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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Biratnagar Jumla

Bir Hospital is the last hope of the poor, but it is letting them down

Beset by a lack of staff, mismanagement and political interference, the country's oldest hospital has become a shell of its former self.

ARJUN POUDEL

Laxmi Prasad Niraula was brought to Bir Hospital in Kathmandu on July 29, all the way from Ilam. Niraula was suffering from jaundice and had fluid accumulating in his stomach. He had been referred to Bir Hospital by the Nobel Medical College in Biratnagar and required immediate treatment. On the afternoon of July 30, Niraula remained on a bed in the emergency ward, awaiting treatment. Attending doctors had told his relatives that Niraula couldn't be admitted to the hospital because there were no beds free in the general ward. He could seek treatment at a private hospital instead, he was told.

"I wouldn't have come here if I could afford private care," 52-year-old Niraula told the Post. "I will stay here until I receive treatment or I will die."

Every day, dozens of underprivileged patients like Niraula visit Nepal's oldest hospital, not because it is the best medical care facility in the country but because it performs a vital public service—it treats the poor for free. But every day, numerous patients face the same dilemma that is plaguing Niraula. The hospital is overcrowded and it doesn't have enough beds, forcing doctors to ask patients, even desperately poor ones from the country's hinterlands, to seek treatment elsewhere. But these patients can't afford care anywhere else, so many of them end up camping out in or outside Bir Hospital, waiting for a bed in the general ward.

As one of the country's few tertiary care medical facilities, Bir Hospital receives patients from all over the country, especially those who cannot afford private, or even subsidised, medical care. But the last refuge for the country's sick



POST PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKARI

With only paramedics and medical officers attending to the emergency ward, patients often have to wait days for a doctor to see them.

and poor has long been beset by mismanagement, political interference and a lack of human resources.

At the time of reporting, for two days, not even a nurse came to see Niraula. Since the hospital is so understaffed, not a single doctor or nurse works the night

shift at Bir, say administrators.

"Only paramedics and medical officers see patients at night," Dr Kedar Prasad Ceintury, hospital director, told the Post.

After spending all night in the emergency ward, sharing the narrow bed with one, or at times two others, Niraula and

his relatives were frantic. His family members were attempting to contact anyone they knew in positions of power who could help Niraula, but to no avail.

"Every day, over a dozen people—ministers, lawmakers, political leaders and others—call me for a bed on behalf of

someone they know," said Ceintury. "No recommendation is needed when we have vacant beds."

But Ceintury conceded that every day, dozens of patients who come to the hospital for quality care at an affordable price are forced to seek private care due to a lack of sufficient beds at the hospital.

"When patients are forced to wait for days, if not months, for treatment or even to just meet the doctor, all their hopes shatter," said Gagan Thapa, a former Health Minister. "They are forced to seek private care and all their expectations from the state and government are destroyed."

Most patients seem to know that getting admitted to Bir Hospital is a long shot, and yet, there are few choices for the poor.

A hospital for the poor

Ever since its establishment in 1889 by Bir Shumsher as the nation's first public hospital, Bir Hospital has been a bastion for those who cannot afford to seek treatment anywhere else. Every day, around 2,000 patients from across the country visit the hospital after being referred there by local healthcare centres in their hometowns. Last fiscal year, there were 422,801 out-patients and emergency patients while 13,159 people received in-patient care and 6,877 underwent surgeries, according to the hospital's records.

The hospital is operated by the National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS), an academic body directly under the Ministry of Health. Along with Bir Hospital, the Thapathali Maternity Hospital, Kanti Children's Hospital, Nepal Army Hospital, Patan Hospital and Nepal Eye Hospital are all affiliated to the academy. Students at NAMS are resident doctors at Bir Hospital.

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang to visit in the second week of September

Wang's visit is likely to set the stage for a possible visit by Chinese President Xi in October.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, AUG 23

Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councilor Wang Yi will be arriving in Kathmandu on a two-day official visit in the second week of September, according to foreign ministry officials. Wang's arrival is expected to set the stage for Chinese President Xi Jinping's likely visit in October, a visit long awaited in Nepal.

Wang will be the first high-level Chinese politician to arrive in Kathmandu since the formation of the KP Sharma Oli government in February last year.

Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali had invited Wang to visit Nepal when he travelled to Beijing in the first week of July to attend the 13th World Economic Forum meeting in Dalian.



REUTERS

He had later visited Beijing and held talks with Wang, his counterpart.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu, however, refrained from confirming Wang's visit, which is most likely to take place on September 15 and 16.

Gyawali refused to divulge the date but told the Post that security agencies have been instructed to make necessary preparations for a possible high-level visit from the north.

"We have not received any official confirmation about the visit but we are expecting the Chinese foreign minister soon," said Gyawali. "To avert any kind of last minute urgency, we have instructed security agencies to make all the necessary preparations."

The security agencies have also been instructed to check the activities of Tibetan refugees living in various camps in Kathmandu and a possible demonstration during the visit, one senior security official told the Post on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

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A semblance of calm has returned to Tikapur, but the demands of Tharus remain unaddressed

Marking four years since the Tikapur incident, where nine people were killed, a three-day conference hopes to address demands and maintain social harmony.

TIKA R PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, AUG 23

In 2015, as the new constitution was set to be promulgated, a large section of Nepalis—Madhesis, Tharus and Janajatis—were protesting the statute on the grounds that various provisions had marginalised them and that their demands were being ignored.

Protests in the Tarai continued for days, with at least 50 people killed in violent clashes. August 24, 2015 was one of the deadliest days, when at least nine people, including a police official and a toddler, were killed in Tikapur. The clash was a result of simmering discontent among Tharus against a campaign called 'Akhanda Sudurpaschim', or Undivided Far West, which was backed by the leaders of the major parties. A clampdown and a curfew ensued. There were arbitrary arrests and many Tharus fled as houses were burnt down and people from the indigenous community attacked.

Today, August 24, marks four years since the Tikapur incident. Despite



POST PHOTO: KIRAN PANDAY

Shops were vandalised in the aftermath of a violence in Tikapur, Kailali in 2015.

the protests, the constitution was passed on September 20, 2015. While the Madhesi parties refused to sign the document, there were celebrations in some parts of the country, with the

government hailing the constitution as "the best in the world". An amendment was passed on January 23, 2016, but many said it was too little, too late.

>> Continued on page 4

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Regency Watch

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang to visit in the second week of September

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The Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu, however, said it had not received any information regarding [Wang's] visit. But it is usual practice for Chinese authorities to keep the foreign visits of senior leaders under wraps, especially if there are security concerns, said a Nepali official who has worked with Chinese officials.

Xi is likely to visit Nepal upon his return from India in October.

“They always make announcements at the last hour,” he said. Since the Oli administration took office, there have been a number of high-level visits from Nepal to China, with almost no reciprocity. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, Vice-President Nanda Bahadur Pun, Prime Minister Oli, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Ishwar Pokhrel, Foreign Minister Gyawali, and some chief ministers have already visited China in the last year-and-a-half. Nepal's engagement with China took off after India imposed a border blockade in 2015 following the promulgation of the constitution. Nepal and China have since signed two important pacts and a slew of partnership and cooperation deals, including participation in the China-led Belt and

Road Initiative. Wang's upcoming visit is likely to set the tone for a possible visit by Chinese president Xi. At least two foreign ministry officials told the Post that an advance Chinese team has already visited Kathmandu in connection with Xi's visit to assess security arrangements, infrastructure at Tribhuvan International Airport, a possible hotel for the Chinese president, and other logistics. Xi is likely to visit Nepal upon his return from India in October, according to foreign ministry officials.

As October will be the festive season, it will be relatively easier for security agencies to ensure security arrangements and other preparations as Kathmandu will empty out, said a national security official, who also requested anonymity. During President Bhandari's visit to China in April, Xi had assured that he would visit Nepal at an appropriate time. Xi has already visited other South Asian countries, except for Bhutan and Nepal.

Officials and diplomats said that since Xi is visiting Varanasi, India on October 12, there are chances of a stopover in Kathmandu while returning home. Xi is visiting India at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as part of what has been dubbed the second series of the Wuhan Summit.

Given China's economic might, expectations in Kathmandu are high that Xi could announce a significant economic assistance package during his visit. The visit is also expected to help expedite a number of projects under the Belt and Road Initiative.

A former ambassador to Beijing, however, said that Nepal should first do its homework and figure out what it wants from the northern neighbour.

“Our economic cooperation with China is not moving fast,” said Mahesh Maskey, who served as Nepal's ambassador to China from 2012 to 2016. “We had agreed to execute several projects with China, including a cross-border economic zone to reduce trade deficits. We had also developed a blueprint of cooperation with China during Oli's visit in 2016 and some of them have been expedited. But others remain idle.”

A semblance of calm has returned to Tikapur ...

>> Continued from page 1

Next month will mark four years since Nepal got a new constitution. In Tikapur, people have largely come to terms with what happened, but the scars remain. In a bid to maintain social harmony and deal with the psychological impact of the violence a three-day Tharuhat/Tharuwan conference is being held in Tikapur from Saturday.

According to the organising committee, peace and communal harmony, rights of the Tharu community, and grievances against constitutional provisions are the conference's major agendas.

“The conference will try to find ways to get the Tharu community's demands addressed and minimise the effects on social harmony caused by the Tikapur incident,” said Minraj Chaudhary, coordinator of the organising committee.

An amendment to the constitution is the common demand of both Tharus and Madhesis. But while Madhesis have representation in the form of political parties, Tharus have no party of their own. The one representative from Tikapur's Tharu community—Resham Chaudhary—is currently in jail after the district court in March handed him a life sentence for masterminding the Tikapur violence.

Now, four years since the constitution was promulgated, two Madhesi parties—Samajbadi Party and Rastriya Janata Party—are saying that they will once again demand an amendment. But neither Tharus nor Madhesis know if the amendment will happen.

“An amendment could not happen when the Nepali Congress was positive about it and the Rastriya Janata Party and Sanghiya Samajbadi Party were both part of government. It cannot happen today,” said CK Lal, a political analyst.

As Tharus are expected to find a way to demand an amendment during the conference, Madhesi parties are trying to form a united force to raise the issue in parliament and on the streets.

But the road is fraught with challenges. A working alliance between the two Madhesi parties will only be possible if the Samajbadi Party Nepal—formed after the merger between Upendra Yadav's Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum-Nepal and Baburam Bhattarai's Naya Shakti Party—quits the government. A party that is in government cannot protest against it. However, Yadav, chairman of the Samajbadi Party, does not seem likely to quit government anytime soon.



A curfew was imposed in Tikapur after nine people were killed in violence that occurred during clashes between Tharu demonstrators and security personnel on August 24, 2015.

On the other hand, the Rastriya Janata Party has a divided presidium that comprises of six leaders. Some leaders on the presidium, according to party insiders, are concerned about losing their space if the two parties unite. “Unless leaders agree to accept Yadav's dominance in the unified party, unification will be a difficult task,” said Lal. “And without Yadav at the helm, the party may not be able to take bold and necessary decisions.”

This has created a catch-22 situation.

“An amendment is not possible without a movement stronger than the previous one,” said Lal. “This constitution is an outcome of a big conspiracy. So it's not going to be amended easily as a majority are against any change.”

While constitution amendment remains a pressing issue, Tikapur locals—Tharus and others—want to move on.

Netra Saud lost his 18-month-old son in the Tikapur incident.

“That incident is a black day not only for me but for all Tikapur locals,” said Saud. “It should not be viewed as one community's hatred against another. We need to have a common spirit that after all, we are all Nepalis.”

The government had paid Rs1 million to Saud as compensation, and the Tek Prasad Memorial Foundation has

been formed in his memory.

“I won't get my son back,” said Saud. “I want a park in his name where people— young and old—from all the communities can come and spend time.”

In the aftermath of the Tikapur violence, opinions were largely divided. Local Tharus said the incident took place spontaneously while others believe it was premeditated.

The government has yet to make public a report prepared by a commission formed under former Supreme Court judge Girish Chandra Lal. The commission had carried out a study on human rights violations during the movements in Tarai, Madhes and Tharuhat movement.

Jit Bahadur Chaudhary, a village leader from Bangau, Tikapur, said that the 2015 movement was for the rights of the Tharu people and that it was purely political in nature.

“The incident was an accident,” said Chaudhary. “Rather than further complicating the issue, the state should find a lasting solution.”

After the incident, the police had filed cases against 58 Tharu activists, charging them with murder. The district court on March 6 convicted 24 of them. Currently, 11 of them, including Resham Chaudhary, are serving jail terms.

Laxman Tharu, a leader affiliated

with the Rastriya Janata Party, was among those arrested. After serving 42 months in jail, he was released five months ago, when Resham was sent to jail.

“Things have gradually returned to normal here,” said Tharu who is busy with preparations for the three-day programme. “It's about time we raised our concerns—not only for constitution amendment but also other agreements that have been signed with Tharus in the past.”

Tharu is hopeful that the programme will help devise a concrete plan for the future.

However, two organisations affiliated to the ruling Nepal Communist Party—Loktantrik Tharu Sangh and Tharu Rastriya Mukti Morcha—are likely to skip the event, as they have been instructed by the party's Dang district committee to not participate.

Today, most prominent Tharu leaders are affiliated with different parties. Rajkumar Lekhi, who is a member of the Rastriya Janata Party, said that though there is a semblance of normalcy in the region, nothing has changed politically. Tharu demands have not been addressed.

“After a thorough discussion for three days among thousands of Tharu people, we will devise a plan to launch a movement to press the government to address our major demands—a Tharuhat autonomous province and amendment to the constitution,” said Lekhi. However, there are concerns about whether Lekhi's Rastriya Janata Party will make a push for the amendment. Analysts say the two Madhes-based parties, which together have 34 members in the lower house and two each in the upper house of the federal parliament, can exert more pressure only when they make a demand for amendment together.

“But unification won't happen anytime soon,” said Chandra Kishore, another political analyst. “Even if they unite, demands from the Madhes could become diluted. A separate force is necessary to raise the issues of the Madhes.”

Lal believes that unless those in power recognise constitution amendment as a national issue, nothing is likely to happen.

“The Nepal Communist Party is not under any pressure to move the issue forward,” said Lal. Even if the ruling party proposes an amendment, the Nepali Congress might not support it as their relations have been worsening.”

Ganesh Chaudhary contributed reporting from Kailali

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Hajar Juni Samma is an exact representation of what’s wrong with Nepali filmmaking

There are problems everywhere in Bikash Raj Acharya’s latest movie. The biggest being the very foundation of the film—its screenplay.

ABHIMANYU DIXIT

Here’s how most Nepali movies work: there’s a likeable protagonist(s) (read hero) who jokes, sings, and dances. His major agenda is to woo the love of his life in the first half of the film. He does this with the help of his best friend, the token comic character whose entire world revolves around the hero and whose sole purpose is to crack a few jokes while communicating the hero’s intentions.

The interval brings in a major twist and the second half that follows turns abruptly intense. The jolly characters morph into emotional wrecks. We then move towards the climax where the antagonistic force is defeated but only after a rather unnecessary plot twist right before the ending.

On the technical side, the cinematographer is more concerned with making things pretty more than serving the story, background scores are flat and fixed for each character—jolly for the comic relief, and brooding for the main lead. Editing choices are safe and redundant: establish every scene with a drone shot, and cut to close-ups for dialogues and expressions. And not to forget the most expensive part of the whole film that needs to take place in exotic locations, the songs: one to introduce the character, one to fall in love, and one to convey heartbreak.

The new film *Hajar Juni Samma*, by Bikash Raj Acharya, the director of five *Nai Nabhannu La* movies, follows this narrative rigidly, offering nothing new.

There are problems everywhere in the movie. The biggest being the very foundation of the film: its screenplay. In the first scene Avantika (Swastima Khadka) goes to Siddhanta Kshetry’s (Aryan Sigdel) guitar shop to change her strings. Avantika notices Siddhanta is coughing excessively and offers advice because she is a medical student. Siddhanta then analyses the guitar and goes on an unsolicited rant about the similarities between boyfriends and guitar-strings, and that she shouldn’t be changing either so frequently.

Now, besides being severely offensive as the hero mansplains how a woman should live her life, the first scene establishes unique character traits: Avantika has a guitar and is a medical student while Siddhanta is an old pervert who has some throat issues. Ideally, these elements should contribute to the story but here, well it’s never mentioned again. Except Siddhanta is a pervert. That one should stand.

Now, the film’s story itself isn’t that bad. It follows Siddhanta’s adopted sons Atharba (Akhilesh Pradhan) and Nishant



(Salon Basnet) who find love letters and gifts from Maya (Priyanka Karki) to their father and confront him about those. Siddhanta reveals that he spent only nine days with Maya and that too some 14 years ago in Sikkim. He also confesses to his sons that he loves her dearly, and that’s why he chose to remain single—to honour her memory.

Nishant and Atharba now take it upon themselves to unite the lovers, and go on a journey from Pokhara to Sikkim. On the way they meet Avantika who is also going to Sikkim because her boyfriend and her best friend are getting married.

From the outside, Bishal Chamling’s (also the producer) story sounds like an independent film measuring up to the standards of *Piku* or *Finding Fanny*. It has great potential of being an emotional journey—one with exotic locations—that leads to self-discovery of its characters.

But Chamling’s efforts have been wasted because the delivery is lazy. So is the screenplay and dialogue, written by director Bikash Raj Acharya and Samipyra Timilsina.

The latter is a journalist, therefore the script has excellent details, such as about the Nepali passport acquiring process, Indian Aadhar Cards, how you need permission from the Indian Embassy to take a Nepali number plated car into India, even how an Indian 1000-rupee note is not permissible in Nepal. But even these details can’t save a film with such incompetent writing.

Logic too falls apart in many places. For example, the makers expect us to believe that 14 years ago, which is 2005,



SCREENGRABS VIA YOUTUBE

the only mode of communication between Siddhant, from Pokhara, and Maya, from Sikkim, was letters. They completely forgo the fact that STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialing) and ISD (International Subscriber Dialing) services was still available in almost every grocery store in Nepal and Sikkim. Had this been a creative decision, the audience would have happily suspended disbelief. But no, this is the result of casual carelessness, zero creativity, and underestimating the

audience’s basic common sense.

The dialogues also are condescending. The token comic character, Nishant, says things like, “There are three types of boyfriends for every girl: someone who is after her; a time pass, and marriage material”. There is a disgusting fart joke, and then, rhymes like “*Breakup Parne ho, Afutira Sarne ho*” (Break couples apart and pull the girl towards yourself).

The film is marketed as an ensemble featuring Aryan Sigdel, Swastima

Khadka, Sanchita Luitel, Salon Baset, Priyanka Karki, and Akhilesh Pradhan. Now, all of these actors are traditionally good looking, and some of them, especially Swastima is a gem of an actor. But if you restrict their capabilities as an actor; by casting them in such confining roles, then you don’t do justice to the actors’ talent.

The current crop of commercial Nepali film makers have a certain comfort zone, as is evident with *Hajar Juni Samma*’s Bikash Raj Acharya, and they sadly seem to have zero intentions of leaving this zone. They make films with the sole intention to sustain themselves, they treat films as only business and without understanding the great power of cinema or the responsibility of its social impact.

For things to change, new makers with new ideas and forms of storytelling must be encouraged; otherwise we’ll just be stuck with this same form of filmmaking—*hajar juni samma*—for a thousand lifetimes.

Dixit is a filmmaker, film educator and film campaigner based in Kathmandu.

HAJAR JUNI SAMMA	
★☆☆☆	
Actors:	Aryan Sigdel, Swastima Khadka, Priyanka Karki, Salon Baset, Bikash Raj Acharya
Directors:	Bishal Chamling
Story/Producer:	Bikash Raj Acharya
Screenplay/Dialogue:	Samipyra Timilsina

How Shah Jahan connects Bhopal, Delhi, and England

How two rulers with a common name left a rich history and culture for its people but one is more renowned than the other.

AENA THAKUR

In the heart of Madhya Pradesh’s capital city, Bhopal, resides Taj-ul-Masajid which literally translates to the ‘crown of mosques’. The mosque was intended to be the largest mosque in the country and was based on the design of Delhi’s Jama Masjid. In a town called Woking in England stands a mosque called Shah Jahan.

The common denominator between these three mosques is the name Shah Jahan. The fifth Mughal emperor Shah Jahan built the Jama Masjid in Delhi and the third female ruler of Bhopal, Shah Jahan Begum built Taj-ul-Masajid of Bhopal. The Bhopal’s matriarch went a step ahead as she also funded the construction of England’s first Mosque in 1889.

The female dynasty of Bhopal started with the death of young Nawab Nazar Muhammad Khan. His 18-year-old wife Qudsia Begum decided that the legacy of her family shall continue and declared her 15-month-old daughter Sikandar as the rightful heir of the state. In 1819, Qudsia Begum became the first Muslim female who defied the veil and became the ruler of Bhopal. Her rule was

legitimised by the British and the clergy.

Both Qudsia (1819-37) and Sikandar (1847-68) were known to be tough rulers who strengthened Bhopal’s military and trained themselves to fight. However, it was the third matriarch of Bhopal, Shah Jahan Begum who brought in the period of flourishing art and culture just like her male Mughal namesake.

Unlike Qudsia and Sikandar, Shah Jahan was not known for her tough training for battles. Shah Jahan followed the system of veil and was more interested in literature, poetry, and arts.

Interested in Urdu and Persian poetry, Shah Jahan Begum also offered state pensions to poets like Amir Minai, a contemporary of Mirza Ghalib.

Shah Jahan Begum ordered that a dictionary of select terms in Hindustani, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, English, and Turkish was compiled to facilitate translation of literature between these languages. A poet herself, Shah Jahan Begum also patronised a group of female poets. According to Siobhan Lambert-Hurley’s book Muslim women, Reform and Princely Patronage, these gifted women included “Hasanara Begam ‘Namkeen,’ author of a diwan and two prose publications, Munawwar Jahan Begam and

Musharraf Jahan Begam, the daughters of Nawab Mustafa Khan ‘Shefta,’ and several others.”

In her book, Siobhan Lambert-Hurley also mentions, “Shah Jahan’s interest in this area was so great that she charged a male poet at her court, Abul Qasim ‘Muhtasham’, to devote himself to collecting an anthology of female poets writing in Persian. Entitled Akhtar-i-taban, it publicised the work of 81 poetesses when it was printed in Bhopal in 1881 in dedication to the ruling Begam.”

Her ambitions for grand architecture is evident from the fact that her daughter Sultan Begum in her biography mentioned that she has lost count of the number of palaces and buildings, her mother made. Some of the prominent buildings that still remain are Taj-ul-Masajid, Taj Mahal, Ali Manzil, and Benazir.

Unlike Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan’s Taj Mahal which is a tomb, Bhopal’s Taj Mahal was a palace for the Begum. Shah Jahan Begum also helped orientalist and scholar Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner in constructing England’s first mosque which is also called the Shah Jahan mosque.

The similarities do not stop here. Just like the

Mughal emperor built a planned city named Shahjahanabad, the Begum too built a neighbourhood with the same name. Hurley mentions in her book, “Shah Jahan was also responsible for building an entirely new neighbourhood of homes and offices within her capital that was predictably named Shahjahanabad. Unlike the version at Delhi, however, it was laid out on a uniform plan in-keeping with the latest ideas of town planning in Britain.”

Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal encouraged female participation in education, religion, and culture. She was responsible for setting up institutions for female education, she reserved areas in mosques for veiled women to pray on special occasions, she also constructed a Pakka bazaar exclusively for women.

Shah Jahan Begum’s daughter Sultan Jahan Begum was the last Begum of Bhopal whose reign ended in 1926. The reign of female rulers in Bhopal broke stereotypes and brought in various reforms in the princely state. Even though women still continue to fight for their rights it should not be forgotten that the Begums did assert their authority in the 19th century and it can be done again.

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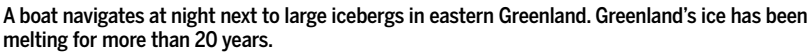
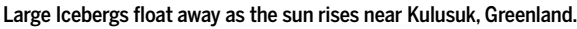
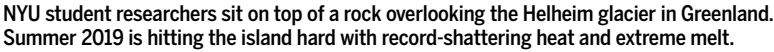
Interested in Urdu and Persian poetry, Shah Jahan Begum offered state pensions to poets like Amir Minai.



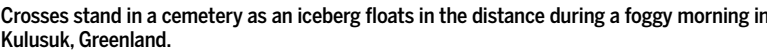
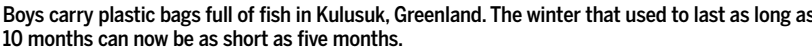
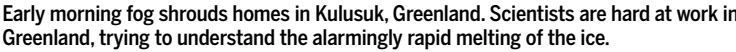
PHOTOS: THE STATESMAN



A large Iceberg floats away as the sun sets near Kulusuk, Greenland.



—Associated Press



Notes from the underground

People like Tatai, capable of loving, appeared unreal to her. Like a mask would someday come off and a disaster would unfold.

PRATEEBHA TULADHAR

She went back to reading her book while the ice-cubes refused to melt in the November chill. But she didn't really want to read the book she was holding. She wondered if she should pick a conversation with the woman who was sitting at the next table. But it had been ages—or so it seemed to her—since she had last found the courage to speak to a stranger.

She continued to stare at the letters on the page before her. The ice cubes stayed intact. She reached out for the cold glass of tea, mint and lemon, and held it in her hands briefly. Maybe the ice cubes would melt. The clammy fingers, the nervous mouth—this wasn't who she had always been.

It was 2019 when her job stopped making sense to her. She carried the senselessness she felt within around her, everywhere. Mere gestures began to sound an alarm inside her head sometimes. Sometimes, it would be something as simple as the way someone cut their food. At restaurants, she always felt like the voices around her grew louder and louder. Or the free background score got louder and louder even when she asked the waiters to turn the volume down. She couldn't stand the noise.

Every morning when he opened the door to take the trash out, he did a thing with his leg at the door that gave her a small headache. Everything bothered her.

Tatai bent down to pick up the magazine that had fallen off the coffee table. Prachinta noticed that deep dimples formed on the small of her back as the white



face as lifeless could have a description. She always wanted to add colour to the girl's memory. She wanted to add fierce colours to her description. But she couldn't. Her memory of the girl was feeble. But she could still recall how the girl always spoke with a lilt as though she was afraid of something, even when her voice seemed to laugh. The girl was called Shamrock. One of her grandfathers had come from England during the British colonial rule of India and never left.

Every time Prachinta thought of Shamrock, she was washed over by an intense urge to paint, to draw or find a way to describe her.

One afternoon, during the final term, Rosy and Prachinta had spent hours in the Oval garden, searching among clovers. "I want a Shamrock!" they repeated during the search. It was as though all they needed was to say the word and they would pass the exams. Magic. The word did something to their teeth and lips when they spoke it, leaving a light hoarse strength at the bottom of their throats. Like the hope from a four-dimensional clove. So like Shamrock's coy smile.

Years later, sitting at a restaurant with her book open, she could only remember fragments of the past. She drank some more of the iced tea and then walked out of the restaurant. A cold breeze had started to blow. The sky was overcast. She flicked open her umbrella and started walking. There was nowhere she was going.

Tuladhar lives in a village in Asia, where everything desirable is within an imaginary walking distance. She tweets @prateesh.

Some photos made way for a brief mental journey.

the pages blank on my diary because you've run out of things to say to me."

The rain lasted all night.

When she woke up, the smell of petrichor had settled and given way to that of the rising heat of the sun. She reached out for her phone first thing, like she always did. There were photos on her Instagram feed. Faces strewn with innocence and confusion. There were no words that spoke to her directly, nothing written for her. But there were a couple of photos that spoke to her from their darkness and their light.

Some photos made way for a brief mental journey. Then she stumbled upon the face of a girl she used to know—a face rimmed with confusion around innocence. This girl used to be in her class. She had very pale skin, fine brown hair. Her eyes were light brown and her lips the colour of skin. Prachinta could not decide if a

shirt covering her torso slipped over during the movement. Tatai picked up the magazine, sat down and started talking about what rice meant to the region. "All Asians wake up to rice," she said. "At least East Asians." How can you wake up to something you have no physical or financial control over, Prachinta wanted to ask her. But she didn't. She only thought of the dimples on the small of her back, while lingering her gaze on the ones on Tatai's cheeks. They dug deep into her cheeks as she spoke, and were released as though in punctuation as she talked without interruption.

Prachinta's bladder felt bloated. She couldn't tell if it was the strange concoction she had been made to drink or her surgery. But she decided she was just going to stay in bed and wait to go until Tatai left. She did not want her to see that her legs needed waxing. And that under the hospital robe

was just a person in need for physical care. She didn't want Tatai to see that she would never be her—the woman with deep dimples, high spirit, kind eyes.

She had always felt inadequate. She lacked Tatai's selflessness, her giving streak and her complacency. People like Tatai, capable of loving, appeared unreal to her. Like a mask would someday come off and a disaster would unfold.

But there would always be the rain to make up for every disaster.

The rain, ushering in winter, fell swiftly. It was almost lyrical the way it created two different strains of music as it landed on the backyard and the garden in front of the house. It was on rainy nights that she would find the inspiration to sit up, wade through words on the ether, cling to posts by strangers in some unknown corner of the world. She moved through comments, micro essays, stray thoughts:

"I decided to leave the rest of

P for protocol

When it comes to our folks serving in the Indian Army, our government should ask the Indians if they are going to war with Pakistan anytime soon.

GUFFADI

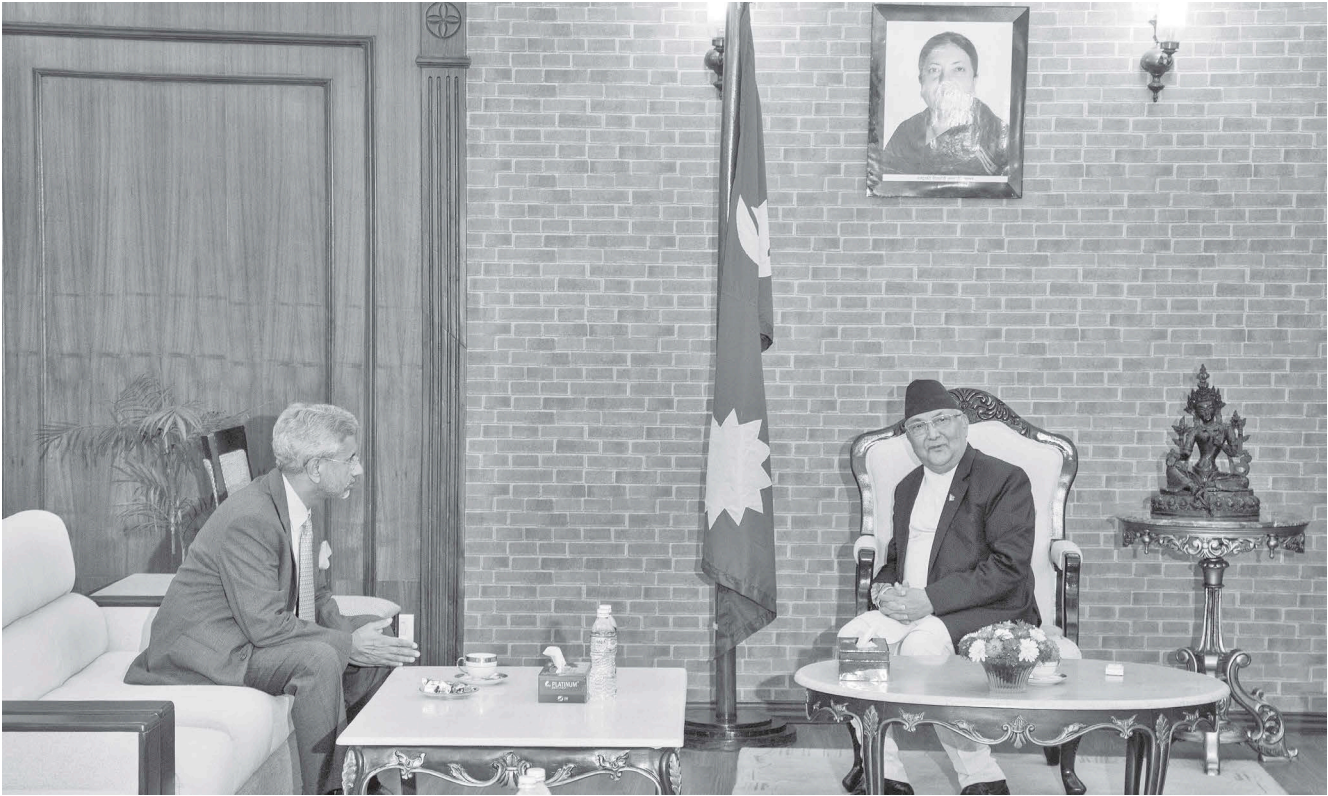
I think it's time our politicians learn a thing or two about protocol when it comes to meeting officials from foreign countries. Our netas should also learn a thing or two about the order of precedence so that they would not look like fools. With due respect to government folks from across the border but it's about time we all saved money by sending emails and using social media to communicate with each other rather than wasting taxpayers money by visiting Kathmandu or Delhi for a few hours of guffsuff.

Recently, we had the RAW chief in town meeting our former Prime Monsters and netas. Let us not blame the Desis all the time. Our netas and civil servants are mostly shameless sons of seedless cucumbers who will bend backwards or anyway possible to secure educational scholarships, free medical treatment and other freebies from India whenever possible. I think it's time our netas and civil servants show at least an ounce of class and not beg for free lunch from our chimekis. We blame thousands of Indian beggars in our town for making our city look bad but forget about thousands of our own thulo mancheys begging for everything else from the Desis.

The media, as usual, made it quite a big issue when the RAW chief came calling but who really cares about the media? Our politicians, civil servants and contractors do not care what our patrakars think about them. They know very well they can have it their way and nobody can do anything about it. After all, this is the land where small fishes get arrested for corruption whereas the big sharks take their money to tax havens abroad. Just look at Rabi. The man is in custody for the death of one of his former colleague.

Yes, the police have to carry out an investigation and hopefully, we will come to a closure and we will know what really happened but it's really tough for our media wallahs these days. Instead of writing the truth without fear or favour, our government wants our patrakars to either shut up and write nothing or face the music if they write about what's wrong with our netas and the government.

And this is also the land of conspiracy theories and us Nepalis are all busy watching YouTube videos, Facebook feeds and what not all related to Rabi. Well, Oli



try to divert the matter to Rhinos and asked the world to start calling them Gaidas instead but it did not go viral as expected. Oli Ba is once again in Singapore and we wish him well. Get well soon and yes, let MaKuNe and Jhallu Baba share the same chair if that makes both of them happy. Just build a bigger chair to fit the two together in the next meeting if possible.

This time around, we had the Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar coming to Kathmandu for some chiya and biskoot with our netas. It's okay with such foreign officials meeting with their counterparts but why should our PM and President waste their own time trying to entertain every foreign official who happen to visit our land? If the President of India comes to town then our Madame President should offer some tea. The same goes for Modi if he comes to town. But we can't have everyone from across the border show up in the capital and get to do a photo-op with our head of state. Maybe, Modi

Jaishankar was once the Foreign Secretary himself and knows how his ministry works inside and out.

will be kind enough to meet and greet all of our government officials when they show up in Delhi.

There is nothing wrong with our former Prime Monsters catching up with Jaishankar but instead of going to his hotel room for some guffsuff, it would have been better if Jaishankar had paid the visits to Dr Saheb's and Deuba's residences. Jaishankar is not a clown—like most of our netas and civil servants. The Indians do their homework very well and do what is best for their country's interest whereas our civil servants and netas do what is best for their pockets while the country can go down the drain.

Jaishankar was once the Foreign Secretary himself and knows how his ministry works inside and out. He last came to our land a few years ago to tell our netas that our constitution was not right and needed some fix-ups. Our netas said no and went ahead and then we had the blockade gift from the Desis. Maybe, our Foreign Minister can learn a thing or two from Jaishankar. After all, the man

served as Ambassador to China for more than four years and was the Desi Ambassador to the US as well.

I think we should ask Jaishankar to give a class to our civil servants and netas how we too can improve economic, trade and cultural relations with both China and India. And when it comes to our folks serving in the Indian Army, our government should ask the Indians that if they go to war with Pakistan anytime soon then please do not send our brothers to fight at their borders.

It's about time India acknowledged the fact that our people have died in numerous wars with Pakistan fighting for India to protect their land and its people. So, it's about time Indian government officials stop bragging about billions of rupees India give us every year to help us out here and there. We have forty thousands of our folks serving in the Indian Army and thousands have died fighting for India. Let somebody do the math. Should India be grateful for Nepali sons fighting for them or should we be grateful for a few ambulances, scholarships and other development projects? I think we both should be grateful we have each other.

Our folks serve in the British and Indian armies and the Singapore Police Force. And the folks who have served before and even now have really not gotten the respect they deserve. It's time Oli and his government scrapped the tripartite agreement with the British and Indian government concerning military service.

Don't worry about a few hundreds who may not get the opportunity to earn a few extra pounds or Singapore dollar or thousands who could earn Indian Rupees if they join the Indian Army. If our government had any spine and respect for the History of the Gurkhas then we should let the UN wallahs know as well that either they hire thousands of Nepalis as permanent peacekeeping force or we will leave the UN peacekeeping mission as well. It's time we also dole out our own set of demands to the world instead of everybody coming to us with their list of demands. And Oli has started it all with this 'It's Gaida, not Rhino' campaign. You may either like or not like him but he is as good as it gets.

Guffadi is a grumpy old man who blogs at guffadi.blogspot.com. You may contact him at maguffadi@gmail.com.

BRIEFING

Ribery hungry for success with Fiorentina

FLORENCE: Franck Ribery said on Thursday his hunger for success drove him to turn down lucrative offers from clubs in China and the Middle East in favour of Serie A's Fiorentina in Italy. The former French international left Bayern Munich as a free agent after 12 seasons during which he earned the nickname 'Kaiser Franck', winning nine league titles among his 23 club trophies. "Football is my life. I still have a special love for football and that's why I absolutely wanted to stay in Europe," the 36-year-old said. Ribery has agreed a two-year deal worth four million euros a year plus bonuses with the Tuscan club. **(AFP)**

Murray heads back to Challenger Tour

PARIS: Former world No 1 Andy Murray is set to compete in his first Challenger Tour event in 14 years at the Rafa Nadal Open in Manacor, Spain, next week. The 32-year-old Murray has confirmed he will skip playing doubles at the US Open to focus on his singles game at the second-tier hard court event in Spain and to build up his confidence. After undergoing hip surgery in January following his first round exit from the Australian Open, Murray began easing his way back by playing doubles, starting at Queen's in June. However, he opted to drop doubles and focus on a return to singles earlier this month and was beaten in straight sets by Richard Gasquet in Cincinnati. He then lost to American Tennys Sandgren in the first round of the Winston-Salem Open. **(AFP)**

Oxlade-Chamberlain inks new Reds deal

LONDON: Injury-hit Liverpool midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain penned a new deal with the European champions on Thursday and pledged to "make up for lost time". The 26-year-old former Arsenal star, who made just two appearances last season after being sidelined with a serious knee injury, has agreed a deal which stretches to 2023. "I feel like I missed out on a year, which I obviously did, so it's really exciting for me to be able to sign," Oxlade-Chamberlain, who moved to Anfield from Arsenal in 2017 for £35 million, told liverpoolfc.com. **(AGENCIES)**

Eleven Arrows stun Red Star, lift Pathivara Gold Cup title



POST PHOTO: ANANDA GAUTAM

Players of Eleven Arrows celebrate with the trophy after winning the Pathivara Gold Cup football tournament title in Phungling, Taplejung, on Friday.

ANANDA GAUTAM
TAPLEJUNG, AUG 23

Eleven Arrows of Sunsari stunned defending champions Red Star Football Club of Jhapa to clinch the Pathivara Gold Cup football tournament title on Friday.

The outcome was decided through spot kicks after the normal 90 minutes of play ended in a 2-2 deadlock. Rupesh KC, Jivan Dhami, Bishwa and Umesh Karki converted from the spot for Eleven Arrows while only Pujan Uparkoti and Bishal Limbu found the back of the nets for the holders.

After the lacklustre first half, the match swung into real action as Yogesh Gurung gave Red Star the lead in the 55th minute. Gurung beautifully converted an 18-yard freekick into goal. But Eleven Arrows drew level through Yannick in the 74th minute. Yannick was in right place to drill home after cutting past two defenders following a nicely set up ball from Prabesh Danuwar. The goal meant Yannick finished the tournament at

Nepal sign off with victory over Afghanistan

The hosts finish fifth in the AVC Asian Senior Men's Central Zone Volleyball Championship.



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Nepal captain Em Bahadur Magar (No 9) in action against Afghanistan during their AVC Asian Senior Men's Central Zone Volleyball Championship in Lagankhel, Lalitpur, on Friday.

SAILENDRA ADHIKARI
LALITPUR, AUG 23

Nepal overpowered Afghanistan in four sets to finish fifth in the AVC Asian Senior Men's Central Zone Volleyball Championship on Friday.

Nepal had a few nervy moments but eventually overcame a spirited Afghanistan side by 25-23, 23-25, 25-18, 26-24 at the Army Physical Training and Sports Centre in Lagankhel. The victory ensured Nepal finish fifth in the tournament. Nepal had also defeated the same opponent in a two-match friendly series prior to the start of the event.

In the first set, Nepal overwhelmed Afghan side to a nervy but comfortable

25-23 victory. Nepal raced to early lead in the set but found Afghanistan right back on their trail. This was also the first set victory by Nepal in the tournament having lost in straight sets against Kyrgyzstan and Maldives during the league stages. Afghanistan bounced back well taking the second set 25-23. The third set saw Nepal produce one of their best performance to sweep to 25-18 victory. Afghanistan put on a great fight in an attempt to level the match in the fourth set but buoyed by a huge cheering crowd, Nepal finally overpowered them to claim a 26-24 victory.

Nepal's coach Han Abbing said he was happy for his players who put in a solid fight. "A win is a result of good

performance. I am happy for my players to bounce back after earlier defeats," said Abbing. The Dutch national also called for more matches to be played to help players gain more exposure. "We practice a lot but what we lack is match exposure. We need to play more matches. Let's also play on winter, go abroad for matches. Let's explore more opportunities but let's play more matches," he said.

Nepal's Dutch coach lamented on players' inability to handle pressure during tense situations, saying it was largely due to lack of match experience. "What we do is practice, practice and more practice. Why not practice, play a match, practice again, play another match and so on. This will

help us gain match experience and players will also know more about handling pressure," he said.

When asked about his contract situation, Abbing said he was open to new challenges and had kept his doors open. "It's a great experience here. Wherever I go, people are nice to me. I am loving life here," he said. A former Dutch player and coach, Abbing was appointed as Nepal head coach prior to the tournament on a three-month contract.

Nepal's hopes of making it to the semi-finals were dashed after consecutive defeats against Kyrgyzstan and Maldives. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will play for the title at the same venue on Saturday.

Swish win to enter NBL 3x3 East final

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, AUG 23

An influential performance from Rabin Gautam led Eastern Swish to the Biratnagar leg of NBL 3x3 East Basketball Tournament on Friday.

In all, six teams took part in the tournament in Biratnagar. Apart from Biratagar, the NBL 3x3 East will be held in Dharan and Birtamode. Top two teams each from three cities will play for the title in Birtamode.

Held at the Bal Kalyan Vidhya Mandir School premises, Swish beat hosts school 21-13 in the final. Gautam, who had represented Southsiders in the Nepal Basketball League, alone contributed a whopping 13 points. In all, Gautam scored 39 points in four matches his team played on Friday.

In the semi-finals, Swish hammered Belbari Basketball Club 21-5 with Gautam scoring 11 points. Bal Kalyan saw off Sagarmatha Secondary School 16-6 in another semi-final match. The 3x3 basketball is played on half court with each game lasting for 10 minutes. The Dharan leg will be played on Saturday and Birtamode leg on Sunday. The final is on August 27.



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Senior Nepali national football team during a training session at ANFA Complex ground in Satdobato, Lalitpur, on Friday.

Hazlewood takes five as England slump to 67 all out

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LEEDS, AUG 23

Australia's Josh Hazlewood took five wickets as England collapsed to just 67 all out on the second day of the third Ashes Test at Headingley on Friday.

In a match they had to win to square the five-Test series at 1-1, England arrived at Yorkshire's headquarters having dismissed Australia for a seemingly modest 179, with fast bowler Joffa Archer taking 6-45, on Thursday. But with Hazlewood returning figures of 5-30, England were bowled out inside 28 overs to leave Australia with a first-innings lead of 112. Joe Denly, with 12, was the only England batsman to reach double figures, with their total seven fewer than the 74 scored by Australia's Marnus Labuschagne, in for concussioned star batsman Steve Smith, on Thursday.

But whereas Labuschagne and David Warner (61) fought hard during their partnership of 111, few England batsmen showed anything like the same willingness to sell their wickets dearly, with several playing key roles in their own dismissal for all Australia's good bowling. England's slump was no great surprise, however, but rather the latest in a line of recent



AP/RSS

Australia's Josh Hazlewood (third right) rattles England.

Test collapses that have seen them dismissed for 58 by New Zealand (Auckland 2018), 77 by the West Indies (Bridgetown 2019) and 85 by Ireland at Lord's last month.

But what made this collapse all the more troubling was that the blue and sunny skies above Headingley on Friday ought to have made conditions for batting easier than the gloom of Thursday, when England captain Joe Root won the toss. World Cup-winning opener Jason Roy took guard having made just 40 runs in four innings this

series. He fell for nine in familiar fashion when he edged a drive off a wide Hazlewood ball to Warner.

England's best batsman, was out for a second ball nought—his second straight zero after a golden duck in the second innings of the drawn second Test at Lord's—when nicking a straighter Hazlewood ball. Hazlewood had taken two wickets for no runs in three balls, with England 10-2.

England were almost 10-3 when new batsman Denly was given out lbw to Hazlewood on nought by umpire Joel

India's Rahane not concerned about century drought

REUTERS
NORTH SOUND, AUG 23

The last time Ajinkya Rahane scored a century in international cricket was over two years back but the India Test vice-captain says the drought does not concern him as long as he is contributing for his side.

The middle-order batsman was dismissed after a gritty 81 in the opening Test against West Indies in Antigua on Thursday, the sixth time he had gone past a half-century in the format since scoring 132 against Sri Lanka in Colombo in August, 2017. Rahane, 31, fell short of the three-figure mark again when he was bowled by pacesman Shannon Gabriel, via an inside edge, but not before he had resurrected the world's top-ranked Test side from a precarious 25-3.

"I knew this question will come, I was ready," Rahane said after a brief laugh when he was asked about missing out on a hundred again. "As long as I am contributing for my team, that's what matters. Yes, I was thinking about my hundred but the situation we were in was tricky. I am not too worried or concerned about my hundred as that will come automatically. As long as I am at the crease, I am thinking about my team, I am not a selfish guy. I thought 81 on that wicket was really crucial and we are in a decent position."

Rahane's innings helped India steady the ship with the right-handed batsman adding 68 for the fourth wicket with opener KL Rahul (44) and another 82 for the next with Hanuma Vihari (32) to help the touring side reach 203-6 on the rain-truncated day. He had missed out from India's World Cup squad and used the time for a stint with English County Championship side Hampshire.

With India playing their first Test in over seven months, the Hampshire stint was helpful, Rahane said. "That was a good thing for me because I took the decision when I got to know that I was not in the World Cup squad," Rahane said. "I wanted to make use of the two months and I thought the county stint helped me a lot. I was focusing on my batting, few areas to work on basically. When you play with Dukes ball in England you got to play close to your body. I was batting at No 3 as well so luckily I got to play the new ball there. Those two months I really used my time well."

DESTINATIONS



POST PHOTOS: KALENDRA SEJUWA

Valley of many virtues

Old Nepali songs serenade Surkhet for its abundant beauty

JYOTI KATUWAL
SURKHET

Surkhet might not be the most romantic destination in Nepal or very popular, compared to other places like Rara and Shey Phoksundo that fall nearby. Yet Surkhet sees a massive number of tourists year-round, because the district makes for a gateway to several famous tourist destinations in the country.

It is where tourists setting out for a trip to Rara in Mugu, Shey Phoksundo in Dolpa, Chandannath in Jumla, and Panchakoshi in Dailekh drop by. Hotels in Surkhet are thus busy year-round, bustling with wide-eyed visitors.

Little may they know that Surkhet has its own several awe-inspiring sites that one can get to within an hour's ride from the district headquarters, Birendranagar. These venues might not be well-known to outsiders, let alone foreigners, but they are worthwhile destinations, all of them with their unique characteristics.

Bulbul Lake, for instance. This time of the year, the lake comes alive with something other than its aquatic splendour. Nepalis might recall coming across the name in their General

“Visitors come mostly from six in the morning to one in the afternoon.” The number of visitors increases during Hindu festivals, with Hindus pouring in with sacrificial goats and pigeons. Many Hindus believe that Deuti Bajai, the goddess, fulfils one’s wishes. Anyone visiting Surkhet, irrespective of their religion, should definitely visit the temple.

Kakre Bihar—the “other Lumbini”

Kakre Bihar is the second-largest and oldest bihar in the country, after Lumbini. Enclosed by dense forests of saal and sala from all sides, it has an exotic location—a stark monument in the wilderness of resplendent green. Kakre Bihar is just about a half-hour's walk from Mangalgadhi in Birendranagar. Constructed by Ashok Malla, a khas king from Jumla, Kakre Bihar was partially damaged during the earthquake of 1934. It took a long time for renovation to begin, and work in earnest only began recently. Kakre Bihar is a melting pot of cultures and religions, worshipped with equal ardour by Hindus, Buddhists and people from other religions. It's because the Malla king who built it was religiously liberal, say locals. There is the Buddhist bihar, but there are also statues of Shiva, Parvati and Saraswati, the venerated Hindu deities.



PRADEEP 65110/CC-BY-SA4.0

of the lake and its compound. Once the area is doubled, there will be not just a couple but seven rafts, sailing their way across the breezy lake."

Viewpoint Gothikanda

Gothikanda provides a safe haven to escape Surkhet's sweltering summer heat. Resting on a steep hill, Gothikanda is cool, lush, vibrant. It makes for a perfect vantage point to view all of sprawling Surkhet Valley, and almost all of the districts in the Karnali region. Gothikanda is being developed by the day. Big resorts have been built, spawning a sort of a mini market-place. It is popular for organic produce from vegetables to fruits. You have to make a half-hour's trek uphill to reach Gothikanda from the district headquarters of Birendranagar. Along the trail, you will see hamlets faraway set up along the steep hills, making for a stunning view. Up north from Gothikanda, there are jungles and nothing else.

Baraha Lake and its mysterious Jalchara

Trapped between the dense forests, Baraha Lake is famous for a species of aquatic birds with no wings—locally called Jalchhara; locals have been requesting authorities to research on just what kind of birds they are. Though not as vast as Bulbul, the lake is expansive nonetheless, covering a total of 16 bigha area. It is just some 20 kilometres from Birendranagar. Locals, however, complain that even though the lake holds extensive tourism potential, it's lagging behind, shadowed by Bulbul, and also because of a lack of motorable roads, proper maintenance and sanitation. "If further neglected, the lake may dry up, who knows," warned Tej Bahadur Basnet, chief of the Barahatal Rural Municipality. But Basnet assured that the Rural Municipality is coming up with a master plan to preserve the lake, committed to developing it as one of Surkhet's crowning jewels.



Knowledge books from secondary school. Or maybe from that iconic song from the Niruta Singh-starrer film *Bandhaki—Surkhetma Bulbule Taal, Laaigo Maya Leu Chino Rumal* goes the song's famous refrain—parts of which were shot in the lake.

The song set the tone for what was to come. Today, hordes of people with movie cameras are seen competing to reserve the best spot to shoot their music videos or films. The crew negotiate with other crews while the cast waits on, observing the lake. The site resounds with Nepali tunes played out on loudspeakers, this time of the year, with Teej songs.

But Surkhet is not just about the famed Bulbule, obviously. The district is equally popular, at least among its locals, for sites of historical, religious and archaeological importance.

Listed below are five such sites that you should visit when you're in Surkhet.

Deuti Bajai—the wish-granting goddess

There was a time when Deuti Bajai temple would be busy only on Mondays and Tuesdays. But today, this temple, built by King Yash Malla, receives over a 100 pilgrims every day. "It's because it's close to Birendranagar. The temple welcomes more visitors today than ever," says Saraswati Raji, one of the priests in the temple.

The renovation is underway and the ward office has made provisions to conserve its surrounding jungle, which is being illicitly cut down and encroached upon. For this purpose and to renovate Kakre Bihar, the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Environment has allocated Rs 40 billion budget this fiscal year.

Bulbule ko taal

The lake has inspired a plethora of songs, dating as far back as the 70s when *Surkhet Bulbul Taal*, *Maya Mai Sani Hunale Chhutyo Maya Jaal* was released via Radio Nepal. The reason is obvious. It's attractive, it's turquoise water a literal oasis amid the heat that Surkhet can experience during summer.

The premise of the lake also has a park and a garden, which lures movie and video makers. The lake is spread over 30 bigha area and, recently, a boating service was launched in the lake, another feather to its already illustrious hat. Moreover, the Surkhnet Valley City Development Committee has come up with a Bulbul Area Development Master Plan and Dev Kumar Subedi, mayor of Birendranagar Municipality, has high hopes. "In a few years, there will come a situation when people will queue up just to get a ticket to visit Bulbul," claimed Subedi. "We are soon doubling the area

