Bedfellows

Who would have thought that Nepal’s two largest communist parties, palespurt ideologically and merging constantly, would unite? Especially when one of them was still in bed with a third party.

But they did. The announcement of a unity agreement between the UML and Maoists was a shock in the political landscape, with the NC trying to cobble together an anti-alliance coalition, including not just Madhesi parties but also the left bloc.

“Think of any other political partners that would have been more different,” said Sajal Kumar Basnet, a political analyst. “They made a mistake in business and ended up at loggerheads. All these years, the UML denounced the insurgency by the Maoists, who in turn vilified the UML’s philosophy of ‘People’s Multi-Party Democracy’.

Of late, former UML leader Deuba had been accusing CPI (M-L) of being ‘insane’ and working against Madhesi, Janajati and other marginalized people. For his part, Oli has often slammed Dalal for breaking their alliance at India’s behest. When they decided to unite, therefore, the cadres of both parties were left utterly confused. ‘Did Dalal admit that the Maoist war, as argued by the UML, was a crime? Did Oli admit that he, as accused by Maoists, only serves the interests of the hill elite?’ Peter asked rhetorically.

This week, Nepal politics birthed even stranger bedfellows. The fringe communist parties of the pro-Devadatta School, condemned by Nepal’s mainstream communists for supporting King Mahendra’s coup in 1960, and vilified ever since, joined the Maoists, once acolytes of China’s Mao Zedong.

All this political promiscuity is the result of a phobia about losing in the November-December elections. But the bed shared by former foes is not so comfortable. Baburam Bhattarai of the New Force threatened to quit if he does not get the Gorkha constituency and 35% of seats for his cadres. The Maoists will not settle for anything less than 40%, making it harder for Oli to addresses demands of his own candidates.

The story is the same in the anti-alliance, with Madhesi and the KP’s claiming more than they deserve. The NC cannot give them what they want, but cannot ignore them, either.

As things stand, the left alliance has an edge over the democratic grouping. But it is far from certain if these blocs will survive intra-party and intra-alliance rifts before polls.

Om Astha Rai
ELECTIONS IN A KAKISTOCRACY

This week’s Supreme Court decision to reinstate tainted Nepali Oil Corporation chief Gopal Khadka, who was relieved of his position last month by the government after a series of media exposures, is symptomatic of this country’s deep political malaise. It followed a slew of similar moves where the executive branch allowed proven kleptocrats legal loopholes to evade punishment. The reason is not difficult to fathom. People, like Khadka, have survived multiple governments because they have been generous with kickbacks to politicians, and spread the wealth around. The rot is so deep that it has infected the body politic from the base down, and the law is used to facilitate lawbreakers.

Taking its cue from the Khadka verdict, and probably discerning that the time is ripe, the Nepali Army has also fired a writ to overturn an earlier court verdict that found soldiers guilty in the iconic conflict, Maine-Saum. Ripe-meister case. This proves that political patronage in Nepal’s kakistocracy has now also entered the realm of transitional justice. Mental casualties from the war are coalition partners in the current government, and they are working assiduously to atrophy war crimes.

Some have found former comrades at arms Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai to be increasingly keen on antagonizing with the UML, and concluded that they must be driven out by the vote to wash their hands of the blood from crimes against humanity committed during the insurgency. The parties are cunningly allaying anxieties because of the fear that voters have wired up to their Guadalcanal. By teaming up with other parties just ahead of upcoming provincial and parliamentary elections, they want to ensure that they remain in power. Election tickets are being auctioned to highest bidders: a powerful former minister jailed for corruption has been distributing tickets to Nepali Congress candidates, and on Wednesday the UML shamelessly made a convicted mafia don a candidate in Musahar.

We may have a new Constitution, there may be new rules of the game, but for the most part we have the same old faces in the same old parties with the same old promises. Women, because the ticket distribution, campaigning funding and vote-buying can be so expensive, the hope that this election might at least begin to clean out our defiled democracy seems now to have been too optimistic.

The silkworms have also cancelled out the chances of the non-mainstream Rikeshwor Sahaj party in the few constituencies where they are fielding candidates. Voters in November, therefore, may not even have candidates for Parliament who represent a class and class-based alternative to the three-party cartel.

We think we had better news, but it does look like the first round of federal elections under the new Constitution will be business as usual in our politics, and politics as usual in our business.

All we can hope for now is that the people, in their wisdom, will at least vote out some of the crooks.

STABILITY ABOVE ALL

Nepal politics is in need of a shake-up and the left electoral alliance has certainly rallied people out of 20 years of nothingness as evidenced by the fury of reactions — generally positive and some negative — from the soap to social media (A/2 party state, Om Astha Rai, 4878). The centre of political gravity in Nepal politics has shifted to the left and the next election is going to be about political stability. It is Advantage Left. Whether Nepal can prosper under a communal party government is up for debate, but stability is such a powerful factor right now that the country has to be able to get away with the fact that it has a very weak economic agenda that is irrelevant in the 21st century.

LITTLE CHOICE

Nepal migrant workers have little choice (Freedom of being Nepali, Upasana Khadka, 4878) as the whole point. Stay home and work is unemployed and unproductive, go abroad and face this harsh reality. Something the leftists can’t get anywhere. And this vicious cycle continues.

BACKSTABBER

In the past 29 years we all know that Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been an expert at stabbing his colleagues in the back. ... why would it ever be any different when he does it again? (Two horse race, Editorial, 4879)?

Sampalika Poudyal

ENJOYABLE STAY

I have stayed at Hotel Shanker twice now on both my trips to Nepal and plan on staying there again when I return next year. (Rana, re-read or re-visit? Sarina Shrestha, 4878), I’m looking forward to seeing the repairs complete. This place really makes my stay enjoyable, and I hope there will be many more heritage hotels like it soon.

Randy Watts

TO PUTE OR NOT TO PUTE

The most disgusting funny thing I have read in a while is (Going nepal in nepal, Rakesh, 4878). Didn’t know whether to puke or laugh.

Jane G

GUEST EDITORIAL

NILAMBER ACHARYA

PLUS AND MINUS

The surprise announcement by the UML and Maoist Centre left after Dhusan to form a larger unity government was welcomed on all sides by the parties’ parliamentary and provincial pols. It looked like the goal was to bring the UML and the Maoist to the side of the support suffered by the Maoists.

There is also talk of ultimately unifying the party, however, until we are told about the strategical underpinnings of such unity and what their common principles and political programs are, we will not know if it is just a game that will go up.

Even though both are left parties, they do not have the same experience in democracy. While the UML-Maoist alliance will in future will depend a lot on the progress that the Maoists make in adopting democratic values, it is not automatic, in the changed circumstances, to dwell on the adversarial relationship of the past. However, it would be morally wrong to forget human rights and to encourage irresponsibility, just because the Maoists are sponsored within the UML, it doesn’t mean their war crimes will be erased.

We are glad to see that the Maoist Centre would join a new alliance with the opposition while it was still in the genuine struggle. The UML left should also turn, reduce the numbers, and come out as the UML earlier. The Maoist Centre also is a political force in this country but it’s leadership has character it is unappealing. The NC should not try to emulate the Maoists.

This regional alliance will already have a long term impact on Nepali politics. Let’s, there has been an effort from the Nepali and Indian parties to make and break the UML. It was publicly acknowledged that Jhalki was hanging the NC, this move may be the UML’s response.

In the distance the ethnic and democratic forces, we have to let them fall. The NC, and NC can compete, but there will be political rivalry if they are formed. They need to work together on international relations, national security issues, large monhtetian and on the constitutional commission.

There is no need to see the other parties are different. Pre- pal alliance had far reaching impact on politics if they fall apart. In this issue, discussed and discuss the functioning of parties, forming the commission to the call of the left. Going together is both good and bad.

Making alliances is for the cause of deporting democracy, it is a positive move but if it is to usher to one-party state then it is negative. The NC cannot get left out of Nepali democracy.

Nilamber Acharya is a former unemployable and member of the Indian Nepali (former foreign service). He should not try to emulate the Maoists.

THE CLOUDY SKY, mountain and waterfalls are the lure to visit Phakding in Nepal. Location: near Namche Bazaar, Solukhumbu. (Photo courtesy: Times).
TURKISH AIRLINES IS NOW FLYING 5 WEEKLY FLIGHTS TO NEPAL STARTING WITH 18TH OF SEPTEMBER.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO ALL OUR NEPALESE PASSENGERS, PASSENGERS ALL AROUND THE WORLD AND OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS, CORPORATES FOR SUPPORTING US. GETTING MORE POWER WITH YOUR GREAT SUPPORT, WE WILL CONTINUE TO PROMOTE NEPAL AS ONE OF THE BEST TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN THE WORLD.

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#WIDENYOURWORLD #TURKISHAIRLINES #EXPERIENCENEPAL #NEPALMORETHANMOUNTAINS
The myth of public transport profitability

Even if it runs at a loss, good urban transport makes a metropolis efficient and dynamic

It was a coincidence to arrive in Kochi in the Indian state of Kerala last week on the day its second metro line was opened (right). The first was inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi in June. The Greater Cochin metropolitan region has a population of just over 5 million. Kathmandu Valley has over 4 million inhabitants, and we have always lamented that the cost of a metro system (one estimate from 2012 is Rs330 billion for a full-fledged 77 km system) cannot be managed by the national and Valley economics.

How is Kochi paying for its $800 million metro project? We know it is financed more or less equally between the state and central government, with an injection from the French external aid agency AFD. Obviously, rich European cities of Kathmandu’s size can afford a full metro network, but does Kochi’s example work for us? Will it work for Kochi? Lahores, too, is rescaling its own new metro (25 trains, meant to carry 250,000 commuters a day) built with Chinese investment, aid to be part of the multi-billion dollar largest under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Rather than make fragmented plans and promises, the 18 new mayors of Kathmandu Valley, perhaps under the angel of the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, can put together an integrated public transport program. It must pass a panel of experts to address the matter, to start with, looking at the studies already done, keeping in mind the extreme distress of the Valley commuter.

The Kathmandu Valley Sustainable Urban Transport Project (KSUTP) has suggested clustering of bus routes and working with the private sector to rationalize the existing hop-on hop-off transport network. To gauge the riding public’s suffering, the reader may simply remember the desperation of commuters waiting for rides at Jamai, Sundhare or Shikari Monopad and the situation in the accompanying photograph on the Kochi metro last week (including a Kathmandu couple).

The mayors’ expert team will have to understand the geographical terrain of Kathmandu Valley, projected population growth, the devastatingly unplanned nature of the urban expansion of past decades, and how the Valley may evolve demographically under the federal system — with the hope that the province will provide alternative modes of urbanism to take pressure off the Valley.

Thereafter, the expert team would need to reach out to these various proposals on the table: from a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which requires wide roads for dedicated lanes, to monorail, cable cars, gondola, trams and trolley busses, light rail, and full-fledged integrated metro trains. Even while all these modalities are considered, the most urgent matter is simply to coordinate the existing private bus companies as well as the Nepal Yak Yatay cooperative (with which the writer is associated) to create a seamless network. There is in no sense imagining grand transit castles in the air before addressing the here and now problems of public transport.

One issue that everyone, from the researchers to municipal analysts, must come to terms with is the matter of surrounding many city of public transport systems. Only in rare instances is urban public transport turning a profit around the world. A true public transport system requires subsidies, provided by the state or municipalities, with the rationale that a good system makes the metropolis efficient and dynamic. It will be hard to be profitable working under public transport standards, running even low occupancy, keeping to labour standards, etc.

Scholar Ruchika Indorewal, who teaches urban design, urban form and design in Mumbai, cautions the Mumbai authorities on an article on The Wire portal: ‘Neglected, Starved and Sold: The Uncertain Future of Mumbai’s Public Transport’, on their plan to partially privatise BEST, one of the best public transport systems in South Asia. What Indorewal has to say is relevant for Kathmandu Valley:

‘The BEST bus system that had been widely regarded as a model for other cities to emulate, is now under sustained attack. Its accumulated losses have become the subject of moral panic. In a world where profitability is the only mark of health, losses are a sign of disorder; sustained losses are seen as a sign of “system pathology”.’

That’s why Mumbai’s bus system has worked as well as it has in past is precisely because it could run at a loss. A public transport system plays a crucial economic role: it facilitates the labour market by efficiently distributing workers all over the city. Almost every metropolitan public transport system in the world runs at a deficit with the intention of partially socializing the cost of improving employment opportunities, reducing transport costs and cutting down travel times... By socializing costs and stimulating demand, public services help economic growth which programmes overall living standards.’

20 years of Qatar
Qatar Airways celebrated its 20th anniversary this month by flying an Airbus A380 in formation with a world-famous Red Arrows aerobatic display team.

The airline was recently awarded ‘Best Cabin Service’ and ‘Best Food and Beverage’ in the 2017 APEX Passenger Choice Awards.

20 years of Buddha Air
Buddha Air marked the 20th year of its operations in Nepal this month, and in a press release announcing it would start international flights from the new Kathmandu airport in 2021.

Despite advice from the government to fly direct from the capital to the remote parts of the country, Buddha Air is said to be considering connecting to the sister airport.

Buddha Air, which is currently based at Tribhuvan International Airport, has been in operation since 1997.

The airline is currently flying to 18 destinations.

Oppo A87 has become the 2nd highest selling smartphone in the world. The smartphone enthusiasts a 16MP front camera with new face gesture and bokeh effects to capture the best selfie.

Oppo A87 is priced at Rs. 26,500 in Nepal.
SMILE.
IT’S PEAK SAVINGS WEEK.
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8TH ANNIVERSARY TIHAR SALE
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30% off all
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Lal Durbar Marg
(opposite the Palace Museum)
Hours: Sunday – Friday | 9:30am – 7:30pm
Saturday | 11am – 6pm
Turkish marks 4 years in Nepal

Turkish Airlines this month celebrates its fourth year of operations connecting Kathmandu directly with Europe and through Istanbul to the rest of the world. The airline has now increased frequency to five times a week. Nepali Times spoke to General Manager for Nepal, Abdullah Tuncer Keceli, about challenges and opportunities ahead. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: Has lead factor on Turkish Airlines Kathmandu sector now returned to pre-earthquake levels?
Abdullah Tuncer Keceli: Turkish Airlines started flights to Nepal in 2013 September and has been promoting Nepal as a tourism destination from the beginning. We are celebrating the fourth anniversary of connecting Nepal to the rest of the world.

The number of people travelling to and from Nepal went down almost 40% after the earthquake, but it has been picking up again. We believe that promoting Nepal as a tourism destination will also help to recover quickly. The tourism industry is one of the main income earners for the country. You can see Turkish Airlines in all tourism fairs such as WTM London, FITUR Madrid, ITB Berlin and ETFM Paris, trying to promote Nepal.

We are not trying to get a big piece from the cake. We are trying to make the cake bigger for everyone. For us, Nepal is more than mountains.

Which areas of the world are you focusing on for Nepal traffic via Istanbul?
It’s mainly Europe. We even celebrated 50 years of operation in some of our destinations in Europe. Our passengers know Turkish Airlines for the quality of its service very well. We have been honoured as Best European Airlines for six consecutive years and fly to 117 destinations in Europe. Of course it is not only Europe. We have 100 destinations all over the world: 9 cities in the US, 5 in South America, 2 in Canada, 53 cities in Africa and almost all Asian countries as well.

What are the major operational bottlenecks for you in Nepal?
Nepal has great tourism potential. We have a target of 5 million tourists in Nepal. But everything must move parallel to reach this target. As everybody knows, there are some infrastructure problems we have to resolve. These are barriers for growth. Roads, airports, connectivity between cities, number of hotels, service quality — all must move in parallel. We have only one international airport. The capacity is a major concern for us and all other airlines operating here. Kathmandu is not an easy destination because of heavy air traffic, which forces aircraft into long holding patterns. The airport has to be urgently upgraded and extended to meet growth targets for tourism.

What about fuel costs?
This is a very critical point for us. We are the only European airlines and have a long distance flight to and from Kathmandu. The cost of refueling in Kathmandu is almost double that of other destinations, which is unacceptable for us and other airlines too. Similarly, ground handling charges are unreasonably expensive and do not meet quality standards. We are trying to have daily frequency to Kathmandu, but it is not easy because of three reasons. Friends must tell the truth. We will correct all these areas together in collaboration with all related organisations and authorities. This is not just for us, it is for Nepal.

Have the international airlines brought this to the notice of the CAAN (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal)?
We have to be hopeful and keep prodding the authorities. All international airlines operating in Nepal need to offer their quality of service to continue their business. Even though Nepal is very popular as a tourist destination, a lot more people would come here if the infrastructure was upgraded. We keep explaining to the concerned authorities that Nepal can reap benefits if airlines bring in more people. So, I am hopeful that the authorities will come up with the solutions. We will keep pushing the government and want everybody to see us as part of the solution, and to provide better service to help Nepal’s tourism industry.

How about congestion at Istanbul for transit passengers?
We already have two airports in Istanbul. Now we are building the third one. The new airport will be one of the world’s biggest, and will be completed next year. The city’s location makes it an ideal transit hub for passengers from Kathmandu to world destinations. We are also encouraging transit passengers flying via Turkish Airlines to make stopovers in Istanbul by offering reasonable packages and e-visas. Besides that, depending on the connection time we have Tour Istanbul packages and free hotel accommodation.

Nepal’s tourism industry has seen what Turkish Airlines is doing to try to develop the market. Hopefully we will celebrate silver, golden anniversaries and be able to offer two daily flights in the future. We will move together with Nepal to reach the targets.

See excerpt of the Nepali Times Studio Discussion

with Abdullah Tuncer Keceli, GM, Turkish Airlines, Nepal.

nepaltimes.com

6 INTERVIEW

13 - 19 OCTOBER 2017 #879

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NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.
Business builder

Connecting Nepali start-up entrepreneurs with venture capital

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Five years after it launched, RedMud Coffee is already a well-established brand in Nepal, on track to become the country’s version of Starbucks. Founded in 2012 with just two employees, the company now employs over 70 young people, and is preparing to open its fifth outlet in 2017.

“Our long-term plan is to open at least 10 outlets in Nepal and sell three tons of coffee annually,” says founder Ashish Adhikari, a USA returnee.

But RedMud’s future might not have been as rosy without the help of Rocketstart Impact, a Dutch program that helps Nepali start-ups secure crucial venture capital.

RedMud Coffee received international investment in 2015 — and hasn’t looked back since. “Our growth would have definitely been slower if it wasn’t for foreign investment,” says Adhikari. “We all should be happy that Nepali start-ups are getting such support from Rocketstart Impact.”

Started in Nepal in 2014, Rocketstart Impact has already helped 20 companies, out of the 521 applications that it received. Of them, 21 firms have secured international investment pledges totalling over Euro 3 million.

Best Paani, Rockhama, Cotton Mill, Bloom Nepal School, Posh Meets, Smart Tech Solution, ICT for Agriculture, Rammed Earth Solution, and Intercontinental systems are among the alumni.

Rocketstart Impact is one of four programs of Rocketstart, started by journalist-turned-serial-entrepreneur Oscar Kneepkers in 2011 to help entrepreneurs realise their dreams. Nepal is Rocketstart Impact’s first country; its priority areas include agriculture, food, education, environment, clean tech and healthcare.

“There is a big gap between people building scalable, innovation-driven companies and the expectation of investors,” Kneepkers told Nepal Times during a recent visit. “Rocketstart Impact helps to bridge the gap between start-ups and investors by sharing the best practices to grow businesses,” he adds.

The program has now received applications for its fourth iteration in which, as in earlier rounds, 10 participants will be selected and given intensive training for 100 days.

Says program director Victoria Dau: “We seek ambitious entrepreneurs with scalable and innovative business models that can create social impact. The selected entrepreneurs will learn to build a business plan, develop communication skills and pitch better to investors in 100 days of mentorship with us.”

After mentorship, the Nepali entrepreneurs have to pitch their business plans to potential investors in Amsterdam.

Kneepkers says that starting Rocketstart Impact in Nepal has been a successful experiment and, encouraged by the popularity and positive response, the program is being expanded to Myanmar.

“I feel very thankful that Nepal will always be the launch pad for Rocketstart Impact in Asia,” he says, adding, “we will continue the program as long as we find entrepreneurs who want to make the local economy and society stronger.”
Shey-Phoksundo may become a bus park,

**TSHIRING L LAMA**

Dolpo is home to many of Nepal’s protected mammals including the snow leopard, Himalayan wolf and musk deer, and is a major storehouse of high-value biological resources like yurpa. It is endowed with some of Nepal’s most scenic natural landscapes such as Phoksundo Lake, the holy Crystal Mountain and Kanjivara Himal, and is also the last remaining repository of the Bon culture. The largest part of the district is made up of Shey-Phoksundo National Park, which was set aside in 1984 for the conservation and management of its nature and cultural heritage. However, Shey-Phoksundo is not treated as a national park: it is used by outsiders and even the government mainly for revenue extraction rather than conservation.

For a small fee, outsiders are allowed to trek across the high slopes every spring to pick yurpa, severely disrupting the ecology of the region. In 2016, I recorded two snow leopard cubs that had been tranquilised by yurpa harvesters, probably by poisoning. I saw a blue sheep being poached and three stone traps set for these animals, which are the main prey of snow leopards. One of these traps was first recorded in 2011, and is still there. Recently, we rescued blue sheep trapped in wire snares 5km from the National Park and Nepal Army post in the village of Tao. Many of our projects, made with the help of the Nepal Trust and the Government of Nepal, are being used to raise the awareness of the locals about the importance of conservation and sustainable development. While working on my thesis on the impact of the yurpa collection on the snow leopard, I found that mostly seven out of every ten respondents had no permit slip from the national park to harvest yurpa. Local residents have to pay Rs 200, while the countrymen pay Rs 3,000. The park collected Rs 5.
to heaven

The lake

Phoksundo lake was formed 40,000 years ago by one of the biggest known rockslides in the Himalayas, which blocked the Sulagad Gorge creating a barrier up to 550m high. The lake is 5 km, the second largest in Nepal and second deepest (afterular) The trek is made up of a mix of terrain and terrain that descends into a gorge at 30 to 350m to the southeast of the lake, probably during a seismic event. Geologists say the natural dam is sturdy and the spillway table enough not to flood downstream settlements. Phoksundo doesn’t have fish, and currently few migratory birds visit it as a stopover.

instead of a national park

With the road connecting Dzul and within two years, Dolpo needs to adopt a strict ecotourism model. Only 431 foreign tourists visited the national park last year, but most of them flew to the national exchequer rather than to the local economy. This number will grow, with a large influx of Nepali visitors once the road is complete. The challenge to be conserved Dolpo’s natural resources and protect its cultural heritage from greater tourist inflows. Blunders have already been made like the ugly stone wall constructed at enormous cost by the Lake Conservation Committee with support from the National Lake Conservation Development Committee (NLCDC). Supposedly built to protect the lake, it ended up becoming an eyesore. The money could have been spent on sediment control gabion walls along three major glacial river inlets into the lake. A majority of the locals support the arrival of the new road because it will bring free-spending Nepali tourists who will stay in lodges. There is also a road linking Tibet with Upper Dolpo, which will reach the region even sooner.

Last year, as a member of the Dolpo Expedition on George Schaller: Return to the Realm of the Snow Leopard, I saw that most monasteries were empty and in a state of disrepair. Many of the monks were missing. Dolpo’s unique pre-Buddhist Bon culture is being gradually eroded by time. Dolpo’s former Saldang, Viper, and Phoksundo VDCs are now grouped under the Sher Phoksundo Village Council. In recent local elections the council was elected from Saldang and his deputy from Viper, and Phoksundo was denied the right to host the council headquarters as previously agreed. In retaliation, Phoksundo has cancelled timber extraction and plans to ban yera harvesting and grazing for residents of Saldang and Viper.

Traders from Phoksundo used to take their Tibetan caravans to Kyalo through Saldang, but this year they have re-routed it through Dho Tarpu to Lamara on the Chinese border. To conserve Dolpo’s wildlife, preserve its unique culture and address natural resource conflict among locals, the Nepalese government will have to work harder than before to enforce laws and plough back tourism earnings for local conservation.

Otherwise, it would be better to designate the Sheri Phoksundo National Park as Sheri Phoksundo Conservation Area.
GETAWAY

Shivapuri Heights Cottage.
A special package for those who wish to view the spectacular display of Lotus Flower lights down in the Kathmandu Valley this Tihar. Buy tickets online, 9447372707.

Glacier Hotel.

Chhaimale Resort.
Enjoy the natural silence and a peaceful weekend. Perfect for BDQ, picnics and family gatherings. Dabhobidaha, (01) 448721, 9851381489.

Balthali Village Resort.
A small, easy retreat with a 360° view of green rice fields, nestled within painted houses. Balthali, Khokana, 9857047518.

Jazzmandu.
The Kathmandu Jazz Festival turns 15 this year. Jazz music will fill the air as various artists play their sets at intimate venues across the valley. Take your pick of where to go.
10 October, 1805 hrs, Nepali Art Council, Babor Mohini. View brochure online: http://www.nepaliartcouncil.org.np/

Golden horizon.
12 artists from Nepal and India come together for a joint exhibition with underlying themes of heritage, society, culture and environment and human psychology. Looks 15 October, 1000 hrs, Nepal Art Council, Babor Mohini. View brochure online: http://www.nepaliartcouncil.org.np/

EVENTS

10

Tihar ayo

17 October, Kuch Tilhar (Dipawali) kicks off with a pious for the best of good deeds, the cow.
18 October, Kuch Tilhar: A solo pujao (prasad) for the best of women (the best friend).
19 October, Gai Tilhar: We come Lumi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, into your home by praying to pujas.
20 October, Nisha Bajai: The Newar community transmits the physical body, while others pray to Godavari, an avatar of Lord Vishnu.
20 October, Nandayu Bhairuni: Welcome in deity 1338 in the Newari calendar.
21 October, Bhai Tika: Siblings and brothers worship each other to ward off Yama, the bringer of death.
26 October, O Bharat: Celebrated by the people of Malishkola, a region of Nepal and India, O Bharat lasts four days. On the third day, people worship a wax statue of Kali at Ram Bahadur in Kathmandu and on the banks of rivers of India.

Photo contest.
Submit your three best tourism-related pictures in this contest organized by the Nepal Tourism Board, SAHAR and SADOL to mark World Tourism Day (27 September). Send your pictures to dipin.epa@gmail.com to participate. Deadline: 31 October, (01) 53424389 www.facebook.com/Nepal2013

Rock climbing.
Unleash your own strength by trying your hand (and feet) at rock climbing at Adreik Climbing Wall. The package includes lunch, a bottle of water and climbing safety gear. No previous experience required. Every Saturday, 8.00-9.30 AM, per person, (01) 4470080, 9841773567, www.facebook.com/rockclimbing

Adrian Pradhan live.
The popular singer is back and performing live, a chance to listen to some of his biggest hits. 14 October, 5.30AM, Tivava, Khokana. Rock, Lalitpur. (01) 5290554

Nima Rumba.
Your favorite pop singer is here to rock the stage again. Reserve your seats. 3 October, 6.00PM, Tipana, Lalitpur. (01) 4470200

Tradition subverted.
An exhibition that explores self identity and gender identification, as well as engaging viewers in a dialogue about urbanization and reciprocity, by artists Lika Tamrakar and Asha Singh. 11 October, 11 December, 6.00PM - 9.00PM. Maka Mandala, Aalekh Road, Lalitpur. (01) 5260116.

Friday night live.
Unwind with a surprising musical performance by Anshika. 27 October, 7.00PM, Al, Lo La, Sanga, Lalitpur. 9431619611

Shivapuri Heights Cottage

Cellar’s Café.
Perfect place for breakfast, lunch or dinner. The only eatery in town where you can chat for the whole of your choice as you dine. Lalitpur, (01) 5405456.

Dhokaima Café.
Try indigenous cocktails with a twist to mark Nepal Samiti 1138 new year at the Rupemuni Bar. Annapurna, (01) 529111, dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com

Falcha.
Give in to the twin pleasures of lemon jess chicken and mutton handi-kabab. Jomolalai, 9817015475.

Café Jireh.
Escape the hustle-bustle of the city and enjoy fine food here. Bhaktapur, (01) 5250162.

Yala Mandala.
Spending an evening at a café in this urban artform village. Take a tour of the gallery and handicraft workshops until your food arrives. Kathmandu Road, Lalitpur, 01559941.

Praza,
A new pick in town. Spend the weekend with great food and craft beer. Budana, 9811220222.

European Bakery.
For pastries, eclairs, Swiss rolls, cakes, chocolates and many more Saturday specialities. Chumle, (01) 4425947.

Wunjala Mosha.
Treat your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in the lush garden surrounded by ancient trees and trickling streams. Rand, (01) 443253

Dunga.
Head down for some delectable continental food and don’t forget their signature cocktails, all served with fine hospitality in an excellent space. Lalitpur, Pokhara, (01) 8432311

Park Village Resort.
Yoga, detox and ayurvedic treatment in a jungle corner at Kathmandu... Osho Yoga Health & Fitness Center, Park Village Resort, Bhaktapur, 01477280, person@okes.com

Milla Guesthouse.
If you enjoy the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect guest house to stay. Not too far from the city, yet miles apart. Bhojpur, 9857041107

Mango Iree Lodge.
Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife excursions, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park. info@mangoireelodge.com sherpa, info@maharajaguesthouse.com

Pataleban Vineyard Resort.
Japanese influenced resort with great views, Jungle walks and picnics. Oshoana, Kathmandu, 9864705984.

Juile Mountain Resort.
Resort 2250m above sea level, the eco-resort has a lounge that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic hammock experience. Shivapuri-Nagarjuna National Park, (Approach), (01) 2871195.
Saving the sound of music

Meet Hari Lal Kul, who is keeping Nepal’s musical tradition alive by preserving its instruments

SEBASTIAN WOLLIGANDT

If you want to hear the history of Nepal in its sounds, you have to visit the shop in Patan that makes and preserves ancient instruments, all lovingly restored to bring the beats, rhythms and melodies that are centuries old right to our ears today.

Hari Lal Kul has given himself the responsibility of preserving this important part of Nepal’s heritage. On a lane in Saugal Tole off Patan Durbar Square, he runs the Nepali Sanskritik Baja Udyog, together with his wife and son. Tucked away in a narrow alley, the place is more of a music museum than a shop, with a collection of over 45 traditional and modern musical instruments.

Kul, 57, is obsessed with his work and always has something to repair or make. Two years ago, he cut short his visit to meet his sister in England because he became so impatient at not doing anything with his hands.

“I missed my work here in the shop, so I changed my flight and came home early,” remembers Kul, who joined the Royal Nepal Army in 1974, when he was just 16, to be a drummer in the marching band.

He learnt the craft of making musical instruments from his father, who learnt it from his father. The Kuls have held the position for at least seven generations.

There is one of the three old musicians families made up of the Kul, Kulu and Kujli. The word probably comes from Kulu, where drums originated during the 17th century. These were brought to Kathmandu as percussion instruments for royal festivals.

Today, Kul also designs and builds other string and percussion instruments like ek rauc, sarangi and madal. He sometimes takes up to three years to finish a madal because the right type of wood needs to be seasoned.

Rahul Gajmala buys their instruments in Hari Lal Kul’s shop. He has even designed his own musical instruments, and one of them can produce the sound of ocean waves or insect sounds.

Ashish Kul, Hari Lal’s 26-year-old son, is also in his ancestral profession. He plans to open a small cafe next to the shop so that young people can see and listen to traditional instruments. But young Nepalis may not need coffee to be attracted to the sound of music; Ashish’s five-year-old son is already making his first moves on drums.

Tungra
The popular ancient folk instrument Dampa is an original rhythm of Tansang Selo, with unique importance and influence in Nepali folk music. This string instrument has a body carved from a single piece of wood and a resonating chamber made from gautsain.

Ek Tare
Plucked with one finger, this was a single-string instrument of wandering bards and musicians from Nepal. The string is pulled over animal skin covering a frame made of dried pumpkin, gourd, wood or coconut, with a split-bamboo cane neck.

Thunder Drum
When the tube is shaken, the sound is amplified and resonates, producing a booming thunder sound.

Insect Sound
Another instrument invented by Hari Lal Kul, it trills like crickets.

Chhau
A slim 2-sided frame drum that has many steel marbles inside to produce soft and melodious sounds like ocean waves. The drum is made of goatskin and has many steel balls inside that strike each other. Invented 26 years ago by Hari Lal Kul, it is used for music therapy and theatre.

Listen
Go online to hear the sound of each of these old and new instruments.
The members of the Julia Sarr Quartet see themselves as having three main things in common: a grounding in jazz music and performance, their shared home of Paris and a strong enthusiasm for bringing the sounds of West Africa to Nepal’s Jazzmandu festival this year.

With a set list of original Sarr songs, primarily from her debut solo album Darahoulou released in 2013, the musicians will collaborate for the first time at Jazzmandu, bringing a new twist to Sarr’s music and a range of musical experiences in their performances.

Sarr will take the stage alongside pianist Fred Soulé, who also arranged the instrumental parts of her album, percussionist Julie Saury and bassist Bruno Scherp, each of whom compose their own original work.

Sarr, who moved to Paris from Senegal at 13, sings original in her native Wolof language, melding the sounds of West Africa with jazz influences while preserving her own culture and language.

She has collaborated with a mix of highly acclaimed jazz musicians, including Youssou N’Dour and Patrice Larose, and is widely sought after as a backing vocalist. She describes her first album, Sëron, in collaboration with Larose, as “an encounter with guitar, Danmenco, and French” influences, while her solo album was a “long journey” in which she had the chance to create original work.

“If you do backing vocal, you serve the music of someone. You must be humble just to give the best of your skill and work,” said Sarr, in conversation with her band mates soon after arriving in Kathmandu. “It’s more emotional when you perform your own work, your song and your own history. It’s a different approach. Going live is transferring your feelings to the people,” she told Nepal Times.

Liking in Paris, where musicians hail from many countries and work in myriad languages, the possibilities for making music are immense. “Paris is a capital with lots of magic, every kind of culture and race,” Sarr says. “We deal very easily as we can learn different cultures from all over the world.”

“Singing in the Wolof language is the most important thing for me,” she added.

Sarr says “the flavour of the song” is at the core of her songwriting process. “A song is like a remedy. When I write songs, I bring in my childhood memories in Africa, the idea of being exiled and the experience of living far from our country, of being detached from your roots and creating your new roots.”

Sarr and Soulé are making their Jazzmandu debut, while Saury and Scherp have each performed three times at the festival since 2009.

Julie Saury continues to return to Nepal with various projects because she has fallen in love with Nepal. “The most exciting part for me is to play with Nepal musicians.”

The Julia Sarr Quartet will have major performances on 13 October at Miskib in Jhamshikhel from 7-9 pm (Rs60), and on 15 October at Yula Maya Kendra (Bhaktapur) 7-9 pm (Rs500). Saisi Limited.

Julie Paque and Shoojaa Shehla

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**HAPPENINGS**

**UNITED WE STAND:** Puwasha Kamal Dahal, Chairman of CPN (Maoist Center) and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (United) signing an agreement on the integration of their parties in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

**HIGH CULTURE:** MP Ranjitra Ashkali dances after inaugurating the Annapurna Sanctum Tourism Festival 2017 at Annapurna Base Camp on Wednesday.

**WE SWEAR:** Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli administers the swearing-in of newly appointed Supreme Court judges in the presence of President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun, and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

**BACK TO SCHOOL:** Former Kumar Malitra Shalaya attends classes on her first day in school in Kathmandu on Monday.

**TALKING BUSINESS:** Minister of industry Surendra Thapa inaugurates a workshop on Nepali-US trade organized by the US Embassy on Wednesday. At right is US Ambassador to Nepal Alaka Teotia.
Remembering Rara

Tulan Neupane in Jilje, Khotabuprakha,
24 September - 7 October

Lok Bahadur Shait used to run a small store near Rara Lake. One day 40 years ago, a government clerk went door to door, ordering him and everyone else in the village to pack up and move out. They were being resettled in the Talai to make way for Rara National Park.

This was in the days of the Panchayat, when there was no question about obeying a royal decree issued by King Mahendra himself. Mahendra was remembered by Rara, and penned his famous poem Rara 40 Jupun Kiag king under a jumper tree on the southern shore of the lake in 1964. The king died before his dream of creating a pristine nature reserve could be realised, but his son Biranda fulfilled his father’s vision by evicting 134 families from around Rara Lake, which was declared a national park in 1970.

Lok Bahadur, now 82, still remembers the day he had to leave his home for good. That morning, he lit a lamp and put enough oil in it for the whole day. He secured his house with a padlock as if his family would return soon.

The family had to leave cows, buffaloes, sheep, mountain goats, and musk. There were rumours that the sooner they reached the Talai the larger would be the plot of land they would get. So he sold all his livestock at throwaway prices and headed down to Malipur village of Bardia district in the mid-western plains.

Back then, displaced families were told that the government had already built concrete houses for them. But that turned out to be just one of the many lies they uncovered as they settled down in the malaria-infested jungles of Bardia.

Not only were there no houses, there was no drinking water and no easy access to nearby towns. The mountain dwellers could not adjust to the heat of the Talai, and moved to Chitwan without asking for government permission.

Chitwan was better, but the Rara family faced resentment from locals. After a five-year struggle, they finally got the land they were promised. The younger generation adapted to the new life, but those who had social, economic and cultural roots in Rara still pine for what they consider home.
Selling Nepal on the Net

Digital marketing of Nepal’s tourism is replacing traditional advertising

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

The number of tourists visiting Nepal is expected to reach an all-time high of 1 million this year, recovering from the steep fall after the earthquake and blockade in 2015. Much of this is not because of placing commercials on cable news channels, but because of a new social media and digital strategy.

The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says positive feedback from tourists on sites like TripAdvisor and Agoda as well as posts on Instagram and Facebook are much more effective in attracting visitors to Nepal. Which means the country could reach the target of doubling arrivals to 2 million by 2020 by having greater online outreach.

“Digital marketing is extremely important to promote Nepal’s tourism, and the best part about it is that we can measure the impact of the money we spend,” said NTB’s Deepak Raj Kashi. NTB spent Rs10 million on digital marketing in 2016-17 — including partnering with TripAdvisor, and believes this contributed to the post-earthquake tourism rebound. This year’s budget has been increased to Rs60 million, and this includes collaborations with Lonely Planet and others. Although NTB still buys costly airtime for commercials on mainstream media like CNN and BBC, they are not as effective anymore.

Says Damian Cook of E-Tourism Foundation: “Firstly, it is expensive, but more importantly it places your tourism message alongside news, which is overwhelmingly negative.” Cook, who participated in an International Travel Blogger’s Conference earlier this year in Kathmandu, says Nepal needs “aggregation” — gathering, filtering, re-purposing and repurposing content from visitors and using this in targeted social media campaigns. Since that conference, global media listed Nepal as the country to visit in 2017. The endorsements were widely circulated on Facebook and Instagram, and NTB sponsored content about Nepal on Facebook to attract Indian tourists.

Travel blogger and consultant Mike Shubic, who also attended the Kathmandu conference, says video is becoming a much more impactful medium: “They say a photo is worth 1,000 words but a 1 minute video is worth 1.7 million words. We consume a lot more information in the video format, in a whole lot less time than it takes to read.”

Indeed, 70% of web traffic today is video content, and by 2020, that number will be 85%. Shubic says a more effective, and affordable, marketing strategy for Nepal...

Facebook friendly

Beggars Rene Magnier and Jeff Johns went to bed after posting a video of their Nepal trip, “48 hours in Nepal: Kathmandu and beyond” on Facebook. When they woke up, it already had 279,000 views. It was shared by Nepalis as well as viewers who had never seen footage of Nepal. It already has 1.1 million views on the couple’s Facebook page. Most of their travel videos do phenomenally well, Johns said in an email interview. The couple live in Dubai and blog about their travels on www.whatsoestuck.com, where they also provide travel advice and feature their blog series.

“More and more people turn to fellow travelers and influencers for advice and feedback,” says Johns. “They feel they can trust us more than an advert or ‘by the book’ place. Facebook is such an interactive platform. It allows our fans to comment, tag and share with their friends, so the information can travel very quickly.”

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“You dog, you cow.”

When the video of a British trader Gemma Wilson being chased by a Nepali meat-slab owner foruggling over a cup of tea on the Annapurna Circuit went viral on the Internet last month, Nepal’s tourism promoters were worried. Within a week of appearing on the Daily Mail website, the clip had been viewed 15 million times, and was widely shared by the mainstream media. However, instead of support, the British woman was heaped abuse on the website as well as on social media on the social web. She was ridiculed for bargaining, while the obviously perplexed and undressed Nepali woman even got some praise for chasing her customer so determinedly up the mountain, venting her anger using such pithy words. The British tourist was also criticized for selling the clip to the Daily Mail, and for trying to make money out of the incident.

would be to either sponsor event development, or run pre-roll ads on targeted video content on websites like YouTube, SOKU and DirecTV.

“The tourism needs people who can capture stunning photos, write helpful content and film compelling footage to be disseminated and shared on social media,” be added.

When people travel they post four times more pictures and videos on Facebook or Instagram pages. The video ‘48 hours in Nepal: Kathmandu and Beyond’ by Nepali visitors Anne Mignier and Jeff Johns has been viewed by 1.5 million on Facebook. (See box)

However, social media can be a double edged sword, and visitors feedback, for instance, on the poor quality of roads, long waits at airport immigration and overcharging can also spread negative publicity.

Which means the only way to increase tourism today is to provide better value and quality service to individual travellers who then post feedback online. (See box)

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Go online to watch ‘48 hours in Nepal: Kathmandu and Beyond’ on Facebook.

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