First impressions

HOME AWAY FROM HOME: Over five million people are estimated to have visited the Nepal Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo this year.

CHONG ZI LIANG
10+2 for public health

Nepal's public health successes are extraordinary, but a 10-fold focus supported by a healthy body politic is needed to consolidate our achievements so far.

Nepal is on track to achieve and even exceed a few of the Millennium Development Goals, such as a reduction of child mortality, fertility, access to drinking water, and basic education. In the past half century, Nepal reduced its under-5 mortality by 80 per cent, from 250 to 50 deaths per 10,000 live births. Most European countries took two centuries to achieve such a reduction.

Some of the greatest public health success stories in Nepal are the eradication of smallpox, polio, leprosy and yaws. There has also been dramatic progress since 1990 in community forestry.

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Prachanda's third step is playing on India's fears in public, while continuing to lobby desperately in private. His support for the Navalites and opposition to Operation Green Hunt is based on the calculation that the Indian establishment will become worried about possible links, and go back to the logjam that motivated the 12-point agreement of detaching the Nepali Maoists and the Indian ultra-left and undermining the latter, an argument reiterated by former RAW chief PK Hormis Tharakan this week in an article opinion piece. If this does not happen, and India continues with its hardline stance, he hopes that open solidarity with Indian Maoists will block Baburam Bhattarai's chance too, since people in Delhi will argue against allowing any Maoist back into power in Nepal.

But Prachanda perhaps does not understand the limits of his power. There is little tolerance in Delhi, or the embassy, for these kinds of games. It has taken a lot - the extension of the CA, hectic lobbying by some key people, the calculation that the Maoists have been relatively weakened and the inside information - for Delhi to give this process a last chance. Prachanda should just look at the militarisation of the PLA and the extension of the CA, hectic lobbying by some key people, the calculation that the Maoists have been relatively weakened and the inside information - for Delhi to give this process a last chance. Prachanda should just look at the militarisation of the PLA.

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Lost in migration

would-be migrants from Bangladesh find themselves in Nepali jails

When he left home in search of a better future nine months ago, Kamal Khan of Bhola, Bangladesh, had no idea he would end up here. Kamal, the eldest son of a village muzazzin, had been led to believe he was going to Iraq as a tailor. But after arriving in Nepal, Kamal’s recruiters told him he would be staying “for a few days” before going on to Baghdad. Those days stretched into months, before the Nepal Police picked up Kamal in a pre-dawn raid on 26 May.

Inspector Praveen Pokharel, in charge of the immigration fraud case, claimed: “According to our information, there are more than 1,000 Bangladeshis awaiting tourist visas in Kathmandu.”

The Bangladesh Embassy in Nepal acknowledged that such incidents are common. “Several such cases have been brought to our attention,” said Emdadul Haque, First Secretary, Consular section. “We get involved and try to help the victims. We have also written to the authorities in Dhaka to take action.”

Deputy Superintendent of Police Deepak Thapa, in charge of the immigration fraud case, said: “We arrested 12 Bangladeshis for alleged involvement in the same scandal.”

Meanwhile, Kamal Khan has been deported from Nepal, and arrived in Dhaka after an arduous overland trip through India. For him, the migrant dream has already turned into a nightmare.

“I didn’t eat for two days,” he said. “I even had to sell my watch to pay for transportation. Now I dread facing my family in Bhola. My father sold a piece of land to pay for transportation. Now I dread facing my family in Bhola. They said they paid a lot of money to agents to get to Arab countries. That’s too bad — they won’t be going to any Arab country from here.”

The plight of people like Kamal Khan fits a broad pattern of deception where many overseas job seekers are being lured into the funnel in Nepal by unscrupulous recruiting agents. In most cases, the recruiters — a nexus of Bangladeshi and Nepali agents — lure Bangladeshis by promising a regular working visa. The Nepal Police, allowing them to get around bans and quotas on Bangladeshi imposed by host countries like Malaysia, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

It is feared that hundreds of Bangladeshis could be in limbo in and around Kathmandu after being duped by recruiters. Many would-be migrants are ending up behind bars for immigration offenses, while others face the daunting prospect of returning home with nothing but their debts.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Deepak Thapa, in charge of the immigration fraud case, said: “A lot of agents have been punished for alleged involvement in the same scandal.”

Despite tough rhetoric, few agents have been punished for ripping off overseas job seekers. Experts say obtaining a conviction in overseas fraud cases would require a high degree of coordination between national law enforcement agencies. They recommend a raft of measures including stern action against dishonest agents and greater vigilance at airports to discourage passport scams.

But preventive measures can only go so far. “Ultimately, the government and the private sector must work together to expand legal avenues for the outflow of manpower,” said Dr Mokaddem Hassan, professor of sociology at Dhaka University. “When legal routes dry up, people tend to use unorthodox methods.”

Nepal acknowledged that such cases have been brought to our attention. “We have written to the authorities in Dhaka to take action.”

Detained Bangladeshi nationals said there were several establishments in the Bagbajar and Koteswor areas that are routinely used as ‘safe houses’ by recruiters. Kamal Khan, who remained in Kathmandu for nine months as he waited to fly to Iraq, was eventually given a Nepali passport (No.255166) that gives him the right to stay in Nepal for one year. He was also picked up in the raid.

Kamal Khan said he had been recruited by an agent named Saifuddin, who was also picked up in the raid. Although Nepal police officers seem to believe they have captured the kingpin of the racketeers, The Daily Star’s investigation indicates that he is only a cog in an elaborate network of agents and sub-agents.

The Nepal authorities are busy tracking other victims of immigration fraud. In a pre-dawn raid on 26 May, the police, acting on an anonymous tip, arrested 12 Bangladeshis.

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The case of Sita Tamang shows the media needs to exercise caution when it comes to covering conflict-sensitive issues.

The transport cannot be categorised as inflammatory. However, in countries where the capacity of the state to protect its citizens is severely limited, the media needs to exercise extra caution. Fact is a powerful weapon and everyone who uses it has the responsibility of making sure that unintended consequences are minimised.

In the field situation of Nepal, the media has to improvise as it reports. Before reporting about conflict-sensitive issues, a journalist needs to ask two questions: is the story contributing to conflict escalation? If so, what can be done to de-escalate the conflict without compromising the accuracy of information, balance and credibility? The rest follows from the answer.

Perhaps it was not necessary to disclose the identity of the victim; her story would have been equally powerful. The names of victimisers may have been forgotten in the full glare of the media’s eyes. The ‘Manju’ alias was a bit too common and perhaps too strong a suggestion that this was just another story. The ongoing debate about releasing names and photographs of victims is a difficult one.

In fact, the way media cover stories of this kind is a complex one. The case of Sita Tamang is a case in point. The story emerged at a time when Nepal was struggling to recover from the conflict.

Khabarpatrika blew it with a lead story, while The Himalaya and other Nepali newspapers failed to make a big deal of the case. Perhaps it was not necessary to provoke reactions that would have even more potential to make the conflict worse. Perhaps it was not necessary to provoke reactions that would have even more potential to make the conflict worse.

The UN Secretary-General Adhika Coomaraswamy and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Pratap Shrestha have been working on a plan to hold peace talks next month. The case of Sita Tamang is a case in point. The story emerged at a time when Nepal was struggling to recover from the conflict.


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What’s sticky?

Simplicity: is the message easy to understand? Most readers quickly forget the messages contained in various development reports because even the executive summaries of those reports use tediously complex language. But the same readers do remember the content of a novel or play because of its simplicity.

Unexpectedness: the human brain ignores what is routine. It notices what is different. For other people’s brains to pay attention, the message must contain something basic one should have picked up while growing up or at school — therefore, not worth bothering about and improving on at work. Yet the reality at workplaces is different. Tales abound of missed meetings, missed sales, inept customers, and company-wide conflicts — all due to poor communications.

One important aspect of communications is to understand how the other side received the content of one’s messages, be they letters to shareholders or advertisements in the media. To be effective, one has to adopt an audience-centric view of communications. This is easier said than done, of course. But a 2007 book, Made to Stick by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, shows how messages can be put together to make them ‘stick’ than done, of course. But a 2007 book, Made to Stick by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, shows how messages can be put together to make them ‘stick’

Emotions: people pay attention to stories. Yet story-telling is seen as something that belongs in kindergarten and not in workplaces.

Concreteness: does the message use concrete language? Good communications use words to paint pictures in their readers’ minds through metaphors and the like. In Nepali conversations, I’ve noticed that most otherwise highly educated people go on and on, sprinkling metaphors and the like. In Nepali conversations, I’ve noticed that most otherwise highly educated people go on and on, sprinkling metaphors and the like.

Credibility: why should anyone believe your messages? When crises strike out of nowhere, nobody believes what the company’s public relations offices say. People are more likely to pay attention to what the CEO or the chairman says or what the business media says. Who do they believe the message is as important as what the message says.

Morality: the Heath brothers write that humans “are wired to feel a sense of justice”. Organisational messages may not contain emotions, but they can be rewritten to tell human-interest stories for the audience to relate to.

Stories: people pay attention to stories. Yet story-telling is seen as something that belongs in kindergarten and not in workplaces.

Hridaya Group, a social youth organisation, opened new showrooms at Kumaripati and Balkumari. A service and spare parts centre are also annexed to each of the showrooms. Customers can also make use of exchange and finance facilities as well.

One more show: Morang Auto Works, the sole authorised distributor for Yamaha Motorcycles in Nepal, has opened a new showroom, Kismat Automobiles, in Bhairahawa. In addition to showcasing all available Yamaha models, the showroom will offer valuation of old bikes and easy financing facilities for buyers. Kismat Automobiles is kickstarting business with an exchange and service camp.

Budding on: Rosebud School will start u+2 classes in the management stream from this year on. Apart from regular classes, the school incorporates project works and internships in its courses. The school is located in Buddhapani, Baneshwor.

The six elements of successful messages are:

- Credibility
- Simplicity
- Concreteness
- Unexpectedness
- Emotions
- Stories

The six elements could well be the key to making messages stick. Conveniently, they make up the acronym SUCCES.
The world of south Asia

If you missed out last year, Travelling Film South Asia 2010 brings you the best non-fiction of the region

And the winners were...

The Salt Stories (84’)
India, 2008, dir – Lalit Vachani
Joint Winner of the Second Best Film Award

In 1930, a group of Indians led by a frail, elderly man marched 241 miles. They marched for salt. Mahatma Gandhi was able to craft an anti-colonial nationalist movement around a basic issue of livelihood: the right of Indians to make and consume their own salt. Almost eight decades later, the film retraces Gandhi’s steps, following the famous Dandi salt march trail in a film that focuses on the issues of livelihood in modern, globalising India.

The Promised Land (90’)
Bangladesh, 2008, dir – Tanvir Mokammel
Joint Winner of the Second Best Film Award

A tale of statelessness spanning six decades and three countries, The Promised Land tells about the 160,000 strong Urdu-speaking community of Bangladesh, living isolated lives in 116 camps across the country. The term ‘Urdu-speakers’, ‘Non-Bengalis’ and ‘Biharis’ is used interchangeably to refer to the Muslim people, who originally emigrated from India to newly created East Pakistan in 1947 and afterwards. Many of them originated from the state of Bihar and were fleeing large-scale communal massacres. Three decades later, during the struggle for independence in Bangladesh in 1971, this community became embroiled in conflict. Branded as collaborators against Bangladesh’s independence, this moment was defining one for the Urdu-speakers, one that has left a devastating legacy.

The Last Rites (17’)
Bangladesh, 2008, dir – Yasmine Kabir
Winner of the Ram Bahadur Trophy for Best Film

A silent film depicting the ship-breaking yards of Chittagong, Bangladesh, a final destination for ships too old to ply the oceans. Every year, hundreds of ships are sent to these yards. And every year, thousands of people come to these yards in search of jobs. Risking their lives to save themselves from hunger, they breathe in asbestos dust and toxic waste. The ship has to die and man has to help it die, as if man and vessel were united in common bondage. The Last Rites bears testament to the resilience of the human spirit.

The way to the road (60’)
Afghanistan, 2009, dir – Bahareh Hosseini
The girls do kick well.

1pm The Battle for Pakistan (40’)
Pakistan, 2009, dir – Mahen Zia
Do extremism and madrasas converge?

The Last Rites (17’)
Bangladesh, 2008, dir – Yasmine Kabir
Where the ships go to die.

2.30pm Children of God (89’)
Nepal, 2009, dir – Yi Seung-jun
The kids of the Ayahgath cremation grounds.

3pm Afghan Girls Can Kick (50’)
Afghanistan, 2009, dir – Ben Campbell & Cosmo Campbell
The new Nepali-Tibet road and the locals.

Saturday, 17 July

11am The Salt Stories (84’)
India, 2008, dir – Lalit Vachani
Following Gandhi’s salt march in our time.

1pm The Battle for Pakistan (40’)
Pakistan, 2009, dir – Mahen Zia
Do extremism and madrasas converge?

The Last Rites (17’)
Bangladesh, 2008, dir – Yasmine Kabir
Where the ships go to die.

3.30pm In Search of the Riyal (60’)
Afghanistan, 2009, dir – Kesang Tseten
Deep study of Nepali migrants in the Gulf.

Sunday, 18 July

10am Saamam (The Music) (42’)
India, 2009, dir – Ramachandran K
Homage to Carnatic music and M D Ramanathan.

11.30am The Promised Land (90’)
Bangladesh, 2008, dir – Tanvir Mokammel
Stigma still haunts Biharis in Dhaka.

1.30pm Mayomi (50’)
Sri Lanka, 2008, dir – Carol Salter
Post-tsunami, she struggles for her family.

3pm Out of Thin Air (50’)
India, 2009, dir – Samreen Farooqui & Shabani

If you missed out last year, Travelling Film South Asia 2010 brings you the best non-fiction of the region.
Buddha’s Orphans is ambitious in a way perhaps no work of fiction by a Nepali writing in English has been. It spans almost the entirety of post-Rana Nepal, ending with the royal massacre of 2001, and in doing so follows the lifelines of four generations in Kathmandu. An abandoned orphan, Raja, grows up next to Rani Pokhari, the site of his unknown mother’s suicide. Nilu grows out of her own prosperous, but dysfunctional family. Together, they live through the joys and sorrows of the tumultuous decades of the Nepali half-century. An epic premise, and who better to bring it to life than pioneering Nepali author Samrat Upadhyay? Indeed, a blurb at the back likens it to a ‘great old-fashioned Russian novel’.

But one fears such voluble praise does a book no favours. The implicit comparison to such luminaries as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and of course, Chekhov, ludicrous, and builds up the kind of expectation that hardly any living author anywhere could satisfy. Are we even expected to take the praise at face value in Kathmandu, where audiences and peers are all too eager to hype each other up, lest the modesty of their talents be revealed to all?

Striped of the hype, then, Upadhyay’s latest novel is a reasonably entertaining romp through Kathmandu’s recent history. As Kanak Dixit noted in the Tavern Tales session at the Nepal-Bharat Library last Saturday, Buddha’s Orphans reminds us there was a Kathmandu before 1990. Upadhyay has gone to some effort to recreate the setting in which his characters take root, and it is instructive to observe how he incrementally conjures up the congestion of the modern-day capital, as well as the changing public moods through the Panchayat-era and into the confusion of the violent, democratic 1990s.

In contrast, Upadhyay’s characters do not entirely convince in the manner of the great Russian novels. It doesn’t help that both Raja and Nilu grow up in extreme circumstances in the bland conformity of Panchayat-era Kathmandu, and that every act of theirs seems designed to entertain the reader rather than conform to reality.

The very strangeness of a tale is often that which warrants its narration. But Upadhyay’s cause isn’t much helped by his publisher in the subcontinent, Rupa & Co. They clearly don’t bother to edit: Buddha’s Orphans features embarrassing typos, narrative dislocations and ill-advised flashbacks. Whatever charm there is in Upadhyay’s straightforward, detailed prose is diminished by the sloppy editing, which is an affront to Nepali audiences. If there is a true orphan in this tale, it has to be the novel itself.

Rabi Thapa
President and MD of General Motors India, Karl Slym, was in Nepal last week to launch a new mini-car from the Chevrolet series, and found some time to chat with Nepali Times:

You have just launched a new mini-car called Beat. Is this the fastest growing segment in the industry?

The mini segment is always the fastest growing. The area that has been created by Tata’s Nano is expected to be the new fastest growing segment. Just before the recession began, the luxury car market was beginning to grow fast. Towards the beginning of this year SUVs started to come back to the market. But if you are in Kathmandu, you are not going to buy a big car because you can’t park it, you can’t maneuver it and if anyone touches it, you get a huge bill to repair it.

Are you watching what your competitors are doing?

We have overtaken them so I would say their biggest competitor is us. We have the fifth biggest market. We are the fastest growing nameplate in this region. I think everyone is watching Chevrolet rather than Chevrolt watching everyone else.

Compared to other countries, cars are very expensive in Nepal. How does this affect the manufacturers?

The price of a car is based on the import duty. The cost of the Beat will be more expensive and so will the costs of the competitors. I understand when countries penalise imports but the idea here is to incentivise the in-house job opportunities. You can’t just penalise without helping. If you look at countries like China and India, and ASEAN, they have all provided support methodologies for people to become manufacturers in the country. That doesn’t mean financial support but infrastructural support.

The market for hybrid cars is growing in Europe and America. When can we expect the same technology in this region?

The problem is the gap between what it requires as a fuel and what the infrastructure is capable of supplying. In Thailand, there is ethanol distribution; in Thailand, there is ethanol fuel and what the infrastructure is capable of supplying. In Thailand, there is ethanol distribution; in Thailand, there is ethanol. We have an 83-hectare Jatropha farm in Gujarat, which produces a biodiesel product. From the government is incentivising it and people are moving to ethanol. We have an 83-hectare Jatropha farm in Gujarat, which produces a biodiesel product. In Thailand, there is ethanol distribution; in Thailand, there is ethanol.

Tavern Tales, a short talk on Writing about Home by acclaimed author Samrat Upadhyay. Sunday 31 July, 5pm sharp, Quizote’s Cove, Jawalakhel, 5538974, Entry Rs 50.

Kabita Yatra, solo poetry recitation by poet Vijaylal Pratik. Saturday 20 July, 5.30pm sharp, Gurukul, Old Baneswor, Tickets Rs 50 and Rs 100, 4446696.

Inner Beauty, Mayuka Kozawa touches the inner beauty of Mikhail art in her paintings, Saturday July 10 to Wednesday July 14, 11am to 7pm, Chai Chai Café, Pulchowk, 984924012, 9808567361.

Weekly Farmers’ Market, a market like no other with organic and gourmet food, healthy breakfasts, fresh coffee and lots of socialising. Saturday July 9, 9am to 12pm, 1905, 4215068.

Poetic Moments, an exhibition of paintings by various artists. Till Saturday 17 July, 7am to 8pm, Kanpur Art Gallery, Boudanath Circle, 9851076492.

Career Fair, organised by SAPE, leading educational fair organiser in South East Asia. From Friday 9 July to 13 July, Exhibition Hall, Bhrikut Mandap.

Omkartangas, solo painting exhibition by Gaurav Shrestha that expresses the omkar symbol in its various forms. Till Tuesday 13 July, 10am to 6pm except on Sundays and holidays, 4241942.

Delicate DedICATIONS, solo painting exhibition by artist Jasmine Rajbandari. Till Tuesday 13 July, 10am to 7pm. Sabia Gallery, Kupondol, 9841469487.

SFF 3 Rs. Cine Fund launch, a local participation project to develop Short Film Factory as a locally-empowered film fund in Nepal, accompanied by performances by Abhaboross and At F4, Friday 9 July, start 6pm, House of Music, Thamel, 4471104.

8th Annual Wine Festival, be there at Kilroy’s for the biggest congregation of wine lovers in Kathmandu, Kilroy’s, Thamel, 4250440.

Where to catch the last of the action from the planet’s biggest sporting event: Sports Bar, the only sports bar in town boasts a 109-inch screen with surround sound and the usual cocktails and drinks menu. Cover charge is Rs 500, but that will mean you won’t have to worry about NEA’s shenangians. Kamalipati, 4438017.

Rox Bar, watch the matches on the big screen at the bar and drink special cocktails prepared just for the occasion. For the aficionados among you. Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4492324.

Imago Del, relaxed and friendly, it has a 250-watt sound system. Seats only 50 so come early and stay on. Lazimpat, 4444246.

The Factory, a special chef is being flown over to create a menu corresponding with the countries batting it out. There will be games, prizes and pitchers of beer. Thamel, 4701185.


1905, it’s all about the food at 1905 in Kantipath, which is featuring a special menu throughout the World Cup with country-themed food or snacks. Kantipath, 4225272.

Cinnamon Lounge, spacious lounge with a menu featuring grilled meat of various kinds. For the hungry man in you. Jalma, 5521339.

Vesper Café, a well-stocked bar and an airy patio to cool off during the intervals, and intense cheering. Jalmael, 5548179.

For the fancy restaurants do not cater to your excitement levels, the World Cup games being projected at your neighbourhood intersections surely will. Get as close as you can to watching the game live without getting into the Rainbow Nation by heading down towards the roaring applause and giant size projector screens. We’ve heard some enterprising types are even hanging cocktail sticks and cocktails.

Catch the finals in Mangal Bajar, Basantapur, Kantipath, Mādra Park, Baneswor, Saneja, Janabahal, Kantipath, Maruthi, Dikahobahal, Khushi and Asian. Entree free everywhere except in Khushi, where they charge Rs 25 per show. We hear there’s some serious betting going on in Asian. Oops! that’s illegal.

DINING

Lazy Gringo: fall-saft Mexican restaurant, the lemonade with refills is what won us over; but the food is mighty fine. Bring your own booze though. J awalakhel, Open daily, 11am-9pm except Monday, 2150017.

Everest Steak House, an old school joint for everything steak. A sanctuary for meat. Thamel, near Chhetrapati Chowk, 4200473.

Summit Hotel, push Western-style dining area with candlelight and a romantic night view of the city. Get really busy with the succulent ribs basket, and add the finishing touch with a hot Dutch apple pie. Thamel, 5521810.

Hankook Sarang, serves up the incredible tastes of Korea, including superlatve steamed rice to anchor meals for kings. Thamel, near Roadhouse Café.

Attila Manj band – live in concert, dance to the groovy music, DJ SMan later on the wagon. Friday 9 July, 8pm onwards, Regal Hall, 1905, Rs 50/person, 4225272, 4215068.

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, KJC brings renowned German musician Rainer Pusich to town to share his knowledge, an unmissable opportunity. From Wednesday 21 July to 20 September, KJC, info@katjazz.com.np.
Cycle city

There is an amazingly simple solution to curbing air pollution in the Kathmandu Valley (and your weight). Ditch your motorbike and get on a bicycle. And if you think the precarious road conditions of Kathmandu won’t let you, there is some good news in the offing. An enthusiastic group of youths have devoted themselves to turning the capital into a cycle-friendly city by 2020.

An ambitious goal, but the small yet swiftly increasing breed of cyclists in the city can at least look forward to breathing easier. Started a year ago by students of Kathmandu University, Rajan Khatik and Shail Shrestha, the Kathmandu Cycle City 2020 campaign is moving ahead with full force. It already has 700 active members, who use bicycles as an angular means of transport.

Their plans involve building cycle lanes, promoting cycling to commute short distances, and encouraging youth participation in cycling sports. In the last year alone, they have organised cycle rallies and conducted cycle workshops to raise the profile of cycling. The campaign has also been lobbying government bodies to build cycle lanes on newly constructed roads and accommodate cycle lanes within existing road networks.

If the authorities reciprocate the campaign’s zeal, the usual spectacle of Kathmandu’s infamous road traffic, which makes everyday cycling more akin to adventure sports, will hopefully take a turn for the better. Ridesafe!

Chinese Whispers: A well-wisher conveys a wish-list to former king Gyanendra on the occasion of the latter’s 64th birthday on Wednesday.

Go in Peace, Comrade: Nepali Congress leaders pay their last respects to Bal Bahadur Rai, who passed away at the age of 90 on Sunday.

What’s Going On? The Public Accounts Committee grills political parties and ministry staff on alleged irregularities in disbursement of funds, Wednesday.

Weekend Weather: The authorities have warned that the usual spectacle of Kathmandu’s infamous road traffic, which makes everyday cycling more akin to adventure sports, will hopefully take a turn for the better. Ridesafe!
Last weekend, I joined my mother in the field to plant paddy seedlings in three tiny terraces by the side of a river. It’s a task that always seems a little futile as the soil is comprised of pebbles and sand. Any fertile particles once there have been swept up and away by the trucks and tractors driving to the river for a wash, allowing the rocks underneath to enjoy the sunshine.

Like last year, the six-inch canal that leads to the field was delivering only droplets, a disappointment for seedlings that like to swim in water. Yet there was my mother, carrying spades, shovels and buckets, insisting on planting in the hope that using the land and the mulch produced during the harvest will make the soil a little more fertile next year.

Her hard work and the unshakeable belief that it will, one day, lead to success seemed particularly remarkable this year. I returned to Kathmandu with mud under my toenails to find pictures of the Fourth of July celebrations of my friends in America. Among the pictures of Wave Your Flag cakes and “the bunch of slobs trying to eat 78 hot dogs without barfing” were messages of pride in the American dream: the promise of freedom and with it prosperity and success, the idea that with hard work, everyone can achieve prosperity.

Stuff of dreams

If nations were people what kind of person would Nepal be?

Wave Your Flag cakes and “the bunch of slobs trying to eat 78 hot dogs without barfing” were messages of pride in the American dream: the promised freedom and with it prosperity and success, the idea that with hard work, everyone can achieve prosperity.

Whether it is the families behind Swyambhnu breaking rocks day in and day out, or the men who lug around baskets of fruits on their bicycles in the high afternoon heat, the culture of hard work is not alien to Nepal. Yet there are also cases like that of Basudevi Sunar of Rajpur who was forced to flee her village with two young daughters two weeks ago because she was ploughing her land to grow food. She was told that as a woman, she is not allowed to use a plough while her (by her account, useless) husband is still alive. So her neighbours shaved her head, paraded her around the village with a garland of shoes around her neck, then kicked her out.

What kind of people punish a woman trying to make a living? And what does it say about the Nepal we want to live in? What is the Nepal of our dreams? Many countries have slowly picked themselves up after ravaging wars, aided by a collective vision. A dream. After the Korean War, South Korea rallied its human resources to build a new prosperous nation. After the Second World War, the Japanese decided to ditch the warrior ethos and adopted a national policy centred on peace. Germany too tempered itself to put an end to its imperial ambitions in Europe.

It holds true that in life, without a vision, it is hard to move forward, hard to bind people together, and hard to lead people. If nations were people, what kind of person would Nepal be? Would it be a man of subsistence stumbling from one day to another? Would it only look out for itself, while making sure nobody is doing better? Never before in our history have we had so much freedom, never before have we had so much control over our destiny. This is the time to set our national vision, a dream that goes beyond the political masquerading that Naya Nepal has become. This is a time for Nepali heroes. Because people are the stuff dreams are made of.
Nobody had anticipated a century ago that countries would enter into major wars over oil. Today, when identical predictions are made over water, the response is strikingly similar: disbelief and a general lack of concern. But experts say things are going to change. Water is going to be the most contested resource in the world in the coming years. Indian think-tank Strategic Foresight Group’s The Himalayan Challenge: Water Security in Emerging Asia, warns that the four countries of the Himalayan sub-region—Nepal, India, China and Bangladesh—will have to make do with 275 billion cubic metres less water over the next 20 years.

This figure is greater than the total amount of water available in Nepal at present. But the Himalayan river basins are home to 20 per cent of the world’s population. Water depletion in this region on such a scale, therefore, means serious social, economic and political repercussions worldwide.

The report warns that glacial melting will cause rivers such as the Ganges in India and the Yellow River in China to turn into seasonal rivers by the second half of the century, greatly undermining the livelihoods of millions who live in these river basins.

Because of water depletion, glacial melting and erratic rainfall patterns, there will be a massive decrease in agricultural production. Food crop production will decrease by at least 30-50 per cent in India and China, forcing them to import from other countries. Consequently, the price of food will skyrocket in the international market and nearly 100 million people in the four countries may be forced to migrate. According to the report, the food crisis and mass migration will lead to conflicts both within and between nations sharing river basins.

As water resources dwindle, water demand will increase along with population growth and economic development. Inevitably, countries will tighten their grip on water resources.

The Nepal problem: too much water, too little water

We hear much about the abundant water resources of Nepal. But 80 per cent of the annual rainfall of Nepal falls between June and September. The monsoon is characterised by heavy precipitation, culminating in flooding across the country. The rest of the year is marked by long spells of drought. There have been marked changes in the behaviour of the monsoon, and therefore the pattern of water availability in Nepal. This year’s delayed and sporadic monsoon has already turned brown. Nepal depends heavily on rainwater for irrigation, and only 35 per cent of its arable land has irrigation facilities.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Nepal will have a food deficit of more than 316,465 tonnes this year, owing to the unfavourable monsoon. The report warns that with changing weather patterns, erratic monsoons and rising temperatures, the ‘too much water, too little water’ syndrome is likely to continue in Nepal.

Water security is a cross-cutting issue with implications for political and economic security. The impact of such massive changes cannot be addressed by the unilateral efforts of nations. The report recommends transboundary collaboration among the four nations for integrated river basin management.
Long journey home

Former child soldier Sita Tamang’s powerful testimony at the Security Council focused the world’s attention on Nepal’s Maoists

Sita Tamang, a former child soldier, was excited to go to New York. But the journey she embarked on last month was less to visit the country she had heard so much about than to fulfill a historic mission.

Sita was invited to the 641st meeting of the UN Security Council by the UN Special Rapporteur on Children in Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy.

On 17 June, Sita was seated next to Radhika Coomaraswamy in the Security Council chamber, where there was representation from 60 countries. Over concerns for her safety, she was introduced as Manju Gurung. Then she recounted her ordeal of abduction by the Maoists at age 11. “My goal is to complete my studies first and then help rescue troubled children like myself,” she said.

Council President Patricia Espinosa, Secretary for External Relations of Mexico, said all types of child abuse during insurgency or war are war crimes. She urged all states to take stringent measures against those involved in such activities. Speakers also argued the Maoists should be charged with war crimes in Sita’s case.

Following her presentation, delegates suggested the council take stringent measures to bring the recruiters of child soldiers to justice.

US representative Susan Rice, quoting the nineteenth century abolitionist Frederick Douglass, said: “It’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Citing Sita’s case of successful reintegration, she emphasized the need to join the campaign against child recruitment into insurgencies. “Even after conflicts end, scars remain in the form of prolonged trauma and impaired social, emotional and cognitive development,” she said.

Former Maoist child soldier Sita Tamang, who gave testimony at the United Nations Security Council in New York last month, has been threatened by Maoists at her home in Chitwan.

Sita, now 18, was introduced as Manju Gurung by the UN Special Rapporteur on Children in Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy. Sita recounted her life story, detailing how she was forced into the Maoist movement at age 11. “Upon her return, five combatants from the UN-supervised Shaktikhor Cantonment went to Sita’s home while she was out grazing goats. A car stopped at our house and five people came out of a car looking for my daughter,” said a terrified Dhan Maya Tamang. “They said she might have to face consequences in the future.”

The Maoists said to me that I should not have criticised them, and that something bad could happen to me in the future,” Sita said.

Sita first told her story to Himal Khabarpatra three months ago, as part of a series on what has become of former Maoist combatants. The UN then took her to New York as a case study of how ex-child soldiers can be successfully rehabilitated.

Human rights organisations and journalists in Chitwan say they are worried about Sita’s safety and the local police has posted a sentry at her house.

Sita’s story

I first saw the Maoists in 2002. I was studying in Class Four and must have been about 11 years old. The Maoists were running a ‘one family, one member’ campaign. Because my parents were occupied with work, I was compelled to go. They said, “Bourgeois education is useless, you should join us, and didn’t let me return home.

After that, I don’t know where Tamang was. She was seven days we reached my maternal uncle’s home in Dhituar. I was very scared. I managed to write a letter to my mother. She came to my rescue and took me home. I was terrified when I found out that while I was at school, the Maoists had come to my house and threatened to kill me if I didn’t join them.

During the ceasefire in July 2003, the Maoists organised a general assembly where we went as volunteers from our school. However, after the event concluded, they forcefully took us to Ghdung. They threatened us and made us work night and day. I would watch other children go to school as I walked along with weapons. At that time I was unaware of child rights. I did not know that using child soldiers is a crime. The Maoists made us walk on difficult terrain.

Commanders would give orders from the back. In despair, I went back to Narayangadh even though I was threatened. I refused, I was harassed. I was compelled to marry. When I refused, I was harassed. I couldn’t stay there so I ran away from home but again they came for me. They took me to the cantonment and talked of taking action against me. Two days later Iran away to Nanyangadh even though I was sick.

I then came across a rehabilitation program that helped me to resume my studies. I now study in Class Nine and I am also the president of a children’s club. But the fear of the Maoists still haunts me.

As recounted to the UN Security Council, New York, 16 June

Threatened

Former Maoist child soldier Sita Tamang, who gave testimony at the United Nations Security Council in New York last month, has been threatened by Maoists at her home in Chitwan.

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Win-bean situation

Dipendra Bachalow in Kantipur, 2 July

Bhairapur: Vegetable farming has transformed the livelihoods of farmers of Shalikhor VDC especially wards 7, 8 and 9. The villagers started vegetable farming 13 years ago. District Agriculture Office (DAO) records show these villagers produce about 42,964 metric tonnes of vegetables during winter and 23,368 metric tonnes in summer. The villagers traditionally farmed potatoes, cauliflowers and cabbages. Since they switched to green beans, there has been no looking back, and their living standards have gone up noticeably.

According to DAO chief Laxman Poudel, a migrant from Dhading, the district introduced the beans to the village some years ago. Since they found it profitable, other villagers followed suit in cultivating it. Now, 600 farmers cultivate the bean on 200 hectares. Moreover, they have doubled their cultivation on another 30 hectares. “We have managed to build cement houses,” he says. According to him, all bean farmers have new houses and are able to meet their expenses. The beans have replaced their thatched roofs with tin recently. “Some farmers have even made doors and windows from it,” he adds. “We manage to make ends meet. He even manages to send his children to school, and even sends them to college,” the farmer says.

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Kathmandu: Nepali hydro-engineers are leaving the country for jobs in conflict-affected Afghanistan, where there is a high demand for a skilled workforce. “Experienced Nepali hydro-engineers are in demand,” says an official at the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) who has returned from Afghanistan. He worked in KFW Bank in Afghanistan for a year. KFW has invested billions of dollars in the hydro sector. According to the official, half a dozen Nepalis are employed in major projects in hydro projects, with two engineers overseeing many such projects in Afghanistan. They are paid a minimum of US$80,000 a month, and some are paid as much as US$250,000 a month.

Afghanistan is getting aid from over the world. Donors have made a huge investment in short-term hydropower projects. The risk is high but a year of income is enough for a year’s expenses,” says hydro-energy expert Dambar Bahadur Nepali. In Nepal, the project head of a hydropower project is usually paid about Rs 200,000 (about US$2,500) a month. But Nepali hydro-engineers with two years of experience in the field are poached by foreign hydropower companies. “A project needs 8 to 10 engineers,” says Nepali. “Big projects require at least 30 engineers. NEA engineers take unpaid leave to work in foreign companies due to the attractive pay and perks.”

NEA produces about 400 hydro-engineers annually.
Far pavilion

T
he Nepal Tourism Board may have hit upon a great fundraising strategy completely by chance. Our roving correspondent took these snaps of bronze Buddhas at the Nepal pavilion of the World Expo in Shanghai this week. Even without a sign saying ‘Donations Welcome’, Chinese visitors (there have been 5 million so far) have dropped oodles of yuan. The only Nepali officials present seemed busy hawking handicrafts on the side, and it wasn’t clear what happened to the money at the mummified cadaver (5 million so far) have been collected.

After all, no one ever throws money at his head on fire and that the Chinese may be so impressed with the thoroughness of our APF they could request a loan to quell future disturbances in Lhasa. Then what do we do?

No wonder the Chinese are so spooked by a Buddhist monk’s 75th birthday. After all, no one ever throws money at his head on fire and that the Chinese may be so impressed with the thoroughness of our APF they could request a loan to quell future disturbances in Lhasa. Then what do we do?

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