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the earthquake in April 2015 brought together four major parties to fast-track the Constitution. This week’s devastating floods have given the government a chance to push through the deadlocked Constitution amendment bill.

In an all-party meeting on Wednesday, Prime Minister Deuba urged the main opposition UML to help pass the bill to pave the way for the Tarai-centric RJP to participate in upcoming elections, and speed up flood relief.

The UML refused, but promised not to obstruct the House when the bill is tabled.

That was what Deuba wanted to hear. Having already persuaded the RJP to take part in elections even without a two-thirds majority for the bill, Deuba’s road ahead looks less bumpy.

The bill is expected to be voted on next week, when a date will be set for simultaneous provincial and Parliamentary elections.

The government has already proposed 21 November to the Election Commission (EC), nearly two months after the last phase of local elections in Province 2 on 18 September. The EC is against holding the two polls on the same day, but it has no choice because both the ruling and opposition parties want it that way.

Deuba wants an election date and an amendment bill tabled before his five-day India visit beginning 23 August so he can show New Delhi that he is on the right track towards implementing the Constitution.

Nepal-India relations, damaged by the Blockade, were on the mend, but the week’s floods, which killed at least 120 people and affected 20% of the country’s population, have the potential to sour relations again. The anger of border villagers at India’s new east-west Indian road embankments for exacerbating the flood has received widespread media coverage in Nepal.

Water expert Ajaya Dixit says Deuba must raise the framework issue with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi: “The visit could be a chance for Deuba and Modi to agree to make a joint effort to install an end-to-end early flood warning information system in the Ganga basin.”

Meanwhile, the government has repeated the mistake it made after the earthquake of announcing a one-window policy for relief distribution. The true extent of the devastation is only now becoming apparent. There has been a massive loss of livestock and crops, and the floods hit a region with one of the highest out-migration rates. Even one week later, families are funding for themselves as government response has been too little too late.

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EDITORIAL

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER
IN DEEP WATER

What is surprising about this week’s floods is that we seem so surprised by them. Nepal is prone to water-induced disasters, and after the 1993 catastrophe the Japanese even helped set up a government department for early-warning and management of floods. Yet floods continue to ‘remark havoc.’

We also like to call floods ‘natural disasters.’ They are ‘natural’ only in as much as they are caused by heavy rain. The ‘natural’ occurrence of floods is actually man-made, or at least exacerbated by poorly planned infrastructure. There is a human aspect to floods simply because we tamper with the natural flow of rivers, damage the watershed and obstruct drainage.

Farmers have long known that floods are actually beneficial because they bring down nutrients and fertilize the soil, and they have learnt to live with them. The situation has only become unmanageable because we have constructed rivers with flood control levees to ‘tame’ them.

Flood plains over which rivers once spread to accommodate excess runoff are now built over. Deterioration of the fragile Chure hills directly upstream from the Tani has resulted in rivers beingushed with sediment, causing them to meander through villages and farms. A river will find its own way to the sea no matter what we do to block its path. We have turned a predictable annual occurrence into a calamity.

It is true that floods are getting more destructive. The monsoons are getting more erratic, and cloud bursts are more common. But even this is man-made because the changes in weather patterns appear to be caused by climate change.

Most flood damage in the Nepal-Tibet and India this year was not caused by Nepal’s four main Himalayan rivers but by flash floods on streams that flow down from the Chure. The waters rammed through the Tarai and in some places were blocked by road embankments on the Indian side. The irony of all this is that the Chure was mined for gravel and sand to feed India’s infrastructure boom, so an act that has made floods more destructive in India itself.

The Kosi barrage is a ticking time bomb, not much for Nepal, but for Bihar. The weir and the dykes downstream were a political and engineering folly because they allowed the Kosi’s sediment to ruin the river’s bed so it is now flowing several metres above the surrounding terrain. A more serious breach in the levees, as happened in 2006, or on a future large flood, could make the Kosi bypass the barrage altogether with destruction of biological properties.

Floods and landslides will only get worse in Nepal in coming decades, that much is sure. Preventing them requires understanding nature’s ways, and letting rivers flow freely again.

GUEST EDITORIAL
AJAYA DIXIT
Disastrous unpreparedness

Floods have been part of the life and livelihoods of the people living in the Indo-Gangetic plains for millennia. Image: written history records that floods only start existing in the 19th and 20th centuries. Understanding the hydrology of South Asian rivers is crucial to deepening our understanding of floods. The bottom line is that floods occur when a river channel is filled with water. This often happens during the monsoon season, when more than 80% of annual rainfall arrives in just four months. As long as the Himalayan range forms a barrier for rain clouds moving from the Bay of Bengal, the monsoon will continue to bring floods. With Nepal, however, there is great variation in the amount and intensity of rainfall.

Recent advances in meteorology and weather system science have helped us better understand the causes and mechanisms of the monsoonal troughs that create heavy rainfall in different parts of the country. The movement of small troughs causes the cloud bursts that unleash catastrophic floods in central Nepal in 1981 and 1991. In 1997, a weather station in Gorkha detected a jet flow of 150 m air in 24 hours, while 240 m of rain fell in 24 hours in Flint, a small village in Utah, USA. Rainfall in Kailash is on average 20% lower than that of the Kali Gandaki river. Without a doubt, the rains from this fine are the largest floods.

Unlike some places in the world that face only one type of hazard, Nepal must learn to live with multiple and regular hazards like floods, landslides, drought and earthquakes. This means that managing disaster risks should become a central part of our development pathway.

Recently elected local councils must swing into action to develop disaster management plans for local communities. Early warning information about floods must reach the most vulnerable risk areas, and we must have systems in place to help them minimize the impacts from such floods. Immediate relief and rescue efforts are critical to save lives and property. But only by preparing now can we ensure that we have the mechanisms and systems in place to prevent a flood from turning into a large-scale disaster.

Ayaja Dixit is a writer for the Nepal Social and Environmental Transformation Nepal (SETRAN)
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The rivers are fighting back

The only way to save Nepal from future floods is to respect a river’s right of way

The deaths and devastation caused by this week’s floods in the Tarai were frightful. But what is even more frightening is that this may be just the trailer for even more horrific disasters in the future if we do not manage our rivers right.

It may sound like a cliché to say that these were not natural but man-made disasters, but sometimes clichés are more accurate. To understand why these floods are man-made and how future disasters can be prevented, we have to look at the way we are treating our rivers.

Rivers are the arteries of the earth, and the roots of human civilisation. Rivers were there before humans came into existence, freely flowing and nurturing plants and creatures in their courses to the sea. In fact, Nepal’s three main rivers are older even than the mountains, carving through these mighty gorges over the last 65 million years as the Himalayas rose.

But we have desecrated these sacred veins of water. We have exploited them for water, irrigation and energy but also for sand, gravel, boulders and other construction material. We think we can tame rivers by building embankments, or dam them to get rich. But the rivers are fighting back.

There are more than 6,000 rivers and rivulets in Nepal, but we have never cared about managing them sustainably. Isn’t it bizarre that a country with so many rivers does not have a long-term policy or vision to use its resources without destroying them in the process?

When our policymakers discuss rivers, they cannot think beyond sand mining, gravel excavation, sewage or hydropower. Rivers are not just for these commercial purposes, and it is not a sustainable way of managing rivers. Removing sand and boulders from the rivers increases the velocity of the water, making them more destructive. Building embankments and encroaching on the floodplains constrains the rivers, squeezing them so they cannot handle runoff after heavy rainfall.

To manage rivers sustainably, it is important to let them take their own course and flow freely. Rivers are supposed to be holy here, but we have destroyed their sacredness. A river in which you cannot swim, drink or fish is a dead river. The Bagmati, despite the clean-up campaigns, is near-death. It has been straight-jacketed, it is a dumping ground and a sewer. If rivers mirror our well-being as a society, the Bagmati proves just how toxic we have made our own city and country. The putrid odour of the Bagmati is a symbol of the greed and selfishness of a decaying society.

Nepal’s official policy never reflected the respect we need to accord our rivers. Just like the exploitation of the Chure, we have mistreated and abused our waterways. The rivers are now seeking their revenge, and we have pushed them to unleash this disaster.

Better late than never, we must start a dialogue to preserve rivers, managing them sustainably and preventing future disasters. The 17th Bagmati River Festival on Saturday is an annual ritual to commune with the holy waters that nurture the Kathmandu Valley civilisation. For the last 17 years, the festival has aimed to raise awareness about a problem that has become much more grave in that time.

The Bagmati River Festival is not just about the Bagmati, but aims to draw attention to the degradation of sister rivers all over the country. The key message is: Don’t mess with rivers, or they will mess us up.

Megh Ale is a river conservationist, and has been organising the annual Bagmati River Festival since 2001.
The shining subaltern

DB Parhars overcame caste barriers to struggle for Nepal’s and India’s freedom

BIZ BRIEFS

It is 14 August 1946 at Dehradun Park in South Cucuta, where more than half-a-million people are present. A 10-year-old boy, holding a shining stick in his hand, is among them. “Gorkhas have been wrongly alleged to be mercenaries for the British, but we shouldn’t forget that not less than 15,000 Gorkha troops deserted the British command and joined Nepal’s Indian National Army.”

That gathering 71 years ago organized by the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee are one year before Indian independence from Britain was to be addressed by none other than Satish Chandra Bose, Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiron Shanker Roy. Sarat Chandra Bose had asked DB Parihar to address the gathering as a representative of Indian Nepal.

DB was a freedom fighter, a writer, and a filmmaker bestowed with the honour of making the first Nepali feature film, Aaj KhoratbAabhori.

Shanker Tiwari was researching Nepali’s democratic movement when he stumbled upon the handwritten memoir of DB Parihar while going through the Bihar University Papers at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) in New Delhi. It was written by DB as a long letter to Chatterjee, a prominent journalist with sympathy for the Nepali Congress who later covered Nepal for 40 years.

“After all was concluded,” admitted Tiwari, who is editing the long memoir, “to be published by the Policy Research Institute next month. “DB Parihar’s contribution to Nepal’s democratic movement, the Gorkha movement in India and Nepali cinema seemed historic. But it is hard to know anything about the man.”

DB’s family was killed by the Rana regime in Shyamganga in 1920 when he was two years old. He was one of the prominent Nepal’s Vande Krishna, who was killed in the Indian struggle for independence. In 1939, while at the Scottish missionary school Dr Graham’s in Cucuta, he started meeting with Jibran Chandona Bose, the legendary freedom fighter who believed in taking up arms against the British and who was under house arrest in Kurungshing.

Six-year-old DB charmed the British guards with his Scottish songs and carried letters between Bose and other leaders of the Indian National Congress, baked into bread loaves or pinned into his shirts, which became known as the Kathmandu Currier Service.

Later, while he was actively involved with the Gorkha League from Cucuta, DB was unhappy with the high command’s decision to support the Rana Regime in Nepal, and he left for India. Gorkha Congress in November 1944. In January 1946, the KNC merged with the Nepal Bhasha, Nepal Karniya Congress formed in Banaras, becoming the Nepal National Congress.

DB was an executive member and secretary of this party, which merged with the Nepali Democratic Congress to become the Nepali Congress at the Cucuta Convention in 1950. He was then sent to Kathmandu for a secret mission of the party carrying pamphlets about the ethos of Siddharta, letters and circulars of the party.

From India’s Freedom to Nepal’s Democracy

Memoirs of DB Parihar

Edited by Shanker Tiwari

Public Policy Foundation, 2017

Turkish aid

Turkish Airlines has partnered with the group Law Army for Somalia (specifically) by social media stars Armine and Casey Nestor and actress Sen Stiller to deliver aid to fight terrorism and drought in Somalia. Hundreds of tons of food and supplies have been delivered in cargo planes to Somalia since the campaign started in March. Turkish is the only international airline that flies to the African country.

High-lift champ

SprintAir, the authorised distributor of Tata vehicles in Nepal, handed over its specialized High-lift Carrying Chump to Sashthi Cruzeri Plaza in a program Wednesday. The vehicle can carry loads of up to 3,000kg and is usually used to load and unload catering services at airports.

Youth day with Qatar

Qatar Airways observed international Youth Day 2017 by handing off the Khidmatro kids indoor ‘culmination’ theme park. The park aims to prepare children in an entertaining way to become well versed citizens in the professional world.

From India’s Freedom to Nepal’s Democracy

Memoirs of DB Parihar

Edited by Shanker Tiwari

Public Policy Foundation, 2017

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Do these cause sensitivity in your teeth?

- Dr. Satish Golar, dentist practising in the UK.

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Hillary meets Hillary

“So how do you check out an elephant – there’s nothing in the security manual.”

The insects sang but the birds were mostly silent in the hill after lunch—a solitary peacock called in the far distance. On an early April afternoon in 1985, I perched on the wooden seat overlooking the tangle of Chitwan grasslands that stretched down to the Rini River. Our largest male elephant, Kathmandu Behadhar, wailed patiently nearby, saddle and rosy, his trunk resting curled on his impressive ivory tusk.

Despite their urgency, I could not give a satisfactory answer to the police, persistent guys with sunglasses, saris and wigs and walkie-talkies. Wearing dark baseball caps emblazoned with ‘US Secret Service’, just in case we had missed their bulging weaponry, their job was to keep the First Lady alive. But mine was to give her a good time at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge. “I’m sure you have nothing to worry about,” I reassured them evasively.

Previous experience with bemused presidential guards at Tiger Tops made me wary. During Jimmy Carter’s visit in 1985, the cry had gone up in camp one evening that “The tiger has come”—meaning to the bail site, where guests were taken heartlessly along swept paths deep inside the forest. His confused security detail was found cowering on their bodas in fear, their doors barricaded.

Hillary Rodham Clinton was taking a break during an official South Asian tour, the first without her husband, the US President. Smartly dressed in saffron gown and accompanied by her teenage daughter Chelsea, she strode over from their secluded bungalow, waved briefly to her hovering entourage, and climbed the steps to board Shambhur. With nervous smiles from the passengers, the elephant lumbered off through the grass down to a spot where the world’s press lined the riverbank ready for the single photoshoot negotiated to take place on her day off – I had made sure their background featured a fine view of Tiger Tops.

“Fancy meeting you all here,” Clinton called out to reporters from under a wide brimmed straw hat. Cameras clicked and whirred as the media captured one of her more memorable images and unusual stories of the First Lady deep in Royal Chitwan National Park, soon to be seen globally on television and in print. Jokes were bandied about Democratic donkeys and Republican elephants. On hearing that a mother and daughter pair of one-horned rhinos had recently been sighted, Hillary Clinton niftily brought the topic around to her advocacy for women’s education. “Mothers and daughters?” she exclaimed.

“So they sending their girls to school?”

Increasingly comfortable atop her elephant, I noticed a conspiratorial chat with Iban Baladar, the naturalist escort balancing behind her howliah. Instead of returning back to the Lodge as planned, with a cheeky wave Clinton mother and daughter crossed the river and vanished into the trees, happily in search of rhinoceroses spotted deer and other wildlife on an impromptu safari.

The poor Secret Service chaps were close to panic. Walkie-talkies crackled in agitation. Not only was their charge on an unlisted elephant, but now she was disappearing out of sight and into the jungle. Hardly commending a passing elephant, three agents and their gear were hoisted aboard and dispatched in pursuit – but not before the driver was given instructions in Nepal to keep a good distance to preserve their solitude. Rarely for them, Hillary and Chelsea were able to experience the undisturbed joys of the Tarai jungle just like any other tourists – well, almost.

An urban myth, and certainly the story she told us, speaks of Hillary Clinton believing that her mother named her with two L’s after Sir Edmund Hillary. Now worriedly discovered in 1947 was years before the New Zealand beekeeper came to fame after climbing Mt Everest in 1953 – the media opportunity for Nepal was irretrievable. A delayed flight from New Zealand prevented Sir Edmund from joining her at Tiger Tops, but a brief meeting was arranged on the hot tarmac of Kathmandu airport. Still dressed in her safari gear with her kid in a dishevelled dark suit, I was pushed forward by her staff to make the introductions. Minutes later, Mrs Clinton’s Air Force 1 flew past Everest itself, and Hillary meets Hillary school around the world.
Two years after rallying to provide medical care to those wounded in the 2015 earthquakes, a New York doctor and an American medical charity have established a permanent presence in Nepal, inaugurating the Christopher Barley Hospital in Sindhuli last week.

Four hours along the BP Highway from Kathmandu, the facility, also known as the Aamiya Community Hospital, has 20 beds and will serve up to 100,000 people in the village of Khalte in the understated district of the Lalan Tanai in east-central Nepal.

“We will be able to provide everything short of major trauma or open heart surgery,” said Christopher Barley at the opening. He was joined by Michael Daube, founder of the US-based, non-profit CITA, which is dedicated to providing healthcare and educational opportunities to excluded communities in underprivileged and remote regions of India and Nepal.

Both men rushed to Nepal after the April 2015 earthquake and were involved in search and rescue for a few weeks but realised there was a much more urgent need for long-term health care in districts not affected by the earthquake. The two selected a former housing complex in Khalte used by Japanese engineers while building the highway from Dhabich to Barabise.

“The location was chosen on purpose: we wanted to have access to roads and to take medical care to a community that wasn’t being served,” explained Barley, adding that they were convinced they made the right choice after 300 people attended a free health camp one week prior to the hospital’s opening. Many had serious health issues that needed surgery and treatment.

“It was an indication that this kind of facility is needed here,” said Daube. “Our aim is to maintain treatment of the poor. We aren’t just extending health care, we are also providing it for a rural community that is deprived of it.”

Although Daube and Barley have teamed up before, this project is significant to both of them. Barley has a respected internal medicine practice in New York City, and has been involved with Daube in raising funds to extend much-needed medical care and education to Humla and Sindhuli in Nepal and Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in India. Their motto is: ‘Making a difference against indifference’.

CITA’s earlier project to build and run a modern hospital in Dimchok of remote Humla district in northwestern Nepal had to be abandoned after a local partner turned out to be untrustworthy.

“This is the first time we have had a project that’s so easily accessible,” said Daube. “It can be a safety net for all the villages in Sindhuli.”

Sean Sheenmaker in Sindhuli
It’s all IT

Nepali software companies write algorithms for self-driving cars and analysed data for French President Macron’s elections campaign, but they could do much more

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Even as an information technology student, Pawan Kandel, 23, is already earning up to Rs11,000 a month developing android applications and websites for clients in Nepal and abroad.

This is not just useful pocket money, but also helps him build practical skills: “There are hundreds of bright Nepali students like Kandel who have found jobs in the software industry.”

“Right now for a person with good technical skills there are a lot of opportunities in the IT sector in Nepal,” says Kandel. “But it is not easy, and there is room for improvement.”

IT and IT-enabled services are transforming the way Nepalis work, creating job opportunities and making the labour market more inclusive, innovative and global. But insiders say there is a shortage of good managers, and the lack of a forward-looking government strategy is hampering growth as well as innovation.

In the 1960s, American couple Diana and Bill Miller established DSI International in Kathmandu to build software, train engineers and cater to clients, mostly in the US, heralding the arrival of the IT industry in Nepal. By the time DSI closed shop in the mid-’90s, homegrown companies like Professional Computer System and Yomari were in place. The 2000s saw an influx of medical transcription work and call centres, and more players soon joined the game.

Since then, homegrown and foreign companies have multiplied to meet the software and design needs of customers at home and abroad. They work in data processing, call-centre operations, medical transcription, map digitisation, mobile and web app development, website development and animation, among others.

“There are great things happening in the IT scene in the country right now but we still have a long way to go if we are to move from a labour economy to a knowledge economy,” says Lara Kale, a software engineer with over 15 years’ experience.

There has been a slew of tech start-ups and homegrown apps, but only a few have made a mark within Nepal. “Currently, Nepal is a trend follower in the global IT market and real innovation is still missing here,” says Bobby Bunet, co-founder of Semantic Creations, who came out with a tourism-related virtual reality (VR) app, NepalVR, last year. “We still have not been able to test out new tech and applications and most of the ideas we pick up tend to be saturated in the international market.”

It is still difficult for tech entrepreneurs to secure funding, and long-term financial security...
TECH GFF: The Semantic Location team (left), which came up with VideorR, the first virtual reality platform focused on tourism, at their office in Kathmandu.

Workers at the CloudFactory office in Bratislava (below and right). CloudFactory is one of the leading companies, employing over 1,000 people.

remains a concern. Many start-
ups are still running on personal funds. “It takes a good four or five years for an IT company to establish itself. The government should consider giving tax holidays for start-ups and establishing specialised economic zones for the industry,” says Kalle.

Workshops and mentorship programs to develop the skills of students and fresh graduates are still difficult to come by, and investment in research and development lags. “AI and machine learning are hot words in the IT world right now, but it is difficult to get research funds and there is a lack of research-minded people,” says software engineer Nishal Shrestha.

Industry insiders say government incentives and policies are needed. “Policies are weak and in the absence of a proper regulatory body, the entire industry still remains fragmented,” says Hemad Shrestha of the Federation of Computer Associations of Nepal and co-founder and director of the Nepal Entrepreneurs’ Hub (NEHub).

The lack of good managerial skills is another barrier. “Nepalis are great engineers and hard workers but we are bad managers,” says Shrestha. “Without proper managerial skills it is difficult to sustain a business.”

Insiders say another factor hindering innovation is the absence of domestic demand. “Existing could offer opportunities to the domestic IT market, but not many are using domestic software, opting instead for expensive foreign software,” says Shrestha.

Outsourcing is turning out to be one of Nepal’s fastest-growing exports. Although still behind India and the Philippines, the country’s inexpensive English-speaking workforce is drawing investors. Many Nepali companies and foreign subsidiaries provide services to overseas clients in websites and app development, big data management, designing and augmented and virtual reality.

“Nepalis are good at crunching numbers, and we work hard at a relatively inexpensive cost compared to other outsourcing destinations. We adapt quickly to newer technologies and our proficiency in English aids in communication and that is what makes Nepal attractive,” says Hemad Shrestha. Besides, working with foreign clients provides Nepali engineers with exposure and skills.

Insiders say the industry is surviving on outsourcing: “We are too focused on outsourcing at the moment,” says Kalle. “The real development of the field we need to come up with real innovations.”

In 2018, Canadian technologist Mark Sears and his wife came to Nepal for a two-week vacation. They met educated people who had basic software skills but lacked work opportunities. Sears stayed on, training youngsters in high-demand skills like Ruby on Rails (a programming language) and matching international technology needs with Nepali capable workforce.

One project led to motrice and CloudFactory was born. Its vision: to help change the lives of millions of people by linking them to work. The idea was that if an individual has a computer, an internet connection and basic skills, then CloudFactory could connect them to the kind of work that was previously limited to people with programming degrees.

Today, CloudFactory employs 2,044 people, 726 in Nepal.

The company uses a cloud-based platform to distribute simple tasks from tech companies globally to CloudFactory workers in Nepal. The tasks can include inserting data, forwarding receipts and answering images for companies developing artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms for self-driving cars. Recently, CloudFactory worked with the French inventory platform Wipadoo to help French President Macron win the recent election.

“With what we are doing, we’re not just providing data entry for our clients, but people who care,” says John Swanston, general manager of CloudFactory in Nepal. “We are doing meaningful work using brilliant technology to get there, and that results in people who care,” he adds.

While CloudFactory started from its competitors is exactly right. It provides clients a relationship with workers for whom the work is meaningful and who care about doing a good job. People working here get an opportunity to grow and make a difference.

Mark Grinter, 29, joined CloudFactory as a part-time worker. Just past four years and she is now a project lead in the company. “The working culture and environment here is great. There is something new to learn every day and new ideas are welcomed. There is constant interaction and mentorship,” she says.
Bagmati River festival, Get ready for rafting, a heritage cycle rally, old decoration challenge, horse and rickshaw riding, art exhibition and much more at the 7th Bagmati River festival 19 August, 7am-7pm, Bagmati Bridge, Kapildev. (01) 4337395

Comic con in Nepal, Events of Mada, UV, Animex and the comic genre are in a treat. The event will also host international cosplay artists from Japan, the Philippines and India. 9 September, 10am-4pm, Heritage Garden, Sonepur. (01) 5313896

Vocal workshop, Register to learn singing techniques from renowned performer, Suddha Damuni, hosted by Kathmandu, yo, Garmentory, 5 July-30 August, (01) 4317584 http://www.kathmanduyo.com/event scheduler-suddha-damuni-event

Women circle, Participate in the year’s amazing stories of women from all walks. It is a common platform for women to share their dreams and talk about the situation of women in Nepal. 20 August, 2-4pm, Ambassador Garden Home, Thimi. (01) 4709724, info@kathmanduyo.com

The connection, Participate in this charity event to support hand-picked dogs. Collecting money will be used to build a home for macropod and elderly dogs. 1 September, 1pm onwards, The Heritage Garden, Sonepur. (01) 2000, 9810350538

Obstacle race, Be adventurous and test your strength in Nepal’s first obstacle race. 9 September, 6am, Goldstone Football Ground, Rs 1,000, free for under 18

Became a photographer, Register for a 10-day photography workshop, August 9-16, Anand, (Chhau Hospital Road, He 06, 500, 9817195777, 9817196088, info@paradisefoto.com)

Healing power, Register if you are keen to learn about the connection between mind and body. Venerable Lobsang Kyungkhy will be giving the profound practice of the meditation Buddha to help treat destructive states of mind. 16-17 September, 10am-4pm, Himalayan Meditation Centre, Narsingh Chaur, Naxal. (9888360092, naxalsg@gmail.com)

Music for a cause, Your favourite band BRIGHT! and singer Sweta Singh Humal will perform live to support the students of Patan Child Brigham Secondary School.

Fusion Friday, Spend the weekend with your favourite band Panchamari at your favourite place, ATV Bar. 15 August, 7-10pm, ATV Bar, Langtang. (01) 4446175

Kantadri Abibah, Book your seats for the musical with Nepali fusion trio KantadriAbibah. 15 August, 5:30pm onwards, Cafe Grape. Outdoors, Jogle, Jhamsikhel, 9817026917

Soufli Sufi, The Sufi band will be performing great sufis songs this weekend. 15 August, 5-10pm, 11pm, The Orcus Place, MD Annapurna. (01) 4460380, 9817017675

Barista Lavazza, The Valley’s best European inspired coffee culture cafe serves excellent moccos and lattes. Don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. Jawalakhel, (01) 480532, barista.lavazza@gmail.com

Ventures Café, Step by step for the best fusion menu and all local favourites and enjoy the breezy outdoor seating. A great venue for your celebration. Sankhu, (01) 4637204

Monsoon Sundays, Food connoisseurs can relish a succulent barbeque with a choice of African, Arabic or Mediterranean specialities, along with access to the swimming pool. 23 July onwards, 12:30-3:30pm, Rs 1,000 per person, (01) 4806677, info@lalitpur.com, www.lalitpur.com/resorts/ventures-catering

Café Jireh, For a peaceful evening and the best firewood pizza. Bhaktapur, (01) 4929072

Mezze by Roadhouse, Spot a superstar at one of Kathmandu’s most popular restaurants. Mercure Plus, Dharara Ring (01) 4239877

Kasaras Resort, A luxury resort located in the lush setting of Chhitrak National Park. For those who value their privacy and prefer a more secluded stay, Kasara offers two private villas with three own pools. Chitwan (01) 4429787 / 4426580, kasaramresort.com

Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Treat yourself to a 90-minute ayurvedic massage at Shivapuri’s Spa, followed by a healthy lunch at the Cottage. Shivapuri Hills, Budhanilkantha, 9817317527, $80/100 per person, otherwise booking essential. Transport available on request at extra cost.

Park Village Resort, Yoga, trustees and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 470599, parkvillage-resort.com

Rupakot Resort, Get pampered in the lap of luxury amid stunning views at the Amanguris. Mundha, Rupakot, Khati, (01) 626600 / (01) 4906680 / 9860363843, www.rupakotresort.com

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, A peaceful place to stay, compile with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna. Will be hard to blame once you enter. Gsung, Lakeside, (01) 486839

Club Himalaya, For amazing mountain views and refreshing weekend excursions, special package available. Nagarkot, (01) 4701037

Gokarna Forest Resort, A namesake paradise that relieves your breathing and encourages meditation, just a 25-minute drive from Kathmandu. Gokarna, (01) 4863712, info@gokarnaresort.com

Milla Guesthouse, If you prefer the quiet and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet miles apart. Bhaktapur, (01) 4381437

Desh Khoidai Jaada, Opens in Kathmandu on 12 August based on true accounts of refugees, this film artistically narrates the reality and inner life of a Bhutanese citizen living in Nepal. Years of research went into Director Kushtik Agrawal’s feature film debut, and it shies through in this narrative that seeks to accurately reflect the experience of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.
“Dallu janey ho?”

An outsider finds Kathmandu buses to be easy and safe—it just takes time

JULIA THOMAS

Every bus journey begins with an extended arm, and a question at the window: “Dallu janey ho?” If a nod follows, I sit in to sit on a tempo at a bend, stand with a hand on the overhead railing or tuck into a bus seat, and the wheelie car on—i'm not the only one asking questions, either: personal interaction, it seems, is Kathmandu's web of bus routes.

In many cities, maps charting public transportation exist with standardized schedules. But after commuting in Kathmandu one quickly learns that knowledge of the city's bus system is established through word of mouth, and lived experience. Kathmandu's best sources of bus information—large Sajjan microphones, route and stops—appeared complex at first. In my first few days in the city, I watched locals nonchalantly wave over buses that did not seem to have consistent or marked stops.

It soon became clear that, as with many other navigation questions, the best way to approach Kathmandu's transit system is to ask the people who know it best: the riders themselves. Once taking buses became a part of my daily rhythm, with the help of those around me, it became easy to move around.

During my first time ride, co-passengers asked where I worked and pointed out my stop when it came along. I stood crouched in the aisle, since no seats were available, and a woman held onto my arm, kindly steadying me while also acting as a comforting force.

We continually exchanged smiles and laughed a little throughout the ride.

On every ride except for some, I appeared to be the only foreigner. The Nepali passengers around me have seemed willing and happy to give directions, and I have never felt unsafe or at risk while traveling on buses. I've learned, and am still in the process of learning, the timings of certain stops and protocols for handing on the roof to signal a stop.

The Metropolitan Police Station operation (see adjoining article) places undercover officers on buses around the city to monitor instances of harassment and assault, particularly against women. It has caught 10 suspects for harassment and assault since it began in early August. This indicates that such events still exist, but compared to years past, it seems that the level of personal comfort in travel may have generally improved.

A young Nepali man told me he has not taken the bus in 16 years, choosing to move about by motorbike instead—a reflection of the belief that buses are uncomfortable and overcrowded. In contrast, a college student said that she takes buses every day and feels they have become more comfortable for women. She even found follow male passengers to be helpful and generous in making space for women, recalling a time when she had a very heavy bag and men made space on their crowded seat.

“Those days, I feel safe, but two or three years ago I didn't,” she says. “Now, I think women can speak if they are harassed; they can talk on the spot.”

In most cases, there appears to be a rotating influx of women, children and men in equal numbers. During one of my rides, a tempo rumbled between Satnepa and Dallu with a female driver at the wheel, and five women riding in the back. Other times, I've been the only female rider for long stretches but have not experienced any sort of disrespect.

These days, perhaps, bus riders—particularly women—can travel more comfortably, with the support of fellow passengers. Of buses in Nepal, this I have learned: ask questions, engage with the people around you, and even when you don't know where you're going, jump in and follow in line with those who know the routes.

Julia Thomas is a 2017-18 Thomas Watson Fellow studying local journalism in countries across the globe. She is currently living in Kathmandu, and is pictured above.

Going undercover

TIME: 4:20pm Tuesday
PLACE: Rana Park
A crowded white microbus prepares to leave on the Gongfu route. A man from the Metropolitan Police Office made up of two officers dressed conventionally as civilians, went on board.

One of them is the driver. Their mission: to apprehend potential oppressors on a bus route that is said to be notorious for harassment of women passengers.

During the hour-long journey, as the buses stop at various points along the way, no one is caught. This is a rare case of law enforcement in Kathmandu Valley not as unsafe as it is made out to be. Or, maybe the police had it all day.

Police have named the sting Safe Trip Campaign, and in the form they have only lasted over 10 people have been arrested for sexual harassment inside buses. Most of these were on routes outside of the Ring Road.

A total of 16 police teams have so far been divided into 23 shifts and deployed in pairs on various bus routes during rush hour as part of the campaign against perpetrators because of social stigma.

“Our aim is to make public transport safe for everyone,” a.I.C. Durga Bahadur Dhungana, the chief inspector, said. “There are so many people who are given to this practice, but we are trying to reduce the number of complaints.”

The sting operation aims to instill confidence and to seek help if they experience any problems while traveling. A 2013 survey showed that more than a quarter of female respondents aged 10-35 said they have experienced sexual harassment on public transport.

On Sunday, the number of complaints has gone down despite women being less reluctant to speak out. This could be because of greater awareness, and also due to women fighting back. Police hope that the Safe Trip Campaign will make harassment on buses more rare. Inspector Shumita Tamang says she is surprised about not catching anyone. “It could be that the incidents of harassment have really gone down.”

Shreeda Ray, who has been commuting in public buses for the last 10 years, agrees that things have improved: “Public transport used to be extremely unpleasant for us until now; but the situation has improved somewhat.”

She adds that fear of police and the introduction of larger buses like Sajja, which are less crowded, have helped reduce harassment cases.

Shreejana Shrestha
For people who love animals, have pets at home that they think of as friends rather than furry creatures to be kicked around, and cannot bear to see living creatures suffer, then Okja is a painful must. For those who don’t care much for animals and bulky vegetarians about why they are not vegan because apparently, from their sarcastic world view, that’s the only real way to make a difference — then perhaps Okja is also worth a chance. This is not because it will indoctrinate you with the irritatingly didactic lectures of sometimes holier-than-thou vegetarians but because it might provide insight into the killing and eating of sentient animals, which could adjust certain minds.

That being said, Okja itself, an incredibly surprising film by the idiosyncratically inclined Korean filmmaker Bong Joon Ho, is not a pedantic film in any way. It is instead a wonderful, expansive work of imagination and tenderness that tells the story of young girl Mija the superb, fierce actress Ahn Seo-hyun who develops a special bond with her super-pig Okja, a genetically modified creature who is a gimmick used by the evil (there’s really no other word for it) Mirando corporation to increase their pork sales.

Okja is part of a 10-year experiment devised by the totally wanky (toot in an endearing way) Luci Mirando, a scion of the corporation named after her family of admitted psychopaths. Okja is conceived in a lab, unknown to the public who are told she is a “special breed,” and 26 of her kind are sent to be reared by farmers around the world so that 10 years later the world can see the “natural” results. In that time, Okja grows up in the verdant rolling hills of South Korea, playing with Mija, roaming and grazing freely. The intelligence that Okja, who is a huge and adorable mix of pig, dog and elephant, displays is unnerving, even for those who are acquainted with the keen instincts of animals. It is therefore even more heart-breaking when Okja and Mija are separated by Mirando.

The determined, unflappable Mija sets out to save Okja, going first to Seoul and then to New York to rescue her friend. Along the way she meets a group of animal activists who both help and hinder her, and becomes unfortunately acquainted with a superficial world that is easily swayed by the media.

For animal lovers, I will spare you any distress. Okja is saved, but not without some pain, and the final scene where she is led by Mija from an animal factory housing thousands of her kind waiting for slaughter is grim beyond description.

There are lessons here, about people who’d do anything to make money, about human-animal bonds that are sometimes stronger than those between people, but mostly about loyalty and fierce courage in the face of despair. Okja came to be because Netflix, new available in Nepal, took a chance on what could have been — and still slightly is — an outré, unpalatable film. I did not adore the movie unconditionally, but I do love Okja and Mija, and I will not forget them.

Watch trailer online nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

NI HAO: Vice Premier of China, Wang Yang, pays a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba at his residence in Baluwatar on Wednesday.

DELIVERING RELIEF: Nepali army personnel load relief and rescue materials for flood victims in the Tarai on Tuesday at Tribhuvan International Airport. Floods and landslides have claimed 123 lives so far and 35 are still missing.

DRIVER’S SEAT: Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Manojit Singh Puri, prepares to drive one of the 30 ambulances that India gifted to Nepal on its 70th Independence Day, Tuesday.

ON THE MOVE: Dr Ganendra KC, is taken to the ICU at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu, on Tuesday after he ended his hunger strike on Day 23, citing the ongoing crisis caused by floods in the Tarai.

BAL KRISHNA: A boy dressed as Lord Krishna on the occasion of Krishna Janmashtami at Patan Durbar Square on Monday. This day devotees visit Krishna temples to celebrate the birth of the Hindu deity.
Convicted, yet elected

Madhav Basket in Nepal, 5-12 August

Democracy has its own flaws, and that was proven once again by the victory of an absurdly ‘frozen’ in the recent local elections.

Amit Rai, the chairman of a cooperative who made off with millions of rupees deposited by 15 clients, was elected chief of a village council in Soa-ur-bahadur district in the second phase of local elections on 28 May.

Unique Group, a savings and loan cooperative established by Rai and nine other investors in Ghangad of Kathmandu in 2009, collected about 1545 million from over 1,000 clients. But the cooperative failed, and Rai went into hiding. Police arrested Rai, and he promised in writing to return the money. Some customers then claimed that they did not receive payment and filed a fraud case against him at Kathmandu District Court. The court convicted Rai of defrauding his clients, and ordered him to return 1545 million to 7 individuals.

Instead of obeying the court’s order, Rai went up to Mahendra Chair Pushpa Kamal Deuba and secured a ticket from his party to contest elections in Saldurungu. No one filed a complaint against his candidacy, and he was elected chair of the Urga Local Council in the district. Advocate Rajab Nikola said: “How can a man convicted by the court deliver development and justice?”

Restricting relief

Editorial in Kantipur, 16 August

Various organisations and individuals have voluntarily come forward to raise money and collect relief for the people affected by this week’s floods, which is very commendable. They may have been motivated by altruism, but it is difficult to rule out the possibility of the misuse of relief money and materials.

Yet, it cannot be an excuse for the government to restrict volunteers from distributing relief in flood-affected areas.

It will take a long time to restore the lives and livelihoods damaged by the floods, but the immediate need is relief. Despite joint efforts by the government, NGOs and individuals, relief has not reached all flood victims.

In many places, people displaced by the floods are hungry. They need immediate support, and the government alone is not able to provide that.

Fearing that the relief will be misused or not distributed equally, the government has introduced a one-window policy, requiring all NGOs and individuals to distribute relief only through government channels. This may delay relief distribution, adding to the sufferings of flood survivors. The government mechanisms for relief and reconstruction are notorious for painfully slow responses and unnecessary procedural hassles.

So, instead of channelising all the relief through one door, the government must facilitate NGOs and individuals to swiftly reach out to flood-affected communities. The government must work with others instead of intimidating them.

Official data shows that the floods have damaged at least 3,000 houses in the Tarai. Tall and sturdy houses were not damaged by the floods, but food grains stored in them are no longer edible. The floods have also damaged water systems, forcing people to drink contaminated water. This could lead to a disease outbreak, and flood survivors have already begun to suffer from typhoid, diarrhoea and skin diseases.

The Health Ministry should be prepared to tackle this crisis.

There were reports that money raised for the survivors of the April 2015 earthquake was misused. The government must not allow this to happen again. But its one-door policy for relief is not the solution.

“Coming, coming ... Ganesh”
14 August

Basu Kehri’s cartoons about floods, Annupurna Post

“Quote of the Week“

“I have put my Sathyagranth in the face of the court, but I will go on another hunger strike if my demands are not addressed.”
Cruising physician Gwinda KC after ending his 11th hunger strike, 15 August

EXCELLENT, SMOOTH, FULLY MATURED IN OAK VATS.
Migration in a microcosm

A tiny village tucked away below the Annapurnas offers clues as to why young men are leaving their homes

SEBASTIAN WOLLIGANDT
in KASKI

"Sometimes I cry because they all have left," says 50-year-old Bir Maya Gurung in Tangting village, clearly happy to have someone to speak to in a neighbourhood that has lost most of its young men to migration.

She sits on the earthen floor of her house, as flames lap a pot in an open, firewood stove in the kitchen. Over a cup of black tea she talks about her five children, all of whom have left - one daughter is in Pokhara, two of her sons are in Japan and two in Malaysia.

"They send some money, so I can buy food in the shop. But they never come to visit me," she says.

Tangting is a Gurung village some 20km from Pokhara, situated at 1,456m and with a spectacular view of Lamjung Himal and Annapurna IV. It has been two years since the road was completed, and Tangting suddenly became more accessible to the outside world. But, like most places in the Himalayan hinterland, there aren’t enough jobs for young people and farming is difficult in the terrace farms.

Nepal’s cities are among the fastest growing in South Asia. The proportion of the population living in cities grew from 3% in 1960 to 28% in 2013. More than a third of the population of Kathmandu is composed of lifetime migrants, with the Eastern Hills and Mountains showing the highest outflows with 24% (see chart).

Om Prakash Gurung, principal of Himalaya Milan Secondary School, is said to see the steady decline in the population of Tangting. "Our biggest problem is migration," he says. "The number of students is decreasing and teachers do not want to stay here: they would like to go to schools in Pokhara or Kathmandu." A school in the UK has assisted in making the secondary school building well equipped, and education is free. Nearly every house in Tangting has a latrine, and a micro-hydropower station delivers electricity. The air is fresh and there is plenty of clean drinking water. Why would anyone want to leave this seemingly paradise for dirty, dusty cities?

"The salary we get here is just not enough, there is a lack of facilities and we need a good hospital," says Irom Bahadur Gurung, whose grandfather was a Gurkha and whose father served in the Indian Army. His parents never left Tangting. But the 25-year-old, who is volunteering at the village school, eventually plans to go abroad: "Maybe for four or five years for further studies, then I will come back because I think we youth have to change the village with the knowledge we get abroad," he tells a visitor.

Om Prakash Gurung isn’t as optimistic: "Two or three young people are missing in every house because of migration. After earning money, most do not come back. Only one: old people, the grandmother and the grandfather, are living here. There is no one to

INTERNAL URBAN AND RURAL MIGRATION FLOWS (LIFETIME MIGRATION, 2006)

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Kathmandu Valley</th>
<th>West Nepal</th>
<th>Central Nepal</th>
<th>Eastern Nepal</th>
<th>Far-West Hills &amp; Mountains</th>
<th>Central and Eastern Hills</th>
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LONELY PLACE: Tangting village sits on a terraced mountainside (above). Local children greet visitors (left). Despite clean air and water, and a good school (right) young people are still leaving Tangting for the grim and polluted city.
help with work,” he adds. Nearly 19% of Nepal’s population is working abroad at any given time, and they sent home Rs1.06 billion in 2014-15. This is 32% of the GDP, making Nepal the largest recipient of remittances as a share of GDP.

Back in Kathmandu, Minister of Labour and Employment Deepak Bohara is aware of the need for concerted action to streamline migration. He told us: “Issues like lack of labour rights, poor compensation, trafficking, fraud and abuse need to be tackled with a strong political will and multi-stakeholder support.” That official support is slow in coming, however, forcing young men like Eka Jung Gurung to go abroad without government help. He is one of the few men who has returned to Tangling from Dubai. Now an active community leader, he is training young men of his village to be tourist guides, hotel managers and cooks.

Eka Gurung worked 18 years in Dubai. He says the working conditions are bad and migrants have to pay recruiters large sums of money to land jobs. He wants to make sure others like him will never have to leave.

“They are working there in 50-degree heat. I saw so many young boys having accidents, and many never come back alive,” he says.

The minimum salary for Nepalis in Dubai is Rs14,000 and Eka says they could easily earn much more on hydropower projects.

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Prehistoric headlines

We have Corknails have never abashed from exhibiting extraordinary valour when we come face-to-face with an adversary: whether it is the East India Company or a rival faction of the Congress. Manuscripts remain of scribed pre-historic newspapers recently unearthed from limestone caves in Chauvar reveal the first time that the roots of many of our present-day national traits were struck in these hoary days of antiquity at the dawn of history when the Earth was young, and Man was just beginning his journey to the pinnacle of evolution. Here are some noted breaking news items from 60,000 years ago:

Collision with Mars Averted

By Our Cosmic Correspondent

The Earth suffered a near miss collision with Mars yesterday as the two planets came to within a hair’s breadth of each other, and disaster was averted only because an alert astrologer in Patan was able to apply the Earth’s emergency brakes. Royalist Astrologer Mangal said his namesake planet suddenly swerved towards the Earth’s orbit without warning, and the two missed each other by a whisker. “Wow, that was close,” a visibly relieved Mr Mangal told reporters. “Thank heavens we’re not going to have a close shave like that for another 60,000 years.”

Women Fed Up

By a Feminine Reporter

Thousands of women launched the first phase of their agitation against their slightly better halves this week on the occasion of a prehistoric Tihar festival by migrating to their ancestral caves in the East African Rift Valley and went on a hunger strike until their menfolk met their 18-point demand, which included a monopoly on curry dishes running around in their birthday suits, a ban on open defecation in closed spaces, and a requirement that husband-gatherers hushbands also learn to clean up after themselves. “We know it won’t happen in a million years,” said one irate primordial spouse, “but it may get them off their hairy butts.”

Fire Discovered

By Our Resident Fireman

Four juvenile male hominoids accidentally discovered fire Tuesday when the woolly mammoth they were herding got struck by lightning on Chauvar Hill, a Primeval Home Ministry source said. The mammoth was burnt beyond recognition, and the young anthropoids said the incinerated mammoth tasted much better than a raw one. “This discovery will revolutionize cooking and warfare,” predicted an antediluvian military analyst on condition that this would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Several disgruntled archeologists immediately started playing with fire, setting ablaze their living quarters and reducing their ancestral homeland to ashes.