Two political leaders who were once ready to kill each other joined hands this week to form a new government. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal suddenly switched sides, abandoning Prime Minister KP Oli for Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress. They agreed to take turns to be prime minister for the next 18 months.

The new-found friendship between these former foes could prove costly. The first casualty will be the Constitution that all three leaders pushed through last year.

Deuba was prime minister when the Maoists went to war in February 1996. In 2002, when he was prime minister for the second time, Deuba put a price on Dahal’s head. Dahal in turn ordered his guerrillas to kill Deuba, and he narrowly escaped a Maoist attack in Kathmandu.

Politics makes for strange bedfellows, but who would have predicted that Dahal and Deuba would one day be best buddies?

Oli foiled an earlier attempt to unseat him in May by charming Dahal out of an alliance with Deuba. This time the Maoist-NC ties seem stronger, and the deal allows Dahal to be prime minister first, to be replaced by Deuba after local elections in December and until provincial and parliamentary polls.

The Maoists registered a no-confidence motion against the government on Wednesday, but Oli has refused to step down, stonewalling instead to face a vote in Parliament this weekend. But the arithmetic is against him. Madhesi and other fringe parties are backing the NC-Maoists, so Dahal is on course to be the next prime minister.

Seven years after a humiliating resignation following his failure to cast the Army chief, Dahal may be Nepal’s 24th prime minister in 26 years. But he will be looking over his shoulder warily at Deuba and Oli.
Social justice, development and peace require Nepali women to be on equal terms with Nepali men in all fields.

When considering the hierarchy of causes for Nepal’s ingrained instability and persistent failure of governance, there is a persuasive argument that it is the result of systematically entrenched and culturally-sanctioned patriarchy. Mapping district-wise figures for malnutrition, poverty and infant mortality rates against data on female literacy offers a direct correlation between gender and societal wellbeing.

Nepal’s worst-performing and poorest districts are in the east-central Tarai and mid-western mountains, where the rate of female enrolment in school is lowest, the caste system is most deep-rooted, and social justice remains just a hope.

The national average rates for fertility, and infant and maternal mortality have shown dramatic reductions over the past 15 years, and this is inversely proportional to the increase in female literacy in that period. Although the dropout rate for girls is still worrisome, it is clear that educated girls marry later and have fewer children, leading to overall enhancement of the quality of life of their families.

For every rupee Nepal spends on development, the best return on investment is if it goes to increasing the enrolment of girl children and upgrading the quality of instruction in schools. We know what works, we just have to go ahead and do it without delay.

Most conservative families inculcate patriarchal values in children, so it is up to the schools to counter this with a gender-sensitive curriculum where it is not just the girl students who learn about their rights, but the boys are also instilled with a sense of responsibility to engender social change.

We have a very long way to go, and mostly uphill. Even today, only 13 per cent of the members of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists are women. And although media is now more responsive to gender issues, the entertainment media perpetuates the objectification and stereotyping of women. Female literacy has empowered young women, but men remain steeped in a closed culture of male dominance.

Nepal’s new constitution, despite some glaring lapses on citizenship and inclusion, is far more progressive than previous ones when it comes to reservation and quotas for women at all levels of political decision-making. This is largely the result of active lobbying by the women’s caucus in the Constituent Assembly, which allowed women across party lines to join hands to push the provisions through.

The caucus has a history of progressive lawmaking — during the constitutional monarchy period before 2006, women parliamentarians had successfully amended the royal succession rules to allow a daughter to become queen. This week, Parliament ratified the appointment of Nepal’s first-ever woman Chief Justice, which is all the more notable because she was not a token female candidate, but one known for wise, courageous and impartial judgements during her career. Nepal has a female President, and a woman Speaker of Parliament and Chief Justice (picture, left). However, despite having a smattering of women in high places and a numerical increase in their representation in the political sphere, we have yet to see a commensurate increase in their participation in governance. A recent BBC Media Action survey of gender and governance showed that while 72 per cent of men in a nationwide sample actively participated in politics, only 48 per cent of women have the opportunity to do so. The researchers listed some reasons: cultural, social and religious barriers, poor education, and entrenched exclusion of women. It is not just women who are ostracised, even the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare had its allocation slashed from 0.29 per cent of the budget last year to 0.22 per cent — a telling indication of the lack of priority given by the overwhelmingly male powers that be.

A massive out-migration of men for work abroad has depopulated Nepal of young males. By default, most local decision-making mechanisms are now in the hands of women, hence they need to be included in the political structure whenever village and district elections take place.

Now that Bandana Rana has become the first Nepali to be elected a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in New York, our predominantly male rulers may want to remind themselves that it is not sufficient to merely guarantee equal treatment in the law. Women must be given an equal start and empowered for maximum participation.

Social justice, development and peace require Nepali women to be on equal terms with Nepali men in all fields.
Truth be told

Govinda KC may be stubborn, but he is a hermit who has done little else in life besides good things to help people in pain

there are only a number of moments in the course of one’s life when decisive steps taken by those around us compel us to rethink and alter the way we interact with our society, surroundings and inner self. This is one of those moments.

One to Many

Bidushi Dhungel

If we cannot come together to condemn the trivialising of our collective health by a media that sees nothing but profit and power, and in support of the only individual willing to lay his life on the line for ours, then we will be doomed by our own small and selfish doing.

On his eighth hunger strike, Govinda KC is not under the influence of the health industry, political power centres or individuals. This is a physician who is a hermit, a Gandhian type who is stubborn indeed, but has done little else in his life other than good things to help people in pain.

Those who wish to question his motives ought to know that if power, politics and publicity stunts were at the core of his efforts, he would have been made minister at least a couple of times by now. On the contrary, he refuses to join any political movement.

Now is the time to question one’s own moral integrity, not that of a lone crusader who wishes simply for reforms in a medical sector that has been shoddily apart by greed and corruption. More than any other sector of national life, healthcare is one that affects us all, and can mean the difference between life and death.

Of all the times barred against Govinda KC, most common is the one questioning his allegiance to liberal economics, growth and the fundamentals of capitalism. It is as though a free market justifies systematically and constantly putting profits before people, and thinking solely of short-term gain.

KC’s essential demand is for a regulated private sector when it comes to medical education, and state-run social welfare that remains free from harmful political interference, with robust and just policies to ensure the best education and services for Nepalis. Every major liberal economy in the world has stringent oversight mechanisms to ensure that the health of citizens is not compromised. What good is producing 5,000 doctors a year if we cannot give them jobs, and more importantly, if we cannot trust them with our lives?

The criticism is less about free markets, and more about the right for the powerful and rich to loot the state coffers through public institutions, and the people through private ones. We all know the tendency of ‘power-sharing’ in Nepal supersedes the realms of Parliament and Cabinet, and fosters in health, education, media, legislature, bureaucracy, and even the judiciary.

Loyalties, allegiances and the depth of pockets override fundamentals in competence such as training, ability and honesty. Govinda KC points this out in the medical sector, for example, with children of rich parents buying their way into already substandard medical schools that are propped up by a corrupt nexus of politicians, bureaucrats and business elite who profit from them.

When a barely-passing student studying medicine at a barely-equipped medical college, what kind of doctors can we expect? Surely, that is not the kind of health system Nepal needs to foster — one where anyone who can afford it is on the next flight out as soon as a health emergency crops up.

But what is happening to the health sector afflicts every other segment of national life, medicine or less-than-satisfactory individuals and organisations taking up crucial positions that determine ourCollective progress, and reproducing a culture of political protection and systemic corruption to sustain the system.

One of the major players in sustaining the nexus between the political, bureaucratic and business elite is the head of the CAA, and that is why KC has added the imposition of Lokman Singh Karki to his list of demands. This did not come out of the blue, as Karki is a powerful figure not just within the medical industry but well beyond. This is the real litmus test for our elected officials, to see whether their loyalties lie with personal gain, profits and a dangerous mafia, or whether they will fight for the people who voted them into power in the first place.

If, on this occasion, the political parties and their leaders fail to deliver a solution, save KC’s life, and act in the interest of the people, whether PM Oli is still in power or whether the Dahal-Nepal rotation has begun, they will have a sizeable number of very angry citizens to answer to. We must not let them off easy this time.
Even less confidence

OM ASTHA RAI

For the past four years, Python has been the dominant language for machine learning and artificial intelligence. It has gained a lot of popularity due to its simplicity and the vast libraries available for data analysis and machine learning. Some of the popular libraries include NumPy, Pandas, Scikit-learn, TensorFlow, and PyTorch.

When your data is ready, you can use the TensorFlow library to build a machine learning model. TensorFlow is an open-source library for machine learning that provides a flexible and comprehensive environment for building and deploying machine learning models.

You can train your model on your data and then use it to make predictions on new data. TensorFlow provides tools for training models on different types of hardware, including CPUs, GPUs, and TPUs.

Another popular library is Scikit-learn. It provides tools for data preprocessing, classification, regression, clustering, and dimensionality reduction. Scikit-learn is built on top of NumPy and is easy to use for building machine learning models.

In conclusion, Python, TensorFlow, and Scikit-learn are powerful tools for building and deploying machine learning models. They provide a comprehensive environment for data analysis and machine learning, and are widely used in the field.

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Nobodies who are somebody

What would be the compensation if Canadian nationals, not Nepali guards, had been killed in Kabul?

The debate must be seen in the context of military and security operations — previously the domain of national armed forces — being privatized. The Kabul carnage also revealed Nepal’s dire remittances-dependent economy, and dismal governance.

In the last 10 years, the Department of Foreign Employment in Nepal has issued some 9,000 permits for nationals to work in Afghanistan. However, the actual number is said to be much higher, since recruitment is through informal channels and there is no official mechanism to record the number of returns.

In 2006, War on Waste produced an influential report that analysed the costs associated with the proliferation of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs). Following the declaration of the US-led ‘war on terror’ and subsequent military invasions, private security companies have operated throughout the world selling security services to governments, international institutions such as the UN, and private firms.

PMSCs provide direct combat, intelligence, training and security services in conflict zones, post-conflict reconstruction and so on. In Iraq and Afghanistan, with a declining presence of the US and allied troops, security services are increasingly outsourced to PMSCs, whose clients include Royal Dutch Shell, BP and ExxonMobil.

As an industry that profits from war and political conflicts, PMSCs have come under scrutiny and faced allegations of human rights abuses, absence of accountability, involvement in the illegal weapons trade, and catalysing or exacerbating political conflicts. Even so, contractors are gradually becoming the accepted form of security.

After the killing of the Nepali security guards, there has been some debate about outsourcing security and whether the blame should be placed on the Canadian government, the British PMSC Sabre International that employed the guards, or the Nepali government for failing to protect its citizens. Or all three.

If we argue that PMSCs should bear the responsibility as they are the direct employers and are also in charge of upholding safety protocols, the question that arises is what mechanism is in place to hold such companies accountable.

An International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC) was prepared in 2010 in consultation with PMSCs, governments and civil society. However, ICoC is voluntary and based on self-regulation rather than being legally binding.

Recruiting vulnerable and desperate employees from poor countries puts PMSCs in a powerful and profitable bargaining position. For instance, there was a case in which Sabre International was receiving $1700 for every Ugandan security guard recruited for the US government, but the security guard’s actual pay was no more than $700.

Private security guards from developing states should doubt receive higher salaries than what they would earn at home, but the risks involved are high. By contracting out security to its embassy, the Canadian government protected itself from any financial liability towards the murdered guards. It leads us to the question of what would be the compensation be if those killed had been Canadian nationals, instead of guards from Nepal?

Since the public outcry over the loss of national soldiers and the subsequent political cost governments could face are significant, guards from poor countries become easy alternatives, risk minimisers and politically disposable bodies safeguarding the interests of the rich and powerful.

The Nepali government has now imposed a ban on Nepali workers going to Afghanistan. It is doubtful if a blanket ban on work, considering that many migrants in Afghanistan use informal channels to get there and remain largely undocumented. Sabre International, for its part, has committed $90,000 in compensation to each family of the victims of the Kabul attack.

The Canadian government condemned the killings and recently held a memorial service for the deceased guards, in the Canadian Embassy in Kabul in the presence of the Indian ambassador and of any representative of Nepal, however. The Canadian government has been tightly-lipped about compensation for the victims’ families.

This is hypocritical because Canada has exhaustive travel advisories when it comes to the protection of its own public service staff working in places like Afghanistan, who enjoy travel accident insurance, medical evacuation, dependent care and so on worth $500,000. The lessons from the Kabul tragedy could be the urgent need for regulation of the PMSC industry through a framework of legal obligations, with intergovernmental negotiations between countries that are either clients or countries supplying security personnel. The UN Human Rights Council has been developing a binding convention for the regulation of PMSCs, which is a positive step. But PMSCs are economically and politically powerful, and a strong backlash should be expected against any regulation.

As for Nepal, the incident is one of the many we wake up calls that relying on remittance without a long-term economic vision is not sustainable.

Guest Column

Sangita Thebe Limbu

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A heavy monsoon pulse is headed our way towards Central Nepal and will bring copious amounts of rain. This is much needed because the precipitation rate for Kathmandu in July has been below normal. However, the bad news is that most of the rain will fall as heavy showers, even cloud bursts, which may lead to landslides and flash floods. People living in earthquake-affected areas need to be extra careful since the slopes are still unstable.

KATHMANDU

AYESHA SHAKYA
in NEW YORK

For someone who debuted her first piece of jewellery only three years ago, Arpna Rayamajhi (pictured) has been creating a great deal of buzz in New York’s fashion circles lately. Her vibrant creations have a natural east-meets-west flair to them, helping her gain a global foothold. She already has a feature in Vogue focusing on her eponymous jewellery line under her belt, and a strong following based on Instagram.

“I was starting to feel a massive disconnect from my own country, and making jewellery became a mode of connect for me,” says the 26-year-old Kathmandu native.

Drawing inspiration from traditional Nepali styles—specifically intricate ethnic ornaments worn by women as well as crafts that have universally become less valued over time—and blending them with a western urban style, Rayamajhi’s jewellery is contemporary, edgy and refreshingly colourful.

“Being away from Nepal has made me see the things I grew up with in a different light. I have a more objective view on handicraft from home and I find some of our work to be extremely beautiful,” she adds.

There are various series in Rayamajhi’s work, and each has an underlying story. Staying true to her unique sense of style, Rayamajhi’s jewellery uses beads, rubber, strings, fabric, silver and gold, and is not limited to a particular kind of design.

“Minimalism is easy and it comes from modernity, but I believe that the more the jewellery, the better, which is reflected in my work. With the colours and materials I use, I am able to bring my heritage forward,” says Rayamajhi.

Rayamajhi finds inspiration in the new and old, in both fiction and non-fiction. Her first-ever series “The Melancholy Death of The Unkin Girl” was inspired by Tim Burton’s book, The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy, and it remains massively popular.

Although Rayamajhi delved into the arts at a young age and experimented with drawing, painting and music, she began designing jewellery only while pursuing her Bachelor in Fine Arts degree from Cooper Union in New York. As a digitally-savvy entrepreneur, Rayamajhi has been posting photographs of her jewellery on Instagram, and continues to use this as a vehicle to showcase her work. Although she is currently designing and crafting her jewellery sets, she hopes to expand her work and employ single mothers in her future.

Besides jewellery, her eclectic Instagram feed features photographs of subjects she is inspired by, her own art work and selfies—the designer models her own jewellery. She now has over 27,000 followers, and counting.

While most of Rayamajhi’s clientele is based in the United States, she is now expanding into Europe, Australia and Japan. In spite of the astounding response so far, Rayamajhi has her feet firmly on the ground. She says “Nothing in life lasts forever. I want my work to continue to have a wider meaning and affect people on a personal level.”

Instagram: raysamayra
Website: www.arpnamrayamajhi.com
If you’re looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, and want a trek that detoxifies you both physically and spiritually, there is perhaps no destination more worthy than a holy hike to the Khaṭpad in the far-western mountains of Nepal.

In the past, Khaṭpad was just too remote: only the privileged — those with access to helicopters — and the really devout made it there. Now, with new roads, Khaṭpad National Park is surprisingly accessible and a fabulous way to see a part of Nepal that is literally off the beaten track.

About 100 trekkers visited Khaṭpad last year. The facilities are basic, but that is the whole point: to get away from it all, to a place with no mobile phones, no electricity, no concrete and no sound of the internal combustion engine.

No wonder Khaṭpad Baba, one of the most revered holy men in Nepal, lived here for 50 years of his life, meditating in an ashram in the forest. It is said he first settled on the banks of Rara Taal, but found the view there too distracting and came to Khaṭpad, drawn by its biodiversity and treasure of herbs.

Khaṭpad Baba was a healer and used medicinal plants to treat villagers from the surrounding districts of Doli, Bajhang, Achham and Bajuras, who brought yoghurt and food in exchange. King Birendra flew here frequently to seek Khaṭpad Baba’s blessings.

Today the ashram itself is a shrine maintained by the Army, and serves almost as a museum of...
books and daily utensils used by Baba.

Khapil stands above the surrounding districts, its thickly forested flanks bathed in clouds this time of year. The top is an undulating plateau of pine forests and meadows with crystal clear streams and ponds. During this season, the place is crowded with pilgrims, as well as livestock that are brought here to graze.

The easier trail is from Bajhang in the north, but one can also climb from Doti to the south. The rains have come after a long winter drought, and the submerged paddy terraces shine like mirrors. But soon, the trail climbs into the tree line. The forest is so thick that people have gotten lost here, so it is best to keep to the main trail.

There is some of the sophistication of Nepal’s more popular trekking routes; only basic tea and buckwheat pancakes with — if you are lucky — chutney made from the cannabis plant that grows wild here.

As the monsoon rains have started, the trails were slippery and leeches dropped from the canopy. Thousands of pilgrims from surrounding districts hike up to the plateau for the Gangas Dashara Mela to offer prayers at the Sabashra Linga, Naga Dhunga and Kedr Dhunga. They take a ritual dip in the Khapil Daia and Triveni Phair.

Besides cleansing them of sins, the festival also traditionally serves as a gigantic match-making opportunity for young men and women. There is a lot of singing and dancing, and love blossoms in the fields of flowers known as jastas that characterize Khapil in the rainy season.

Rich biodiversity — attributable to altitude variation — is one of the reasons Khapil is a national park. It has 224 species of medicinal herbs, 266 bird species, and more than 20 species of mammals. From 3,200 m the terrain dips down to 300 m on the banks of the West Seti River in Dipayas.

Getting there
Fly or take the night bus from Kathmandu to Dhangadi, then the bus to Lamjung in which takes 12 hours. Return via Doli.
EVENTS

Temple run,
Make your run existing with Kathmandu Running Club and circle ancient temples in areas like Sawayambhunath, Basantapur Durbar Square, Pashupatinath, Swayambhunath and T 몽
16 July, 7 am to 8 am, Sawayambhunath temple

DINING

Meze by Roadhouse,
Spat a supernat at one of Kathmandu’s most popular restaurants.
Monsoon Plaza, Dobhar Marg, (01) 4223607

Shambala Garden Café,
Lunaud at Hotel Shangri-La and enjoy a live performance by City Guyarr every Friday.
7 pm onwards, Hotel Shangri-La, Lopan, (01) 4217069 Ex-720/700, Rs. 1000 per person

Music mania,
Hear the Chhagbu trim mero pop sensation haraam komal ve, as part of the live musical for 2016 hosted by Fiji, Nepal.
7 July, 1 pm to 3 pm, The Victory Lounge, Nahar, (01) 4563558, (9821454730), Tickets: Rs. 1000

GETAWAY

Reminiscing 50s,
Sway to the tunes of the 50s with Kathmandu Cats and The Dirty Doo Bees Band.
15 July, 7 pm onwards, Wilder’s, Sano, (01) 552548

Hotel Landmark,
Made entirely from traditional Nepali brick and woodcraft, this hotel is rich not only in heritage, but also offers great services and boasts an award-winning restaurant, The Hungry Eye.
(01) 4565891/29636696/29638497, www.landmarkkathmandu.com

Kavre poetry slam,
Find yourself in the Kavre Regional Slam, a poetry slam for poets aged 14 to 25, as part of the QC Awards 2016: National Poetry Slam.
30 July, 11 am to 2 pm, Khaone village, Aran, (01) 556197, Registration deadline: 16 July, Register at https://goa.gk1.gov.np, Fees: Rs. 100

Kathmandu Kora,
Join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts and ride 50, 75 or 100 km to raise funds for a sporting centre in Nepal.
16 July, 7.30 am onwards, Lingaulbazaar, (01) 441178, www.kathmandukora.net

Salt & Pepper Restro Lounge,
Epresso, mochas, lattes, frappuchinos, cocktails, liquor, beers and flavored shishas, with an outdoor late-night terrace.
Lakeside, Pashupati, (01) 4654848, 58462558

KJC for kids,
Chair group, movie time, wall climbing, mural, games, dance and more for kids at the JKC Summer Camp for Kids.
25 July to 12 August, 10 am to 2 pm, Monday through Friday. Ages 5 to 11 years, Kathmandu, Rani Devi Davar, (01) 5073654

Design a tee,
Live the dreamer in you and design a t-shirt with the theme ‘Men and women should grow hand in hand’ during HACDOS2016.
21 July, 11 am to 2 pm, Leeplay Academy, Bishalnagar, (01) 6529277, Deadline: 20 July

Hankook Sarang,
Serves incredible Korean cuisine, including superhuman steamed rice to anchor meals fit for a king.
Thamel, (01) 4255675, info@hankooksarang.com

Milla Guesthouse,
If you prefer quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet miles away.
Aashistana, (01) 5073437

Hyderabad at Sunrise,
Experience the true flavours of Hyderabad at hotel Y & Y with a spread of kebabs and biryanis.
25 to 27 July, buffet lunch Rs 450/-, dinner Rs 550/-.
Sunrise Restaurant, Hotel Y & Y, Price: Rs 2,200 plus taxes per person (includes a glass of Heineken)

Enjoy the city’s finest with Ruslan

Music

Journey

GETAWAY

Glacier Hotel,
Good value and friendly service for travellers on the last day of Luke Rhewa,
Dhulikhel, (01) 467792, www.glaciermotel.com

ATithi Resort & Spa,
A vast variety of hotel pitches with modern amenities and traditional Nepali architecture, enjoy with a fancy pool and a cozy restaurant.
Lakeside, Pashupati, (01) 4667860, info@atithi.com

Meghuli Serali,
Enjoy the maroon offer at ‘A’ Safari’s Meghuli San and relax with fine dining and wildlife safaris in Chitwan.
Chitwan National Park, (9811809066/9811007548)

MISS MOTIVATION

Kripa Joshi

Difficult roads lead to beautiful destinations.

Authors Unknown

Nepal’s No.1 Vodka
Falling with the water

Why canyoning in Jalbire’s all-natural water theme park should be your go-to adventure this monsoon

SAMRIDDHI RAI

Jalbire is this gigantic, gorgeous waterfall not far from Mugling. I can’t think of a better place for you to about your canyoning adventure in, said my camping guide Suman Dai. It was a starry night, wrapped in a pine-scented breeze with our tents camped next to a dark, silent lake. I hope to share that story with you in days to come, here in ‘Sammy Adventures’, a new fortnightly series in Nepal Times.

Suman Dai said those words with such conviction that I had to look up the place. Next thing I knew, I was packed up and on the morning bus to Chitwan.

From the Prithvi Highway where we were dropped off, it is a bit of a hike to where the canyoning begins. But finally seeing the tall beauty at the end of the trail made the uphill effort worthwhile. Locals have been thronging to Jalbire’s Lamo Jharness for years now, but its popularity among non-locals is a recent trend. ‘The monsoon is the best time to come here for a dip,’ said Moja Gurne, a trained river guide and also our canyoning expert for the day. The rains create a huge natural swimming pool at the foot of the waterfall.

While relishing your moment at the waterfall, taking pictures and swimming in the pond are quite fun, it is the adventurers who know how to truly enjoy the gifts of this little known paradise. Apart from the Lamo Jharness, the entire stretch of Jalbire has more than a dozen waterfalls, cliff jumping spots and natural slides — just the perfect place for canyoning.

Generally, a canyoning experience means plunging down a waterfall, and you would be pretty much done. But not in Jalbire. Here, you cliff dive, slide, and canyon through several waterfalls. By the end of my three hours in this au naturel water park I was exhausted, and yet somehow still couldn’t get enough of it. I have undertaken several adventures throughout the country, from sky-diving to rafting, but Jalbire canyoning is in a league of its own. And if anyone asks me for the one adventure they should look for in Nepal, I would definitely recommend this.

Getting there
Kathmandu to Jalbire: 120 km. Approximate drive time: 3 hr 30 min.

Samriddhi Rai is a singer/songwriter. Her Sammy Adventures’ travel vlog on Jalbire canyoning is up on her channel, youtube.com/ samriddhirai

Canyoning 101
Canyoning is simply hiking down fast-flowing mountain streams by abseil and rope work, supported by other outdoor activities like jumping, swimming and technical climbing. Gearing up for the adventure requires a wet suit, helmet, life vest and shoes made specially for canyoning.

Canyoning should not be done without professional guidance. Pay heed to the safety instructions given by the guides.

One needs to be fit to indulge in the sport, especially during the monsoon. The increased volume of water requires one to be strong enough to withstand the force of the waterfall.

Popular places to canyon in Nepal

SINERI: A newly discovered water world 30 km from Kathmandu.

LWANG GAHALE, POKHARA: Lwung Ghaile is considered one of the most beautiful villages in Pokhara, with a successful tourism story to share. The Kudi Fall is 107 m in height and a popular canyoning spot.

BHOTE KOSI: 113 km from Kathmandu, Bhote Kosi is the country’s unofficial adventure capital. There are many spots for canyoning, the famous ones being...
THE LEGEND OF TARZAN

Having grown up enthralled by Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book, I’ve always had more of an affection for Mowgli over the other feral child who grows up to bear his chest, emit

his famous yowl (is there really another word for Tarzan’s famous cry?) and is purportedly the Lord of the jungle.

Over the years, due to several terrible film interpretations of Tarzan, the character has gained a reputation for being embarrassingly camp, a half-naked wild man who speaks broken English, communes with wild beasts, and drugs women around by their hair.

Fortunately, the new screen adaptation pays attention to the original source material from Edgar Rice Burroughs’ Tarzan of the Apes novels, allowing Tarzan (played by the very handsome Alexander Skarsgård) to be the noble, reserved, charismatic

and highly intelligent character that Burroughs wrote him to be, wielding enormous physical power matched by a quick brain that allows him the gifts of a polyglot. This romantic figure is bittersweet by his aristocratic heritage: Tarzan is by birth John Clayton III, Viscount Greystoke, an English lord with immense wealth at his

fingertips.

Set in the early 1900s, The Legend of Tarzan begins with the now-civilised Lord Greystoke being accorded by the British Prime Minister (Jim Broadbent), who tries to persuade him to accept an invitation to the Belgian Congo at the request of King Leopold II in order to help British diplomatic ties with Belgium. When Greystoke politely, succinctly, and artlessly declines, we see the polished veneer of British nobility augmented with a flash of the wild, indomitable spirit that makes Tarzan so fascinating.

Ultimately, the wild man-turned-gentleman is persuaded to return to the place of his birth by George Washington Williams (Samuel L. Jackson), an American diplomat who suspects the ugly truth —

that the tribal people are being enslaved to build roads and bridges.

Tarzan returns to the jungle accompanied by his beloved Jane (the lovely, feisty Margot Robbie) and with Williams in tow, to try and save his former family (both human and animal). The real truth is far more ugly, and unfortunately a pretty fair indictment of how Western colonisers treated their fellow Africans, bringing a much-needed political context into the romantic tale of a man who was brought up by apes.

While the film has not done well at the box office, it is extremely well made: a visually gorgeous creation with scenes of Africa and wild life that are stunning on the big screen. For the elitizing sceptics, I give you this — never once in this engaging film are the words “Me Tarzan, you Jane” uttered, a blessing in itself and one more reason to give this surprisingly decent film some of your time.

nepalitimes.com

LEADING LADY: Nepal’s first female Chief Justice Sushila Karki assumes office on Monday.

NEW DAWN: Subram Bhattarai reaches the Election Commission on Sunday to register his Naya Shakti Party.

FLEEING FLOODES: Residents of Tarutani move to a safer location after being displaced by a flash flood in Brah Kosi on Saturday caused by the river being blocked by a landslide in Tibet.

CELEBRATING PEACE: Folk instrumental ensemble Kumumba performs during an event to mark NGOs Search for Common Ground’s 10th anniversary on Monday.
Nepal's first female Chief Justice, Sushila Karki, in an interview with BBC Nepal Service 11 July

RBC Nepal Service: Were you hand-picked by the Maestros as a Supreme Court (SC) justice when you were a senior advocate?

Chief Justice Sushila Karki: I am neither a Maestros nor a Congress. If anything, I am a democrat. They say I was hand-picked by the Maestros, but I have heard that the Congress leaders are cursing themselves for recommending my name because I delivered verdicts that were not favourable to them.

But is it not true that you were recommended by the Nepali Congress (Democratic) to be a member of the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee?

I do not know who recommended my name at that time. Now, all political parties, except the RPP-N, want to take credit for that. I dare any political leader to claim that I begged them to make me a justice.

Do you feel you lacked experience when appointed directly to the SC?

True. I did not have experience working as a judge, but I had the knowledge. It was not so difficult. I had not studied commerce, so I faced problems when hearing cases about tax and revenue matters. But I was good at hearing criminal cases right from my first day at the SC.

Would it not have been easier for you if you had started working as a judge at the appellate court?

I do not think so. All I needed to work as a SC justice was courage, and I had that. Public prosecutors pleaded, and their statements were drafted and presented to us. Then, we got the statements from the defence lawyers. We thoroughly examine both, and reach a conclusion. If we are confused, we consult each other.

Who should be afraid of you as the new Chief Justice?

I do not think anyone should be afraid of me. But I will not spare those who are corrupt.

You spoke about CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki in the Parliamentary Hearing Committee. I ran into him for the first time today, and asked him why he is spreading rumours that we are brother and sister. He just grinned, and did not say anything.

But the fact that you met him for the first time today does not prove that you are not a relative of his.

I do not know who he is, and I have not passed a single ruling about any case involving him in his private capacity. A case involving the CIAA should not be his personal case. But if the CIAA is involved in wrongdoing, should I not hear a case against it?

So Karki’s position is in danger?

I do not have personal animosity against anyone. I am just pointing out his mistakes.

What are your plans after retirement?

I came to Kathmandu to serve as a SC justice when I was doing well as a senior advocate. If I were greedy I would not have accepted the offer. Senior lawyers often refuse to join the Supreme Court because they earn a lot more as advocates. They say that what a SC justice SC earns, which is only Rs 40,000, is not sufficient to live on in Kathmandu. But I never thought about it because I am not after money. I do not have any vested interests, and will work impartially during my one-year tenure.

What about Khila Raj Regmi’s appointment as the Chair of the Council of Ministers while still serving as the Chief Justice? Regmi was a very fair justice. A wise person, too. But he ended up becoming Prime Minister when he was still Chief Justice. The judiciary is still paying the price for that decision.

In the Parliamentary Hearing Committee, you spoke of how much suffering you had to bear while serving as a SC justice for seven years.

I do not want to blame anyone, but as the only woman justice at the Supreme Court then, other justices would often pass disparaging remarks without realising my presence in the chamber. I would find it difficult to digest their comments. This gender discrimination permeates all strata of the state and society today.

The Judicial Council’s decision to recommend former UML legislator Sagan Pradhan Malla as a SC justice has sparked criticism that it opened the door for politicians to enter the judiciary.

I do not think so. Our Constitution and laws do not bar those involved in politics from becoming SC justices. Even so, we have not recommended those who were active in politics as SC justices. If Sagan Pradhan Malla is a political person, so are Hari Krishna Karki and Prakash Ray (who have been recommended as SC justices alongside Malla). We recommended Malla because of her capability. She is well-educated, an expert in her field, has been part of many court cases that resulted in landmark verdicts in favour of women’s rights, and is committed to law and justice.
Neglect of the neglected

Official neglect has left Nepal’s healthcare workforce unprepared to care for mental illness

BIBHAV ACHARYA and SONIYA HIRACHAN

S hanti arrives at a clinic in a rural Nepal hospital complaining of aches and pains. The generalist examines and sends her to the lab for a test, all of which are normal. In the last few years, she has spent a lot of time and money seeing generalists who tell her there is nothing wrong.

The generalist suggests this could be psychological; she should see a psychiatrist. Shanti is afraid that the generalist thinks she is “crazy”. Besides, the nearest psychiatrist is more than a day’s trip away.

In a recently published study, our team at Possible spoke with 29 MBBS physicians, Health Assistants and Certified Medical Assistants from three district hospitals. Generalists described two groups of patients with mental illness.

For the first group, the patients’ sense of reality is altered, resulting in severe behavioural problems (in patients like Shanti). Generalists quickly recognize the need for a psychiatrist, and noted that well-resourced families take such patients to the nearest psychiatrist while poorer patients visit traditional healers. Patients who do not improve may be isolated and locked away for the rest of their lives.

Patients in the second group, however, continue to see health workers in private or government hospitals. In primary care clinics, almost 20 per cent of the patients have aches, pains, dizziness, and numerous other problems that have no clear source. Generalists usually suspect an underlying mental illness, but do not know what to do next. In desperation, they prescribe vitamins and painkillers, but the patients do not improve. Aches and pains move to a different part of the body, or the patient seeks services at another facility, spending more money on visits and repeated lab tests.

Often, patients bear stigmatizing and dismissive comments about their problems from generalists: women are told their anxious response to domestic violence is a sign of weakness, others are told there is “nothing wrong” with them. These words are meant to normalize the situation and somehow comfort the patient, but have the consequence of making patients thinking that they are being blamed or that their suffering is being dismissed as a norm.

Even though the generalists know that such patients require more time, they report being too busy to sit down with the patients to learn more about what ails them. With more than 70 patients waiting to be seen, it is easier to say a few words of reassurance and prescribe vitamins.

In Nepal, medical schools and other health professional institutes include minimal to no mental health education. This is incredibly inadequate because mental illnesses are the biggest cause of chronic diseases. Such neglect has left our healthcare workforce woefully unprepared to care for people with depression, anxiety disorders, dementia, psychosis, epilepsy and substance abuse. This educational gap among generalists is particularly concerning in the context of humanitarian crises like the earthquakes in 2015.

In response to these findings, our team has implemented a program to provide high-quality mental healthcare integrated into the primary care clinic at Bayalpata Hospital in Achham district. The strategy prevents patients from the costly and often stigmatizing process of visiting a psychiatrist in the city. We have trained all generalists to recognize mental illness and avoid harmful and ineffective medications. We have recruited counsellors trained by Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Nepal. When a generalist suspects mental illness, the counsellors conduct a thorough evaluation and make treatment recommendations. Shikhar B Swar, a Kathmandu-based psychiatrist, revises cases and travel to Achham for training and supervision.

There are many cases of patient receiving inappropriate or no mental healthcare. To address this, medical institutes must train our healthcare workforce in mental health. Generalists should be comfortable recognizing and treating mental illness like any other common illness. In addition, psychiatrists must engage in training and supervising generalists and counsellors.

Given the severe shortage of psychiatrists, particularly in rural Nepal, patients cannot all be directly seen by a psychiatrist. The government must include counsellors as part of the workforce around the country. The cost of training and supporting counsellors is a very small price to pay for the benefit of avoiding unnecessary tests and clinic visits, setting aside time for the busy generalists, and providing non-stigmatizing mental health services.

The post-earthquake period has increased the nation’s attention to mental health. Now we have a clear choice: do we roll out services that are affordable and effective, or do we keep telling patients suffering from a real illness that there is nothing wrong with them.

Bibhav Acharya, MD is the Co-Founder and Mental Health Advisor for Possible, which runs a healthcare delivery system in Achham and Dolakha in partnership with the Nepal Government. Soniya Hirachan, MD is the Co-Founder of Shared Minds, a non-profit that provides mental health training for generalist clinicians in Nepal.
Suicide rate per 100,000

14 Apr 2015 - 12 Apr 2016

26-43
16-25
1-15
Population below 100,000

SOURCE: NEPAL POLICE

NATION 15

15 - 21 JULY 2016 #817

AND OUT

per 100,000, the seventh-highest in the world after countries like Sri Lanka and South Korea. However, Nepal has the third-highest rate of female suicides, and it is the main cause of death among women in the 15-49 age group in Nepal.

"People migrate for better economic opportunities. When they do not find them, they become frustrated, which may lead to depression," said Ram Sharma Pathak, Professor and Head of Population Studies at Tribhuvan University.

Besides dislocation, exposure to violence during and after the war as well as recent natural disasters could be other factors leading to a rise in mental health problems, believes Kshem Karki at the National Health Research Council: "Over the years, the migration and displacement of people have been exacerbated by the ten-year-long conflict, floods, landslides and most recently the earthquake. There is a lot of stress related to both internal and external migration."

Jhapa in the eastern Tarai has seen a sharp increase in its population due to new migration from the hills, and there seems to be a correlation with an increase in the suicide rate there over the last three years.

Hari, 26, moved to Jhapa with his wife from their ancestral village in Kathmandu. The displacement and new surroundings drove Hari to alcohol while his family struggled with earning enough. In September last year, Hari hanged himself on a tree outside his house. He was among 249 persons who committed suicide between April 2015 and May 2016 in Jhapa alone.

The district’s suicide rate three years ago was 25 per 100,000, and rose to 31 per 100,000 this year. Jhapa has now overtaken the neighbouring district of Ilam, which had the notorious distinction of having the highest rate of suicide in Nepal.

"There is unhealthy competition, low coping skills and wide prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse in the district. People have become more aggressive as well," said Saligram Shastri, a clinical psychologist with Transcultural Psychosocial Organization in Jhapa.

Although there is high emigration of young men from the Tarai to India and overseas, the pills are seeing more people moving down from the mountains. Plains districts like Jhapa, Morang, Kapilvastu, Nawalparasi, Bardiya and Kanchanpur—which have high rates of in-migration—have witnessed a surge in suicides in the last three years. The suicide rate in other Tarai districts, as well as in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, has seen a decline, while Lalitpur has seen an increase.

Experts say that dislocation, in itself, is not bad because people want to take their own lives, but the absence of proper diagnosis and treatment of mental illness has led to an epidemic of suicides.

Societal taboos and stigmatization of mental health have made it difficult for many to seek help.

"Society is yet to understand and accept mental illness as a problem, rather than stigmatizing it. The stigma is still there," says Surya Shrestha, a social worker at Nepal Health Foundation.

The Ministry of Health’s Health Management Information System still does not list suicide as a category while recording deaths. Data is from the Nepal Police, which treats suicide as a crime. Sarij Ojha of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital notes: "There is still a lot of social stigma when it comes to suicide. Therefore, it is important to spread awareness and deal with it as a mental health issue."

Some names have been changed.

Do not shy away from seeking help. If you, or anyone you know, would like to speak to a trained mental health professional, please contact:

TUTH Suicide Hotline: 9940021000
Transcultural Psychosocial Organization-Nepal Crisis Line: 666032900 Mental Health Helpline Nepal: 16600 0133846

FEPF only accepts compensation applications from returnees who are physically ill or injured; they can get up to Rs 300,000 for 79 categories of physical afflictions. Family members of those who die abroad can receive Rs 500,000.

"Mental health was never considered when compensation provision were made, but we can amend the directive in the future to also include returnees migrants with mental illness," said Nirmala Thapa of the FEPF.

FEPF

Health experts cite culture shock, homesickness, physically-taxing workloads and an unfriendly environment as some of the reasons for the mental health problems among migrant workers.

"The lack of awareness about mental illness is one of the biggest challenges," explains Bhana Ratha Khayati, a psychologist at the BP Koirala Institute of Health and Sciences in Bhairahawa, "and treatment is difficult in destination countries because of the language problem."

FEPF data shows that 460 Nepali migrant workers have committed suicide, mainly in Malaysia, Qatar, Israel, Kuwait and Bahrain surveyed last year showed signs of depression. They complained of poor working conditions and various forms of abuse and stress.

Sushma Lamichhane of the Pratik Nepal Co-ordination Committee says his organisation has dealt with 39 migrants with mental health issues in the past three years, adding: "But this is just the tip of the iceberg, as many others have never been recorded anywhere."
WANTED, DEAD OR ALIVE: A New Prime Minister

South Asia’s oldest nation-state and newest monarchy that scores consistently high marks in the Corruption Perception Index and Failed State Index requires a 24th Prime Minister in 28 years.

This is yet another feather in the cap for a country that is always breaking World Records in the Guinness Book for categories including Kicking a Rubber Band with the Ankle Non-stop for 7 hr 56 min in the ALL Nepal Free-Style Chungi Tournament, and for the first Dog to Climb Mt Everest Without the Aid of Artificial Oxygen.

So be it, as it may, and to cut a long story short, a Himalayan Democratic Federal Republic that has already ceased being democratic and may not remain federal or a republic for much longer either (going by remarks by Congress Amrute to his Fifth Column this week) has an urgent vacancy for a vacuous new Prime Monarch that can take office ASAP. And that means now, mister.

Candidate should be a tall, bright, handsome, fair-skinned vegetarian, UV-eligible toothatear with elastic morals and expandable girth. Guts, age, disabilities, ethnicity, gender orientation, sexual preference, marital status if any, eating habits, incontinence and incompetence are no bar.

Prospective Slime Minister should ideally have possession of at least one healthy kidney, and a functioning alimentary canal that can digest a 40% cut from each allocated government grant to community hospitals serving the rural poor. Should have experience serving as Prime Minister of this country in at least one previous tenure — candidates who have been prime minister at least three times would be preferred — during which time he/she should have paid lip-service to socialism, given a tongue-lashing to the monarchy, plundered the exchequer, delayed projects of national prestige for personal gain, sabotaged hydroelectric plants being built by rival contractors, taken cuts on irrigation projects that collapsed during their first test, and indulged in nepotism, communism, sectarianism, anachronism and general buffoonery.

The candidate should have shown a demonstrable ability to both kick and kiss ass, groove palms, partake of kickbacks, play footie with tycoons, pay off the Corruption Watchdog, amass cash in the Cayman Islands through intermediaries named in the Panama Papers, embedded an amount equivalent to and not exceeding ‘Three Arabes meint’ for rebuilding ex-querillas, and have had a sidekick who was once caught in flagrante in a telephone tap for accepting from the embassy of a certain country which shall remain nameless but which begins with the initial ‘T’, an amount in the vicinity of 50 Coroordes to buy off CA members.

Candidate should have passed at least Grade 8, and be able to provide continuity to the predecessor’s frequent flights of fancy to promise piped gas into every Nepali home, launch a thousand ships in the high seas flying the Nepali flag, harness energy from the sun we emit while shooting the breeze at cabinet meetings to power electric railways to interchange the country and, last but not least, pledge to turn Nepal into Singapore or Bhutan (whatever comes first).

If you think you are made of prime ministerial material, and wish to apply for this post, download the application form at www.gone.gov and attach a medical profile attested by a certified coolboxer, a full medical report that includes a brain scan to prove the existence of an empty skull, as well as a receipt showing a pre-paid amount to certain beneficiaries.

QUALIFICATIONS:

20 years of experience in being sworn in multiple times as prime minister, operating, umpiring, light-fudging, kula-draping, budget-waving, budget-swatting, and地块ing of Nepali society to benefit your subject under the sun and/or moon.

Must have never committed previous term’s promises and be prepared to admit to all, and be able to explain the promise if it is “thrown at least one breast at the opposition Chair” (or is it “thrown at least one breast at the opposition Chair?”). Either way, should have refused to hold local elections for 20 years. Must have a long and distinguished career in the nepotism, with a Masters in Science, in Wheeling and Deal-making and a PhD in Horse-Trading and Arrogating.

As opposition leader should have amazed experience in looking down the nation for not less than 50 days in a year by using terms like burning glass with drapers still inside, and making an arm of himself. Applicant must be for all-in and out laws and should take up minimalistic bars at any time, and not declare all wide open like they are meant to at this point in time.

Prime Ministerial aspirants must be in possession of extensive in advance stages of demarcation in the close, and a certificate duly notarised by at least three referees who have been victims of his past extortions attempting to call on his exceptional fundraising capabilities.

Candidate must have close family links to organised crime, and be on a first-name basis with spies and leaders abroad, to garner international solidarity for engineering at home.

SALARY:

Negotiable, but has in-built premiums for side incomes from the Prime Minister’s media interests in standard operating procedures and precedents set by previous prime ministers.

FINE PRINT:

Glimpse at equal opportunities employer. Women are encouraged to apply, but do so to their own peril. All applications must be submitted.

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