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A jungle out there

After returning from China early this week, Prime Minister KP Oli told journalists that Chinese President Xi Jinping had accepted his invitation to visit Nepal by the end of 2016. The question is: will Oli still be around to welcome Xi?

Even while he was in China, speculation was rife that the days of the UML-Maoist-RPPN coalition was numbered. The gossip mills had started spinning as soon as three-time Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was elected the Nepali Congress president. Deuba is a veteran political coup-maker with a reputation for toppling incumbents.

But the Oli camp tried to quash the rumours. 'Government now stronger' read the banner headline in the UML's party organ, *Budhabar*. But the more Oli and his allies try to reassure the public and party cadre, the more they believe that the countdown for his ouster

has begun.

UCPN(M) spokesman Dinanath Sharma publicly said this week that the Oli government had failed and there should be an alternative -- this from the UML's main coalition partner in government.

The RPPN, the other important UML ally in the government, is also on the verge of a split with senior leader Keshar Bahadur Bista putting pressure on the party president and Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa to quit the government.

We asked NC leader Balkrishna Khand, a close aide to Deuba, if the main opposition is trying to topple the government. His reply: "We do not need to topple this government, it will collapse on its own."

Deuba has told close aides to focus on electing him as the party's parliamentary leader next week. If he is party president and parliamentary leader, Deuba will try to consolidate his hold in the NC by nominating his aides into

key posts. It will take him at least three months. He is not expected to create any trouble for Oli till that happens.

But Khand was sure that the present government would not be in power to present the national budget for the next fiscal year.

Analysts say that as long as the UCPN (M) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal stands by Oli, the present ruling coalition will not unravel. Dahal has said that in the worst case the present coalition can be transformed into an all-party government by bringing in the NC and Madhesi parties also on board.

Deuba would benefit if the Madhesi parties take to the streets again. If that happens, Oli may have to give way for an all-party government led by the NC.

On Thursday, the Madhesi Front threatened more protests not only in the Tarai but also in Kathmandu. That came a day after Nepal figured prominently in talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with

EU officials in Brussels. A joint press statement underlined 'the need for a lasting and inclusive constitutional settlement in Nepal in a timebound manner'.

Nepal's Foreign Ministry reacted swiftly on Thursday, accusing India and the EU of 'interfering in Nepal's internal affairs and hurting the sentiment of the people'. 

Om Astha Rai

SUN AND MOON

Korean spiritual movement gains political foothold in Nepal 

BY SEULKI LEE PAGE 14-15

SAVE NATURE
FROM POLITICIANS

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

Restoring Resorts

Re-introduce resorts inside
Chitwan National Parks, or not?

PAGE 8-9

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SAVE NATURE FROM POLITICIANS

Patronage and corruption threaten to undo Nepal’s achievements in conservation.

One achievement that Nepal’s can justifiably feel proud of is nature conservation. In a country where a vertical topography bestows such a stunning spectrum of biodiversity, preserving nature is Nepal’s contribution to protecting the global environment.

The foundations of conservation in this country were laid during the much-vilified Panchayat, and it was royal patronage that saved our national parks from the devastation that has been seen in India and elsewhere.

In earlier times, the jungles of the Tarai were decimated by trophy hunting. In 1850, Jang Bahadur Rana infamously killed 30 tigers in just one hunt. In 1911, Nepal’s rulers hosted King George V in Chitwan, and the 600-elephant hunting expedition massacred 36 tigers, 18 rhinos, an innumerable leopards, bears and even porcupines in a day of bloodshed. That gory record was broken by Juddha Shamsher who personally slaughtered 433 tigers from 1933 to 1940.

Nepal’s royal families later turned from being avid hunters to ardent conservationists. But, by then there was an even more lethal threat to wildlife: habitat loss caused by national policy of transmigration of hill peoples to the plains during King Mahendra’s reign.

The tide turned in 1973 when enlightened Nepali environmentalists and the royal government set aside what was left of Chitwan into a 923 sq km national park and a World Heritage Site. The tiger and the rhino were rescued from the brink of extinction, and there are now over 200 tigers and 500 rhinos in Chitwan alone. Gharials released into the wild from a breeding centre in Nepal have been found as far downstream as the Ganges delta in Bangladesh.

After the democratic transition, however, political interference and corruption threaten to undo past achievements. Wildlife poachers with political protection thrive amidst Nepal’s unstable transition. There is demographic pressure as the population of the Tarai explodes. The proposed East-West Railway alignment bifurcates Chitwan, jeopardising the park’s integrity. Pollution, overfishing and dam construction on the Narayani endanger aquatic fauna and the reptiles and birds that depend on it for food.

Despite all these hazards, Chitwan survived because of the pragmatism shown by Nepal’s early conservationists in partnering with local communities. The antagonistic ‘people vs park’ practice seen in other nature reserves was replaced by a ‘people for park’ approach. Community forests were set up in the buffer zone,



BIKRAM RAI

villagers were allowed in to cut thatch once a year, and in return they helped by providing intelligence about the activities of poachers.

Chitwan also became a model for eco-tourism and sustainable nature protection. In the 1970s and 80s, it was Tiger Tops Jungle Resort -- with rooms located on the high branches of tall sal trees -- that introduced exotic Chitwan (and Nepal) to the world. Not only did the lodge showcase the amazing work done to conserve Nepal’s biodiversity but, by attracting upmarket world travellers, brought the government substantial revenue that was ploughed back into conservation work in Chitwan and other national parks.

In 2012, Tiger Tops and a few other concessions lost their contracts. The argument was ostensibly that such resorts disturbed the wilderness area, but as we reported in this paper back then, it was mainly due to political pressure exerted by lodge owners in Sauraha who thought they could corner the upscale tourism market. Today, Sauraha has become a backpacker strip, overrun mainly by cheap eateries and sleazy bars, earning it the moniker ‘Thamel by the Park’. Meanwhile, Nepal lost the only destinations it once had for high-end safari tourism in the same league as Cottar’s 1920s Camp in Kenya’s Masai Mara, or Four Seasons in Tanzania’s Serengeti.

The debate about whether or not concessions should be given out to the highest bidders to set up resorts inside the park has heated up again after the Supreme Court overturned its own earlier ban in a decision in 2014. The government is drawing up guidelines to regulate future contracts for park lodges.

We have misgivings about allowing resorts inside the park given the state of lawlessness and impunity, the politics of patronage and reckless kleptocracy prevalent in Nepal today. As we have seen with shady petroleum contracts, the protection of black-marketers and the state’s involvement in illegal sand-mining and logging, Chitwan concessions could very well go not to the most bonafide bidder, but to the ones offering the juiciest kickbacks.

Even so -- and indeed we cannot -- halt progress any more than we could stop breathing just because the air is too polluted. Our effort should be targeted towards cleaning up the park lodge industry, and revive the successful eco-tourism model that allowed Nepal’s national parks to be sustainably conserved through revenue from high-end tourism.

Times

THIS WEEK

YUVARAJ SHRESTHA

Most reached on Facebook
And the rest of the news that didn't fit by The Ass
Weekly news roundup to bring our valued customers up to speed on goings-on in this great country of ours. (17,287 people reached)

Most shared on Facebook
So you want to be a voluntourist? by Michael Nishimura (81 shares)

Most popular on Twitter
Forecast: more thunderstorms by Om Astha Rai (51 retweets, 90 favourites)

Most visited online page
So you want to be a voluntourist? by Michael Nishimura (2,817 views)

Most commented
Un-intended Trans-Himalayan Consequences by Kanak Mani Dixit (15 comments)

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

DYING FOR OTHERS
Being recruited into the Gurkha Army is 100 times better than slaving it out in the Arabian desert or working as a darban in Mumbai ('Dying for others', Om Astha Rai, #801). I would suggest young Nepali men to get an education and do something worthy in their villages in Nepal, but if they want to serve in the British Army or other forces they should be free to do so.
R Rai

TRANS-HIMALAYAN CONSEQUENCES
the anti-Nepal lobby will poke fun at the new Nepal-China relationship, while pro-Nepal ones will go gaga over it ('Un-intended Trans-Himalayan consequences', Kanak Mani Dixit, #801). Like it or not, it is a milestone. It may take time to get the incomplete connectivity finished and get really moving. But it will provide the much needed alternative to the Blockade, which is precisely what it is.
Armugam

■ Kanak Mani Dixit could have also laid out the many agreements politicians of this country have signed in the past and what really

came out of those.

Cartoonist

■ Perhaps the ghosts of the 1962 Sino-India war is still haunting India, and its colonial schizophrenia has not ended. That is why it cannot see Nepal as a bridge to normalise realtions with China through trade.
Sabita Thapa

VOLUNTOURISM
It's a two way street ('So you want to be a voluntourist?' Michael Nishimura, #801). A lot of missionaries disguised as volunteers come to Nepal only to sell Nepal's religion. Many volunteers come to Nepal for a vacation and spend most of their time hanging around in Thamel. There are very few real orphanages in Nepal these days, and so are very few real volunteers.
Hurray

■ It is best to do a thorough research before visiting a foreign country to volunteer. This kind of problem exists in orphanages in Cambodia too.

Eira Torvinen

■ It is unfortunate that some organisations take advantage of those wanting to volunteer. There are others out there committed to responsible volunteer travel. Working with reputable local groups is an important factor, and as an organisation, we make that part of our commitment, with Nepal being one of our areas of specialty. We support local communities by employing local guides, staying and dining in family and locally owned lodging. We also connect humanity by helping people to understand different cultures.
Zoe Katsulos

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #802

Q. Should Nepal discontinue the recruitment of its men in foreign armies?

Total votes: 116

■ Yes 42.98%

■ No 48.86%

■ Don't know 8.16%

Weekly Internet Poll #803

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the government permit wildlife resorts to be set up inside the Chitwan National Park?

Times

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Escape velocity

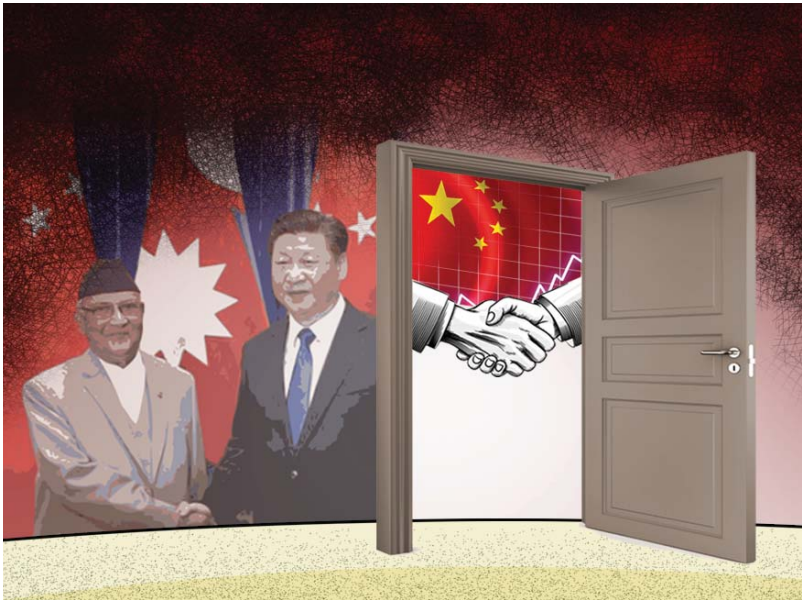
There should be no reason why India should tie itself in knots over Nepal seeking closer relations with China

The transit treaty signed between Nepal and China last week undoubtedly marks a milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries. There are detractors who have said the agreements are impossible to implement. Some have gone further, spelling doom, reminding Nepalis of their absolute dependence on India and warning of the wrath they are likely to incur for challenging Indian hegemony in the region.



THIS IS IT

Rubeena Mahato



To be sure, we have to wait and see how the agreements will play out in real terms and the tangible benefits that will accrue, if any. But more than anything, the agreements mark a major shift in how Nepal has conventionally engaged with China. The days of a subdued, cautious diplomacy, practiced by both countries in relation to each other, largely to avoid alarming and offending India, is over.

There was no reason for a country like Nepal not to foster better access and connectivity with a booming next-door

economy like China. But geopolitics meant that until now, Nepal was happy to orient itself towards the more accessible and culturally closer India. China appeared fine with assuming a lesser role in the region.

The accusation from the Indian end that Nepal is playing the China Card is laughable. In fact, so well-entrenched and pervasive is Indian influence in Nepal that under normal circumstances, Prime Minister Oli or any Nepali politician, could not have dared to take such a drastic step. Prime Minister

Oli went to India for his first official visit, careful not to break the tradition and hurt Indian sensibilities, even though there were strong voices in Nepal suggesting he do the opposite.

India will continue playing a decisive role in Nepal's domestic politics, and predictably there are rumours of efforts already underway to topple the current government. It was only India's rash adventurism that culminated in a nearly five-month long blockade, and its gross miscalculation of the ability of Nepali people to

endure hardships that made Oli's bold foray to the North possible.

With the unthinkable achieved, one could endlessly speculate what would be India's next move: Will it punish Nepal even more harshly? Will there be another blockade? Will new violence erupt in the Madhes? But frankly, Nepal cannot plan its long-term policies around 'what India wants' when India continues to act like an impulsive and irrational bully. There is no reason why Nepal should be chastised for exploring alternatives when it faces the risk of another blockade for even a small perceived slight. Nepal should do what is in its best interest: diversify its trading options, end its reliance on one country and balance the security and economic interests of both neighbours. We should also do all we can to safeguard India's security sensitivities and assure it that Nepal's new engagement with China does not come at the cost of its relationship with India.

India for its part, needs to seriously introspect the failings of its foreign policy, one that has led it to sabotage relationships with one friendly nation after another in its own backyard.

The current New Delhi establishment with its famously jet-setting Prime Minister is clearly not doing something right.

India with all its soft power, its goodwill and warm people-to-people relations across South Asian countries fails miserably when it comes to establishing a regional political leadership. For its smaller neighbours, India represents a coercive and disruptive power, incapable of rising above petty insecurity and imperial hangovers from the British era. The onus lies on India to try and change this perception.

All said and done, Nepal cannot escape its geography. The unique and long-standing civilisational and cultural ties that Nepal and India share are a source of strength, and should remain so. But equally, there should be no reason why Nepal as an independent country cannot seek better relationship with China. India should be confident enough to let a sovereign Nepal conduct its domestic and foreign affairs in the manner it deems fit.

Instead of lamenting the loss of a nation from its so-called 'Sphere of Influence', India should accept the changing reality. If the 'special' relationship that Indian and Nepali politicians so love to harp on about is merely a euphemism for 'partial sovereignty', it is not acceptable to the Nepali people. And for all his failures and misadventures, Prime Minister Oli deserves credit for driving this point home. 🇳🇵



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Dangerous rubbish

E-waste is adding a new problem to Nepal’s already mismanaged and overburdened garbage disposal system



BIKRAM RAI



LOKMANI RAI

The rapid spread of computers and mobile phones has brought a new problem to Nepal’s already mismanaged and overburdened garbage disposal system: disposal of e-waste.

Imports of computers, mobiles phones and other electronic gadgets topped Rs 250 billion last year, making up

seven per cent of the total import bill. The number of SIM cards in use in Nepal has now overtaken the country’s population of 28.8 million. More than half the population has access to the Internet.

The disposal of electronic devices with toxic components poses a challenge in many developing countries which have been dumping grounds for hazardous electronic waste from Europe. But poorer countries are

now generating their own e-waste, and do not have the disposal safeguards that the West has in place.

“The number of consumers is growing rapidly, and it is high time we addressed the problem of e-waste,” says Min Prasad Aryal, spokesperson at the Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA).

Nepal’s laws on environmental protection, including the 1997 Environment Protection Act,

which states the general goal of ‘making legal provisions to maintain clean and healthy environment’ has no guidelines, solutions or even recognition of electronic waste.

Cathode ray monitors have an average of 2 kg of lead in them, mobile phones have rare metals, and other consumer electronic devices have hazardous material. As e-waste mixes with solid waste in landfills, heavy metals can leach into ground water sources.

But it is clear from what Aryal at NTA says that the government and the regulator have no clear plan, just a statement of intent. “E-waste affects public health and the environment, so it should be addressed in a timely manner,” Aryal told us, “we have made a draft for e-waste disposal regulation and will propose it to the concerned authority.”

The NTA report recommends that the government create definitive regulations and

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WHAT'S IN THEM

DISCARDED ITEMS:



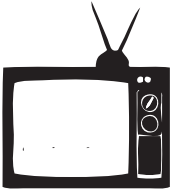
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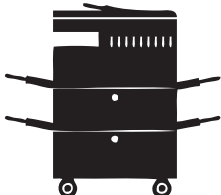
Mobile phones



TVs



Vacuum cleaners



Photocopiers



directives, define roles and responsibilities, launch awareness programs, formulate a stricter registration and authorisation mechanism for electronic goods and establish a fund for e-waste management.

Says Aryal: “Unlike other countries we do not have regulations to collect, store, dispose and recycle e-waste. Vendor, consumer or producer responsibility regarding e-waste should be defined by law.”

An NTA study has divided electronic equipment into 89 broad groups which include electronic gadgets, kitchen appliances, to vacuum cleaners, washing/photocopying machines and their parts. These gadgets contain at least 15 hazardous elements and toxic heavy metals including antimony trioxide, arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, chlorofluorocarbons, chromium, cobalt, lead, lithium, mercury, nickel, polybrominated flame retardants, polyvinyl chloride, selenium and zinc.

Scavengers do pick up metals for recycling, but they are not interested in the most toxic of the

components. “We collect copper, brass, steel, tin and plastic,” says Rajesh Jaiswal, the proprietor of Lakshyabar Mai Ki Jay, a scrap trading firm at Lalitpur.

A lethal component of e-waste is acid in old batteries. Although scavengers take the lead for recycling, the acid is just poured out, where it seeps to the underground water table.

“For mobile batteries, cracked monitors and other items we have hired a garbage collector who disposes of them in the municipality landfill,” says Shambhu Saran of Rautahat who runs a scrap store at Sanepa.

Bishnu Thakali of the Women Environment Preservation Committee confirms that e-waste is treated like the rest of the garbage, dumped into the river or its banks. She says: “This has dangerous impact on public health and environment”

According to the NTA study, most of the toxic e-wastes are carcinogenic, and pose health risks to humans with repercussions on cardio-vascular diseases, inflammations, skin diseases, birth defects, etc.

Currently, plastic parts, copper wire and metals from abandoned electronics are removed and sold to scavenger groups for recycling in Nepal and India. As there is no recycling unit for e-waste in the formal sector in Nepal, scraps that aren’t reused are piling up in municipal dumps or are just discarded.

Secretary at the Ministry of Environment Bijay Kumar Mallik admitted his office hadn’t done much to address the problem. He told us: “It has not been an issue yet.”

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Tough Golf,

Bhutan bagged first place with a total of 302 in a team event held at the sixth Nepal Open Amateur Golf Championship. Bangladesh and Nepal A team followed in second and third place respectively.



More for Samsung,

A Samsung Digital Plaza was recently inaugurated in Pokhara aiming to cater to the growing demand for Samsung products outside the Valley. Him Electronics, authorised distributor of Samsung in Nepal, will make a wide range of Samsung TVs, refrigerators, washing machines, microwaves, mobiles, monitors and printers available at the outlet.

Zoom across,

G.O. Automobiles recently launched the new Figo Aspire in Nepal. Boasting of a stylish interior finish, the 1.5l auto gear full option sedan is priced at Rs 3.1million and charges Rs 13,610 for a three year maintenance period.



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Battling irrelevance

The dustbin of history awaits party clowns who have played the people for fools all these years

Nepal seems to have entered a woozy state of suspended animation these days, a zone that’s in-between-crises where seasons change and time passes but nothing actually ever gets done. From earthquake relief to moving the TRC forward to providing basic services like electricity and water, the mechanisms of state are on hold while most of our leaders stopped even pretending to govern by going on holiday to Beijing.

 **MOVING TARGET**
Foreign Hand

The current UML/Maoist/RPP coalition led by KP Oli will be remembered as one of the least pro-active governments in history, just when urgent action was needed most. If only our PM had mobilised the vast resources at his disposal to help the quake victims his status would be god-like by now. Just imagine how much civil strife could have been avoided, and what a hero he would be, if only he had negotiated in good faith with Madhesi leaders. Instead, through his trademark buffoonery and sheer inactivity, KP Oli has managed to render his government irrelevant while still in power.

The blockade provided the perfect excuse to drop all pretence of governance and focus exclusively on making the black market pay, reinforcing the grab-what-you-can ethos that’s become the new normal. Nothing got solved in the Tarai, ethnic resentments fester and the show went on the road to Delhi and Beijing.

Unless you were on those junkets (China offered hospitality to 11 delegates for a few days, KP Oli brought 98 for a week) or are part of his bloated cabinet, PM-sahib has already faded into lame-duck obscurity. Just ask any of the earthquake victims, still waiting patiently for aid after 11 long months, how relevant this government has been, and weep.



The battle against creeping irrelevance doesn’t stop there. As staunch monarchists-cum-Hindu chauvinists in a secular republic the RPP is like a one-trick pony from a circus that already left town. Praying for the return of a disgraced royal family and defending the cow as national animal is hardly a recipe for progress.

Congress is the only party not locked into an outdated, discredited ideology, giving it the best chance of staying relevant. A strong showing in the last election confirmed they’re still perceived as the lesser of several evils, which is the best anyone can hope for these days, while the death of party chief Sushil Koirala presented a historic opportunity to revitalise the party leadership.

Alas, rather than look to the future the mantle was passed to three times PM Sher Bahadur Deuba, a man firmly locked in the past. His dubious achievements include being in power when war broke out, getting jailed for corruption and dismissing all

locally elected governments, a policy disaster that harmed every village and town nationwide for many years to come. The king then dismissed him, brought him back and dismissed him again, making Deuba the Dubious the only PM in history so honoured. One can’t make this up, and despite the near-certainty a new progressive leader would win the next election, hierarchy trumps common sense and the country’s better interests every time. (see issue#794 ‘The stifling burden of hierarchy’)

Since the blockade collapsed, the Madhesi parties have reverted to their default state of disarray, a nuisance factor on the edge of the national polity. Until, of course, the next time their unaddressed grievances boil over and the Tarai explodes all over again.

That leaves the Maoists in all their manifestations, already so outdated in the 1990’s they had to wage a 10 year civil war just to gain relevance.

Maoism cannot survive without an enemy and after decades spent attacking the state, education system, feudalism, revisionism, capitalism, industrialism and foreign handilism, the Maoist leadership, now firmly entrenched in the moneyed elite they once targeted, have nobody left to attack but themselves.

That would explain the countless fractures in the party since the war ended, especially since both the splits and frequent attempts at reunification follow their time-honoured tradition of pointless activity. (see issue #755 ‘Pointless Activity (Revolutionary)’)

Recent unification talks with Mohan Baidya’s CPN Revolutionary-Maoists, whose name alone disqualifies them from reality, predictably went nowhere. The closest they came to agreeing on anything occurred when a CPN-M member asked Baidya, in the interest of party unity, to stop burning the constitution all the time.

Needless to say, nobody spoke about anything that actually matters to voters, like reducing inflation, providing jobs and improving services.

Ironically, the only one talking about the economy is the man largely responsible for the economic mess Nepal’s in today. Baburam Bhattarai, Maoist ideologue and Prachanda’s constant side-kick for 25 years, has been reincarnated as a free-market capitalist. His recently formed New Force party, widely hailed as a desperate last ditch attempt at relevance, promotes an odd economic model blending both Maoist and Keynesian policies. First destroy the infrastructure, padlock the factories and stop all development projects and then get rich rebuilding it somehow.

When all is said and done, the dustbin of history awaits these party clowns who’ve played the people for fools all these years. Let’s not forget that political parties can only justify their existence and stay relevant in a democratic system through achieving goals that benefit the people. By that measure, all of the above players lost relevance long ago. 🇳🇵



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Babu Ram Mahato's love for nature brought him back to Nepal

A jungle safari guide by profession and wildlife enthusiast by passion, Babu Ram Mahato's (*pic*) life mission is to put Nepal on world map as a wildlife tourism destination. And he believes the best way to achieve that is through word of mouth promotion. Which is why he makes sure not one of his guests at the Chitwan National Park leaves dissatisfied after a tour of the jungle.

"He has eight wives, he is living in paradise," jokes Mahato about a massive 34-year-old gharial as he shows visitors around the Crocodile Breeding Centre at Kasara Resort in Chitwan.

From migratory patterns of Siberian ducks to the Coriolis effect on vines growing on trees, this self-taught guide is a walking Wikipedia of Chitwan's flora and fauna.

"I grew up studying the plants and animals around me. The prospect of sharing this knowledge with others was appealing," explains Mahato on his decision to become a guide. Despite studying only upto SLC, Mahato has never stopped learning. "I buy a lot of books and read them in my free time. The more I learn, the better

information I can give," he says.

At 15, Mahato lost his father and being the eldest of four siblings was responsible for taking care of the family. He first worked as a labourer in his village, then moved to Pokhara to work as a lab assistant and later went to Dubai.

"My only aim in going out of the country was to earn enough to buy land in my town," he says. "We have citizenship, but what is a man without his own home?"

Then after three years working in the UAE in a job he didn't enjoy, Mahato's love for ecology called him back home. "Working in a desert like Dubai made me realise what I was missing. I constantly used to think of my country, of the lush greenery and the scenic views," recalls Mahato.

And this time upon his return, with hard work he got his dream job. "I took training for six months and then began working as a guide," says Mahato, who now lives with his wife and two children near the national park. He is presently working for Kasara Resort.

In his four years of working as a safari guide, Mahato has learnt Spanish and Chinese to communicate with tourists. He is also working to hone his English skills, referring to a dictionary every time he doesn't understand a word.

Mahato admits that guides in the area need better training, especially when it comes to engaging with tourists. Relating to his experience of losing his cousin to a man-eating tiger, he stresses that we still only know very little about the animal kingdom. "I still don't think of myself as a naturalist, or a scientist. I still have a long way to go," he says.

Despite all that he has been through, Mahato feels he is finally at home in the jungle. "I know this is the field for me, this is my final destination." 🍌🍌

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The debate about whether or not to allow wildlife resorts inside national parks flares up again

SMRITI BASNET
IN CHITWAN

Spread over 932 square km, the vast Chitwan National Park is Nepal's showcase conservation success story. It has restored the original population of tigers, rhinos and other wildlife through habitat conservation, and reduced poaching to zero. However, the debate has resurfaced about whether to allow high-end resorts inside the park that can potentially fund conservation efforts. For decades,

Chitwan was synonymous with Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, the luxury resort that introduced Nepal and its national parks to the world. But the hotel lost its license in 2012, and there has been a prolonged legal battle to restore the contract. "Allowing hotels inside Chitwan National Park is an issue that requires critical thinking," said Ghana S Gurung at WWF Nepal. "If we start allowing tourists inside, how is the wildlife going to survive?" But hoteliers, including Kristjan Edwards of Tiger Tops, argue that Nepal should go for upmarket tourists who are willing to pay more for an exclusive safari package, and fund conservation activities in Nepal's national parks through the hefty royalty hotels will pay (*see below*). "We need to have concessions inside the parks more than ever now, and Tiger Tops has a proven record in having minimal impact and in helping conservation," Edwards said.

Several other lodges besides Tiger Tops were evicted from Chitwan National Park four years ago after their contracts on the government leased land expired. Critics said the decision was politically motivated by hoteliers in Sauraha who could not compete with the high-end hotels. However, the government said at the time it based its decision on an assessment by a Cabinet Committee that saw hotels inside the park as a threat to the ecology and wildlife of the area. Acting on a writ filed the same year, the Supreme Court denied renewal of their contracts and asked the lodges to shut all operations. However, the Supreme Court nullified the writ in October 2014, allowing park lodges again. "Hoteliers have demanded that we look into the issue, so we are trying to draft a manual as fast as we can," said Uday Chandra Thakur, Secretary of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation. While wildlife conservationists

warn that allowing concessions inside the park can have an impact on the ecology of protected areas and disturb the wilderness, the government is drafting a Tourism Concession Manual which will re-allow resorts inside national parks as long as they abide by strict guidelines. Conservationists fear that restoring resorts inside the park will open a floodgate of new concessions that could irreversibly damage conservation work so far. They say flora and fauna have regenerated in areas where the resorts used to be located. "We can now hear the roar of the tiger, which was rare before," says Prasanna Yonzon of the group Wildlife Conservation Nepal. Fanindra Raj Kharel, Director General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation wants stricter regulation and tougher criteria to decide who should get licenses. "We want to facilitate competition, if the business is



RESTORING RESORTS

Conservation and The two can go hand-in-hand and Nepal has shown how to do it

KRISTJAN EDWARDS

Nepal used to be one of the first countries in the world to understand the importance of tourism for conservation. The implementation of concessions in Chitwan made it one of the most well-known and managed national parks in the world and they need to be re-introduced right away. One of the first initiatives towards conservation in Nepal was taken 60 years ago by the royal government in Kathmandu which was concerned about diminishing wildlife in the former hunting areas of Chitwan. From the outset, a national forestry plan classified nature areas by topography and micro climate, and also the differing cultural attitudes towards forests by local population. After more than 50 years of tourism in Nepal, we have seen that if well-

managed and controlled, it can be a sustainable way to conserve the ecosystem and at the same time provide an income to the government. After Chitwan was designated Nepal's first National Park in 1973, Tiger Tops was given a concession to build a lodge inside its boundary. Later, these concessions grew to seven and they ensured a sustainable number of tourists inside the park to prevent overcrowding while at the same time bringing in enough high yield tourists to pay for the upkeep of conservation. An example of an overrun area today is the eastern part of Chitwan. At the beginning there were only few lodges in Sauraha. Today, the area has turned into a backpackers' haven. Nearly the entire northern part of the park along the Rapti river is occupied by lodges or land that have been bought to build lodges. All of this is putting immense pressure on the



TIGER TOPS

park. The lesser the movement of tourists in this type of park, the easier it is to conserve. This can be highlighted by examining the western end of the park which has over the past 50 years had very few tourists and is well maintained. The jungle around Sauraha, on the other hand, has been devastated and the population and

variety of wildlife has diminished significantly. Chitwan once had the greatest concentration of rhinos in Asia, today it is hard to spot even one around Sauraha while they are still plentiful in the western part. The other extreme is to have too few or no tourists in this type of forest, which is the case of Bardia. There, the Babai Valley which constitutes 70 per cent of

the park has no rhinos left. Over the last ten years, 83 rhinos were translocated to Bardia and at its lowest count the population dwindled to just 16. None were in the Babai Valley where there are no tourists. Three years ago the government did an assessment of existing concessionaires and had found all to have contributed

willing to pay royalty fees and take conservation efforts forward we have no problem with it," he told *Nepali Times*.

The government aims to monitor activities of lodges and establish a list of do's and don'ts before permitting new resorts inside protected areas. Additionally, it wants to be transparent by introducing a tender process where the highest bidding hotel gets the lease. Besides Chitwan National Park, concessionaires are also looking to set up lodges inside other protected areas like Sagarmatha, Langtang, Makalu Barun, and Rara National Park.

Eco-tourism projects that allow hotels inside national parks in North America and Africa have been sustainably managed through strict monitoring and local community engagement.

"The key issue may be how the concession is structured, where the site is located, what is the threshold or carrying capacity of tourists, and the behaviour of hosts and the guests," said

Hemanta Mishra, one of the founding planners of the Chitwan National Park in 1973. "These issues are important irrespective of the lodge location inside the park or outside."

But WWF's Gurung is skeptical. "The guidelines may work in national parks like Langtang or Bardia where there are buffer zones. But Chitwan already has so many hotels in its buffer zone. If they only allow limited hotels inside then that will raise questions as to why others were not allowed," he said.

The lodges were paying up to Rs 30 million a year in royalty to the government, and this went to the upkeep of Nepal's national parks. Former Hotel Association president and owner of Machan Wildlife Resort, Prakash Shrestha, said there has been a marked drop in high-end tourism in Chitwan, which is Asia's number one safari site, since 2012.

He said: "The ecology is our product, conserving it would benefit everyone." 🇳🇵



PICS: BIKRAM RAI

tourism

significantly to conservation efforts and that Tiger Tops had been outstanding in its self-regulation and implementation of social welfare schemes like education, which indirectly helps conservation.

Three court cases were filed in the Supreme Court, one of which was a written petition that the concessionaires were not good for conservation. All three cases were judged a year ago and the verdict of the court was that in fact the concessions were a positive force for conservation and should be implemented immediately. For over a year nothing has been done.

The Department of Wildlife says that until it is able to develop the capacity to monitor private firms allowed to conduct tourism activities in the protected areas, the move will create risk of smuggling of endangered animals and plants, not considering that it is in fact in the interest of the concessionaries to protect wildlife in the area.

It seems the government has lost its understanding of tourism. All its policies and lack of regulation are geared towards promoting lower and lower yield of tourists. Tourism related ideas like homestays are only creating a race to the bottom when nothing is done to promote quality high-end services. Like its airlines and airports, Nepal's tourism strategy is in need of a drastic makeover.

Well-regulated concessions can restore value to Nepal's wildlife tourism. This will be hailed by conservationists as positive action, and an acknowledgement by the government of sustainable eco-tourism. It will revive Nepal's tourism industry and image as well as most importantly be a step in the right direction for conservation. 🇳🇵



Kristjan Bahadur Edwards was born in Reykjavik, has lived in Nepal since 1972, and now runs the Tiger Tops group of companies.

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EVENTS

Heritage ride,

Join Tour De Lumbini, Kathmandu Cycle City 2020 and Cycle City Network Nepal as they ride along seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley.

23 April, 8am onwards,
Basantapur Darbar Square,
9841303867



Get sporty,

Run, ride or rock climb and participate in the fifth edition of Himalayan Outdoor Festival.

29 April to 1 May, Hattiban Hills,
www.himalayanoutdoorfestival.com,
9823287228/ 9843817625

Moving Mountains,

A photo exhibition showcasing World Food Programme's earthquake response in Nepal.

1 to 8 April, 10am to 6pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)5260607

Art exhibition,

Park Gallery presents series two of its bimonthly exhibition with artworks by Saroj Bajracharya titled 'The Missing Link'.
31 March – 30 May, Park Gallery, Pulchok, (01) 5522307



From the Ground Up,

Listen and share stories with a young group of people involved in reconstruction and rebuilding efforts in Nepal.

12 April, 5 to 7pm, Alliance Française, Teku, (01)4242832

KJC for Kids,

Music lessons, vocal training, ballet dance, beat boxing, arts and more for your kids at the KJC Spring Camp for Kids. For children aged 5 to 11 years old.

4 to 15 April, 10am to 4pm,
Mondays to Fridays,
Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01)5013554

#photoNepal,

Attend a travel photography exhibition by veteran photographer Tang Yue Fan as part of the #photoNepal series.

1 to 3 April, Nepal Tourism Board,
Pradarshini Marg, (01)4256909

Historical exhibition,

A display of 40 paintings by celebrated mid 19th century Nepali landscape artist Rajman Singh Chitrakar.

10 to 24 April, Taragon Museum, Baudha, 9843722329

Ride along,

Get ready for the eighth Enfield rendezvous and poker run starting from Kathmandu and ending at Pokhara.

12 to 14 April, Rs 10,400.
For more information:
9559112666/9793185744

Learning to click,

Learn the art and history behind photography with a six-day photography workshop for beginners.

Fee: Rs. 4000 + 13% VAT.
Application deadline: 5pm, 31 March
6 to 11 April, 2 to 5pm, photo.circle headquarters, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, 9818830540,
sagar@photocircle.com.np

Trade Expo,

A three-day trade expo organised by the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (FWEAN).

1 to 3 April, 10am to 5pm, Army Officer's Club, Bhadrakali, (01)2003080,
www.fwean.org.np

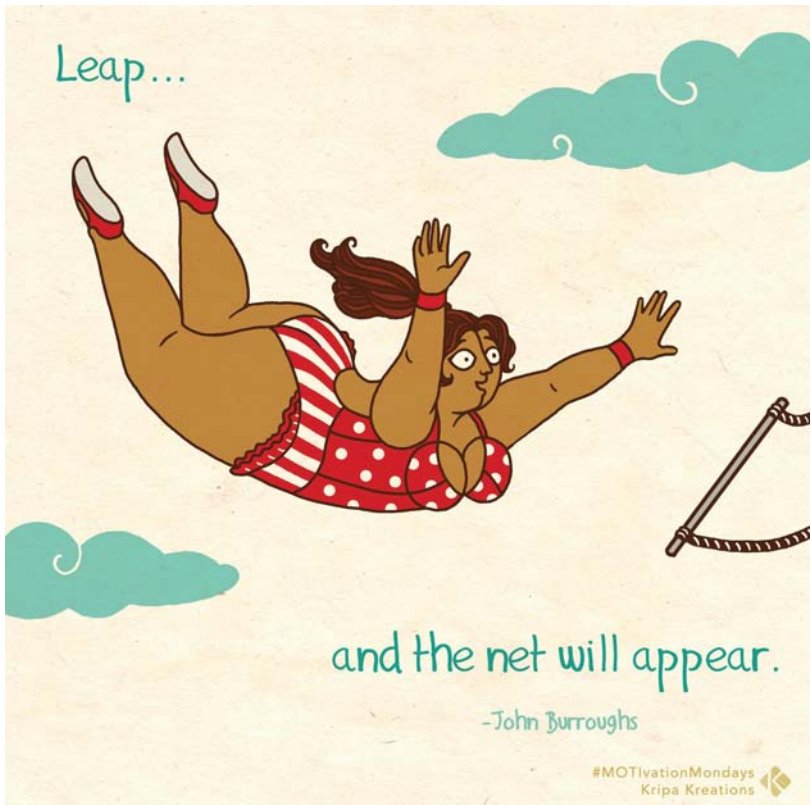
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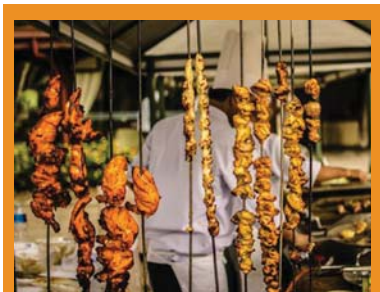
DINING



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Jawalakhel, Shaligram Complex, (01)5536919



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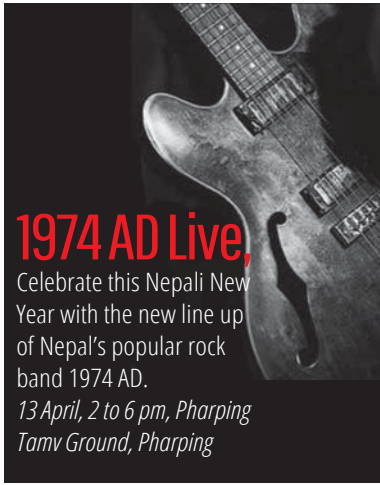
Patan Darbar Square, (01)5527127

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MUSIC



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13 April, 2 to 6 pm, Pharping Tamv Ground, Pharping

Kanta dAb dAb,

Enjoy a musical evening with the Nepali fusion trio, Kanta dAb dAb.

1 April, 8pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172



Metal night,

Book your seats for a night of hard-hitting heavy metal featuring bands Binaash, Aakrosh, Nude Terror, DISORDER, Crown Of Thrones and Vivace Octave.

30 April, 12 to 6 pm, Reggae Bar, Thamel, (01)4700654

Ciney Gurung live,

Fine dine with Ciney Gurung serenading you. Rs 1,799 per person.

Every Friday, 7pm onwards, Shambala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999



Music mania,

Be part of the rock and roll mania with the 12th edition of the KCM Inter College Music Competition. Preliminary rounds on 15 and 16 April.

Registration fee: Rs 5000, 10am onwards, 23 April, Jawalakhel Football Ground, 9849149154, 9849465316, 9813505758

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Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01)4411113, bjl@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com



Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.

Bhetani, Bardia, (084)402008, info@mangotreelodge.com



Shangri-La Village Resort,

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Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs 7500 per person including one way transportation from Kathmandu, rafting and lunch (self transportation and non rafting package also available), (01)4420252/9808187015/9860260894

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Under the able direction of Nepali theatre pioneer Sunil Pokharel, William Shakespeare's epic fantasy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* gets a Nepali rendition, *A Midsummer Night's Sapana*, filled with spectacular performances, effectual lighting and a brilliant live score.

Currently being staged at Gothale Natakghar at Shilpee Theatre, this interpretation is a milestone for Nepali theatre, which is oftentimes plagued by pitfalls when adapting western plays. But coming from the man who kicked off the theatre scene in Kathmandu, you wouldn't expect any less.

The play begins with Maharaj Trichandra Jung (Safar Pokharel) planning his wedding with his queen, Kiran (Avash Adhikary). When the king commands she follow her father's will or face punishment, the lovebirds flee with Kiran and Hemlata (Hira's friend who is in love with Kiran) right on their heels. The four of them wind up in the same forest as fairy king Indradev and fairy queen Tejashwi, who are in the midst of a lover's quarrel, and a group of commoners



SHILPEE THEATRE

practicing a play to perform at the royal wedding. With the introduction of Chature (J.D. Tamu), the fairy king's loyal imp, the story progresses and takes a supernatural turn with tricks, mischief, and magic.

To those already familiar with the original play, the story may be predictable, but this production successfully creates an engaging tone to suit the taste of a Nepali audience. The dialogue translated into Nepali departs from the

poetic prose of the original and is often laced with popular jargon and double entendre, with costuming also reflecting the diversity within the Nepali culture.

A single, multi-level set designed by Anup Baral is used for the entire play, and the actors utilise the stage beautifully, popping in and out from under the ramp. The lighting and background score by musical

trio Baaja.music deserve special mention for setting the tone and mood for each scene without being distracting. The director playfully weaves the band into the play, making them as much a part of the drama as the actors themselves.

With music comes dancing. Staying true to Shakespeare's original production, much of the dancing is focused on the fairies, and choreographer Pradeep Lama does

a commendable job in introducing the different personas of the characters between scenes.

The amateur cast that includes students from Pokharel's recent theatre training program is up to the task, led by Tamu's Chature, who swishes in and out of the set with his acrobatic moves and mischievous smile. Bijay Tamrakar does well as the mischief making but well-meaning king of the fairies, Indra Dev, and Sapkota's Lalit is entertainingly filled with exaggerated facial expressions and dialogue delivery.

But the star of the play was Anil Subba, who shines through and through as Baley, the cloth merchant who wants to play all the characters by himself in the reenactment of Kamdev and Rati – a tragic comedy his group is preparing for the royal wedding. He is boisterous, self-indulgent, and all-around hilarious. It takes tremendous skill to make the audience laugh out loud simply with body movements and Subba does so effortlessly with his expressions hidden behind a pig's head.

The play within the play has the audience roaring with laughter and adeptly ties everything together at the end. 🇳🇵

Until 2 April
5PM, Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali
Tickets: Rs 500,300 (200 for students)
Director: Sunil Pokharel
Cast: Safar Pokharel, Suraj Chaulagain, Nisha Joshi, Avash Adhikary, Sangeet Sapkota, JD Tamu, Pujan Thapa, Bijay Tamrakar and others.
Duration: 2 hrs



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If you go to see *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* with low expectations, then you might end up having not so bad a time. This is mainly because the



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

film, while not all that terrible, does have its “Oh, my god, is this really happening?” moments.

The film picks up right where *Man of Steel* (2013), Zack Snyder’s Superman origin story ended,

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

with Metropolis in shambles after an alien (well, Kryptonian to be precise) attack. Batman aka Bruce Wayne (played by a surprisingly tolerable Ben Affleck) is in Metropolis for some unexplained reason. Left without Batsuit or Batmobile, he finds himself, despite his millions, as vulnerable as the next man, witnessing a near apocalyptic event that is averted

by a flying alien in a red cape with super-human powers. The seeds of envy, disguised as suspicion of the “other” are firmly sown that fateful day in the world of the Marvel universe.

If the title itself is not enough of an indicator of those deeply ill-thought out plot points, let me state clearly that two superheroes going up against each other is exactly as lame as you think it’s going to be, and far worse than two superbaddies fighting the usual eardrum shattering battle.

There really isn’t much of a plot, to be honest, outside of this bizarre rivalry between two massive egos, although Superman (the extremely handsome, blue-eyed Henry Caville) is far more likeable than the brooding, churlish Batman, who is redeemed only by Alfred (played by a calibrated Jeremy Irons) with his warmth, sense of humour, and extremely keen radar for detecting (and trying to pre-empt) his master’s warped motivations.

Jessie Eisenberg also livens things up as a sociopath with a will to make trouble, playing a young, extremely unstable Lex Luther. The film is almost saved by the presence of Holly Hunter as Senator June Finch with just the right amount of Southern sass, Amy Adams as the intrepid, lovely Lois Lane, and Gal Gadot as a mysterious, dark haired beauty who pretty much steals the show.

While relatively meaningless as a whole, *Superman v Batman* is at its best when addressing the human relationships that motivate our superheroes. Much could also have been improved if Batman didn’t behave like an insular frat-boy whose pride is wounded. Luckily, his antics are nipped fairly quickly in the bud before most people start to lose their patience, and some special, sensible adult women intervene to avert disaster, albeit with a lot of collateral damage. This year’s season of blockbusters has begun, and with some luck, the ones to come will improve upon this \$250 million indulgence. 🇳🇵



nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

DUST ATTACK: A traffic policeman stands with his face covered at Singha Darbar during a sudden dust storm in Kathmandu on Monday. One person died, and seven others were injured in the storm.



NARESH SHRESTHA

FASHION WEEK: Models walk the ramp on the first day of TGIF Fashion Week at the Hyatt Hotel in Baudha on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

CLEAN RIVERS: Deputy Prime Minister Bijay Gachhadar (centre) takes part in the Bagmati River clean-up campaign which marked its 150th week on Saturday.



BIKRAM RAI

TIME TRAVEL: British scholar John Whelpton (right) discusses his forthcoming book *Janga Bahadur in Europe* at Yala Maya Kendra in Patan on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

BANGLA IN PICS: A visitor looks at a photo on display at the ‘Bangladesh through Clicks and Brushes’ exhibition at Patan Museum Gallery on Monday.

V A C A N C Y



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“Let us hold local elections in quake-hit districts”

Interview with Sushil Gyewali,
CEO of National Reconstruction Authority
Korobar, 30 March

करोबार

Korobar: What is the progress of post-earthquake reconstruction?

Sushil Gyewali: We have developed mechanisms and policies. We now have a structure to work at the grassroot level. People complain about delays, but it was not possible to begin reconstruction without internal preparation.

What is the authority doing now?

We are carrying out a survey to collect and verify data about damage and earthquake survivors. We have completed 60 per cent of the survey, and we will distribute housing grants as soon as we have the exact data.

Is it true that the ongoing survey was carried out under pressure from donors?

This survey was necessary because we did not have reliable data about earthquake survivors. The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report was just a preliminary document, and we



workers because most of the skilled and able-bodied youth are abroad. There is a scarcity of construction materials. I do not want to give them false hope.

Earthquake survivors are saying that the Rs 200,000 housing grant is not sufficient.

The amount of the housing grant was determined before I was appointed as the authority chief. The government decided to give each family Rs 200,000, assuming that construction materials and cheaper workers would be available at the local level. If this amount still falls short, they can apply for a reconstruction loan of up to Rs 300,000.

had promised during the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction (ICNR) that we would collect reliable data before distributing housing grants. It helps us distribute housing grants among the real survivors, and avoid the fake ones.

Will earthquake survivors be able to rebuild their houses before the next monsoon?

I do not want to lie. They will not be able to rebuild their houses before the monsoon, even if we begin distributing housing grants now. It is difficult to manage construction

Donors are complaining that the authority has failed to spend the reconstruction budget.

This is not true. They have in fact lauded our vision. We have so far signed loan agreements amounting to Rs 125 billion.

We are preparing to sign another Rs 75 billion loan agreement with India. China is also releasing the money it pledged. The Finance Ministry has already released Rs 65 billion for reconstruction activity.

So what are the challenges?

The biggest challenge is to mobilise people.

The lack of elected representatives has made it more difficult for us to work at the grassroot level. If possible, let us hold local elections across the country. If not, let us do it in the 31 earthquake-affected districts. If that is also not possible, let us do it in the 14 most affected districts.



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Korean movement gains



UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION NEPAL/FACEBOOK

South Korea’s Unification Church is affiliated to a Nepali political party that has a minister in the cabinet

SEULKI LEE

Buddhism spread from Nepal to the Korean peninsula two millennia ago, but in the past 60 years Korea has been exporting two of its dominant ideologies to Nepal. Nepal’s communists, notably the Workers Peasants Party with its stronghold in Bhaktapur, have been inspired by Kim Il Sung’s Juche Idea. And South Korea’s Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon has now got a sizeable presence in Nepal’s religious and political life.

Although it has been in Nepal since 1975, ‘Unificationism’ got a political foothold after Moon’s visit to Kathmandu and the establishment of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in 2005. It now has 12,500 members in 30 churches across Nepal.

“Ours is a national political party with a clear ideology, but I am a Hindu, associated with the Unification Movement,” said Ek Nath Dhakal of the UPF South Asia and leader of the Nepal Family Party who is in Prime Minister Oli’s cabinet as Minister of Peace and Reconstruction. (*See Interview, overleaf*)

The UPF’s motto here is ‘world peace through the ideal family’ and it tries to steer young Nepalis away from immoral activities through training sessions, and in ‘family education’ which can be interpreted as evangelical outreach. Worldwide, Moon’s Unificationism makes headlines whenever it stages mass weddings like the one at Dasrath Stadium in Kathmandu (*pic, above*) last year in which 70,000 couples got married simultaneously.

UPF’s ‘ambassadors for peace’ program recruits public figures in Nepal to promote reconciliation,

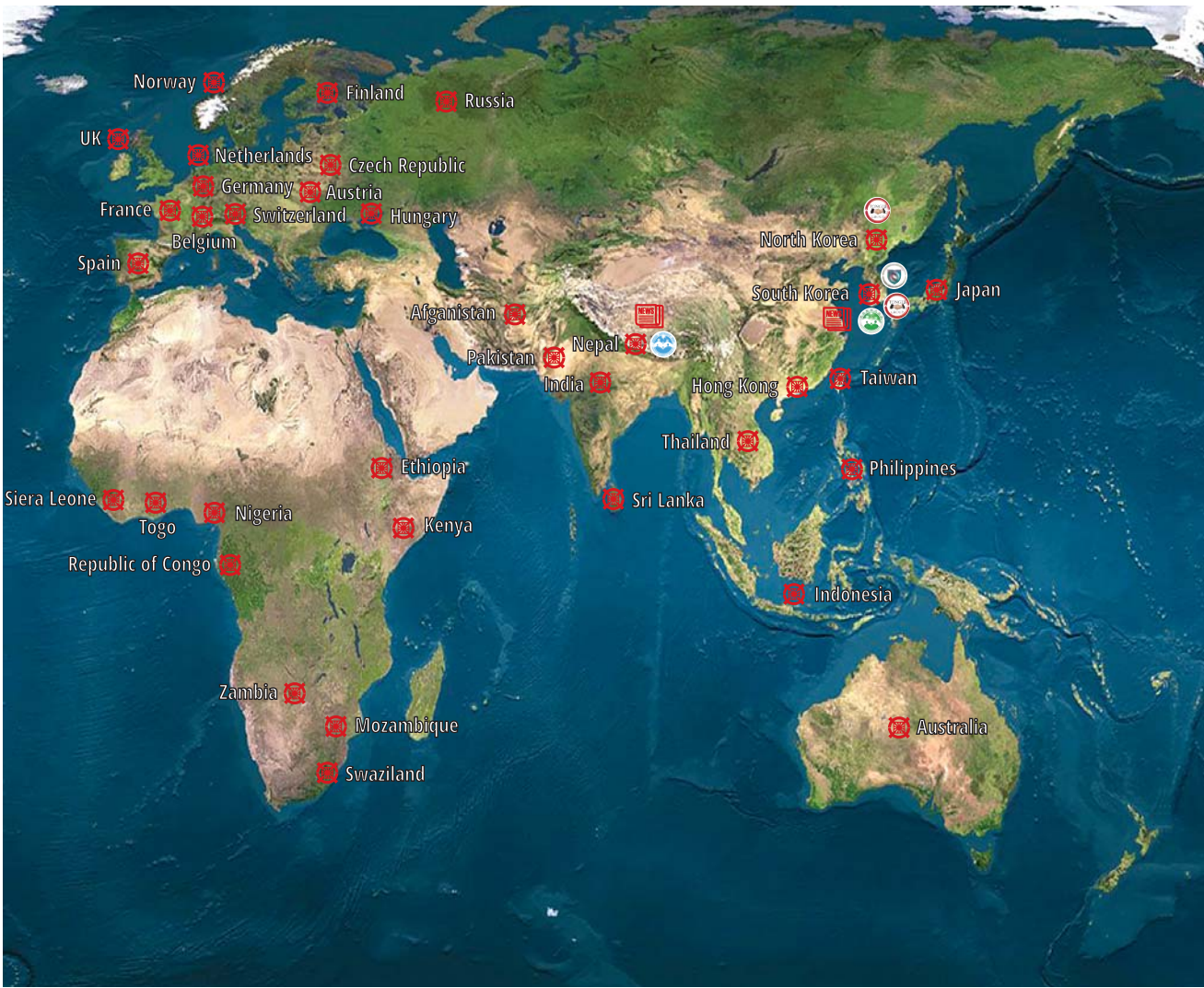
conflict resolution and building peace. Even President Bidya Bhandari is listed among 8,500 UPF ambassadors for peace.

“Rev Sun Myung Moon’s peace philosophy is powerful message to us in Nepal because there are so many ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. He said we are all family, sisters and brothers under God,” explained Deepak Sapkota, who heads the Dhading chapter of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, the official name of the Unification Church). “We want Nepal to be the centre of God’s kingdom of heaven in the world.”

Indeed, the FFWPU mentions Rev Sun Myung Moon’s special desire for Nepal to serve as a ‘model peace nation of God’. However, UPF functionaries deny that their movement is a ‘church’, preferring to call it a ‘peace movement’. Indeed, its head office in Bhagwati Bahal in Kathmandu doesn’t have a cross.

“It is a movement above all religions. It works for harmony among different religions to build world peace,” explained Binod Dangi, 40, the Secretary-general of UPF Nepal. Dangi started following Unificationism as a student in 1995, and says he is still a practicing Hindu and Moon’s philosophy doesn’t necessitate conversion.

During a meeting last week, Dangi wore a ‘Blessing Ring’ with the Unificationism symbol. He said: “The unification movement is to turn us into true Hindus, true Christians, true Buddhists or true Muslims by finding the best path to make one’s religion 100 per cent one.”



MOON AROUND THE EARTH



UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE

Sun Myung Moon founded the Unification Church in Busan, Korea in 1954, calling it ‘The Holy Spiritual Association for the Unification of World Christianity’. Although derived from Christianity, it has its own interpretation of the Bible and the main theological textbook *Exposition of the Divine Principle* that Moon wrote in 1952 during the Korean War, says human beings are bearing the consequences of adultery between Eve and a snake as the ‘original sin’.

The book points out contradictions in Christianity leading even enlightened spiritual leaders to fall prey to physical pleasures. Unificationism believes that Jesus should have married and monogamy is the strict rule of the Moonies, hence the emphasis on family to build ‘Cheon-Il-Guk’, God’s kingdom of heaven.

Unificationism teaches that God is the creator and heavenly parent, whose dual nature combines both masculinity and femininity like husband and wife. Having married, he and his wife would have become ‘True Parents’, created a ‘True Family’, and would have saved humanity and perfected the world.

In Unificationism (‘Tong-Il-Gyo’ in Korean) Moon is the messiah claimant whom the God sent after Jesus as the Second Coming. Moon died in 2012, and he and his wife, Hak Ja Han, are regarded as the universal father and mother.

Moon founded Tongil Group in 1959 to support the growth and development of the Unification Church. The South Korean conglomerate (*See map, above*) is involved in the chemical, ship building industry and media, hotel business internationally, as well as automobile production in North Korea.

political foothold in Nepal



“I am a Hindu associated with the Unification Movement”

Minister of Peace and Reconstruction of Nepal Ek Nath Dhakal is also Chairman of Universal Peace Federation (UPF) South Asia and leader of the Nepal Family Party. He spoke to *Nepali Times* this week about his faith, politics and views on transitional justice in Nepal.

Nepali Times: What is the link between the Unification Church and the Nepal Family Party?

Ek Nath Dhakal: The party has links to all faiths, as it has with the unification movement. The Nepal Family Party is a kind of conservative party with a manifesto that promotes family values, interfaith dialogue and harmony. Our core view is to honour the institution of marriage.

Are you in the cabinet because of your contribution to Prime Minister Oli's election campaign?

No. I'm in the cabinet because I have contributed to society, the country and people of Nepal. There are 11 political parties supporting Prime Minister Oli.

Nepal Family Party is just one of them. The Prime Minister gave me this portfolio maybe because of our party's clear agenda on family values. It is also not out of his kindness that he has given me this ministry, this is our right because we have supported this government in a parliamentary system.

This is your second tenure as Minister, what are the main challenges in Nepal's post conflict process?

The challenge is how to implement a new constitution and how to address the people's need for development and employment. My ministry focuses on how to maintain peace and order in society so that politics is not violent. We want to reconstruct all infrastructure damaged during the Maoist war.

Moonie politics

A religious group that mixes business and politics

Korea's Sun Myung Moon and his philosophy of Unificationism has branches, owns companies and even runs newspapers all over the world, but Nepal is the only country where it is involved in politics.

Founded in January 2008, the Nepal Family Party crossed the election threshold with one seat in 2008 and two seats in the 2013 Constituent Assembly election. Ek Nath Dhakal, the current Minister of Peace and Reconstruction, is the first elected Moonie leader in the world. ('Moonie' is a slightly derogatory term for followers of Sun Myung Moon.)

In South Korea, a similar political party failed twice in the past decade to get a single seat in the legislature. The Unificationist party there had an electoral platform emphasising education and family values, and to prepare for Korean reunification.

Minister Dhakal admitted in an interview (see below) that his party is inspired by Rev Moon, adding: "The Nepal Family Party has a new ideology in Nepal's traditional political arena, it is inclusive and forward-looking that focuses on peace and family values."



EK NATH DHAKAL/FACEBOOK

Dhakal said Nepal needed a new party which can embrace diverse elements of society and bring different political parties together for nation building. "We keep very good relationship with all politicians," said the 42-year-old. "Our size may be small but our ideas and influence are big."

Minister Dhakal clearly has connections among Nepal's political parties. On a recent trip to Korea to attend a Unification Movement program, Dhakal had a dozen Nepali MPs in tow. A senior UML leader told *Nepali Times* on condition of anonymity that the Family Party has most top political leaders "in its pockets".

When asked, Dhakal said: "I don't want to mix politics and religion, and I was appointed as a Peace and Reconstruction Minister because of my contribution to the Prime Minister's election."

There is speculation that Unificationism is a front for Christian evangelism, and the politics of patronage. Moon's famous and controversial remark about theocracy 1973 feeds such assumptions: 'The separation between religion and politics is what Satan likes most'.

Moonies were also involved in the 1976 Korea Gate scandal in which the South Korean National Intelligence Service was found to have worked with the Unification Church to gain political influence in the United States.

Back in Nepal the movement tries to keep its spiritual (Unification Church), social (UPF) and the political (Nepal Family Party) activities separate. However, officials from the three groups are often seen together at public functions like one last week in the Dhanusa Nepal Family Party district election. Santosh Kumar Paudel, president of the church branch in Nepal, Minister Dhakal of Nepal Family Party and Binod Dangi, secretary-general of UPF Nepal were seen together again at the ribbon-cutting of the Nepal Family Party headquarter in Baneswor on 30 March (left to right in picture above).

UPF Secretary General Dangi took pains to clarify: "Please do not mix up the UPF or Unification Movement with the Family Party in your story. They are different groups with different goals."

Seulki Lee



BIKRAM RAI

What do you think is the key to deliver transitional justice and accountability in Nepal?

The key is the support and cooperation from parties involved in the conflict. This government is fully committed to provide justice to the victims, and we will bring the perpetrators to justice. The international community has certain reservation about the commissions, but the government will amend laws that contradict the principles of transitional justice. Peace is not the absence of war it is unity, harmony within individual, family, society and the nation where people are employed and able to exercise the democracy fully.

Is there any truth to allegations that

your party is involved in evangelical proselytising in Nepal?

Not true at all. Yes, I am associated with the Unification Movement. I'm Hindu and proud of guru Rev Mrs Moon. This is an open fact. But ours is a national political party with a clear ideology. All these false allegations have been spread by some radical communists and radical fundamental Hindus. Because my party is small and new, people do not understand. When there is something new, there is always controversy.

nepalitimes.com
Watch interview





Here today GONE tomorrow

There comes a period in the history of every nascent democracy when citizens are forced to ask: Is this government doing its job? Is this government accountable? Is this a government? Does it even exist? In Nepal, the answer to the last question is "Umm ... maybe not."

Everyone wants the Oli Collision Government to step down. But if it doesn't even exist, how can it resign? Logically speaking, it is not possible, so when Prime Minister KPO told reporters this week he refuses to step down he has a point. He asked with his characteristic witticism: "If I am not here, I am there. And if I there, I'm not here." There were no followup questions from aforementioned journo, who had fallen asleep.

But the Prime Minister has raised an important question. Why should he step down, especially after his recent achievements which, in no particular order not even alphabetical, are:

- Got officious officials in offices of New Delhi to officially turn the unofficial Brocade off.
- Kept Nepal functioning throughout the last 7 months by ensuring a smooth flow of lubricating oil to grease palms.
- Foiled another Blockade by going to India before China.
- Wore gloves the whole time

while in India so hosts wouldn't steal his thumbprint.

- Took a Super Jumbo delegation to India as a show of force.
- Oh yes, nearly forgot. Went to China, too.
- Got the Chinese to agree to just about everything but forgot to put any of it down in writing in the spirit of the warm and close bilateral relations between China ... and India.
- Unleashed a dust storm in Kathmandu the day after his return to demonstrate his supernatural powers.
- Since the chance of making a big blunder by taking a decision is so high, he has decided not to decide anything for now.
- Keeping a low profile by being a prime minister who is neither seen nor heard until this hulla ballu of regime change subsides.

The Prime Minister may want us to leave him alone just as he is leaving us alone, but the fact is that most Nepalis want a change of government. There are many reasons for that, and I have forgotten the most important one. Hang on, it'll come back to me in a sec.

Meanwhile, here is a commercial break from the Ministry of Misinformation which pays the media to become



more self-reliant, self-important, self-righteous and self-censored by allocating government advertisements on a case-by-case basis, which means journo will be bribed with cases of cash each. Unlike some of its peers the Donkey is not the type to take the money and run. My journalistic code of ethics compels me to be true to my salt, and tow the party line once adequately compensated. And to keep our end of the bargain here is today's installment of government ads. We'll be right back after these messages.

MISSING

Several external drives have gone missing from the Corruption Watchdog's mainframe servers.

The drives contain highly de-classified, sensitive top secret data on high-profile personalities which have already been leaked to the media. But they could undermine national security if they fall into the wrong hands. Anyone finding the missing drives should keep them. Beware: they shouldn't tell anyone about it, least of all, us. They should

crush the drives by running them over with a 20-ton truck, melt them down with a blowtorch and bury them at an undisclosed location since they are the only proof we have about the real crooks in this country. Federal Democratic Kleptocratic Government of Nepal Ministry of Hard Knocks Lost It and Found Department

PLAY GOLF, MAKE FRIENDS

The Nepal Golf Club, a GONE Undertaking, announces a drive to enlist new members from the Kathmandu diplomatic corps, loyal members of the drooling elite, sections of the media industrial complex and other interested parties. Whether one

plays golf or not, the message is the same: to exploit bonds and forge personal links with leading decision makers in the country and let them score birdies. Slogan: 'Restore Monarchy after 18 Holes'.

INTERNATIONAL TENDER TO CLIMB MT EVEREST

In an effort to boost revenue, GONE is auctioning climbing permits for Mt Everest through international bidding. Sealed tenders are invited from interested expeditions desirous of breaking records on the world's highest mountain for the Autumn Season 2016. Applications should list the activities they wish to undertake while on top: (Tick One) Land Hot Air Balloon on Summit, Rollerblade To Base Camp, Blast Off into Outer Space on Personal Rocket from Summit Launchpad, Open Scenic Momo Shop and Cutlet Outlet. Send tender document with earnest money in envelope and slip it under the table at Ministry of Tourism and Fatalism, Exhibitionist Road by 15 July. GONE reserves the right to accept in part or reject earnest money if it is not earnest enough without assigning any reason whatsoever. So there.

I got it now. The Oli coalition must step down because we want a change of scenery.



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