Collateral damage

Harinder Mahato of Birganj (pictured, above) was preparing to take his wife to Mediolab in India for medical treatment last week. He had saved up INR 10,000 — all in high denomination 500 and 1,000 notes. But on 8 November, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the surprise announcement to ban those notes saying India needed to weed out black money and counterfeit currency. Just like tens of millions of Indian families, Mahato’s hard-earned money suddenly became worthless. He rushed to the Birganj office of Nepal Rastra Bank the day after the ban, but it had stopped exchanging Indian currency. Birganj is the corridor for 80 per cent of India-Nepal trade and INR serves as a parallel currency here. India’s demonetisation move has shaken Birganj’s economy, which was just beginning to recover from last year’s blockade.

Rastra Bank resumed changing Indian currency two days ago, and hundreds of men and women lined up to change the weekly INR 1,500 limit by showing citizenship certificates. But they still cannot change Indian 500 and 1,000 notes.

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) estimates that the demonetisation has traded at least INR 8 billion worthless in Nepal. Besides traders, businessmen and those living in border towns, Nepali migrant workers, students, tourists and pilgrims in India have been most affected by the decision.

Rishal Thapa, a Nepali who works for Axis Bank of India, says: “Besides migrant workers, students are the hardest hit because they do not have bank accounts.”

After a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Modi early this week, the Reserve Bank of India has formed a committee to exchange the bills for Nepal, but the critics have not eased.

Devraj Airi of All Indian Nepali Migrant Workers Society in New Delhi says: “We cannot exchange currency on our own, those who can are ready to help, but give us only INR 400 for every INR 500.”

Rishal Sah in Birganj

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CONVENIENT UNTRUTH

The emperor doesn’t like it when we point out that he is naked.

As the shock of Donald Trump’s victory in the US elections gives way to dismay over his choice of cabinet, journalists and the public at large are feeling the sting of what is known as ‘damaging’, ‘harmful’ or ‘outrageous’ speech. The president-elect’s rhetoric and actions, which are often characterized by personal attacks, insults, and untruths, are causing concern and debate about the role of journalism in a post-truth era.

In our own neighbourhood, we have seen the rise of populism and nationalism, with leaders such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey and President Donald Trump in the US. These leaders have used their power to suppress dissent and control the media, which has led to a decline in the quality of journalism and a decrease in public trust in the media.

In this context, it is important to consider the role of journalists in a post-truth world. How can journalists maintain their integrity and continue to hold those in power accountable? What strategies can they use to counteract the effects of fake news and misinformation?

One strategy that journalists can use is to focus on the impact of their work. By highlighting the consequences of false information, journalists can encourage their readers to be more discerning and critical of the information they consume. This can be done through the use of data and evidence, as well as by highlighting the stories of individuals who have been affected by false information.

Another strategy is to engage with the community and stay connected. By building relationships with their audience, journalists can learn more about their needs and concerns, and use this knowledge to guide their reporting. This can help journalists to stay relevant and relevant in an increasingly pluralistic society.

In conclusion, the role of journalists in a post-truth world is more important than ever. By focusing on the impact of their work, engaging with their audience, and maintaining their integrity, journalists can continue to play a vital role in holding those in power accountable and ensuring that the public is well-informed.

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The business of entrepreneurship

Students planning to study in the United States have to spend up to Rs 500,000 before they even get a visa, or are denied one. With the same amount they could easily start a viable business and generate employment for others, the field is open for anyone starting a business in these fields:

TRIVENI CHAND and PANKAJ PARAJULI

Despite developing a growing taste for coffee, Nepal’s consumers consume only 700-900 tons of coffee beans a year. This is set to grow as Nepali farmers take to coffee as a cash crop in a big way.

Coffee cultivation can be three to five times more profitable than other cereal crops, and high-quality exports fetch a gross margin of over Rs 40,000 per tonne. However, the lack of export incentives for processed coffee beans and fluctuating prices after harvests may act as brakes.

But domestic demand for roasted coffee is growing and one five-star hotel in Kathmandu consumes up to 70 kg of coffee per day with each lingerie using 250 g of coffee per day. The “huge untapped potential for the growth of the coffee market,” says Salendro Jhang (pic: above) of Spindrift Coffee House Franchise.

“Coffee has the potential to create a job out of every 100 hectares of coffee plantations in Nepal, out of an estimated potential for 1 million hectares. The field is wide open for entrepreneurs,” said Jhang.

Fertile environment

“Do you go to college so that you can play with money?” the founders of Pisachabila Bio Tech, Pradeep Lama (posing, left) and Markim Pratap Singh (posing, right), were often asked. But no one laughed at the entrepreneurs who saw wealth in waste, and are now making a fortune selling fertiliser from compost and vermiculture.

Using earthworms to convert biodegradable waste into fertiliser, vermicompost offers three important ingredients for plant growth—nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (NPK). The resulting product has no smell and is packaged for sale at supermarkets and bazaars.

What makes it an attractive business proposition is that vermicomposting needs low capital inputs, and brief technical training. The business plan shows that if employ 2,200 earthworms to digest organic waste over six months at a cost of Rs 500 to produce 1 tonne of vermicompost that can sell for Rs 7,000. Besides the Rs 700 profit, there is an additional Rs 350 income from the sale of excess earthworms.

Pisachabila Bio Tech started by producing just 300 kg of fertiliser, and it now sells 40 tons per day.

Say churpi

A popular hard cheese made from yak milk in Nepal’s mountains is proving to be a lucrative product in the pet food industry worldwide. High-quality churpi, made from the solid-fat part of yak milk, is now sold in the pet section of supermarkets in Europe and the United States and is worth nearly Rs 100 per kg.

Once a source of income for many yak herders, churpi had almost disappeared. But the new emerging market for churpi-based dog chews and the high prices has boosted the income of many farmers who can now expect to earn up to Rs 340,000 per season. But the problem is in insufficient supply of milk because of the lack of government inputs to raise the productivity of yak farms.

Passang Dorje (a farmer who has seen milk production drop and has a high vet bill). There is almost no support from the government. A churpi collector produces a gross profit of Rs 75-100 per kg, being churpi exporter can earn a profit of Rs 100 per kg.

The major hurdle is ensuring standard size and quality demanded by exporters.” says churpi collector Tsering Tulku (pic: right).

There is also a problem of quality. Mould and other damages mean that exporters like Premi Lama can only sell 200 of the 305 kg from one churpi collection. He could salvage another 85 kg to sell in the local market, but he earns only half of the Rs 1,500 that he would earn for 1 kg for export.

The non-profit Institution for Sustainable Actions for Prosperity (ISAP) is working to provide basic training in animal husbandry and medical knowledge to farmers and collectors as well as work to maintain standard quality and size.

Premi Chaudhry is a Program Assistant at Institution for Sustainable Actions for Prosperity (ISAP) while Pushya Purkaji is the Executive Director at Institution for Sustainable Action for Prosperity (ISAP).

Allo sarkar

Ma Thupa Magar (posing, above), 24, has turned a Rs 100,000 investment into Himalayan Allo Udye, an enterprise worth more than Rs 5 million in just three years. The company uses the Himalayan giant nettle and turns it into a fabric that is known for its strength, smoothness, lightness, durability, and a smile-like pattern.

More than 700 entrepreneurs work at different value chains of the allo plant. Yet, most of allo’s potential has been untapped in Nepal’s 50 districts where it grows. The processing of the fibre requires only locally available inputs, Ashoka wood sleds and Rambo (white felt) or caustic soda.

“Even reading skillful labour force is easy,” says Thupa Magar, “as anyone can be trained to make allo yarn and to woven products just in a month.”

But the major obstacles are contacting minor farmers to access raw materials and reaching customers. An allo investment plan will break even within a year. Profits can be maximised by carrying out allo processing more than once a season, along with production of branded fabrics.

“Most importantly, the business needs a product identity and a passion for hard work,” Thupa Magar says.
Sketching Bagmati
SMRITI BASNET

Once crystal clear, the holy Bagmati flowing across Kathmandu Valley today is one big dumping site for garbage. What used to be a destination for pilgrims is now a filthy stench-filled sewer.

In hopes of reviving the enthusiasm for change and the river itself, Cuban-American artist Alberto Rey and American graphic designer Jason Dilworth have come together for the unique Bagmati River Art Project.

Fourteen paintings of the Bagmati as seen from Sundarijal, Gokarna, Guswoli and Chobar have been put together after an extensive field trip with a team of scientists earlier this year. The exhibition on the 20-23rd of November at Siddharta Art Gallery will feature paintings by the duo along with works of Kathmandu University students and other visual-media art forms.

As an artist who has been dealing with contemporary issues, including environmental woes, Rey’s artworks of Bagmati do not paint a grim and grimy picture. His approach is rather to make the artworks aesthetically pleasing, giving viewers a certain exoticism when seen from a distance.

“It is very easy to make something ugly look ugly. But if it is not attractive, people are going to dismiss it. How can you then seduce the viewer to look at the painting?” asks Rey rhetorically.

The artist compels viewers to view the image more closely, eventually leading them to spot minor details that really portray what the Bagmati really is.

To fully comprehend the crisis of the Bagmati, the artists have paired their work with charts. These colorful graphics carry core data from the Bagmati River Expedition 2015 to show the impact of pollution on the river.

What motivated Dilworth was the need to make the audience empathise with the data rather than take it as yet another fact-based finding or get completely lost in scientific jargon. “This hopefully will cause them to pause,” he said.

The multimedia project also includes a documentary and a book, which also comes with Nepali translations that detail the history, cultural significance, policies and future challenges for the Bagmati. Having slitted through more than 200 government reports and research papers, Rey and Dilworth’s objective has been to make the information available to the public.

“Art has a way to make important information accessible to the public in a way that they are more likely to want to know about it,” said Rey.

After the three-day art exhibition at the Siddharta Art Gallery the exhibition goes on a tour of major cities in the United States.

“When people think of Kathmandu it is either as a mystical or backward place. But this project shows that it is like any other river in America,” said Dilworth.

Believing that there is still a lot that the international community has to learn from Nepal, especially when it comes to community efforts to clean up the Bagmati, the artists are optimistic about restoring the river to its former glory.

Said Rey: “How can we solve it? I don’t have answers to that yet. But we want to present a sense of hope.”

Bagmati River Art Project, 20 to 23 November, 11 am to 6 pm, Siddharta Art Gallery, Balber Matal Rovisted, (01) 4218048, 4433930
The charade of impeachment

As Parliament dilly-dallies, the Supreme Court presses ahead against Lokman Singh Karki

Three weeks ago when one-fourth of parliamentarians signed an impeachment motion against the anti-corruption czar, Lokman Singh Karki, there was a brief period of optimism that the House was finally getting serious. Hope rose that the man who had extorted business, terrorised journalists and activists, and silenced bureaucrats and politicians was finally going to be facing the music.

However, Deuba has suddenly gone all quiet. And in recent days some NC MPs have been vocally defending Karki, and his cronies are actively lobbying to delay the impeachment process.

Karki remains suspended from his position as chief of the CIAA (Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority), and faces another case in the Supreme Court that questions his appointment. He tried to ignore the summons when Supreme Court staff went to his house to serve the notice. The Court summoned him to be present in person for clarification, and Karki finally appeared before the judge on Tuesday with a written clarification.

Karki seems to be more worried about the Supreme Court hearing than the impeachment process in Parliament. This must be because he knows that the impeachment proposal was registered by the one-fourth parliamentarians only after the top leaders of all three parties suspected that he was going to target them. After all, the top leaders had all agreed to appoint him CIAA chief during the tenure of Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi as head of the council of ministers in 2013. There are dark whisperings about how powerful people and entities lobbied on behalf of Karki at that time.

Karki knows that politicians in Nepal are fickle and can easily be persuaded to change their mind about impeachment by Parliament. In fact, that already seems to be happening as Maoist-Center Chair and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal told a television talk show this week that the impeachment motion was brought in all of a sudden without his consent, and that there first needed to be a consensus among all three parties on it.

In fact, the political parties and most of their MPs seem to have gone cold on impeachment, preferring to let the Supreme Court take the lead on the matter. This dilly-dallying and wait-and-watch policy is almost as mysterious as the registration of the impeachment motion itself.

Nothing, as they say, is certain in love and politics.

What the politicians should realise is that this is not about Karki, but a matter of principle. Do they have the political will to investigate the truth or not? Or are they so complaisant in his appointment that the whole impeachment call is a charade?

The Supreme Court is due to start hearing all cases against Karki on 1 December. The hearings will also perhaps reveal why top politicians as well as President Ram Baran Yadav agreed to his appointment and to what extent, as is widely believed, foreign intelligence handlers were complicit. To add to the drama this week, the Karki-less CIAA announced it had started investigations on police officers and bureaucrats reported to be close to its former chief and were his accomplices in his abuse of authority.

While the impeachment motion is debated in Parliament and the Supreme Court prepares for its hearings against Karki, the big fear is that the investigation on alleged embezzlement of funds meant for ex-guerrillas in the Maoist camps will be shelved. Which is why Prime Minister Dahal does not want to be too harsh on Karki, remembering his bitter experience with the sacking of Army Chief Roshmangad Khatiwada which led to his resignation from his first prime ministership in 2009.

Meanwhile, prime minister-in-waiting Sher Bahadur Deuba, does not want to risk an internal party mutiny by going after Karki. Given that, the impeachment motion is now being played out in public and the people are closely scrutinising how their elected representatives will respond to a tainted individual. All eyes are on Parliament as it decides whether to impeach Karki, or give him a clean chit in the first case of its kind in Nepal.

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Rolling in dough

Swiss chef Fredy Andermatt is in Kathmandu to teach Nepalis the fine art of bakery

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Sixty years after Swiss development expert Toni Hagen taught Nepal’s how to make yak cheese, a baker from Bern is trying to show Nepalis the flavor points of making the perfect croissant and apple strudel.

Fredy Andermatt knew he wanted to be a baker since he was 12, and followed his passion to become a world-renowned baker and pastry consultant travelling the globe to share his knowledge.

After training bakers all over Europe, Africa and West Asia, 56-year-old Andermatt is in Nepal for a month of classes on making 40 varieties of bread, and 30 kinds of pastries and desserts at the Bata-era former cowshed that has been turned into a state-of-the-art bakery at Dhokaima Cafe in Patan.

“I only train interested people because when you bake, it should come from inside your heart,” says Andermatt, who has worked with Nepali chefs in Dubai and Doha and had always wanted to bring his knowledge here.

“I know how to get the crust of a Swiss apple strudel. Just right, or to make an apple crumble that crumbles as it is supposed to. Or vanilla and chocolate banana pies, oatmeal cookies, cream tarts, baguettes, mille-feuille, and varieties of mousse cakes that smell and taste like the originals. Andermatt has honed in with world leaders at G-8 Summits, been to 70 countries, and says he enjoys training bakers more than baking by himself. In every new country he visits, Andermatt first tries to understand the culture and lifestyle and tailor make his baking accordingly.

The winner of Chef of the Year while working on a cruise liner based in Miami and a frequent contributor to American culinary magazines, Andermatt brings a Swiss predilection to perfection to this week.

“Like in every profession, discipline and passion are more important than learning the skills,” says Andermatt, who has never given up learning and is trying to improve his craft and come up with new recipes.

One morning in the week, Andermatt is busy with hands-on training of the chefs from Dhokaima Cafe and other bakeries in Kathmandu. He is happy that Nepali consumers will soon be able to savour a wide range of bakery items even after he leaves. But he is happy to share his favourite recipe:

Chocolate mousse cake

Ingredients:

- Cream: 120g
- Chocolatine: 150g
- Whipped cream: 150g
- Gelatine: 5g
- Brandy: 15g
- 1. Cook cream with small pieces of chocolate to make ganache. Cook it down and mix with whipped cream and gelatine.
- 2. Make the sponge with sugar and a bit of brandy. Fill it with whipped cream mixture and brandy.
- 3. Freeze for two hours in deep freezer.
- 4. Bake the apple and put some apricot jam on top again.
- 5. Add blueberries on the cake for 15 minutes.
- 6. Decorate with your choice.

Recipe:

1. Whip egg whites to stiff peaks.
2. Mix flour and baking powder and put it in a coating ring, greased with butter and dusted with flour.
3. Bake at 175 degrees for about 25 minutes.
4. Cool and make two quiches, each one on
In 1993, when Prabin Bikram Rana was gifted a bottle of fine French wine his whiskey-loving friends had scoffed at him. "What is this? It does not even give you a high." Five years later, having returned from university in France, Rana was surprised to see that wine was no more a rarity in Kathmandu’s stores.

Bordeaux, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chianti, Merlot, Pinot Noir - slowly but surely, a new wine culture is sweeping in as people in Kathmandu have started to identify, scrutinize and experiment with wine. The trend has been helped along by the surprising affordability of good wines in Nepal.

"People here are ready to accept any wine from any part of the world on the condition that it is of good quality," said Antoine Garet, a French wine sommelier based in Kathmandu who feels the variety offered in Nepal makes the market interesting. "Here, if people like the wine, they like the wine," he added, explaining that unlike in France, people in Kathmandu select wines by its taste rather than an established concept of the kind of wine due to its newness and lack of reference.

This willingness to taste wine has expanded the market exponentially. Kathmandu is no longer limited to only European wines but imports New World wines from Australia, Chile and South Africa. The newest entrant is Sula from India, the success and popularity of which goes to indicate the openness of the market to experimental.

Currently, a bottle of fairly decent wine sells for Rs 700-2,000. But there are wines as expensive as Rs 60,000. In addition to the greater availability in stores, restaurants offering house wines, with costs at Rs 500 a glass, has opened up a whole new demographic of consumers.

"The popularity is growing, but with the tax on imported wines, it is still a luxurious drink for many and will be for years to come," said Garet.

The wine wave in Kathmandu began about 20 years ago when European wines started being sold at astonishingly low prices in the market. "Whether it was the distributor or actual vendor lowering the price, they were attempting to develop the market. If that is the case then it seems to have worked," said Bruce Owens, an American anthropology professor who has been coming to Nepal for 40 years.

However, for Owens, it is not just the increase in the variety but also the expanding vocabulary which goes to show how the wine drinking culture is transforming.
DOMESTIC WINES

Riding the wine wave in Nepal are local companies who have added local and low-priced wines.

Himwa has been one of the early makers of berry-based wines with a bottling plant in eastern Nepal. After suffering setbacks during the conflict, Himwa is back with an expanded range of products.

“Grape wines have a history of millennia, and it will take time for us to match up to that level,” admits Arkaya Ranijkar of Himwa, which manufactures alcohools and fruit wines.

“The Internet and social media have made the world a smaller place and wine is gaining popularity.”

This year, Himwa is aiming for a sales target of around Rs 130 million, up 35 per cent from last year. While Ranijkar admits that his wine might not be as pur with the wines internationally, he feels this growing trend has influenced sales as well.

From a five per cent share of the wine market to now almost 33 per cent, locally made wines are also a big hit in the market. “There is widespread popularity, especially in the age group between 18 and 45, and low prices might be one of the factors,” said Ranijkar.

SEE, SWIRL, SNIFF, SIP

Same Thupa of Silver Mountain (left) feels this is the best time to educate his hospitality management students about wines. The oenology lab at his school is doing just that: bringing young Nepalis up to speed on wines.

“Wine is delicate and is an integral part of food in the world,” says Thupa, who also conducts training for wine distributors and dealers in the Valley.

With a capacity of 20 students, Silver Mountain’s oenology lab is fully dedicated to the education of wine. A compulsory course, students are taught to follow a rigorous routine to sample different wines with the well-known see, swirl, sniff and sip technique. Students are encouraged to experiment with various wines to be able to develop an understanding of its origins, flavors and importance.

“If with awareness we also start categorizing wines by quality, encourage wine tasting, if we educate properly and encourage a proper drinking culture, then in the future we can have many Nepali sommeliers,” says Thupa. “As educators, even though we don’t deal with the public directly, we can educate them indirectly through our students.”

Although the market has improved, Thupa still feels there is room for growth. “People need to be introduced to newer products for the market to grow,” said Thupa, citing examples of the Opus One Winery in the United States, which mixes wine with traditional Bordeaux grape varieties, a winery unique in the Napa Valley.

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**Planetary Nepal.**
A two-day art festival highlighting environmental issues with the theme of illegal wildlife trade for its third edition this year. For art exhibitions, panel talks, discussions, the launch of the green issue of Lali magazine on Friday. Be sure to the check out and attend documentary screenings, wall paintings and concerts by some of Nepal’s favorite bands on Saturday.
18-19 November. Jadeghat, Karkot, Lukop. (01) 4241155, 4242032

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30 November (presentation), 10am-11:30am, or 1 December (workshop), 10am-3pm, Palace Square, Patan, Shital. Apply here: https://www.gov.do/culturalaffairs/corte/11317/vistas/

**Deconstructive desert.**
Delicious deconstructive desert prepared and presented annually in front of you.
14 to 24 November, 3 to 7 pm, Lyceum Theater, Kathmandu. (01) 571724

**Barista Lavazza.**
The newest addition to the Valley’s European inspired coffee culture serves excellent mochas and lattes, don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich.
Jomolang (01) 482472, Jomolang. (01) 5524857

**Celebrating women.**
Network with universities, organisations and companies supporting and celebrating women.
19 November, 11am to 3pm, Jomolang. Book your spot here: http://hk.ky/mcdh

**Impact Marathon.**
Gear up for the 10km, 21 km and 42 km scenic trail route runs as part of the Nepal International Marathon.
26 November, 5 am onwards, Kathmandu. Registration deadline: 12 November, www.marathonnepal.com

**Taste of Dhokaiima.**
Mark your calendars for a scrumptious desert tasting session at Dhokaiima which is all set to launch its new line of freshly baked baguettes, deli style mille-feuille, pastries and more baked items. Read more on Page 7.
18 November, 5:30 pm onwards, Dhokaiima Cafe, Patan, Dhaka. (01) 5522173

**Embers.**
A large and cozy place that serves a blend of continental and Nepali Nethli. Krishna Goli, Pulchowk. (01) 555509

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Jomolang. (01) 5524096

**Mango Tree Lodge.**
Cultural walks, rafting on the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Sarlahi National Park.
Bhetori, dordoi, www.mangotreelodge.com

**Bipuli’s Maya.**
Enjoy an intimate evening listening to Bipuli’s new album Mayu. Limited tickets available.
Sunday, 20 November, 6pm, tongkot, Jomolang. www.lyjona.com

**Plebian night.**
Come and see the indio alternative band Plebian from Khammou play live.
18 November, 7:30pm, 11pm, House of Music, Thamel, Rs 300

**Alchemist live.**
Cheap beer and chicken BBQ will accompany a live performance by Alchemist.
18 November, 6:30pm, 11pm, BAC Art Cafe, Pulchowk, Lalitpur

**Open mic night.**
Grab the mic and sing your heart out at the house of music every Tuesday. House of Music, Thamel, Rs 100/75.

**Music workshop.**
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28-29 November, 5 to 12 December, Rs 1000 per class, www.kipnapa.com

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**MISS MOTIVATION.**
Kripa Joshi

**Let us not grow weary in doing good,**

for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.
Skydiving off the roof of the world

After I started Sammy Adventures fortnightly series in Nepali Times, a lot of people have asked me what my most crazy stunt has been. Without doubt, it is the time I skydive from near Mt Everest. It is an adventure so adventurous that the Everest Skydive has been listed as one of the 50 ways to be a daredevil by CNN. The Explore Himalaya Everest Skydive—an elite jump conducted twice a year in spring and autumn. This is quickly followed by more affordable dives in Pokhara each year.

1. Meeting the team
After signing up, the first thing on the to-do list is meeting the team in Thamel. The first thing that strikes you in that roomful of professional skydivers is how big they are. They need to be since most have to make tandem dives as instructors. Ryan Jackson was my instructor pilot for the big dive and has been closely allied with Everest Skydive expeditions since its inception in the year 2008. Led by Team Leader and veteran skydiver Tom Noonan, the team was complete with experienced divers, engineers and a filmmaker.

2. The walk
Apart from the fact that you dive right into the lap of the highest mountain in the world, what makes Everest Skydive special is also how you tune in to the surroundings before making the jump. After a flight to Lukla, the team walks down to Phakding (2,640m) on the first day, and treks up to Namche Bazar (3,440m). The next few days are spent getting to know the place and acclimatizing by going on short hikes to Khunde, Khumjung or Thame. It is only on the 5th day that the team reaches its skydiving headquarters and primary landing zone in Syangboche (3,780m).

3. Jumping off
I was instructed by Ryan to put on my jumpsuit and get rigged for the dive. The previous day we learnt some tips and tricks when up in the air, like safety features, the ideal body posture and how to pose for selfies and videos. At the controls of the Fishtail Air helicopter is ace Italian pilot Massimo Follini and he coaxes the A330 to climb to 6,000m. With Ama Dablam almost at eye level I am told to jump off. Surprisingly, I was overcome by a sense of calm and composure.

As Ryan got to the edge of the chopper, with me buckled like a baby kangaroo, I could see Namche Bazar below looking like an airstrip. Then at the count of three, off we went flying down. It felt like I was floating in a beautiful dream that would never end. There was a brief few seconds of fear during the free fall with the wind roaring in my ears. Because the landing zone itself is at quite a height, the free fall did not last more than 13-15 seconds, but it was more than enough to completely push me into a zone of ecstatic moments of living. I doubt anything I do for the rest of my life will ever come close to the Everest Skydive experience.

Facts and figures
Apart from the Syangboche Airport landing zone, Everest Skydive also makes Ama Dablam Base Camp and Gorak Shep landings.
Price: $22,000 (tandem) and $25,000 (tandem)
While Everest Skydive is mostly targeted towards international professional divers, for homegrown adventure seekers the team organizes the annual Pokhara Skydive priced at an average of Rs 60,000 to Rs 70,000 per dive.
www.everest-skydive.com

nepaltimes.com
THE NICE GUYS

Every year remarkable films get ignored as behemoth franchises take over the world with their huge commercial budgets that reach into the psyches of movie goers and permeate the other with their clutch and irresistible adrenaline inducing trailers.

The Nice Guys: A shining, hilarious, insomnia film by the brilliant Shane Black is an example of one of the smaller films (its budget was $10 million that got left completely) by the wayside (it made just $17.3 million at the box office) when it opened earlier this year - meaning that further films by Black are less likely to be made, even as the Marvel machine moves inexorably on.

While I have no particular objection to the action movie franchises which employ tens of thousands and pour money into studio pockets, I lament the sideling of more original voices like those of Black whose talents include writing the script for Lethal Weapon in 1987, and whose directorial debut Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005), starring none other than Robert Downey Jr., was a breath of fresh air.

The Nice Guys, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival this May is an extension of the now classic buddy cop genre starring the truly great Russell Crowe and the usually charismatic Ryan Gosling as a hapless detective duo who floundered hilariously in the midst of a murder mystery scandal that penetrates into the deep, black heart of 1970s Los Angeles.

Crowe plays Jackson Healy, a thug with a heart of gold who ends up bringing the ever so slightly inept, continuosly sloshed Holland Cotter (Gosling), a work out of his house Private Investigator, or P.I., whose preternaturally wise daughter Holly (played by the old soul Angourie Rice) is his essential sidekick.

As the three unlikely partners hustle around trying to find the solutions to a corruption scandal that is truly quite heinous, the film, in addition to being side-splittingly funny, also manages to retain a real gravity, grappling with real evil as well as our flawed heroes' struggle with their own ruthless moralities, resulting in powerful and accurate character studies of two grown men who have lost their way but manage to regain a sense of decency while they do both right and wrong by the people they love.

Gosling and Crowe steal the show in this classic movie that harks back to the good old days when films told a damn good story, you fell in love with the characters, watched things over and over again, and memorised all the funny lines. The Nice Guys is one of the coolest films I've seen this year, memorable, valiant, funny with a heart of gold, and stunning to look at, with style and verve. Can you say the same for anything else you've seen recently?

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

ONE CHINA: New Chinese ambassador to Nepal Yu Hong called on Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at his official residence in Baluwatar on Tuesday.

BANGLADESH: Nepal's ambassador Masashi Ogawa hands over four ambulances to Nepal Red Cross Society in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

ALL TALK: Nepal Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba (center) held a meeting with Madhesi leaders on Wednesday to forge a consensus on the contentious clauses of the Constitution.

TENTH TIME: Dr. Govinda KC began his tenth hunger strike on Sunday, demanding that theدمك المتهم مؤسسة is appointed as the Dean of the Institute of Medicine.

HERO’S WELCOME: Nepal’s national football team returns home to a hero’s welcome on Wednesday night, after winning the AFC Solidarity Cup – the third international title in just one year.
Let there be light

Barabise 3k in Himal Khabar, 13/16 November

If it were not for the death of a young woman at childbirth, many people in Grinchur village of Sindhupalchok district could have died when the 7.8 magnitude earthquake flattened their houses on 25 April last year.

The villagers had gathered outside to attend the funeral of 23-year-old Puruna Tamang, who had died after struggling for days to give birth to a baby. She was not taken to hospital because the villagers thought that her labour pain was a result of the wrath of the goddess.

“Friday was Saturday, and we normally used to spend Saturdays indoors watching television,” recalls 67-year-old Iasing Tamang. “But we went out that day for Puruna’s ritual. Her death saved our lives.”

One-and-a-half years later, the villagers of Grinchur still remember Puruna as a young, beautiful and cheerful woman. They no longer remember the ruins of their destroyed houses, and the rainy and chilly nights they spent in temporary tents for the past year and a half.

People in Grinchur now have new, clean and earthquake-resistant houses to live in. As thousands of earthquake survivors wait for the final instalment of housing grants from the National Reconstruction Authority, villagers recently moved into three-room houses with separate kitchens, bathrooms and spacious verandahs. They also have solar-Driven water and internet facilities.

At a time when Nepalis are frustrated at the delay in post-earthquake recovery, the construction of a model village in Grinchur is a shining light. “For us it is a rare beacon of hope,” says anthropologist Sonam Dogra. “It has inspired other villagers, and put more pressure on the apathetic government.”

The Grinchur model village was built by an unlikely activist: the Dharmendra Suntal Foundation. Initiated by Suman Khati and his partner Kunjana Ghimire, the most popular comedian duo on Nepal television, the foundation is now developing Grinchur village as a tourism destination.

Grinchur is located on a mountain top against the backdrop of Himal Himal, and above the outskirt River. While comfortable home-stay, paragliding and a chance to absorb the rich Tamang and Newar culture, Grinchur could attract many tourists.

Named after Kate and Ghimire’s most iconic television characters ‘Dhurmus’ and ‘Suntal’, the foundation recently built 19 model houses in the earthquake-scarred Paharganj of Kavre district. It collected Rs 5.85 million from the television serial after grinchur, another serial Akhnojali and the social networking site www.sagoon.com.

Dharmesh and Suntal made a personal contribution of Rs 900,000, and themselves worked on the construction of the model houses.

After grinchur, Dharmesh and Suntal wanted to build another model village in Sindhupalchok, the world earthquake-affected district. When they reached grinchur village, not many people believed that television actors could actually help them.

“Initially, I did not trust Dharmesh and Suntal,” said Sabadur Tamang, who has recently moved to a new model house in grinchur. “But I soon realized what they meant. They worked day and night themselves, and built houses for us.”

After the success in grinchur, more people trusted Dharmesh and Suntal, and they raised Rs 601 million from Nepalis living within and outside the country. At least 225 people, including 70 masons and 65 labourers from the village, worked on the houses. The Nepal Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police also contributed.

Dharmesh and Suntal also said their two story house and shifted to a one-storey one to manage the new project.

After the earthquake, they have stopped producing television serials to focus on their reconstruction projects. Their daughter is sick, and doctors have advised them to take her abroad for treatment, but personal loss did not stop them from working tirelessly for earthquake survivors.

“Our hearts burn with pain even when we see the broken state of our country,” says Dharmesh. “We feel immense satisfaction when we contribute to rebuilding the country.”

Suman Khati, an expert on infrastructure building, says Dharmesh and Suntal have not only inspired Nepalis but also set an example of integrated development.

“In a mountainous country like Nepal, it would not be possible to build infrastructure for all the scattered households,” he says. “I build the houses at minimum cost, we need the kind of integrated village that Dharmesh and Suntal have helped set up.”
WHO GUARDS THE GUARDS?

Simplifying the recruitment process and easing restrictions will help Nepalis working in Afghanistan more than a blanket ban

DHAN SINGH DHAMI could have been at his duty station as a security guard in Afghanistan by now, but a four-month ban on Nepalis working in the war-torn country delayed his plan.

After the death of 13 Nepalis guarding the Canadian Embassy in a terrorist attack in Kabul in June, the government prohibited Nepalis from going to Afghanistan. Dhami was stuck in Kathmandu, and rue: “If it were not for the ban, I would have earned Rs 600,000 by now: I lost three months’ salary,” he said.

But one month after the ban was lifted, the 30-year-old soldier is still waiting because he is being given the runaround by his recruiter. He is not sure if and when he will leave Nepal.

Dhami has worked as a guard in Afghanistan before, and is a vocal critic of what he says was a senseless ban. “As Nepalis not dying in the countries where they...”
Afghanistan

Nepal

are allowed to go? Are their bodies not returning in caskets from Malaysia and the Gulf where there is no war?” he asks.

“Why does our government stop us from working in Afghanistan?”

Dhimal first went to Afghanistan in 2004, two years after retiring from the Nepal Army as a second-class warrant officer. He spent his gratuity to find a job in Afghanistan. For the next 11 years, he guarded the American Embassy in Kabul and assisted the US-led military forces in Helmand on behalf of a security contractor.

Dhimal saw plenty of violence and bloodshed — watching some of his colleagues die in front of him. But he wasn’t afraid, and the pay was good.

When he retired from the Nepal Army, he just had an ancestral house in remote Darmabhal in the far-western mountains. He now owns a two-storey building in a housing colony in Kathmandu.

“I risked my life for money, but tell me one place where there is no risk?” he asks. “It was risky during the Maoist war here, and I was nearly killed many times.”

Dhimal was previously recruited by DynCorp International, a private American military contractor. He returned home in December last year, and again applied for a job through another company, the British-owned Angis Defence Services.

But the ban came in the way, making his departure uncertain. buddha Gurung of the BMP Nepal, a local agent of the British company Angis, says at least 70 Nepalis were in the final stage of going to Afghanistan when the ban was announced.

Since 2011, Angis has hired 805 Nepalis retired from the British, Indian, Nepali armies and Singapore police. It is still seeking 200 extra guards through BMP Nepal. Angis, DynCorp and all other private contractors filled in for the gap left by Nepalis during the ban by recruiting guards from India and Kenya.

In July, the government sent a fact-finding team to Afghanistan to decide whether the country was too risky for its citizens and to recommend safety measures. The Labour Ministry lifted the ban last month on the basis of the team’s recommendation.

But it is still not easy for Nepal to go to Afghanistan because of a new government requirement that private contractors have to submit a copy of their agreement papers with original employers before recruiting guards from Nepal.

For example, if the DynCorp needs to recruit ex-Gurkha soldiers to guard the American Embassy in Kabul, it has to send a copy of its agreement with the United States government to Nepal’s Department of Foreign Employment.

Prabha Shrestha, joint secretary at the Labour Ministry who led the fact-finding mission to Afghanistan, explains: “It is to ensure accountability if an attack like the one at the Canadian Embassy occurs again. If we know who is there in the actual contract paper, we know whom to hold accountable.”

After the Kabul attack, Sabre International that had hired Nepali guards to protect the Canadian Embassy, was accused of not providing adequate compensation and not bearing medical expenses of the wounded Nepalis. Members of Nepal’s Parliament slammed the Canadian government for trying to wriggle out of its responsibility to help the victims’ families.

Although well-intentioned, the requirement has meant that Nepali guards find it difficult to go to Afghanistan even if the ban has been lifted. Private contractors are unwilling to disclose their agreement with foreign embassies in Kabul.

“It is a burden,” admits SBI Chising of Steed Gorkha Overseas, the local representative of DynCorp. “We are ready to submit a copy of our agreement with the American contractor, which reveals salary scales, insurance amounts and safety measures. But the contractor will probably not disclose its agreement with the American government.”

Because of this restriction, the contractors that recruit Nepali guards for UN agencies, American and British embassies, and provide better salaries, insurances and facilities have not taken anyone from Nepal even after the lifting of the ban. Only 165 Nepalis have got labour permit to work in Afghanistan as guards, plumbers, electricians and cooks after the ban ended.

“This is what happens when unnecessary restrictions are imposed on the legal way of migration,” says Padam Upadhyay of Universal Connection, the representative of DGC Security that hires guards for UN agencies.

“More restrictions just increase the number of people going illegally.”

Iraq was banned in 2004 after the massacre of 12 Nepalis by a terrorist group, but Nepali workers are still going to Baghdad. After Syria and Libya were banned, Nepalis have virtually stopped going there not because of the violence, but because there are no jobs.

Another uncertainty is America’s rule in Afghanistan under President Trump, who initially called for the withdrawal of the US forces from the region.

But lately, he has approved Obama’s plan to retain 9,000 troops there. So Afghanistan will attract more Nepalis in future. Experts say the best way to protect Nepali migrants from being extorted and exploited on the route or in Afghanistan is to facilitate their work by simplifying the recruitment process and easing restrictions.
Vote for Donkey Party

B eing a vibrant democracy, Nepal has always had a trick or two up its sleeves that can teach the world about how to make this system work even more vibrantly. And while the political parties are being scrutinized, the voters are being educated. The Ass

Cardinal Rule #4: Glitz. In Nepal it is not necessary to win elections; it is just necessary to have parties that are popular. The more parties you have, the greater the chances of winning. 

Cardinal Rule #5: Nepalis exhibit their disgust with the existing political parties by voting with their feet and emigrating to Canada.

It is good to see that the Americans have followed many of these cardinal rules in the inter. Which is why, just as in Nepal, democracy is alive and kicking in the United States. But there are still things that the Americans have to master:

- Kill the war, the police, the economy, etc.
- Clear out the slums.
- Deal with the war, etc.

And, of course, the biggest problem of all: how to make the system work even more vibrantly.

The Ass