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Right fight

Around the world, women's sports are consistently thought of as subpar to the games men play. Female athletes are relegated to the sidelines of national conversation. They get less coverage in the media, are treated with less respect and receive smaller paychecks than their male counterparts.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, *Nepali Times* caught up with a few female athletes who have done the nation proud in recent international tournaments.

A bright spot amidst Nepal's lacklustre performance in the 12th South Asian Games were the three gold medals, two of which were brought home by women. Sixteen-year-old wushu phenom Nima Gharti Magar (*pictured*) bagged the first gold for Nepal in the 12 day-long event.

Competing in her first international event, Magar

resolutely stated that "girls are not weaker than boys" after clinching the gold, proving that girls are not inferior when it comes to physical tasks.

Magar considers herself lucky to have such a strong support system at home and at practice, and credits her family, seniors and coaches for her success. "I never had to face any discrimination while training or performing in events," says Magar, who is competing in a field still dominated by men.

Still, Magar's friends who began training at the same time quit because of lack of support. Magar wants to encourage other girls who feel passionate about sports to pursue their dreams.

For now, the 10th grader is concentrating on her studies but says she will get back to training as soon as the exams are over.

Sahina Shrestha



march
International Women's Day
Special
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LAND OF OUR DAUGHTERS
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

TRAPPED IN THE NET
THIS IS IT
BY RUBEENA MAHATO
PAGE 3

GOPEN RAJ

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LAND OF OUR DAUGHTERS

On the International Day of Women, we salute the millions of women across Nepal who will not have a holiday because they are too busy feeding and raising their families.

Nepal is run by men. It is a sign of our dysfunctional patriarchy that Singha Darbar, Baluwatar and just about every government office is populated by men from certain dominant groups. You don't need to be an activist with an inclusion agenda to notice this glaring incongruity.

However, it would be safe to say that more and more households, communities and cooperatives in rural Nepal are being run by women. With most men gone, rural Nepal has been feminised. Women have more of a say in school and health post management, in forestry and irrigation user groups, and in farming cooperatives. This may be why, despite purposeless governments in Kathmandu, there is still some development going on in the hinterland. This year, the number of girls sitting for SLC exams has again topped the number of boys.

Last year, Nepal made history by appointing a female president, and although Bidya Bhandari has a largely ceremonial role and the widow of Nepal's respected communist leader isn't exactly a torchbearer for feminism in Nepal, her appointment was a symbolic boost for women. For the first time in its history, Nepal has a woman head of state. This week three women lawyers were nominated as justices of the Supreme Court.

Unfortunately, there isn't much of a ripple effect of President Bhandari's appointment on other political appointments. The current government of KP Oli, with its jumbo cabinet of 40 ministers, has only five women. The most well-known and influential female Nepali politicians continue to be those who enjoy close personal ties with the top leadership. This is true of all parties: Bidya Bhandari, Sujata Koirala, Hisila Yami, and Onsari Gharti Magar are all consorts or daughters of powerful politicians. While we probably have one of the most gender-balanced parliaments in our history, there are few women in the House who



BIKRAM RAI

are directly elected, and members from the proportional representation quota are mostly handpicked by party strongmen. We may have women in high office, but their presence is largely token.

The new constitution is undoubtedly more progressive than previous ones for trying to be inclusive, but it gets an 'F' for unequal citizenship provisions for Nepali women married to foreigners and the off-spring of single mothers.

Despite amendments to certain provisions, the current constitution still makes it difficult (almost impossible) for women to pass on citizenship to their children without their husband's documents or consent. It is a heavy irony that for a country with the most progressive laws on LGBT rights in the region, we discriminate so directly against our women.

The problem however doesn't lie only with the law and lawmakers who didn't see any fault in drafting a constitution that denies more than half its population an important right. The problem lies also in the lack of public outrage against this flagrant culturally sanctioned gender discrimination.

Society is still steeped in patriarchal values, and even women leaders across the political spectrum justify the citizenship provisions because of the belief that Indian men will swarm across the open border to marry our women and become Nepali citizens. The media reflects and propagates this societal paranoia, and a male-dominated and heavily-politicised civil society is largely mute on the issue.

Although female literacy doubled in the last 20 years, women are still held back from exploring their full potential and gaining financial independence. As our columnist Rubeena Mahato writes this week (*see overleaf*), female journalists are routinely harassed by trolls in cyberspace for their opinions. The attacks are personal, cheap and vulgar and are representative of the attitude of many who cannot accept a woman's place in the public sphere.

Elsewhere in this special International Women's Day issue of *Nepali Times*, we highlight women achievers who have excelled because they were given a chance. Whether they are wushu players or ultra-marathon runners, social activists or educationists, Nepali women have demonstrated that despite everything stacked against them they can contribute to society and

make the nation proud.

On 8 March next week, while salaried women all over the country will have a day off millions of women across Nepal will be hard at work, like every other day in the year, to feed and raise their families. We salute these women who hold up more than half the sky.



YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

LEAVING FOOTPRINTS

Every country should harness as much green energy as possible ('Leaving footprints', Sahina Shrestha, #797). India is trying to do the same. But this should not be at the cost of starving people for energy.

Maheskumar Vyas

■ Why is there even a government in this country? All along, they have been talking about selling electricity to India, and now they weasel out and go buy. Incompetence at its worst!

Chuck

■ To: All nay-Sayers, where were you when we were enduring 19 hours of load shedding. Finally some potential relief has come and your nationalism-cum-environmentalism BS starts to spew forth? If 20 years of load shedding has not prodded us, another year of electricity (or lack of) will not. What will prod us to develop our resources is logical, national consensus on land usage. Finally it comes down to political will.

Namah

■ If we look at the roster of energy ministers in the last decade in Nepal, it is obvious that nothing can be expected from them. The current Energy Minister is "Top" Bahadur Rayamajhi. His name "Top" cracks me up but if we move past that, he has no academic credentials to lead this important job. Radha Kumari Gyawali was the energy minister from 2014-2015. She has a BA and MA in Political Science. Great! There are several more "namunas" like these competent ministers. And we wonder why our energy policy sucks.

Puru Shah

THE FINE PRINT

Obviously, our politicians and leaders have proven their 'illiteracy' over and over again ('The Fine Print', Puru Shah, #797). It's time to make these agreements available on public domain.

Namah

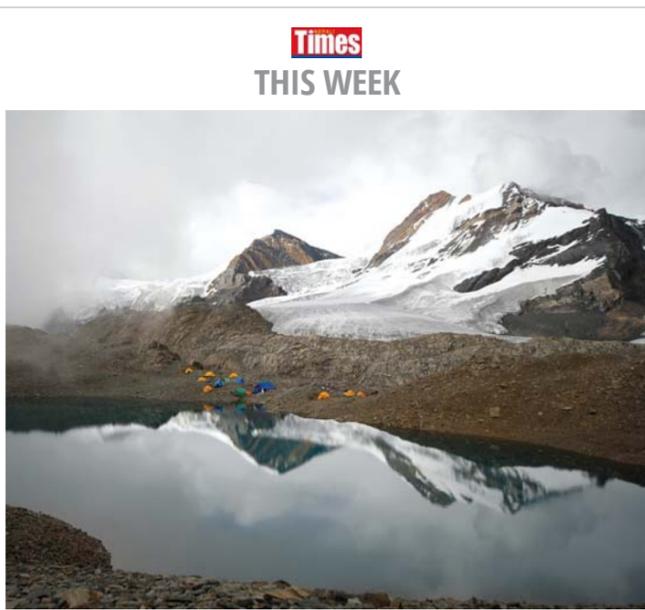
■ I agree. I have not come across any publications by Nepal Government that includes contents of the MoU. Very closed door negotiations.

PS

THE VERTICAL UNIVERSITY

This is a great initiative ('The Vertical University', Rajeev Goyal & Priyanka Bista, #797). I would like to thank the founders and applaud them for highlighting the importance of conservation of Nepal's rich biodiversity. Projects such as these will help raise awareness amongst Nepalis and get more people interested to understand and protect the environment in general.

Rupa



PADAM GHALE

Times THIS WEEK



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Most shared on Facebook

Go take a hike by *Seulki Lee* (26 shares)



Most visited online page

Go take a hike by *Seulki Lee*
(1,617 views)



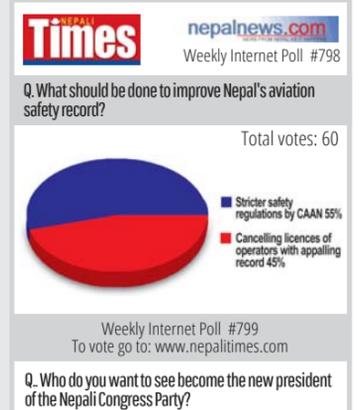
Most popular on Twitter

Wired, Editorial
(57 retweets, 83 favourites)



Most commented

Leaving footprints by *Sahina Shrestha*



Trapped in the Net

The parallel universe of social media is inhospitable terrain for women

A disturbing number of people on social media today feel compelled to censor themselves and shy away from debates and engagement for fear of online abuse. Abuse existed before the internet, of course, but the new medium has made such attacks easier and more frequent.



THIS IS IT
Rubeena Mahato

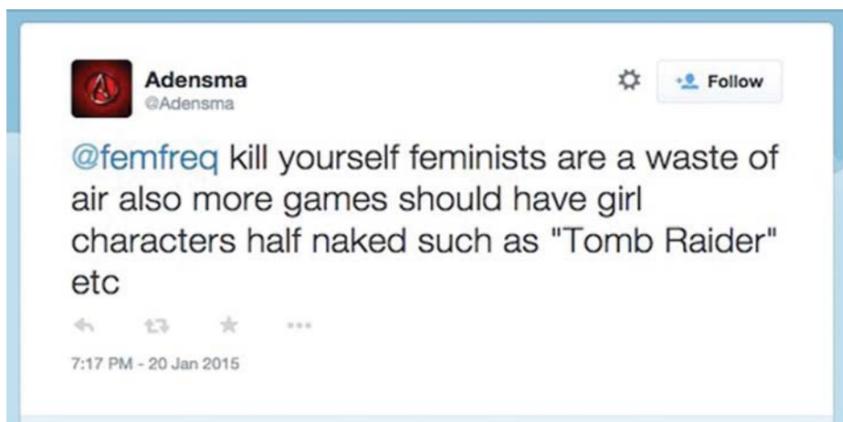
You can comfortably sit in your home behind a computer, doling out patronising, unkind and unsavoury remarks at people, smug in your own condescension. While people would think twice before doing so in the real world, somehow the internet and the hyper-expressive world of social media make it easier for people to treat such behaviour as acceptable. Trolls think they are dissidents, and you are expected to take insults in the name of free speech.

And if you happen to be a woman online, chances are that you face repeated and targeted attacks, unfair stereotyping and criticism not just for your opinion but simply for having an online existence.

'physical harm', just like we are told in the real world. Block and delete and forget about it, we are advised by well-meaning friends. We do so, but no one expects accountability from the abusers.

Women have often found themselves cut off from public spaces and now it is the online space where they feel marginalised. Even without trolls, it is certainly not a place where women can expect to interact on equal terms. If, like me, you found the all-male panels of the real world frustrating and came here expecting no one would cut you off mid-sentence, be prepared to be disappointed. There will always be some guy explaining your own ideas to you before telling you 'you don't really understand'. Rarely are men questioned in the same way. In fact people who bully, harass and troll women are often promoted by prominent people on social media who either don't seem to care or understand how their endorsement holds women back.

Some people find it odd that I tweet about politics, and they make it a point to tell me that in not very flattering ways. I have been a political reporter and columnist for *Nepali Times* for five years, I studied politics in university and this is what I do. Should I apologise for doing what most men can do without



In my five years of having a public twitter account, I have seen my fair share of harassment targeted at women for all kind of reasons: for speaking up as well as for keeping quiet, for being a 'feminist' and alternatively for 'not', for the kind of clothes we wear and for our personal choices. Irrespective of what you say, if you are a woman with an opinion, be prepared for some unprovoked and irrelevant references to your body, and lots and lots of 'mansplaining'.

Men also receive abuse, but women even on opposite sides of the political and ideological spectrum often find themselves to be the subject of sexual jokes and denigration. Men will be attacked for being callous, dishonest, crooks and corrupt but if a woman offends you she is either a crazed 'feminist' or a 'slut'. Women are not thought of as independent, thinking beings with free will and their opinions are at most dismissed as being 'manipulated' or 'guided' by others.

It's a man's world out there, but the virtual world is even more male-dominated. If anything, the misogyny of the everyday world seems to be magnified in the cyberspace for women who decide to put themselves out there. And the solution to this? We are told to ignore the abusers and grow a thick skin unless they really mean

being questioned? Is there a list of things that women should not talk about in social media lest it makes the men uncomfortable? Avoid this place altogether, we tell ourselves. Women do not need yet another place where they have to learn the rules of what they can and cannot do.

The internet was once lauded as a liberating technology helping people achieve freedoms, demand transparency from their governments and fight

authoritarians. But social media also stifles free and constructive debate and sharpens differences instead. It was supposed to be a place where people could engage, interact and seek consensus. It has turned into a virtual battlefield where lies, slander, propaganda and hate speech force people

into isolated echo chambers. There is little scope for thoughtful, considered and balanced discussions, it prefers certainty over nuance, instantaneousness over substance and depth, and lazy stereotyping over acceptance of diverse realities.

There must be more meaningful ways to engage in civilised public debate online, without cyber-bullying and harassment. Until that happens, the internet will remain an inhospitable and unequal terrain for most people, including women.



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BIKRAM RAI

Online violence

Nepal lacks adequate laws to deal with increasing violence and harassment of women in cyberspace

SAHINA SHRESTHA

When Sima Thapa started receiving inappropriate comments and pictures on her Facebook page, she tried to delete the comments. But every time, a new stalker would spring up.

When one heckler repeatedly took to sending her lewd messages, Thapa contacted the police in hopes that the matter would be resolved. But the police ridiculed her predicament.

"They told me these things happen when you are young and pretty, can you believe it?" said Thapa, who is a law and psychology student. "It was me who had to lecture them on civil rights and their responsibility to take any action."

The police finally acted and caught the offender, who was asked to apologise to Thapa and touch her feet. "What is the point if he still doesn't realise his actions were wrong?" asks the 25-year-old.

What happened to Thapa is not an isolated case. Every day, up to ten complaints of online stalking and harassment are lodged with the police in Kathmandu alone, all of them from young women. There are nearly as many from other parts of the country.

According to Nepal Police's Metropolitan Crime Division, most of the cases involve perpetrators creating fake IDs on social media to blackmail victims for money and defamation. More often than not, the offenders are people victims already know.

According to advocate Pabitra Raut, most online violence cases are settled out of court, and the perpetrators are rarely punished.

"Online violence has implications on the psychology of the victim. If the security personnel handling the case takes them seriously, it helps to alleviate their pain to a certain degree," says Raut.

The growing reach of the internet and social media has inflicted harm on women and girls even in rural areas. According to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Krishna Prasad Koirala, (see box) sexual abuse via the internet has become common because of the proliferation of cybercafes and smartphones.

"A lot of cases have come in where they first become friends through social media, develop a relationship, take and exchange nude photographs, and later are blackmailed for money or sexual favours," Koirala explains.

Many concede that cyberspace is not a friendly or safe place for women, but Nepal's laws seem ill equipped to deal with it.

Says Raut: "Nepal lacks clear laws to deal with violence on social media. The accused is charged under the Electronic Transaction Act and Defamation Act but with the technology moving as fast as it is, we need a separate law for this."

Under the current Act, handheld smartphones are not included in the definition of 'computer', and in 90 per cent of the complaints, proof is hard to come by.

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against women

Internet crime, stalking, and identity thefts are common because of the proliferation of cybercafes where users often don't log out. The large Nepali diaspora has also led to the rapid spread of social media with more than 5 million users in Nepal. It is a problem apprehending offenders who are not in Nepal.

"Even with computers it is hard tracking down the

IP addresses, when it comes to phone you need to save the evidence and have it printed out," says Raut.

The law also states that a report must be filed within thirty-five days of the occurrence of the offence, leaving many cases of online violence unreported. Moreover, victims outside of the Valley are more at risk, since cases of cyber crime are only handled by



the Kathmandu District Court.

There is also concern over the vagueness of the punishment for online violence. A person who commits a computer related crime is liable to a fine not exceeding Rs 50,000 and/or imprisonment not exceeding six months, depending on the degree of the offence.

"There needs to be clearer definition regarding the crime, the degree of punishment and liability," says Raut.

A potential solution to many of the cases, however, is as simple as strengthening the privacy settings on social media accounts.

Says Raut: "Following simple steps like not accepting requests from strangers and not sharing passwords go a long way." 🇳🇵

Cyber literacy

With more people going abroad for work, many left in the villages have started using social media to keep in touch with their loved ones. And as the number of users grows, cases of cyber crime have spiked in recent years. Most of the victims are lured into friendships and relationships through social media and are coaxed into sharing nude photos, which are later used for blackmail.

Police in the eastern district of Panchthar for instance, have started training secondary and higher-secondary students and family members of migrant workers on internet safety.

"It was important to start this campaign since criminals started using mobiles, computers and social media for criminal activities like fraud, rape and blackmail," says DSP Krishna Prasad Koirala (pic) of Panchthar.

Having worked in the Criminal Investigation Directorate and the Crime Investigation Bureau, Koirala developed the framework for the media literacy course himself. Participants are trained on what the internet is and how to use it



LAXMI GAUTAM

properly, learn about privacy settings and the advantage and disadvantages of using social media.

Students in 20 schools in the district have been trained, and Koirala hopes to reach all 37 VDCs in Panchthar.

Laxmi Gautam in Panchthar

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Newbie to Sydney

Qatar Airways recently added a new flight route from Doha to Sydney, making this the third flight connecting the airlines to Australia. It



will operate a Boeing 777-300 daily, connecting Australian passengers to its global network of more than 150 destinations.

Huawei in Nepal

Chinese mobile company Huawei recently unveiled the Huawei Mate 8 in Nepal. Claiming to be a productivity-driven smartphone, the Mate 8 is equipped with the next-generation Huawei EMUI 4.0 operating system, based on Android's



Marshmallow. Sporting a 4000 mAh high-density battery, the phone promises a fast charging speed and a long lasting battery.

UEFA Fever

With the UEFA EURO 2016™ tournament around the corner, Carlsberg recently announced its "Live it LIVE!" campaign, giving customers an opportunity to win a VIP hospitality package to watch the match live in France. Upon purchase of every bottle/can of Carlsberg, patrons can fill out a ticket and place it in the Carlsberg drop-box at the nearest selected outlets for the next eight weeks. The lucky winner will be announced on 3 May 2016 via lucky draw.



Life of a billionaire

Billionaire Binod Chaudhary's English version of his autobiography *Binod Chaudhary: My Story* was launched recently.

Tracing the entrepreneur's journey and challenges in the business world, the book also features personal stories of Chaudhary's life. The autobiography was translated into English by late journalist Sanjeev Ghimire.



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WWF Nepal, the global conservation organization leading international efforts *for a living planet*, seeks applications from qualified Nepali candidates for the following full-time position. If you think you are an achiever and willing to work within a diverse team in a multicultural environment with commitment and passion for what you believe in, you are highly encouraged to apply.

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Major Responsibilities: The Program Development Officer will help support WWF Nepal's program development and fundraising portfolio. Under the supervision of Deputy Director - Program Development and Monitoring s/he will work in close coordination with other departments, field programs and partners to develop concept notes and proposals that are in line with emerging funding trends and donor requirements. His/her responsibility shall include substantial time spent at WWF Nepal's field project locations to interact with project managers and communities to support project development opportunities.

Qualifications: A Bachelor's degree in Environment Science, Management or a related field with at least three years of development sector experience in fundraising, marketing and developing proposals is required. It is essential that the individual possesses excellent technical writing skills essential for developing project proposals and the ability to comprehend and interpret proposal development guidelines. Public relations and marketing skills will be of an added advantage.

Interested applicants are requested to download the **application form** on the below mentioned website and send the same with an application letter to the **email address** below by **17:00 hours on 11th March 2016**. Please mention the position you are applying for as the subject. Emails without an application letter and completed application form will not be entertained. Only shortlisted candidates will be informed. Detailed TOR for the above mentioned position can be downloaded from our website.

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Judicial match-fixing

By giving in to political pressure Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha has failed to uphold the integrity of the Judiciary



RSS

After months of dithering, the Judicial Council finally nominated 11 justices to the Supreme Court this week. Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha, who heads the council, nominated seven sitting judges from the Appellate Court and four senior advocates.



LEGALESE
Binita Dahal

They are Dipak Kumar Karki, Kedar Chalise, Meera Khadka, Sharada Prasad Ghimire, Hari Krishna Karki, Biswombar Prasad Shrestha, Ishwor Khatiwada, Ananda Mohan Bhattarai, Anil Kumar Sinha, Prakash Raut and Sapana Pradhan Malla.

As per constitutional provisions, the senior-most Justice becomes the Chief Justice after the retirement of their predecessor. Which means Hari Krishna Karki, Bishwombar Prasad Shrestha, Prakash Raut and Sapana Pradhan Malla are next in line to be future Chief Justices.

This clearly shows that the members of the judicial council were very strategic in placing the nominees' names in order of seniority. It also shows that there has been political manipulation in selecting the names and ranking them. It is like match-fixing in the judiciary.

This is deadly serious as the politically affiliated nominees will give verdicts according to their political affiliation, thus continuing to undermine the judiciary and the rule of law.

The Judicial Council apparently recommended political figures for the first time. Sapana Pradhan Malla, though highly regarded as one of the most competent female lawyers of her generation, has already played the role as the parliament member from CPN-UML. She is a member of that political party.

This means the principle that appointments to the Supreme Court must be non political and not from political cadres has been flouted and creates a precedence for future appointments. What is even more ironic is that it is Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha,

known for his integrity and professionalism, who made this decision under his watch.

Shrestha got to lead the Supreme Court at a time when its image had been tarnished by two of his predecessors, and there were high expectations on the part of the Bar and Bench from him to do better. His predecessor, Damodar Prasad Sharma, was criticised for recommending some controversial figures to the Apex Court, and the person he replaced, Justice Ram Kumar Prasad Sah, was also similarly tarnished.

Unfortunately, like them, Shrestha also gave in to political pressure. Many career judges and senior advocates who are in line for Chief Justice were seen lobbying to be appointed both in the Judiciary and political parties. It is an irony, and a sign of the times, that we have seen career judges visit offices of political parties to thank the leadership for recommending their name to the Judicial Council.

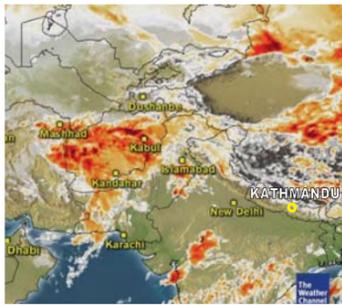
The current list as in the past has been made with some vested interests from the JC.

Whatever precedence he set in many of the human rights and women's issues will now be forgotten because of his politically motivated appointments. Shrestha failed to exercise impartiality and reward judges for their merit and integrity.

The Judicial Council has brought in three women, two Newars and a Madhesi, but has failed to make its nominations truly inclusive under guidelines of the new constitution. It has also nominated only people from the judicial profession and not those with academic backgrounds, civil servants and the Attorney General's office. There are also no senior advocates from outside Kathmandu.

It was comparatively easy for Chief Justice Shrestha to take the decision as only the law minister was from the political side in the Council. But he failed to seize the opportunity.

The Supreme Court which has a massive backlog of cases is waiting for some qualified and capable justices who are willing to give justice to the people, not ones who have political or personal ambitions. ❑



It is warming up, but the haze is still filtering the sun and this is keeping the maximum temperature below the mid-20s. The minimum is now climbing regularly into the double digits. The weekend will tend to be partly cloudy with overcast afternoons but with less than likely chance of precipitation. The daily variance of temperature of 18 degrees is normal for this time of year, which means you have to dress like an onion and peel off the layers as the day progresses. Happy spring.

| FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| 25° 10° | 26° 10° | 25° 9° |

TEACHING THE WRITE WAY

Activist challenges notion that social service is solely for women

MICHAEL NISHIMURA

Late one night six years ago, Haushala Thapa Zimba stormed into an orphanage in Baluwatar with a few friends and rescued 14 children who were ill-treated in the shelter. She created a home for the children and set up the charity, Children and Youth First (CYF).

Today, the organisation supports a school in Bhaktapur that now houses 50 underprivileged children called Life Vision Academy (LVA), and Haushala Creatives, a co-working space equipping women with skills so they can earn more.

"I saw their conditions and how they were being taken advantage of. People like us, who have the knowledge of social work and the passion to do it must take action against unjust situations," says Thapa, who is pushing for gender equality through education while challenging the idea that social service is solely for women.

Thapa has a pedigree in social work; her father Khem was with Save the Children and her mother Rupa was a midwife.

"Every holiday or semester break, my father took me to his project areas and my mom took me to her village, where a lot of people still don't go to school," says Thapa. Her upbringing inspired her to work on a progressive curriculum at LVA that breeds creativity and inquisitiveness, encouraging students to 'play and learn'.

"We take the kids out of the classroom to expose them to their environment," says Thapa. "When you give them that sort of



DO-GOODER: Haushala Thapa Zimba with students at Life Vision Academy, a school her organisation, Children and Youth First set up to educate underprivileged children in Bhaktapur.

experience, when they go back to their books again, it's much easier to relate to reality."

Despite her commitment, Thapa often faces skepticism because of her age and gender. The 29-year-old director oversees a team of 19 staff members and frequently has to win over people doubting her capabilities. Some men question whether Haushala Creatives is actually a workplace, insinuating that it is a place for women to chitchat.

Challenging the idea of what constitutes 'women's work' is yet another difficulty. "As a woman you're classified and expected to serve the society," says Thapa. "Men should serve their society, too."



march
International Women's Day

Thapa takes inspiration from strong women like her mother, who have overcome societal constraints to achieve their goals. She believes that in order to change patriarchal structures, instead of controlling girls on what not to do, we must transform the way we teach boys and men from day one.

"Once sons are aware of the issues that women and girls face and understand how to be emotionally supportive, everything will fall into place," she contends.

Changemakers like Thapa are hopeful that gender equality is improving, even if some people refuse to see it. She says: "Women are changing things, expectations put on women are motivation to excel more, to set new standards and think about how we can do things better in the future." 🇳🇵

www.cyfnepal.org
www.haushala.com

MICHAEL NISHIMURA

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To the finish line

Jumla teenager will not stop running towards her dream

SMRITI BASNET

Ultra marathon runner Bishnu Maya Budha never thought she'd set foot in a foreign country. Yet on her very first trip overseas, she won the MSIG Lantau VK female championship in Hong Kong, covering a distance of 5km in 51 minutes and 50 seconds.

Budha was running not only for her love of the sport but also to silence critics back in her town in the remote northwestern mountains of Nepal who doubted her.

"Being a girl, people in my village thought I was up to no good. But I did not care, I did what I thought was right. I kept on running," says Budha, who is busy preparing to run her next race in Yading, China.

Raised in Jumla, Budha was in Grade 10 when she started running. "It started off as a hobby. I used to play volleyball and badminton, and running was just another sport for me."

Two years later, Budha has a newfound outlook on life and on running. Winning the Jumla Rara Ultra Marathon in 2014, her very first race, strengthened this resolve.

Zealous and perseverant, Budha continued to compete in more races to reach her dream of becoming the world's top ultra marathon runner. She took first place at the Manaslu Race and

also ran in trail and ultra marathon races in Annapurna, Shivapuri, and Kathmandu.

But for Budha, winning is not the only motivation. It is the idea of being recognised and representing Nepal in the world that keeps her going, despite people's disapproval.

Budha confesses that initially it was hard not having the support of her family. However, it was her guru, Hari Rokaya, who refused to give up on her.

"She has immense potential and she can achieve so much in this field," says Rokaya. Still, his wish is to see her enrolled in the Army: "You need a job, some kind of stability. One cannot just run and earn a living, unless you have access to good facilities and are financially sound."

Nevertheless, the 19-year-old is optimistic that she can support herself through her passion. Taking inspiration from running sensation, Mira Rai, she believes the sky is the limit in her running career.

Budha's biggest gripe, however, is against the government for not giving ultra marathon running the recognition it deserves, even though there are brilliant runners from Jumla and elsewhere.

Still, she says: "No matter what people say or do, we should not lose hope." 🇳🇵



ACTION ASIA EVENTS



GOPEN RAI

Downplaying wo

The subdued welcome for the female football team after

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

When Nepal's men's football team beat India in a tightly contested match to take gold in the 12th South Asian Games in Shillong last month the whole country erupted with joy. The last time Nepal had won was 23 years ago in the 1993 SAG Games in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Finally, the dark cloud hanging over Nepal's football had been lifted, analysts said. But what was forgotten amidst the celebrations and extensive coverage of the men's victory was that Nepal's women's team was also competing in the Games, taking silver. But there were few fans at the airport and no victory parade through the streets of Kathmandu.

"Of course, we would have loved to be in their place and have

the support of the entire nation with us," says team captain Anu Lama, who isn't really surprised by the subdued welcome. "That's just the way things have always been."

In the absence of private football clubs for women in Nepal, it is the departmental clubs of the Armed Police Force, Nepal Police and Army, which provide job opportunities for women footballers. More than half of the players including Lama who were selected for the SAG are associated with these clubs.

"People don't want to invest in women's football because they don't think they can make money out of it," explains Sanjeev Mishra, a football analyst and development director at ANFA (All Nepal Football Association). "But, initiation should be taken by big clubs. Only then will performance improve and result in increase in quality and quantity of good players."

Currently, as national players,



DHRUBA KC

WUSHU WARRIOR

"My gold medal is a message for girls who think they are not as good as boys"

SAHINA SHRESTHA



Watching Nima Gharti Magar's intense concentration while performing nanchuan (a form of wushu practiced with a sword), it's hard to believe that the teenager gold medalist from the South Asian Games took up the sport only four years ago.

The movements are graceful yet powerful as she effortlessly maneuvers the heavy sword with an air of confidence that belies her young age. In a field still dominated by men, the 16-year-old is determined to break barriers and gender stereotypes.

"My gold medal is a message for everyone, especially girls who think they are not as good as boys when it comes to physical tasks," says Magar, sitting on the banks of Godavari river, where she first began her wushu training.

Many of her friends who began their training with her have quit and her friends at school are also not interested in sports, and Magar says she is frustrated with the attitude among her female friends. Those close to her know Magar

as someone who'd always stand up for herself. She'd beat up her older brother when he tried to look down on her. Father Mansur Gharti Magar encouraged both his children to try out the sport when they showed interest in joining the local Ninja quan.

His son dropped out but Nima continued training. "Look at her now. She has earned a name for herself and done us proud," says Mansur.

Nima always enjoyed watching players of the Ninja Wushu Quan train beside the river from her house in Tikathali. So when a friend suggested they join together one day, she jumped right in. Soon after, she made it to the national team, securing the second position in the 9th National Wushu Championship, but lost her spot when she came in third in the Lumbini Championships. Remaining confident, she trained even harder and qualified for the Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea.

But her form wasn't included in the final list.

"She cried for days," remembers Mansur. With only three spots in the SAG closed camps, Nima's worries were compounded since she also missed her exams while training. But when she called to say she made it on the team, her father told her to concentrate on wushu and not worry about her exams.

"If she has to, she can always give her SLC next year," says Mansur, who had moved his family to Kathmandu from Rolpa in 1999 to escape the conflict.

For now, the 10th grader is concentrating on her studies. "My first goal was the SAG and now that I have achieved it, my next goal is clearing the SLC," says Nima.

When she is not busy studying and training, Nima enjoys drawing and with her new-found popularity she has found another hobby. "I enjoy photo shoots," says Nima as she poses for the camera.

nepalitimes.com
Wushu Warrior



Women's football

SAG shows that women still have to play defense

each female player receives a monthly salary of Rs 10,000 from ANFA, Nepal's prime football governing body, compared to Rs 15,000 for male players.

Some male players earn up to Rs 70,000 a month playing for local clubs, others even more from endorsement deals. "That unfortunately is not a possibility for female players," says Dhruba KC, coach of the women's team.

KC suggests increased grassroots training for young

women and girls, holding more women's tournaments and offering football programs on par with those for male footballers to develop women's football in Nepal.

Every year ANFA receives \$250,000 in assistance from FIFA and less than 20 per cent goes towards the development of women's football.

But KC believes lack of funds is not the main problem. "What's lagging is a clear vision and dedication to improve women's football," says the coach.

Since 2010, the women's team has put on consistently good performances, reaching the finals of both the South Asian Games and the SAFF Championship three times in a row. But in all these matches, Nepal lost to India.

"Everybody talked about how the men's team hadn't won an international title in over two decades, but nobody wanted to discuss why the women's team couldn't perform against India," says Mishra.

An aging pool of players, lack of adequate training, limited exposure, and a lack of interest from sponsors has all hurt women's football in Nepal.

The problem, however, is not only in Nepal. Women's football usually gets much less attention than men's football around the world. People like KC are trying to change that before the next SAFF Championship in September.

Says KC: "Our women are equally capable and talented and have the ability to win medals. They just need more support."



Judo Queen

For Phupu Lhamu Khatri, winning the gold medal during the 12th South Asian Games in India last month was by far the greatest moment in her life.

But, even as the first Nepali woman to take gold in judo at the SAG, Khatri's introduction to the sport came about purely by chance. After a judo tournament held near her family's restaurant, many of the competitors dropped by for lunch.

Judo Association members Chandra Dangol and Lila Adhikari struck up a conversation with Khatri and persuaded her father to let her give the sport a go. The following day, her father took her to the judo club, and at 13, her journey to being a judo champion began.

Khatri cites her father, Dorje Khatri, as her biggest motivation to excel in the sport. He was tragically killed in the avalanche on the Khumbu Ice fall below Mt Everest in 2014 that took the

lives of 18 Nepali climbers.

When it was announced that she had won the gold medal, Khatri said she saw her father before her eyes,

smiling and congratulating her. "I always think of him before I do my judo, and in that moment when I saw him, it was too amazing. He's my hero," she says.

Khatri also attributed her win to the opportunities and support that her family and coaches have given her throughout the years. "It was an achievement of a lifetime and judo gave me that platform," she says. "I'm so thankful for that, and for everyone who has helped me get to this level."

The 21-year-old is currently in Hungary, undergoing further training in hopes to qualify for the Olympics, which will be held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil this August.

Khatri said that she would love to continue competing in judo, but that it would depend on her family's circumstances. As her father was the main breadwinner, the family has been struggling to cope ever since his death.

But, she says: "Even if I don't compete in future I will be attached to the sport, perhaps as a coach. Judo gave me a platform and a name, so I can't live without it in my life."

Yuwei Liew



EVENTS



#photoNepal

A photo exhibition on tourism in Nepal by Min Ratna Bajracharya.
4 to 6 March,
10am to 5pm,
Nepal Tourism Board,
Exhibition Road, (01)4256909

Women's run,

Join in on the fun and celebrate International Women's Day by participating in the second 5K Fun Run. 5 March, 7 to 9am, Jawalakhel Ground, 5ktmfunrun@gmail.com, 981879278, Registration fee: Rs 200

The Vagina Monologues,

Hear out female voices on sex, relationships and violence against women. 8 March, 4.30 pm, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka, For bookings: (01)4249761

Hamri Bahini VG Monologues,

Celebrate this Women's Day by supporting those raising awareness about violence against women. 5, 6 and 8 March, 2 to 4pm, Shilpee Theatre, Anamnagar, 9860178609, Rs 500



KJC for Women,

Special discounts for women on KJC's music lessons this Women's Day. Offer valid till 15 March, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01)5013554, info@katjazz.com.np

Japanese art,

Paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs and more by 11 Japanese artists celebrating Japan's art and culture. 27 February to 8 March, 9.30am to 4.30 pm, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, (01)4220735

Cosplay contest,

Compete at Otaku Next's cosplay competition. 5 March, 10.30am to 4.30pm, Chhahari Services, Baluwatar, (01)4424692, rhea.chhahari@gmail.com



Fly high

A total of 150 pilots from 26 countries are competing at the Paragliding Pre-World Cup being held in Pokhara. The eight-day event, which began on 26 February, is organised by the Nepal Air Sports Association and comes under the 'PWCA Class 1 – Pre World Cup Tour'. The competition is divided into five categories with one for Nepali pilots. Until 5 March, Pokhara

Trade Expo,

A three-day trade expo organised by Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (FWEAN). 1-3 April, 10am to 5pm, Army Officer's Club, Bhadrakali, (01)2003080, fwean.info@gmail.com, www.fwean.org.np

Art Market,

A place to sell and buy art -- paintings, prints, posters and design products. Also enjoy live art by Artlab and live music by Pahelo Batti Muni. 5 March, 12 to 4pm, The Yellow House, ange@image-ark.com, nayantara@photocircle.com.np, pranidhi@image-ark.com

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



A girl should be two things:
who and what she wants.
-Coco Chanel

#MOTivationMondays
Kripa Kreation

DINING

Kakori goes Rajasthani

For a genuine Rajasthani experience, visit Kakori at the Solatee Crowne Plaza, where an assortment of delectable Rajasthani dishes awaits all at the Rajasthani Food Festival.

Prepared by Chef Shailendra Singh Rana from Rajasthan, the cuisine offers a unique mix of textures and tastes. With emphasis given to dried vegetables, pulses, and milk products, the dishes are mainly prepared with ghee.

Guests can enjoy a sumptuous variety of Suruwati Khana or starters, available in both vegetarian and non vegetarian a la carte options. The non-vegetarian starters feature marinated and charcoal roasted spicy chicken (Murg Banjara) and char grilled lamb marinated with hung curd, mace, cumin and roasted Jodhpuri chilli (Gosht Marwadi). For vegetarian starters, guests can enjoy traditionally prepared onion fritters with Jodhpuri spices (Pyaz ki Kachori) and deep fried lady fingers coated with spices (Kurkuri Bhindi).



For mains savory varieties like Murg Jodhpuri, Laal Maans, Murg Jaisalmeri, Paneer Shekhawati, Jaisalmeri Ker Sangari, Rajasthani speciality Dal Bati-Churma and more can be enjoyed with rice, naans, roti or paranthas. Additionally, guests also have the option to order vegetarian and non vegetarian thalis.

To round off the meal perfectly, the restaurant offers a variety of traditional Rajasthani sweets like Balu Shahi, Mohan Thal, Mathura Peda, and Apple Kheer. So don't wait and book yourself a seat to enjoy a relaxing, authentic Rajasthani dinner at Kakori.

Until 10 March
Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza
Tahachal, (01)4273999

MUSIC



Sabin Rai Live,

Live performance by the pop rock star Sabin Rai. Entry fee: Rs 500
5 March, 6pm onwards, Tamas Spa Lounge, (01)4257658

Gypsy Jazz Fest,

Groove to the tunes of gypsy jazz with international gypsy jazz artists and Nepali guitar maestro Hari Maharjan. 4 to 13 March, multiple venues across Kathmandu and Pokhara, 9860342165

Shahid Mallya Live

Enjoy soulful sufi and electronic music with Shahid Mallya and Elektro Sufi. 4 March, 7pm onwards, The Malla Hotel, Lainchaur, Kathmandu, 9813089163



Kanta dAb dAb,

Book your seats for a musical night with the Nepali fusion trio, Kanta dAb dAb. 12 March, 6 to 10.30 pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01)5528362

Tribute to Linkin Park,

Lift your spirits as Underside & Friends pay tribute to Linkin Park as part of Phase IX of the Tribute Nepal Series. Tickets: Pre sales for Rs 400, Door sales for Rs 500. 5 March, 2pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel

Syndicate Star,

Hum to the tunes of Syndicate with singing sensation Bipul Chettri. 5 March, 7pm onwards, The Victory Lounge, Darbar Marg, For bookings: 9801031277, 9802961570, 9801362313, 9801444055, 9813103771

GETAWAY



Famous Farm,

Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the aankhijhyal. Nuwakot, (01)4700426, info@rural-heritage.com

The Yellow House,

Bed and breakfast for the light traveller. Sanepa, (01)5553869/5522078, www.theyellowhouse.com.np



Park Village Resort,

Far away from the madding crowd, yet so close to the city. Budhanilkantha, (01)4375280, pvh@wlink.com.np

Barahi Jungle Lodge,

The first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park, spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool. Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01)4411113, bjl@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com



Tiger Mountain Lodge,

Situated 1000 ft above Pokhara valley, this resort offers spectacular views of Machhapuchhre, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu. www.tigermountainpokhara.com, (01)4426427, 9849194874

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TABOO NO MORE

Why is it so difficult for Nepali society to embrace female sexuality?



KAUSHAL RAJ SARKOTA

AYESHA SHAKYA

Over the past few decades, Nepal's conservative society has grown more mature when talking about sex. More schools are including sex education in their curriculum, and sexual awareness campaigns have been successfully organised in villages, which in turn have helped drastically reduce HIV rates across the country.

Even with such shifts in sexual attitudes, there is still one subject that is rarely spoken about: female sexuality. Left mostly to be discussed within private circles and in hushed tones, women's sexuality unsettles even the most open-minded and attracts its fair share of judgement and, in some cases, mockery.

Despite the challenges, efforts have been made to remove the taboo surrounding this topic. Last month, Madalenas Nepal, Mandala Theatre's women's group, performed the Nepali interpretation of *The Vagina Monologues*, or *Yoni Ka Kathaharu*. Based on the iconic play written by Eve Ensler, each monologue

tackles issues women face on the matters of sex, love, abuse, female genital mutilation, masturbation and orgasms. As the name suggests, it keeps the vagina in the centre of the discourse as a symbol of female strength and empowerment.

"*The Vagina Monologues* is not just a play, it's a process. With the 13 actors, it became a therapeutic experience where we grew confident owning our bodies

and talking about it," says director of the Nepali adaptation, Akanchha Karki.

Similar to the controversy it stirred back in 1996 when it premiered at the Off Broadway Westside Theatre, this year's shows in Kathmandu had their fair share of challenges.

"There was a sense of misunderstanding from some of our counterparts that *The Vagina Monologues* was meant

to put men down, that it was about male-bashing. They believed that by talking about female empowerment we were propagating western-influenced anti-men ideologies," says Karki.

Besides the insecurities, the actors were taunted for talking about topics related to sex and even received condescending remarks on their professionalism. Characteristic of male-dominated societies, some men felt threatened

by a group of women embracing their sexuality and talking openly about their experiences.

However, once the performances were staged, the level of animosity from some of their male counterparts decreased. It was also a positive sign that many men came out to support the performances out of genuine interest and curiosity.

"I was interested in learning more about feminism and while no one should expect a paradigm shift regarding how our society sees feminism after the show, *The Vagina Monologues* was a much needed blow to the patriarchal system we were brought up in," said Rajan Shrestha.

Movements like *The Vagina Monologues* act as agents of change that look to bring about a revolution in the way both men and women perceive female sexuality. Even as we fail to change the patriarchal mindset so entrenched in our society, art can play a crucial role in curbing that gap and being a platform for women to talk about themselves freely.

"There is a thin line between vulgarity and sensitively portraying aspects of the female sexuality. If we had performed in a sexual manner, we would probably not have got the same kind of positive reaction from our audience. In a closed society like ours, issues such as these need to be tackled responsibly first," says Karki. 

Madalenas Nepal will have an encore performance at Rato Bangala School Auditorium on 8 March at 4.30pm.

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for their day breaks. It will enable them to stay energetic and active throughout the day.

So, honey has all the goodness in the world: from being a healthy addition to your diet, to providing energy to the body, to increasing your metabolic system, and even working as an antioxidant. Love honey in all its glory and imbibe it as a part of your daily lifestyle for a healthy life. If old is gold, then honey is the treasure we've been handed over for generations. For anyone who wishes to lead a healthy lifestyle, honey must become an important component of their diet. There's really more to it than just a diet-friendly ingredient.

What people are not aware of is that it is an important ingredient for preventing illnesses and remedial for other health/medical conditions. Honey is a natural ingredient that possesses anti-bodies properties unlike sugar. While it has been recommended to stay away from sugar for patients, one must not stay sugar free. Hence, a honey diet is recommended. There are studies that suggest regarding the treatment of various organs honey is a good agent that aids patient's

non-cytotoxic to normal cells. Honey aids in

combating common ailments like headaches, cuts and bruises, burns, acne and pimples, dry skin, nausea, dizziness and more. For instance, one must chew honeycomb to calm down a severe hay fever. The Chinese believe that consuming honey drink helps reduce

the heat in the body. Honey and lemon juice is considered beneficial to battle obesity. It is so, because honey mobilises extra deposited fat, and the body utilizes it as energy. Honey is your best friend, especially if you are a foodie! A spoonful of this tasty golden liquid after a heavy and oily meal will do wonders for your digestive system. It also works as a great detox tonic.

Honey does not go bad. Yes, it's true! Honey is probably the only food that does not get spoiled over time.

The unique chemical composition of low water content and relatively high acid level in honey creates an environment unfavourable for



bacteria or other micro-organisms to grow. Elixir of life Honey is the only food that includes all the substances necessary to sustain life. These include enzymes, vitamins, minerals and even water. No wonder, it's called a superfood. Honey is also the only food eaten by humans that is produced by insects. Natural food supplement: Honey contains vitamins and antioxidants which are vital for a healthy body.

to reduce inflammation and scarring. If you're feeling sleeplessness, then mix honey with warm milk and have it before sleeping. It is known to make you feel relaxed and rested, and get you a good night's sleep. It's not just the adults who benefit from these golden drops. If your kids seem to feel lethargic throughout the day, or lack energy, then give them toasts with honey

recovery. It appears that honey is an intelligent food item that is selectively toxic to weak or harmful cells and



THE OSCARS REVIEW

It has been a strange and troubling year for the world of mainstream Hollywood cinema. The industry has been accused of racism, sexism, nepotism, and discriminatory practices at the highest levels.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

The Oscars ceremony this year was boycotted by some of Hollywood's most famous, with people like Will Smith and Spike Lee declining to attend and calling on Chris Rock, the host, to step down in solidarity with the black actors who, along

with an entire slew of actors from various ethnicities, did not figure whatsoever into the nominations this year; all of the actors across the main categories were white.

Most unfortunate, as a trend this year, is the success of *The Revenant*. A behemoth of a film by Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu - the Mexican filmmaker who became famous with his visceral, violent film *Amores Perros* (2000), and won the Oscar last year in the 'Best Director' category for *Birdman*.

Thankfully, while Leonardo DiCaprio did indeed win his long awaited Oscar in the 'Best Actor' category for his starring role in *The Revenant*, a cumulative win for having been nominated multiple times in the past, the film itself did not win in the 'Best Picture'

category, with *Spotlight* (reviewed previously in this column) stealing the show and gladdening the hearts of scores of movie goers around the globe, all of whom have been beating their chests in frustration at a win that would have solidified the status quo of white male hegemony in a world run by the very same.

Spotlight's win is an indicator that *The Revenant* was recognised for what it is, a vehicle for DiCaprio, made by a director who has enough hubris to continue making some of the most pointless, difficult to watch films that have come out of Hollywood.

Similarly, George Miller's excruciating, pain-filled, over the top horror show, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (also reviewed in this column), made for bit of a surprise run by winning 6 Oscars - mainly for visuals and sound related awards - once again a reminder that Hollywood rewards epics with pretensions towards artiness.

It was hard to find anything to like about the Oscars this year, aside from the *Spotlight* win. Year after year, this ceremony, which caps a season of massive spending on unworthy films that will not stand the test of time, is given so much media attention only to leave a bitter taste in the mouth. Luckily, this year's main films are actually a decent lot, with *Spotlight* being a classic example of what good, solid cinema ought to aspire towards.

nepalitimes.com

Trailer

HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

A NEW ERA: Senior leaders of various political parties along with PM KP Oli and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar observe a minute of silence to remember martyrs at the start of the 13th Nepal Congress General Convention at Khula Manch on Thursday.



GOPEN RAI

OUR TURN: Nepal Congress Acting President Ram Chandra Poudel and leader Shashank Koirala announce their candidacies for the posts of party president and general secretary at the party office in Sanepa on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

MAKING CLEAR: Former Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai and other members of Naya Shakti at a press meet to declare the party's financial guidelines at Babarmahal on Tuesday.



UNICEF

JOINING HANDS: Finnish Ambassador Jorma Suvanto (left) and UNICEF Representative to Nepal Tomoo Hozumi sign an agreement to co-finance recovery and reconstruction of WASH facilities in earthquake affected schools and communities in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

WELCOME: Information and Communications Minister Sherdhan Rai offers a free SIM card to a tourist on arrival at the Tribhuvan Airport on Wednesday marking the formal launch of a government initiative to provide free mobile SIM cards to all foreigners visiting Nepal.

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Deuba, Poudel or Sitaula?

Balkrishna Adhikari in *Nagarik*,
2 March

नागरिक

Nepal's oldest political party and currently the largest in Parliament, the Nepali Congress (NC) is amidst a rigorous process to elect its new leadership. Senior leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, acting President Ram Chandra Poudel and General Secretary Krishna Sitaula are in the fray to win the top post.

percentage, another round of elections will take place and only the top two candidates will be allowed to campaign. Sitaula has held out a proposal to Poudel: whoever is thrown out of the race between the two of them will have to support the other in the next round.

The NC's youth icon Gagan Thapa is the General Secretary candidate of the Sitaula panel. He is popular among younger constituents, which could hugely



Poudel, who claims to be the senior most leader of the establishment faction, has teamed up with Shashank Koirala, son of the visionary socialist BP Koirala who founded, nurtured and shaped the NC. Not only has he persuaded Shashank to be his candidate for General Secretary, but he has also brought Sujata Koirala, another inheritor of the Koirala legacy, by his side.

Poudel is adept at defending the party's ideology and is friendly with the NC cadre. But the road to victory is still bumpy for him, and he would face the biggest obstacle from within the establishment faction.

Krishna Sitaula, an influential leader of the NC establishment, is determined to stop Poudel from securing 51 per cent of the votes. As per the NC's statute, if none of the candidates secure the required

benefit Sitaula. Thapa had become an NC central committee member by winning the highest number of votes in the previous election. His temperament is a strength; he listens carefully before speaking and has rarely offended his friends. But even for him, victory would still be a tall order.

Running against Poudel and Sitaula is Sher Bahadur Deuba, the supreme leader of the anti-establishment faction of the NC. He has pitted Arjun Narsingh KC against his own son-in-law, Thapa, for General Secretary. Deuba is not articulate, talks less and avoids debate. But he is good at managing and mobilising resources, which many say is the reason why NC cadre support him. He is also trying to cash in on the split in the establishment to become the next NC president.

Ani at UN

Himal Khabarpatrika, 28 February-5 March

हिमाल

For more than a decade, Nepal's famous singing nun Ani Choying Drolma has shared Buddhism's sacred chants with fans worldwide. Now for the first time, on the occasion of International Happiness Day, the unlikely rock star will sing Buddhist hymns for peace at the General Assembly of the United Nations. This is the first time a Nepali singer will be performing at the UN's General Assembly.

"To be able to call for peace at the United Nations is both an opportunity and a thing of enthusiasm for me," said Ani. She added that she wants to utilise this opportunity to spread the Buddha's messages of peace. Known for her lullaby-like spiritual songs, Ani is also a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF Nepal.

Apart from performing Himali Buddhist hymns and spiritual songs, the guest of honor performer will also present her remarks at the General Assembly. Her team will include musicians Nhoo Bajracharya, Gopal Rasaili and Raman Maharjan.

Since 2012, the UN has been celebrating March 20 as the International Day of Happiness to promote the idea that the pursuit of happiness is universal and that people's well being is an integral part of economic growth.

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WORK IN PROGRESS



A Nepali migrant worker gets ready for work in the morning, he shares the small room with four others.

JAN MØLLER HANSEN
IN DUBAI

A hidden army of millions of labourers from India, Pakistan, Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal and other Asian countries construct and maintain the gleaming skyscrapers, sprawling shopping malls, roads, hotels, sports facilities in Dubai – a city that has erupted on the shores of the Arabian desert.

This is one of the wealthiest and most luxurious cities in the world, and it is the migrant workers who toil here that make this lifestyle possible. They created the physical environment, they maintain it in prosperity and luxury.

In return they get a little bit of the wealth, which they send home to take care of their families and prop up the home economies. Salaries and facilities in Dubai are better than some other countries where Nepali migrant workers go. However, their quarters are congested and some of the labour practices are problematic.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) says in a recent study that 100 per cent of Nepali workers in the Gulf countries have their passports withheld,



80 per cent are confined to their place of employment, 76 per cent do not receive wages on time, 61 per cent have endured physical abuse, 52 per cent have reported excessive working hours and 50 per cent have been deprived of basic nourishment like food and drinks.

In addition, the price migrant workers pay for their salaries is prolonged separation from their families. 🇳🇵

'T' is from Ilam. He cleans toilets in the worker's dormitory where he lives in Al Quoz industrial area of Dubai. He earns \$180 a month for 10-15 hour work days. He saves a little more than half of that and sends it home to support his wife and two children.



Workers are bused out early to their construction sites across Dubai.



ALL PICS: JAN MÖLLER HANSEN



Rajesh Neupane is from Palpa and has worked six and half years as a storekeeper in Dubai. He earns \$450 a month and is able to save \$300 working 10 hour shifts and sometimes has to work 14 hours with no overtime.



Gobin Thapa is from Jhapa but had moved to Darjeeling before migrating to Dubai to work as a security guard. He is 30 and has been here three years.

United Arab Emigrants

Nepali workers in the UAE move from construction to services

OM ASTHA RAI

When Tom Cruise crawled up and slid down the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, for a death-defying stunt in the 2011 blockbuster *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol*, movie fans in Nepal watched enthralled.

But little did they know that their own countrymen were among the 700,000 migrant workers in this Gulf emirate who built and maintain this iconic tower in Dubai. Nepali migrant workers, together with others from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have helped build not just the Burj Khalifa but much of the UAE since the early 1980s.

"Whether the Burj Khalifa or the Palm Island, almost every modern structure of Dubai was built by South and East Asian migrant workers, including Nepalis," says Bal Bahadur Tamang, former President of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA).

But Dubai's construction spree has slowed down in the last few years as oil prices continue to fall, and the demand for Nepali labourers in this most populous province of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) decreases.

"Dubai no longer requires as many construction workers as it used to," says Hira Kumari Yadav, Nepal's Labour Attaché for the UAE. "Very few visas are issued these days for construction workers for Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Fujairah."

However, increasingly more Nepalis are now entering the service sector in the UAE, working as chauffeurs, transporters and security guards and also in hospitals, hotels, malls and supermarkets.

"The pattern is certainly changing," says Tamang, who has been sending Nepali migrant workers to the UAE for the last 15 years. "Arab employers now trust Nepalis in well-paid jobs which till a decade ago used to be dominated by people from Kerala and the Philippines."

Tamang used to send mostly construction workers to the UAE until five years ago. Now the 1,500 Nepalis he sends there every year mainly work in the service sector.

The UAE is the fourth largest destination for Nepali migrants, after Malaysia, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. More than 400,000 Nepalis have migrated to the UAE in the last 10 years alone, and currently about 225,000 Nepalis are estimated to be working there. They send home nearly Rs 70 billion every year.

Lokendra Poudel, a 28-year-old scaffold fixer from Jhapa went to Abu Dhabi in 2008 after two years in Qatar. He returned home last week to be with his family for a three-month holiday. He says the UAE is relatively better than Qatar in terms of work safety.

"The company where I work does not compromise on our safety," he says. "And we get salaries on time."

As in Malaysia and other Gulf countries, young and certified healthy workers die in their sleep in the UAE, too. Last year more than 60 Nepalis died in the UAE, mostly due to heart attacks and road accidents. With the

international spotlight on working conditions, the UAE is reforming its laws and introducing new policies to reduce the risk of exploitation of migration workers.

In January, the UAE became the first country to prepare labour contract papers in languages other than Arabic, which the workers can read and understand. Says Labour Attaché Yadav: "They now know what they will have to do and how much they will be earning before leaving Nepal."

Two years ago, the UAE made it mandatory for the employers to pay the workers through the bank, reducing the risk of exploitation of the poor migrants.

Tumbling oil prices have hit the Gulf states, but the UAE is relatively unaffected because it has diversified its economy to trade, tourism and investments. After Malaysia temporarily banned the entry of migrant workers, labour recruiters are now even more focused on the Gulf, particularly the UAE.



But Tamang of the NAFEA is not confident that the UAE can be an alternative to the lost job market of Malaysia. "The UAE is a distinct destination for the safety and freedom that it offers to migrant workers," he says. "But in terms of volume of workers, it cannot replace Malaysia."

Tamang says the government must now focus on sending skilled workers to the UAE so that even if the numbers decrease, their earnings will not be affected. "At least 40 per cent of Nepalis in the UAE are already in decent and well-paid jobs," says Tamang, "whether this will grow depends on how our government approaches the UAE."

The UAE is preparing to set up its embassy in Kathmandu, which labour recruiters believe is long overdue so that Nepal can lobby to increase the UAE's uptake of Nepali workers. 

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Intelligent life on Mars?

Although men are supposed to be from Mars, the Mars Exploration Rover Mission that has been looking under rocks on the surface of the Red Planet these past months has found no traces of members of the male species hiding there.

Perhaps, if the staffing of the NASA space program was more gender balanced and there were more female scientists calling the shots, the quest for intelligent life in the inner planets would have centred instead on Venus, where there would have been a higher probability of finding women. (The good news is that a Nepali space scientist has found proof that there is water on Mars, although no traces of it have yet been discovered in Mangal Bazar.)

As we get ready to mark another Intergalactic Women's Day back here on Planet Earth next week, it is time once more to pay tribute to the longstanding struggle of women from all walks of life for equal rights with men. If men can make complete asses of themselves, it is argued, then women should also have the right to make she-asses of their



good selves if they so desire. This is what gender equality means in practice in the real world. Over the ages, in the arena of behaving like idiots, it was the men who enjoyed a monopoly. But it is not pre-ordained which sex should have more oxymorons, and if women too want to be as idiomatic as us men, then where is the harm?

Having had a headstart, maledom has always had an unfair

advantage in the race to be the most-asinine sex. Women have a lot of catching up to do, but given perseverance, commitment and determinism they can be as (if not more) idiosyncratic than those with both X and Y chromosomes. Some men are asses, and have their egos slightly dented when they see women overtaking them in this march towards mediocrity, but they should take solace in the

fact that imitation is the best form of flattery. What would be more delightful than to see women civil servants mimicking men as they squeeze zits in public while sunning themselves in the balmy spring sunshine on the balcony of the Department of Women and Labour.

Ever since cave men dragged cave women by the hair and chewed mastodon entrails with their mouths open, right down to the modern industrial age where men still haven't learnt to stow their toilet seats in an upright position during takeoff and landing, us boys have been rightly called the 'stronger' sex. Speaking of which, a recent survey has found that men, on average, think about sex 23 hours a day and the remaining one hour they spend in extracurricular activities such as taking sun-baths on the balcony of the Ministry of Manpower during which period they don't think about anything in particular.

So, if women want to play catch-up with us chaps, they will have to take up some manlike hobbies, like:

- Not just complain that we have a headache, but become headaches ourselves
- Let our eyes rove all over the member of the opposite sex we are talking to, taking time to kick the tyres and closely inspect the fenders and boot
- Use the upcoming Holi days to go on a no-holds-barred, all-out offensive against the opposite sex
- Treat anyone who has the nerve to overtake you on the Rabi Bhavan uphill as a personal affront to maledom and accelerate swiftly to keep ahead even if it means colliding with the road divider
- When lost in a strange city, never consult a map, never ask for directions and show we'd rather be lost than found

These simple ideas will allow even the most feminine woman to be as macho as the hairiest of us testosterone-filled numbskulls who are proud to call ourselves men.



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