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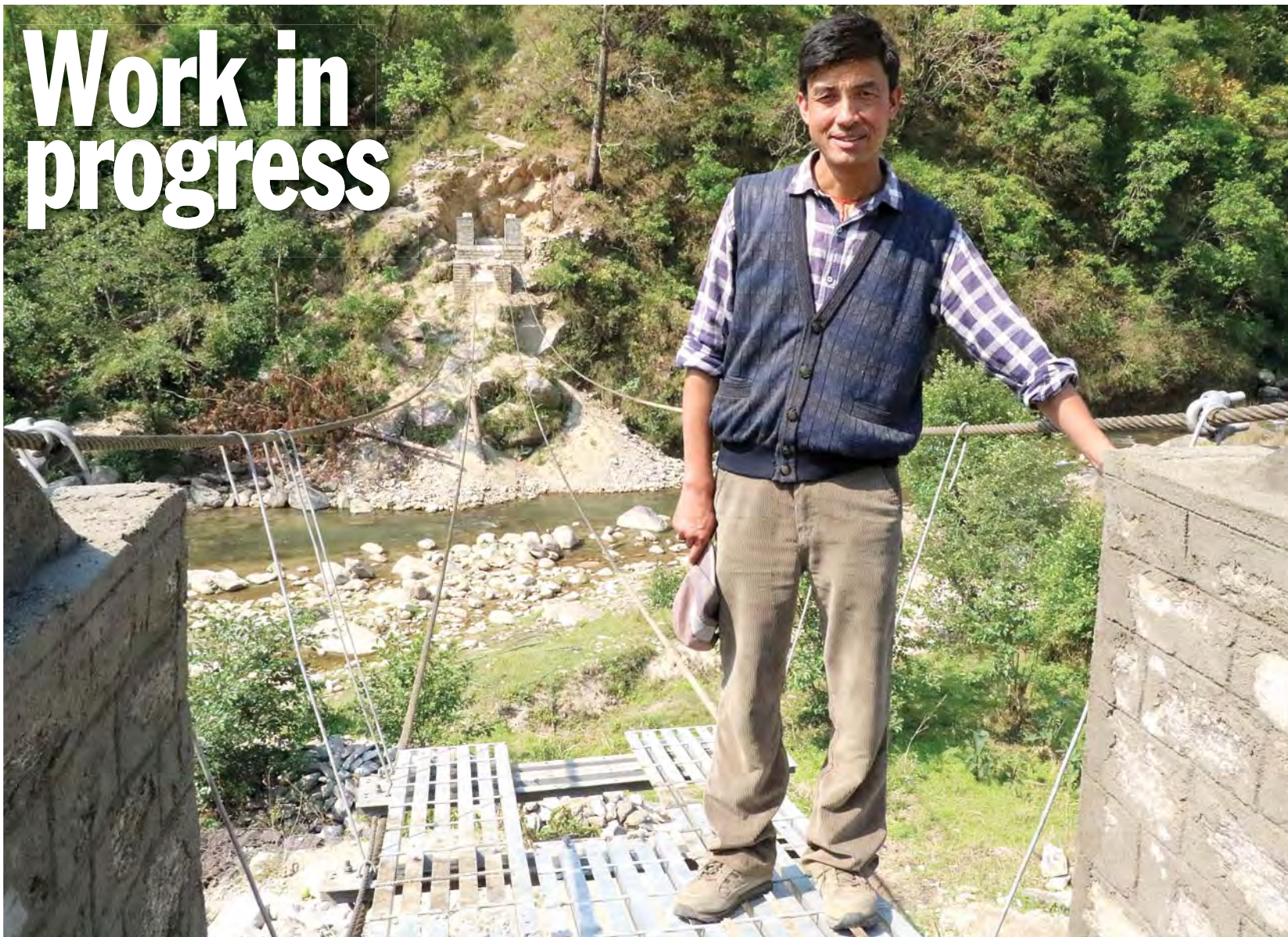
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KUNDA DIXIT

Lila Jirel (*pic, above*) is an engineer who used to work for the Dolakha District Development Committee (DDC). Restructuring in the new Constitution means his office is now called the District Coordination Committee (DCC) but he still has to oversee rehabilitation of this footbridge in the village of Phasku.

"Maybe if we have elected local leaders development will move faster," Jirel says, a view echoed by villagers here.

The prospect of local elections has raised hopes that projects like this will benefit from enhanced accountability and speedier grassroots development. Just like this half-built footbridge, local democracy is a work in progress, and we will see if the new DCCs live up to the promise.

However, in Kathmandu there is considerable confusion about elections, and preparations have been overshadowed by

uncertainty over the longevity of the coalition in the aftermath of the impeachment move by Parliament against Chief Justice Sushila Karki.

Bimalendra Nidhi has withdrawn his resignation and is again Home Minister, but Kamal Thapa's RPP has quit the coalition and Bijaya Gachhadar's Nepal Loktantrik Party (NLP) is threatening to do the same.

"The government has our support, but it is ignoring us on major issues, including impeachment and Constitution amendment," says Shiva Lal Thapa of the NLP. "If the Prime Minister does not take us into confidence, we will withdraw our support to him."

With the 37-MP RPP already out, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal government may fall if the 17-MP NLP also quits the coalition. The newly unified RJP Nepal, with 25 MPs, has promised to back the government if it is likely to

fall, but only if the Constitution amendment bill is passed.

The governing Maoist-NC coalition and RJP Nepal have already agreed to fast-track the amendment bill, but still lack the numbers to do so. The RPP is divided, with its pro-monarchy faction pressing for rejection. Gachhadar's party also opposes the bill in its present form.

So, staying in power with the support of Madhesi parties will not be a cakewalk for Dahal.

This week, nearly 44,000 people nominated themselves for 13,000 posts (mayor, deputy mayor, village council chief and ward committee member) that will be elected on 14 May in provinces 3, 4 and 6. But the government is on the brink of falling into a minority just when it needs to focus on one agenda: making elections a success.

And the second round of local elections on 14 June...that is still a huge question mark. 🇳🇵



CRUMBLING HISTORY

Two years after the earthquake, the historic town of Nuwakot struggles to protect its famous seven-storey darbar and other surrounding monuments. Follow us on a 360-degree video tour of Nuwakot Darbar Square.

360°

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Bridge builders

BY SONIA AWALE

PAGE 14-15



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LADY JUSTICE

The impeachment process against Chief Justice Sushila Karki by the governing coalition this week has plunged Nepal into another political crisis, thrown impending elections into doubt, and could even lead to a constitutional void in January 2018 if those polls cannot be held.

The main responsibility for this act of utter irresponsibility lies with the Nepali Congress under the leadership of its three-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba who wants to be prime minister again when (or, if) Pushpa Kamal Dahal steps down. Deuba had no love lost for Chief Justice Karki despite the fact that she was close to the Koirala clan while growing up in Biratnagar. In fact, Karki's husband Durga Subedi was a member of the team that hijacked a Royal Nepal Airlines plane carrying a stash of cash to Kathmandu, landing it in India to use the money to fund the party's pro-democracy campaign.

It is indeed this country's great misfortune that a party that was once a respected member of the international social democratic movement, led several

leadership last year that Parliament lodged an impeachment motion which the NC reluctantly supported. But since then, several verdicts by the Supreme Court have directly challenged the party, the latest being Karki's ruling to stay the appointment of Jaya Bahadur Chand as police chief and the appointment of Nabaraj Silwal to the post.

Chief Justice Karki may be accused of overstepping her jurisdiction or overlooking Silwal's own qualifications, but there were strong indications that Chand was being promoted over more experienced colleagues due to direct intervention by Sher Bahadur Deuba. Silwal's writ in the Supreme Court was being heard on 2 May, and it seems to be no coincidence that the impeachment motion was registered late in the evening of 30 April so that Justice Karki would automatically have to step down.

But Sushila Karki did not go meekly away. Her last verdict, an hour or so before the impeachment motion was lodged up the road in Parliament on Sunday, was to find three ex-IGPs guilty in a kickback scam involving the purchase of armoured personnel carriers for Nepali UN peacekeepers in Sudan. She had showed similar gumption last year, at a time when most politicians were cowering and the media had been silenced, by ruling against the appointment of Lokman Singh Karki. In fact, the Supreme Court acted even while Parliament waffled on carrying through with the impeachment motion.

The irony of all this, of course, is that the same Parliament that started an impeachment motion against one Karki (Lokman) has now tried to hound out another Karki (Sushila). Yet the background to the two impeachment proceedings within six months couldn't be more different. One was notorious for the abuse of authority that he was supposed to be vigilant about, the other was a fearless, independent and incorruptible judge who was the embodiment of Lady Justice in Nepal.

Other factors were also at play to hasten the impeachment motion. Deuba just couldn't handle the fact that a woman his party was close to was standing up to him. His fragile ego was hurt, and he might have believed rumours that Karki was hauling him in for contempt of court. There were also several other verdicts on corruption cases that the Supreme Court was ruling on before Karki retired in June that would have been damaging to the party.

Deuba found a willing partner in Prime Minister Dahal, who had been alarmed by a recent Supreme Court order to arrest Bal Krishna Dhungel for his complicity in a war-time murder case. And the Nepal Army could have been spooked by her ruling on the Maina Sunar murder in which several officers were implicated.

Clearly, Karki had ruffled a lot of feathers. It may just be that she was too honest and too impervious to threats and intimidation for the corrupt political cartel that runs this country to tolerate. The executive and legislative branches have now brought down the remaining pillar in Nepal's democracy that was still standing upright, the judiciary. Now, there is only the press left.



successful pro-democracy campaigns, one whose leaders have sacrificed their lives for an open society, the rule of law and the separation of powers, should be the one that is dealing this unprecedented and possibly fatal blow to Nepal's democracy.

The latest sign that the NC has abandoned its remit was that party General Secretary Sashank Koirala (son of the great BP) said last month that 'the judiciary should be answerable to parliament'. A cabal within the NC was getting increasingly irritated by the fact that one of their own was, as Chief Justice, passing judgments in the Supreme Court against the party's interests.

The NC was conspicuously muted in its criticism of Lokman Singh Karki's abuse of authority after his appointment in 2013. It was only when the former CIAA chief started hounding the top political

Times.com

ONLINE VIDEOS



MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS

Unlike the Langtang and Manaslu Trail, the Annapurna Sanctuary wasn't affected by the earthquake, so the constant flow of trekkers from around the world keeps growing. Go online to get a taste of stunning vistas and dramatic weather along Nepal's most popular trail during this year's spring trekking season.



ALMOST GONE

One of the most well maintained and preserved palace complexes, Nuwakot Darbar, was ravaged by the earthquake. Yet reconstruction of the old palace is moving at a slow pace. Come along on a 360-degree tour of the palace complex and see the damage for yourself.



BUILDING BRIDGES

10 footbridges in Dolakha were either destroyed or damaged following the earthquakes of 2015, cutting villages off from medical help, schools and jobs. Two years later, locals are rebuilding. Follow us to the villages of the Tama Kosi Valley to see communities coming together to rebuild the trail bridges vital for travel, commerce and tourism.

NEPALI EDUCATION

Someone once told me, in Nepal, meaning of education changes according to the place you live and the economic status of your family ('High schools', Pawan Dhakal, #856). Unequal education means the opportunities you get are also unequal.

Akisha

A LONG WAIT

Two years lost and nothing gained ('Reconstructing the reconstruction authority', Om Astha Rai, #856). It is sad that even those people who want to work can't because of political bungling, how much more should the people wait?

Sham Mainali

NO HORN

The Ass has done it again ('Snarling at traffic', Backside, #856)! Personally, I don't have much faith in this campaign. Like any other policy that has been introduced, this will fizzle out too. Either that or Nepalis will surely find a way out and make the situation worse. Don't just enforce laws, educate. Many still don't see the point. And why would they? Who is going to shout on top of the lungs at that person crossing the road with his/her earphones on, and with his/her eyes glued to the mobile screen. While we keep getting hornier (or thornier) at least we have the Ass to calm us down, and make us laugh our lungs out.

Simrika Limbu

WHAT'S TRENDING



Being fulfilled

by Smriti Basnet

The annual Dhaba festival at Soaltee Crowne Plaza catered to all tastes. Read our review at nepalitimes.com and watch the video to see two chefs from the hotel prepare a succulent Chicken Tikka.

Most reached and shared on Facebook (8,596 people reached, 14 shares)

All together now

by Sashi Shrestha

A radio program that has helped transform awareness about post-earthquake reconstruction into behaviour change.

Most popular on Twitter (39 retweets, 73 likes)



High schools

by Pawan Dhakal

The education sector is so neglected in Upper Mustang and Dolpo that most teachers are unable to hold conversations in the language they are supposed to be teaching.

Most commented

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Two impeachments in six months, yet the background to the two couldn't be more different http://bit.ly/2oWW43x

Nissim Raj Angdemba@nissimangdemba
GoN should be ashamed of themselves for raising baseless accusations against those working against power abuse and corruption.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Chief Justice is suspended even if parliament registers a motion of #Impeachment & even before it votes on it http://bit.ly/2qsb5x #Nepal

United We Stand@ISDBR
Don't hesitate to say that she is the best SC Chief Justice. Not only that, she is the best govt. official till today. A big Salute to her!!

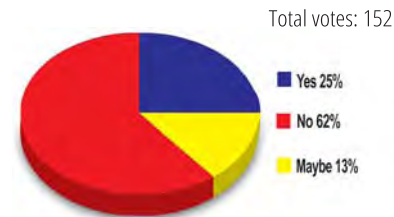
Nepali Times@nepalitimes
Milijuli Nepali has been sharing stories of hope and survival from villages affected by the 2015 earthquake http://bit.ly/2ps7foE

UNDP in Nepal@UNDPNepal
Wonderful story by @nepalitimes on the inimitable power of #radio to bring people together and sustain hope, particularly in difficult times

Times

Weekly Internet Poll #857

Q. Is it a good idea to hold local polls in two phases?



Weekly Internet Poll #858
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What approach should Nepal take to tourism?

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

Exit, the crusader

Sushila Karki is forced out of the Supreme Court, not in disgrace but in a blaze of glory

For weighing the value of one lone woman to the Nepali nation, you just have to reach back half a year ago, when the national prospects looked so bleak. Lokman Singh Karki had managed to cow down the political class, compromise



ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

the national police, and create a parallel state structure that was all set to sabotage the constitutional process and grab the Kathmandu crown with the help of quislings and opportunists. It required Sushila Karki to block him, with the politicians hiding behind her judicial robe. And as is their wont, the ingrate politicians have paid her back with an impeachment motion.

Nepal's judiciary has had great moments of jurisprudential exposition. There were fine judgements even during the autocratic Panchayat era and against King Gyanendra's power grab in 2005, but the overall politicisation of appointment of judges has weakened the judiciary.

Both the bar and the bench have gone into corrupt embrace, justice is compromised and delayed. The public suffers in grim fatalism. The politicisation

of the judiciary was further exacerbated when the Maoists entered the state structure as part of the peace process, and the lack of dignity and circumspection displayed by the present (Maoist) attorney general is a case in point.

The result of the overall atmosphere has been the 'setting' of court procedure, with collusion in the assignment of judges to particular cases. While individual judges sought to fight the tide, the courts lost their lustre to such an extent that the Nepal Police would not act on Supreme Court directives, as shown in its refusal to arrest the murder convict (Maoist) Bal Krishna Dhungel.

It required the advocate-turned-judge Sushila Karki, following up on her predecessor Kalyan Shrestha as chief justice, to try to jump start the judiciary again through activism within the year that she had before retirement. She despatched CIAA chief Lokman Singh Karki, declaring his 2013 appointment null and void when even the politicians who had appointed him didn't dare to impeach him. Now, it is the same politicians who are trying to impeach her.

Chief Justice Karki had just a month more to go before retirement, but the Maoist and Nepali Congress leaders wanted

to publicly prove that they were far above the law. Indeed, having ruled for a decade of the peace process under the faux democracy defined by 'consensus politics' these leaders had developed a sense of invincibility. They saw Chief Justice's personal austerity and public probity as a threat. By compromising the Supreme Court through such intemperate action, they also hoped to get the entire state super structure, including important constitutional commissions, to submit to their diktat.

A whole array of people were unhappy with the Chief Justice, including those enmeshed in long-pending corruption cases that she was committed to bringing up for decision. Congress Chair Deuba, of course, wanted his choice of police chief put in place, and was enraged that she stood in the way. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal would have wanted to punish the Chief Justice for ordering the arrest of the murder convict Dhungel.

Chief Justice Karki was simply trying to leave the judiciary in a better state than she found it at her oath-taking. The edifice of justice had to be reconstructed brick-by-brick, but she had too little time, which is why she may have seemed to some to be an activist judge in a hurry.

Sushila Karki has not been disgraced by the impeachment

motion, it is the political class led by Deuba and Dahal that is emitting bad odour, even as the country goes into local elections. They have created conditions where Chief Justice Karki will have retired while still in suspension, before the impeachment motion fails in Parliament, as it will. The impeachment motion is proof of the contempt the top political leadership has for representative politics, constitutionalism and separation of powers.

Indeed, not since the fall of King Gyanendra has there been such a unified voice across the spectrum of civil society, from radical progressives to liberals and the royalist right, all expressing outrage at the impeachment motion. The Acting Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli himself told the *Nagarik* newspaper the impeachment process was unfortunate, and a whole slew of former chief justices, judges and civil society leaders have condemned the procedure.

Some may have expected a modest people's movement to protest the impeachment action, but the public is focussed on ensuring that local government elections are held after a hiatus of 19 years, knowing that many forces would want to scuttle the exercise.

It would be good to see Chief Justice Karki back at the bench and retiring from the chair rather than while in suspension. But we know that Sushila Karki is not one to sit back and watch the judiciary degraded and compromised. Deuba and Dahal will live to rue the day they forced her out. 🇳🇵



GOPEN RAI

Exactly a year ago this month, Sushila Karki had just been appointed Chief Justice, but since Parliament hadn't yet ratified her appointment she was still acting.

MPs took months even to form the hearing committee to approve the recommendation by the Constitutional Council, so she took over her responsibilities



LEGALESE
Binata Dahal

without even taking her oath. The delay affected the hearings of 11 other justices, the Chief Election Commissioner and ambassadors.

The same MPs who delayed Karki's confirmation took no time at all to register the impeachment motion last week. But the move, spearheaded by Sher Bahadur Deuba of the NC and Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoists, has triggered a huge backlash from former Chief Justices, constitutional experts, civil society, the media and the public. Some MPs from the two parties even said they were either

not informed or never signed the impeachment order.

The clear message of this motion is that if the executive thinks that the decision of the judiciary is going against its wish it can target anyone with the signatures of one-fourth of MPs.

There is still time to withdraw this move. The much-delayed local election is taking place soon and there is great public anticipation.

This has somewhat muted the call for the withdrawal of the impeachment motion. But if it is not withdrawn, the motion will be taken as a precedent, and have a long-term impact on the separation of powers and

democracy.

Karki may have lacked the deeper understanding of jurisprudence of some intellectual and dynamic justices in the past, but being corrupt is worse than having comparatively less experience.

There was heavy pressure on Karki during the case against the then sitting Information and Communication Minister JP Gupta, or suspended CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki. But she never allowed it to deter her from what was right. She always listened to her conscience and based her verdicts on evidence.

The latest dispute was the case of Police DIG Nabaraj Silwal.

Unimpeachable evidence

The coalition doesn't want to impeach Sushila Karki, just suspend her so she can't hear high-profile corruption cases

Whether she is right or wrong in her judgement, the case was decided through a full bench. It is clear this decision is not the only reason political leaders wanted to suspend Karki.

It was to prevent her from passing judgement on several high-profile corruption cases that she was going to clear before stepping down next month. Otherwise, why the hurry to impeach someone whose term was expiring in 40 days?

Now that the fourth largest party in parliament, RPP Nepal, has withdrawn from the coalition, the impeachment motion will not be passed by the required two-thirds majority.

The principle of separation of powers has once more been blurred, just as it was when the four-party cartel made Chief justice Khil Raj Regmi the chief executive in 2012.

The former chief justices

rarely speak publicly on decisions by the government or Parliament. This time, some prominent figures from the judiciary have said that if the motion against Karki is not withdrawn, the Supreme Court will lose its independence.

Parliament has not been transparent about the impeachment motion against the suspended chief of the CIAA, Lokman Singh Karki, either. The NC didn't even feel it necessary to give any response to its reluctance to pursue the case. This time, their motive is transparent: not to impeach Karki, but just to suspend her so that she will not be allowed to hear the corruption cases.

The legislature should immediately reject the untimely, irrelevant and unprecedented impeachment motion against Karki because it will not only drag the independence of the judiciary into crisis but also threaten the rule of law and democracy in Nepal. 🇳🇵

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Qatar Airways has launched a new stopover package for its transit passengers in Doha that includes a one-night free stay in a luxury hotel and complementary transit visas. The package, which will be valid throughout the summer, is part of Qatar Tourism Authority's effort to promote and market Qatar among international travellers.

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China to Mexico

China Southern Airlines, the first Chinese carrier to operate a route to Latin America, has started a new flight route: Guangzhou-Mexico-Guangzhou. This route will operate every Sunday, Thursday and Saturday from Guangzhou via Vancouver. Beginning 1 June 2017, the airlines will also run second daily flights on the route: Guangzhou-London Heathrow-Guangzhou.

Flydubai holidays

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Seamless connection

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Tragic start to Himalayan Spring



TOGETHER ON TOP: Ueli Steck (left in the main pic) with Nima-Gelu and Tenji Sherpa in the kitchen of their camp on 20 April as they prepared to attempt a summit of Mt Everest.

A shadow descended on Nepal's Spring 2017 climbing season this week after the death of Swiss mountaineer Ueli Steck on Nuptse on 31 April.

Steck, 40, who was known as the 'Swiss Machine' for numerous record-setting climbs in the Alps and beyond, died after falling more than 1,000m as he was ascending Mt Nuptse. He was reportedly acclimatising for a summit of neighbouring Mt Everest to be followed by a traverse to adjacent Mt Lhotse, all without supplemental oxygen. In 2012, Steck climbed Mt Everest without oxygen.

Steck's death casts a pall over other notable expeditions this climbing season, which has a record number of climbers challenging Mt Everest. Among these is an attempt to reach the top of Mt Kanchanjunga, the world's third highest mountain, by three Nepali women: Maya Sherpa, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa Akita and Dawa Yangzum Sherpa.

The three previously climbed Mt Everest and K2 in Pakistan, the world's second-highest peak.

"Steck was climbing alone, so we don't know what happened," Ang Tshering Sherpa of the Nepal Mountaineering Association told *Nepali Times*. "Perhaps he slipped on the ice, or there was a rock fall."

Noted mountaineering chronicler Elizabeth Hawley of the Himalayan Database (*see box*) said Steck always climbed alone, which led to some questions about his claimed achievements. This included his solo summit of the south face of Annapurna I in 2014, for which he was awarded his second Piolet d'Or (Golden Ice Axe award) for mountaineering.

"He said he didn't give a damn if anybody believed him or not, and I think that was true: he climbed for himself," said Hawley, who had interviewed Steck many times. "He was mild-mannered and pleasant, and being alone on the mountain

wasn't an unreasonable risk for someone of his skills. It's possible that something fell and knocked him off the mountain: we'll probably never know," she added.

Hawley's colleague, and climber herself, Billi Bierling, was working on a translation of Steck's latest book when she heard the news, and wrote in a tribute to her friend: 'What I liked about Steck was his modesty and the fact that despite his amazing achievements he was down to earth – never arrogant.'

2017 could be a record climbing year because expeditions scheduled for 2014 and 2015, which were cancelled because of an avalanche on Mt Everest and the earthquakes, respectively, have been rescheduled.

Other notable climbs this year include an attempt by David Goettler of Germany and Italian Hervé Barmasse on the south face of Mt Xixapangma,

just north of the border in China and the 14th highest peak in the world. Bad weather forced them to abandon the route last year. Nepal's Min Bahadur Sherchan, 85, will be making another attempt to break the record as the oldest man on Everest. Blind Austrian climber Andy Holzer is back on Everest after turning back after the 2014 and 2015 disasters.

Also, Spanish ultra-marathoner Kilian Jornet will be making a second try at setting a new speed record for climbing Mt Everest from the Chinese side. But Hawley said she had little time for speed records, which are made to be broken: "The first one to set a record is a pioneer. The next ones are succeeding based on his experiences, his successes."

LAST ADVENTURE

Watch Ueli Steck explain the challenge of climbing Mt Everest and Mt Lhotse. He died acclimatising on adjacent Mt Nuptse.

[nepalitimes.com](#)



Mountains of data

Since the first US expedition to Mt Everest in 1963 until recently, Kathmandu-based journalist Elizabeth Hawley met every year with every climbing expedition that claimed to have climbed a peak in Nepal, quizzing them in detail and taking meticulous records. The result is the Himalayan Database, which has records of all expeditions in the Nepal Himalaya since 1905.

The database includes 454 mountains, and is supplemented by information gathered from books, alpine journals and correspondence with climbers. Besides Nepal, there is information on expeditions on both sides of border peaks such as Everest, Cho Oyu, Makalu and Kangchenjunga. Data on expeditions to trekking peaks are included for early attempts, first ascents and major accidents.

The database is searchable by peak, climber, expedition, nationality, season, mortality rates and causes and more. It includes selected pre-set reports plus capability for custom searches and analyses, and literature references to journals, books and published expedition reports.

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This has been an unseasonably wet summer, and the pre-monsoons haven't just appeared prematurely but also brought unprecedented precipitation. The total rainfall for April was 20% higher than normal, and the temperatures up to 3 degrees below normal. This trend is going to continue, although at a somewhat less intense rate. Expect afternoon buildup during the weekend with sometimes violent storms over the mountains. Early next week there will be more pre-monsoon squalls.

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20 years and 2 brands later, businessman Pradip Man Shakya is still going strong

SMRITI BASNET

Businessman Pradip Man Shakya has always trusted his instincts. Although he graduated in Fine Arts from Lalit Kala Campus, his intuition guided him to launch Shraman Apparel, a garment business, in 1990. Shakya's sixth sense boded him well. In over two decades the company has proliferated and spun off two popular clothing lines: Karuna Natural Wears and Juju Wears. This year Shraman celebrates its 27th anniversary and the man behind it could not be more elated.

"I always felt the urge to make something out of my life," said Shakya. "Once I found it, I didn't let go."

When the entrepreneur established Karuna in 2006, he hoped to encourage Nepalis to try clothing made here. Minimalistic, comfortable, a brand ahead of its time, Karuna uses natural fibres like hemp, bamboo and nettle to make tops, pants, shirts and T-shirts. Today, the line has expanded to include leather belts, wallets and even bamboo underwear.

Shakya founded his recent endeavour, Juju, in 2013. The T-shirt company banks on Nepal's vast cultural heritage and colloquial as well as world-famous adages for its designs. Priced lower than its sister brand, the T-shirts feature global personalities like Albert Einstein and Abraham Lincoln wearing Dhaka topis, colourful re-creations of Bhairav and Machhendranath, pop culture references and quotations.

"A T-shirt is a statement, it inspires not only those who wear it but those who see it too," said Shakya.

The businessman ran a factory in the 1990s with 500 workers, exporting to GAP and Walmart. "I knew nothing then, it was



GOPEN RAI



all learning by doing," said Shakya.

By 1995, he felt the urge to promote clothes made in Nepal. He flew to Japan with some samples and came back with an order worth \$9,000. There was no looking back. In 1997, Shakya created Karuna and started exporting to countries like France and Japan. By 2006, he opened his first store in Darbar Marg under the same label.

By then, most of his garment contemporaries had closed shop following the political turmoil, and moved on. But Shakya stood his ground. "I couldn't jump to another business, I kept on with it," said the 56-year-old who, with the support of his export business, found it easier to sustain his venture.

He still remembers how those entering his Darbar Marg store grimaced, mumbling grievances about how expensive the Nepali brand was. Disregarding them, Shakya adamantly continued.

He sees a stark contrast between then

and today, when demand for products made in Nepal is growing. The driving factor, Shakya feels, is consistency. "They valued our quality, and kept coming back for it," said the entrepreneur, who sees to it personally that quality is not compromised. He is involved in every stage, from creation of the designs to release of the final product. Shakya sources fabrics from Sankhuwasabha, Bhaktapur and a vegetable dyeing venture in Kakani, and raw fabrics and threads from India and China.

Following the success of his Karuna store in Kathmandu, he recently opened an outlet in Pokhara. Juju already has two stores in the capital, and Shakya says sales are increasing 25-30 per cent a year. Recently, the company opened a Karuna showroom in Canada, and sent 200 pieces of Juju T-shirts to Australia and Hong Kong.

Fixed on his office wall is a sample of a new design with a quote from Abraham Lincoln that perfectly summarises his vision for tomorrow: "The best way to predict the future is to create it." 🇳🇵

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SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
in ANNAPURNA BASE CAMP

Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) is one of the most popular trekking destinations in the world, but limited hotels and lodges on the hiking trail has left visitors sleeping in dining rooms and storage areas. Tight quarters

during spring season get even worse in autumn when trekker arrivals double.

The number of international visitors to the Annapurna Conservation Area, most destined for the ABC and Ghandruk treks, has increased three-fold in the last 20 years, but the number of hotels remains the same, thanks to the rigid policy of the Annapurna Conservation Area

Project (ACAP), which has barred locals from opening new hotels or expanding to existing ones.

As visitor numbers continue to surge after the earthquake, the situation is becoming critical. "I tried my best to add rooms to adjust for the growing number of tourists but ACAP never allowed me to," says Ram Gurung, whose father started New Panorama Guest House, maximum

occupancy 25, in Deuarali three decades ago. "I receive more than 250 guests a day in peak season and accommodate them in dining and store rooms or wherever possible," he adds. According to ACAP's Pokhara office, 200-250 foreigners a day are taking permits for the ABC trek this spring season. This figure usually doubles in the autumn. There are no figures for domestic tourists.

Although there are limited hotels after Chhomrong point, ACAP doesn't cap the number of permits.

More than 19,029 foreigners trekked to ABC in 2016.

"We feel really bad when our guests complain about poor accommodation services," says Amit Gurung of Polar Trekking and Expedition in Pokhara. "ACAP needs to understand the growing popularity of ABC trekking and act



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sanctuary

The Annapurna Base Camp Trek urgently needs more accommodation or to limit trekkers



ALL PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA



accordingly. The only solution is to build new lodges along the trail.”

There are four hotels in ABC, five in Machhapuchhre Base Camp, four in Deurali, two in Himalaya, three in Dovan, five in Bamboo, three in Upper Sinuwa and three in Lower Sinuwa.

New lodges are essential if Nepal is to sustain its most popular trekking route, says Deepak Raj Adhikari of the Trekking Agencies

Association of Nepal (TAAN), Western Region Association, in Pokhara. “It’s our responsibility to accommodate tourists comfortably during their treks, but we have failed to do so,” he explains. “ACAP should either develop a mechanism to issue limited trekking permits or allow locals to build new hotels.”

ACAP is making plans to allow more hotels, says Rashmi

Acharya of ACAP, Pokhara, but it must proceed cautiously before giving the green light to more development on the conservation area’s public land.

The organisation is finalising a policy that will allow locals to build new hotels on the trail, she adds. Once it is approved, ACAP will form a committee, including locals along the ABC trail, and start consultations.

Currently, ACAP is guided by the Conservation Area Management Regulation (CAMR), 1997. Acharya refused to speculate on the number and locations of new hotels. Of the 35 popular trekking routes in Nepal, only three, Langtang, Manaslu and Rolwalin, were disturbed by the quake. ABC trekking was unaffected and has continued growing in popularity. 🇳🇵

BREATH-TAKING: Visitors to Annapurna Sanctuary Hotel (centre, above) see stunning views of the Annapurna range, including: Machhapuchhre (left and right below) and Himchuli (centre).



Watch to get a taste of the stunning vistas and dramatic weather along Nepal’s most popular trail, the Annapurna Sanctuary, during this year’s spring trekking season. (See more pictures online)

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EVENTS



Poetry with Alok,

Join for a night of poetry, comedy and performance with gender non-conforming writer and entertainer Alok Vaid-Menon.

22 May, 6 pm onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, Pradarshani Marg, Kathmandu, Rs 500, For more information: wordwarriorsnepal@gmail.com

Bird counting,

Make a day out of bird watching and be part of the Urban-Rural Bird Count Phase II, organised by Bird Conservation Nepal. Registration required.

1 to 10 May, For more information: (01) 4417805, 4420213

Film opportunity,

A chance for independent young filmmakers with projects to apply for the Writing Program and Asia Threads organised by DocSkool.

For more information: docskoolnepal@gmail.com, www.docskool.org/Home



Click away,

Hone your photography skills with a 10-day workshop for beginners. Learn from professional artists and photographers.

6 to 15 May, 7 to 10 am, Artudio, Chhauni Hospital Road, Rs 5,500, 9803779777/9813931488/ 9851180088

Pop-up bazaar,

Discover varieties of high-quality products made in Nepal. Unique selection of clothing, jewellery, books and home decor will be displayed after the organic vegetable market.

6 May, 1 to 5 pm, Le Sherpa restaurant, Lazimpat, 98510.29049, karavankathmandu@gmail.com

Photo Nepal,

Great pictures by Thai photographers will be displayed in the May session of Photo Nepal. The photos are based on the nature, culture and people of Nepal.

5 to 10 May, 11 am to 4 pm, Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu, For more information: mediacenter@ntb.org.np

Bloggers networking,

Sign up for a free networking event for Rising Junkiri. Aspiring bloggers and writers can participate too.

10 June, 2 to 8 pm, Octave Kathmandu, Woodland Complex, Darbarmarg, Admission: Free for members, non-members will be ticketed, For more details: risingjunkiri@gmail.com



Short story contest,

Let the writer in you emerge. Apply for Writing Nepal 2017: A Short Story Contest, organised by La.Lit in partnership with writer Samrat Upadhyay and Indiana Review.

Deadline: 15 August, For more information: facebook.com/lalitmag.com

Discovering Patan

Join a tour to discover Patan – an initiative of Kathmandu Triennale 2017. Collect an interactive map of this cultural city at the entrance to Patan Museum.

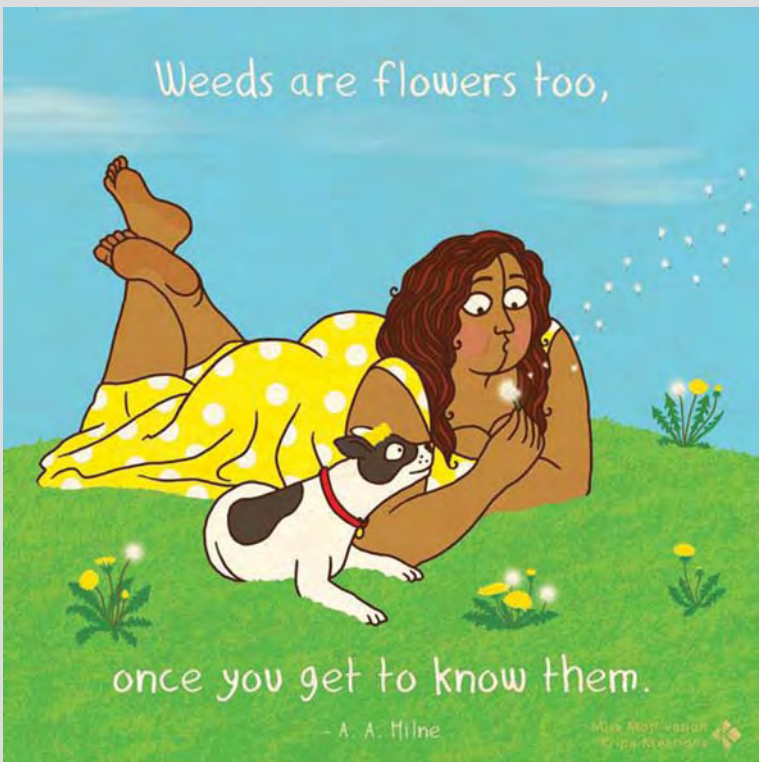
9 May, 10 am to 1 pm, For more details 9818239744

http://kt.artmandu.org/



MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Kanta dAb dAb live,

Spend a musical evening with this sitar, percussion and bass trio. Enjoy as they entice you to groove with their fusion beats.

6 May, 8 to 11 pm, House of Music, Thamel, Rs.300, 9851075172

Flow live,

Book your seats to enjoy live music by The Flow Band.

5 May, 7 pm onwards, Sky Lounge, Hattisar, For details: 9849552341



Drum circle,

Groove to the rhythms of a drum circle this weekend. Bring along your own drums or just sit back and enjoy the music.

10 May, 6.30 to 8.30 pm, House of Music, Thamel, 985107517210

Fusion night,

Enjoy your weekend to the beats of fusion music by Upendra and Friends.

6 May, 8 to 11 pm, Ai-La Lounge and Restaurant, Kumaripati, Free entry (01) 5008681, ailalounge@gmail.com



Kathmandu Chorale,

Hear Hannah Dornon direct the choir as it performs classics and pieces from the musical 'Sister Act'. The choir will be performing pieces by notable composers like Eric Whitacre, René Clausen and Thomas Tallis.

6 May, 3.30 to 6 pm, KISC, Jhamsikhel, For more information:

www.thekathmanduchorale.wordpress.com

DINING



Lhakpa's Chulo,

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, and other continental cuisines - take your pick.

Jhamsikhel, 01-5542986

Dechenling,

The place to head to for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, its pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings.

Thamel, (01) 4412158

Dan Ran,

The best authentic Japanese food in this part of town.

Jhamsikhel, (01) 5521027



Dhokaima Café,

Try indigenous cocktails at the Rukhmuni Bar.

Patan Dhoka, (01)5522113, dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com

1905,

Heritage boutique suites with garden dining, 1905 Suites and Restaurants is now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bookings open for four boutique suites with promotional rates and offers till June.

Nagpokhari, Naxal, For more information: 9860374450

Barista Lavazza,

The Valley's best European inspired coffee-culture cafe serves excellent mochas and lattes. Don't forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich.

Jawalakhel, (01)4005123, barista.nepal@gmail.com



Downtown,

Go Indian at this restaurant, although it serves Chinese and Continental food too. Don't miss out on the Biryani.

Pulchok Road, (01)5010751

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Megauli, Chitwan, (01) 4429820

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Nuwakot, (01)4700426, info@rural-heritage.com



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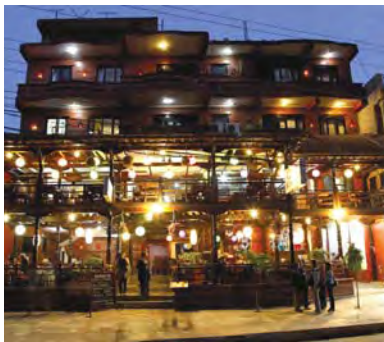
Chisapani Baad Bhanjhyang Road, (01) 4316377

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www.neydohotel.com/contact/html



Hotel Landmark Pokhara,

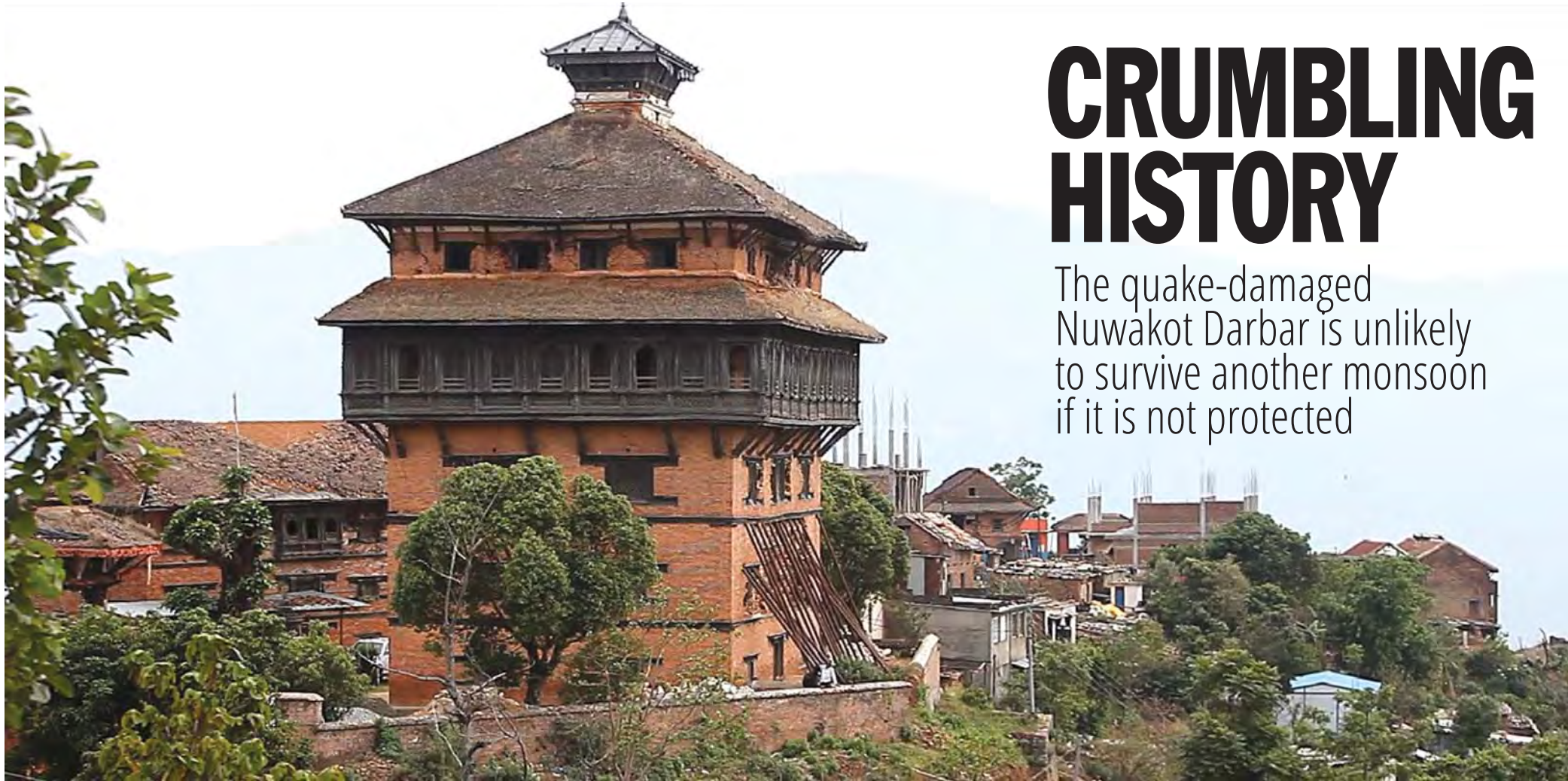
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Lakeside Pokhara, (61) 462908, 9851059096

Milla Guesthouse,

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Bhaktapur, 9851024137



PICS: BIKRAM RAI

CRUMBLING HISTORY

The quake-damaged Nuwakot Darbar is unlikely to survive another monsoon if it is not protected



SAHINA SHRESTHA
in NUWAKOT

On 25 April 2015, Govinda Baniya, office staff at the Department of Archaeology (DoA), had just taken a break from his museum duties when the earthquake struck. As the temples and monuments in Nuwakot Darbar Square swayed and palls of dust covered the area, around 30 people visiting the palace-turned-museum ran for cover.

Sitting sublimely over the Trisuli River, the Nuwakot Darbar was probably the best preserved and impressive palace complex outside the Kathmandu Valley. Built by Prithvi Narayan Shah as his forces attacked Kathmandu in the late 18th century, it was nine storeys high before the 1934 earthquake reduced it to seven.

The 2015 quake damaged the south and west sides of the palace. Pillars developed cracks and the roof came unhinged. Aftershocks and the subsequent monsoons caused further damage. “The only reason the building is still standing is because it has a strong foundation and was

periodically maintained before the earthquake,” says Baniya.

Before King Prithvi Narayan unified Nepal, Nuwakot served as a colony of Kantipur (Kathmandu), and was regarded as the main western gate to the Valley. It was the central trade point between Tibet and Nepal, and the three Malla kingdoms of the Valley had constructed palaces to house their representatives.

It’s believed that King Prithvi narayan brought in artisans from the Valley to build the Darbar, and influences of Kathmandu can be clearly seen in the intricate wooden carvings as well as in local place names, like Indra Chok. Talk to any local here and you will be proudly guided through the historic importance of the place, but frustrations over stalled rebuilding are bound to surface.

“The Director General of DoA has visited this place a number of times and every time he promises to expedite the reconstruction, but nothing has happened yet,” says local resident Birendra Kumar Shahi.

The Chinese government has signed a MoU with the DoA to rebuild the main palace and smaller buildings in the Nuwakot Darbar

Square, while the DoA is responsible for rebuilding the temples.

According to DoA Director General Bhesh Dahal, work in Nuwakot will start as soon as rebuilding of the Nautale Darbar in Basantapur ends. It is also being reconstructed with help from China.

Two years after the earthquake, it is clear that nothing has been done to protect the monuments, let alone start reconstruction or renovation. There is neither scaffolding to support the monuments nor tarps to cover the roof, whose leaking caused further damage to the interior. The south and west walls are supported by metal rods.

Stone statues and pillars are being housed on the ground floor of the palace, along with the museum’s artefacts, including the bronze statue of King Prithvi narayan and his two queens. But many of the stone statues have been marked with numbers and they, along with exquisitely carved pillars, lay unprotected on the floor.

The Nuwakot Darbar complex is on UNESCO’s world heritage tentative list and Christian Manhart, UNESCO country representative, says the government should at least work to protect the monuments. “I am not talking about the

overall reconstruction: I am talking about covering the roofs with tarpaulins and supporting the structures with scaffoldings. It must be protected to prevent collapse. In its present condition, the palace will not survive another monsoon,” warns Manhart, who visited Nuwakot last month.

Temples and monuments too

The temples and monuments surrounding the Nuwakot Darbar, including the Garadghar with its unique soldiers’ frieze, are in no better shape than the palace. The roof of the Garadghar has completely collapsed and the structure may have to be completely rebuilt. A section of the exquisite soldiers’ frieze – carvings of Gorkha soldiers who took Kathmandu – lies buried under salvaged timber, which sits outdoors, unprotected.

The Taleju Bhagawati temple to the north was also ravaged by the earthquake and the idol has been moved to a makeshift structure. After the quake, the 400-year-old Bhairabi temple titled slightly to the left, but because it was neglected during the monsoon, the temple collapsed.

Locals worry that the palace complex may face the same fate as the rest house built during

COLLATERAL DAMAGE: The seven-storey Nuwakot darbar is propped up by metal rods. Without proper care, UNESCO warns that the palace will not survive another monsoon. The stone sculptures and other archaeologically important artifacts stored on the ground floor of the Nuwakot Darbar (*left*). The timber salvaged from the Bhairabi temple, lies outside unprotected (*right*).

the time of Rana Bahadur Shah, grandson of King Prithvi narayan. Says local Surendra Kumar Shahi: “When the rest house started deteriorating, our fathers and grandfathers requested King Mahendra to restore it: although he gave the orders it was never restored. Given the government’s apathy, it will not be surprising if the palace complex vanished just like the rest house, erasing another part of history forever.”



HERITAGE LIVE!

Series coordinated by Alok Siddhi Tuladhar



Two years after the earthquake, the historic town of Nuwakot struggles to protect its famous seven-storey darbar and other surrounding monuments. Follow us on a 360-degree video tour of the Nuwakot Darbar Square.

nepalimes.com



Captain Fantastic

Veteran actor Matt Ross has written and directed a film that is fresh, engaging, entertaining and infuriating. *Captain Fantastic* is a heavy-hitting independent film, which screened for the first time at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2016 and a



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

few months later at the Cannes Film Festival in the "Un Certain Regard" category reserved for young savants. Surprisingly, the film broke out of the caveat reserved for such free-spirited, artsy films, earning a Best Actor nomination for Viggo Mortensen, who is at the helm of this unusual family drama.

Mortensen plays Ben Cash, a determined father of six whose outlook on American life

embodies the slightly nauseating trope that people spout when eviscerating the evils of capitalism and expounding on the importance of human freedom and individualism, as if manifest destiny is all that matters in this complex, deeply stratified, often difficult to navigate modern world. Carried away by grand notions of how they should live (like noble savages), the Cash family has removed to the woods where the children learn survival skills and are homeschooled in philosophy, literature, quantum physics and other impressive topics; Noam Chomsky is their hero.

At some point, watching this beautifully shot, wonderfully written film, every alarm bell starts to go off in your head as you begin to gauge the exceptional but also possibly damaging effects this kind of rigorous parenting can have on young minds. Spouting liberty and freedom and forsaking consumerist capitalism is all very well, just as anarchy seems fun when you're young, until you realise that isolation is as harmful to the psyche as video games are to the imagination,

and simple living is a choice made only by the highly privileged.

Luckily, this is not a film that tries to indoctrinate. Instead, it is a portrait of some wonderful but flawed human beings who deeply believe in a certain way of life, and are brought into direct confrontation with the defects in their ideology. When I was training for my Masters in Fine Arts, specifically film-making, one of my most impressively academic professors gave us some invaluable advice: when you are making a film about ideas, make sure you include a voice somewhere that argues against the holes in your model so that the people watching know that you don't think you are infallible. *Captain Fantastic* follows that advice, and succeeds because of it.

Watching this film gave me a funny feeling: a mixture of deep concern along with moments of delight, hilarity and sadness. Until I went away for higher studies I was raised in Nepal, where the teacher's word is (still) law; having been muffled for so long I can testify that there is much to be said for giving growing minds the freedom to really explore. But, as this film ultimately recognises, almost everything is okay as long as it is not over the top. 🇳🇵



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com

HAPPENINGS



RSS

WE ARE IN: President of Federal Socialist Forum-Nepal, Upendra Yadav (left), during a press meet in Kathmandu on Wednesday. The party announced it will take part in the first round of the local election and nominated candidates in Kathmandu and Pokhara.



EMBASSY OF INDIA, KATHMANDU

ELECTION WHEELS: Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Manjeev Singh Puri, hands over vehicles to the Election Commission on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

YOUNG GUN: Bibeksheel Nepali's Ranju Darshana registers her candidacy for the post of Kathmandu mayor at the National Assembly Hall on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

ON THE MOVE: Devotees pull the chariot of Rato Machindranath in Pulchok, Lalitpur, on the first day of the festival on Sunday.



NEW ZEALAND CONSULATE

REMEMBERING HEROES: Australian Ambassador Peter Budd with New Zealand Consul General Lisa Choegyal at the ANZAC Day ceremony at the Australian Embassy in Maharjanj on 25 April.

An Aviation Milestone

We are proud to announce that both Yeti Airlines and Tara Air are now ISSA Operator airlines. The IATA Standard Safety Assessment (ISSA) Program is a new global safety standard for commercial airlines not covered by existing IATA programs. Our two airlines are the first and only airlines in Nepal to attain this milestone.

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The kakistoracy

Shiva Gaunle in *Kantipur*,
3 May

कान्तिपुर

The way ruling coalition MPs have defended the impeachment motion against Chief Justice Sushila Karki proves that their move is nothing but an attempt to exert control over the judiciary.

Ruling party leaders sought to meet Karki ahead of the Supreme Court's final verdict on the appointment of the new police chief, but Karki refused to meet their emissaries since Supreme Court guidelines do not allow the Chief Justice to meet parties to a *sub judice* case.

They decided to teach her a lesson.

NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba was angry with Karki because of her ruling against the appointment of the new police chief. But there were other reasons. Karki was also to hear a high-profile case this week about the encroachment of Phewa Lake in Pokhara. She was delivering final verdicts on other cases, including one involving ex-Minister Govinda Raj Joshi. Now she is out of office, and those charged with corruption are heaving a sigh of relief.

Karki's tenure was ending on 7 June and she had publicly vowed to settle all high-profile corruption cases before then. She probably didn't realise that she had powerful enemies who would stop at nothing.

The impeachment motion against Karki will most probably fail, but the country will have to pay the price. All constitutional bodies will proceed cautiously from here on, and the Constitution could even fail eventually. Ours is a democratic system in which the executive has limited authority,

and cannot perform specific tasks of constitutional bodies. For example, elections are held by the Election Commission and corruption cases are investigated by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority. These are some of the checks and balances in the Constitution.

Now, any party that has 150 MPs (one-fourth of the numeric



GOPEN RAI

strength in Parliament) can bully the Election Commission. The Public Service Commission may have to think twice before selecting civil servants. The National Human Rights Commission may not have the guts to speak out against the violation of human rights by major parties. Good governance and accountability are in deep peril.

The Constitution is clear about the basis of impeachment. Only those who have seriously violated the Constitution and other laws can be impeached. It is clear that the ruling parties knew that they would not be able to justify and pass the impeachment against the Chief Justice. Even so, they filed it because they wanted to keep her out of their way for a few weeks to avoid verdicts on corruption cases.

Deuba's fall from grace

Ameet Dhakal in *www.setopati.com*, 1 May

सेतोपाटी

The manner in which the impeachment motion was registered against Chief Justice Sushila Karki, and the kinds of charges levelled against her, show just how ridiculous those in power can become.

The legislature is empowered to use the impeachment process against the judiciary and constitutional bodies as a last resort, if they cause demonstrable harm to the nation by overstepping their

evidence about the CIAA chief's abuse of power to run a parallel government in defiance of the legislative and judiciary. When the impeachment motion was finally filed against him, it was a justified move, one appreciated by the public.

In Chief Justice Karki's case, necessary public debate was missing. While some people have doubted her legal and constitutional expertise, no one has ever questioned her integrity.

The charges levelled against the Chief Justice are so baseless and frivolous that they only expose the malicious intent of the government. The prime accusation is that she interfered in the executive's right to choose the police chief. But her verdict clearly states that the government can appoint the police chief only if it follows its own guidelines. It is the court's duty to judge whether the executive's decisions are in tune with the Constitution and other laws.

In her verdict on the petition against the Maoist-NC government's decision to appoint Jaya Bahadur Chand (who had lower performance scores than his competitors) as police chief, Karki was merely fulfilling her duty as Chief Justice.

Former justice Balram KC has never been the Chief Justice's admirer. But he has publicly defended her verdict against Chand's appointment, arguing that either the best performing officer must be appointed as police chief or the guidelines must be revised.

How did that verdict infringe on the rights of the executive? None of the MPs who signed the impeachment motion have dared to explain it in public. And it was a bench of five justices that unanimously nullified Chand's appointment. Why was

the impeachment motion not filed against four other justices?

Other accusations against the Chief Justice are weak and ridiculous. For example, she has been accused of discriminating against justices while assigning them responsibilities. It is a Chief Justice's basic right to decide which justices will hear which cases: she does not need to consult the government for that. Neither Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal nor NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba has the right to grill Chief Justice Karki about this.

Why did Dahal and Deuba gang up on her? Details of their joint conspiracy will surely come out. At this moment, it looks like they were afraid that the Chief Justice could also nullify Prakash Aryal's appointment (as the new police chief after Chand's promotion was overturned by the apex court).

In his second tenure as Prime Minister, Dahal had partially restored his reputation. But he has now lost it all in one fell swoop. The conspiracy to impeach the Chief Justice will be even more counter-productive for Deuba. In his past three tenures as Prime Minister, he has disgraced himself and his party many a time. But this will be his biggest shame.

Now the question: how will the NC shed the dishonour brought upon it by Deuba? Two-thirds of the MPs who signed the impeachment against the Chief Justice are from that party, so the NC will have to take the biggest share of the blame.

This impeachment motion is bound to fail, but it has already suspended the Chief Justice. Deuba has deliberately misused the constitutional provision of impeachment and it has set a seriously bad precedent.

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Impeachment

कान्तिपुर

Vatsyayan in *Kantipur*, 3 May

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The earthquake damaged the roof of the Supreme Court building. The Prime Minister did not repair it. He instead took aim at the judiciary.”

Ex-Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha in
Annapurna Post daily, 4 May

Here is a model for connecting villages, creating jobs and boosting local economies after a disaster

SONIA AWALE
in DOLAKHA

Six decades ago, Swiss geologist Toni Hagen walked across Nepal asking locals what they needed the most. They asked him for bridges to connect them to neighbouring villages and markets. There are now a lot more motorable roads, but even then, in many remote valleys of Nepal the demand is still for bridges.

When the two big earthquakes of April-May 2015 struck Dolakha, 10 trail bridges were either damaged or destroyed, cutting villages off from medical help and relief supplies. Bridges that were listing after the 25 April quake, fell into rivers in the 12 May aftershock, which had its epicentre only 5 km from the town of Singati.

“This bridge was badly damaged in the first quake, but people made temporary repairs using wood, and they used it to construct this new one,” said Lila Jirel, sub-engineer at the Dolakha district Coordination Committee (DCC), pointing out the rusted wires of the old bridge dangling across the river.

Jirel opted for the suspension type construction with sturdy galvanized iron decks and wire mesh for protection. The foundation of the towers and the walls is reinforced concrete to prevent damage in future earthquakes.

The Jhangrali bridge near Singati was built by the local community with help from Trail Bridge Support Unit (TBSU) which is a project of the Swiss aid agency, Helvetas. The Swiss have been building foot bridges across Nepal ever since Hagen’s days (*see box*). They had built



nearly all the 79 bridges that were damaged in the earthquake in the 14 worst-affected districts, and in two years Helvetas has already rebuilt 72 of them.

TBSU uses the community model for rebuilding, which is why reconstruction has been swift. A committee is set up to manage construction, and members are provided with technical support for building and maintenance. Once complete, a Bridge Maintenance Committee is formed with the DCC and Bridge Wardens appointed and trained

for routine maintenance.

“Trail bridge rebuilding is one of the fastest sectors to recover post-quake because of the decentralised way in which communities themselves were involved in reconstruction,” said Man Jonchhe at Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). “And now with unprecedented rights installed by the new constitution at the local level, trail bridges will be built even faster after the local elections.” (*Read full interview online.*) Subani Tamang, 64, owns

a farm on the other side of the road, but could not travel to meet relatives after the earthquake. Nor could relief material be taken to villages up the mountains and there was no access to the market for her produce. So she decided to donate a part of her land for one of the bridge towers.

“Since the bridge collapsed in the earthquake, people in all nine villages on this side were having a hard time. After talking it over with my family I decided to give away my land,” she said, heaving a large bundle of hay across

the bridge. “I feel good about it because what is there to take with us when we die? It is best to make our lives easier while we live.”

Like Tamang, there are about 7,000 people who have benefited from the 86m long bridge. Construction started in December 2015 and was completed in nine months at a cost of Rs 5.7 million.

Nawaraj Moktan of TBSU said trail-bridge building in Nepal has been a Swiss speciality and Nepali engineers have amassed a lot of experience in design and construction in difficult terrain.

Moktan has trained bridge-builders in Laos and others have shared their expertise with engineers in Bhutan, Tanzania and Burundi.

There is high demand for bridges in Nepal, so TBSU selects them on the basis of the population that will benefit, prioritising areas where there is a detour of more than one hour in the absence of a bridge, the presence of disadvantaged communities, and access to market through roads on the other side of the river.



Bridge builders



ALL PICS: KUNDA DIXIT



“From the very early days the philosophy has been to involve local communities in building bridges, and we are still using that model,” Moktan explained as he hiked down from the road to the village of Jaruwa. He remembers building the bridge over the Charange Khola in 1995 after floods and landslides ravaged Dolakha and Sindhupalchok, isolating hundreds of villages from health posts, schools and jobs. He is back to supervise its reconstruction after the earthquake.

“We stopped farming for a year because the bridge used to be our only route to take the oxen to plough our fields on the other side,” said Kamala Nepali, secretary of the Bridge Management Committee. “Now that the bridge is being rebuilt, we are all so relieved. We couldn’t farm and many of us actually went hungry.”

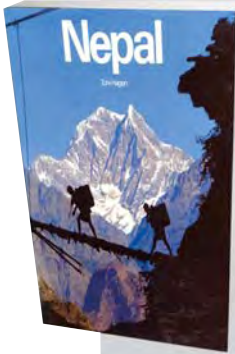
When it is completed in July, the 56m long Rs 2.3 million bridge will connect 528 households to the highway to Charikot. But construction has been delayed because of the lack

River-crossing

The Swiss involvement with building foot bridges in Nepal begins with geologist Toni Hagen, who experienced first-hand the difficulties of travelling in the mountains. Hagen first came to Nepal in 1950 and over the next 12 years walked 12,000km across the country.

He helped launch the Pedestrian Bridge Project in 1960, and the first foot bridge was built over the Marsyangdi a year later. The Suspension Bridge Project started in 1973 and continued until 2001 with help from the Swiss Association for Technical Assistance (SATA), later known as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Another Swiss aid agency, Helvetas, started the Bridge Building at Local Level project in 1989, involving local communities to use a flexible design. Today, 350 new bridges are being built every year and there are more than 6,000 across Nepal, and not just in the mountains.



REBUILDING OURSELVES: Pesi Doma and Rama Sherpa (*above*) hurry across the newly rebuilt suspension footbridge over the Bhothe Kosi at Jhyankhu to catch a bus to Charikot. They were cut off from the road for many months after the earthquake destroyed an earlier bridge.

Subani Tamang (*left*) donated part of her farm to accommodate the tower for the bridge.

of workers. So the bridge is being built by workers from Bardia.

One of them is Rabu Raji, who used to go to India to find work every winter. This year, he came to Dolakha because he heard there were well-paying jobs in post-earthquake reconstruction. He doesn’t regret it. “Why go to India when there is work in our own country,” he asked, tightening the steel suspension cable over the river.

But not everywhere has it been easy to set up local communities to help build and maintain bridges. There are disagreements about the site, costs and wages, and local rivalries sometimes make it complicated.

Binod Tamang, secretary of the committee managing the Jhangrali bridge, had to work hard and use all his diplomatic skills to get the communities to work together. The bridge committees have served as the responsible agency in the absence of elected village councils.

Said Tamang: “If we had elected local bodies, they would have understood our situation and problem. But we are all excited about local elections.”



Communities in Dolakha are rebuilding their towns and villages that were all destroyed in the earthquakes of 2015. Follow us to the villages of the Tama Kosi Valley to see how locals are getting together to rebuild the foot bridges that are vital for travel, commerce and tourism.



DIPESH KHATRI

RISING FROM THE DUST: The bridge over the Tama Kosi in Singati in May 2015 (*top*) and new construction along the bazar this week.



Rising from the rubble

Very few people had heard of Singati before the earthquakes of April-May 2015. Today, this settlement in Dolakha district is seared in the national memory because of the images of death and destruction two years ago.

Dozens were buried under the rubble when the 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck on 25 April, and the 7.3 aftershock on 12 May brought rockslides down on hundreds of survivors queuing up for food and relief supplies. In all, it is estimated that 200 people lost their lives here in the two quakes.

No one used to live here because Singati was a cremation ground at the confluence of the Tama Kosi and Bhothe Kosi and people thought it was haunted. But when the road was built to service several planned hydropower projects on the rivers, Singati grew quickly and had the look of the wild west.

The flimsy concrete buildings collapsed like houses of cards when the earthquakes struck, the weakened structures that survived the first quake went down in the second. Others were buried as the mountains came crashing down onto the roads and villages along the river.

Today, Singati has the look of a boomtown again. There is concrete being laid, houses are being rebuilt, carpenters are busy. “We never imagined Singati would grow into a city like this,” says Binod Tamang, who is only 28 but still remembers Singati consisting of a few timber buildings.

There are at least four new hydropower plants coming up, with the 465MW Tama Kosi III slated for completion next year after delays caused by the earthquake and Indian Blockade. Further upstream is the site of the 900MW Upper Tama Kosi dam which will inundate a part of the Valley. There are four other projects on other rivers in Dolakha.

The trail to Rolwaling is being repaired, and when it opens for trekking the region is expected to rival the Annapurna. Singati will benefit because of its market. Further into the future, if the Lamabagar route to Tibet is made motorable, Singati would be along a new transit route between Nepal and China.

The biggest obstacle to speedy reconstruction, as elsewhere, is the delay in disbursement of housing grants. “The Rs 300,000 is only enough for a stop-gap house, so they should just give that out and let people build sturdier temporary shelters,” says Tamang.

The other reason for the delay is that even if people have money, there aren’t enough masons, carpenters and construction workers. There are so few young men in the surrounding villages that workers are not available even if the daily wage is Rs 1,000 with food.

Every household here in Singati has someone working in Malaysia or the Gulf, and the remittance they send home is what is paying for the rebuilding, not the government grant. “I don’t know why people are migrating to Malaysia: they can easily earn as much here on reconstruction,” says Dolakha District Coordination Committee sub-engineer, Lila Jirel.



Who shrank Mt Everest?

As if all the attacks on Nepal's national symbols were not enough, there is now an international conspiracy to prove that Mt Everest has shrunk. In the normal order of things this would be a matter of celebration since it would make the mountain easier to climb and we could give permits to another 1000+ expeditions, rake in royalty fees.

But putting it together with the call to replace the National Animal Cow with the Sloth Bear, and the National Bird Danfe with the Fruit Bat (don't these traitors know bats are mammals?). They even want to turn our double triangle flag into a hexagon, and move border pillars to the north of Lumbini. This nefarious international conspiracy is giving me sleepless nights. On a matter as serious as this, the whole nation should be getting sleepless nights. Wake up, yes, you there in the driver's seat.

What if the geologists find out that after the last earthquake, Mt Everest has not just become shorter, but it has moved entirely over to the Chinese side? If Mt Everest is no longer the highest mountain, and it isn't even ours, how can we hold our heads high again as Nepalis among the community of nations? Imagine our ignominy and shame.

And, more importantly, what will all those proud owners of Mt Everest Restaurant and Bar (credo: 'Get High Here') do? Everest Bank ('Our Interest Rates Is Highest') will have to change its name to K2 Bank. Mt Everest Hotel must alter its credo from 'Nepal's Top Hotel' to 'We Were Great Once'.

Then there is the Everest Herald Daily which could come up with a new slogan: 'We Won't Ever Rest Till We Get Our Mountain Back'. Everest Insurance could tell it like it is and say 'Mt Everest Is Lower, But Our Premiums are Higher'.

Mt Everest Momo's motto needs to change if they are to continue to home-deliver to Base Camp by helicopter: 'Freeze-dried Dumplings Without Oxygen'. Everest Corrugated Zinc Sheets will need to change its tagline 'The Roof of the World' to 'The Gazebo of the World'. Everest

Rubber Flipflops ('First To Summit in Chappals').

Sir Edmund Hillary's family will be in the horns of a dilemma: to return his knighthood or not. We will have to rewrite all our text books and NTB's promo brochures will have to be replaced with ones that say 'The Land of Everest, Being Second Is Not So Bad'.

It is an unthinkable, nightmarish scenario. And what I want to know is why GONE had to be such a smart ass and grant permission to an expedition whose discovery would be potentially disastrous for our national morale, if not morals.

It is therefore in our national interest to safeguard Nepal's vertical integrity and territoriality to pre-empt any revisionist attempt to recalibrate Mt Everest's height and ensure that Qomolungma (Tibetan for 'Goddess Mother of the Earth') and Sagarmatha (Nepali for 'The Pointy Dark One Behind the White One with the Flat Top That Is Third from Right If You Are Looking Counter-clockwise') remains the tallest one in the world.

There are several steps that Nepal's Bureau of Standards and Metrology can start taking right away if we can get them to wake up:

1. Every expedition climbing Mt Everest henceforth must ensure that team members who reach the top all carry at least 10 kg of rocks in their rucksacks to deposit at the summit. With 500 people expected on the Summit every season, we can add 20 metres to Mt Everest in just a few years and #MakeNepalGreatAgain.
2. All Cleanup Expeditions that used to bring trash back from the South Col and dump it on the banks of the Bagmati will henceforth be required to take it on to the summit instead. Let me just get my calculator out, here: by 2025 Mt Everest will cross the 9,000 m mark.
3. Dispatch a bulldozer and tipper truck from Trisuli to the summit ridge and start piling sand and gravel on top.



The Ass



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