Bypassing government

Nearing the second anniversary of the 25 April 2015 earthquake, the Nepal government continues to face criticism for delays in rebuilding, but so do international relief agencies accused of duplication and overcharging for overheads.

International NGOs were censured in the aftermath of the earthquake for inappropriate and inefficient aid, and the criticism continues. The government, meanwhile, has tried to shift the blame on the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), which it set up in 2015 without granting it real autonomy.

"From any international standard, emergency relief and saving lives went very well because governance was decentralised," says Frabin Manandhar of the Association of INGOs (AIN). "It was when the government centralised operations by creating the NRA, dissolving it again, re-creating it, that it created layers of bureaucracy. Every project had to be approved by the NRA. It took months."

Manandhar admits record-keeping was not a priority immediately after the disaster, when the central government gave INGOs a free hand to work and 93 new agencies arrived. He says any flaws in the groups’ work stemmed from the need to act immediately.

However, journalist Emily Treutman who also worked in Haiti, accuses multiple INGOs of taking credit for the same work: "One organisation pays for the helicopter, another hires people to drive the truck, and then a final organisation pays for the tarp. All three take credit for ‘providing shelter’"

Manandhar thinks INGOs deserve credit for mobilising quickly, spending their own money before donations arrived. He estimates that flash appeals raised 60 per cent of post-earthquake funding, the rest came from existing sources. From April–December 2015, INGOs spent all the money raised, but in 2016 they only spent 60 per cent because official permission for rebuilding was so slow.

Subindra Bogati of the Nepal Peacebuilding Initiative says INGOs must work more with local groups, but adds: "I wouldn’t be that critical of their work right after the earthquake. No one knew what to do, INGOs were doing their best."

Bogati says donors need to change their mindset: "that local groups cannot deliver projects. We recognise that it is a long-term challenge: "There’s a lot of competition and INGOs don’t want to put themselves out of business."
CLIMATE CLIMAX

In recent weeks we have learnt that February 2017 was the second-warmest in NASA’s global historic records. The only warmer February was last year. The Arctic was literally on fire, suffering their hottest year on record with polar sea ice at record low winter maxima for three years.

If all this sounds bad, hear this. The Himalaya is warming much faster than the rest of the planet. Even if countries meet or exceed their commitments for emission cutsbacks, average global temperatures will still rise by 1.4°C by 2100, but in the Himalaya, Pakistan and Tibetan Plateau, temperatures rise by 1.8°C. The effects will be apocalyptic, and we are already seeing signs of it in Nepal’s glaciers thinning, retreating and losing mass at an alarming rate. Trends were reviewed at an international conference on Understanding Climate Change and Climate Action that week in Kathmandu organised by the Nepal government with Kathmandu-based ICIMOD and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The JPCC has been cautious over since its last study prediction two years ago that Himalayan glaciers would melt off by 2035 was proven to be unfounded. Even so, its new figures look serious. We are now looking at Nepal’s glaciers shrinking by half by 2050, and losing up to 80% of their ice by the end of the century. More than 1,000 glacial lakes have formed in the Himalayan arc alone as the mountains thaw, and some of them are in danger of bursting. The trend is worse west to east along the Himalayan arc.

The mountains store 6,000 cubic km of water in the form of ice, which now gives water to 3 billion people downstream in South Asia, China and South-east Asia who grow food for nearly half of humanity. Poor countries argue that it is a problem created by industrialised countries with their historic CO2 emissions. But India will soon become the largest greenhouse gases emitter, although its per capita carbon output is still small. Nepal’s minimal carbon footprint may means we cannot do much to mitigate global warming, but we can act locally by reducing pollution, controlling forest fires and crop burning, upgrading traditional brick kilns, and improving public transport. Soot and dust particles cause Himalayan snowfields to melt much faster than they would with just global warming.

Change on the landscape is now. It is just making all our old problems worse. It is at the community level that Nepal needs to boost farmers’ capacity to cope with the change. Pollution travels across national boundaries, so controlling it needs cross-border cooperation. Uplifting climatic, macro- efficient energy has co-benefits for public health and the economy. After all, green is also the colour of money.

GUEST EDITORIAL

DAVID MOLDEN

Mountainous change

Though we at ICIMOD were pleased to collaborate and organise this week’s JPCC gathering in Kathmandu, the message about climate change was rather grim. Unless we act now, while global temperatures average less than 1°C above pre-industrial levels, temperature increases of 0.5°C every 10 years will see Himalayan glaciers melt off by 2035.

The JPCC’s figures show that if we cut green house gases by 80% by 2050, we can prevent catastrophic changes for mountain people and environments. The community representative from Humla told us “We used to graze alpine sheep. Now we graze on rice.”

Across the Himalaya, agriculture is a major activity. Not only does it birth the health of humans and ecosystems, many people live off it. With rising temperatures, we can expect glacier and snow melt. Some scientists have estimated that global warming could be reduced by 0.6°C under a business-as-usual scenario. This is a cause to celebrate. We need to act now, while climate change remains remote, in order to stop climate change from becoming a major one.

Similarly, addressing climate change requires regional cooperation and coordination between countries, sharing data, information, and solutions that can equip and empower mountain communities regardless of their natural location. And this easily permits another opportunity for mountain economies. The need is there, and a shared mindset in climate negotiations to influence others to work together to reduce emissions.

We can look to the Arctic to find inspiration for this kind of cooperation. Also heavily influenced by climate change, nations in the region have enacted the Arctic Council, an organization of eight nations that, historically, have always been very effective at it. But for the cause of climate change they have added a billion and shared knowledge to improve scientific data for the purpose of alerting policy making that will impact future generations.

If ICIMOD, we are supporting an initiative called the Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMALMAP) to provide a current and comprehensive evaluation of the HP at-risk across ecological and environmental landscapes. It will be an environment-friendly tool that can be used as a ‘Himalayan Pressure Gauge’, where mountain peoples and countries work together to solve mountain problems. It’s not only early, but there are pathways, the time is now.

David Molden is the Director General of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

GUEST EDITORIAL

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Blackhole

Foreign donations have fallen off because the world understands the funds vanish into a giant hole of inside inefficiency and corruption [Editorial, Second chance, 2015]. Stop blaming donors, asics do I know what I say? [David Durkan]

Online Videos

Online Videos

What’s Trending

Gagancare by Krishna

Even though Gagans Thapa hasn’t been able to launch a national health insurance plan, half Infib was now got free medicare, and the government will pay for patients needing implants and kidney transplants.

Most used online page

The annual week-long chariot festival of Bhaktapur has begun with the start of Nepali New Year. Bhaktapur festival is famous for its temple-poking and chariot pulling is celebrated for nine days and eight nights and is observed mainly in the Bhaktapur Durbar Square and them. If Bhaktapora is top for you or you missed it, catch glimpses of the festival with this next video on www.nepaltimes.com.

Backside

We online to “read the real” ecological home takeover this Now Year’s Day. Let us long

The cost of Free Healthcare

Gagam Thapa should look at Venezuela before he goes too far down the socialism road (Fidelics for the people, 2015). Without personal responsibility, investment and consequence, health care schemes are not successful and financially ruin a nation. It’s nice that he has the welfare of the Nepali people in mind. I’m just saying that ‘Free’ health care is a lofty goal that has the potential for abuse for the patients who want it all, but pay almost nothing. Unfortunately, limited resources must be budgeted to other worthy causes like education, water, roads, bridges, etc. as well.

Sigmund Stengal

Black Hole

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No turning back
Why Nepal’s upcoming local elections matters more than ever

On 14 May, Nepal’s will go to elections for newly-defined local (village and municipal) governments. These comprise one of three constitutionally-mandated elections to be completed by January 2018. At the time they were announced, news of elections at the local level brought mixed reactions: from those who wish for some sign of progress in a country mired in protracted political conflict, to those who want their needs and interests addressed before elections can take place.

The local elections will be a significant step towards implementation of a new constitution that mandates a restructured nation-state, reflecting for the first time in Nepal’s history a federal, secular republic with a plural political order and inclusive social character. If successfully concluded, the elections will instil confidence and ownership of the constitution in the general public and rebuild trust in the country’s choice of system of political representation. Additionally, successful local elections would ease the path for the two following elections to provincial and national government. Thus, local elections are closely linked with institutionalization of the new constitution.

The elections will also fill a longstanding political void at the local level. Local elections are being held after a long gap of 19 years and for only the third time since the advent of multiparty democracy in 1990. For almost two decades there has been an absence of elected officials at the village level and a palpable lack of local representation of concrete, interests and needs in the country’s public policy and administration.

In the 1990s, the government tried to bridge the ever-widening gap between the state and citizens by promulgating the Local Self-Governance Act, which attempted to give more autonomy to local governments. However, resource and capacity constraints at the local level combined with the decade-long conflict significantly limited positive effects of the well-intended Act.

Most tragically during this period, elected local governments were dismissed and civil servants authorised to assume administrative as well as developmental functions. Combined with a provision of the interim constitution that required political consensus in government, these civil servants worked on behalf of all-party machinations that fuelled syndicate-like behaviour at the local level. The experiment was a governance disaster; the collusive tendencies among political parties, with no opposition and the lack of accountability checks and balances, had a detrimental effect on local-level democracy and state efficiency. Such arrangements not only formalised local corruption in Nepal but also undermined the formal procedures of governance and institutionalised nepotism, lack of transparency and (informal) decision making.

By returning to participatory governance, next month’s local elections couldhalt and possibly reverse the downward spiral in local government mismanagement, culture of impunity, organised corruption, and citizen exclusion from the decision-making process that we have witnessed in the past 15 years.

Local elections would be a crucial step in addressing political marginalisation and point the way to truly participatory democracy and inclusive development. For example, the constitution mandates such political party to nominate at least one woman for the head or deputy head position. This should promote women’s participation in public life from the grassroots upwards – even though the most recent constitution amendment proposal, to remove local elected representatives from the national electoral college, significantly jeopardises that outcome. Sweeping changes are probably coming to the country’s socio-political foundations that have survived for many years.

The transition to a new structure will present opportunities and challenges at all levels of governance and society. At the national and regional level, there will inevitably be uncertainty and conflict between different levels of government as the transition takes place. At the local level, the transition will present opportunities to engage local communities in governance, but will also suffer from uncertainties that might cause confusion, conflict and unrest at the local level. The resolution of conflict at these various levels will be important for the success of the transition in leading to improved governance at the sub-national level.

Rising dissent and grievances related to state restructuring in Nepal reflect both popular anxiety with the political process as well as the lack of facilitated dialogue to discuss and resolve emergent issues. Rather than descending into easy condemnation of transitional politics thus far and adopting tried positions staked by the venal political elite, the Nepali public have a real chance to take back the body politic and exercise their citizenship.

Whether from the hills or the plains, from the east or west, Nepal can and should seek leadership of their own neighbourhoods and communities. That is a position of strength that matters most in a democracy. And they will be on the right side of history. 

Bishal K Chalise is a graduate from the Australian National University and George Varughese is the Country Director of the Asia Foundation.
Undemocratic democracy

Proof of how far we have fallen is a senior leader demanding that the judiciary should be kept under parliament

Nepal’s governing curious has relentlessly tried to manipulate politics through Parliament. A clause in the Constitution regarding elections enshrined after the promulgation of the new constitution reserves the right to prosecute 12 members under a common election symbol for the parties which are currently in Parliament.

CONNECTING DOTS
Dinkar Nepal

New political parties, or ones that did not secure a seat in the last Parliament or ones that boycotted past polls, are forced to field independent candidates under different symbols. This is a barren display of political citizenship.

Nepal’s Prime Minister Baburnaras Chaudhary, in an interview with the Election Commission building, despite the fact that it has opposed the 14 May local elections in line with the Madhesh parties.

The Election Commission, which is constitutionally bound to function within the legal framework enshrined by Parliament, has rightly expressed its helplessness. Another new party, Mahasabha Nepal, has taken the matter to the Supreme Court, which has delayed the case, scheduling a hearing just two days prior to 14 May.

From the government’s side, there has been no effort to explain the rationale behind this strange and undemocratic rule. (vident, there is none. The only unenforced benefit of such a law that we can give lawmakers may be that the ever-increasing number of political parties is technically too difficult to manage for elections. Some point on social media that the ballot paper is going to be longer than the average height of Nepals.

This pattern of manipulating the legal process for dishonest ends is the hallmark of rulers everywhere. Its extreme form is when rulers change the constitution to remain in power.

Many rulers have resorted to constitutional means for decades by turning their democracies into semi-dictatorships. Often, when a particular leader becomes strong enough to control the party and legitimate politics (decision-making by the majority) is exploited to fulfill the interests of the leader.

In Nepal, the decade-long era of conflict and another decade of misguided pacts has, in the name of transition, created a culture of fear by consensus of the Top-Heads. This supposedly transitional political culture has created many spoils: senior cadres have become able to manipulate power within the party, and second-rung leaders have followed them to become the clique supporters of this leadership style among their group of followers.

With political parties as the only effective instrument as of now for diverse interest groups, the major political parties have been able to monopolise political discourse. The media, the only source of input in Nepal’s dead civil society, has been compartmentalised because of the interlinking of group interests and hence fails to accept its responsibilities.

Due to these dynamics, the top leaders have been able to redefine the notion of accountability. They have gone to the extent of publicly suggesting reform in the political structure of the nation to defend their undemocratic decisions and unethical practices.

Recently, when the Supreme Court intervened in the government’s decision to appoint the chief of police by bypassing seniority rules, the Nepalese Congress deferred the decision in a judicial setback.
A serious Swiss

Toni Hagen knew from his country’s experience that Nepal would benefit from democracy and decentralisation

A slight frown creases the florid brow of the portly gentleman in the patterned short-sleeved shirt as he shyly presents me with a copy of his signed book. “I might have given you a copy already, but this one has the new introduction.” His voice has a toffee-textured Swiss lilt, but his kind eyes are grave.

And well might they be – this is the fabled guru Toni Hagen, a serious man of ‘high moral principles’ who carries the weight of Nepal’s development on his shoulders, having single-handedly explored and surveyed the forbidden kingdom when he first arrived in 1950, way before anyone else.

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For the full text of the interview, go online.
nepalitimes.com

Mad Country
by Samrat Upadhyay
Soho Press, 2017
304 pages, $16 trade paper
Releasing in summer 2017 in Nepal

Is that why the title is Mad Country? Mad Country is a state of mind more than anything else. The title story in the collection features a successful woman entrepreneur who is arrested in a petty altercation and turned into a political prisoner, thereby starting the process of her madness. She undergoes a complete transformation of her identity and, by the end, questions the reality that she held so dear before her arrest. Many of the characters in the collection are dwelling in, transitioning through, celebrating, suffering through various stages of madness. After I finished the book, I thought that Nepal’s tumultuous political history and sometimes deranged rulers might have been in the back of my mind. But Trump happened in America, so who is madder now?

Kathmandu won’t let go of me
Samrat Upadhyay’s sixth book, Mad Country is coming out this month in the US. Nepal’s most accomplished English language novelist talks about his evolution as a writer.

Nepal Times: What can you tell us about Mad Country?
Samrat Upadhyay: Mad Country teeters on the edges of realism, and at times goes off the deep end. It’s my most psychotic and hallucinatory book. It’s unlike anything I’ve written. My last story collection, The Royal Country was in 2006 and that book appears tame now in comparison. Mad Country is frothing at the mouth, ready with a torrent of abuses.

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Do you see any change in how your unconventional characters are received by readers?
I wouldn’t say that my characters and plots are unconventional. It depends entirely upon who is deciding what convention is. By definition, literature is convention-defying. Convention asks us that we perceive and accept reality a certain way, often the established way, often put in place by those who benefit from such arrangements. Literature is an art form that rearranges this arrangement and shows us other, perhaps more beautiful and truthfull, ways to experience reality.

Nepal writers in English have not come up at the speed anticipated. What is missing?
To be a writer you need to immerse yourself in the universe of books, and you need to spend long hours writing. Some young writers may quick success without first even knowing how to write a proper sentence. Nepal writers need to grud their laziest and get to work.

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be novelist Amitav Ghosh published his most recent non-fiction, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, before Donald Trump and his merry band of climate refugees assumed power in Washington. Yet, the key message of his book about the nature of empire in an age of globalisation, which is known by populism and climate denial is eerily prophetic.

Climate change negotiations like the 2015 Paris Agreement threaten the global power status quo, and voters in some western democracies are convinced that this will result in an erosion of their power and wealth. Global disparities have widened in the post-colonial world. But to attain true climate justice, industrialised countries would need to cut their emissions by 80-90 per cent, something that is politically untenable for petroleum addicts.

Since he was so accurate in predicting how climate denialism in America could lead to someone-like Trump, we have to believe Ghosh when he draws a parallel between the carbon economy and militarism. The irony is that while the political corporate complex in Washington depends on the environment, the American military sees increased instability around the world due to global warming. It is addressing the new challenge of ‘green security’ through greater surveillance of environmental activists and an ‘armed lifestyle’ mentality.

‘Corporations and carbon billionaires’ are funding research to sow confusion about anthropomorphic climate change so that the corporate media can shift attention away from the dangers of warming by trying to be ‘balanced’. Such false equivalence has parallels in the way the US media covered Trump during the election campaign last year. Ghosh wrote the following lines at a time when a Trump victory was not even a remote possibility: ‘The denial and disputing of scientific findings has become a major factor in the climate politics of the Anglophone’. Ghosh sees the latter as part of a larger pursuit of individual happiness that underpins Anglo-Saxon cultures as central to the discourses of consumption. Although he may be accused of extrapolating a bit, there is merit in the argument that ‘the rate of climate denialism tends to be unusually high’ in the US, UK and Australia. It is the Anglosphere that is driving the global carbon economy of the anthropocene to protect the western way of life. Ghosh acknowledges that official denialism in these countries exist in direct contradiction to a growing citizens’ movement and global environmental activism.

The grip of fossil bares on the new US administration is so strong that it has failed to see the potential to make money from renewables. Under public opinion pressure, the Norwegians are weaning themselves off petroleum: new car sales in Norway will be 100 per cent zero emission by 2025, and one brezy day last July, Denmark produced 40% of its electricity from wind farms and exported the surplus to neighbours. China has discovered that ‘green’ is not just good for the environment but good with ‘greenbacks’, and is already the world’s largest exporter of wind turbines, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaics.

‘[Under Trump, America risks being left behind in the global race for green energy, India, for its part, will soon be the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases and is relying on what Ghosh calls the politics of attrition’ – the argument that the poor are more used to adapting to hardships than the rich. The author forces us to think about industrial agriculture that is burning...

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**Ministry of Alternative acts**

It has been 33 years since *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for which George Orwell imagined a dystopian world where everyone is constantly under state surveillance, where two truths co-exist, thought is controlled, history and language manipulated.

Orwell wrote the book in the post-war gloom of 1949 England, when Stalinist totalitarianism was providing strong competition to Nationalism for man’s inhumanity to man. At that time, 1984 must have seemed so far in the future that the novel was seen as a kind of science fiction. But here we are in 2017, and there is still North Korea under Kim Jong Un, which has outdone Oceania under Big Brother. Or, as has been remarked by many liberal opinion makers, the United States under Donald Trump.

*Ministry of Alternative acts* places in *Animal Farm*, one of the totalitarian superstates of Oceania, ruled by an elusive Big Brother (who may or may not exist) with four ministries: Love, Truth, Peace and Plenty. Known as Miniluv, Ministrue, Minipax and Miniplenty respectively in Newsewa, the official language created solely to meet the requirements of the political ideology of Ingrish (English Socialism).

This is all Dear Leader Eighty-four: a dystopian world where everyone is constantly under state surveillance, where two truths co-exist. The Ministry of Love is responsible for ensuring that everyone is happy, the Ministry of Truth ensures that everyone is truthful, the Ministry of Peace ensures that everyone is peaceful and the Ministry of Plenty ensures that everyone is prosperous.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is 1984, March 24. A letter dated 24 March 1984, received from Big Brother...

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**Thirteenth Floor**

*by George Orwell*

FP Editor’s Pick

available on KUNDU....

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**Random Reading**

*Eighty-four* that gives readers an uncan...
More Climate Readings

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Earth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet
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by Bjorn Lomborg

Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil
by Tony书法

Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil
by Tony书法

Literature and Latté

Chai houses in Kathmandu are no longer merely places to drink coffee: people are going there to get work done, or study for classes. That means more and more cafes are offering more books that patrons can buy or rent, so they can enjoy their favorite drinks. Whether you just want to relax with a good read or use the spaces to study is entirely up to you.

Bodhi Books and Bakes in Mahalaya is one such cafe. It doesn’t just offer organic coffee and delicious, fresh pastries, but also a broad selection of books. If you want to seriously study for school or college, Kathoha, also in Mahalaya, is the place for you. The cafe also sells itself a mini-library and can provide food and drinks for your study group and even offers tuition. Student customers can also take advantage of classes in sociology, psychology and CP as well as prepare for the IELTS and TOEFL, language tests and study in a caffeine-induced trance.

Sara Bakery started as an in-house bakery for Himalayan Beanz Coffee, but due to high demand for its pastries, opened a separate shop. Sara is best known for its customised cakes that can be ordered online. The outlet in Jawalakhel also offers books. Clients can bring their own or borrow one of the many books that line the walls of a separate library room dedicated to those who want to relax and enjoy a page-turner.

Chai in Fusanke is another one of those places where you can chill out with a good book. Primarily a breakfast and brunch restaurant, customers can buy one of its many books and curl up at one of the corner tables.

The growth of the reading culture in Kathmandu is the result of many trends: the arrival of new publishing houses, the popularity of annual literature festivals that bring together different cultures, and even online access to information about literature. Book cafes started as a reaction to the sudden popularity of literature in Kathmandu but today they are contributing to the growth of that culture by helping to put books within easy reach of citizens.

Clara Bullock

Thamel Tales

Everyone knows Thamel, Kathmandu’s social gastro. With Nepal’s emerging literary scene, an account of the neighbour hood that is the pulse of the city was long overdue.

Kaji Thapa has now stepped in with a beguiling biography of a neighbourhood transformed by publishing houses. It’s named Capital Cult Books from a location on Google Maps is a literal triumph. Thapa explores and guides his readers to tales of the past and lives them with narratives of the present, trying to get to the root of Thamel’s where, when, why and now.

As the reader gathers, there are no simple answers to these questions but Thapa leaves his audience leaving a whole lot more about Thamel that is not part of the consciousness of today’s generation. We journey with him when it was an open space field steep through its steep valleys, it’s time to a flourishing business district for Malls, then as a hub of crime and drugs. Yet, there are also pulchritudinous tales of Thamel as the setting of the emerging rock and roll culture and a spiritual hub, all described with the author’s anecdotes and interviews with the community.

Thamel is also a poignant slice of the city we lost to time. Thapa reminisces about the good old days, his almost lyrical words transport the readers to a bygone era, away from the concrete present of the new Thamel that spins everything from fast-food, Chai houses to the streets, going to the local tel of 20s of smoked brick houses with tiled roofs... interpreted with accounts of real people — an aspiring young, a local member, a worker, a managerian sage who has witnessed its changes in the past and many other interesting tales — he says Thamel’s soul lives. For a book that covers the area and its multiple facets, it is surprisingly not a compiled read. What adds extra value and depths are the small excerpts from works of Bimal Upadhyay, Malla, Shakespeare, Nether, different powers and age at the beginning of the chapters written by the author.

The book does get involving at times as Thapa tales to pass too many details into one sentence or one page, making it difficult to follow. However, he compensates with thorough research skills and a precision with words. The book is much more than a biography of Thamel, it is an exploration and rediscovering of a bee for the neighbourhood which was lost somewhere along the time. I grew out of it, Neo, a decade ago, and you want me to go too, things and not just cry on your...
**NEW YEAR’S**

A curated list of events to begin Nepal: New Year 2074

**Fun at Lahim**

Games, programs for kids, a fashion show, live music, food fest and more to celebrate New Year.

17 April, 3 pm onwards, Lahim Cafe, (01) 4418313

**Heritage ride**

Pedal through the seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley with fellow cyclists and bike lovers.

13 April, 6 am to 9 am, Borderlands, Nepal Times, (01) 4808746

**Be Helipiri**

Come together for open-air sessions, dance crew performances and Cosplay photo booth to begin your New Year. Funds raised will be donated to a social project in Nepal.

14 April, 3 pm onwards, Around the Corner, Boudha, 9841637597

**Day of dance**

Start your New Year on a groovy note and join this urban dancer workshop led by instructor Pramodh Kumer Bhandari.

13 April, 3 pm to 12 pm, 480 Dance Academy, Khumal, 9841653737/8966603287, Register before 14 April, 2 pm

**Yoga special**

Spend a relaxing morning with fellow yoga lovers at the Yoga Festival this New Year’s Day.

14 April, 11 am onwards, Nepal Yoga Home, Gokarna, 9811637531, Register: nepalyogahome.com/yogafestival

**Miss Motivation**

Kripa Joshi

It was character that got us out of bed, commitment that moved us into action, and discipline that enabled us to follow through.

29 April, 09:30 am onwards, The Festival, Thamel, (01) 4701185

**Vinyl session**

On New Year’s Day enjoy soul, funk, reggae, disco, boogie, afro beats, rhythm ‘n’ blues and all under one roof with Mama Dasha (AUS).

14 April, 5 to 6 pm, R5 Momo, Nagi, 9840601512

**Hike and yoga**

Enjoy yoga while gazing in the view of the hills. The hike and meditation session will be followed by a picnic.

27 April, Meeting point: Tsaroja Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lamjung, (01) 4807744, Fee: Rs 1,500

**Nepal-Britain exhibition**

Attend an exhibition celebrating the bicentenary relationship between Nepal and Britain.

13 to 24 April, 10 am to 5 pm, Nepal Art Council, Bakhtapur, (01) 4207075

**New Year fun**

Have a splash at Kathmandu Fun Valley whilst listening to Talih Rai and band as they belt out some of their past hits.

14 April, 10 to 10 pm, Kathmandu Fun Valley, Bhaktapur, (01) 6540171

**Gypsy Jazz**

Spend a jaw-dropping evening this Nepal New Year with friends and family.

15 April, 6.30 to 10 pm, AMC Art Cafe, Pulchowk, 3881747779

**Meze by Roadhouse**

Sip on a special at one of Kathmandu’s most popular restaurants. Merveilleux Pizzas, Darbar Main, (01) 4223087

**First Friday**

Enjoy as Nepal band Sound of Streams serenades you with their music this New Year’s Day.

14 April, 6 pm onwards, The Festival, Thamel, (01) 4701185

**Vootop**

The new home of Newari cuisine that also has a safe and secure menu for those who are not yet ready to experiment with new dishes.

(01) 4805002

**The Fun Café**

Relish a lavish buffet brunch this New Year’s Day with friends and family at The Fun Café.

14 April, 12 pm onwards, Radisson Hotel, (separate Rs 1500 plus taxes per individual), Rs 4699 plus taxes for two adults and two children under 10 years, Rs 888 plus taxes (Grandparents, parents, children: total 6 pass)

**The Vesper House**

Step by for the best in Italian and all local favorites, in their breezy outdoors seating.

Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs.

(01) 5504779, www.vespercoffee.com

**Embassy**

Away from the hustle bustle of the streets, enjoy the variety of multi-cuisine dishes at a place ideal for business meets and casual rendezvous.

Poonpurkhet, (01) 440040

**Mila Guesthouse**

If you prefer the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far away from the city, yet miles apart.

Bhaktapur, 9841624137

**Dhulikhel Lodge Resort**

Located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills and mountains to the north.

Dhulikhel, (01) 4091499, dhulikhelodgeresort.com

**Neydo Monastery**

A monastery and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great Bodhisattva. Upon your request behind a book a room.

Pokhara, www.neydolodge.com

**Temples Tree Resort and Spa**

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Gauthep, Lakeside, Pokhara, (01) 465819

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**GETAWAY**
An illustrated history of the Chitrakars

New book commemorates the legacy of generations of Kathmandu’s hereditary artists

SAHINA SHRESTHA

It was no surprise that Madan Chitrakar, an artist from a family of generations of painters, was drawn to art from a young age. Paint ran in his veins. His work is known as ‘painter’, and the surname is synonymous with Nepali art. Madan is the son of Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, who ushered Nepali art into the modern era of Nepali art, and learnt insights and skills passed down from his forefathers. Modern education helped Madan find his niche in contemporary art.

What bothered him as an art student, and later as an artist, and art historian was that many of the narrative concerning Nepali art were referenced from foreign publications and relied on evidence sourced from museums abroad. Little was written and published about the evolution of art and the milieu of Nepal’s family of hereditary artists. So when Sangeeta Thapa, Board Member of the Patan Museum Development Committee, proposed a book on the art and history of the Chitrakars, Madan jumped at the opportunity. Nepal Painting Through the Ages was five years in the making and contains historic paintings, many previously unseen and unheimlich. It contains reproductions from the collections of the National Museum, Chitwan, Patan Museum, the National Art Museum, Bhaktapur and the private collections of Chitrakars and Rana families.

The book focuses on the cultural environment, motifs and driving factors behind the artists and evolution of forms and formats in Nepali art. An accompanying essay by Madan Chitrakar provides an insight into the tradition of his family’s inter-generational involvement in the arts. “The book is not a recitation of history,” Chitrakar told us at the launch of his book last week at the Kathmandu Triennale. “Rather, I expect it to serve as a more comprehensive reference material and inventory for writing the history of Nepali paintings. It is an attempt to narrate the history of Nepali traditional art, how it emerged and how it has evolved over the years.”

The book is a visual journey through time, separated by form and subject. It begins with the earliest painted manuscript covers from the eleventh century to medieval paubhars, the precursors to Tibetan thangkas and which remain at the fulcrum of the Newar art tradition. The book moves on to modern works, including hand-painted photographs and oil and canvas portraits of the Rana and Shah dynasties. There are also examples of murals from the vilas, bahis, and palaces around Kathmandu Valley. We see the evolution of Nepali art through foreign influences, religious social and political beliefs and more modern techniques. An image featured in the book, of a wall painting at the Shiva temple at Bhaktapur, shows King Shripadendra Malla personified by Vishwanath and Queen Vishwa Laxmi as the consort of the Lord, illustrating the royals’ desire to be considered divine.

While early paubhars were based on religious forms, later ones show the influence of Rajasthani and Tibetan styles. The Chitrakar artists also incorporated styles and poses from Mogab art in their portraits of the Malla kings. And with the advent of photography, their art was influenced by the western style of portraits. Apart from acting as an inventory of the representative works of the Chitrakar artists from past and present, the book unintentionally highlights the neglect and disregard for heritage in Nepal.

The murals of Krishna and Vishwanath found in Bhimsen Thapa’s palace in Logan were already destroyed before the April 2015 earthquake destroyed them. The author found a late 19th-century ritual painting of Naryesvari Devi folded in a corner of a drawer in the National Museum without proper preservation. An 18th-century painting of Ram Sambhava was too damaged to be interpreted properly, and another exquisite paubha from the early 18th century was too damaged to restore. The book is a treasure trove of rare and historic paintings from the past, recorded and documented by a member of the clan that made art history in Nepal.

Lumanka ti

Sitting on the boundary of two massive teetar trees, Nepal has frequent earthquakes. So it is not unusual that quakes figure prominently in folktales and literature.

With the 2015 earthquake instilling so widely in national and international publications, what more can an author offer on the subject?

The writer-artist duo Kashi Amaty and Prakash Ranjit have come up with a novel idea. Lumanka ti (Newari for ‘don’t forget’), is a graphic novel combining visual narrative with long forgotten myths and legends of the Kathmandu Valley. The story takes place in 1234 CE in Nepal Manakata, Kathmandu Valley. King Ananda Malla is being haunted by the wrathful God Bhairav and the country is fighting a never-ending war with the Rudra Yamah clan. The priest comes up with the idea to end the nightmares and win the war by turning the God.

The writer has taken liberties with the story, borrowing from both history and myths. He combines the story of Atlaya Malla, the king who died during the first recorded earthquake in Kathmandu, with that of King Shripatendra Malla, who built a temple for Siddhi Lakni to tame Bhairav’s anger.

The dialogue in a graphic novel should be simple and colloquial, which it is. But Ranjit’s dark and morose illustrations breathe life and drama into the tale. Those detailed illustrations and the use of scattered Newari words evoke the ambiance of ancient Kathmandu. If Amaty and Ranjit polish their storytelling and iron out the kinks, they could produce a whole lot of other graphic novels based on Nepal’s history.

Lumanka ti

Lumanka ti

by Kashi Amaty and Prakash Ranjit

Frontline, Jumhurki
50 pages NR 250
www.frontline.com.np

FRIDAY, APRIL 21st

10AM - 5PM

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Assassin’s Creed

Taking a break from the season’s “serious” award-nominated films, let us examine Assassin’s Creed 2016’s end of year action film based on a wildly popular videogame. It stars Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard, two extremely serious actors who effortlessly jump between well-respected, independent cinema and the silver screen, and are the closest thing to the truly glamorous, old-fashioned stars of cinema’s golden era. It is therefore surprising that these two particular, old school thespians would agree to star in such a franchise tie-in that is already an extension of another franchise based on a series of videogames that play on rudimentary (read childish) tropes of the Templar and Assassin mythologies.

To cut a long story short, Assassin’s Creed is surprisingly well made and fairly engrossing if you start watching it with very low expectations. There is the usual preposterous storyline: Fassbender plays Callum Lynch, a convict with violent tendencies who is put to death for his grim crimes – apparently he is genetically pre-disposed to violence. He wakes up alive, in Spain, in an uber-futuristic facility where he is told by the lovely Sofia (Cotillard) that he has been chosen for his gene code. It links him to his medieval ancestor Aguilar de Neha, an “Assassin” of the “Creed” who is sworn to protect human free will against the upright Templars, who wish to control humanity for the sake of peace.

Sofia is apparently both brilliant and beautiful, so confoundingly clever in fact that she has created the Animus, a contraption that can simulate the past when someone of a similar enough genetic code is hooked up to it (there is no real explanation for how it works). Hence Cal’s ability to access Aguilar’s past, and locate the mysterious “Apple”, the kernel of temptation that holds the secret of free will. Sound kooky? It is, but surprisingly one is willing enough to go along; after all it is a videogame.

We are swept up in Cal and Sofia’s interfaces as they search for the desired object through 15th-Century Spain, a treat for the viewer, even as we must forcibly suspend our disbelief. The script though, continues to unravel, and while Fassbender and Cotillard grit their teeth and do their very best, the ridiculous relationships, particularly between Sofia and her incredibly self-centred father Allan Rikkin (played by a cold Jeremy Irons), finally entangle the storyline – there is no way out.

As mindless action films go, Assassin’s Creed is really not that bad. It lacks a sense of humour, and it is dreadfully motivated, but you can tolerate it on a lazy afternoon; that is, until it suddenly ends, in media res, leaving you indignant and wondering why you had invested so much in a film about a video game about assassins and cults, and apples.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

HAPPENINGS

ML HELLO: Prime Minister Pratap Singh Bajwa is welcomed by Army Chief General Bikram Singh at a military commissioning ceremony in Bhatkalpur on Wednesday.


WOMAN ON TOP: After becoming the first woman to lead the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), Biruwari Rama pujas to pray with outgoing President Pushpaj Ram and newly elected Vice-Chair Shrikanta Gohila.

BATHING THE RAIN GOD: Devotees carry the idol of Rama Mahendranath in a palanquin before the annual haj bath ritual at Lagarkhel on Wednesday.

THE CRUX OF THE BUCKET: Devotees pull a chariot carrying the Bhairao to mark the start of the week-long Bisket festival in Bhatkalpur on Monday.
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Push to undo

While the recreational use of marijuana is controversial, the case for legalising its medical use is strong

girls because the issue of body shaming is closely related to their psychology.”

Sreemati Banerjee, 22, also faced psychological trauma due to body shaming. Banerjee weighed more than 100kg during her teen years, could never find clothes that fit and was publicly embarrassed about it.

“The word most used to hit me right in my heart and I felt so embarrassed. I was obsessed with losing weight,” she says. “Smoking marijuana was my last resort, as other medicines I tried didn’t help.”

Banerjee started smoking pot at age 18 and continued for six years, trying to lose 20 kg. She never reached that target, but she did get addicted.

Her husband admitted her to Sober Recovery a few months ago. Now Banerjee, the mother of a six-year-old son, regrets the path she took and is learning to accept her weight. “I am still not slim, but I am happy with my body.”

Shilpa Thapa Magar is just 15 and also felt that she needed to lose weight to be “perfect.”

She started smoking marijuana because she felt her stomach was too large. One evening she was walking in the streets smoking when police caught her and handed over to the Rehabilitation Centre for Children at Risk at Helinike Mandop. Eventually, she was taken to a rehabilitation centre.

Magar says she has learnt her lesson now: “I will stay away from drugs and eat less to have a flat stomach.”

Slim dreams

Girls using drugs to lose weight are getting addicted to them

SHREJANA SHRESTHA

Six years ago, Timilsina weighed 90 kg, but she wanted a fit body and flat stomach. Upon hearing that smoking marijuana could help lose weight, she lit up and chased her dream to be slim.

“I always felt bad about my body and wanted to look like my friends who had slimmer bodies,” Timilsina, now 22, recalls. “I gradually lost my appetite after I started smoking marijuana. Over the years I lost almost 30 kg.”

Originally from Hetauda, Timilsina lives in a rented flat in Kathmandu with friends. She used to smoke as many as 30 sticks of marijuana a day as it was easily available, and gradually developed an urge for hard drugs. She admits now that she never realised how she was moving from smoking pot to popping pills.

Two weeks after she started taking pills, her parents found out. They admitted her to Sober Recovery Women’s Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre in Kathmandu.

“I lost weight and became slim, but I never realised the drug was spoiling my life,” she told Nepal Times adding, “I wish I had never taken drugs. I regret a lot what I did. Now I want to gain some weight and live a healthy life.”

Body-shaming is leading many young girls to try using drugs to stay slim. Out of 40 women admitted to Sober Recovery, 9 had been smoking pot from an early age to try to lose weight. Some, like Timilsina, moved to harder drugs and became addicts.

Experts warn that it is a dangerous, hidden issue. Says tahering Wungro of Sober Recovery: “In most of the cases it is difficult to counsel such girls because the issue of body shaming is closely related to their psychology.”

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Girls using drugs to lose weight are getting addicted to them

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the government treats it entirely as a narcotic drug whose use and sale is illegal.

“Marijuana is less habit forming than opiates and carries virtually no risk of fatal overdose, thus it has been wrongly classified,” says Rajiv Kaffe, a prominent legalization activist. Moreover, where the drug was banned it was done without proper scientific research. Studies have shown that the chemical cannabidiol found in marijuana has beneficial medical properties."

Activists also say that marijuana can help control crime and wean the dependency on other hard drugs. The most vivid proof of that is KC, who did heroin for 22 years. He says marijuana could be added to harm reduction in drug rehab in Nepal if it was available legally.

“Take it from me, marijuana was my saviour. It made my pain bearable and took away my addiction to heroin. Believe me, many heroin addicts like me would give up heroin,” says KC.

Activists say that legalizing marijuana will help patients to get high quality cannabis for their conditions, and by regulating the drug, the government can keep a tab on the criminality associated with it.

Says Kaffe, who is still on ART: “By strictly regulating the drug, removing the moral policing and not criminalizing it, a lot of the stigma associated with it will go away and reduce the number of addicts.”

To be sure, there are negative effects of smoking too much marijuana, or using it for non-medical purposes. Overuse and abuse can lead to dependency, memory loss and emotional swings.

Doctors like Suraj Ojha, head of the department of psychiatry at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, remain unconvinced: “Marijuana should not be legalized in a country like Nepal where the regulations are so lax. Yes, it may have medicinal properties but the government in the current state will not be able to regulate and monitor it. This is not the time to be talking about legalization.”

NATION 15

hash ban in Nepal

LEGALWEED
Canada is set to legalise marijuana this week, and Argentina did so last month.

Marijuana legal for medical use
Argentina, Austria, Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Italy, Portugal

Free use
Spain, Portugal

On prescription
Netherlands, Canada

Used as treatment for cancer, multiple sclerosis, AIDS, spinal cord injury, glaucoma, etc.

Malaysia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Croatia, Portugal

Small amounts
Jamaica, Uruguay

Use of derivatives
France, Romania, Germany

NATION 15

BENEFITS OF POT
Research has proven the benefits of medical marijuana, showing it to be effective for:

- Neuropathic pain
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscle spasms
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Cancer and HIV patients
- Epilepsy
- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder

CELEBRATE LUXURY

NATION 15

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