WORKING IN HIGH PLACES

Given the Nepali state’s failure to protect millions of migrant workers abroad and offer them safe and decent jobs at home, it is not surprising that the government was caught off guard by the tragedy on Mt Everest last week. The high death toll of Nepali climbers should be a wakeup call to address overcrowding on the world’s highest mountain, increase compensation and insurance for workers, and to set aside more of the climbing fees for welfare of expedition support staff.

134 Nepali signs and the world’s tallest mountain (8,848m) have been killed in over 100 avalanche incidents.

Percentage of deaths in avalanches between 1900-2000

Nepali 46.8%

Foreigners 28.3%

Avalanche statistics: statistics given without a projection of Nepal’s climbing season for 2014. The data reflect only an overview. Nepal is a highly mountainous country with an extended climber’s season. It is normal to have several avalanches throughout the season.

COME HOME: Among the three Nepali climbers still missing is Ash Bahadur Gurung. His wife, Menuka, and 10-month son, Awin (left), wait at their home in Thamel for news.

“I STILL CALL HIM EVERYDAY” PAGE 17

But a week after the avalanche, hope is fading for Gurung and the other two missing, Pemba Tenji Sherpa and Tenzing Chhotar Sherpa.

LAST GOODBYE: The funeral in Kathmandu for one of the 13 killed in the avalanche this week. Since the first fatality in the spring of 1922, Mt Everest has claimed the lives of 104 Nepalis. The majority of them are fathers, sons, brothers and sisters from Solu Khumbu. Nepali high altitude workers are exposed to much more risk than their clients in the Himalaya. The solution is to ensure better work conditions for the Nepali staff, higher peak fees to reduce over-crowding, pre-expedition experience of clients and setting aside part of the climbing fees for workers’ welfare.

DANGEROUS BUSINESS

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It is time the government set aside more substantial portion of the fees it earns from Himalayan climbing to the welfare of workers who lay their lives on the line.

If the government has already collected more than $3 million in fees this season, then the workers in other expeditions, want to lose their income. It may not be a Mount Everest moratorium this season to draw the world’s attention to the critical role of Nepali workers in climbing the world’s highest peak. Last Friday’s disaster on Everest drew attention to other Nepal’s forced to work in hazardous conditions building stadiums in Qatar, as female household help in Kuwait, or as security guards in Kabul. The Nepali state doesn’t seem to provide safe and decent jobs within the country, nor protect its citizens from the clutches of ruthless recruiters.

Given these failures, it is not surprising that the state has been caught off guard by the scale of the tragedy on Mt Everest. The government needs to urgently address overcrowding with a new pricing policy on the world’s highest mountain, as female household help in Kuwait, or as security guards in Kabul. The Nepali state doesn’t seem to provide safe and decent jobs within the country, nor protect its citizens from the clutches of ruthless recruiters.

Forgive and Move On.

The tragedy and avalanche disaster on Mt Everest last week that took the lives of 16 Nepalis was not wholly unexpected. The Khumbu Icefall is a treacherous gauntlet that this season claimed the lives of 16 Nepalis. The workers who lay their lives on the line to get to the top are fully aware of the perils. There are ‘subjective’ dangers in mountain climbing—luck of training, experience, ambition, overconfidence, carelessness or recklessness. Lately, the pull factor of the world’s highest mountain has attracted woefully unprepared climbers to its slopes who not only endanger themselves, but also put other climbers in harm’s way.

‘Objective’ dangers, on the other hand, are related to weather, avalanche or rockfall, earthquakes, and lately, global warming. Alpinists weigh all the factors and take a calculated risk. Sometimes expeditions are called off when objective dangers are deemed unacceptable as in 2012 when a team leader concluded that the Icefall was too hazardous.

It is when expeditions become over-commercialised, the mountain is oversold, there is too much money at stake, that the tipping point is breached. The occupational hazard of working on the mountain then becomes a losing gambit, as the commentaries in this edition (see page 16-17) by veteran climbers note. It’s not that the workers on Mt Everest don’t know that they are exposed to more risks than their employers, they have accepted it as a part of the job they have to do. It’s just that there have been too long left that although their remuneration has improved it is still disproportionate to the dangers in their line of work. Hence, there is that very unfair and disgraceful situation where there is a lack of justice. The Himalaya is 12 times richer than being a US soldier or police officer.

There is a pall of gloom in the Khumbu region this week, almost every Sherpa household has lost someone who was related, or a friend. The government has reacted surprisingly swiftly to raise compensation levels, but it will still be difficult for families who have lost their main breadwinner like Ash Bahadur Gurung (see story inside).

The state has been caught off guard by the scale of the tragedy on Mt Everest. The government needs to urgently address overcrowding with a new pricing policy on the world’s highest mountain, as female household help in Kuwait, or as security guards in Kabul. The Nepali state doesn’t seem to provide safe and decent jobs within the country, nor protect its citizens from the clutches of ruthless recruiters. Given these failures, it is not surprising that the state has been caught off guard by the scale of the tragedy on Mt Everest. The government needs to urgently address overcrowding with a new pricing policy on the world’s highest mountain, as female household help in Kuwait, or as security guards in Kabul. The Nepali state doesn’t seem to provide safe and decent jobs within the country, nor protect its citizens from the clutches of ruthless recruiters.
Nothing unites the political parties of Nepal more than their fear of having to face the long arm of the law on atrocities they were responsible for during the conflict. Interesting that politicians who think nothing of punishing the people with crippling shutdowns over petty disagreements show such striking solidarity and unity of purpose.

We are now told that the_Dekendra Thapa was an informer so he deserved to be tortured and buried alive. That the personally motivated murders of Ujjan Shrestha and his brothers should be seen as a political act because it was carried out by Maoist party members? That the custodial death of Krishna Sen Ickhu should not be probed because he was a Maniist? Mains Sunar’s mother Devi, Ujjan Shrestha’s sister Sabhri, Krishna Prasad Adhikari’s...
Pro-perpetrator justice

At the outset, let me state that the bill on forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) needs revisions to ensure justice for victims. Some NC leaders including Law Minister Narhari Acharya have clarified that there is no provision for ‘general amnesty’ in the bill on forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Inquiry Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has made recommendation for amnesty to such person to the Government of Nepal. This was clearly the escape clause for perpetrators from both sides. Sitaula, for his part, has expressed surprise that the OHCHR and others have criticised the bill for its amnesty clause. Sitaula and the Maoist apologists need to re-read their Preamble of the CPAs which categorically prohibits pardons for gross abuses of human rights and orders an adherence to international norms. Clause 26 on pardon is devious. Although sub-clause 2 contains a specific exception from amnesty for rape, it does not talk about the 35-day statute of limitation on reporting rape from amnesty for rape, it does not talk about the 35-day statute of limitation on reporting rape. The draft bill does not say anything about prosecution for grave crimes, its scope is limited by Clause 22 (on reconciliation) and Clause 26 (provision on pardon). And Section 25 (4) says that if a person holding public position is found to have committed a gross human rights violation, the commissions ought to recommend departmental action against him to the concerned authority and that the said authority should take action within three months. Then the bill says the commissions can recommend prosecution to the government through the Office of the Attorney General. The AG doesn’t have to act on the commission’s recommendation to prosecute, however, just state reasons for it. End of story. We know what happens when AGs are political appointees from the Babhunan Bhatarai-Mukti Pradhan combine ordering the Dailekh district attorney’s office in 2013 not to pursue the Dekendra Thapa murder case.

The draft should be amended so that commissions can approach the courts directly in cases involving gross abuses and heinous crimes. The commissions should also be independent, impartial and powerful to reassure victims that the intention is honest because Clause 39 prevents any further investigation of the cases. Even if the bill is improved and strong and independent commissions are formed, the chances of completing the task in two years time is remote. Based on my own reporting trips in some districts during 2007 and 2009, most families wanted to pardon and move on. But they wanted the complete truth out.

THE DEADLINE
Damakant Jayshi

and the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappeared Persons. Yes and no. The bill allows perpetrators to be pardoned under the provision of mediaslip (‘patch up’) between them and the relatives of victims and survivors. Surely, it is the victims who must have the final say, not any political party, the security forces, or human rights activists. Remarks by Acharya and his colleagues, NC vice president Ram Chandra Paudel and general secretary Krishna Prasad Sitaula, are misleading and counterproductive. Paudel was home minister of Peace Secretariat, he oversaw the first draft of the Truth and Reconciliation Act 2007. It had this provision (No. 25): ‘Notwithstanding anything contained in Section 24, if any person is found to have committed gross violation of human rights or crime against humanity in course of abiding by his/her duties or with the objective of fulfiling political motives, the Commission may make recommendation for amnesty to such person to the Government of Nepal.’ This was clearly the escape clause for perpetrators from both sides. Sitaula, for his part, has expressed surprise that the OHCHR and other human rights organisations were opposing a bill that contained provisions for punishment for perpetrators, and abided by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2006. The OHCHR and others have criticised the bill for its amnesty clause. Sitaula and the Maoist apologists need to re-read their Preamble of the CPA: ‘Remaining committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, international humanitarian laws and the fundamental principles and basic principles and norms related to human rights.’

Here’s another gem from Sitaula: ‘While signing the peace accord, nowhere do you have provisions calling for action against everyone. Only the crimes against those unrelated to the conflict would be prosecuted. If this is the guiding principle, then the torture and murder of Manist cadres at Bhairabastu and 19 Maoist massacred in Doramba have no recourse to justice because, as per Sitaula’s logic, the killings were part of the conflict. The UCPN(M) has amply demonstrated it is not for it. End of story. We know what happens to hundreds of cases (including grave crimes) that have been withdrawn from courts across the country since 2006. It also violates two directives from the Supreme Court which categorically forbids pardons for gross abuses of human rights and orders an adherence to international norms. Clause 26 on pardon is devious. Although sub-clause 2 contains a specific exception from amnesty for rape, it does not talk about the 35-day statute of limitation on reporting rape under criminal laws. The clause doesn’t mention murder, torture, abduction and clubs them under ‘other serious crimes.’ Are the drafters banking on the fact that most women would be reluctant to file rape cases? While Clause 25 of the draft speaks about prosecution for grave crimes, its scope is limited by Clause 22 (on reconciliation) and Clause 26 (provision on pardon). And Section 25 (4) says that if a person holding public position is found to have committed a gross human rights violation, the commissions ought to recommend departmental action against him to the concerned authority and that the said authority should take action within three months. Then the bill says the commissions can recommend prosecution to the government through the Office of the Attorney General. The AG doesn’t have to act on the commission’s recommendation to prosecute, however, just state reasons for it. End of story. We know what happens when AGs are political appointees from the Babhunan Bhatarai-Mukti Pradhan combine ordering the Dailekh district attorney’s office in 2013 not to pursue the Dekendra Thapa murder case.

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FIGHT FOR TRUTH:
Human rights activists and family of victims are arrested after they stage a sit-in protest at Singh Durbar against the new TRC Bill last week.

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Golf Season
The Surya Nepal Masters Title began on 22 April. The 21st edition of the tournament boasts the biggest prize ever in the history of golf in Nepal, with a total prize of Rs 4.8 Million.

Ice cold
CG Electronics is bringing in a new Kelvinator Chest Freezer to Nepal for the first time. The company hopes that the product, with its state of the art technology and efficiency, will be a hit among its customers.

Real Goal
In light of the imminent FIFA World Cup, Real Juice has launched its ‘Score the Real Goal 2014’ campaign. The campaign, which will run for three months, will culminate in a lucky draw, where the super bumper prize winner will get a new Kia Picanto car.

Upgrade Vienna
Qatar Airways has announced that it will be upgrading services on its Vienna route. The airline will use an A330 aircraft come September, replacing its current A320 aircraft. This decision will see an increase of 168 seats in Business Class and 1,624 seats in Economy Class.

New Year, New York
Etihad Airways has announced Sunila Shrestha of Yeti Travels as the winner of its ‘New Year, New York’ internal marketing promotions. The event was held to promote the Nepali New Year, in conjunction with Etihad’s double daily operations to New York.

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The Global Leader in Connectivity
former journalist and social activist Ateeq Ansari, 57, comes across a group of men in Varanasi’s labyrinthine Pilli Kothi where he’s campaigning for Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal, and tells them, poker-faced, “We Muslims always vote to defeat someone. Why don’t we develop the confidence to vote for a candidate whom we wish to win?”

Ateeq is trying to resolve the dilemma India’s Muslim voters face countrywide as this mammoth month-long election passes the halfway mark. Apprehensive of Hindutva politics, Muslims across India obsess at identifying which non-BJP candidates are likely to secure the maximum non-Muslim votes, and then voting en bloc for them. In reality, though, Muslim consolidation behind one candidate is never complete because of political loyalties and personal affinities.

This dilemma has become acute in Varanasi where the BJP’s Narendra Modi and the AAP’s Kejriwal are fighting an epic electoral battle on 12 May, the final voting day in the ten-phase election. Kejriwal has parachuted into the city to provide a spirited fight, but there is also Ajai Rai of the Congress, a local denizen, the announcement of whose candidature had temporarily put a brake on the increasing Muslim consolidation behind Kejriwal. The reason? Since Rai, it is presumed, can attract votes of the Bhumihar community, there are Muslims who believe their votes to him would substantially enhance his electoral fortunes.

Last week, Rai toured the Muslim-dominated Madanpura, where resides Haji Mukhtar Ahmad, the sardar, or supremo, of 52 mohallas of weavers. The Haji quizzed Rai about his alleged role in the religious polarisation of the 2009 elections. Rai denied it outright, but the Urdu daily Inquilab published the exchange verbatim, reopening old wounds and slowing his campaign down overnight.

You’d think Muslims would be unforgiving of Rai, but it is not as simple as that. Rai could fade away soon, they say, because he simply lacks the stature to take on Modi. “But then, in case Muslims feel Kejriwal too can’t give a fight to Modi, then quite a few might vote for Rai. He comes to our weddings, consoles us in our grief. They would say, why spoil our relationship with Rai,” said Wajuddin Ansari, a member of the cabinet of Sardar Hashim, who heads a group of 12 mohallas.

Sardars, Cabinet, Mohallas? These social institutions date back 400 years, invented to administer weavers of Varanasi. There are principally three groups of 12, 18, and 22 mohallas, each headed by a sardar whose office is hereditary. At the apex is the sardar of 52 mohallas (12+18+22), styled as the final court of appeal. Earlier, those living in a sardar’s jurisdiction would bring to him problems pertaining to family, craft and religion, and defiance of his verdict could trigger punitive action such as social boycott.

India’s deepening democracy has diminished the sardar’s formidable clout. Sardar Hashim says his decision on voting would be acceptable to 20 per cent of his followers. But that is 300,000 Muslim votes, and will matter to parties in a fragmented polity. Certainly, nobody wants to incur the wrath of the sardars, for they have intermittently demonstrated their capacity to mobilise people on religious and industrial issues. For instance, in 2008, the sardars organised a massive public meeting to condemn terrorism. The transformation of these medieval social structures among Muslims in India’s Hindu heartland could have been even deeper had the BJP not stoked the community’s fears.

It is this paranoia of the BJP which will propel Varanasi’s Muslim notables to attempt, yet again, to consolidate their votes. Muslims, despite the stereotype of it, is heterogeneous. Before checking out of Varanasi, I asked a Muslim woman who works as a hotel receptionist about her political preference. “I will vote Kejriwal.” Why? “He isn’t a fake,” she replied. But many would dismiss her positive voting attitude to claim she is merely articulating her anti-BJP sentiment in an idiom rationally appealing to a Delhi journalist. It is tough being Muslim in the time of election.

ajazashraf3@gmail.com
For many, covering the entire length of 4 Namo Buddha to Lumbini on foot is a staggering feat. But making the journey on a wheelchair is almost unthinkable. Ram Bahadur Tamang achieved this feat on Friday when he reached Lumbini, his end destination after wheeling across from Namo Buddha in Kabre for 26 days, ten days ahead of schedule.

The 31-year-old, who hails from Mankha, Valay, SindhuPalchok, was injured in a bus accident in January 2011, which left his lower body paralysed.

The idea of setting on the 366km Lumbini Wheelchair Yatra came to him early this year. "While travelling on buses, I often noticed that passengers would easily lift 100kg potato sacks onto the vehicle, but when it came to helping me with my wheelchair, they would often hesitate," recalls Tamang.

The Yatra was his means to generate awareness of spinal injury, as well as to raise much needed funds for poor patients to access rehabilitation services at the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) in Sangha, where he also works as a vocational training staff. "If we remain confined within a room, the society will never acknowledge our presence, so we must go out and show the world what we are capable of," explains Tamang. Through the Yatra, Tamang also hoped to campaign for disability rights by reminding policy makers that "we are capable of," explains Tamang. Through the Yatra, Tamang also hoped to campaign for disability rights by reminding policy makers that "we are capable of," explains Tamang.

The Yatra, Tamang considered wheeling up the dusty, diesel-filled smoke section on the slopes from Naubise to Lumbini as one of the major challenges of the Yatra.

Tamang warns a local woman about the dangers of cutting fodder from a tree.

Members of the Army Rehabilitation Centre in Swayambhu bel Sherwell to Tamang (in blue).

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After 26 days on road, paraplegic Ram Bahadur Tamang completed his Lumbini Wheelchair Yatra on Friday.
Dining

Alfresco, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Soacree Cowone Place, (01)4723989

Yin Yang Restaurant, exists west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice to your life with the pad Thai or green curry. If you can’t handle the heat, fall into the safety net of its western dishes. Thamel, 10am to 10pm, (01)4701510

Golden Dragon, breathing fire, roasting duck. Jhamsikhel

Busy Bee, head over for live rock and pop performances in English, Nepali and Hindi, indulge in their beer and pizzas to waste the night away in good fashion. Lakeside, Pokhara (061)462640

Maya Devi Village Restaurant, enjoy a BLT sandwich breakfast with fresh fruit, muesli and curd in the lap of a Phewa Tal sunrise, and visit the magnificent vultures in their enclosures. Pokhara, 9806647917, mayadevivillage.com

Life is flow, an exhibition by photographer Susanna Ferran and poet Frederic Hoffmann accompanied by sound healer Chaitanyashree. 25 April to 22 May, Image Ark Gallery, Babarmahal

Cha cha cha, learn one month’s worth of salsa in four days. Rs 1,000 for singles, Rs 1,500 for couples. 28 April onwards, Monday to Thursday, 7:30 to 8:30am/5 to 6pm/6 to 7pm. Saha Dance Academy, Bhaktapur

Czech castles, the National Museum of Czech Republic comes to Kathmandu with an exhibition on the country’s castles. Runs to 25 April, 10am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

By winds and tides, an art exhibition, 25 April to 12 May, Alliance Francaise, Teku

Rashomon, watch the Nepali adaptation of one of cinema’s greatest whodunits. Rs 200, runs to 10 May, 5.15pm, except Mondays

People of Karnali, the Gallery Mitini opens to the public with an exhibition of photographs of the Karnali region by Uban Blue Images. 4 May onwards, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

In search of education, screening of a documentary on the difficulties of getting a good education in Karnali. 4 to 6pm, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

Three pieces for Patan, an exhibition by Dutch artist Bart Drost. 27 to 30 April, Patan Museum

Rampwalk, graduates from Design Academy Mitini will showcase their work at a fashion show. 3 May, 12:30 to 13:30pm, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

Support the cause, gather with like-minded fans to declare your love and support for the Nepal cricket team. 7 May, 10am, Beatlespur

Three pieces for Patan, an exhibition by Dutch artist Bart Drost. 27 to 30 April, Patan Museum

Project handling and network with professionals. 12 April to 15 May, Dinebistro, Gauginghat, register at (01)4251335

Mother’s day, pay homage to those who bore you and continue to bear you. 29 April

Click, a 12-day crash course in photography for beginners. Rs 4,000, 25 April to 6 May. 7am to 9pm. Artudio, Lajimpat. Register at 9851010088, artudio.wordpress.com

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Rampwalk, graduates from Design Academy Mitini will showcase their work at a fashion show. 3 May, 12:30 to 13:30pm, SEA Centre, Lajimpat

Support the cause, gather with like-minded fans to declare your love and support for the Nepal cricket team. 7 May, 10am, Beatlespur
Lhakpa’s Chulo, Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto, and Thai green curry - take your pick, Jhamsikhel!

Embassy, positioned on Lajimagar’s embassy-laden lane, this restaurant has a menu with Nepali, Indian, Thai and Japanese dishes on offer. Lajimagar

Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake. Lakeside, Hallamanchok, Pokhara, (061)463748/485163

Pagoda Chinese Restaurant, head to this jade palace if you are in the mood for Chinese with clean, green and peaceful environment. Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01)4357268, pvh@wlink.com.np

Lal Durbar Restaurant, authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows. Hotel Yeti & Neo, Durbar Marg, (01)4200899, reetnam@laldurbar.com

Barista lavazza, the newest addition to the Valley’s European inspired coffee-culture cafes serves excellent mochas and lattes, don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. Jawalakhel

MUSIC

Kripa Unplugged, young aspiring musicians give their own renditions of classics. youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged

Shangri-La Village Resort, set amidst peaceful surroundings with a breathtaking mountain views, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience. Gharipatan, Pokhara, (061)462222, (01)4410051, shangriilavillage@gmail.com

Chilling and relaxing, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort. Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247

Pokhara Grande, a great pool to escape from the tropic heat, a massage parour and spa to loosen up and a gymnasium to release stress. great options all around. Lakeside, Pokhara

Mango Tree Lodge, cultural walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park. Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com

UP FOR GRABS

Football season may be over in Germany but things are still undecided in Europe’s other premier competitions:

26 April, Real Madrid vs Osasuna, 7.45pm
27 April, Liverpool vs Chelsea, 6.50pm
28 April, Villareal vs Barcelona, 00.45am
30 April, Bayern Munich vs Real Madrid, 00.30am
1 May, Chelsea vs Atletico Madrid, 00.30am
3 May, Everton vs Man City, 10.15pm; Barcelona vs Getafe CF, 7.45pm

For the next installment in their monthly lecture series, the Cultural Studies Group Nepal presents to you a lecture by Carol Buckley on elephant welfare in Chitwan National Park.

With 40 years experience working hands-on with captive elephants, Buckley is known all over the world for her extensive knowledge of elephant behavior, physiology, and culture. As the founder and president of Elephant Aid International, she builds chain-free enclosures, provides instruction in pedicures and foot care, and teaches mahouts in Compassionate Elephant Management, a form of domestication where mahouts and elephants work without the use of pain and intimidation.

Discussing the state of Nepali elephants with Buckley will be Kamal Kunwar, chief conservation officer at Chitwan National Park. Together, Buckley and Kunwar have embarked upon a project to free 63 working elephants from chains.

25 April, 9.30am, Shanker Hotel Rs 450 for non-members, half price for students with IDs

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Barista lavazza, the newest addition to the Valley’s European inspired coffee-culture cafes serves excellent mochas and lattes, don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. Jawalakhel

Night live, catch Nepal’s first nepo-folk band live and get a sneak preview of their new album.

Star Night BBQ, catch Ciney Gurung live as you chomp on your meat stick.

Shastriya sangeet, the best of Hindustani classical music every new moon night.

Reggae night, get a taste of jah music from Chari Amilo Kala Samiti every weekend.

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Waterfront Resort, head to this eco-friendly resort to make your stay right in front of Phewa Lake. Sedi Height, Pokhara, (061)466303/304, 9801166311, sales@waterfronthotelnepal.com

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Patan Museum builds on its unique exhibits by opening to the public four new restored annexes, including courtyards of priceless beauty.

HARIZ BAHARUDIN and TOHEE MING

**MULCHOK**

At the heart of the Patan Palace this was once a hub for rituals and festivals including royal weddings and even the investiture of the crown prince. Often vandalised and preyed upon by antique robbers, Mul Chok used to be neglected, misused and plagued with misguided restoration. This elegant and imposing courtyard is now open to the public.

It is twice the size of the adjoining Sundari Chok and has undergone several renovations. It even survived a roof collapse during the 1934 earthquake and features a wide spectrum of different architectural styles, serving as a living testament to the rich tapestry of influences in Nepali architecture.

Mul Chok is still used for rituals including the 15-day Dasain festival in October, where a goat is sacrificed to the Gods. During the festival it is said the goddess Taleju is brought down to a special room in Mul Chok by priests. A notable feature is the courtyard’s large gate, which is spectacularly adorned with 12 intricate golden statuettes. These detailed statues were originally damaged or lost, but has since been restored by the KVPT.

**SUNDARI CHOK**

This courtyard is a living museum. It preserves its architectural elements in its natural environment, rather than simply displaying them in glass cases.

One example of Kathmandu’s intricate water architecture is the Tusha Hiti waterspout, which features an image of Vishnu with Lakshmi on his lap, carried by their mount, Garuda. Lined around the walls of the step-well are three rows of 72 elaborately carved stone sculptures. The gilded copper waterspout was stolen in 2010. A replica was made based on photographic documentation and installed in 2012, only days before the original was miraculously recovered by police. The original spout is now safely stored in the National Museum.

Meanwhile, a complete waterproofing and fitting of steep pins have ensured that water will not seep into the carvings, and that stone elements are kept secure.
Nepal Architectural Exhibition Gallery

The architectural galleries, while slightly small, still give a sense of grandness with elevated wooden beams and warm yellow lighting. Divided into about four main sections, the gallery showcases various aspects of Kathmandu Valley’s Newari architecture. Visitors can get a sense of how these designs have evolved over the ages, from the length of struts (bilampau), to the design of carved windows and the motifs found on tympanums (the triangular or semi-circular surface above the porch).

One notable exhibit is the carved wooden columns from different periods, ranging from 15th-18th century, showcasing how their designs have been influenced from various periods.

Behind the palace lies the refreshingly open space of Bhandarkhal Garden, which is completely different from the European-style Garden of Dreams in Thamel. Also, as the Bhandarkhal water tank with its Lohan Hiti waterspout is connected to Patan’s water infrastructure, it previously functioned as the palace’s main source of water.

Before restoration, the tank lacked foundation and was prone to leakage, pointing to the failure of the traditional black clay waterproofing system. In the new restoration, new brick foundations and retaining walls were built, while a pond liner was added to prevent leakage of water. Nepali craftsmen and stone conservators from the University of Applied Arts Vienna worked together to restore carved stone elements.

Bhandarkhal Garden and Tank

The museum in the former seat of the Malla Kings of Patan, one of Kathmandu Valley’s crown jewels, brings in hundreds of visitors every day. Last year alone, more than 66,000 visitors came to see the rare Buddhist and Hindu relics exhibited here.

Now, Patan Museum has added new annexes, including the MulChok, Sundari Chok and the Bhandarkhal Garden and royal pond. Of these, the Sundari Chok built by Siddhi Narsingh Malla in 1637, is regarded as a masterpiece.

It had been closed to the public because of thefts of its religious figures.

“It makes me happy to finally be able to show people all of these. People need to know and appreciate our culture,” says Rohit Ranjitkar of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) which oversaw the restoration.

Besides the courtyards, museum visitors can also enjoy a look at the garden that was exclusive for the royal household and a newly-curated exhibition space that showcases traditional architectural elements of Nepal. Suresh Man Lakhe of Patan Museum hopes the new attractions will “bring in more visitors, both foreign and local, as the works here deserve to be seen”.

KVPT’s work is however far from over. Restoration of the Sundari Chok’s eastern façade remains incomplete due to lack of funding. But Ranjitkar says this should not stop the public from catching a glimpse of the priceless carved sunken spout of the courtyard.

“Even if it’s a bit incomplete, people should visit and understand why it is important to protect our heritage,” Ranjitkar says.

Due to the increased maintenance costs, the museum has increased its entrance fees. It now costs Rs 400 for foreigners, Rs 250 for Chinese and SAARC visitors and Rs 30 for locals. There is also an annual ticket option that costs Rs 1000.

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Wednesday this week was the 22nd death anniversary of pioneer Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, and offered an opportunity to revisit one of the pioneers of South Asian cinema.

No discussion of Ray’s work can begin without the *Apu* films, the heartbreaking trilogy about a boy called Apu. Ray used to say he never shot a foot of celluloid before making *Pather Panchali* (the first installment) and although it took him three years to finish the film, it was an instant critical success, winning national and international awards. The realism and humanity portrayed in *Pather Panchali* continued in *Aparajito*, which again won big at Venice, Berlin and Cannes Film Festivals. By the time the third film *Apur Sansar* was finished in 1959, Ray was already the star of Indian cinema.

If his early films depicted the rural poor, a lot of Ray’s later work centred around middle-class Bengalis like himself. The first of these is *Kanchenjungha*, in which a three-way romance plays out between upper-class Bengalis vacationing in Darjeeling. In *Aranyer Din Ratri*, modern-types wander aimlessly through a jungle. Another set of three films, dubbed the *Calcutta Trilogy*, depicts life in modern Bengal where English-speaking youngsters have to deal with the crushing weight of past glory and present hopelessness.

Ray is also one of the first Indian filmmakers to dwell on the fate of women in Indian society. *Charulata*, the heroine nurtures a latent sexual attraction to her husband’s much younger brother, and *Share kaire* portrays the love lives of married women. Besides writing his own screenplays (mostly Bengali literature staples) and directing them, Ray was also what is known today as a music director for his films. In *Jahanagar, The Music Room* (1956), a film about a decadent heirless landlord whose fortune is dwindling, the classical music is as much of a character as the protagonist. Later, Ray would go on to compose the entire score for *Teen Kanya* after finding classical trained musicians too loyal to their own schooling.

Ray was also a prolific writer. From his 35 stories about a detective called Feluda, Ray eventually made two detective films. He has written on his experiences in filmmaking (*Bishoy Chalachitra* and *Ekei Bole Shooting*) and also published an anthology on cinema inside and outside India (*Our films, their films*).

Much has changed in the 60 years since Ray made his debut film, but his work will always be a primer for anyone from this part of the world who wants to look at our own societies through the camera.

Nepali Times

**RAY’S WORLD**

**MUST SEE**

**WATER BABIES:** Two boys try their hand at fishing with a handmade fishing net at Trishuli River near Kurintar on Sunday.

**GOODBYE:** Family members of the Nepali mountaineering guides who were killed in the avalanche on Mt Everest last week carry a victim’s body for funeral service at Sanga Monastery, Boudha on Sunday.

**NEPALTIMES.COM**

**WATCH TRAILER**

**ALMOST READY:** A priest paints the face of Rato Machhindranath idol with clay in Patan on Tuesday.
Just dance!

First it was salsa. Then came zumba. And now it’s a mix of hip-hop, contemporary and every other combination of PT routine and belly jiggling that can be maneuvered into popular Hindi songs. No surprise then that fitness studios around town have started offering Bollywood dance classes, and every other dance academy survives solely on revenue generated by such courses.

I always found gyms a bit limiting. My attempts at Baba Ramdev’s ‘tornado-in-your-belly’ yoga moves ended in painful cramps. One afternoon during load-shedding hours, I found myself walking towards the distant sounds of disco beats above the steady put-puts of a generator. I had to be part of the club.

The next thing I knew, I was inside a large sparkling room where maxi-clad aunties and balding middle-aged uncles were trying hard not to let their tummies bounce. Two days later I made friends with a local gangster who explained to me why the belly shake will never go out of fashion. Soon-to-be brides and grooms, who were sweating it out to look svelte on their big day, listened intently.

Most Nepalis who grew up imitating dance moves from Gaiji Kheto think no one has a better sense of rhythm than themselves. My classmates and I proudly explained to me why the belly shake will never go out of fashion. Soon-to-be brides and grooms, who were sweating it out to look svelte on their big day, listened intently.

Kathmandu. And this time it happens to be the dessert-loving world of frozen yogurt. Frozen yogurt is having its moment in the sun around the world and now Thankfully goes against this norm and the two mediums had fruits and sprinkles. The one with fruit was my favourite - clean, fresh and just what the doctor ordered for a hot summer’s day. The scarlet lusciousness of strawberries, the golden tanginess of pineapple and the fresh crunch of apples not only make this extremely palatable and healthy, but also very pretty.

Froyo is also a good place to catch a quick lunch. Their chicken Panini (Rs 300) could be improved with a more generous serving of chicken, and was also on the dry side. But their ham sandwich (Rs 250) was perfectly adequate - nothing to rave about but not bad either, serving its purpose to quickly quench my hunger pangs. Froyo’s lemonades and iced teas (Rs 70 onwards) are also perfect to beat the heat, although I found their smoothies kind of expensive.

Froyo in Uttar Dhoka, an area with a couple of decent places to hangout in and the same building as Barista Lavazza, is perfectly located. The open area in front of the Metro Park Complex has been transformed into a fun vibrant area with pink signboards, fluttering parasols, greenery and a pink mottled cow who claims that ‘a Froyo a day keeps the doctor away’.

Check their counter for the dessert of the day - it was yogurt cheesecake (Rs 150) on our visit and it was marvelous. The grainy crumbliness of the chocolate cracker base provided a perfect foil to the creaminess of the yogurt custard, creating a dessert that was paradoxically light and fresh but decadent at the same time.

In our obsession for fitness and health, tasty food often takes a back seat. Frozen yogurt thankfully goes against this norm and this in part explains why it happens to be the dessert-loving world’s craze du jour. Frozen yogurt is having its moment in the sun around the world and now Thanks to Froyo, we can enjoy it in Kathmandu too.

How to get there: Froyo is located on the ground floor of the Metro Park Complex, opposite Uttar Dhoka in Lagimpat.

REVIEW

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The main attraction at Froyo is their frozen yogurt. Thers is 100 per cent natural, low-fat, gluten free and can be enjoyed without worrying about loading on the calories. You choose your cup size and your preferred flavor and can opt to add a selection of fresh fruit, chocolate sprinkles and nuts as toppings. Prices start at Rs 90 for a small cup and goes up to Rs 290 for the large cup.

Or you could sample one of their frozen yogurt parfaits, smoothies, or shakes. I did not look for new ways to enjoy their frozen yogurt parfaits, smoothies, or shakes. I did not notice the taste so different from a regular ice-cream, although fellow foodies say that it is not as sweet.

I must say I enjoyed the tartness of it and tried three different cups at one go. The small cup came with a complimentary stick of wafer and the two mediums had fruits and sprinkles. The one with fruit was my favourite - clean, fresh and just what the doctor ordered for a hot summer’s day. The scarlet lusciousness of strawberries, the golden tanginess of pineapple and the fresh crunch of apples not only make this extremely palatable and healthy, but also very pretty.

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After a few weeks, the novelty of jumping in front of six-foot mirrors wore off and I left my neighbourhood dance club for another institution that thankfully has caught on with the moves of our time. Dancing Queen

Kathmanduites may sneer at Bollywood as Barista Lavazza, is perfectly located. The open area in front of Uttar Dhoka who claims that ‘a Froyo a day keeps the doctor away’.

Just dance!
Avalanche protection

There are protective gears that can sometimes help climbers survive avalanches, but as far as we know most icefall sherpas do not carry any of these potentially life-saving pieces of equipment. Here are some of them:

1. A simple, useful collapsible shovel made of high-strength plastic to dig through avalanche debris.
2. Avalanche Rescue Beacon: Also known as transceivers these can help quickly locate companions buried during an avalanche. In developed countries, these are standard issue for ski patrollers involved in avalanche work. Skilled practitioners can find buried people in about 5 minutes after they first pick up the signal. The best proved rescue equipment is a transceiver for promptly finding the general area of the victim, a probe to confirm and pinpoint the spot and a shovel to dig the debris.
3. Avalanche airbags: The avalanche airbag systems (ABS) may help prevent trauma and burial by diverting expired air away from inspired air. The air we breathe in is 21 per cent oxygen and what we breathe out is only 16 per cent oxygen and 5 per cent carbon dioxide. By not mixing inspired and expired air, the victim does not readily asphyxiate (die from lack of oxygen) and remains alive for longer for rescue. Asphyxiation followed by trauma and hypothermia are the main causes of death in avalanche victims.

There may be many other ways to deal with avalanche problems, but if we can implement the use of at least some of these new gadgets, it may prove to be life-saving. The cost should not be a factor as it would be a very small proportion of the money expeditons spend and it would be money well-spent.

Bowers and Wilkins (B&W), a name synonymous with high-definition, high-quality audio products, has always been the go-to brand for audiophiles the world over. With the P7 over-the-ear headphones, B&W once again cemented its place at the top of the quality sound foodchain.

Right out of the box, the B&W P7 headphones look exceptional. Unlike many pairs of premium headphones, they actually feel expensive as well, all thanks to the liberal amount of leather used. Boasting executive looks, luxurious build quality and peerless audio pedigree, the P7 also has an instantly recognizable identity. It is also elegantly proportioned and its beautiful design exudes a touch of class and quality.

The executive black finish, soft-stitched leather headband and removable cushioned earcups, and the brushed aluminium and stainless steel parts give it a sophisticated finish, and feel engineered to perfection. This classiness further extends down to the hinge mechanism that allows the P7 to be folded for easy carrying.

Yes, enough about the looks. If you are wondering whether P7s is all looks and no function, then don’t worry. The actual sound is where the P7’s trumps and beats the pretenders. To state that the P7s produce impressive sound would be a gross understatement. The P7s create a fantastically open sound, with extremely detailed and well-balanced sound reproduction that is capable of coping with the lowest of frequencies and highest ranges with a pin’s ease. You have to hear it to believe it.

Music, especially high-resolution lossless formats, sounds epic and immersive. Whether it’s classical, rock, heavy metal, pop, hip hop, R&B, or electronic, with especially bass-heavy tracks sounding powerful and refreshing, the P7s allow the listener to enjoy any genre without the faintest distortion even at full tilt.

Movie viewing also becomes an enriched experience, with the gizmo lending each sound a realistic feel (especially actions sounds such as thundering explosions), and soundtracks sounding positively glorious.

The P7s ship with two 3.5mm cables (one with an in-line mic and a three-button remote for iOS devices, and one button free) which is a welcome addition, especially as the cable is often the first component to break.

Rs 40K is a hefty price to pay for a pair of headphones, but the B&W P7 headphones pack in a top of the range combination of premium materials and durability, comfort, timeless style, and most importantly, phenomenal sound quality, which will not leave you questioning your purchase.

Yantrick’s Verdict: If you appreciate good quality sound, P7s is a must-have. No questions.
For damaged, dry or frizzy hair:
1. mix some olive oil with warm water, honey and comb through hair. Leave it for a few hours and wash out for amazingly soft hair.

2. For deep treatment for your hair: take some conditioner, aloe vera, egg, banana, honey, and mayonnaise. Mix it together and apply this mixture on wet hair and leave it for an hour or overnight.

3. To get rid of split ends: mix one egg yolk with 3 tbsp of olive oil, and 1 tbsp of honey. Apply this hair mask to the ends of your hair for 1 hour before washing, every 2 weeks.

4. To add moisture and shine to dull hair: mix ½ bananas to strengthen or ½ avocados to soften, 1 egg, 1 tbsp each coconut oil, olive oil and honey. ¼ cup water. Mix and comb through damp hair, clip up the hair and cover it with a shower cap. Shampoo after 15 mins.

5. Every time you shampoo, massage your scalp for at least 1 minute to stimulate hair growth and enhance the strength of your roots. Only put conditioner on the bottom 3/4 of your hair (avoid the roots).

6. When applying hair serum, stick to the ends of your hair, not the roots, as it will help smooth out any dry, split ends.

7. Always brush your hair before you shower to prevent tangles and of course, clogged drains.

8. To get the full benefits of your hair products, apply them 10 minutes before you style so that it absorbs into your hair.

9. Refrigerate your conditioner, as it will help seal your hair cuticles and give it a shine.

10. If you have a hair color appointment, use a deep conditioning mask about three days beforehand so that the color can be fully absorbed.

11. Your diet is crucial in maintaining your hair’s suppleness. Eat more Omega-3 rich foods like salmon, sardines, avocado pumpkin and walnuts. Take food rich in Vitamin B vitamins like beans, nuts and whole grain. Good sources of Vitamin E include brown rice nuts, wheat germ and leafy green vegetables.

12. Avoid smoking, as it will cause your hair follicles to shed at an abnormally high rate.

CROWNING GLORY

Since the age of time, one’s hair has been associated with beauty. Often, people find themselves naturally drawn to those with thick, lustrous hair. But it’s not just about the dating/mating game. More importantly, good hair is equated with youth and vitality.

Yet, people forget to care for their hair, resulting in irreparable hair damage. We really owe it to ourselves to give our hair the treatment it deserves. Here are 12 homemade, au natural remedies that will bring you one step closer to swishing that silky mane with pride:

Say no to gaps
EXTREME EVEREST

The high demand to climb the world's highest mountain, and the need for Nepali high altitude staff won't change

The spring 2014 climbing season in the Khumbu was already affected by the blacklisting of Nepal's domestic airlines by the EU. Then came the avalanche disaster on 18 April which killed 13 Nepalis on Mt Everest with three still missing. Nepali guides at Base Camp decided on Tuesday to halt all expeditions.

"After today's meeting we have requested everyone here to stop climbing this season to honour all those who lost their lives and are still missing," Tulsu Gurung, a local guide and three time Everest summiter told Nepal Times from Base Camp on Tuesday. "Some of our friends are still missing, we cannot imagine stepping over them," said Gurung, whose brother Ash Bahadur Gurung (see box) is among three climbers still missing.

The government agreed this week to raise the insurance coverage of high altitude workers and support staff to Rs 1.5 million from Rs 400,000. But the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Aviation on Tuesday urged Nepali expedition staff to resume work after a week of mourning.

Some expeditions also want to continue. "We respect the decision of those who don't want to climb because of the tragedy, but that doesn't mean all expeditions will be halted," says Ang Tshering Sherpa, president of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

The final decision to continue or cancel climbing Mt Everest this season will immediately impact the at least 300 climbers and 400 support staff at Base Camp, and also affect the economy of the Khumbu region.

However, in the longer term, there are two things that won't change: the high demand to climb the world's highest mountain, and the need for Nepali high altitude workers in commercial expeditions.

"You cannot get a commercial expedition's customers up without Sherpas," says Elizabeth Hawley who has kept records of expeditions in Nepal for nearly 50 years, and her Himalayan Database is regarded as the definitive history of past climbs.

In the aftermath of the Everest avalanche, the issue of climbing safety for Nepali support staff, their salary and compensation has dominated the discourse.

A meeting of Nepali climbers at Base Camp this week issued a 13-point demand that includes better pay, increased compensation for death or injury on the mountain, doubling of insurance, and even building a monument in Kathmandu.

But there were no demands for minimising the risk.

One idea floated last year to reduce the danger to climbers on the Khumbu Icefall was to ferry loads by helicopter to Camp 3. New model helicopters have better performance and have an operating ceiling of up to 7,000m. But Hawley is skeptical it will work: "You need enough money, and even building a monument in the region, rather than on Everest to minimise risk.

For Tashi Sherpa of the international outdoor wear company, Sherpa Adventure Gear, there is something grossly unfair about the risk that Nepali climbers take. He said: "I find it baffling that the critical component to the glory of climbing Everest has the highest risk and the lowest valuation."

Birikut Rai and Matt Allibor

Taking chances on

Nepali high altitude workers take the risks to create a rope and ladder umbilical to the summit for their clients

DAVID DURKAN

Since the first fatality in the spring of 1922, Mt Everest has claimed the lives of 105 Nepalis. The majority of them are fathers, sons, brothers and sisters from Sola Khumbu.

Historically, western mountaineers were elite climbers: mostly well trained, acclimatised and proficient. They worked out the route, climbed and fixed the ropes, the ladders and established camps, and then they secured the passage of the Nepali ‘staff’ who carried the equipment. From about 1980, there was a transformation as western and Nepali agents created 'Instant Everest' – offering the summit as a product, to anyone who can want to climb because of the glory of climbing Everest has the highest risk and the lowest valuation."

Birikut Rai

After an earlier unsuccessful attempt on Mt Everest, Gurung wanted to make it to the top this time and then go abroad for better opportunities. Menuka is visibly distraught, but tries to put on a brave face before their five-year-old daughter. She says: "They say the rescue has been halted, but tell him everyday hoping he will pick up his phone and speak to me again."

David Durkan

Since the first fatality in the spring of 1922, Mt Everest has claimed the lives of 105 Nepalis. The majority of them are fathers, sons, brothers and sisters from Sola Khumbu. Historically, western mountaineers were elite climbers: mostly well trained, acclimatised and proficient. They worked out the route, climbed and fixed the ropes, the ladders and established camps, and then they secured the passage of the Nepali ‘staff’ who carried the equipment. From about 1980, there was a transformation as western and Nepali agents created 'Instant Everest' – offering the summit as a product, to anyone who can

Birikut Rai

Menuka Gurung had just put her ten-month-old son (right) to sleep last Friday when she started receiving the first of many calls from frantic relatives about an avalanche on Mt Everest.

She knew her husband Ash Bahadur Gurung, 28, was a veteran climber and one of three still missing. "After today's meeting we have requested everyone here to stop climbing this season to honour all those who lost their lives and are still missing," Tulsu Gurung, a local guide and three time Everest summiter told Nepal Times from Base Camp on Tuesday. "Some of our friends are still missing, we cannot imagine stepping over them," said Gurung, whose brother Ash Bahadur Gurung (see box) is among three climbers still missing.

The government agreed this week to raise the insurance coverage of high altitude workers and support staff to Rs 1.5 million from Rs 400,000. But the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Aviation on Tuesday urged Nepali expedition staff to resume work after a week of mourning.

Some expeditions also want to continue. "We respect the decision of those who don't want to climb because of the tragedy, but that doesn't mean all expeditions will be halted," says Ang Tshering Sherpa, president of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

The final decision to continue or cancel climbing Mt Everest this season will immediately impact the at least 300 climbers and 400 support staff at Base Camp, and also affect the economy of the Khumbu region. However, in the longer term, there are two things that won't change: the high demand to climb the world's highest mountain, and the need for Nepali high altitude workers in commercial expeditions.

"You cannot get a commercial expedition's customers up without Sherpas," says Elizabeth Hawley who has kept records of expeditions in Nepal for nearly 50 years, and her Himalayan Database is regarded as the definitive history of past climbs.

In the aftermath of the Everest avalanche, the issue of climbing safety for Nepali support staff, their salary and compensation has dominated the discourse.

A meeting of Nepali climbers at Base Camp this week issued a 13-point demand that includes better pay, increased compensation for death or injury on the mountain, doubling of insurance, and even building a monument in Kathmandu. But there were no demands for minimising the risk.

One idea floated last year to reduce the danger to climbers on the Khumbu Icefall was to ferry loads by helicopter to Camp 3. New model helicopters have better performance and have an operating ceiling of up to 7,000m. But Hawley is skeptical it will work: "You need enough money, and even building a monument in the region, rather than on Everest to minimise risk.

For Tashi Sherpa of the international outdoor wear company, Sherpa Adventure Gear, there is something grossly unfair about the risk that Nepali climbers take. He said: "I find it baffling that the critical component to the glory of climbing Everest has the highest risk and the lowest valuation."

Birikut Rai and Matt Allibor

Taking chances on

Nepali high altitude workers take the risks to create a rope and ladder umbilical to the summit for their clients

David Durkan

Since the first fatality in the spring of 1922, Mt Everest has claimed the lives of 105 Nepalis. The majority of them are fathers, sons, brothers and sisters from Sola Khumbu. Historically, western mountaineers were elite climbers: mostly well trained, acclimatised and proficient. They worked out the route, climbed and fixed the ropes, the ladders and established camps, and then they secured the passage of the Nepali ‘staff’ who carried the equipment. From about 1980, there was a transformation as western and Nepali agents created 'Instant Everest' – offering the summit as a product, to anyone who can
Chomolungma

pay. Today, it is the Nepali staff of high altitude workers who establish the routes, take the risks, and create a ‘rope and ladder road’ from Base Camp to Summit. ‘Climbers’ don’t even need ice axes to get to the top.

The once noble sport of mountaineering has been turned into a commercial circus of performing clowns. Inexperienced, incompetent and often unfaithful indemnity pay varies from western to Nepali ‘expedition agents’, so they may ‘conquer’ the world’s highest mountain.

The Nepali high altitude worker is exposed to danger and hardship for 30 to 30 percent of an expedition’s time frame. The climbing tourist is only exposed to danger between 20 to 20 percent of the time. Nepali high altitude workers are:

1. Underpaid
2. Poorly insured
3. Poorly equipped
4. Poorly trained
5. Poorly led
6. Pressured to climb in dangerous weather
7. Lacking English skills which can be fatal, eg: K2 tragedy

Many members of commercial expeditions have never met before, have no idea of their experience and cannot work as a team. Many are inexperienced and the Nepali guide is often put in a difficult and dangerous situation to get this client up, and then down.

When the ropes and camps are established the clients move from the safety and luxury of EBC via a series of pre-set camps, where Nepali staff cook meals, melt snow for water and carry their equipment. There is usually a designated ‘guide’ to push them up the ropes. Then there is a newly developed oxygen mask that gives an oxygen level in the blood of 70 percent - similar to that most people have at 6000 m.

The Nepali high altitude worker works hard, suffers and is paid poorly, and as we have seen, he dies. The clients return home as heroes to write articles, books, appear on tv, hold lectures, receive sponsorships and even become experts on Himalayan mountaineering.

This week, the government formed a joint task force, led by the chief of the Mountaineering Department. It is made up of representatives from the Nepal Mountaineering Association, Trekking Agency Association of Nepal and Expedition Operators’ Association – the very organisations who have fostered and allowed the present crisis.

The solutions are clear:

1. Better working conditions for the Nepali staff (wages, training, certification, etc).
2. High peak fees to reduce crowding, reducing the number of expeditions and climbers allowed on the mountain, and required pre-expedition experience of clients.

Let us return the adventure of mountaineering to Mt Everest, and put in the hands of new, knowledgeable minds with less economic interest in the decision-making process.

David Ducken is a Welsh mountaineer living in Norway and former Contributing Editor to Mountain Magazine.
Foreign investment in media

For example, the main owner of APCA which publishes the English daily The Himalayan Times is Indian. Similarly, Himal South Asian magazine is published by the South Asian Trust and is backed by a grant from the Norwegian government. The government-run Nepal Television has received assistance from China since its establishment, and so has Radio Nepal. The IRC Nepal Service is run fully by a foreign entity and there are many private radio networks that have received funds from abroad. For instance, Upasaka Radio network is supported by the Media Development Investment Fund and many of its programs are run through foreign assistance.

Nepal’s community radio network, considered a pioneer in the region, is partly or directly run through such foreign aid. Radio Sawal, one of the most popular program that airs on Kantipur Television is produced by an international organisation that pays for its broadcast. Another program Samkou that airs on the same TV channel is produced with the support of the Norwegian Embassy.

Our readers are intelligent enough to understand the agenda of the mouthpieces of political parties. It is an insult to our readers when we say that media with foreign support threaten national integrity. We need to consider how rapidly the media landscape in Nepal and the world is changing. The internet has changed the way Nepali audiences access the international media.

The International New York Times and China Daily are both published and distributed in Nepal. In this era of digital and social media and the democratisation of communication the readers now have access to the medium of disseminating news and views with alternative voices in the media landscape.

Few years ago the Ministry of Information had shown initiative to create a policy to ensure financial transparency in media houses. But the opposition of few media heavyweights didn’t let it move forward.

Politics and media are the two pillars of any democratic society. When these two entities aren’t transparent about their workings, it will only weaken democracy. Some people consider transparency in politics and media too idealistic, but we feel that these are the foundations of democracy. We hope this new discussion will pave the way to make our politics and media more transparent and accountable.

The real issues

1. Can media be funded by embassies?
2. Can parties get money from abroad?
3. Can NGOs be funded by embassies?
4. Can you kill your brothers and sisters with guns from neighbours?
5. Can murderers be taken to court after a complaint?

The real issues:

1. Can one take office leave and wait in line for petrol?
2. Do we have to wait in line again for another CA election in two years?
3. Do we have to wait in line for passports to go to the Gulf in five years?

Crime and punishment

Himal Khabarpatrika Weekly Poll, 28 April

The decade long armed conflict brutalised the society and witnessed massive human rights violations and atrocities from the state security forces and Maoists. But seven years after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), there still has been no concrete decisions taken to address the war crimes and punish or grant amnesty to the perpetrators. The Truth and Reconciliation bill tabled in parliament last week has polarised the country between those opposing and supporting it. There are many CA members who have objected to the provision of amnesty for those involved in serious crimes.

The MoAs have maintained that conflict-era crimes should be addressed by the TRC. Human rights activists say there should be no pardon for grave violations of human rights. Here is the response to the weekly Himal Khabarpatrika survey:

Q: How should the perpetrators of the war crimes be treated?

Forgiven: 11% — Don’t know/ Can’t say: 3% — Tried: 86%
A dangerous place to work
Equality and safety for Sherpas only possible if we turn the whole Everest-pyramid upside down

JON GANGDAL

The cold dust of the killer avalanche on Mt Everest last week struck us all. We can feel nothing but grief and pain with the families of the brave boys who gave their lives for ... for what? For the glory of their nation, like at war? For the glory of their attention-seeking sahibs who have had the highest mountains in the world as their playground for more than a century? Or for what we all have to do: our daily duty to feed ourselves and our families. Mount Everest, Chomolungma, Sagarmatha provides for everyone: as a mountain, as the Mother Goddess of the Earth, as a symbol of power and glory. For the Sherpas, the mountain has a great impact on their lives mainly as the most important and dangerous working place in the world.

After the tragedy on 18 April, it is tempting to come up with new rules and regulations. These will not help unless we are willing to turn the whole Everest-pyramid upside down, and put the Sherpas and other locals on the top of it. Not as ‘The Real Heroes’, but as workers with the same rights as other workers.

The formal rights of the Sherpas and the general way they are led and treated on climbing expeditions, is – with a few exceptions – like how bosses used to treat their employees in the first years after the Industrial Revolution: everything is for the benefit and the interest of the owner.

Every expedition leader (including myself) have made decisions for the progress or profit of the expedition. They give bonuses for more loads, fixed ropes and high altitude metres climbed. But I haven’t yet seen an expedition leader rewarding a Sherpa for saying: “Sorry, Sir, it’s not the time to go up now, I have a really bad feeling about this.”

We foreigners are on top of Maslow’s pyramid of needs. This becomes very visible on climbing expeditions. We seek to realise our own egoistic goals of self-actualization in ‘been there, done that’ fashion. (although Maslow also opened for a new level: Mission). The Sherpas are in the opposite position: they are traditionally struggling at the bottom to earn their daily living.

As modern foreigners coming from democratic countries (some of us with big aid budgets to Nepal) we like to see ourselves as equal to other human beings. But the problem starts when my fellow-climber on the mountains regards me as an equal brother even though he is an employee. That is the main reason why the Sherpas are willing to risk more. They do it for their families, and they may say “Yes” when they mean “No”. Whether we like it or not, their position is not free. Only a few break out of this prison of needs and go back to their communities, or establish other businesses.

My closest Sherpa friends through 20 years, admit this when we are talking as brothers. They say: “We are always afraid on expedition, but we have no choice if we want to give our children better opportunities so they don’t need to put themselves in the same danger as us.”

Mt Everest is primarily a dangerous place for work, and it is going to be increasingly so. To organise the work, establish quality systems and improve security will be the easy part. It will not need many new rules and regulations. An effective system for responsibility and sanctions will be more important.

Expedition leaders at Base Camp today find themselves in the same desperate position that I was in when a Sherpa in our expedition was swept away by an avalanche on the West Ridge in 1994. We all have to find out the best way to deal with a new reality for Sherpas in their high and risky place of work.

There is no easy way to the summit for those of us who were not born under Chomolungma. But it will not spoil the wonderful feeling of making the impossible possible, knowing that those who are nurtured by the mountain are more safe and feel more comfortable.
A buyer’s guide to cars

Like pets who look like their masters, have you noticed lately that cars are starting to resemble their owners? It’s startling. Give it another million years of evolution, and automobiles will shed their 4-wheel drives and start walking around on two hind legs. In the old days, when they designed cars, they got a box and attached tyres to it. These days, they take the current Miss Universe, add an internal combustion engine with T-bone McPherson struts and install fendere.

This is why these days we see cars with grinning radiator grills, cars that have fangs that look like Dracula, vans with double chins, convertibles with big bosoms, sedans that have Spiderman headlight lenses, cars with cute derriere, cars that greet you and obey voice commands, cars that throw tantrums and refuse to start unless you tickle them behind their carburettors.

Today’s anthropomorphic car designer strive to endow their creations with human attributes. So much so, that some cars even have sex. No, silly, they don’t mate in the garage when the lights go out. (Not that I am aware of, anyway.) I mean automobiles these days are actually gender differentiated. There are cars that are definitely male, there are cars that are definitely female, and there are cars that are definitely both.

Take the latest Proton Waja, for instance. With its protuberant Y-front crushable bonnet, this is an unmistakably masculine machine that likes to run around in its undies. Or the Toyota Innova, which in profile bears a striking resemblance to Diljit Dosanjh, a compact MPV that would actually look good in a turban. But for oozing testesterone from every pore, there is nothing to beat the ultimate he-car: that stud from the Mahindra stable, the XUV500. The XUV500 is to automobiles what Dominique Strauss-Kahn is to the IMF.

On the other hand, the sleek curves, well-proportioned chassis, and ventilated disk brakes of the new BMW i3 make it most assuredly a fraulein on ze autobahn. Then there is the Nissan Versa hatchback with its spacious trunk of generous 450l storage capacity which, in hindsight, has striking parallels to JLo. The Volkswagen Tiguan, with its quiet intelligence and self-assured demeanour makes any other male car look slightly retarded. Then, of course, there is the whole trans-sexual range of cars of which we have problems pinning down the exact gender, if any. The foremost example of cars of this persuasion is the swarthily effeminate Fiat Punto, now tell me is that a he or a she?

Not a usual resort....refresh yourself.

Not a usual resort....refresh yourself.