NO WINNERS

There is little to expect from political partnerships that have repeatedly failed the people in the past

*Shekhar Kharel*

Nepalis are wondering who won and who lost after the Supreme Court on 7 March effectively ruled that the Nepal Communist Party secretariat and its constituent elements, the UML and MUC, need to disband. Even the leaders of the parties are confused.

Within 24 hours of the court decision, a party that was left in two factions suddenly went back to its status three years ago. Leaders who were caught on the wrong side had to slink back to their mother party. Despite judicial interventions to scrap the NCP on Sunday, and to reconstitute the House on 23 February, Nepali politics looks as confused as ever. To be sure, Prime Minister Oli suffered a setback with the House restoration, but he got a reprieve with the party re-split. His estranged UML, led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Bhumeshwar Adhikari, who had defected to the Pushpa Kamal Dahal camp, have been forced to return to the fold.

The biggest relief must be felt by Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya, who had been underfed over a month on whether the Oli or the Dahal faction would get the NCP party name and election symbol. He sprang into action after Sunday’s court verdict and scrapped the NCP altogether.

Even Dahal himself must be feeling less stressed now. The bruising political battles with an aggressive Oli was taking its toll, but he is now in sole control of his own independent party. It is like he has moved from a big house of an abusive landlord to its own small shed.

The biggest, and sorriest, losers must be Oli’s former UML comrades and former prime minister, K P Sharma Oli, and the rival Nepali MGP from Ashraf, Shhim Ram. The bad blood between them and Oli will surely affect the internal dynamics of the reconstituted UML.

The March decision transformed Oli from a majority prime minister to a coalition leader. It is intriguing that even though the Maoist Centre has sent feelers to the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) to form a coalition, it has not withdrawn its pre-unification support for the UML.

Oli himself, who just needs the support of the JSP to remain prime minister, while Dahal will need both the NC and JSP. Dahal is hedging his bets, he does not want to lose a no-confidence vote since he cannot push another one for a year, and Oli may come more suddenly for early elections.

The wily Oli is already looking at the option of splitting the JSP vote to prevent the number needed to stay on as prime minister. With 121 MPs in the House, Oli just needs 77 more votes to cobble a coalition, which he can get even if the rest of the JSP’s anti-Oli leaders use against joining. He can do that by agreeing to the JSP demand to free Rashmi Chaubari, who is in detention for the Tikapur massacre of policemen in 2012.

The key player in the formation of the next government will be the JSP and not the NC or the Maoist Centre. In fact, the JSP can even form a government with the NC and the Maoists. Within the UML, the Nepal-Khalasar camp does not have the numbers anymore to challenge Oli till the next party convention.

Despite the involvement of the three organs of the state – the judiciary, the executive and the legislature – Nepal’s politics is more tangled than ever. When even a two-thirds majority government could not deliver on stability in the past three years, it would be foolish to expect a fragile coalition to do so now.

Which is why Oli may have been right: the best option may be fresh polls. If it is overrun by an all-party election government, it could deliver a fresh mandate and restore a dented polity.
It’s broke, fix it

There has been a lot of speculative articles this week about the winners and losers in Nepal’s latest political upheaval, after the decision on 7 March by the Supreme Court that annulled the unilateral dissolution of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Putting on the position that the party name was already registered, the bench went beyond what was demanded to reconstitute the NCP’s two constituent parties, the UML led by K.P. Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s Maoist Centre.

Ever since 2014, the country has been faced with the challenge of developing policies for the coexistence of these two leaders to overcome their over-sized egos. Nepal’s political parties have grown to such a state that the party and government get mired in intrigues and back-stabbing behind the truculence of Oli, Dahal and Meharry Kumar Nepal.

Then, the Covid-19 crisis struck and Singha Darbar was too distracted to even look around for the response to this. The leaders were busy in their residences in Babarmahal, Kamalapur and Balkot in back-burner wheeling and dealing.

Increasingly isolated, and fighting a rear-guard action, Prime Minister Oli or dissolved the Lower House on 20 December just before the Dahal faction could trigger a no-confidence vote. When the Supreme Court had promised the House on 23 February, there was great jubilation, with Dahal and the NCP feeling such other audios in front of a cheating circle.

That celebration turned out to be premature because it looks like Oli had another trick up his sleeves. Sunday’s decision effectively dismantled the NCP and bifurcated it once more between the UML and the Maosists. If it is indeed true that UML had masterminded this all along, then he is even more of a schemer than we had given him credit for. That is not necessarily good for the rule of law since it means unacceptable executive interference in the judiciary.

The general conclusion is that UML had nothing left to lose, and was willing to destroy Parliament and split the party to prevent his two nemesis from gaining control of the NCP chair and prime ministership — even if it meant sacrificing his leadership of government.

As someone said to the Times, Oli is paying chess and Dahal is playing checkers. The coming weeks will show how the party members in Parliament will play out the formation of the next government.

Both the UML and the Maoists are now charging, the Nepal Communist Congress (NCP) and the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) to get the total 135 in the current 270-member Lower House.

The UML with 121 MPs will just need the NC’s 63 seats to cobble together a coalition, whereas the JSP with 63 (assuming it requires both the NC and the JSP to be 64 to do so. All week, the parties have been wooing the NC’s Star Bahadur Deuba and JSP leaders, with Dahal more interested for now in ensuring UML in a no-confidence vote than in forming a government.

One look back to the bad old days of cyclical coalitions of the late 1990s and the early 2000s when the functions of government were paralysed by short-term politicking — exactly the kind of instability the 2015 Constitution was supposed to put a stop to.

Since the bifurcation of the UML party in 2018, it would bring pliability and put Nepal on track to growth have also been derailed.

The country has now gone back three years. To be sure, the UML and the Maoists had never really united and it remained ideologically polarized between social and (NC) (People’s Multiparty Democracy vs People’s War).

True to the dictum that a Communist party regards faction immediately to the right of it as a greater danger than an all-out right-wing party, factions distrusted each other more than the NC. As he got more concerned, Oli was openly flying with the political wind.

The question now is which ex-prime minister will be the new prime minister. Not that it matters much, these are all technocrats and failed leaders who have had multiple chances in the past decades to prove their statesmanship.

The worst-case scenario would be if the current political crisis could be turned into an opportunity by the four main parties to skip a generation and elevate a new crop of younger leaders with fresh energy and ideas.

But that may be wishful thinking. We may be once more seriously underestimating the egos and ambition of these superannuated septuagenarians.

The best outcome now would be if the four main parties skipped a generation to elevate a new crop of untapped younger leaders

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

As we noted last week, the oft-repeated caution by President George W. Bush to “stop the fight” is not acceptable even today in the US.

Domestic political upheaval aside, it is not only in war-torn and disputed territories, and nuclear or other international policy agreements and policies leading to equitable social justice — but also in the US.

Two weeks, two deadly clashes, with the Reconciliation Parishad’s withdrawal of the UML and Oli-Maoist (following the Oli-Maoist estrangement, and a rise on the CCOA, there has been much against opposition for a political conflict in a conflict in the US.

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The US has been a symbol of the 21st century, but it is not acceptable even today in the US.

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HIGHEST HONORS COME WITH HIGHEST STANDARDS

We have been awarded the Diamond Status by APEX Health Safety independent audit powered by SimpliFlying for our efforts in ensuring the highest standards of hygiene and safety for our passengers.

TURKISH AIRLINES
Nepal must save Nijgad Forest to receive climate funds

Aakash Das Shrestha

As the 4th most vulnerable country in the world to the impact of the climate crisis, Nepal has emerged as a bellwether international climate and conservation event.

Outside of the poles, the Himalayas is the largest storehouse of fresh water, and the mountains are one of the most biologically-diverse regions on Earth.

Nepal is a compelling story for international development partners who have invested vast resources into its conservation effort for decades, and not without some success.

But how accountable are these partners if their resources are awarded to the very actors perpetuating the ecological disasters that their funds are meant to prevent?

Nepal entered 2021 with a winter drought that resulted in burned mountains and raging wildfires. In February it saw high profile donor-funded events, including a visit by the British MP and President of COP26, Alok Sharma, who announced a combined £7.4 billion Green Recovery Support package for Nepal.

However, none of the donors seemed concerned that the government plans to clear-cut Nijgad Forest, the last remaining tract of native hardwood jungle in Nepal’s eastern plains.

The forest is a corridor for nature across in India and Nepal and is home to tigers, rhinos, elephants and pangolins. To understand the importance of Nijgad Forest, one simply has to read the detailed documents Nepal has submitted to agencies like UKAID, USAID and World Bank to qualify for funding that goes into protecting forests and endangered species.

The government and the international community already agree that destroying Nijgad Forest would be devastating for Nepal. Yet, as Nepal’s political leadership openly pushes plans to clear-cut Nijgad, the international community is set to award it with additional billions of dollars and an ambitious green-washing opportunity.

It is to address this devastating contradiction that today I am launching the campaign #SorryNijgad.org, and demand that Nepal’s development partners conditions conservation aid on the government’s commitment to protecting Nijgad Forest by the time COP26 Climate Summit takes place in Glasgow in November.

The Nepal government’s plan to build an international airport by logging Nijgad’s trees amounts to perhaps the largest organised ecological crime in the country in recent times. It is enormous in scale, absurdity and the amount of money that will change hands.

For most of 2020, Nepal’s Cabinet caved an agreement with Zurich Airport International as the justification to start chopping down trees worth millions of dollars even though no such agreement existed. (See www.nepalcontext.com 18 September, 2020).

In May, the former Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism Yogesh Bhattacharjee invoked that imaginary agreement to defy a standing Supreme Court order that barred cutting of any trees for the project. He ordered the felling of 4,000 trees, and in September announced plans to cut down tens of thousands more by end-2020.

At the same time, Prime Minister Oli was boasting about his government’s commitment to forest conservation to world leaders at the UN General Assembly. Nepal will make similar declarations at COP26. The E3.5 billion airport has never had a finance, developer or an airline that plans to use it. What the cruelly Nepal Communist Party was steadfast on, instead, was to expedite the logging of more than two million trees estimated to be worth over $500 million, and ignoring all local protests, experts, court orders, and the government’s own regulations in doing so.

The issue of accountability also touches the country offices and headquarters of Nepal’s development partners, as well as taxpayers back home whose funds are going to projects led by bad actors dishonest in their intentions.

Why is Nepal being given unconditional financial assistance to conserve the Tami Arc Landscape (TAL) and Chure region while the country’s political leadership is actively working to destroy both the TAL and Chure?

How did the World Bank agree to an agreement to make $859 million available to Nepal till 2025 for Emission Reduction based on TAL, when the government is planning to clear over 8,000 hectares of forest in the TAL?

Additionally, all of TAL is open to oil and gas exploration, and China is already drilling there.

International funding needs to be accountable, otherwise it is not only futile but also reckless. Even without a global climate crisis, deforesting Nepal would unleash ecological horror in the region.

Deformation of this fragile landscape will make floods deadlier, affect water resources, increase human-wildlife conflict, harm the TAL and other conservation areas, disrupt trans-boundary ecosystem services, cause inter-generational climate injustice, disproportionate social equity, and remove a major carbon sink.

In short, it would result in the exact相反 of Nepal’s commitments to writing and its proclamations at past international climate and conservation conferences for which it is receiving billions of dollars.

Nepal’s political leaders know from experience they can defraud countries out of billions without consequences for ecological crimes. Receiving a $7.4 billion green fund from the international community without having to prove accountability would bolster these leaders, and give them the confidence that they can also get away with it internationally.

The US and UK embassies in Kathmandu, the World Bank and World Wildlife Fund must demonstrate both due accountability, and work to save Nijgad before COP26 as proof of good intentions.

#SorryNijgad.org is making this demand.

Aakash Das Shrestha

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A metaphor for metamorphosis
A British teacher whose love for butterflies made him stay in Nepal, and become a citizen

Shrihari Karki in Pokhara

A
during his Uncle Bob’s butterfly collection as a young boy in England in 1964, Colin Smith had no idea that the butterfly collecting would eventually become his life. Not in the UK, but in faraway Nepal.

As a Boy Scout, Smith’s fascination with butterflies grew as his entomologist uncle taught him about the metamorphosis in the life cycle of these fascinating insects. Before long, Smith was collecting butterflies himself, while also preparing to enroll at the Imperial College in South Kensington. In 1964, Smith came to Nepal as a teacher for United Mission Nepal (UMN).

“I was told that alongside teaching, I needed to have a hobby, so I told him that I collected butterflies,” he says. He was asked to make a collection from Nepal to bring back home.

It was a sunny Sunday morning, and Smith, now 55, sits in a thin half-sleeved shirt in his garden in Pokhara. He has lived in Nepal for 55 years now, the last 25 of whom with his Buddhist wife Priyanka’s family in Lamjung near Pokhara.

Smith taught math and English around schools in Pokhara and Kathmandu, which is where he met Priyanka, a teacher at Pokhara’s Prithvi Sanyam Campus and had started a small natural history museum there. They persuaded him to collect butterflies for the museum.

He also started collecting and photographing rare butterflies from all over Nepal for Tribhuvan University, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and the International Mountain Museum in Pokhara.

But then a new reality set in. “It was one thing to collect butterflies as a hobby, but it was another thing entirely to do it every day,” says Smith, who was travelling all the time from Dharan and Sankhu to the west, to Gorak Shep and Sikkim in the east.

“No one knows why, but Godavari is the best place to find butterflies in Nepal, and why more than half the species in Nepal are found here,” says Smith, recalling his days with friend and fellow butterfly expert Mahendra Limbu exploring the biodiversity-rich mountain south of Kathmandu.

Nepal is one of the best places in the world for butterfly watchers. Of the 17,900 so-called species of butterflies in the world, 660 are found in Nepal, and 20 of them are on the endangered list. Smith and Limbu both believe there is great potential if Nepal marketed expeditions in the peak butterfly viewing seasons in March-June and August-October. Smith says it is important not just to show visitors Nepal’s fabulous diversity of butterflies, but also to provide detailed information about each species.

During this time, Smith began writing articles on butterflies for academic journals, which led to his first attempt at making a comprehensive checklist of butterflies in Nepal. He would go on to write four more books about butterflies and moths which are now used as school textbooks.

In the early 2000s, Smith began working mostly on moths, collecting for Kathmandu University. “I used to travel around with a fluorescent bulb in a white sheet to collect dead specimens in the evenings,” says Smith, who has come to be known as ‘Mr. Moth’, as he so enjoys his hobby. “Butterfly Grandad” is also what Uncle Bob’s own grandchildren call him back in England, as it was fitting Nepal nickname for Colin.

Min Bahadur and his friend Surendra Priyagra met Smith as a young boy during a camping trip to Rupa Lake. They showed an interest in collecting butterflies and in the process, formed a deep bond.

“He taught me everything there is to know about butterflies,” Surendra says. He and Min Bahadur often joins Smith as the sun illuminates the south face of Machapuchare. The butterfly collection is now at the international Mountain Museum, and Smith’s photographs are postcards.

The printed postcards do not sell anywhere because of the collapse of tourism and the demise of the postal service, so Smith hands them out to children in his butterfly walk.

In 2019, Smith was granted honorary citizenship of Nepal.

“There wasn’t anything for me to do in England, while there was something for me to do here,” he says.

Although he had always wanted to be a Nepali citizen, being one took him a long time. He had applied as far back as 1995, but it was only years later, after Surendra Priyagra pulled all possible efforts that the Nepal government finally responded to the request.

“The man wanted to live out his life here, be cremated and have his ashes scattered in the Seti, so he deserves to be a Nepali,” says Surendra.

The last time Smith left Nepal was to go to England in 2006, his brother lives in New Zealand and he hopes he could go there once to visit, but admits that at his age, travelling is difficult.

Smith finishes up his toast and an espresso, which Min Bahadur’s daughter brings him. He places leftover scraps of eggs down on the floor and says, “This is for the fishes.”

Then Pintu Raji stands up, the white bag clutched in his hands, and slowly makes his way back inside his little green house.
“The Laxmi-Narayan will finally be back where it belongs – in the hands of Nepalis.”

The 800-year-old statue of Laxmi-Narayan stolen from a shrine in Patan’s Patlekhana in 1984 was recently traced to the Dallas Museum of Art. On 5 March, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) handed over the 70kg stone figure to the Nepali Embassy in Washington. It will soon be returned to Nepal.

Nepali Times spoke to US Ambassador Randy Berry about the US government’s role in repatriating this and other religious objects in future.

Go online to watch the interview on Nepali Times Studio.

Nepali Times: What is the role of US Embassy in repatriating stolen religious objects?

Randy Berry: In this case, our Regional Security Office – staffed with special agents from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security – played a crucial role in recovering Nepal’s Laxmi-Narayan statue.

Overall, helping to protect cultural heritage is an important and unique aspect of our foreign policy. For more than 30 years, the US Department of State has had a Bureau dedicated to education and cultural affairs, which is to foster mutual understanding between Americans and people of other countries through people-to-people exchanges, such as the Fulbright and NEP programs, and through sports, arts, and cultural programs.

With the US government in the future?

Randy Berry: While possible, we need to collaborate with the concerned stakeholders to identify the objects and facilitate their return. They are not only in the United States, but in many places around the world. I hope other governments and museums follow suit. It takes a long time to make sure that all of the information and documentation is such that when the time comes for actual handover there doesn’t appear any evidence of the piece anywhere. We have learned a thing or two in this process, and I think we will be more effective in the future.

What are America’s policies on restoration of antiquities of Greece, Italy, Egypt, and Cambodia?

Randy Berry: I can’t speak to a broad policy for those pieces from those countries. However, the Department of State has incredible programs that demonstrate the United States commitment to cultural preservation and cultural protection. As discussed earlier, my knowledge, we are one of the few foreign affairs agencies that has an entire bureau that is in part dedicated to the art and culture of our diplomatic partners. That is because we consider cultural heritage vitally important – not only as a matter of foreign policy, but because we recognize the country’s commitment to preserve cultural and historical sites, art, and property for future generations.

We allow a number of the objects from Nepal are in the United States, and we are working very hard to identify them and bring them back to the proper places. We also know that some of Nepal’s heritage also reside in institutions throughout Europe and other countries, and I would encourage my colleagues to join the fight because it is what is right.

You personally have a degree in art, how did you shift to diplomacy?

Randy Berry: I had an enduring interest in art as a means of communication, art history, and art preservation throughout my life, and my Mawenzi’s art studies focused on Art History. I also had the opportunity to be a young man to live and work in North Africa, and study the ancient architecture, sculpture, and monuments from Cairo (in Egypt) to Tunis (in Tunisia) and all points in between. As a result, the massacres of Pharaonic tombs up and down in the Nile Valley is a huge impetus to me because it goes to the core of the identity of the place and it’s hard for me to imagine a place like Egypt without its ancient culture.

Art has been a vital form of human communication since prehistoric times. It is a reflection of who we were, what we believed, and how we lived. When we preserve artistic objects, we are, in essence, honoring those ancient storytellers who used form and medium, rather than words, to express cultural value.
Despite politics, Nepal’s stock market is bullish

NEPSE is going through a tectonic shift with record transactions, but crucial reforms are needed

Santosh Pokharel and Sudhymma Dahal

A side from second-guessing what will happen in the unsorted Parliament on Sunday, the main post-time of urban Nepal three days is to speculate about the country’s volatile stock market. During the past six months, the Nepalese stock market (NEPSE) has soared, which immediately begs the question: is it a full recovery?

The NEPSE Index is a record high market capitalisation, which is the total value of shares listed in the stock market. Daily turnovers have started creating the Rs10 trillion market capitalisation to be making it.

All this has happened at a time when the economy is being battered by the impact of the pandemic, which has led to heated debates over whether the market is in a bubble and early to crash, bringing downgrade investors down with it.

Current highs are the combination of several factors:

- Low interest rate
- High liquidity in the banking system
- Commoditisation (conversion of physical certificates to electronic units of shares)
- Reinvestment of ‘kitta-kamta’ in real estate
- Fear of missing out (FOMO)

Low share prices between 2017-2018 have been attributed to the appointment of Yubesh Khatiwada as finance minister. He famously (or infamously for investors) once remarked that investing in stocks was “not productive”

One factor that has gone relatively unnoticed but has been a game-changer is the advent of ‘online trading’. The possibility to make transactions through the online banking system has ushered in a new breed of investors. Online trading has made the Nepali stock market easily accessible to the public, who can now trade from their living room instead of going to a broker office or bank to make a paper deal.

This trend was starting to be noticed even in the data before COVID-19 gripped the country. From October 2019 to February 2020, the number of monthly share transactions doubled from an average of 200,000 to 400,000, which pushed the NEPSE Index to the 1,600, despite relatively higher interest rate having about 11%.

Following COVID-19 restrictions, the number of transactions further increased and reached a whopping 1.3 million per month in recent months. This reflects the unprecedented wave of retail investors who, with a click of a mouse, can invest more than otherwise would be sitting idle, earning savings account interest rates.

This increased participation and diversification of the investor base is also reflected by the data on stock market penetration. TIFMAT accounts have increased from 800,000 in mid-July 2017 to 1.4 million in mid-July 2018 and is currently estimated at 2.5 million—about 8% of Nepal’s total population.

More than 1.5 million Nepalis applied for the recent IPO of an infrastructure finance company. Compare this number with India, where around 2% of the country’s population invest in the stock market, while in China this number is estimated to be around 7%.

But, online trading also brings a host of new challenges. Asymmetric information, poor advisory services and buying shares based on rumors are big concerns. Investors can lose money in the share market if they overpay for stock or if their investment horizon is not long enough. Moreover, by not investing they can also lose potential gains. So, investors need to understand and be aware of cognitive biases that limit investing success. It is as much about human psychology as it is about finance and economics.

The importance of diversifying across different companies and sectors, having a long-term investment horizon and personal finance management are even more important these days, but these are severely lacking in Nepal. An investor’s main motto always has to be buy a diversified set of companies, invest regularly, keep track of the company’s financials and hold for a long period of time.

Crucial reforms now await Nepal’s stock market, these can include:

- Increased participation of companies in manufacturing, agribusiness, etc.
- Strong regulation on insider trading
- Return trade settlement systems
- Increasing the limitation of 50 brokers
- Creation of index funds and exchange traded funds (ETFs)

The NEPSE Index jumped more than 10% in the past year. You could argue that its current level is a bit high, but just because it has gone up by 10% does not mean that it is overvalued, and vice versa.

The cumulative annual growth rate of the NEPSE between 2001 and 2021 is around 12%, which is in line with the 11% return of the S&P 500 (which tracks 500

of the largest US companies in the same period). During these 20 years, there have been other periods when the NEPSE fell as much as 75% between August 2008 and June 2011 and soared over 300% between June 2011 to July 2018.

Stock markets are cyclical by nature. Corrections, and subsequent rallies, are bound to happen. In this apparently chaotic environment of ups and downs, one thing is how to stay—fundamental shift and dynamism of trading online. This will have short-term disruptions, but it is likely to stabilise the Nepal stock market for years to come.
Landlocked Nepalis sail

Upasana Khadka

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and KC’s first memory as a crew member in a cruise liner was being astounded at the sight of a humongous multi-level ship docked in the Guangzhou port in China. The mammoth 17-deck ship, with an accommodation for 7,000 people, was going to be his home for the next nine months.

However, once inside he found the corridors in the crew area were narrow and maze-like, cabins were cubbyholes. He felt claustrophobic and lost.

When the pandemic hit, he was stuck in a passengerless ship for five months, docked in a port in Malaysia. Crew members enjoyed privileges reserved for guests: larger rooms with balconies, relaxed hours, amenities and good company.

KC is one of the estimated 7,000 Nepalis who make their livelihood at sea. He sailed with his family in the Philippines, Indonesia and Southeast Asia, where he was stranded during the pandemic.

“While we are on the job, the work is highly demanding. There are no weekly days off and the pressure can be quite overwhelming,” KC says.

The pay is comparatively better, while the crew members’ entertainment is prioritised via video games, and crew bars and the food and living costs are taken care of. And there is the travel opportunity.

Under past conditions, he was able to see over 40 countries, including France and Italy, he says Bijaya Ranjit, who was always fascinated by India.

Lake in Pokhara, the largest body of water she saw while growing up. “It is exciting and you don’t want to miss a thing because you know whether you will ever get to see these places again.”

Ranjit is hopeful for a 2022 revival, and hopes his seafaring adventures will take him to places like Australia and Canada where she has not yet seen.

“The ship offers many opportunities for personal growth,” she says. “I focused on learning language training. To survive the monotony and grind, you have to be able to make light of the dreary days at sea and to find solace in the company of your shipmates who become like family.”

Dipendra Thapa has been working in the cruise line since 2009, and has visited 70 cities in the last 14 years. His previous jobs at five-star restaurants in Nepal prepared him well. But when Covid-19 hit, his ship made its way back to Italy, where he was stranded for a few months.

“There is a world of its own inside the ship and we made use of it as we wanted to go home,” he recalls. But once the case started rising in Italy, crew members were isolated in single passenger cabins in the ship.

“Of course we were nervous and uncertain but my employer took the best care of us given the situation,” says Thapa, who was repatriated via Qatar after a month of being isolated in single rooms with support from the Nepali embassy in Geneva. He is hopeful that things will normalise soon, even though there is much uncertainty about what awaits.

“Just because we are in Nepal, landlocked does not mean we shouldn’t exploit sea-based opportunities,” says Thapa.

Of the 855 sailors in Nepal, only two specialize in seafarer deployment, while a few others hail both land and sea-based workers. Bhakti Bahadur Payangi at Good Alliance Overseas, has recruited over 2,600 seafarers in the last decade, and needs to ensure the maritime sector is recognized by the government before he can send Nepalis out.

In destination countries, visa rules to seafarers are very flexible as the governments retain some autonomy: they are only arriving for transit to

Alistair Tan in Hong Kong

over the next five years. more than 300,000 Hong Kongers are expected to emigrate to the UK according to the British Home Office. But only a few of these leaving will be from the city’s 25,000 strong Nepal community.

Hong Kong is an appealing destination for Nepalis wanting to emigrate further abroad because of the country’s association with the British Gurkha Gurkhas are the only community in the UK that are regularly hired out in the country’s police and fire services. The Gurkhas have been a part of the British military since the early 19th century, and currently serve in the army, navy and air force.

“Today, Nepalis are an integral part of Hong Kong,” says Uttar Man Timpal Limbu, a solicitor in the UK and who previously lived in Hong Kong for 20 years. “The majority of them are permanent residents and they enjoy the same rights as anyone else in Hong Kong.”

A 2013 survey by the City University of Hong Kong (CUHK) showed that 17% of Nepalis worked in the construction industry, 11% in the food and beverage sector, 12% worked as security guards and 9% worked in community, social and educational sectors. Seven percent were cleaners and only 5% worked in professional and executive

Nepalis leaving Hong Kong

But unlike many locals, it is not because of the new National Security Law
the seven seas

Nepali migrants hope for post-Covid revival of jobs in the world’s maritime fleet

When Nepal Times met him last week, he had just completed his mandatory pre-departure orientation training required to obtain labour approval. “I am going back to the UAE and rejoining my old job because I cannot afford to wait any longer.”

Unlike many others, Rohit Raj Rai decided the sailor’s job was not for him. After the first three months, he had quit, even though the earnings were attractive. “The grind leaves you no time to save or even concentrate on your own savings level. I am not sure I can guarantee a secure future as there are no opportunities for citizenship. I am trying to save enough to start on my own.”

He says, “I did not enjoy that three months’ work and the money I earned. My eyes were only on the money, and I had to have a stable job.”

In the end, what is important for him is that he can save some money to start on his own. “I am thankful to the government for giving us the opportunity.”

In Sri Lanka, there is also a sense of hope and optimism among the migrants. “I am hopeful that the situation will improve soon,” says Brajeshwar Thapa, a migrant worker who has been in Sri Lanka for the past eight years.

The situation in the Middle East, particularly the UAE, is improving, with more opportunities for migrants to secure permanent residency and citizenship.

In conclusion, the situation for Nepali migrants in the world’s maritime fleet is improving, with more opportunities for permanent residency and citizenship. However, the challenges remain, and the government needs to continue its efforts to provide better job opportunities and to protect the rights of migrants.
Haatemala Festival
Be a part of the virtual Haatemala Festival that aims to connect artists and audiences across theGati Subsahak Adhikoi communities worldwide in the fight against the caste system, cultural and religious barriers, and to promote equality among all communities.
13 March, Jan

Utaka Jalra Mini
Get set for the vibrant mini festival celebrating the cultural and traditional heritage of Nepal.
14 March, 14AM, Gokarna

Hiking and Camping
Embark on a Himalayan experience, camping amidst the scenic views of the Himalayas.
12 March, 1200am

Saturday market
Wade through the vibrant stalls and gain a true insight into the rich culture and heritage of Nepal.
13 March, 9AM, Pokhara

Hindu Festival of Colors
Witness the festival of colors as seen through the eyes of the Goddess Kumari in Kathmandu.
13 March, 1200pm

Virtual street festivals
Goapele’s Curious Street Festivals & Carnivals is a virtual tour of eight of the most vibrant street festivals in the world. The virtual festivals include the Glastonbury music festival, the Coachella music festival, the Munich Oktoberfest in Germany, and the Glastonbury festival in New Orleans.

Kungsagart
Kungsagart – a Nubian creole artist generates educational content on scientific, technological, political, philosophical and psychological subjects. Students, parents, or curious viewers are looking for educational material, head to the Kungsagart YouTube channel.

Our Pick
In writer-director Geraldine James’ latest film about homophobia, Young Women,文化艺术和旅游。The result is a deeply moving portrait of the lives of young women in the UK and elsewhere.

Events

Online Archives
The world at home
Travel may be limited these days, but discovering new, unique and diverse experiences from across the globe doesn’t have to be. Get your guide. The world at home initiative brings you the top news, articles, and activities to keep you entertained.

Dining

Kung Fu noodles
Kung Fu Noodles is a Chinese restaurant with a wide range of noodles and soups. It reflects the amazing food culture of China, which you don’t have to work too hard for great food.

Cafe Images del
Cafe Images del is a popular place for its variety of food and drinks. It is also popular for either business meetings or private conferences. The main theme of the cafe is what one is looking for.

Country Terrace Restaurant
Country Terrazza is popular for its tasty and diverse range of Italian dishes, ranging from Neapolitan, Italian, and Mediterranean-inspired dishes. Enjoy your time with them.

Air Quality Index

Our Pick

Kholo

Ashim Shaky

Promising Young Woman

Vice

Vice Watch documentaries about anything and everything from the VICE YouTube channel. Start from documentary about Russian tennis player, the Mysterious King of the Ukraine, and the Russian tennis player. Make Peoplesoulful, as well as the instrument documentary on human traffickers in Nepal.

Kungsagart – a Nubian creole artist generates educational content on scientific, technological, political, philosophical and psychological subjects. Students, parents, or curious viewers are looking for educational material, head to the Kungsagart YouTube channel.

JSTOR

Kungsagart

Kungsagart – a Nubian creole artist generates educational content on scientific, technological, political, philosophical and psychological subjects. Students, parents, or curious viewers are looking for educational material, head to the Kungsagart YouTube channel.

Ashim Shaky

Mar 12 - Mar 17

Van Gogh Gallery

Davide Moroni Gallery

Tulcão

Myanmar on my mind

A famous Nepali saying goes: ‘Your karma will follow you even if you go to Burma.’

Pratibha Tuladhar

Myanmar confused me. Or perhaps it’s Burma.

What is the correct way to speak of your country, I ask. My friend of Karen ethnicity pauses, looks at nothing in particular for a while and then answers: Burma is what the British called us. Then the military junta formalised it as Myanmar when they took over.

Which do you prefer? I ask.

Neither. But given the situation we are in, I’d rather say Burma, he says.

***

The humidity swallows me.

The heat feels different from that of Chiang Mai, where I have flown in, because the air sticks to me.

As Ravi and I walk along Ewa lake, I cannot help notice that the banks are dotted with couples leaning into each other, some kissing. I try to look away, but as we walk around the lake, they are everywhere, sticking together in the swirling heat.

I would later ask a friend about the sensational lives of Yangon. He would tell me they are all young people from all over the country, who work in the city and live in tight accommodations. Migrants, he would say. Not people from Yangon.

A boat cuts across Ewa, creating a silhouette of itself in the shadow beneath it, and for a moment, I feel as though I could fall in love, too.

Let’s sit down, I say.

And Ravi and I have a moment of quiet, even as behind us, the roar of vehicles and the chatter of voices drawn out our thoughts. But our quiet doesn’t last too long.

We are greeted by a couple: ‘Namaste.’

Ravi and the couple take off in Nepali.

***

Evenings are better for walking.

I go down Kaba Aye Pagoda Road. The feeling of being in a new city where no one knows you is liberating. I’m almost smiling to myself at the notion of this newfound freedom, when I’m rudely interrupted by a taxi driver.

Welcome to Yangon! Nice, big, he grins, and I feel like I’ve instantly been transported from Southeast Asia to South Africa. While I had enjoyed drawing no attention to my body in Chiang Mai, in Yangon I am confronted by what I had kept left behind—everything.

It strikes me that I am on the fringes of South Asia. I guess, I feel like I am back home.

***

Bhauji lets me borrow a lanyang. Unlike the lungi worn by women in Nepal, this one comes with a ziplock that lets me fasten it to my waist, without having to tie it to keep it there. I let me walk around without having to worry it might slip.

As a taxi rides in the direction of my office, passersby cast casual glances at me, but without genuine interest. I return their gaze, my eyes screening the dark lanyang men wear to complement their light-coloured shirts. My attention is trapped by the intricate patterns on women’s lanyangs, each design speaking of the provinces and ethnicity of the wearer.

I clutch the shoulder of my lanyang and then, in an attempt to make sure it doesn’t get tangled between my legs causing me to trip, I marvel at the grace with which men ride past me on their bicycles, dressed exactly as I am.

Next door to the office, a school bus pulls over and children jump out of it and run into the school building. Each one of them wears a green lanyang held at their waist, and a pastel green shirt.

When I step inside the office, the girl who runs office errands and whose name I cannot recall, smiles wider than usual. My colleagues tell me lanyangs welcome you.

You could stay here forever. No one would think you’re not one of us, they say.

Until I open my mouth? I ask.

They laugh.

***

The YHS line—red, green, yellow—drives around the city. When it stops to pick passengers, they step in with their umbrellas and their lunch baskets. When it stops again, they get off. A cash box is set near the door, into which passengers drop coins equivalent to the length of ride they hitch. No one checks if they have paid. No one leaves without paying.

How does this work? I ask Bhauji.

I know, she says. Wouldn’t have worked in Nepal. But people here are religious and they believe in virtues. They pay.

We get off and walk around the city and nostalgia comes at me in waves. I feel like I’m walking along some forgotten street in Cawnlw. The buildings at the Mahabandarla Pagoda near Sule Pagoda bear remnants of the colonial era, a street flanked by a church, a mosque and a pagoda, adjacent to another.

Reflecting against this memory of its colonial past, on the other side of the city is the Myanamar Plaza, where the mall rises along wide, clean streets, a reminder of where the country was headed since it transitioned into quasi-democracy. We stop at an Indian restaurant at the mall that serves the best Indian food. As we sip our coffee, I tell Bhauji: This country confuses me. But I’m starting to think of it as a confluence between South and East Asia. Looks like India, but has a different feel. People look like they could all be from Nepal or from Thailand, but they are not.

Asia is like a great, long river that repeatedly flows into itself, not?
LIFE TIME
Anjana Rajbhandary

Unfortunately, it is not limited to the time to get to the destination but also the possibility of how the teachers, co-lecturers or bosses stare at their chests, make inappropriate comments, or offer unwanted touch. “Ever-touching” is the term referred to public acts of sexual harassment that includes and may not be limited to whistling, making explicit comments, and touching inappropriately. It embarrasses and humiliates women in varying degrees and forms. It is a violation of women’s rights and can give rise to violence against women. Yet, it is taken lightly by a majority of the time.

Every form of harassment towards women is a form of objectifying women and shows lack of respect. Many justify such acts as “natural tendency” for men to behave, but it should never be an excuse. Most men pretend it never happened because of the fear of the consequences associated with confronting the perpetrator.

A shopkeeper touched my arm in Thamel, once. I continued to walk as if nothing had happened, but my sister who was with me confronted the man, who only kept smiling. The discomfort felt by women who experience such incidents can be immense and can leave one without the ability to instantly react. What is actually problematic is that the men who commit such acts feel no shame or remorse.

The daily occurrence of “ever-touching” often leads to many girls and women avoiding going to school or work because they do not feel safe. The term, “ever-touching” rooted in biblical reference, is bothersome as it places the blame on women, portraying them as the agent of seduction. Also, the term “ever-touching” seems to tempt someone. Therefore, even the term “ever-touching” tends to put the blame on women as being responsible for what unfolds.

The negative connotation implies that the woman is a “reductive temptress” who tantalizes men and thereby tries to justify men’s actions as if men have no control over it. How often have we heard at the heels of sexual assaults that the woman was dressed in a way that they were “asking for it”?

The society tends to downplay the severity of “ever-touching.” If there has been no physical harm to the woman saying “boys will be boys”, but such acts need to be addressed and have consequences for the perpetrator. No one should have to be physically harmed or killed for this intolerable act to be taken seriously. Harassment of women is a despicable and brutal violation of human rights.

“Ever-touching” is a big problem in South Asia that needs more attention. India’s Supreme Court has made a legal change in 2012 and that is but one example of how sexual harassment and assault towards women can take a turn for the worse.

Harassment and harassment of women is a significant problem in Nepal and a law is set in motion in our society. Boys and men need to be made aware and educated about the severity of such crimes and subjected to punishment if guilty.

The Government of Nepal has laws to address violence against women, but there is a gap when it comes to their implementation. Anu, 17, on her way to school gets whistled by at construction workers. She walks silently, looking down, cringing at the thought of her daily route. There are many others who share her experience.

Sita, 25, was groped on the bus one day. “He continued to look at me after he did that, and I continued to feel ashamed.”

Violence against women causes trauma and can lead to feelings of distress, helplessness, and other mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide. What may seem like a harmless dirty glance, offensive comment can often lead to rape and death.

Some men act that way to prove their masculinity to their friends. It is important for all parents to have a conversation with their sons on the proper way to treat women, and it is a difficult conversation to have but they are usually the most important. Parents need to raise their sons, so they are never the reason a girl’s reputation is sordid or she feels unsafe or afraid.

Men will never understand the four women experienced daily. Men do not understand the struggles women experience everyday regarding their safety. A male friend of mine says he never wants to have a daughter, not because he discriminates between men and women, but he would be scared for her.

We need to create a safe atmosphere for all genders so one does not live in fear of the other. The silence of women should not be perceived as weakness. Men need to acknowledge that when they are disrespecting women, they are disrespecting their own creators. It is time; we stopped making excuses and men start learning to respect themselves so they can respect women. Every girl is someone’s daughter.
Who were the Charitraheen Cheli?

17 years before the current street rallies for women's rights, a feminist group had shocked the Kathmandu patriarchy

Sajana Baral


They called themselves the Charitraheen Cheli (Women of the Republic) and their manifesto was a ‘declaration of independence’, denouncing dowry, gender-based violence and discrimination.

Point number 9 read: “We may have breasts, vaginas, clitoris and womb; we also have kidneys, liver, lungs, stomach, hearts, pancreases, intestines, fingers and toes, nails, arms, legs, public, hair, skin, eyes, ear, mouth, lips and tongues. All people have independent minds, spirits and souls.”

Long before the Women’s March and 15 years ahead of the international #MeToo Movement, Charitraheen Cheli in Nepal laid the groundwork for activism on issues that are just as relevant today as the country records daily cases of rape, killings and sexual assaults, with the state still treating its women as second-class citizens.

The declaration and subsequent contributions in newspapers created ripple and rumbles, and the group was eventually criticised for abandoning the cause, as its anonymous members drifted and their movement fizzled out.

Another point in the declaration read: “Which idiot would think women should have the permission of their fathers/husbands/guardians to obtain passports, or to travel and work abroad? (The same idiots who framed our Civil Code, that’s who). Having reached the age of 18, we exercise the right for complete freedom of movement. Instead of curbing this freedom, the state should fulfil its obligation to provide women with protection, via consulates, in the foreign countries in which we travel, work and reside.”

Seventeen years later, a government department last month tried to restrict the movement of women by requiring all females under 40 to have a written consent from a male family member and a ward official before travelling abroad.

“Enough is enough,” wrote the team in a phrase that has since been used in the Rape Against Rape rallies in Kathmandu. The group added that since marching from Bhaktapur to Sighar Darbar with a placard is mostly a waste of time and bad for the lungs, it was resorting to ‘non-violent guerrilla tactics’.

The 69-point declaration was also published in Nepal Times in Kathmandu and gave way to speculation among the identity of its members. Guerewol brackated them as enlightened, English-speaking, foreign-fed, elite women from Kathmandu.

“We are underground because it’s fun down here,” retorted the Charitraheen. “We are everywhere around you, on the streets, in your office and even in your home. You are being watched!”

Cheque print

"You think, we ink"
Sonia Awale

I was exactly a year ago that Nepal went into lockdown. After detecting its second case of Covid-19, deviating the tourism industry and impacting the economy. But despite a falling infection rate and the arrival of vaccines, the government has been slow to reopen tourism and restore the livelihoods of millions of Nepalis.

Instead of resuming visas on arrival, for instance, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation and the Department of Immigration have been unresponsive and confusing in places that is deterring all but the most determined travelers.

Although Nepal Tourism Board announced last week that recommendation letters for visas can now come from any entity in Nepal (but just trekking and mountaineering operated agencies still need visas before traveling), and PCTI’s recommendation to government to act as two weeks ago.

Already, 500,000 Nepalis have lost their jobs due to the lockdown and pandemic. The Navigation is an ongoing phase to vaccinate 1.6 million people above 65 years old, and the government is waiting for the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide a clear-cut protocol for vaccine passports. It adds: “It might look like there is no pandemic anymore in Nepal and life is back to normal, but let us not mistake this drop in the case to think that the worst is over. We have to wait for vaccine percentage to increase.”

The government is now using the first batch of the two million doses of Covishield vaccines that it purchased from Serum Institute of India last month. On Sunday, Nepal received another 348,000 doses under the COVAX initiative. Later this month, China is also expected to donate 500,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccine.

As the vaccination drive gains speed, in Nepal and across the world (over 350 million doses have been administered so far), documentation of inoculation status will become vital to ease cross-border travel. Soon, vaccine passports might be essential for all international journeys.

On Tuesday, China became the first country to rollout Covid-19 vaccine passports that show details of inoculation and results of nucleic acid and antibody tests. Chinese citizens can now register for the

Covid’s collateral damage

One year after the lockdown, the pandemic has left the lives of many Nepalis in tatters

Even before vaccine passports, the government needs to ease entry procedures for visitors

Watch Saglo Samaj video of people who have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to the lockdown and pandemic, and how they are coping with the economic impact. Himalmedia’s Saglo Samaj tv magazine program is broadcast every Monday evening at 8:30pm on DishHome channel 130.

O ne year after Nepal went into a Covid-19 nationwide lockdown, there has been economic stagnation. While most reports have focused on the impact on Nepal’s GDP growth rate, companies that have seen backlogs and Nepal’s macroeconomy, largely forgotten are stories of individual hardship.

Despite the breakthrough vaccine development in the past year, the pandemic continues to impact millions of Nepalis. Those with means changed their predictions, others are surviving on loans. But the pandemic-induced economic fallout means half of Nepal’s households are at risk of falling back into poverty.

This week, the Himalmedia video magazine, Saglo Samaj, interviewed farmers, tourist guides, hotel operators and taxi drivers most affected by the crisis.

No country for farmers

Buffalo milk is the only source of income for farmers in Kamthand VDC. But for six months during the pandemic, they could not sell their milk, and even now do not get a fair price.

Farmers take the risk of selling their milk to the Dairy Development Corporation’s collection point, but payment is slow. Local dairies also buy some of the dairy products that with the tourism sector which consumes most of these products down, milk sales have been all-time low.

We sell some milk but the price is not good. Some days you get money, other times you don’t. We live in misery,” says dairy farmer Kumanth Yadav.

Yadav has 13 buffaloes and used to sell 20 litres of milk a day. “This is what we Ullitre people do, raise buffaloes, sell milk, there is no other occupation,” he says.

“Milk did not sell well this winter, sometimes even the dairy doesn’t buy,” and we have no income.”

Guiding life

Uma Man Shah has been a tourist guide, but lost her job after tourists stopped coming last year.

“Many of my guides who changed their profession due to the crisis. I got into teaching myself. But we still have an attachment to the tourism sector and find it hard to adapt to other fields,” she says.

She says she will get back to being a guide once tourists return. “In the past year, I have been reading and writing a lot, I’m ready for tourists to come back so that I can share my knowledge with them,” Man Shah adds.

Shakar Shahi’s guide for 11 years, and also turned to teaching after the tourism sector collapsed.

“Even if I am in a classroom, I dream of travelling to the mountains,” says Shanti.

“The hardest part is to adjust to a new job.”

He says tourist guides could have been integrated into the Department of Archaeology to help in excavation work, adding: “We are ready to transfer our knowledge. Don’t leave us in this limbo.”

End of hospitality

The lockdown devastated the tourism industry, with least 1 million people losing their jobs. Luxury hotels in Kathmandu and Pokhara laid off hundreds of workers.

“We aren’t asking the hotels for 100% salary. We just want simple meals and enough money to pay school fees of our children,” says Kamal Ghimire of the Nepal Independent Hotel, Catering and Restaurant Workers’ Union.

The Airport Hotel in Kathmandu is a 3-star property with 82 rooms. Because of its location outside the gate of the airport, it used to consistently have 70% occupancy. The past year was a washout, and now barely 5% of the rooms are occupied.

“The hotel used to be very crowded and even with our 100 staff, we used to hire additional workers to manage all the parties, seminars and conferences,” says owner Binay Shah.

“Today, we are working with about 10 employees and yet we are finding it difficult to pay wages or the electricity bill,” he says.

No alternative to migration

Ganesh Tamang worked abroad for six months in the Gulf, and in two weeks, he had to pay his ticket back. Unable to keep up with loan repayment, the bank took possession of the vehicle.

“I still get up at 5 in the morning but instead of driving, I go to feed and milk my buffaloes,” says Tamang, who is now raising livestock and poultry to make a living.

Sugar Bohara also used to ply a taxi in Kathmandu for 16 hours a day, preferring to work in Nepal rather than sell in a foreign land. But with income nearly zero for this past year, he struggles to pay the medical bills of his elderly mother and his children’s education.

“My heart is against it, but I have no alternative but to go abroad,” he says. “I can’t sleep at night thinking about my piling debts.”

Collateral damage

What Covid-19 did to the world is hard to put in words. It killed millions, locked down countries, devastated economies, halted travel, and wiped out industries. The impact was so profound that whole countries went into lockdown. The pandemic taught us how fragile the world is and how much we take for granted. The pandemic has brought about a new normal, and while some industries have started to recover, others are still struggling. The pandemic has shown us how interconnected we are and how much we depend on each other. The pandemic has also shown us how vulnerable we are and how much we need to work together to overcome challenges.
WELCOME TO NEPAL

Association (ATA) is launching a digital travel pass later this month that will provide airlines and governments documentation of travellers’ inoculation or test result.

Qatar Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Air New Zealand, Gyan Airlines, RwandAir and Singapore Airlines have already signed up for the platform, with Chinese and Indian airlines registering soon.

As a tourism-dependent country that has been hit hard, the government should introduce an immunity passport and waive quarantine for travellers possessing one," says Prativa Pandey of CWDC Clinic Travel Medicine Centre in Kathmandu.

Nepal must strike a balance between measured and unforthcoming entry procedures for arriving passengers. Nepal opened regular domestic flights in September last year, and passenger volumes have surpassed pre-Covid levels. However, arrival restrictions have meant that tourist traffic is still stagnant.

In February, 9,146 foreigners arrived in Kathmandu by air – less than 10% of pre-pandemic figures for the month. Of these, most were Indians, followed by Chinese, Americans and Europeans.

Nepal’s hospitality industry was expecting steady growth at the start of the peak trekking season, and trade officials had been lobbying for visa on arrival and reduced quarantine times which the government, mired in a political crisis, has ignored.

Foreigners flying to Nepal still need a visa before arrival from an embassy abroad. Pre-approval or recommendation letter a travel agency or government department. All travellers must now have Covid-19 negative test result obtained within 72 hours prior to departure. Passengers are also subjected to seven days of hotel quarantine at their own cost, 10 for those coming in from countries with a variant strain.

“We have to make our travel procedures hassle-free as possible to boost arrivals. And there is no point of quarantine if it isn’t even monitored and quarantine is instead spending that time in Pokhara or Chitwan," says Pandey.

Meanwhile, Safe Nepal Travel, a project supported by the National Geographic Society, has launched a website to revive trekking and climbing tourism in Nepal. In the next two months, the site will provide readers latest guidelines from WHO, national government, hospitals and the travel industry in Kathmandu.

Says Alton C. Byres of Safe Nepal Travel: “Through the provision of timely and valuable information related to safe trekking, climbing, travel, and safety protocols, we hope to facilitate the return of adventure tourism to Nepal as soon as possible."
NCP (Pvt Ltd)

Many of you who cannot make head or tail of the recent trends in Nepali politics have SMSed me in the past week to ask: Will Charan Rupavah become prime minister again? Is it possible for Nepal to finally graduate to middle-income country status? And also, does God exist? As a media analyst it is incumbent upon me to refer you to a more competent astrologer who has predicted that the planets are favourably aligned to make Deuba prime minister of Nepal up to a total of seven times. At last count he had only made it to #4, so he has three more match points to go.

Meanwhile, for comrades who believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat and like to define their parties with prefixes like “united” and “aligned,” Nepal’s Communists are splitting faster than uni-cellular amoebas through the process of binary fission.

In fact, recent developments within the NCP have set off a runaway thermonuclear chain reaction. Other sub-atomic comrades, however, are coming together to create even more heat and sound through nuclear fusion. There was already another party called Nepal Communist Paheli when they congested, which means they now have to come up with a completely new name. There is therefore no other option but to distinguish the various incarnations of the party with creative suffixes in brackets. As well-wisher, the Ass offers below a range of choices:

Nepali Communist Party (united)
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified)
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified)

The acronym will get to be even more complicated if, and when, the various permutations of the next coalition government become clearer:

ML-U (ML-MC)
MC-MC (P-NCP)
MC-MC (P-NCP)
MC-MC
MC-MC
MC-MC
MC-MC

The only problem is that the 2017 Constitution has an open definition for which that prohibits horse-trading. The Ass takes umbrage at the specist language insisting that it is only horses that get to be traded. How about us donkeys, aren’t we also good enough to be bought and sold by the highest bidder? Why isn’t anyone ass-trading? Why discriminate?

To which I am sure you are dying to also ask: Is God a he or a she?

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