the construction in 2073, he is yet to receive the remaining two grant installments. His house's blueprint is not approved by the municipality as he was not able to produce the certificate of land title in a cluster. The inherited land is, infact divided into 6 different portions among the brothers of his grandfather. He sat down with the remaining relatives entitled to the land to reach an agreement that permitted Bhai Krishna to use the land exclusively. The officials however, seek proper land title documents to process further.

"The land transferring process started long before the construction, and still it is lingering," says Bhai Krishna. For the construction fund, he took loan depositing his farm land as collateral. Maharjan is a handicraft entrepreneur.

Surjamaya Maharjan (72), is forced to stop the ongoing reconstruction of her ancestral house. She planned to reconstruct the house up to three storeys on 1 aana and 3 paisa inherited land. The papers she presented only showed the 1 aana and 1 paisa of house land. Her housing blueprint was disapproved and her loan plea was denied. By the time she received the message that her house did not receive approval, the basement construction works were already completed. She had to abandon the plan forcefully. "The title certificate came short of 2 paisa, I don't have any idea what will happen now."

Most of the earthquake affected families are facing the issues related to proper documentation of land title, land ownership and division agreement papers, approval of blueprint of house reconstruction or not meeting the standard criteria set by the government. Without resolving the prior mentioned issues, people cannot claim the remaining grants to expand their reconstruction plans.

Gomadevi Dhakal, Chief at Secretariat of Lalitpur District Coordination Committee, National Reconstruction Authority shares that so far very few families have received the second and third installments. "Although some municipalities have introduced flexible measures to assisting the affected families obtain the documentations, the problems still persist." Dhakal shares.

Persisting chaos

Mahalaxmi Municipality, Siddhipur portraits despairs of affected families who are living in rented rooms in complete dilemma. Manamaya Maharjan (76), living in a small rented room with her husband questions the government's role in easing the pains of the



people. The government has set the criteria for reconstructing houses in municipality areas which only suits those having at least 2.5 aanas of land. The couple's land is no more than 2 paisas in measurement. Manamaya says, "We stopped the rebuilding of our house as soon as we were made aware about the criteria." She further said that she is hopeful that her dream home would be completed with the approval from the progressive thinking government, the installment grants and with the some money she has managed through loans.

Suryamaya Awale Amatya (46), also faces similar situation. She has built a new earthquake resilient house strictly following the standards set by the state. She is surprised that the house where she has already moved in, is yet to be approved by the government. She said that the officials at the municipality keeps telling her that there is no criteria and regulations for the old and remote community and on that basis, her house will not be given the deserved approval.

Ratnaman Mali (35), of Thecho has a different headache. He didn't have the official documents of the land where his ancestral house stood before earthquake. He informed the then VDC

to divide the land in to 3 plots and managed to register two plots in 2070 and 2072 BS. Now, he is not able to produce the adequate document for the entire land. Without the remaining portion of land, he does not fit in the government's criteria of the beneficiaries. "We didn't face such problem in the past. As soon as the municipality were formed, we have such difficulties fulfilling the standards," Mali elaborates.

At Godawari 12, Laxmitole, Reshma Maliis feeling dejected by the authority as she was left out from grant beneficiaries list for not being able to produce land title. She has already constructed the house and started living in it on the land of 2 aanas. "I've sold my farming land. I have not received a penny from this government." Gyanmaya Maharjan (74), moved into her reconstructed house more than a year ago in Siddhipur, Gachchhen. She has not received the second and third installment grants. She is also told that her land does not receive the approval so her grants have also been halted.

Lumanti Support group for Shelter is facilitating the reconstruction and rebuilding of 115 houses in Thecho alone. According to Yatra Sharma, Project Coordinator, out of these houses the owners of 52 houses do not have adequate documentation and land title papers. And even among the land owners who have official documents of the land, there is difference in actual land mapping and the documented land sizes and positions. Only 63 families have been successful in presenting the exact documents and to receive the third installment grant. Some families have already been built houses without obtaining any land ownership title or

any approval paper from the government.

The authority has been announcing the mandatory requirements which the people claim came out very lateat first place and secondly there is no assistance from the government's side in the whole process of acquiring land ownership certificate, getting approval and receiving subsidies. It is the task easier said than done. The problems of land ownership escalated with the reformation of the local government – turning village committees to municipalities. Sharma says, "Even though assuming that the families obtain the land certificates, the problem still remains in getting approval under the standard land measurement mentioned in the contract."

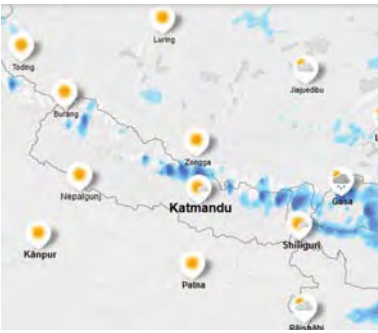
Lobbying

Gyanendra Maharjan (37), reconstructed his house with the support from Lumanti. His ancestral house used to stand on the land plots under the names of his father and his grandfather. Although he has received the approval for the land and reconstruction of the house, his journey so far was actually paved long before he started rebuilding. He initiated the process of while planning the reconstruction work. "I recently got the approval for the reconstruction, facing after several hurdles", he says. "I have enlisted myself in the victims list for the second and third installment grants." He sold his 3.5 aana ancestral farm land to manage money for the house constructed on 1 aana 3 paisa and 2 daam land.

Many cases similar to that of Gyanendra have surfaced in the area as Lumanti conducted discourses with the Godawari municipality, under Lumanti's Thecho housing project. The meeting with the municipality was fruitful in drawing attention of the government on issues of reconstruction process and problems of the victims. The meeting was successful in bringing the municipality and the community to come to an agreement to loosen some provision to obtain the approval for housing blueprint. The ward level offices play the major role in preparing the required reference letters that will come in handy to acquire the approval from the municipality based on the evidences produced by the families – regardless of the difference in size of the land and mapping, the ancestral land with permission letters from the relatives to use, land with partial documented certificates etc.

Gajendra Maharjan, Mayor of Godawari Municipality pointed out that there are several cases of land title certificate, the land belonging to local guthi, separation of single land in multiple plotsthat is hindering the reconstruction process. Despite the issues the Mayor is optimistic that families will be soon entitled to safe and better living status "There is big difference in the settlements and needs of the core areas and the peripheral communities. We have further worked on the criteria for both areas and reformed them considering the well-being of thevictimized families. Following this decision, even the families having less than 2 aanas land can construct their houses. They do not need to leave portion of land for pathway, and they can reconstruct their houses in old state." However, he emphasized that presence of legal documents for the families to be eligible for the grant.

In partnership with Lumanti Support Group for Shelter.



The weather is warming up, but temperatures are still not in the normal values for this time of the year. The maxima is depressed by the pollution haze that filters the sun, while the minima will climb up to the double digit this weekend. More normal for this time of year is the afternoon buildup, especially over the mountains that will result in storm-like situations with brief passing showers. But mornings will be bright and mild.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
23° 8°	22° 8°	24° 10°

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Wintering in Mongolia

The huge wide open spaces of Mongolia release the soul and make the heart sing

“I don’t think we get many tourists at this time of year.” The Mongolian airline official looked doubtfully at the lines of stocky Mongols lined up at the Hong Kong airport check in desks. “Mostly only foreigners coming for business. Winter in Mongolia. It is cold.” In Ulaanbaatar it is dark when we land but the roofs and streets are white, and pavements packed with snow and ice. In



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

the gloom, plumes of horizontal smoke gush from tall chimneys beyond the highway– the city is heated by coal, and there is an acrid taste in the back of my throat. Actually it is almost always cold in Mongolia. “We have such a short summer -- the tourist season is only a couple of months in July and August.” says Shatra, swathed in cashmere fleece and fur as we head out of the city in the early morning dark to drive two days, yes two days, to the remote Mongolian town of Khankh,

on the northern border adjoining Russia. Our task for the week is to train locals to help them improve ecotourism in the Khuvsgul Lake National Park. This settlement on the Siberian end of the lake is best accessible in winter when the lake freezes solid. Our Mongol team, in a convoy of three warm SUVs, take their equipment seriously. They do not venture outdoors without layers of high tech clothing, big jackets, hats, gloves and scarves. Soon I discover why. The unforgiving temperatures are never less than 20C below zero and one night it reached up to minus 47C. Cold enough to send shooting pain through a carelessly ungloved hand and make my track-shoed feet ache. From then on I wear lined hiking boots and our leader Badral, indulging me with his impish smile, gives me some serious gloves to supplement my wool mitts. Even the vehicles wear blankets on their bonnets at night, and one diesel jeep had a brazier fire lit underneath to thaw the engine. The huge wide open spaces of Mongolia release the soul and make the heart sing. The white snowy steppe reveals intricacies of shadows and colour as the low winter sun traverses the amphitheatre of the vast blue Mongolian sky. We drive north and west for 12 hours on a good road lined with packed

snowdrifts, flurries of spun silver blowing across the surface and black ice lurking in treacherous corners. A frozen veil lines the inside of the car windows. Our cavalcade stops for a snack -- boar and horsemeat -- and three well-kept mastiffs appear out of the empty landscape to politely beg for titbits. In the monochromatic landscape, a man in a crimson deel and turquoise sash pushes his car back from the ditch into which it had skidded. A flock of sheep pick their way through the snow, herded by a boy huddled on his brown pony. Herds of horses with shaggy winter coats fend for themselves, pawing at the unpromising ground to find something to eat. The short days are framed with an insipid dawn and a lingering rosy sunset that sucks all colour from the countryside. As we pull into Murun with headlights blazing for the overnight stop, a sliver of new moon rises above the harsh black outline of the hills. The swirling steam, bulky silhouettes and tooth-aching cold remind me of my winter journey the long way home from Nepal in 1974. By rail through Siberia, only 20 km north of Khankh, testing my personal limits by travelling defiantly alone on boats and trains -- from Japan to Scotland. Next morning we offer prayers to the lake

with sprays of vodka, then gingerly drive onto the frozen, glittering surface. Badral explains: “It’s early in the year and the lake is only just driveable – the ice is only 50cm deep now, but next month it will be one meter thick and safer to drive.” This is a massive body of water measuring 135 by 45 km, and in places is 240 m deep. Mongolia’s sacred ‘Mother of Oceans’ contains two thirds of the nation’s fresh water and is linked by a meandering river to Lake Baikal. As we venture away from the shore, the texture of the lake ice keeps changing. We



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WALKING ON ICE: Training locals to improve ecotourism in the Khuvsgul Lake National Park (*above*). Toktor, the driver makes offerings of vodka before venturing onto the ice (*left*).

ride the smooth black, fractured white with cracks, sometimes frozen ripples as though a wind has suspended the ruffled surface, and then clouded waves like circular lily pads. We slide to a halt and get down to dance on the ice, pausing at a shaman shrine amidst pine trees on the lake's largest island.

Snow is blown into icy ridges and glittering blocks where the great sheets of ice have melted then collided and overlapped, crashing into uneven joined gullies of anxiety for the drivers. Long cracks have formed into a frozen furrow, sometimes several metres wide. These cause the most concern and have to be inspected before our cautious convoy dare proceed -- some are still soft but narrow enough for us to splash across. The trusty Toyotas forge through in a fog of steamy confidence, but other fissures require long detours. Toktor, our stolid and highly skilled

driver, has stopped singing Mongolian songs, his broad brow creased into a frown. Most alarming are the gunshot booms as the ice expands, cracks, and ricochets in the unusual cold. The thermometer on the dashboard reads minus 29C and it is midday. Toktor adjusts his brown fur hat and radios to his colleague in the car behind. "I'm so frightened I can hardly speak," comes the reply. Toktor sighs when we reach the end of the lake. "Landed!" He grins, his big face wrinkles with relief.

The Khankh lodge door opens in a dramatic swirl of vapour, like a pantomime entrance of dry ice as the frozen air condenses in the warmth, frost crystallises inside the door frame, and big boots clump inside. It was late that evening, nursing milk tea by the stove with flame patterns flickering on the cabin's wood ceiling, that Shatra tells me the real story. A pony whinnies outside.

"The drivers were unusually nervous because last night the Khankh school van ended up at the bottom of Lake Khuvsgul. In the reckless dark, the driver hit an unseen crack. There was plenty of time for him and the ten teachers to get out unharmed, but now the school has no transport." 📺



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Sabina Devkota

● **Jayanti Acharya, 62**, had never been ill in her life. She had never had an accident. So when she learnt that she had multiple fractures in her bones, she was shocked. The doctor who examined her was not. He ordered a blood test, and it confirmed what he had guessed: Acharya had Vitamin D deficiency.

● **Lasata Bajracharya, 17**, began to feel pain in the hip late last year. She initially ignored the aches, and kept going to school. The pain did not subside, and she suffered unbearable muscle cramps. A blood test revealed she was suffering from Vitamin D deficiency.

● **Raj Shahi, 28**, was passionate about martial arts, and always aspired to be an ace karate player. But a bone disorder caused by low Vitamin D forced him to give up the dream. Instead of practicing karate, he is now in physiotherapy.

● **Chandika Gurung, 42**, was being treated for a thyroid disorder when she started suffering chronic joint pain. Soon, she could not even walk or stand up. A blood test showed it was due to a sharp drop in Vitamin D.

An increasing number of Nepalis are falling victim to a nationwide epidemic of Vitamin D deficiency as they adopt an urban life-style, stay indoors a lot and do not work or stay outdoors under the sun.

Exact data on the percentage of Nepalis suffering from low Vitamin D is not available, but doctors interviewed for this article all agreed that it is now becoming a national health emergency.

“Residents of Kathmandu Valley are at very high risk of Vitamin D deficiency, which leads to a host of

medical complications,” says Sunil Poudel, an orthopedic specialist at Spark Health Home.

A research team found low Vitamin D levels in 74% of 2,158 patients at a medical lab in Pokhara in 2014-15 and published the finding in the Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences in 2016. In Kathmandu, a study conducted seven years ago at a nursing home found that out of 50 patients who were treated, 78% had low Vitamin D.

Worryingly, Vitamin D deficiency is affecting under-five children more than other age groups, leaving them with life-long ailments. A study conducted by University of Oslo in 2013, examined 280 children below five in various parts of rural Nepal, and found that 91% had low Vitamin D. The same research showed that children who had been breast-fed had higher levels of vitamin D.

Vitamin D is vital for humans as it enhances their capacity to absorb calcium, which protects bones from rickets, osteomalacia and other disorders resulting in thin, brittle, misshapen and broken bones.

Vitamin D is naturally found in very few food items like egg yolk, cheese and salmon. But 15 minutes of exposure to direct sunlight every day is enough to replenish Vitamin D levels in the body. Ultra-violet solar radiation allows the skin to generate Vitamin D which is then transported to the liver and kidney.

Depressed Vitamin D levels do not directly kill people, but it makes them susceptible to other deadly diseases like diabetes, asthma, cardiac arrest, paralysis, thyroid, dementia, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and cancer.

However, despite its prevalence only a few Nepalis know about the importance of Vitamin D for good health. Most patients find out about it only when they go to hospitals to treat a different symptom caused by insufficient level Vitamin D in the blood.

A majority of kidney patients being treated at Grande International Hospital have been found to have low Vitamin D. Nephrologist Bishnu Pahari says: “This proves that there is a direct correlation between Vitamin D deficiency and renal failure.”

Vitamin D deficiency can also lead to depression, says psychologist Saroj Ojha: “If the body doesn’t get enough exposure to sunlight, it does not secrete enough of the hormone, serotonin. Vitamin D supplements

are prescribed for some patients with signs of depression.”

What was once regarded as a condition confined to countries in the polar regions where the sun does not shine for 4-6 months in a year, is now a disease found all over the world as people move to cities and do not stay outdoor enough.

Says Poudel: “Those who mostly stay in shaded rooms, or apply sun block before stepping outside are more susceptible to Vitamin D deficiency.”

Nepali film actresses Keki Adhikari and Richa Sharma have recently found out that they have low Vitamin D, and both are on supplements. They said in an interview that since the film industry demands for fair skin, they could not expose themselves to the sun. Public health experts say, the stigma against dark skinned people and the increasing use of fairness creams is contributing to the Vitamin D crisis. Doctors usually prescribe Vitamin D capsules to patients, but nutrition expert Aruna Uprety does not endorse this: “If nature has blessed us with a bright sun, why do we need Vitamin D supplements. Just let the sun shine on you.” 🇳🇵

(Some names have been changed)



Watch this short video to learn more about the significance of vitamin D and prevention and treatment for the deficiency from the experts.

nepalitimes.com

Brain:
Dementia and Alzheimer's

Bones:
Weak and deformed bones

Muscle:
Muscle Disorders

Vitamin D deficiency is growing into a hidden epidemic among Nepalis

Let the sun shine

Decoding Vitamin D

Symptoms



- Frequent illness
- Fatigue
- Back pain
- Depression
- Slow healing
- Bone loss
- Hair loss
- Muscle pain

Effects



Rickets and Osteomalacia



Depression



Cancer



Kidney problems



Diabetics



Cardiac Arrest

Prevention



Soak up the sun as much as possible



Eat vitamin D-rich foods like seafood, egg yolk, cheese and milk



Eat calcium-rich foods like sardines, broccoli and spinach

Who needs more sunshine?



Ultraviolet rays of the sun are filtered by pollution haze, so city-dwellers need more exposure to direct sunlight

Dark-skinned people need to be in the sun three times longer than others



Smokers need more vitamin D.

Those using fairness creams and sunblocks need more sunlight falling on their skin



Heavier people need to be in the sun longer

Pregnant women need more Vitamin D



Elderly people need more sunlight exposure

Sick or convalescing people need to stay out more



Blood, bone and brain

How vitamin D deficiency debilitates our bodies

Blood:
weakened
muscles of the
heart

Respiratory:
Reduced
immunity and
respiratory
infections

Pancreas:
Can cause
cancer

Vitamin Alphabet

Vitamin A: Important for vision and immune system. Found in carrots, vegetables and meat.
Vitamin B: Needed for cell metabolism. Found in nuts and berries.
Vitamin C: Helps prevent scurvy and heart disease. Found in citrus fruits.

Vitamin D: Helps absorb calcium and magnesium, prevents diseases. Found in sunshine, egg yolk, seafood.
Vitamin E: Prevents heart diseases and repairs damaged skin. Found in nuts, wheat germ and fruits.
Vitamin K: Promotes blood clotting and bone metabolism. Found in fruits, meat, dairy and fermented foods.

EVENTS



Yellow House market

Start your Sunday morning with a scrumptious breakfast at the Yellow House and take a stroll around the stalls for interesting art and local food, accompanied by music.
18 March, 9am-12pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, (01) 5553869

Economics of happiness

A talk program on the Economics of Happiness by Author Mark Anielski, discussing on how governments, communities and individuals can redefine their approach to measuring economic prosperity.
16 March, 5:30-7:30pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchok, (01) 5530229



Made in Nepal expo

Expo organised by Nepalese Young Entrepreneur Forum for the sixth time. More than 125 Nepali product and service stalls, Paleti (a Newari Bhoj), photo exhibition and product launch.
16-18 March, 10am-6pm, Bhrikutimandap Exhibition Hall, (01) 6200561

GAMCE

Global Adventure and Mountaineering Conference and Expo is an international forum for exchange of information, products and services on adventure and mountaineering.
23-25 March, 9am-7pm, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, For Registration: (01) 5543018, mountainadventure.events

Farmer’s Market

A 10-minute walk from the Boudha stupa, the lush green garden of Lavee Residence awaits with organic food stalls and live music.
17 March, 8am onwards, Lavee Residence, Boudha, 9808996175



Ford’s Motor rally

A motor competition where teams of driver and navigator have to solve tasks during the 200km drive from Kathmandu–Pokhara.
24-25 March, 6:30am onwards, Rs14, 999 (Net for two members in one car)/Rs25,999 (Net for four members in one car), For Registration: 9801133378, 9851133378

HR Meet

With the theme ‘HR can change, HR can drive’ for 2018’s HR meet. Growth Sellers bring together prominent speakers, professionals, experts and participants in the field of Human Resource. This is the 11th edition of the grand annual event.
19-20 March, 9am onwards, Hyatt Regency, Boudhanath, Rs 8,000 (+VAT), For Registration: 9801014483



The Francophonie Week

Celebrating the beautiful language of Molière, the much awaited Francophonie Week of 2018 will have various film screenings, live music, games and contests scheduled for each day.
20-23 March, Alliance Française de Kathmandu, Pulchok, 9843067788, For schedule: www.alliancefrancaise.org.np/ francophonie-week-2018/

ABOUT TOWN

MUSIC



Kramasa live

Giving you what you want, Classic Rock n’ Roll covers along with the band’s original compositions.
16 March, 6:30pm onwards, Wicked Spoon Fork and Rock, Jhamsikhel, 9843471625

Open mic night

Featuring Kaustuv for classic covers of Bob Dylan, Eagles, Dire Straits and more. The stage can be yours too.
13 March, 7-10pm, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, 9851075172

Ketan Chhetri

Base Camp music festival continues with Ketan performing his originals and classic hits.
16 March, 8pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5528362



The Midnight Riders

Celebrate St. Patrick’s Day with The Midnight Riders playing classic rock, southern rock, blues, ballads and hard rock, 70’s retro disco, 80’s pop and contemporary hits.
17 March, 3pm-1am, Irish Pub, Lazimpat, (01)4416027

Pahelo Batti Muni and Ranzen

As a part of Base Camp music fest, Pahelo Batti Muni will be performing, followed by performances by Ranzen.
16 March, 7-11:30pm, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs300, 9851075172

OUR PICK

Opens in Kathmandu on 16 March

Directed by Shivam Adhikari, Panchayat is a movie portraying Nepali society during the Panchayat era in the time of king Birendra Bikram Shah. It shows the lifestyle, culture, language and tradition of Nepalis in the year 1974 focusing more on the situation and treatment towards women. The lead role is played by Neeta Dhungana, who was awarded the Best Leading Actress Award in an international film festival, for her role in the movie. Along with Dhungana, the movie stars Saroj Khanal, Rupa Rana, Ganesh Giti, Jahanvi Basnet and Bishal Pahari.

DINING



Rox Restaurant

In celebration of French gastronomy, Hyatt has prepared a special full set Goût de France menu including amours, soup, starter, main course and dessert.
21 March, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs4,500 (per person), (01) 5171234

Tasneem’s Kings Kitchen

Pre-order the freshly added item on the menu—Bohra Tandoori Chicken at Tasneem’s Kings Kitchen, and enjoy the dinner with open mic comedy and live music.
Pulchok, 9801282727

DanRan

Chinese cabbage pickles made differently in Korean and Japanese styles served at the Japanese restaurant. For sushi lovers, the chef is also hosting a sushi workshop on 17 March.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5521027



Bayleaf

Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes such as Burmese Tofu Thoke, Khao Swe Thoke (Noodle Salad), Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and many other pork signature dishes.
Tangal, opposite to Attic Bar, (01) 4437490

Nilgiri Thakali Delights

Enjoy the taste of authentic Thakali cuisine with the popular Dhido set, either vegetarian or non-vegetarian.
Tangal, (01) 4411487

Mul Chowk

Mul Chowk’s a-la-carte menu is essentially Continental with an Asian flair. Try their chicken roulade served with mashed broad beans and sautéed vegetables.
Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4259801

GETAWAY



ChaChaWhee

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Gharipata, Behind the airport, (061)466652, www.chachawhee.com

Atithi Resort & Spa

The resort offers luxury at its best, offering a multitude of spa options and claims to use only the best of oils and soaps.
Shanti Patan, Lakeside, (061)466760/ (01)4002077, www.atithiresort.com



The Old Inn

Experience Bandipur’s peaceful ambience, a sunset from Chimkeswari hill and view of the Gorkha valley from high up on this ancient hilltop kingdom—a perfect getaway.
Bandipur, (065) 520110, www.theoldinnbandipur.com

Hotel Barahi

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Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 460617/463526, www.barahi.com



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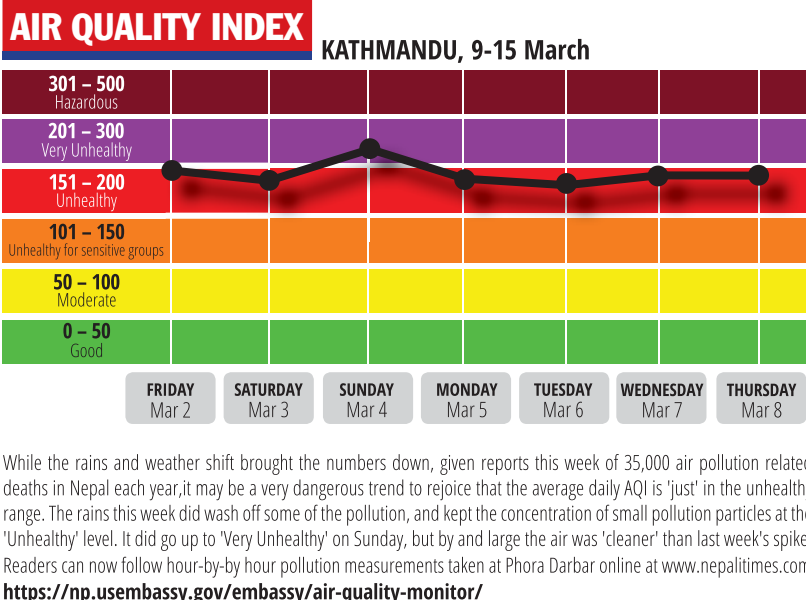
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<p>Elderly Care Assistant Fine and professional care by our qualified and experienced care giver.</p>	<p>Travel Support for Sick Clients Travel support for sick clients are provided by professional.</p>
<p>Appointment Management Apointment management with required doctors in different hospitals.</p>	<p>Equipment Rental & Drug Supply Drug supply at your doorstep and best quality medical equipments in rent.</p>



Win-win for women

Young women who have overcome deprivation and discrimination could make ideal assistants to newly-elected village and municipality women leaders

Namrata Sharma
in Nepalganj

As provincial governments and legislatures get down to business in Provinces 5 and 6 in western Nepal, young elected representatives hold the answer to inclusive development of this under-served region.

The newly-elected local women vice chairs of village councils and female deputy mayors could get help from young women and committed individuals who have struggled against deprivation and discrimination.

“I am worried that the newly elected local women and Dalit leaders will be considered incompetent for their jobs,” explains Sharada Regmi Biswokarma, vice chairperson of Baijanath Rural Municipality in Province 5. One of the vice chair’s responsibilities is to address judicial issues, and many lack the expertise and experience in legal matters.

If men were vice chairs they too would be in the same situation, but Biswokarma feels that elected women are more likely to be labeled unfit, and their position scrapped by the next elections.

Saraswoti Tharu, 21, is an undergraduate student at the Mahendra Multiple Campus in Nepalganj, and also serves as a support teacher in her high school. She was forced to be independent from age 6 when her mother ran away with another man leaving her with an older brother.

She was abused by her father and step mother. Saraswati attempted suicide, but found her feet with help of a local charity.

Bimala Pariyar is from a Dalit family with three siblings. Her father was a migrant worker in India, earning just enough to pay for her ailing mother’s medical bills. She was lucky to get a scholarship to go to school in Khajura of Province 5, and now works as a social mobiliser for Room To Read, and is attending college at the same time.

Nazia Khan, 20, is part of a Muslim family of two brothers and four sisters. After her sister’s education was stopped she was identified as a possible child at risk and was enrolled into a school here. She is also teaching and studying for her undergraduate degree at the same time. “Education empowers girls from Muslim communities to stop from being child brides and to gain confidence to earn and study,” says Khan.

Manisha Khadka is from Surkhet in Province 6 and was married when she was in Grade 10.

She quit school for six years as she gave birth to a son. She is now trying to catch up with her education, while her husband often beats her up at home. She is now also a part-time teacher and is speaking out in public against domestic violence. “The fact that I got support to continue with my studies has made a big difference to me,” says Khadka.

Sirajun Nisha is also an undergraduate with her own income as a Friday teacher. She comes from an under-privileged Muslim family and had to support them as a child worker. She was lucky to be identified as a possible girl at risk and was put to school till Grade 12. She now teaches younger girls like herself in the madarsa from where she graduated and earns enough to pay for her college.



NAMRATA SHARMA

“I now know why education is important: to stop myself and others from being abused,” she says.

Somana Khadka is blind but is studying for her Masters, and is vice president of Asahaya Bidyarthi Sangh in Surkhet. Because of her education and support from her

peers in the NGO she is able to anchor district level programs and is aspiring to be a writer and already has published poetry.

Madina Khatun from Surkhet is a mother of five sons and three daughters who are uneducated because they have to work to

repay the family debt. Her second daughter was married off while she was in Grade 8 and now has two children and a difficult life. Madina took several loans from microfinance institutions and money lenders.

When the madarsa was started

in 2001, there were 44 students with a majority of boys. Today it has 200 students with more than 60% girls, says head teacher Ahmed Raza. The girls have continued with their studies while the boys have dropped out because they have to work to pay off the family debt. The message from these young Nepali daughters is that education empowers them to reject early marriage, find jobs, and deal with domestic violence themselves. Many vice chairs of rural municipalities have been elected after a long struggle in the women’s rights movement. However, they lack the knowledge to take up the judicial role of the vice chairs. The women profiled above come from diverse backgrounds, but all have struggled to overcome discrimination and entrenched poverty. They could be ideal assistants to elected women representatives. They are young, smart, committed, and need jobs, and elected women need help in their new positions. It could be a win-win.

Namrata Sharma is Chair of the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal
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Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

When I first saw the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh's *Lieutenant of Inishmore* on stage in New York in 2006, I never imagined that this brilliant, sharp, funny, melodic, verbose writer would make the jump into cinema. His work seemed made for the stage, with characters



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

and patterns speaking beautiful, articulate sentences more suited for theater than cinema.

Imagine my surprise then, on him winning the Best Screenplay award this year at the Oscars for the spine-chillingly poignant, belly achingly funny film which he also directed, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* – a heartbreaking film about a woman who goes all out to find her daughter's rapist and killer.

Mildred Hayes (played in a feral, funny, riveting, unforgettable performance by Frances McDormand who won the Best Actress Oscar for her role) is infuriated by the lack of progress from the town police in

the brutal murder of her teenage daughter Angela. Separated from her drunken abusive husband and consumed by grief at the loss of her daughter, Mildred puts down a payment of \$5000 to paint an accusing series of signs on three billboards just outside the town – shaming the town police who have no leads even months after the killing. Needless to say, the small insular town is aghast at her brazen, unrepentant attitude on accusing one of the town's most beloved members, Chief Willoughby (Woody Harrelson) of ineptitude. It also doesn't help that Chief Willoughby is dying of cancer.

The film follows a tight, sharp dramatic arc that includes unforgettable performances from a cast of actors who play the town's kooky characters in a story about how revenge can consume, and forgiveness can redeem.

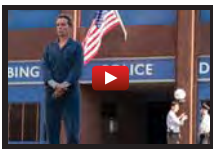
Sam Rockwell, another under the radar but incredibly fine actor won for Best Supporting Actor playing Officer Jason Dixon- a bigoted policeman whose life is changed by Mildred's vendetta.

McDonagh does the almost impossible, which is to create a deep, dark film about violence, loss, racism, brutality and sexism, lacing it with irreverent humour

and a complete, compassionate understanding of the flaws of humanity. McDonagh understands that "No man is as bad as his worst act" – but nevertheless everyone must pay for their actions if they have morals: for the immoral sociopaths, there is no reprieve.

All of McDonagh's films, including the hilariously funny and incredibly bleak *In Bruges* (2008), are suited almost more for theater than for cinema. Yet this film manages to be a powerful work onscreen: it creates a sense of place so strong that one believes McDonagh's version of Bruges and quiet Ebbing, Missouri are out there somewhere.

While *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* lost in the Best Picture category to *The Shape of Water* (reviewed last week in this column), it is as worthy a contender, if not more deserving. For those who want to see a real masterpiece this year, this is the film to watch. Do not miss this film, it is the stuff of legend.



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RSS

SWEAR WORDS: President Bidya Bhandari, re-elected as the Head of the State for a second term, after her oath of office was administered at Shital Niwas on Wednesday by Chief Justice Gopal Prasad Parajuli just after he himself was dismissed by the Judicial Council.



GOPEN RAI

SHARING IN THE SORROW: Bangladeshi Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism A.K.M. Shahjahan Kamal at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Maharajgunj on Wednesday to meet survivors of the US Bangla air crash on Monday.



RSS

UPPER HOUSE: UML's Ganesh Prasad Timilsina is elected as the chairperson of the National Assembly at the BICC in New Baneswor on Wednesday.



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Lucky escape



SETOPATI

Setopati, 12 March

सेतोपाटी

Sanam Shakya of Lucky Travels speaking to Chetana Guragain:

I was among 12 travel agents returning from a Fam Trip to Dhaka, and boarded the US Bangla plane at 12:30 pm. The plane was full, and I was seated in the front. There were Nepali MBBS students at the back returning to Nepal. There must have been around 30 Nepalis and as many Bangladeshis on board. We were all excited about flying back to Nepal, even though the mountains were not visible. Passengers were taking pictures through the right side windows. The plane circled probably due to air traffic. I have been flying into Kathmandu often, but I had never seen the mountains so close.

Even before the plane landed on the runway it was shuddering in an unusual way. The plane impacted the ground with such force it felt like we had hit a mountain. It skidded and hit an obstacle. There were cries, passengers fell off their chairs, others were trapped in their seats and baggages fell from the overhead lockers.

We realised that the plane had made an emergency landing away from the runway. The only challenge was how to get out. We tried to get up from where we were trapped, but couldn't. Then the back of the plane caught fire and smoke started billowing out. There was frightened screaming. We knew that if we didn't get out we would be burnt alive. We managed to extricate ourselves. Passengers ahead of us got out, and we followed them. We could not rescue the others in time, some had their hands and legs trapped. By then the fire was so intense we couldn't go near. I don't remember much after that. Now I am at Norvic, around three of our group members were killed. I am frightened thinking how close I was to dying in the plane. This is probably what they mean by being lucky.

“We had to improvise”

Nepal Army Lt Col Puran Ghale was in the first rescue team to reach the US Bangla crash site on Monday, and spoke to BBC Nepali Service.



GOPEN RAI

BBC Nepali: What did you see when you reached the crash site?
Puran Ghale: The plane was burning on the grass, and we sensed a danger of the fire spreading and we heard explosions.

So how did you respond?
We have gone through frequent training drills precisely to respond to such disasters. Even last year, we had conducted a large-scale simulated crash. Learning from our mock crashes, we tried to douse the fire and rescue passengers and crew members. We split into different units, and tried to cut through the cabin to reach survivors. My unit had collapsed structure rescue equipment, but we also needed to improvise. The fire control team of the TIA also arrived there with foam and other equipment. The ambulances took a little more time.

What challenges did your unit faced in rescue?
The aircraft was engulfed in fire, fuel was leaking from the tanks. We had to be careful not to ignite the fuel and trigger an explosion. We had to manually break into the aircraft hull and pull out passengers. After police arrived, we got more manpower to rescue passengers by using traditional equipment like axes and ropes.

What are the lessons from this crash?
The fire could spread easily, causing more damage. So we need to keep the airport area clean, removing all the grass. If aircraft engineers were there, they could have showed us the right way to get into the wreckage. In this case, they came only after we requested them.

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Kanak Mani Dixit

Things seem to be going smoothly enough as Co-pilot Prithula Rashid handles cockpit communications with the TIA tower. The aircraft is cleared to descend and land at the southern ‘02’ end of the runway.

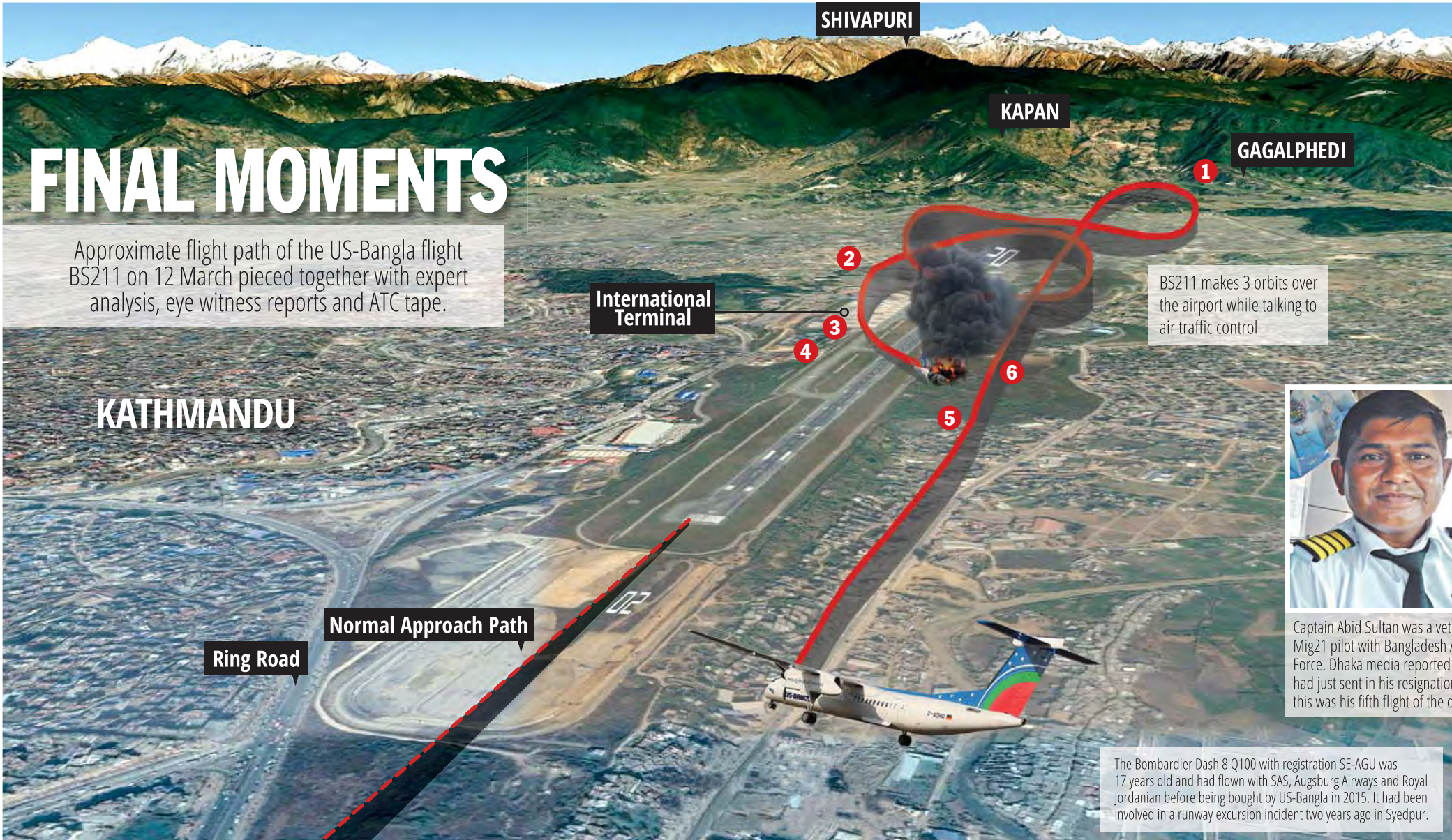
At one point, however, Capt Abid Sultan takes over even as a female air traffic controller (ATC) comes on to inform the aircraft that it is moving towards the northern ‘20’ side of the airport when he had been given permission to land on ‘02’.

There seem to be some confusion in the mind of the pilot about the runway ends 02 (south) and 20 (north). Even as the Dash 8 is on approach, the Nepali pilots of other aircraft are heard warning the ATC that the US-Bangla pilot seems disoriented and that he should be taken out of harm’s way with the help of radar. They point out that the pilot didn’t seem to know where he was and were worried about where he would end up (‘*almaliyo jasto chha*’, ‘*yo kata jaala*’).



20 by 02

Confusion over the two ends of the runway also reflects a separate tragedy of the mismanagement of Kathmandu airport



GRAPHICS: KIRAN MAHARJAN



Probably the last photograph of the Dash 8 as it flew low over the domestic apron before crashing, posted by an eye witness on Facebook.



View of smoke billowing from the crash site taken from the international terminal.



Photo posted on Twitter by passenger on Indigo 6E 32 shows crash site, and the stationary Buddha Air 282 that had just landed.



The crash site was close to the Fire Station and the Army base, so rescuers were quickly on hand, but the wreckage was too mangled and the fire too intense to bring out trapped passengers.

1 PULL UP PULL UP: Dramatic mobile video emerged on Wednesday showing that BS211 had earlier nearly hit the mountain and crashed at Gagalphedi before turning back south towards the airport.



JANAK RAJ BISTA

An exasperated male ATC comes on to warn the pilot at one point: “I say again, do not proceed towards Runway 20.” Again, he is asked to remain on hold and not to land because there is another Buddha Air aircraft on approach.

After that plane lands, the ATC asks the pilot whether he wants to land on Runway 02 or 20, and he chooses the latter. He is then asked if he has the airstrip in sight, to which he replies, “Negative”. Then, immediately thereafter, the pilot reports, “Affirmative”.

At that point Capt Sultan announces his understanding: “Cleared to land Runway 02” (even though he had sought permission for 20). The ATC too now clears him to land on 02. Talking to a Nepal Army helicopter (Army 53) which is on hold 15 km away, the ATC says that the Bangladesh aircraft is "on final for 20”.

Apparently, this was Capt Sultan’s fifth flight of the day, and he had just sent in his resignation to the US-Bangla management in order to join a Gulf airline.

A scary video that came to light on Wednesday shows the Bombardier careening close to the ground below the Shivapuri ridgeline at Gagalphedi, pulling up and climbing southwards without retracting the landing gears. It was a small glimpse of an aircraft that seemed to have lost its way in clear daylight.

The question arises why the ATC did not ask the aircraft to move from ‘visual flight rules’ to instrumental flying, after having witnessed this dangerous circuit.

The last recorded words of the US-Bangla pilot, spoken calmly, was: “[Unintelligible] said sir, are we cleared to

land?” After some silence, the ATC, clearly alarmed by the plane banking tightly over the parking bays at TIA, shouts, "I say again.... Turn!". There is silence, until a fire tender comes on air, indicating that the crash has occurred. Later, a Simrik Air pilot comes on to ask if the runway is closed, and the ATC confirms, “Airport is closed.”

The miserably inadequate radio communication leading to the tragedy focused international attention once more on Tribhuvan International Airport – the questions of safety and mismanagement. The fact that the aircraft ploughed into the earth within the perimeter of TIA spared the population of the densely populated city precincts nearby. The plane also dangerously overflew the terminal building, the hangars, and aircraft on the parking bays and taxiways.

Nothing will bring back those who were killed that fateful afternoon, and while we hope for the rapid recovery of the injured, one expects the airport authorities and government going right up to the Prime Minister’s Office will regard this tragedy as a wakeup call to make improvements so that the sole international airport is no longer an object of national shame.

It shows how badly the airport is managed that we rejoice when we find that the toilets actually have water or do not smell. Yet, lackadaisical attitude of staff in all categories, the chaos at the luggage carousels, the long lines snaking down from the arrivals escalators to get through a single body scanner – all of this add up to give the worst possible first and last impression of the country as a whole.


Incongruously, TIA’s ground handling and landing fees are among the highest in the world, and these charges are obviously passed on to hapless passengers. The stacking of aircraft above Bara and Parsa waiting to land is now legendary, and the lack of bays for those airliners when they finally touch down is scandalous.

TIA has over the past decade not been able to carry out the simple task of extending the taxiways to the end of the runaway on each side – to expedite takeoffs and landings. There is deep concern among those in the know that the runway tarmac surface is in dire need of repair.

But all these issues pale before the tragedy of deaths in the crash on Monday. It exposed the airport’s lack of facilities and personnel for handling such emergencies.

Actually, insensitivity is on exhibit in numerous fronts at Nepal’s only international airport. To the saddest example, no one has thought of providing a separate reception area for the on-average three coffins that arrive every day carrying the bodies of migrant workers.

These coffins are treated like just another piece of baggage, and have to be balanced across two to three trolleys and gingerly wheeled out by bereft family members even as voyeuristic eyes devour the scene at the arrivals concourse. Nothing more need be said.

“Tribhuvan” is the Puranic term referring to the three realms: heaven, hell and earth. From being close to hell on earth, TIA must graduate to something somewhat better. 

“Runway in sight.”

ATC conversation of the last few minutes of Flight BS211 was uploaded on YouTube from www.liveatc.net from which *Nepali Times* got this transcript. UTC times are approximate.

0822Z
BS211 Co-pilot: Good day, Bangla Star 211 final runway 02.
VNKT Tower: Bangla Star 211, tower. Wind 220 degrees eight knots, tailwind component seven knots, continue approach.
BS211 Co-pilot: Continue approach.

..
0824Z
Tower: Bangla Star 211, wind 220 degrees seven knots, tailwind component six knots, you’re cleared to land.
BS211 Copilot: Cleared to land, Bangla Star 211.

..
0825Z
Tower: Bangla Star 211, tower?
BS211 Copilot: Go ahead, sir.
BS211 Captain: Go ahead, mam.
Tower: Bangla Star 211, you were given a landing clearance to runway 02.
BS211 Captain: Affirmative, mam.
Tower: You are going towards runway 20.
BS211 Captain: (Unintelligible)... to runway 02.
Tower: 211, runway 20, cleared to land.
BS211 Captain: Cleared to land. (Unintelligible).

..

0826Z
Tower: Bangla Star 211, Kathmandu Tower
BS211 Captain: Go ahead.
Tower: Bangla Star 211, request your intention.
BS211 Captain: (Unintelligible)
Tower: Bangla Star 211, that would be VFR.
BS211 Captain: Affirmative.
Tower: 211 join ... right downwind to runway 20.
BS211 Captain: Copied.
Tower: Right downwind runway 02 ... and Bangla Star 211, traffic at final ... runway 02 at two miles, report sighting.
BS211 Captain: Copied, Sir. We'll be at runway 02.
Tower: Confirm you’re tracking towards runway 20?
BS211 Captain: Affirmative.
Tower: Right ... left, right downwind runway 02, I say again Bangla 212 traffic is on final runway 02 landing on runway 02.
BS211 Captain: Copied Sir

..
0828Z
KTM Tower: 211 ... I say it again, do not proceed towards runway 20. Cleared to hold at your current position.
BS211 Captain: “Tower, 211, making a right holding, right holding for runway 02.
KTM Tower: Okay that’s good but do not land. Traffic is on short final runway 02.
BS211 Captain: We have that, Sir copied.

(Unintelligible) ... we’re cleared to land”
..
[Tower tells other domestic traffic to hold outside Valley. Transmission in Nepali]
Pilot 1: 02-20 *nai almaliyo justo chha.* (He sounds confused between 02 and 20)
Pilot 2: Affirm Sir, Affirm. *Kata ho yo ta ekdam disorient bhako just lagyo.* (Yes, he sounds very disoriented)
Pilot 1: *Teita eslai ta radar vector garera uta pathauna parcha jasto chha hai, yo kata jala* (Unintelligible) *Yo surrounding danda kanda ma ta teti ramo chaina hai visibility.* (Right, we need to give him a radar vector out of here before he goes somewhere else, visibility in surrounding mountains is not so good.)
Tower: Roger, thank you sir.

0832Z
Tower: BanglaStar211, runway... cleared to land. Runway is vacated, either runway 02 or 20?
BS211 Captain: Yes Sir, we like to land on 20.
Tower: Okay runway 20, cleared to land. Wind is 270 degrees, six knots.
BS211 Captain: 260 copied, cleared to land.
Tower: Bangla Star 211, confirm you have the runway in sight?
BS211 Captain: Negative, Sir.
Tower: Bangla Star 211, turn right and ... you have the runway, confirm you have the runway not in sight, yet?
BS211 Captain: Affirmative, we have ... runway in sight. Requesting clear to land, Sir.
Tower: And Bangla Star211, cleared to land.
BS211 Captain: Cleared to land runway 02, Bangla Star 212.
Tower: Roger, runway 02, cleared to land, Bangla Star 211.

..
0833Z
BS211 Captain: Sir, are we cleared to land?
Tower: Bangla Star 211, I say again ...turn...” (Shouting) .. Fire ... (Siren in background) ... airport closed.



BANGLADESH MIRROR

THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH: Ashna Shakya (*third from left*) with her friends before boarding the plane on 12 March in Dhaka. Only Samira Byanjankar (*far left*) survived the crash along with Princy Dhami (not in the picture). Saruna Shrestha (second from left), Algina Baral (*second from right*) and her cousin Charu Baral (*right*) also died.

Ashna isn’t coming home

It is the final day of MBBS examinations at Ragib-Rabeya Medical College Hospital (RRM-CH) in the Bangladesh town of Sylhet for Nepali medical students.

The students were completing five long years of their medical school, they were stressed yet excited to be graduating. They were even more thrilled to be going back to Nepal to their families.

Dipa and Ashna were worried about the exams. Ashna, being the calmer one and the stronger willed among the two, told her not to fret and just focus on her studies. All along, Dipa had depended on Ashna’s support.

Ashna tells Dipa about her early morning phone conversation with her mother in Nepal who had wished her good luck for the final exam, and how much she was looking forward to seeing her home soon. Ashna told Dipa she felt confident after the call, and was sure her exam would go well.

Dipa flew back to Kathmandu on the same day after her exam, leaving Ashna with her other friends who were flying on the next day.

On 12 March in Kathmandu, Dipa got a call from her friends still in Bangladesh saying that a flight from Dhaka had crashed. Dipa thinks it is a joke, until she hears it was the US-Bangla Airlines flight her friends boarded. She turns on the tv, and the news is all over. She finds out Ashna is among 11 of her friends who died.

Dipa hurries to hospitals and helps families to identify their daughters, her friends. Despite the vast sadness welling up, she suppresses her emotions as she tries to comfort the parents and relatives.

On Tuesday, Dipa builds up her strength to go and see Ashna’s parents in Patan with four other friends who were at school together. Ashna’s mother Rupa Shakya is sitting on the floor, and her face lights up briefly when she sees Dipa and her daughter’s friends. She extends her arms and gets hugs. The tears flow, as she mumbles her daughter’s name. Seeing this, Dipa’s pent-up emotions erupt in a flood of tears. Face pressed against her knees, Dipa’s hunched shoulders are convulsed with grief.

“I still have 14 months of internship left in Bangladesh,” she sobs, “how am I going to complete it? I do not want to go back to that place now, what is the point? I don’t have anyone to lean on ... I should have forced Ashna to fly back with me.”

Sikuma Rai

5



GOPEN RAI

6



DEEPAK JUNG RANA

Video from a rescue helicopter shows the scar made by the plane as it skidded after impact on the eastern slope of the runway.

 **nepalitimes.com**

Listen to audio





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