PRo-women

Thanks to the new Constitution, women who were under-represented in the First Past The Post results will get seats in federal and provincial assemblies via Proportional Representation quotas.

The unexpectedly wide margin with which the UML swept the provincial and parliamentary elections has put the Left Alliance in a celebratory mood, but it comes with a tinge of worry for male members in the party’s proportional representation (PR) list.

Since only two of its candidates won in direct elections, the UML will now have to nominate mostly women among the 49 or so of its PR quota to make up for the shortfall. The new Constitution stipulates that 33% of the members of both houses of Parliament have to be women. However, only 6 of the 235 members are women – only 2.3%. At least 85 of the PR members nominated to the Lower House (about 77%) will have to be female to make up for the shortfall – and the UML will have to come up with the most women because of its big win.

The Mallas will be under slightly less pressure, as the UML has more candidates to choose from. Among the party candidates, 78 women were elected in the elections, but only 64 of them could make it to Parliament. The remaining 14 candidates will be used to make up for the shortfall. This means that the party will have to nominate at least 78 women to make up for the shortfall, and even here the UML must nominate the most women.

Political analysts have seen this as a great leap forward in constitutionally-guaranteed representation of women, Dalits, Madhesis and (in due course) federal and provincial legislatures. District-level women cadre of all the parties will now be part of law-making bodies.
GUEST EDITORIAL

BHOBYAJ POKHAREL

Electoral reform

Nepal recently held three elections with overwhelming participation of voters. We have made remarkable improvements in recent years in electoral management and in making election bodies more inclusive. Compared to the past, campaigning is now more peaceful and elements and ripple effects appear to have been resolved.

However, we need to take some further steps to improve the electoral process and strengthen democracy. Political parties can still manipulate the current electoral system, which creates mistrust among voters. The Election Commission (EC) doesn’t have adequate time to educate the people, so we need to provide our education, make voters’ education a continuous process and consider legal damage to reduce the number of invalid papers in the future.

More than 4.4 million people are voting in foreign countries. We need to make the election dates in the Constitution so that everyone can vote. Voters can vote by casting a vote in Nepal or through the internet. Online voting could significantly increase voter turnout in the future.

With an early voting system they would have enough time to travel to cast their ballots. It is essential to allow more time for travel to Nepal to vote.

A lot of Nepalis cannot vote even though they are living abroad because of the dense district. We must improve the electoral system so that people can vote where they are temporarily living or working inside the country. Early voting and allowing public transport on the day of election will make it easier for people to exercise their voting rights. Election Day should be the only day after which the voter must have the certificate.

Using the election date in the constitution would make planning and management easeful and easier for the government, the EC, political parties and political leaders. It is also time we introduced voter registration and election-related logistics management to the local government. Similarly, by revising the EC’s regulations, we can focus on policy, planning, capacity building, overall supervision and monitoring aspects of polling.

Voting has been made too easy for the government, and the problem is the influence of money. Challenges for representation. Political parties must be public funded to increase their efficiency and transparency.

All seats, constituencies and regions were included in the Constituent Assembly process through proportional representation. We need to return to direct voting in the next election as well as help elect minority candidates to ensure equal representation.

Bhobhayaj Pokharel is a former Chief Election Commissioner, watch his interview with Times online.
DISCOVER MORE OF ISTANBUL

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMEBR.
Nepal is a mouse that has to learn to live with two big tomcats in the neighbourhood, one red and the other saffron.

With the end of World War II, Nepal was aware of the winds of change in the world and took a very smart step by sending a goodwill mission to Washington DC in October 1946. The result was the classic 25 April 1947. Nepal and the United States established diplomatic relations.

We are currently celebrating the 75th anniversary of Nepal-America relations with various events. In those seven decades, the US has helped Nepal eradicate malaria, built a roadway to Kathmandu (now defunct), contributed to the East-West highway, and established the forestry campus and agriculture college in Pokhara and Chitwan. Many of us went to some of the best US universities on full scholarships. Peace Corps volunteers became the first foreigners to teach in remote Nepal villages, and became ambassadors for the millions of Americans who came here as back-packers and hippies.

1947 was also the year Britain granted independence in India and Pakistan. Only three years later, Nepal and the Republic of India signed a treaty of peace and friendship and trade and commerce. This treaty continues to be a source of debate and suspicion in Nepal, even though many have not read it.

In 1949, China declared its intention to ‘liberate’ Tibet, and it was not until 1955 that Nepal and the People’s Republic of China established full diplomatic relations — eight years after the US. Nepal no doubt benefited from having the US as an ally or America’s power in the world grew. Strong bilateral relations have worked as the third leg of the stool — helping Nepal remain stable. Nepal made a smart move then and must continue to do so as smart as it was in 1947. America took over the world not so much with its military might but rather with its popular culture, food, Hollywood movies and curious like Tom and Jerry. The plot of Tom and Jerry is very relevant for a country like Nepal that needs to be clever, agile and able to stay ahead of the game, given we live in a two big cat economic world.

There is an episode of Tom and Jerry that you must not lose sight of. The Count is a specially relevant to Nepal. Chinese reformer Deng Xiaoping, the leader credited for heading China to economic prosperity, once said that it didn’t matter if the cat was black or white as long as it caught mice. Like the quick-thinking Jerry, Nepal today has to deal with two tomcats, one red and the other saffron.

A big challenge today in Nepal, where one in four have left the country and more are planning to do the same, is that there is a tendency to not be risk-takers but to play safe and play the second mouse. This mindset is to watch and see what happens to the first mouse. If the first mouse gets killed at the mouse trap, the second mouse gets the cheese.

What we need in Nepal is a society that supports new ideas and risk-taking entrepreneurs, and creates the supporting ecosystem for their enterprises to flourish. Silicon Valley startups have a lot to teach us. We can offer Nepal as the new innovation centre for entrepreneurs who use our strategic location between two of the world’s largest markets.

Many Nepalis today have cousins in the USA who support them back home. Nepal has demand to have Washington as its ally, friend and cousin. The next 70 years are a chance for Nepal to look forward to these relations for co-prosperity.

Elections and everyday democracy

Vignettes from election day in Sindhupalchok

Free and fair elections are the ultimate benchmark in assuring whether a society is democratic or not. With the recently concluded parliamentary elections, politicians and optimists would like us to believe that Nepal has marked an end to its protracted transition period and now the journey is towards political stability and economic prosperity. Beyond the rhetoric, however, what is the status of democracy in everyday life?

It was evening and the temperature had dropped below 10 degrees at Piplahada, a small village located on the hour’s walk from Chautara, the headquarters of Sindhupalchok district. With all the electoral preparations done, the polling officers were conducting a final pre-election meeting.

It was around two polling station at the Siddhi Kamaldevi School, still scarred by the 2015 earthquake. The single-storey building that housed these classrooms had many cracks, one of the rooms was missing a wall, and the doors in the remaining two had come off their hinges. On a wall outside, along with pictures of Buddha and Laxmi, Fraud Devkota, was a quotation: ‘Even if I don’t carry a kharika... I will destroy the injustices of this world using my pen.’

The elections were happening on school grounds that didn’t even have a proper classroom. Let alone fighting the injustices of this world, it seems the most pressing battles for students here are to cope with freezing cold in winters without walls and finding a decent toilet. Across Nepal, elections were happening in dilapidated schools and crumbling public spaces that spely reproduce decades of failed promises, a history of isolation from the centres and the permanently disempowered state of the country.

Jajarkot Parjuli, the newly elected deputy mayor of Chautara Sangukhad municipality, is in her well-furnished office explaining how centralised governance is the key reason for Sindhupalchok’s underdevelopment despite it being so close to the capital. And now that the local government is in place and the process of institutionalising federalism is well under way, things will improve. Such optimism does not carry through as we travel further into the remote village of Kadambas on dirt tracks.

The concept of centre is relative. Just like the Kathmandu-centric approach to governance creates and marginalises peripheral spaces, the district headquarter-centric approach pretty much does the same. A few hours from the town centre and still within the boundaries of the municipality, there are settlements that lack water supply and proper housing. Yet, even in those places, party flags, posters and pamphlets were ubiquitous, all promising the staple political services of stability, development and prosperity.

On election day in one of the polling stations in Kadambas, an elderly female voter came accompanied by a young man. She was wearing her Husband’s clothes, it looked like she had come directly from work in farm. The young man brought the ballot and voted on her behalf. The female voter seemed uncomfortable but did not speak, either indirectly but whether she voted by choice, what that vote meant for her, how she voted and on whose behalf. It is a difference to her life are difficult things to say.

An election is a process that reaffirms the status of ordinary people being disconnected to the state. Yet, the circumstances under which people are voting, the realities of their everyday lives, and the actual choices they have to vote or not to vote are all likely to determine if elections can be more than just a perfunctory democratic exercise.
Belmaya, the filmmaker

SUE CARPENTER

Ten years ago, I was living in Pokhara teaching photography to give girls a voice. Their photos showed such vibrancy and talent that the British Council hosted two exhibitions of their work in Kathmandu. Looking back at an article I wrote in Nepali Times then, one girl stood out: Belmaya Nepal.

At 14, she was a natural filmmaker from an under-served community who had struggled in Nepal’s patriarchal society. Fast forward to 2014, and Belmaya had fallen back into a life of poverty and hardship. She got married at 19, had a baby daughter and moved to her husband’s Tamang village. Now they were back in Pokhara, living in a tiny, windowless room. Sitting on the concrete roof, she told me of the troubles she had endured. “I’ve never seen happiness in my life,” she said, and I don’t think I’ll ever find it.

Belmaya was orphaned at the age of nine, and had to cut grass and collect firewood before school. Her teacher mocked her for having “a brain filled with cow dung”, and Belmaya was so hurt she dropped out. “If I could have continued my studies, I could have found a better job. I wouldn’t have to ask my brothers for help. I wouldn’t have to be dependent on my husband,” she said.

Her life was about to change, however. Belmaya grasped the opportunity to learn filmmaking skills to continue her love of photography. It put not just the camera but its power into her hands, to tell stories from her perspective.

Since 2014, I have followed Belmaya’s journey into filmmaking for a feature documentary, Fierce. With the forces of family and society against her and a lifetime of disappointments, Belmaya could so easily have dropped out. But she not only stuck with the training, she used what she had learnt to transform her domestic life.

Last year Belmaya made her graduation film, Educate Our Daughters — a personal, short documentary about the importance of education for girls, through the prism of her own lost childhood and her hopes for her daughter, now a spunky five-year-old. Towards the end of the film, in an unconscious echo of her 14-year-old self, Belmaya states, “I want to go back to my village and show them what a girl can do.”

She did just that, creating a pop-up cinema to screen her film to family and neighbours. It was a magical evening, with her community finally understanding and celebrating her mission to tell powerful stories that challenge the status quo.

These followed her first professional commission from Thomson Reuters Foundation, Rowing Against the Flow, about boatwomen struggling to compete in a man’s world, and she is now planning a film about female frogticide in Nepal. Now, both her films have been selected for the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival next week.

Ten years after her photos were exhibited in the capital, Belmaya has come full circles in showing what a girl can do. Girls can excel at anything. Like boys, they just need the opportunities.

belmaya will present her film at 730pm at 130pm on 14 December
Sue Carpenter’s Nepali photographer and filmmaker
www.belmaya.com

Hybrid power
A wind-solar generation plant in Nakhonrungsima of Sinthali has started producing 112 kW of energy per day for 83 rural households. The project is a joint undertaking of the Asian Development Bank and Renewable Energy Promotion Centre.

Go St Petersburg
Qatar Airways will launch a film series, using a Boeing 777, to St Petersburg, Russia on 1 December, connecting the Russian cultural destination to many parts of the world, including Nepal via Lhsa.

Fording it
Ford has introduced its GO Fords’ Extended Sales and Service Network in Dubai to be its global product line-up as well as for repair of 15-20 cars a day.

Direct deal
Turkish Airlines has announced a codeshare agreement with Brazil’s Azul, allowing customers to purchase tickets directly from Turkish Airlines sales channels to fly to Brazilian destinations.

Red edition
After the launch of the 15 and 15 Kids in Black, Øyning has introduced the 15-club in red. It provides larger storage and a better precision with EGB RAM-64 GB ROM at a price tag of RsA,999.
Bardiya beginnings

How Nepal’s wild west was opened to eco tourism 30 years ago

T
e today if you want to visit the jungles of Bardiya, the drive from Nepalganj airport takes less than two hours. Things were very different back in 1983 when Tiger Tops was first asked to build a camp in Royal Bardiya National Park, thus opening up Nepal’s neglected western districts. It was easier to drive through India than struggle with the poor roads and rickety crossings on the Nepali side of the border. The East West highway, taking care to avoid the occasional bullock cart, herd of goats or bright buffalo balancing loads on their heads. Peering over the concrete balustrade of the Babai Bridge, golden and marsh mugger crocodiles bask greasily on a sandbank, warming their reptilian blood in the pale afternoon sun.

After an hour or so, the farmland gives way to sal forest, until the exciting moment when you turn left at an unremarkable truck stop village, down a dusty lane that leads across the river and into the Park.

One afternoon, my boss Jim Edwards asked me to accompany him to a meeting with Prabhasak JNR Rana, managing chairman of Kathmandu’s Soulel Ovheli Hotel and respected doyen of Nepal’s blossoming tourism industry. We drove across town in the back of Jim’s green Range Rover with Jim Bahadir, the diminutive driver perched on a pile of cushions to see over the wheel.

Across acres of dark polished wood with our feet in deep- pile carpets, Prabhasak smiled kindly over his half-framed glasses.

“Your father has the government concession for a tourism operation in Bardiya, and we would like Tiger Tops to develop it. The short grassland plains in Bardiya where our family used to hunt are fantastic for wildlife viewing — tiger of course, no less but wild elephant, swamp deer and blackbuck, and in the rivers, mahseer and freshwater dolphin. Very complimentary to Chitwan!”

Prabhasak’s distinctly high voice was shrill with excitement, Jim was characteristically unfazed by the daunting logistics and enormity of the task. That is why he was so much fun to work with; he had vision, charm and confidence, and trusted me to help make things happen. Besides, aristocratic Nepali partners could cut through the bureaucratic maze, appealing to Jim’s cavalier business methods.

At his father’s sprawling palace across the Bagmati, General Nara greeted us warmly. A formidable former police chief and sportsman of impeccable blue blood, his two daughters were royal princesses married to the King’s sons. Framed photos of Hitler and Mussolini hung in the palace, and the fountain in front of the house I never saw working. A sprightly old man with a wavy leg and infectious laugh, General Nara ended ruling privileges to his dying day.

Rani Nara, comfortable in her curlicue and jewels, basked socially with the two, though the dusty chamberlains, silvery mirrors and Rana portraits, Jim smiled details of the Karnali deal, and I sat there wondering what we were getting ourselves into.

On the first staff meeting in Bardiya — we liked military terminology at Tiger Tops — it took Balamur Thapa three whole days and two nights sleeping rough to reach from Nepalganj, and our Land Rover was wrecked in the process. The terrain was remote and rugged, and the Park so little known, so unvisited visited. Stocky and serious, Balamur was every khaki-clad inch a naturalist of the old school, trained by Chuck Mc Dougall, knowledgeable, committed and reliable. Jim had encouraged him with his skinny 17-year-old nephew, “Look after Jim,” Jim said, placing Steve Webster’s hand into Balamur’s. “He’s fresh from the Channel Islands and needs an adventure.”

With the park warden, Balamur identified the glimmering riverine site that would become Karnali Tented Camp. Right on the Suffolk backwaters of the jungle. He found land on the forest boundary for Karnali Lodge with space enough for the elephant camp, staff quarters, vegetable garden and fishpond. By 1987 the tented camp was underway with a simple central lodge, 12 safari tents and shared bathroom blocks made of grass and bamboo. The lodge opened later in 1988.

My misgivings had been premature. Balthard’s newly accessible biodiversity became a magnet for wildlife devotees, filmmakers and scientists, it established much of Nepal’s more adventurous circuit for enthusiasts. With its exemplary sightings, Leonardo DiCaprio was shown his first tiger at the lodge, impressing his current commitment to their conservation, and the tented camp was always a favourite, especially at this time of year for family Christmas Vilas. Balamur was the first of many distinguished Tiger Tops Karnali managers — Coron Thapa, Dushyant Singh, Pradeep Rana, Gurmeet Malikar — until he left for a Norwegian university scholarship. Nowadays, Balamur teaches children in Shikhatar, with an English wife and three sons.
The Marston menagerie

Wendy and Robin Marston were away from their Sama Ga home two weeks ago when they got a frantic call. Their house was on fire. They rushed back to see smoke rising and lots of ash from the burnt grass and hay in the backyard.

The Marston’s store of straw and hay had caught fire, and their pet donkey Puja had tried to make small people working inside dash away to extinguish the flames.

"Puja is our heroine. She is intelligent and smart and very inquisitive. She likes to walk around to see what is going on," says Wendy, who with her husband Robin have lived in Nepal for 40 years, rescuing and caring for four generations of abandoned and sick animals.

The British couple currently has two donkeys, two ducks, four cats, four dogs and a sheep in their backyard.

First thing every morning, Wendy feeds her 33 animals, then heads out on her rounds of Patan to take care of street dogs, most of whom she knows by name. The dogs are so used to her, they wait for Wendy every morning.

"When I see them hungry, I know I should do something," says Wendy, who started feeding street dogs 20 years ago, and brought home the one that needed care.

She also raises money for children burned victims of government hospital in Kathmandu, and does other charity work.

There are an estimated 32,500 dogs on the streets of Kathmandu, and many suffer from under-nutrition, infections, mange and other injuries and illnesses. But the work of animal rights activists has reduced the number of stray.

"There are a lot fewer street dogs who are looking very sick and hungry these days," says Robin, a trekking entrepreneur.

Robin rescued Puja’s mother from a brick factory near Chobhar nine years ago, taking her home in the back of his car. After three months, the Marstons got the rescued donkey examined for a possible hernia. It turned out that she was pregnant, and Puja was born. Her mother died soon after, and the Marstons got Puja a sheep named Shobha (after Shobha De, the Indian writer) for company.

The other donkey, Jasmine, was an orphan when she was rescued from a brick factory a year after Puja was born. "They are like sisters, but sometimes they are difficult and nippy to each other," Wendy explains.

The 13 animals are taken together for walks around the Sama Ga neighborhood every morning and evening. This includes Dick and Daisy, two ducks saved by Wendy from the butcher’s knife in the nick of time.

For 40 years, there have been animals in the Marston yard. Says Wendy: "We didn’t look for them, they came looking for us. They allow us to live with them."

Zoph Lin

Watch short film about Wendy and Robin Marston, who have been living with donkeys, sheep, ducks, cats and dogs in the area for 40 years.

nepaltimes.com
SKIN TRADE

Besides being in demand as beasts of burden, donkeys are also wanted in China, where the skin of the animals is used in a traditional cosmetic called qipao, which makes people look younger.

According to the latest donkey skin trade report by The Donkey Sanctuary UK, donkey populations worldwide are facing a crisis due to increased demand from China, where the population of domestic donkeys has dropped from 9.4 million to 3.4 million in the last 20 years. Demand in China is at its highest since 2014, with the largest manufacturer of qipao, Dongfengfujie, alone consuming 1.5 million skins annually. China produces only 1.5 million donkeys annually, the rest have to be imported.

Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger, where donkeys are vital for fetching water, are losing their donkeys to the Chinese market, while some Chinese companies have set up slaughterhouses in Ethiopia to export donkey skins to China. "They bring the donkeys in trucks and kill about 200 of them every night, pass the skin, and transport them by sea to China," Saqib E Jafarghaligi, manager of the Donkey Sanctuary (Tigray) told the Asia for Animal’s Conference in February.

Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal have officially banned the donkey skin trade, and the Ethiopian government also shut down its slaughterhouse early this year.

Although there is no evidence that Nepal donkey skin is being smuggled into China, Alex Mayer of the Donkey Sanctuary says that Nepal should start taking precautions because the market for the skins is right next door. "Nepal can act now to stop the flow of donkeys coming from India to China," Mayer said, adding that Nepal needs to stop these trade or start as a mule producer as well to produce mules.
Animal activists work for the welfare of Nepal’s mules and donkeys

ZYU LIN
in DHADING

Soon after sunrise on a chilly winter morning, the donkeys are getting ready for another day carrying bricks at a kiln in Dhading. All day, they carry loads of up to 45kg of freshly-baked red bricks, making more than 30 roundtrips up and down the hillside. Some of them have their fore and hind legs tied so they do not stay.

During the brick season from December to June, thousands of equines together with their child handlers, come from India to work in the 300 or so kilns in Kathmandu and surrounding districts. Brick factories pay owners according to the number of bricks they deliver every day, and there is a tendency to overwork the animals.

Eight years ago, activists from Animal Nepal started working for the welfare of donkeys and mules toiling in brick factories. Nineteen factories in Dhading currently get help from Animal Nepal and UK-based The Donkey Sanctuary, whose Equine Outreach Program currently helps 21 donkeys, 359 mules and 177 horses in the district.

Arul Kumar Yadav from Animal Nepal explains that education includes telling owners that cutting donkey’s ears does not prevent tetanus, and to ensure that the animals are properly fed.

Says Yadav: “We have found that owners are now more conscious about the health of their animals. They call us more frequently, and they believe in us. Factory owners now provide money every week for nutritious food for the animals.”

Indian equine owner Ajmal Kasgar has just brought 24 mules and 6 horses to Dhading for the season, each costing up to Rs70,000.

“Mules have incredible perseverance and endurance, that is why I prefer them,” says Kasgar, who will sell the mules to Nepali villagers for ferrying work in the mountains. He will take the horses and donkeys back to India during the monsoon. Kasgar says business is flourishing because of the post-earthquake demand for bricks for reconstruction.

Shaneet Adhikari, who owns the Raktaadi Brick Factory in Dhading, confirms that the brick business is soaring, and adds that many kilns are moving out of Kathmandu because of competition. As demand increases, Adhikari is now planning to phase out mules and mechanise transportation.

BRICK SEASON

Watch our video of donkeys and mules arriving from India to work in brick factories on the outskirts of Kathmandu valley during the long winter season.
15 December

Nepal-India exhibition, 22 artists from Nepal and Inda will showcase their diverse artworks on the themes of women, gods, culture, life and many more.
11 December, 4:30 pm, Nepal Art Council, Bal Bhavan, Kathmandu, (01) 420775

Silver jubilee, Alumni event to celebrate 25 years of Rato Bangala School.
29 December, 3:30 pm, Kano Bangala School, Patan (Nicos), (01) 522084

16 December

Even When Fall (UK), Sky Neil, Kate McKean, 88 mins.
Thank You for the Rainbow (UK), Lilja Dahl, 88 mins.
Manta (France), Wojciech Kossakowski, 41 mins.

17 December

Wakasagi (New Zealand), Simon Wincuis, 13 mins.
Tender Lon (Nepal/Russia), Yuki Vovk, 46 mins.
Sing with Arty Bird (South Korea), Hyewon Lee, 88 mins.

18 December

Yanir van Hagen’s Nepal (Nepal), Tani Hagen, 41 mins.
Squidal (Spain), Vania Lagope, 74 mins.
Sandglass (Arts Time Space Adventure (India), Nimmy Modak 5 mins.

For more films and timings, visit kimff.org

EVENTS

Bird watching, Join a half-hour nature walk wth the huge hot panamic hiking trail to raise awareness about the importance of greenery for the conservation of birds and biodiversity.
16 December, 6:30 am, Neyaprou Board, Kathmandu, (01) 4471085, 8155600, include six breakfast, lunch, two-way transportation

Nepal-India exhibition, 22 artists from Nepal and Inda will showcase their diverse artworks on the themes of women, gods, culture, life and many more.
11 December, 4:30 pm, Nepal Art Council, Bal Bhavan, Kathmandu, (01) 420775

Tattwa live, Make your weekend memorable at Srumkula Garden with a taste of barbeque and live performances by Tattwa Band.
14 December, 2:30 pm, Srumkula Garden, Hotel Shangri-la, (01) 4412299

International beer fest, Get to taste more than 60 varieties of beers from local and international breweries and vendors at the first International beer fest.
The event is followed by live music.
16 December, 7:00 pm, Forest Lodge, Nauk, (01) 5244500, http://nepalinternationalbeerfestival.com

Zajzy night, Tapping to the beat of jazz with Ivan Strechija, Balin Wagle and Sahil KC.
25 December, 2:30 pm, Eighth Club and Bar, Jonkheer, (01) 5117757

Acoustic gig, Singer Rashep Nepal and pianist Ajab Shrestha are going to play some great acoustic numbers.
29 December, 7:00 pm, Eighth Club and Bar, Jonkheer, (01) 5117757

MUSIC

Ash King live, A chance to catch exclusive Ash King live in Nepal. He will performing his hit songs from India/German, Bang Bang and Bodyguard, among others.
23 January, 7:00 pm, Kano Bar and Lounge, Tepauter, (01) 4412299

Sing-Ma, Get fed on court experience with authentic eats from Singapore and Malaysia. Tip: by the blueberry cheese cake
Thomson, (01) 539099, 9814521650

Tabela, Satisfy your taste buds with exotic zingyni this weekend.
Mansion Club, Kail, (01) 5117785

DINING

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, A peaceful place to stay, complete with swimming pool, massage parlor and sauna. Once you’ve arrived, it’ll be hard to leave.
Gangtok, Sikkim, (0364) 403873

Park Village Resort, Yoga, dekka and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu, Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort 07-4720016, parkvilleresort.com.np

Buddha Maya Gardens, Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a ride at probably the best lake in the area.
Lumbini, (01) 5345700, info@buddhama.org

Mango Tree Lodge, Cultural walking, trekking in the k改进文”世界旅行”探索，and jungle safari at Bardia National Park.
Jhorsa, Bardia, (01) 4864938, info@mangotreelodge.com

Tranquility Spa, De-stress, relax and pamper yourself with a wide range of massages at any of the spa’s nine branches in Nepal.
www.tranquility.com.np

Hotel Landmark Pokhara, For the best views of Phewa Lake. Combine your stay with a cultural performances every evening.
Lakefront Pokhara, (044) 460398, 982103989

Juile Mountain Resort, Residing 2550m above sea level, the resort boasts a luscious terrace that opens across hills covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic farm to table experience.
Sherpa-Nepal National Park, (01) 4815299

MISS MUTTONATION

KIRPA JOSHI

Cafe Jireh, For a special event and the best friedwater place.
Arthop, (01) 5301792

Last Friday Bar & Grill, Indian cuisine, anyone? Tip: by the kaba.
Lukkam, (01) 4556270

Gyakok at Ghangi, Hot up with Gyakok special Gyakok at a special price of Rs999 (inclusive of taxes).
Complimentary drink included.
Visit on 21 December, Ghangi Botique Hotel, (01) 4490888

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 8-14 December

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The Air Quality Index for the past weeks shows the air at ground level in Kathmandu is the unhealthy red bust. These are average daily figures, and the warning things that the PM2.5 is worrisome morning and evening peak hours when the concentration of dangerously small particles is on the rise. The red figure is an extremely high level of the same, as well as the state of a serious state of living in the Valley.
https://nepal.nep.gov.np/embassy/air-quality-monitor/index

Gyakok at Ghangi, Hot up with Gyakok special Gyakok at a special price of Rs999 (inclusive of taxes). Complimentary drink included. Visit on 21 December, Ghangi Botique Hotel, (01) 4490888

Gyakok at Ghangi, Hot up with Gyakok special Gyakok at a special price of Rs999 (inclusive of taxes). Complimentary drink included. Visit on 21 December, Ghangi Botique Hotel, (01) 4490888

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The Air Quality Index for the past weeks shows the air at ground level in Kathmandu is the unhealthy red bust. These are average daily figures, and the warning things that the PM2.5 is worrisome morning and evening peak hours when the concentration of dangerously small particles is on the rise. The red figure is an extremely high level of the same, as well as the state of a serious state of living in the Valley.
Prehistoric paintings in Mustang

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Till now, the most interesting archaeological finds in Upper Mustang were sky caves containing human remains 3,300 years old, and scriptures and textiles suggesting the region’s links to the ancient Silk Road. But recently, anthropologists and archaeologists have discovered 40 rock paintings made of red and yellow ochres that they say could rewrite the history of the people of this part of Nepal that jet into the Tibetan Plateau. The paintings of wild yaks, horses, and other animals, with depictions of the crescent moon and human figures, were found on rock faces in the Kya and Ludak Valleys in the eastern part of Mustang.

“The paintings and inscriptions are different in style, execution, composition and placement, suggesting that they are from various historical periods,” says Pidel Devkota, who had been documenting the impact of climate change in Mustang for the past 10 years when he came across the rock art which are in such a remote location, even local herders didn’t know of them. At the Kya Valley site, the paintings were found on a cliff facing southeast towards Khairkali Himal, and although the Ludak rock art site is exposed it was only found three years ago.

Devkota collaborated with John Vincent Bellucci, an archaeologist and cultural historian specialising in Tibet, and the two have jointly published a paper, “Obscured for Centuries: The Lost Rock Art of Mustang,” documenting the discovery. As carbon dating has not yet been done, Bellucci compared the rock art and inscriptions, based on Devkota’s photographs, with the rock art in western Tibet, Sipti and Ludak. He dates some of the paintings as far back as pre-7th century BC.

“The first phase of paintings is prehistoric but the later phases are clearly motivated by Buddhism and Yongdron Bon religious practices,” writes Devkota in the paper.

The rock art depicts hunting and other wild animal-human interaction, birth giving, anthropomorphous portraits, fused shrines and other sacred symbols. Bellucci notes that the rock art in Kya and Ludak focuses on the beliefs, values and activities of the painters, although pinpointing their specific traditions is difficult. It is also difficult to discern whether the artists were pastoralists or agriculturists or both.

Given that the Mustang region was visited by prominent masters of Tibetan Buddhism and adherents of the Bon Po, Devkota writes that more detailed examination of the rock art and other sites may lead to identification of important centres of the beliefs here. He also notes that the pigments have faded and some of the relics have deteriorated, while the sites are vulnerable to rockslides and erosion, revealing an urgent need to protect the sites from rockslides and the harsh climate of the plateau.

Says Devkota: “Even if we cannot preserve it on site, we should at least have proper documentation for the future because if we lose it now, we may never fully understand what these works represent.”

LEPHANTANG – Kya and Ludak

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Murder on the Orient Express

As someone who grew up reading Agatha Christie's mysteries, I will say with some surety that aside from the most dour of fans, most will be happy with this latest, cheeky, lively and often weighty film adaptation of one of her most famous murder mysteries.

The film begins with a necessary introduction to the great, and beloved, Poirot (Kenneth Branagh, who stars and directs); for those who are unfamiliar with his frocks the man is extremely particular. But here, the director and writers have gone one step further, recognising that Poirot is actually one of those people who has a disorder—one that demands order. It is this particularity that makes Poirot a brilliant detective, but also frequently causes him (self-admittedly) great stress, an effect that is often comedic in Christie’s books, and sometimes in this adaptation, but is taken somewhat more seriously than a mere eccentricity here, giving the film a gravitas that others before it have fallen short of.

When Poirot gets on the Orient Express he is a tired man, weary of the world and the crime solving that has made him famous. He wants to rest, and read Dickens but that is not to be seen very soon after he boards, the Orient Express is blocked by an avalanche in the dead of winter (prompt the:), with a picked train, a multiple stabbing and a set of extremely diverse but oddly connected passengers who come under Poirot’s hawk-like scrutiny.

I cannot give anything away in this most complex, and must original, of whodunits, one that made Christie even more famous (if that were indeed possible) for her innovation. The film will leave you guessing but, more importantly, it will leave you thinking. Often whodunits are just suspenseful thrillers but here, the writers have understood that the horror and gravitas of the first murder that leads to this second one must be understood for the viewers to go along with the story’s shocking denouement.

Sometimes, crimes are committed and justice is not served. Often, we as regular citizens go about our lives oblivious of the harm that can come from being the victim of a crime where the perpetrator goes unpunished. The thousands of innocent victims whose lives were taken by the Maoists or the Army during our civil war, the millions of women sexually harassed by men who habitually walk around unsolved, snug in the knowledge that their standing as men keeps them safe in ‘be said, she said’ situations—all this becomes food for thought in light of this seemingly fluffy mystery film that takes on the challenge of developing a beloved Christie classic into a film appropriate for our times; when Nepal is in a post-war state with people desperate for truth and reparation, and the #MeToo campaign has yet to make any way for those who still live under their oppressors.

That is a great film for fans, but an even better one for those not acquainted with the great Hercule Poirot. Christie’s books sold precisely because she was able to conjure up and define a detective like Poirot (my personal favourite amongst her recurring detectives), who takes on the knottiest of ethical issues without flinching something we all could learn from.
**Lost her leg, but not her zeal**

Basanta Khaika in Nagarkot, 9 December

Mini Katwal was accompanying Nepal Congress provincial assembly candidate Narayan Karki on the campaign trail in Nepaltar of Udayapur on 29 November when a roadside bomb went off with a terrible bang. Their jeep was thrown into the air. Both were severely injured, as were the driver and seven others.

Katwal and Karki were immediately airlifted to Kathmandu, where they are still at Teaching Hospital. While the nation’s attention is focused on the election results, those who risked their lives in the elections and became victims of violence, like these two, have been forgotten. Karki, 68, is a school principal. His left leg is broken in five places and his right leg in three. Katwal, 37, is a student of education and had to have her right leg amputated. Both are ideologically committed, and believed they were working to strengthen democracy, and never imagined that they would be injured in the kind of ambush more reminiscent of the conflict years. Meeting her in hospital, Katwal doesn’t show any pain or self-pity. “Cowards attack you from behind. I have lost my leg, but I haven’t lost even a inch of my commitment and self-confidence,” says Katwal, who has been active in student politics. “I lost my leg while working for the party, and I will devote the rest of my life to the party.”

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and senior NC leaders visited the two injured cadres in hospital, which the two injured cadres say has encouraged them. Katwal was born in a remote village of Udayapur and being the eldest, has taken it upon herself to send her brother and two sisters to school in Kathmandu.

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**Why is Myanmar’s general here?**

**BBC Nepal, 12 December**

Myanmar’s army chief, who is accused of masterminding the ethnic cleansing of his country’s Rohingya people, is in Kathmandu on a four-day visit. The Nepal Army said it is here to study Nepal’s peace process, especially the demobilisation of the rebel fighters.

Several human rights activists have criticised the visit of someone accused of gross human rights violations, saying the timing is not right. However, Nepali officials maintain that the Rohingya issue is Myanmar’s internal affair unconnected with General Min Aung Hlaing’s visit to Nepal. Some 600,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since August, in what the United Nations has characterised as a “textbook case of ethnic cleansing.”

This has brought widespread international criticism of Myanmar’s democracy warrior and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi.

“The visit exposes Nepal’s lack of adherence to its responsibility to uphold international law, and shows support for gross violations of human rights,” said activist Gokinda Subedi. Other activists say Nepal should have been much more sensitive to the fact that it has just been voted into the UN Human Rights Council.

According to Nepal Army spokesman Niranjan Debali: “This visit was solely intended to improve bilateral relations, and there has been no discussion at the level of the Nepal government or Nepal Army about the international reaction.”

Former Nepal Army General Balananda Sharma, who has worked on the Myanmar peace process, agreed that General Hlaing’s visit should not be seen from the perspective of that country’s internal affairs.

Gen Sharma, who was in charge of the secretariat managing the integration of Maoist Fighters into the Nepalese Army, added: “They also need to end their 79-year insurgency: it is good he is here to hear about our experience in the peace process.” Of the insurgent groups in Myanmar, the government has peace agreements with eight and efforts are on to bring 13 others into a truce.

This is not the first time that senior officials and political leaders of Myanmar have visited Nepal to meet the prime minister and politicians. Nepali activists say officials here should alert Myanmar’s military personnel about the need to investigate war crimes. But others also say that the process of Myanmar’s efforts to ensure transitional justice should not be delayed by its Rohingya crisis.
Cranes replace cranes in

Nepalis are proud about Lumbini, but not outraged about its development

OM ASTHA RAI
in LUMBINI

When Kenzo Tange was asked to draw up a master plan for Lumbini in 1978, the famous Japanese architect’s vision was to develop the nativity site as a forested and tranquil place reflecting the Buddha’s teachings of compassion and fragility.

Although progress on the Lumbini Master Plan has been sluggish, successive governments over the last 49 years have largely followed Tange’s original blueprint for the World Heritage Site. But now, a proposal to build luxury hotels inside Lumbini’s core area threatens to mangle the master plan and disturb the sanctity of the Buddha’s birthplace in Nepal.

Three years ago, when Dipak Chandras Amatya, a confidant of UML leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, was Nepal’s Culture Minister, he set up a committee to review the master plan, which then directed the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) to allow at least four luxury hotels and one international meditation centre inside the protected zone.

Tange, one of the most eminent architects of the 20th century, also designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. But the LDT got an administrative staff, Irwin Singh Muktar, to make alterations to Tange’s master plan. New deputy mayor of Kapilvastu municipality in Chitwan, Muktar admits his five-member committee did not consult anyone to approve the proposal to build more hotels within the Lumbini World Heritage site. “We did not have enough time and resources to consult people, and we did not really mean what we wrote in it: the LDT should not have taken our proposal seriously,” Mukhtar now confesses.

Nevertheless, the Lumbini Trust used Muktar’s recommendation to allow the construction of more hotels at the northern end of Tange’s design, adjacent to the Peace Stupa (see map, overview).

Altman Yamagata, who retired as the member secretary of the LDT this month, told Nepal Times he had also invited Thailand’s Dhammakaya temple to build a huge international meditation centre in Lumbini. Dhammakaya is one of the most powerful and controversial Buddhist sects in Thailand, and wants to build a guesthouse that can accommodate up to 1,000 pilgrims. Sources say UML leader Khadga’s son, who was implicated in a construction scandal at Bhairawa’s new international airport, and a Patan-based idol exporter are involved in the hotel project.

So far, there are only three hotels (Gaala, Shakka and a pilgrimage centre) inside the Lumbini site, and lack of space in the Tange blueprint for more high-end hotels. So, the LDT is planning to make room by bulldozing over adjacent wetlands that are habitat for endangered Sarus cranes and other migratory birds.

Tangana justifies the construction, arguing: “If you want more pilgrimage tourism, you have to build more accommodation for it.”

Although Lumbini does have a shortage of rooms for pilgrims, there are 20 hotels outside the protected area catering to all levels of tourists. But land is expensive and ownership fragmented, so investors cannot find suitable sites for big luxury hotels outside the nativity zone. Landing land inside Lumbini would not only be cheaper but owners could also charge premium room rates from wealthy pilgrims.

Gita Giri, a professor at Lumbini University and the author of several books says: “The Kenzo Tange master plan may be old, but it is not outdated. No one should modify it without proper assessment, and if the changes are for commercial purposes we should not allow that to happen.”

Pilgrims come there to pray, not watch birds…”

Lumbini is not only the birthplace of the Buddha, but also famed for the Sarus crane (Antigone antigone), the silent flying bird in the world and an iconic species of wetlands.

Legend has it that the Buddha once recited a wounded crane and set the bird free in the jungles of Lumbini. The Buddha is seen in many historic drawings with a crane, and scholars believe that these non-aggressive cranes have inhabited Lumbini for at least the last two millennia. However, the majestic birds are now on the brink of extinction in South Asia because of habitat destruction, pesticide use, electrification and hunting.

If Lumbini’s wetlands are converted into luxury hotels, the holy site would lose its remaining population of 150 birds, Jero Komans, a 40-year-old former in Lumbini, says. “When we were young, we used to see lots of them; these days they are rare.”

A TDT-backed bird sanctuary was set up in the New Lumbini Village along the northern perimeter of the Lumbini Master Plan by the International Crane Foundation, which had taken the land on a 50-year lease from the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT). The foundation restored the natural wetlands and built ponds inside the sanctuary so the cranes could mate, hatch and raise chicks during the monsoon. The protected habitat is now threatened by plans to allow new hotels on the wetlands and its surroundings.

For some people, wetlands are wastelands,” says Venkatesh Meteja, a Buddhist monk who has been working with the foundation to protect Lumbini’s cranes. “The loss of the Sarus sanctuary will be a devastating blow for crane conservation in Nepal.”

Meteja, whose official name is Achariya Tirtha, was recently appointed Ven Khenpo of the LDT, and his first order of business will be to protect Lumbini’s holy birds.

Altman Yamagata, former LDT member secretary supports the latter plan, saying: “People come to Lumbini to pray, not to watch birds.”

nepaltimes.com MA

THE MONK AND THE SARUS

Birds in the Lumbini’s protected area have taken to the suredLavs coves over the Buddha’s time. Now, there is a proposal to build high-end resorts as two Ward voters of Ven Khenpo, who is leading opposition to the new plan.

International Crane Foundation

15 - 21 DECEMBER 2017 • 888
Buddha’s birthplace

“Save the Sarus”

Venerable Metteya (Awadhish Tripathi) was recently appointed Vice Chair of the Lumbini Development Trust. As a Buddhist monk and scholar, he has been active in the protection of Lumbini’s cranes. Just days before his appointment, Nepali Times spoke to the monk about why it is important to save the birds. Excerpt:

Nepali Times: Tell us about Sarus cranes, and the threats they face.
Venerable Metteya: Sarus cranes are endangered mainly because of habitat loss. They nest in wetlands close to forests, but land is scarce and there is encroachment. The use of pesticides has poisoned the cranes’ food cycle. Their egg shells have become thinner, and the hatching rate is low. High-power transmission lines are another threat to the low-flying cranes.

Is it possible for the hotels and the wetlands to co-exist? Kenzo Tange’s idea was to leave 80% of Lumbini as a nature preserve, and the crane sanctuary was a vital part of that plan. The preservation of Sarus cranes will enhance the cultural values and significance of Lumbini. Building hotels where the cranes live is not what we want to see in Lumbini. That is not the legacy we want to leave behind for future generations. The Buddhas were born under a tree, got enlightenment under a tree, and passed away under a tree. His teachings reflect this harmony between humans and nature. Tange’s Lumbini Master Plan reflected that.

Why is it important to save the Sarus crane? Partners in Lumbini believe that if Sarus cranes alight in their farms, they will have a better harvest. There is also scientific evidence that the cranes eat bugs and insects that destroy crops. The birds’ wetland habitat also helps recharge ground water by acting as natural sponges and filtering pollutants. They are a vital part of the ecosystem, and we must preserve them.

Kenzo Tange Master Plan for Lumbini, 1978

1. New concrete structures are already coming up next to the crane sanctuary in the wetland inside Lumbini’s protected zone.
2. Lumbini is now a rectangular green oasis in the middle of farms and factories along the densely-populated Bharbay-Bowari industrial corridor. Pollution from the factories is already affecting the tranquility and pristine environment of Buddha’s birthplace.
3. The Peace Stupa marks the northern edge of the axis of Kenzo Tange’s Lumbini Master Plan. The stupa is adjacent to the crane sanctuary, where the new luxury hotels are proposed to be built.
4. The view north from the eternal Peace Lamp up the Central Canal towards the Peace Stupa.
5. The under construction Lumbini Museum.
6. The Maya Devi Temple at the Sacred Garden is the inner sanctum of Lumbini, where Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world congregate.
Deubadesh Kshetri

**State of the art**

Babu Ram Rajya Baidyaland

Awful State

Pashupati Pranta

Bahun Raj

Wry

MJF(D)

MJF(R)

TMLP(N)

NSP(G) MJF(M)

Upadro

Oligarchy

The Ass

**Provincial mindset**

Now that we have elections out of the way, and the wheat has been separated from the chaff, the nation’s attention has turned to the subject everyone has avoided so far: federal provinces, their names and boundaries, as well as the governors and chief ministers thereof.

So far we have said we will cross that bridge when we come to it, but we cannot keep putting it off. Sooner or later, we have to bite the bullet, take the bullet by the horns, and cross the Rubicon.

No political discussion in Nepal these days is complete unless you have uttered the "F" word. When talk around the family dining table turns to federal provinces, as it often does, minors have to be sent to bed early because parents punctuate their sentences with " WTF!" (What the Federation!)

To avoid coming to blows, the political leadership, in its infinite wisdom decided to name federal provinces after single digits.

However, there is again talk of adding provinces and changing their boundaries, and in the interest of pragmatism and flexibility, we propose to revive the following map with names that should satisfy everyone: After that we will have making Deul deals, the summer capital and Dhangadhi, the winter capital.

Provinces 3 is also seeing a tussle between Patan and Heruwa. The ideal way out is to connect the two with a tunnel, locate the capital underground somewhere equidistant between the two and name the capital, Patanwa.

Similarly, Province 2 may soon go to war over whether its provincial capital should be located in Birganj or Janakpur, and the only compromise the Ass can think of is to temporarily locate it in Durbar, until a mutually acceptable solution can be found.

Now that the politicians have nearly an absolute majority in the house, the path is open to roll back secularism from the Constitution and turn Newupal back into a god-forcing nation once more. This, of course, is going to open a whole new can of worms in a Pastor's Box about whether Nepal should be a Secular Republic or revert back to a Hindu Kingdom.

Since all dispute resolution is about compromise, we can meet mid-point and declare that some of the federal provinces will have the option of declaring themselves Secular Monarchies if they so wish.

**Map of Nepal**

- Deubadesh Kshetra
- State of the art Baidyaland
- Babu Ram Rajya
- Pashupati Pranta
- Bahun Raj
- Wry
- Limbo
- Upadro
- Oligarchy
- The Ass

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