After reports of abuse on social media, fewer Nepali women are getting married to Chinese men.

CHINA-NEPAL
bilateral relations

Who will bell the cat?

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Sixty years ago, when Swiss geologist Ton Hagen walked across the length and breadth of Nepal he used to ask villagers what they wanted most. The reply was almost always: a footbridge. Rivers divided Nepal into an archipelago of isolated valleys, especially in the monsoon. Nepal’s trail bridge-building campaign is a success story which we will talk about some other time. But when Hagen returned to Nepal in the 1980s and again asked mountain dwellers what they wanted, the demand was for motorable roads.

Today there is scarcely a part of Nepal where an excavator isn’t in action digging a road. More roads have been built in the last ten years than in the last 60. Humla is a road. More roads have been built in the past two decades areas never destined to be roads. But if we look around, we see mountains as high as they are now, and the peaks are no higher now. The question then arises, why are roads so much more important now than before?

Achham and Dolakha are in the past two decades areas never more arid. Western districts of Achham, like Ramechhap, Kavre and Dolakha have always suffered from lack of water. In fact, the Himalaya are fed by springs. In fact, the Himalaya is a gigantic sponge that stores water under its mountains.

It is too late to blame climate change, we already is happening out of necessity. It is too late to blame the road-building campaign that was started in the 1970s. It has now been confirmed that the road-building campaign was in fact a success. It was the state’s responsibility to provide alternative sources of water.

It is tempting to blame it all on climate change because that lets the government and local officials off the hook. It was the state’s responsibility to provide alternative sources of water even before global warming made the problem worse. This was not a new problem: Nepal’s mid-hills have always suffered from prolonged drought. Flash floods and water shortages.

Desperate villagers (mostly women because the men have left) have to walk hours to fetch water. Vegetable patches have wilted. Children are dropping out of school to help carry water. Districts may have declared open-defecation free, but there is no water in the latrines.

Many reasons have been put forward for this Great Desiccation. Across the Himalaya, the 2015 earthquakes disrupted aquifers, dried up perennial springs, disrupted the monthly rainfall graph across Nepal hasn’t changed much in the past 20 years. If the total precipitation is the same, why are springs going dry?

Gigantic sponge

Global warming is melting the Himalaya, and glaciers are receding at an alarming rate. Water stored as ice along the Himalayan arc are on the Tibetan plateau is the fountainhead for 1.2 billion people from China, Southeast Asia and South Asia. But snow melt provides less than 20 per cent the net flow of rivers that originate in the Himalaya, the rest are fed by springs. In fact, the Himalaya is not as much the water tower has a gigantic sponge that stores water under its mountains. That sponge seems to be going dry.

Whatever the cause, there are certain things that can be done immediately to reduce the water stress of Nepal’s villages. Some of these are featured in our reportage: farmers in Kavre are already harvesting rain from rooftops in underground tanks to tide over the family’s water needs till the next rainy season, collecting monsoon runoff in ponds so they recharge the aquifers. Besides making it mandatory for new buildings to be earthquake resistant, the government should also require them to have rainwater harvesting systems.

But, as we see in Kavre, much of this already is happening out of necessity. It is too late to blame climate change, we need to catch rain wherever it falls.
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Trending: Australian education

A record number of Nepali students are heading to university Down Under

JESSICA CORTIS

With the 2017 academic year commencing at Australian universities this month, a record number of Nepalis are heading there for higher studies, making Nepal Australia’s fifth largest source of international students.

Lured by relatively lower fees, easier process for student visas and more affordable job prospects, there have been 20,463 Nepali enrollments in Australian educational institutions as of September 2016, twice as many as last year. However, many students interviewed said privately they intended to stay on and work in Australia.

“We'd like to think educational reputation is the reason people come to Australia and not for the sake of permanent residency,” Australian ambassador Glenn White said Nepali Times. He admitted he is often asked why Australia attracts so many Nepali students, and said he hopes more students will return and contribute to Nepal’s economy.

Manita Ustaludhayana of the Nepal International Education Consultancy (NIEC) says it’s much harder to stay in Australia than it is in the United States. But she believes more than 90% of Nepali students who go to Australia to study will settle down there.

Post-graduate student Shilpina Amatya, 24, says she will apply for Permanent Residency when her visa expires in 2018 as she aims to get her foot in Australia’s corporate world. Amatya believes the working conditions are the main reason students are breaking their visa agreements.

“The limit of 20 hours work a week for students hardly covers rent and food when you have to add the burden of tuition fees,” she said.

With a history of Nepali students breaching visa conditions, Australia stresses the importance of sticking to the set working hours. “20 hours might not be enough but students come here to study, not to work,” said Ambassador White. “Australia needs to provide jobs for its own people. There is no point in advertising jobs that aren’t available.”

He added that recent changes to the Skills Occupations List (SOL), which is part of Australia’s immigration points system, have made it harder and costlier for students to meet the requirements of the SOL, but they are applying to students like Amatya, however, admitted that it is difficult. “We are paying thousands of dollars for a degree, and on top of that, to get Permanent Residency we have to do additional courses which will cost another $10,000,” Nepali student Keshav Koirala, 18, will be headed to Australia for an undergraduate nursing studies next year, and says he has chosen Australia because “not all degrees in Nepal are recognized globally.”

Nepalis are migrating for studies abroad because of fulfilling quality of education back home, Sagar Raj Sharma, a professor at Kathmandu University, says Nepali universities have to be restructured to retain Nepali students.

The curriculum has become obsolete and we place too much emphasis on theory,” says student Nischal Bajracharya who will begin his masters in information technology in Sydney in 2017 but believes his degree will be useless if he cannot put it into practice back home in Nepal.

Australian and Nepali institutions are also cooperating in introducing a new model in which students get instruction in Nepal but get Australian certification. Last year, Northern Rivers TAFE Australia offered vocational training in hospitality institutions in Kathmandu valley and got Commercial Cookery Certificates is accredited to Australian standards.

Adapting this education model would not only provide Nepali students with a degree that is internationally recognized, but would also potentially save them thousands in tuition, not to mention bring down the visa-related rates.

Noticing the swelling numbers of Nepalis applying for student visas, Western Sydney University (WSU) recently signed a “memorandum of agreement” with Kathmandu University. Nepal has now become WSU’s second biggest market for international students.

Ashwani Ghimire, studying a masters in convergent media at WSU, confesses his decision to leave Nepal was not just driven by the need for a higher education. “I have a lot of family over there and Nepal has a large Nepali diaspora.”

However, NIEC’s Manita Ustaludhayana says the main reason students would be overspending their visa and applying for Permanent Residency is because of the government. “No one would want to leave their own country if there were jobs here. The number of Nepalis leaving for PTK status in Australia is a big reflection of the Nepali government and our economy.”
Learning to reconstruct

Volunteers from around the world are filling the gap left by the government in helping rebuild quake-damaged schools.

BIDUR — Brought up in a family where education was an utmost priority, Carolina Padera needed little convincing to fly to Nepal when she learnt about how All Hands Volunteers was helping rebuild schools destroyed in the 2015 earthquakes. The 22-year-old Portuguese who is doing her masters in clinical psychology in London made personal appeals and raised funds through Facebook and Instagram to help rebuild some of the schools destroyed by the earthquakes before she came to Nepal.

“Every child should have an opportunity to learn inside strong buildings where they can dream of a wonderful future,” says Padera.

She is currently working to reconstruct classrooms at the Prithivi Secondary School in Bishur municipality of Nawakot district. The buildings were damaged on 25 April 2015 and nearly two years later children are still studying in makeshift sheds.

Godfrey Aldena from the Philippines is in Nepal the second time to help in reconstruction, and says he was inspired and motivated by the work All Hands Volunteers did in his hometown. “We don’t really need a reason to help others. I feel that people who have time and money should help,” says the 30-year-old.

All Hands Volunteers is partnering with Nepal Sties which has already built and retrofitted five schools in Nawakot and Sindhuwallakh. Out of 528 government and private schools in the district, only 150 classrooms were deemed safe after the earthquakes. More than 6,000 volunteers from different parts of the world have been in Nepal over the past two years through All Hands Volunteers, says project manager Sukha Hesselink. Another group is working on retrofitting Kalyandevi Higher Secondary School in Jilling.

Eric Bella from the US is leading the two-month project in Jilling and works with 10 other volunteers from different countries and with the local community. “We are not just trying to provide new buildings to the school but also structurally safer buildings from which students can escape quickly in future earthquakes,” he says.

All Hands Volunteers has teamed up with local masons and pays for the building materials and resources required. From money it raises from private donors and volunteers.

Volunteer groups like All Hands have stepped in to fill the gap left by slow government response. The National Reconstruction Authority says it will start rebuilding 2,000 schools this year. More than 8,200 private and public schools were destroyed or damaged by the 2015 earthquakes.

However, even the District Education Officer of Nawakot Chandu Bahadur Khadka admits it will take two more years to complete rebuilding all schools.
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Who will bell the cat?
Lokman Singh Karki's future hangs in the balance between Parliament and the Supreme Court

Nepal's deadlocked politics appears to have left many gaits in limbo the Constitution, elections, important bills in parliament, and last but not least, the impeachment of the suspended head of the Commission of the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA).

Binita Dahal, Parliament and the Supreme Court are playing cat and mouse over Karki: parliament on its impeachment motion, and the Supreme Court in a case questioning his qualification.

Parliament would like the apex court to bell the cat, while the Court seems to be buying time so Parliament can settle the political package deal that involves his impeachment.

In October, 157 members of parliament from the CPN-UML and M zbani Centre dramatically filed an impeachment motion against Karki after a secret political pact. At that time it was believed that the first-of-its-kind impeachment motion would be discussed in Parliament soon enough.

There were some perfunctory sessions in the House, but they fizzled out as the politics got annexed in a dispute over the Constitution amendment. Proceedings have been stalled for a month with the UML disruption.

But even if Karki has only been suspended, and even if he continues to occupy his official residence and appears to still enjoy the benefits of his position, the politicians did overcome the dread with which they regarded him to file for impeachment. It was to save their own political skin because the man was getting too powerful and was directly challenging their authority.

Still, Karki has been defanged and he cannot file or investigate any corruption case. So they feel safe enough, but they do not want to go all the way by pursuing the impeachment motion.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has started its hearings of the case questioning his qualification for the post of CIAA Chief.

The Supreme Court's justices intentionally or unintentionally try to halt hearings on the most contentious issues as happened with the former Army Chief Gen Rookmangad Katwal and the former Prime Minister Khil Raj Regmi. The Supreme Court scrapped both bids, saying the issues raised were of no consequence anyway, giving a verdict only when Katwal retired and Regmi handed over prime ministership to Sushil Koirala.

By nature, Supreme Court justices are required to be neutral and give their opinion only through verdicts. But in some politically motivated cases, justices have preferred to keep mum. Karki's case has grabbed the attention of not only politicians and bureaucrats, but the whole spectrum of Nepali society. The justices are fully aware of Karki's reputation for using fear, intimidation, threats and money to silence opponents.

There was speculation that the Supreme Court would defer the case, or take its own sweet time. On the contrary, it started and continued the hearings even though Karki's lawyers tried to prolong it constantly. The justices have now said they will not tolerate any more delays. Both sides have brought in the big guns, pleaders of lawyers with formidable reputations. The justices have warned them not to duplicate or prolong their depositions.

Chief Justice Sushila Karki seems determined to get this case over and done with against a man who had repeatedly tried to influence the court, and despite more attempts to delay it, had resumed the hearings till press time on Thursday.

Karki has been issuing veiled threats through statements trying to influence the case through his personal website and Facebook. While giving the hearing of the supplementary writ petition challenging his qualification started last week, he made an appeal through his personal website (see page 1B) saying all allegations against him were baseless and motivated.

Even though the impeachment motion and the case against him are underway in parliament and Supreme Court, Karki could get a clean chit or be convicted. It is the same politicians who brought him in three years ago who now want him out. His actions during his tenure show that he has no regard for the essence of the rule of law. His statement is already a blatant violation of the principle of sub judice and an insult to the dignity of Court.

Karki's lawyers should now focus on defending their client's case than try to influence or postpone the hearing. And with parliament showing signs of cold feet, it is now up to the Supreme Court to finally rule on a case that has badly bruised and weakened the Nepali state.
Kamal Mani Dixit, who passed away in Kathmandu on 29 December at the age of 87 was the closest Nepal came to having a Renaissance man. He was also one of those rare Nepalis who was a front-row witness of Nepal’s tumultuous modern history as it unfolded in his life time— from the absolute rule of the Ranas in the 1940s to the overthrow of the oligarchy in 1951, from King Mahendra’s dissolution of a popularly elected government in 1960 to the set-up of a constitutional monarchy in 1991, from the Jana-Andolan III in 2006 which turned Nepal into a secular republic in 2008 to the promulgation of the seventh Constitution in 2015.

Dixit was comfortable being himself in times both good and bad, taking all these changes in his stride, and lived a life filled with literary joys, and devoted to public service, philanthropy and to the causes of free speech and democracy.

Born in Gaighatar in Kathmandu in 1929, Dixit grew up in a family that had modest financial means but printed, as was common then among Kathmandu’s upwardly mobile Brahmins, religion and education. Dixit had earned his Bachelor’s from Banasthali Vidyapith University and had started working in Kathmandu when his family came upon wealth, mostly in the form of land near Patan Durbar, through the bequest of Ranjan Jagadamba Rana, whose wish was that the wealth he put to use in perpetuity to serve the public, and for the public good.

Ranjan Jagadamba could not have found a more scrupulous and creative steward of her trust, for Dixit spent the next six decades putting the inheritance to benefit the public starting with the fields of education and Nepali literature.

Dixit managed Madan Memorial Girls’ School in Lalitpur, and started and ran Madan Puraskar Guti, which not only oversees the go-to archive for Nepal’s literatures, but also awards the prestigious Madan Puraskar to writers annually. A man whose devotion to Nepal’s language and literature knew no bounds, Dixit started and edited Nepali, a literary quarterly, and authored 75 books that ranged in subjects from contemporary essays to historical narratives to commentaries to memoirs to criticisms and mendiant social observations. His writing style bore the hallmarks of clarity, simplicity, wit and self-effacement – all of which he used to great effect to let ideas, observations and memories play out in the public sphere.

Moreover, working closely with a wide cast of writers, linguists, poets, playwrights and historians, he edited and published 22 books on poetry, religious epics, dramas, songs and stories. Through his lifelong literary pursuit, he helped bring many obscure and neglected but immensely talented Nepali authors and their creations to light. By doing so, he cemented his reputation as the trusted custodian of Nepal’s literary outputs.

So much so that he even found time to translate and write children’s books, regularly teaching, as he did in his 80s, a much loved course on metres and lines (chhand) of classic Nepal’s poems to students at Rato Bangala School.

Likewise, literature and commerce often do not go together, but by dint of his personality, wide-ranging interest and influence, Dixit served ably for many years as a member, respected manager, board member and owner of enterprises as diverse as, but not limited to, Sajha Yatayat, Nepal Bank, Salt Trading Limited, National Finance and the Rotary Club. Everywhere he served, he could be relied on to provide shrewd observations, wise counsel and lively meetings that quickly got to the heart of the matter.

What I remember most about Dixit was his child like curiosity. He took genuine interest in people and ideas, and gently asked questions after questions until he understood whatever there was to learn. He started using email in his 60s, and Facebook in his 80s. On learning that there was no universal platform for Nepal script on computer, he oversaw an effort to promote the Nepal Unicode script, which has made it easy for all Nepalis to communicate electronically in Nepal with one another.

Many years ago, Aristotle wrote about the kind of erudition or engaged life one should consciously strive to live, the kind of life which is ‘lived the way you would like to have lived till the moment you die’.

Dixit, who was affectionately known as Dadaji, was revising and fusing over the content of a book just two days before he departed – leaving a richly public-spirited legacy that is at once quietly inspirational and hard to emulate.
PAN LAN

A few years ago, it had become trendy for Nepali women to get married to Chinese or Korean men, but the number of such marriages has decreased drastically after reports of abuse of Nepali women.

The number of Nepali-Chinese marriages, especially, has dropped after an online report about the difficulties of getting a marriage license in Nepal went viral on the Chinese social network WeChat in February. Chinese online sites have since last year published several reports of Nepali women being trafficked to China through fake marriages with Chinese men, and the scrutiny of Chinese male applicants for marriage certificates has become much stricter in Nepal.

PICTURE PERFECT: Ms. Li, a Chinese hotel manager in Thamel, poses for a honeymoon photo with her Nepali wife, Samia, at Kathmandu Durbar Square (right). Ms. Li says she fell in love with her because she was single and honest.

Xu Kai, who teaches Chinese language in Pokhara, says he did a lot of research about Nepali customs before marrying a Nepali girl. He went to Nepal with his Chinese wife at the Garden of Dreams in Kathmandu. (far right).

It is definitely very difficult to tell whether it is a fake marriage or not, the actual process is decided on a case-by-case basis,” explained Kishu Acharya, Chief District Officer of Lalitpur. “If applicants are a real couple, they can marry here there are no restrictions.

However, Acharya confirmed that the scrutiny procedure is more complicated and stricter compared to the past, mainly because of reports of fake marriages and human trafficking.

These days, besides the standard process the District Administration in Nepal investigates the economic and social status of the Chinese and Nepali marriage applicants, require police reports, letters from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Chinese Embassy. They also interview witnesses who can confirm that the marriage is real.

The WeChat post based on what a Chinese woman identified only as ‘Chen’ heard from a District Administration Office in Pokhara that there was a moratorium on Nepali women getting married to Chinese men because of reports of rampant abuse. Even within Nepal, media reports of fake marriages and the abuse of Nepali women in China and Korea have given local people a negative impression of mean from the two countries. Chinese and Korean men who want to marry Nepali women are all blacked as people with bad character who cannot find wives back home, or are regarded as traffickers.

Such negative publicity both in China and Nepal appear to be the reason for the drop in Chinese men getting married to Nepali women. The Lalitpur District Administration Office has recorded 21 Nepali-Chinese couples from 2013 to 2015. But there are no records of marriage licenses for Nepali-Chinese couples since the office reported after the earthquake in April 2015.

An official at the Kathmandu District Administration Office said there were even fewer marriage registrations there, and that the drop could be because of media reports exposing the inhumane treatment of Nepali girls by alcoholic or drug addicted Chinese husbands.

Miao Maclin, a 39-year-old Chinese woman who owns a jewelry shop in Thamel, says he has detected a change in the perception of Nepali women towards him in recent months.

“I tried really hard to convince my Nepali female friends that I am not here to buy a wife, and that such persons are rare in China and most of Chinese men are kind and well-behaved, but I failed,” Miao admitted. “It guess it is because the only way of locals to know about the outside world is through news media and then they assume that all Chinese men are the same.”

Miao said he is fond of his Nepali female
friends, and prefers them to Chinese women because they are “more conservative, retentive and family-oriented.” But he is still disappointed that some Nepali women have a preconceived notion that all Chinese men are out to trap them into fake marriages.

Because of the large number of Nepali students now in universities in China, there are growing numbers of young Nepali men also getting married to Chinese women, and they have a different sort of problem: getting a resident visa in China.

“I didn’t expect that getting a visa would be the biggest obstacle in our marriage,” said 29-year-old Mei Liu, who got married to 24-year-old Sangu Xi. The couple moved to Shenzhen but Sangu will have to wait five years to get a Chinese Green Card during which time he will have to commute between Kathmandu and Shenzhen.

“Every time Sangu goes back to Nepal, I’m worried that I can never see him again,” Liu said, “sometimes I feel like whether our marriage can go on. It all depends on the visa.”

There are also cultural differences that strain marriages between Nepali men who tend to be patriarchal and Chinese women who are more independent. Yan Yan Jun, 23, is in a relationship with a young man whom she met in Tianjin and resents the expectation that she has to do all the housework even though she earns more than him.

But, Yan says: “I’m quite lucky that my boyfriend is not like other Nepali guys who think they are superior to women and unwilling to listen to their partners.”

Nepali businessmen using the Chinese social network WeChat to contact Chinese customers, are increasingly drawn to the dating function of the site to find Chinese friends.

WeChat is a cross between WhatsApp and Facebook and has a ‘People Nearby’ function through which users can find people in the vicinity. If the greeting request is accepted, the two can chat and be friends.

When Nepal Times experimented with the ‘People Nearby’ function one afternoon last week, we got 96 Kathmandu men in a radius of 30km to 3km from Patan. Only one of them was a female user.

Another WeChat feature called ‘Shake’ matches users who simultaneously shake the phone and can exchange greetings. But Shake doesn’t appear to be as popular among Nepali men.

Nepalis are using the Chinese dating app ‘Momo’, a location-based social networking app popular among the youth in China. After registering a Momo account using Nepal phone number, Nepali Times found at least 10 male Nepali users within 4km.

A 24-year-old Nepali man from Kathmandu said he was looking for ‘sexy and open-minded Chinese girls’ but was disappointed that he hadn’t found a single female friend after using the app for months.
Events

Champadevi hike, Escape the hustle of the city and enjoy a day hike to Champadevi hill via Thanglung. The event is a fundraising event to support Asia Pacific Way Congress – 2017 to be held in Kathmandu. 21 January, Meeting point: Bhrikutimandap ground, 7 to 7.15 am. Registration deadline: 19 January, 9815149579/9851068754, Rs 1000.

Self defence, Participate in the self defence classes for women with Romee Giri. Truthful and young national referee of taekwondo. 29 January, 9 am to 1 pm, 5th Floor, Lipton Club. Tickets: https:// Dempa.com/my me/06151509649, Rs 4500.


Start-up talk, A day dedicated to talk about start-up with Jeremy Carman from Seed gum and guest speaker Kushal Gurung. 25 January, 7 to 9 pm, Kathmandu College of Management. Gwarko, 9815141253.

Kamali Dialogue, Attend Kamali Dialogue’s 3rd series to get to know more about the art of storytelling in Magar. 28 January, 7 to 9 pm, Merit Club. Rs 4500.

Jhamsikhel fair, A fun-filled day of party games, magic show, food, beverages, music, horse riding and more. 7 January, 10 am to 5 pm, Jhamsikhel Marga, 9843886994.

Music

Friday Jam, Spend a musical evening listening to Coronavirus covid-19 pandemic with Italian electrician and member Ashutosh and Steven Tamsang on guitar. 6 January, 8 pm onwards. Rs 2000.

Dining

Koto, Japanese cuisine of the highest quality, served with meticulous attention; food fanatics will find themselves in a haven for sushi and tempura. Location(9814943880, 9801051302, info@kotorest.com)

Kathmandu Tree Lodge, Culture walks, rafting in the khalhi, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Sardi National Park. info@kathmandutreelodge.com

Getaway

Atthi Resort, A perfect place to stay, nearby gausi, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice. Shambhunath, Chisapani. Ph: 981496780, 980103927, info@atthiserest.com

Mango Tree Lodge, Culture walks, rafting in the khalhi, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Sardi National Park. info@kathmandutreelodge.com

Hyett Regency, Start off your New year relaxed. Enjoy a full-body exfoliation treatment and a soothing massage at Hyett. Offer valid till 31 January, Hyett Regency Kathmandu, Budhanil, Rs 2000 per person. Includes 45 minutes herbal soft scrub, 60 minutes aroma therapy massage, use of steam shower and whirlpool.

Neydo Monastery, A monastery and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great stupa. Leave your troubles behind and book a room. Ph: 9815150302, www.neydohouse.com

Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel, Add value to your trip by booking rooms in the hotel. Ph: 9815150302, www.neydohouse.com

Miss Motivation

Kripa Joshi

Knowledge has a beginning but no end.

Spiritual learnings, Spend a day learning about the practice of the Medicine Buddha and take part in guided meditations, group discussions and philosophical teachings with Australian monk Venerable Lobang Ngenpa. 6 January, 9 am to 6 pm, Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Center, 9843696530, www.jhankar.pr, Rs 1500 (Registration recommended).

Tribute to Coldplay, Get a rare chance to tour of famous British rock band Coldplay’s tracks as part of phases 1 of Truffle Series Newep event. 21 January, 7 pm (Entry open), Purple Nile Rock Bar, Thamel, Rs 500 (Advance note), Rs 700 (Door sale).

Hyett Regency

Neydo Monastery

Mango Tree Lodge

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Kripa Joshi

Knowledge has a beginning but no end.
Owning up to our past
Bureaucratic insensitivities worry local communities working to rebuild heritage sites

SAHINA SHRESTHA

When the April 2015 earthquake destroyed Kathmandu Valley’s centuries-old monuments in a matter of seconds, it was the community that responded first to the disaster. Neighbourhood groups were first on the scene, and after rescuing those trapped under the rubble they started the painstaking work of removing heritage items from the ruins. This spontaneous reaction was possible because of the activism of the ancient gorkha community trust system. Despite many areas in the Kathmandu Valley losing their homogeneity, the aftermath of the earthquake was proof that a sense of responsibility and ownership has survived.

But with the government’s decision to rebuild heritage sites through a laborious tender process, local community members worry whether that reconstruction will adhere to traditional architectural norms, and erode the sense of community.

"By calling out tenders for heritage reconstruction, the government is driving a wedge between the physical heritage and the people," says conservation activist Sunnans Shrestha. "Will future generations still feel the same level of love and ownership towards our heritage if the approach is not participatory?"

Many of the monuments that were damaged during the earthquake were intricately decorated brick and timber structures built in traditional Newar style, many in the Kathmandu Valley over the past millennium. Descendants of the original artisans who worked on the monuments can still be found continuing traditional crafts like woodcarving, stone sculpturing and metal works, and many say that not including them in the reconstruction process will be a blunder.

"We are working according to the Public Procurement Act and the conservation guidelines ensuring that there is a participation of locals in the reconstruction process," says Ram Babdu bulkar Kumawar of the DoA.

However, there is justified concern that with some temple reconstruction after the 1934 earthquake, the government will mess things up as it did by using concrete to rebuild the 17th century Ranipokhari temple.

"Look at what happened to Ranipokhari," says Birendra Bhakti Shrestha of Campaign to rebuild Kathmandanad, "who is to say the same thing will not be repeated in other heritage sites if contractors are allowed to rebuild.

The contractor selected by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) claimed that it used concrete because cement had been used in previous reconstruction. However, conservationists insist that reconstruction should be done using traditional materials. A public outcry forced the KMC to backtrack and the Department of Archaeology (DoA) directed the demolition of the cement pillars of the Balgopalswor temple, and has taken over restoration.

"Reconstruction should be done by people who know the monuments best. Private contractors do not understand the historical and cultural value of the temples," says heritage expert Sushila’s Amatya.

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Sophia Pande

HAPPENINGS

GIDDY-UP: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal rides a transplanter at the launch of Paddy Super Zone program in Itahara on Tuesday.

APPY NEW YEAR: Foreign Affair Minister Prakash Saran Mahat launches the Nepal Passport App in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

FAST AND FAVOURED: Minister for Information and Communications Surendra Kumar Koirala during the launch of Nepal Telecom’s 4G service in Kathmandu on Sunday.

STRIKE A POSE: Police personnel draw a strike enforcer in Kailali on Wednesday. The strike was called by a struggle committee of people opposed to the road expansion drive in the Kathmandu Valley.

GRANNY GREETINGS: Two women at Pashupatinath Temple greet each other on 1 January.
What’s wrong with nationalism?

Kishore Nepal: You have chosen a difficult path isn’t it?

KP Oli: Yes. But it is necessary because our sovereignty is at risk. For years after India’s independence in 1947, Kashmir became an Indian state. Bangladesh emerged as a new nation in 1971. And Tibet was annexed into India in 1974.

But Nepal is a UN member. So why are you so paranoid?

UN membership gives Nepal a degree of legal status. But that does not mean that our sovereignty is completely protected.

What didn’t you raise this with the Indian Prime Minister?

Worrying other countries is one thing, but it is quite a different thing to actually do it. But the latter is now being turned into a bitter row. We have made a mistake by creating friction, 2. A case-only state.

Why did the major parties hastily promulgate the constitution?

I had no idea where we were when we were negotiating for eight long years.

Why are the parties polarised then?

This is a battle for nationalism. Have we ever begged for anything from India? Have we ever done anything to India? We have always expressed our commitment to protect India’s maturity and justified concerns. But why did India just take note of our constitution?

All of you top leaders stood up to Indian foreign secretary Jashankar. Why are you divided now?

India made the wrong move at the wrong time. The special envoy’s object was also wrong. I told Jashankar: Nepal should not feel bullied by India. But whenever I talk of Nepal’s national interest, I am accused of being a narrow nationalist, or a disciple of Mahendra.

Why did the Nepali Congress breach the agreement with the UML when you were set to become Prime Minister?

You know why — to stop me from being Prime Minister. It is a power game, but it is also about nationalism. Tough against Mahendra’s authoritarianism, but I appreciate his nationalism to stand on an issue. But when I talk of nationalism, you people make fun of me.

Karki statement

Posted by Lokman Singh Karki on his Facebook page on 22 December

The day I took over the anti-corruption agency, I made a resolution to eradicate corruption in Nepal. My focus was to develop the CAC as an active, powerful, fair and transparent anti-government body. The CAC was so rampant that no sector was unaffected by it. When I began to clean up the mess, certain political parties said ‘Their MPs targeted me with an impeachment motion.

At that time, I was investigating irregularities by opaquely NGOs, unscrupulous cooperatives, politically-protected trade unions, tax evaders, business syndicates and cartels, media outlets interested in misguiding the nation, corrupt businessmen in the guise of media entrepreneurs, power brokers involved in parliament horse trading, hunger strikers sponsored by NGOs and individuals amassing disproportionate wealth. When I was about to file cases against corrupt leaders, they gagged me and pushed for my impeachment. I have left it up to the people to decide whether I need to be removed.

I have thoroughly studied every act of conspiracy against me, and I have reached the conclusion that the corrupt want me to remain at any cost. Whether I stay or go is not important, but I have a few questions: Was it my fault to investigate those who fraudulently received billions of rupees through NGOs to weaken national unity? Was it my fault to take action against those who illegally stashed away money and invested in overseas businesses in violation of Nepali laws? Was it my fault to clean up the mess at the top?

I was accused of trying to act like the Chief Executive. Did I ever interfere in the appointments of ministers? Did I ever recommend anyone close to me as justice, secretary or manager of a public enterprise? Did I really create a parallel administration? I challenge my detractors to prove when and how I overstepped my jurisdiction.

I am confident that I will get out of this. Once I resume my job, I want to ask in fulfilling my promise to rid the country of corruption. Even if I am impeached, I will continue to expose the corruption with the support from the people.

The people are the defenders of democracy, and they want a country free of corruption. Although I was a retired bureaucrat, I knew the extent and dimensions of corruption only when I became the CIAA Chief. To eliminate corruption, we need to put all state mechanisms under surveillance. The CIAA has increased surveillance on many individuals, and cases have been filed against some of them. I do not want to publicise everything at this stage. But I will not hesitate to do so when the people want me to.

I have recommended actions against those who are obstructing the proper functioning of the anti-corruption campaign as an aware Nepali citizen. Only time will tell how many of them will be caught with their pants down.

Exposés

New evidence of the suspended CAC Chief (Pokhara Singh Kurmi) overseeing his Jurisdiction.

CASE 1

On 7 February 2015, a day after a meeting between Karki and the Office of the Nepali Post-secretary Srijal Gautam, the CAC ordered the ‘Chief to approve the ownership transfer of Goanka Resort. In 1995, the Royal Palace had handed Goanka Resort to L M Swar Brothers of Singapore for 30 years. A provision of the agreement between the Palace and the New Zealand-based hotel operator I M Swar Brothers to transfer its major share to any other entity. The first, which was formed to manage royal property nationalized after the death of the monarchy, did not allow L M Swar Brothers to transfer its ownership to the hotel.

However, the Trust swiftly facilitated the transfer of ownership of Goanka Resort to the condominium, Karki is suspected to have had a personal interest in the deal between the two companies.

CASE 2

An investigation by the Ministry of Health exposed anomalies in the allocation of BMSM seats by the Nepali Medical Council. The probe team also recommended actions against the Council’s registrar Nirmala Upadhyay in its report. But the CAC upheld the Ministry, recorded the report and exonerated Upadhyay as its ‘Health Expert’. Sources say Upadhyay showed Karki how to interfere in the medical sector.

CASE 3

When the CMA filed cases against the Nepal Tourism Board in April 2017, it issued a warrant for former forest secretary Shankar Paudel, who was known among his peers as an honest bureaucrat and against whom Karki told a lie about him to the Supreme Court. “Since the ministry promptly handed it’s investigation.”

CASE 4

Former Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) General Manager Gopal Krishna was being investigated by the Ministry of Supply, but the CMA appointed Krishna’s ally Pushkar publically defended him in a press meet. He said, “It’s a lie. It’s a lie. The ‘accused’ will be cleared by the Supreme Court.” The ministry promptly halted its investigation.

CASE 5

In June 2015, a team of ‘experts’ sent by the CMA prepared questions for medical entrance examinations replacing the ones drafted by Kathmandu University. Later, CMA chairman Shanta Raj Subedi told a parliament committee that CMA Commissioner Raj Narayan Rout’s daughter Piyusha appeared in the entrance exams.

CASE 6

On 16 September 2016, the Supreme Court decided to review a writ petition challenging Karki’s appointment. In a hurriedly called press conference, the CMA announced that it had expedited investigation into embezzlement of allowances for ex-Mostar candidates. A commissioner later said: “There was no investigation underway, and no notice was ever served against any Mostar leader.” Karki was just trying to bargain with Maoist leaders.
RECHARGING THE MOUNTAINS

As natural springs dry up, more families are selling their land and moving out of the mid-hills of Nepal

SONIA AWALE
in KAVRE

Nepal has always had too much rain or too little. But irregular monsoons and a worsening water shortage are emptying villages in the mountains of Nepal.

While scientists try to find proof that weather extremes in the Himalayas are a result of global climate change, here, in Bhalubari village 40km east of Kathmandu the real concern is that there are few men left to till the dry red soil.

“At least 10 families have left our village in the last few years and migrated to the cities because of the lack of water,” said Nama Ghatane, who leads a women’s group here.

Even as farmers sell their land and move out to Kathmandu, people from the city have bought their homesteads as investment. The terraces lie dry and fallow amid a stunning backdrop of snow mountains to the north.

Even among the families who have stayed, the menfolk have migrated to the Gulf or Malaysia in search of work. “Our men have left to earn Rs 10,000 a month, tilling in the desert heat, while we need to hire people paying them 30,000 a month to work on our fields,” added Ghatane.

Luxman Prasad Adhikari, 48, has stayed despite the shortage of water and workers because he earns a decent income from selling milk and vegetables.

Making every drop count

WORTH OF WATER: Namrata Dungana (left), an avid advocate of organic fertiliser, uses waste water from her kitchen.

Now, villagers in Kavre have found that switching to organic vegetable farming can earn more money, help revive the soil, and adapt better to unpredictable weather.

Centre for Environment and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED), which won this year’s the Adaptation at Scale award (see box) has been training farmers in Kavre in organic farming and water conservation so they can better adapt to water shortages.

One successful technique is drip irrigation to grow vegetables without wasting even a single drop of water. This protects the soil, boosts productivity, irrigates the fields with limited water supply and makes it much more cost-effective to farm.

“We collect rain water and water from the kitchen and washing in plastic ponds, and we don’t waste water at all,” said 64-year old Nanima Dungana, carrying a heavy load of fodder on her back.

Dungana is also an avid advocate of jholmal, an organic fertiliser and bio-pesticide prepared by mixing locally available cattle urine, dung, farm waste and water.

Bimala Bajgain also uses jholmal, and said: “We had no idea about organic farming but since using jholmal two years ago, our harvests have increased.

Scaling Up

The Center for Environment and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED) recently won the Adaptation at Scale Prize for its successful implementation of ICIMOD’s Resilient Mountain Village (RMV) pilot project. The EUR 18,000 prize was given by the UK Department for International Development for successful climate change adaptation initiatives in Nepal with high potential for being replicated. The RMV approach is being tried out in eight villages in Kavre and works with 40 farmer’s groups made up of mainly women. One of the most successful components of the program is the fertiliser and bio-pesticide called jholmal.

KALCHE, KAVRE – In all his 70 years, Gyan Prasad Dhungana has never seen the weather being so unpredictable. Storms are more violent and frequent, and the rains erratic.

“We used to have showers every other day in May and June and there used to be gentle weeklong rains during the monsoon,” Dhungana recalled. “Nowadays the monsoon is often delayed and they say it is because of global warming.”

Bimala Bajgain, 35, who heads the Women Farmers’ Group here, says: “The monsoon does not follow any timetable anymore, and the late rains mean paddy planting is delayed and there is lower yield.”

Decades of sprinkling chemical fertilisers and pesticides have also ruined the soil, reducing harvests, causing ecological harm and making farmers poorer.

We save money because we don’t need to buy expensive pesticides and fertilisers anymore.”

Jholmal doesn’t lower the fertility of soil, protects plants from harmful pests and improves productivity. Farmers are also managing locally available compost by covering it up rather than drying out in the sun for maximum benefit. Introduction of methods like mulching and drought resistant seeds have also helped boost productivity of oats, crops like cucumber, pumpkin and bitter gourd.

“We need to have a different mentality and patience, but we now know the importance of organic methods,” said Bajgain. “I now want to share our experience with neighbouring villages.”

Sonia Awaale at Kavre
And the reason he can do that is because he has water all year round from a rainwater harvesting system. He has also built a bloga plant to turn manure from his buffaloes into cooking gas.

"Many have left for Qatar and Malaysia but so far we are not doing badly with the farm and the livestock," Adhikari said, "it means we will have been better off if the government had helped us with irrigation and we could grow off-season vegetables."

To be sure, droughts and water shortages are not new in the Himalayas. But farmers here who depend on rain-fed agriculture have had to walk further every day to fetch water. Only 15 of the 65 natural springs in the village still have water.

"Springs have been drying up one after another in the last few years. We don’t know if it’s because of the earthquake or changing climate," said Ghatane, while waiting for a trickle to fill up her gagan. "It doesn’t rain as much as it used to. When it does, it is not on time or regular anymore."

Here in Phulbari and surrounding villages of Kavre, women farmers do not allow a single drop of water go waste anymore. With help from ICIMOD’s Himalayan Climate Change and Adaptation Programme, they are collecting monsoon water, using wastewater to irrigate vegetable fields, and digging ponds to recharge ground water and revive springs.

After technicians identify a spring, women build a recharge basin up the hill to collect monsoon runoff and let it slowly seep into the soil. This prevents the spring from going dry, and water is collected in a tank that feeds a tap. Ghatane’s group has revived several springs that had recently gone dry.

The happiest farmers these days in Phulbari are the ones who have installed rainwater harvesting systems. Laxmi Panjari’s 7,200 litre tank still has water she collected from her roof last monsoon.

"Even if the springs dry up, we still have enough rain for the kitchen and cattle," said Panjari. Many households here now have plastic-lined ponds to store rainwater. Some families have even built 27,000 litre tanks to store rainwater from one monsoon to the next.

The only drawback is the cost, but when there is no alternative and when water becomes so precious for irrigation and drinking, Phulbari farmers have found that necessity is the mother of invention. Being self-sufficient in water has empowered women like Ghatane. She says: "There are few men here, so we women are responsible for taking most household decisions. It makes sense that we are the ones with these new ideas, and when a woman learns the whole family learns, too."
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