Nepalis on Thursday witnessed something they had not seen in a decade: both the ceremonial and executive heads of state offering flowers to the statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah—a divisive icon loved by many and loathed by some.

President Bidhya Bhandari and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba celebrated Prithvi Narayan’s birth anniversary as National Unity Day, signaling a shift in the way the state views the founder of modern Nepal.

After Prithvi Narayan’s 326th descendant, King Gyanendra, was deposed by pro-democracy activists in 2006, the government of Girija Prasad Koirala cancelled National Unity Day saying Nepal’s founding ruler was a feudal king.

But Maoist guerrillas brought down Prithvi Narayan’s statues across the country. They could not topple the one in front of Singh Dhauki, so they covered it in a shroud. A section of nationalists opposed what they viewed as the Nepali version of China’s Cultural Revolution, but their voices were ignored.

A decade later, as Maoists prepare to merge with the UML led by nationalist KP Oli, the Sher Bahadur Deuba government has revived Unity Day, giving rebirth to Prithvi Narayan as a unifying figure.

“Prithvi Narayan Shah should not be punished for what his descendants did,” says Nepal Congress Spokesperson Bhusan Prakash Sharma. “He should be respected for giving us a sovereign and unified Nepal.”

But some more recent Prithvi Narayan acted as a feudal lord, who they say invaded weaker principalties and annexed them to his Gorkha kingdom. They marked National Unity Day as Black Day.

“By reviving Prithvi Narayan Shah’s legacy, politicians have proved they love the status quo, and do not regard our cultural diversity,” says Junajit activist Om Gurung. “They marginalized as progressive during the April Uprising, but they are now showing their true colours.”

Gurung is hopeful that things will change, and that oppressed people will rise once again to challenge Prithvi Narayan’s legacy. But he looks at a far-flung possibility, as nationalist Oli and ex-revolutionary Pushpa Kamal Dahal intensify closed-door negotiations to create a unified leftist party.

They are hoping to rule Nepal for at least five years. Despite his party suffering humiliation in last year’s elections, Dahal has managed to stay put so far. But his government has already decided to hold the Upper House elections on 7 February, after which Oli is expected to be the new Prime Minister.

Oli’s second innings as PM will not be easy. When UML Chair Madhav Adhikari became Prime Minister in 1994, he unveiled several welfare programs, a move that benefited his party to this day. But Oli may not be able to follow suit, with the state exchequer depleted and economists warning Nepal may not achieve 7% economic growth.

And, activist Govinda KC, after being arrested for contempt of court and released by the Supreme Court, will be challenging the new government even more vehemently. Oli’s hatred for KC is not hidden, and his nexus with medical businessmen, described by KC as mafia, is well-known.

Om Astha Rai

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Prithvi Narayan Shah re-born

In the heady aftermath of the 2006 Democracy Movement, new terminologies like “New Nepal” and “Kamadhenu” (“paradigm shift”) were being bandied about to question Nepal’s established history, and images of unified Nepali like Prithvi Narayan Shah or Binashabha Acharya were questioned. Many got outwitted by this type of retroactive political correctness to question the whole historic base of the Nepali state.

Prithvi Narayan, the founder of modern Nepal, forged a unified Nepal through military conquest in the 1769-1770 period. But as an outcome of China’s unsuccessful Cultural Revolution, his statue were burned down across the country. His figure outside Singh Darbar was covered in a shroud, perhaps because the new rulers of the republic couldn’t bear to be reminded of this ancient achievement.

Nepalis had been celebrating Prithvi Narayan’s birth anniversary as National Unity Day for decades. The new rulers, disciples of foreign philosophers like Karl Marx, Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong, decreed the banishment of the founding king from the holiday list. The so-called capitalists who who were so opaque to the novelist, thinker, academic or apostate trampled on the word.

A decade later, the government has finally corrected its mistake. National Unity Day was capitalized by the post-April uprising—major government led by the Nepali Congress (NC) in 2006. But a government led by the same party that led to the reinstatement of the holiday on Thursday.

A lot of water has flown down the Bagmati in this period. NC leader Krishna Sitoula, who was Home Minister when unity day was cancelled, stated the same number of a Hindu royalist, Maoist ideologue Bhairab Thapa. This time, the name Kramabhata, is no longer a Maoist, and is now a friend of his ex-foe in the NC.

Govinda KC’s charges

1. It is an open secret that Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli process two tax-free apartments and a judicial probe into this charge is warranted.
2. Parajuli has promised his due birth day in his second central bank. As per personal income tax certificate, he turned 65 (retirement age) in July 2017. It is legal for someone who has resigned his age limit to hold the position of Chief Justice.
3. Parajuli’s directed attention Singh Karki (whose appearance at the time of the inquiry in the case of his involvement in the case of the constitution to be to show his respect. Peepa had been firing for several days ago Mike and I didn’t expect there would be a big gun at midnight but there was. It stretched for several suburban blocks and in fact there were found to find. It’s as though every family in Auckland said to themselves, this is our last chance to show our affection. I decided we had to find a further solution. A large Indian family including 12 year old boy holding a large white flower stucked from his garden as they left home. Michael Charles Dillan

How can a judge who set justice appears judicial independence?

8. Supreme Court verdicts in the cases involving Chandramaya Sharma (the island revenue department’s Director accused of corruption charges for 1991 in general law), Gopal Khadka (Nepal Oil Corporation’s heat subjected to the government over corruption, but reinstated by the court), and Karki have protected the corrupt. These cases, all after Parajuli became Chief Justice, have made a mockery of the rule of law.

Parajuli awarded the social work with three promotions (Supreme Court judge, Regional General and High Court Chief Justice) within seven months. This blatant nepotism has disgraced the post of Chief Justice. Must go. Saving the day not jut judicially but freely needs to be independent.

9. After arrest the reinstatement was first against Chief Justice Sunil Thapa, Parajuli assured office as acting Chief Justice. How can an unethical person be acting the Supreme Court respectable?

10. Karki was charged with contempt of court for a news story that exposed how Parajuli’s personal law firm was involved in the case of the constitution. Karki has already got a clean chit, meaning that his story was publicly proven true. The contempt of court charges against me are baseless. It is Parajuli who should face a contempt of court action.

(Govinda KC’s disposition at the Supreme Court on 8 January the court revoked KC’s contempt. Seeking Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli’s contempt and academic certifications to look into the allegations leveled against him. KC was arrested on a contempt of court action after publicly calling Parajuli a "thief".)

Sir Ed’s funeral

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The end of the road for Bhutan’s refugees

Sir Ed’s funeral

Although several issues, like changing top-down systems of government, accompanied the birth of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 1907, its government is still dependent on the King’s role in shaping the country. The last major policy decision of the past week was on the kingdom’s energy policy.

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Although several issues, like changing top-down systems of government, accompanied the birth of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 1907, its government is still dependent on the King’s role in shaping the country.
Re-imagining tourism

Nepal is not land-locked, but land-linked, with untapped potential for Indian, Chinese and domestic Nepali tourism

In 2017, Nepal’s tourism arrival figures nearly reached 1 million for the first time. But Nepal outbound tourists spent more than what foreign tourists spent in Nepal last year.

Like everyone else, Nepalis love to travel, see exotic places, enjoy good food and drinks and shop till they drop. A Hong Kong immigration official once asked me politely: “Nepal is supposed to be a poor country. Yet, why is it that we see so many passports in which the occupation says farmer and yet the purpose of visit is tourism?” Nepalis have historically always been on the move, whether to trade, work, to fight world wars, or for pilgrimage. They brought back stories and gifts, encouraging more to travel. With ever greater disposable income, mobility and social media, we can expect word-of-mouth publicity to propel more tourists to travel abroad in the years to come.

The tourist spending figure also does not take into account what Nepali domestic tourists spend within Nepal for food and drinks, which is often more than foreigners. But they do not like to pay for the room, because historically we never paid for the ‘floor’, or straw mat or rug on the floor.

Given that Nepali tourists outnumbered foreigners in Pokhara this holiday season, there is a ripe opportunity for hotels and lodges if they want numbers to grow. The woeful system for Nepalis and foreigners is also an issue. Nepali passports are regularly lost from flights and tourist buses. Yet a country of 30 million with nearly 2.8 billion people right next door, tourism has huge market potential.

At a recent interaction in Bhaktapur we explored how the three markets could build more synergy. How can a Chinese or Indian tourist be convinced to spend more time in Nepal? When the new Bhaktashivas and Pokhara airports are completed, tourists can be more spread out, and the sky would literally be the limit.

Nepal is not land-locked, but land-linked, and we can get far more tourists coming by land and highways linking the country to China and India are now upgraded. Millions of tourists can arrive by bus, rail, car, motorbike, or simply walk across.

On a recent flight, a group of Malaysian tourists proudly told me they were carrying bags of ‘old clothes’ to give away during their trip to Nepal. Shame on the firms making poverty a tourism product. Charitable tourism takes visitors to orphanages and homes for destitute women and schools, where they display nous and duty children as tourism products. Nepal can never get its true worth if we always sell the country as a cheap destination. Animals in cages and in chains, like the elephant breeding centres, and even safaris in Chitwan have no future either as animal rights activism grows.

The looming question is whether we will have enough sector wise work to satiate the ‘off season’ with Nepali, Indian and Chinese tourists? In the Khabru, ‘going south’ at the end of the peak trekking season means flying off to New York, California or Sydney to see relatives. Most qualified Nepali workers are in hotels in Dubai and Doha. One reason Nepal tourism entrepreneurs are not interested in investing in business expansion is because the children are not keen to come back to take up the family business.

Tourism can and should be an end but also a means to meet conservation goals and improve the quality of life for the local people. While the Chinese want to buy tiger bones as an aphrodisiac and Indians seek shawls made from Tibetan antelope wool, tourism could provide a way to experience these exotic animals in the wild so that tourists are no longer forced to purchase illegal wildlife products. Competition should not also arise among architects but among chefs. The tourism sector badly needs a cultural revamp, and we need to roll out services and products. Who will be the first to open an oxygen bar? The Bills for elderly Indian pilgrims going to Kailash? Can the Trump tax break be converted to benefit American tourists for long treks and safaris?

Anil is President of Sovereign.

Power investors meet

Can Nepal generate 400,000MW of hydroelectricity in 10 years and unleash a show of downstream industries? That is the ambitious goal set by the Nepal Power Investment Summit (NPIS) 2018, taking place 27-29 January at Soutee Crown Plaza.

The Summit is organised by the Energy Development Council, the umbrella organisation representing the entire energy sector, both private and public. The three-day conference will target knowledge-sharing on investments in Nepal, feature renowned speakers and provide a platform for investors, contractors and financiers worldwide to expand business and make deals in the energy sector.

The Energy Mart is the highlight of the summit, gathering sponsors and their products to attract project stakeholders to make deals. More than 100 qualified hydropower projects, 20 solar generation projects, 10 transmission line projects and 13 smart city plans will be showcased at the summit.

Nepal’s topography and natural resources provide a unique environment for the generation of hydropower, which has so far been largely untapped. More than 6,000 rivers originate in Nepal, and how to India, while Nepal’s six main rivers actually originate in China and flow across the Himalayas into Nepal.

While Nepal has potential to generate up to 48,000MW of economically feasible hydropower, only 400MW has so far been harnessed. Although 2,000MW is expected to come online in the next 2 years, the lack of investment in energy means much of Nepal’s hydropower potential flows unused into India every year. The estimated investment opportunity of hydropower in Nepal is US$ 8 billion.

With the country likely heading towards political stability after elections, there is a sense of cautious optimism among investors about electricity generation. According to the government’s Energy Demand Projection 2020, per capita electricity consumption can reach 700-kilowatt-hour per year by 2030, for which a total of 8,000MW will be needed.

Fortune 500 companies and equity financing firms will participate in the summit with the result that engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) financing from US$ 25 million to US$ 20 billion will be accessible. China Construction Bank, the world’s second-largest bank, will provide training on how to get access to such loans. A step-by-step exclusive book, How To Develop a Hydropower Project, will also be available. Ziya Lim

Qatar discounts

Through its global sales campaign, Global Travel Boutique, Qatar Airways is offering passengers discounts across all cabin classes, along with opportunities to earn Qmiles from the Privilege Club, discounts at Qatar Airways lounge, and prizes from Qatar Airways Holidays.

Free Mahindra service

Mahindra owners can get service for their vehicles from 8-12 January at all Mahindra authorized workshops across the country, and can also avail discounts on spare parts, lubricants and accessories.

Dust-beating Berger

Berger has introduced new Anti Dust Parts with Dust Guard technology, which don’t allow dust to enter into engine wells.

The result is better protection and maximum air filters to make trucks run new and vibrant day by day.

Turkish triumph

Samiul Khan has won a round trip to any Turkish Airlines destination after participating in a joint campaign of Turkish Airlines and Chandigarh Hills. The campaign, aimed at مواسات between Chandigarh_cardholders and Turkish Airlines to get discounts from Turkish Airlines and visa versa.

Hyundai delights

Hyundai has come in Winter Delight Scree, which includes car deals, free comprehensive insurance for a year, an exchange bonus up to Rs 180,000, a holiday bonus worth Rs 20,000 and much more.

Islington expansion

Islington College has launched a new MFA course focused on senior leadership, e-commerce, international trade and Mahindra automotive engineers. The course is in partnership with Alibaba Group, China, and UKC, Thailand.

BIZ BRIEFS

QATAR AIRWAYS: Qatar Airways is offering passengers discounts across all cabin classes, along with opportunities to earn Qmiles from the Privilege Club, discounts at Qatar Airways lounge, and prizes from Qatar Airways Holidays.

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What’s next for the Nepali Congress?

The Pradip Giri-Gagan Thapa duo can rejuvenate Nepal’s founding democratic party

After suffering humiliating defeats in all three levels of elections under the new Constitution last year, the rank and file of the Nepali Congress (NC) is now debating how the party should move forward.

The NC’s old guard argue that party president Sher Bahadur Deuba need not step down, and blame candidates, internal rivalry and national-international factors for their electoral defeats. But the NC’s young turks believe that they succeeded in the past only because of a divided communist vote bank, and that their top leaders ignored the need to strengthen the party. They argue that the NC needs an overhaul if it is to counter Left unity.

Last week, Deuba and his party’s young frontman leader Gagan Thapa engaged in a public spat over the issue of leadership and reforms. While Thapa was argumentative, Deuba looked impotent and exhausted. Thapa and young NC leaders are pressing the NC’s old-generation leaders to retire, allowing the new breed of energetic, idealistic and visionary democrats to emerge. They are angry, and insecure about their political future. But Deuba does not seem to care.

To be sure, the NC has suffered humiliating defeat before, in 1994 and 2008. It bounced back, but this time the task looks far more difficult. A party that was rejected by the people in the first elections, under the very Constitution it led in drafting, is unlikely to come back easily. Nothing is impossible in politics, but the party needs to do a lot of soul-searching to regain people’s trust.

The fact that the NC will be out of power for at least five years could be a blessing in disguise — its movers and shakers will get more free time to contemplate, strengthen their organisation, reform policies and gain a fresh impetus in the process. The NC can reclaim its lost glory if it takes on the role of a constructive opposition instead of wasting energy on cobbling together unviable coalitions. It needs to be watchful about the policies, programs and roadmap that the communist government will be taking in the next five years.

In the 1990s, Man Jhalak said that China would not export a political ideology. But Xi Jinping, arguably the most powerful leader since the Great Helmsman, has signalled he is out to consolidate his power. This may influence the way Nepal’s communists behave.

The mandate that the NC has got from last year’s elections is to balance the resurgent communists, safeguarding not just democracy but also liberal values. Ahead of the 2023 elections, the NC stood in favour of diversity by supporting a Constitution amendment bill. But its leaders failed to explain to people that their stand was for an integrated and sovereign nation. As a result, they were viewed with suspicion and people voted them out.

The NC now needs a leader who is eloquent, argumentative and ideological. Fortunately, the party already has a leader with all these qualities: Pradip Giri. If the NC appoints Giri as its parliamentary party leader and Gagan Thapa leads the NC in the federal Parliament, the UML-Maoist government will have to act more responsibly. The NC duo will also prevent the Left alliance from morphing into a totalitarian force.

During elections, the UML-Maoist alliance effectively banded the NC as a party of the corrupt and criminals. The humiliation of the NC shows that a large section of people subscribed to that description. The NC needs to shed this label, and rebuild itself as a party of patriots and democrats working to fulfill the dreams of the visionary BP Koirala. The current NC leadership is acutely incapable of doing this. If anyone can, it will be the Giri-Gagan duo. How can the NC help the farming-working class? How can it contain the outgrowth of allopathic Nepal? How can it emerge as a party of Dalals, Medhatis and Janajatis?

For decades, the NC was dominated by BP Koirala and his clan. Deuba challenged the Koiralas, and took over party leadership. While the Koiralas are still trying to reinstate the dynasty, a resolute Deuba is trying his best to stay put. The NC will be doomed if it doesn’t separate itself from their clutches.

Puranjan Acharya is a political analyst.

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Successful struggles

RAMU SAPKOTA

Amidst all the scandals in the medical education sector, there are stories of struggle and sacrifice like those of interns Priya Sherpa and Sanjana Pokhrel, who rose from humble beginnings in rural Nepal and are on their way to becoming physicians.

Now 24, Pokhrel was 5 when her mother passed away in their home in Syangja. Her father was bedridden, and with no money she could not continue her studies so a neighbour dropped her off at Maiti Nepal shelter for children.

Sherpa, 22, and from Bajasa, had an even more harrowing childhood. After she lost her mother at a young age, a neighbour took her and a younger sister to Kathmandu, where they were forced to work as domestic help, not given enough to eat and never sent to school. When the neighbour became physically abusive, Sherpa’s sister ran away and reported it to police, after which both were rescued by Maiti Nepal.

Pokhrel and Sherpa were then admitted to Teresa Academy, a school established by Anumadha Koirala of Maiti Nepal in 1998 with the aim of educating less fortunate children and orphans. So far, 245 students have graduated and many are now working as engineers, doctors, singers, or chorographers.

"I went everywhere asking for support so that the children could study. Their success today has given me a kind of satisfaction that is found rarely," says Koirala, adding that the school operates with funds from national and international donors.

As a young student in Teresa Academy, Pokhrel wanted to be a basketball player but when she excelled in exams she decided on a medical career. Sherpa also pursued medicine soon after getting commendable scores.

Koirala herself rescued Krishna Prasad Neupane from the streets when he was six. When the Neupane family moved to Kathmandu from Jumla 22 years ago, they sold herbs on the footpaths in Canada during the day and made the open ground their bed at night. Koirala saw their miserable condition and took Krishna to Maiti Nepal. The boy started imagining himself becoming a doctor after finishing his high school with flying colours.

Koirala then got all three of them to study in Lumlech Medical College. Four-and-half years later, they are now treating patients, prescribing medications and dressing wounds in the emergency ward.

"If we hadn’t arrived in Maiti Nepal, none of this would have been possible, we couldn’t have found this happiness," says Pokhrel, who wishes to pursue an MD and earn a specialisation. "I want to serve the poor and victims of violence." Neupane aims to become a surgeon and work at Maiti Nepal’s clinic.

Having been a victim of domestic violence herself, Sherpa knows she is fortunate and says she chose this profession so she could help others by specialising in public health.

Stuck at Maiti Nepal, Koirala is content: "They will soon become doctors and yet they make time to check up on me from time to time. What more does a mother need to be happy?"
A year ago, Mara Tole, restaurant owner Suresh Bajracharya got up to a rude shock: an emaciated street dog with third-degree burns was limping to his door. Someone had thrown scalding hot water at it, leaving a large patch on his left side useless.

Bajracharya was so moved he started volunteering for a neighbourhood animal management program, taking in injured, malnourished dogs and giving them canine penicillin paid out of his own pocket.

"If I had known who had thrown the boiling water on these street dogs, I would have heavily punished the person," says Bajracharya, who blames street vendors from outside Kathmandu.

For a country that celebrates...
Woof of fresh air

Kathmandu gets citizens to be responsible for their community dogs

The Adventures of Bhuya, where students imagine themselves as dogs of the community.

Social worker and dog lover in Ward 20, Rajesh Shrestha, says, “The whole perspective of community dogs has flipped and people have come together more closely as a result. Before in Ward 20, we used to worship our own dogs in the vicinity of our own homes. Now we get together in public spaces and celebrate all dogs together.”

Citizen policing has also toughened on criminals who don’t abide by the new standards of animal welfare and citizen responsibility. A car accident two months ago on Gosa Kandel Marg, near Chinchamarg, left a street dog injured and unable to walk. The motorist was about to leave the scene of the crime, but eyewitnesses said that butchers, shopkeepers and regular community members surrounded his vehicle, and forced him to pay a fine of Rs15,000 for injuring a dog belonging to their community.

This would never have happened before; they would have let the dog die. Now we feel responsible,” says Anjali Sindukar. The money compensated was then directly used to treat the dog’s injuries.

But not all street dogs are so fortunate enough to enjoy the newfound warmth. Trekking guide Sunita Tuladhar says a certain proportion of street dogs in tourist areas, where there are fewer close-knit community groups, still suffer from occasional violence.

“From awareness to action, but the human behaviour is yet to change,” he says. “For a long time people cared, but people who work at the stalls are not from Kathmandu, and they throw stones at the dogs because they don’t want their businesses disrupted.”

Nepali culture is achieving its success of reducing the number of lactating female dogs in the area, and promises to deliver up to 80% vaccination and sterilization rates in the words because the community will follow up individual cases itself.

Other results of educating citizens to be kinder to dogs include fewer people being bitten by dogs, and reduced cases of suspected rabies, and fewer complaints about dogs. To celebrate World Rabies Day, Ward 20 was labelled the first ‘animal managed ward’ of the city.

KMC has said that it will create a registration system where dog owners and animal management assistants must mark down the birth and death of all animals, along with their owners. Any animals found without a guardian could then be traced back to their original owners, and the owners fined for abandonment. Using a smartphone app concerned citizens could scan an embedded microchip attached to an abandoned dog, linking it back to the registration system.

But the project to register all dogs (and to a lesser extent, cats) will have to wait until the next fiscal year, when the government is predicted to be more stable.
### Events

**Champadivi Hike**
- From Purging to Champadivi, elevation 2250m, for muger views of Jangarh, Goughatank, leg and dhanpati lake, and to explore the remote side. The trek is organized by Mining Nepal Treks & Expedition.
- 13 January, 7am-9pm, Dharan, Kathmandu, (01) 5212288, 58419622

**3 Days Meditation**
- Dr. Christoph Gurtner, an internationally recognized yoga expert with 20 years of experience, will instruct the meditation program. Focus, breathe, and relax.
- 12-14 January, 5:30-7:30pm, Rambudha Farms, Dharan, (01) 4455604

**Happy Hours**
- An open community event to network, share and develop innovative business ideas. Drinks and snacks at Cafe Kathmandu and pop-up shop selling various items.
- 12 January, 5-7pm, Kathmandu, Community, (01) 4455229

**Maker’s Market**
- Featuring products from Makkaan, Bhau, Little Things, Tanks, Ajarbaha, Ombra, Paradise Nine, Sprinkle Gates, Miss Matt, Cake 5, Mixmilk and more. All music by female entrepreneurs within the Stitch and Make community.
- 13 January, 2-9pm, Namo-Nepal, Patan

**Swing Night**
- Put your vintage outfit and swing along with Lindy hop dancers as Speakeasy, featuring Dhaulagiri Salim, plays tunes from the ’20s.
- 13 January, 7-10pm, Viva Cafe and Bar, Thamel, (01) 4451157, (01) 4455115

### Music

**Octave**
- Enjoy Friday night with Octave Band performing rock n roll classics at the beer garden.
- 13 January, 6:30-10:30pm, Biggaku Art Cafe & Bar, Phulchoki, (01) 3714776

**Tattwa Night**
- Live music at Tattwa band and a BBQ under the stars at Chandrakala Garden Cafe.
- 13 January, 9pm onwards, Hotel Shangri-La, Bhaktapur, (01) 4413099 (ext. 7250-7568)

### Dining

**Yuwa for Children**
- Yuwa has come together to organize the Yuwa Bazaar, an educational event to provide school supplies to 607 students of Rati Bari Secondary School, Bhaktapur. Admission is free for students.
- 13 January, 2-9pm, Rastiya Krishi Bhawan, (01) 4451157

**Reading Melia**
- Celebrate the day away in Nepal’s Stri Bhawan National and Voluntary Nepal’s annual reading. More than 100 influential writers, celebrities, and 30,000 readers to organize the National Reading Melia 2078, which will include books, a photo exhibition, a poetry reading, and talks about books.
- 22-23 January, 7-10pm, Rashmi Khadgi, (01) 4455604

**Jhwo, Bhwayne**
- Come to enjoy local talent like the Samas Band, Lukayi dancers, and magicians, accompanied by Nepali culture, to raise funds to provide medical hygiene dignity kits and education in government schools.
- Shikra Foundation for Stri Bhawan, Memorial Health Project
- 13 January, 6:30pm, Nepa Damodar, Dhulikhel, (01) 4450617

### Getaway

**Hotel Shangri-La**
- Running winter days experience from 1200 to 1400 for great hospitality.
- (01) 4413099 (ext. 7250-7568)

**Hotel Mansalu**
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- (01) 3714007, hotelmansalu.com

**Kathmandu Guest House**
- What sets Kathmandu Guest House apart is its cozy and picturesque courtyard garden, which many guests have described as an oasis. Providing service since 1967, the guest house bears its service and quality.
- (01) 4450802, yoko@kmh.com

### Air Quality Index

- Kathmandu, 5 – 11 January
- 31 - 06: Poor
- 06 - 18: Moderate
- 18 - 30: Satisfactory
- 30 - 60: Good
- 60 - 100: Very Good
- 100 - 150: Excellent
- 150 - 250: Great
- 250 - 350: Very Great
- 350 - 450: Excellent
- 450 - 650: Great
- 650 - 1000: Excellent

*Note: The air quality index is measured by the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Nepal. The data is provided by the Nepal Air Quality Monitoring Network (NAQMN) and can be accessed at [http://www.uffmon.org](http://www.uffmon.org)*
From seedy cyber cafes to sleek smartphones, online harm is just a touch away

RYAN CHANG

Two years ago, a college student in Kathmandu shared with her boyfriend a nude video of herself, trusting it to be a secret between just the two of them. They soon broke up, and the boy published the explicit video on social media out of revenge.

Within days, the entire country was awash with the scandal. Online trolls posted responses and bombarded social media with GIFs of the video. Memes appeared comparing the student’s college to the port’s sex trade. Tormented and shamed, the girl took her own life.

But the video is still circulating—in its legacy locked in the permanent continuum of the Internet, even after the victim’s death. It is a reminder that the web is far from safe in Nepal, and that millions of children and young adults are at risk.

New technologies have made it more difficult for the authorities to keep up with child abuse and other crimes in the cyber world, and Nepal’s antiquated legislation has not kept pace with the challenges of the shifting online frontier.

In its Children in a Digital Age report published in December, UNESCO recommended that governments worldwide take seriously the impact of digital technology on children’s lives. Teenagers and young adults aged 15-24 are the most connected age group, with up to 78% of them online compared to an average 48% of the total population.

However, new technologies—such as the dark web and cryptocurrencies—allow “made to order” child sexual abuse material to be distributed. Lack of education on how children can protect themselves online makes many of them vulnerable.

Young victims in underprivileged areas become vulnerable the moment they are connected to the internet. Activists in Nepal say reporting on the issue has been minimal.

Every day we have more cases of children sexually assaulted from meeting strangers online, commercial sexual exploitation on social media,” says Summina Tuladhar, Child Rights Officer at Nepal Concerned Centre (CWN).

Cases of cyber-crimes filed to date under the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) 2061 have mostly concerned financial transactions and online defamatory statements towards political leaders. Separate legislation to protect young people at risk online is urgently needed, says child rights activist Anil Bajarkashahi.

According to student Nikesh Tandukar, 20, “If the cyber crime laws are strong, then no boy will ever try to repeat the incident of the college girl’s suicide to embarrass a girl.”

In Kathmandu, cyber-baiting has netted young victims who have just finished their SLCs. Nikesh Tandukar was hooded on social media to join a recruitment program making intense sticks for Rs15,000 a month. After paying an application fee of Rs2,500, Tandukar never heard back from the recruiters.

Without proper knowledge of how internet use, young adults hooked on Facebook face embarrassing and shameful consequences. Dilshad Awaal, 21, had his timeline covered with pornographic GIFs and videos by a hacker. “My friends feared I would be arrested. They thought I was the one sharing this on public,” he says. Children in Nepal are exposed to pornographic material at a younger age than in many other countries.

College student “Shake” told Nepali Times it was first shown to him when he was eight years old. “I was afraid and surprised; it felt like a horror movie for me,” he said. Now, 10 years later, watching pornography has become a daily habit for him.

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) says up to 62% of Nepalis were using the Internet in 2017, a staggering 86% of them on mobile phones only, with the remainder accessing the web on fixed computers.

However increased access to the internet via mobiles has also given children, especially from marginalized backgrounds, the chance to be treated as people rather than members of known group. “When they are in the virtual world no one can discriminate against them based on who they are or offline,” Tuladhar says.

In hard-to-reach districts such as Mugu, Humla and Jumla, where schools are sometimes closed for up to six months at a time, the internet has replaced books as the de facto source of information. For college-aged students, the internet has become the best source of learning outside of school.

Praveel Melwar, a Kathmandu classical musician, credits free content on YouTube for teaching him advanced techniques for playing tabla when he was younger. “If a teacher asked me to buy cassette and CDs now, I would think he’s crazy,” he says. SAFETY SURVOR: Ani Raghupati, of Childline, in a web safety workshop session at Birgunj Resort with students from Bajewal School.

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Times
12 - 18 JANUARY 2018 #892

NATION 11
Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle

For those sick of mediocrity, sequels, this is not one of them. The writers, and director Jake Kasdan, have taken the film in a completely new direction, turning it into a fine comedy adventure full of some pretty great special effects and side-splitting laughs.

The laughs come mainly from the amusing premise that arises when four teenagers innocently choose avatars that are completely different from them. They then find themselves sucked into the game and inhabiting those very characters they so carelessly chose. When a young, very dirty blonde teenager named Bethany (Madison Iseman) is turned into the retard cartoon character, Professor Sheldon Obren (Devon Bick), whose main weakness is endurance, in a game that relies on speed and cleverness, the joke is complete. The other avatars are almost as funny, but nothing can beat Jack Black acting like a feather-headed, attractive teenager whose phone is in bar Mosco. The film’s writing manages to sustain the joke throughout, with some truly hysterical set pieces and yet, as good writers do, the characters evolve, bringing dimensionality into what might otherwise have fallen flat towards the end.

Jumanji the game for the uninitiated, is an entity that is determined to suck its viewers into the world of the game itself, so when this happens to these four new players, they find themselves with somewhat useful avatars but a classlessness and a finite number of lives that endanger their return to the real world. The game itself is constructed with levity, avatars, and some very malevolent bad guys designed to strike fear into the hearts of all players, and viewers. This is a film for the large screen, not for the small. The effects, the scope of the game itself and the existential crisis that the characters face, will suffer from watching this self-indulgent treat on a smaller screen where the jokes may continue to be funny but the plight of the characters may seem ridiculous.

Jumanji cost between US$90-110 million to make but it has grossed over US$129 million to date, making it a huge success and a clear indicator of how, sometimes, a good escapist film is what people, the world over, crave.

With its sharp, sometimes raucous, writing and the stellar cast that includes a surprisingly nuanced Dwayne Johnson, the great Karen Gillan (of Dr. Who fame), and the hilarious but in this case rather one-note Kevin Hart in lead roles (I have saved you the surprises of who turns into whom) the film is populated by some of the funniest comedians working today, making for a whole lot of really, really funny moments.

Despite its sometimes-flagging sense of originality in terms of plot, this is a great, extremely diverting film, with some jokes that are entirely inappropriate for the very young so beware of taking those under 13 years old. You can expect to laugh a lot but will also jump in your seats with the realistic special effects – another notable aspect of this fine, funny film.

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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!}

HAPPENINGS

#AJMWITHARJ: Arjuna Coomara KC talks to journalists on Wednesday night after being released by the Supreme Court. He was arrested on contempt of court after publicly branding Chief Justice Gosal Pillai’s “corrupt.”

TABLE TOPICS: Top leaders of the CPI, UJW, and CPI (Marxist) Centre parties participate in a Left Unity coordination meeting held at UJW leader KP Dog’s residence in Balawat on Tuesday.

TAKE THAT: Participants in the National Boxing Championship, organised by the National Sports Council, in action on Saturday in Biralwade, Jaffna.

DRAWING LIFE: Arton, work on the intricate paintings of Arthya Mithun on the white washed gate at Frans Shikha on Tuesday. A street celebration is scheduled to mark the end of the project.

HAPPY WINNING: General Manager of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Turan Kemer (left) andestates Manager of Chandragiri Hills (right) present the prizes to the winners of the ‘Ride to Ty’ campaign last week.
Commissions for commissioners

Santa Gaha Magar in Himal Khubepatriks

In 1992, when Nepal held its first parliamentary elections under the 1990 Constitution, the polls cost just Rs10 million.

In November-December last year, when the first parliamentary-provincial elections under the 2015 Constitution were held, the Election Commission (EC) spent much in just repairing old vehicles.

The total cost of the November-December polls was Rs18 billion—181 times higher than in 1992, and double the amount allotted for the second Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in 2013.

One might argue that the election budget may have skyrocketed because of inflation and the necessity of simultaneously buying two sets of elections. But the 1992 elections budget is equivalent to just about Rs10 million in today’s currency.

“The latest elections were much more expensive than all the past polls, even after adjustment for inflation,” says Nilekshi Upreti, former Chief Election Commissioner.

A Himal Khubepatriks investigation has found that the parliamentary-provincial polls were wasteful because all Election Commissioners were hand in glove for kickbacks.

They bought luxurious vehicles and unnecessary equipment and materials at inflated prices. They even submitted fake bills, and transferred the secretary who refused to go along with the scams.

Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav and Election Commissioners Ilu Sharma, Ishwar Prasad Poudel, Suchit Kumar Shah and Nandendra Dahal unanimously decided to buy five luxury vehicles for themselves. When Secretary Gopi Nath Mainali opposed their decision, he was transferred out of the EC—a move that violated the election code set by the EC itself.

After removing Mainali, the EC fast-tracked the procurement process to buy the five vehicles, each costing Rs23.3 million. Sources say the five commissioners got a cut of Rs 10 million from this purchase, which they divided up among themselves.

Despite having four printing machines at its disposal, the EC bought another machine for Rs140 million. But the new machine was not used to its optimum, and voters were ultimately allowed to cast ballots by just showing citizenship cards.

An EC official told us on condition of anonymity that the five commissioners got a kickback of Rs10.6 million for the new printing machine.

“Electoral Commissioners bought the machine only to pocket their cuts,” he said. “If the new machine was really required, it would not have been thrown into the streets.”

Chief Election Commissioner Yadav took home TVs and air-conditioners bought for his office. Election Commissioner Ilu Sharma was caught on CCTV cameras taking a TV set out of her office. Her daughter rides in a car owned by the EC, and she has allowed her domestic help to use a scooter bought by her office.

The EC spent a huge amount of money on producing, publishing, airing and broadcasting voter education materials, clearing the payments for work that was never done, or only partially completed. Sources say the commissioners ordered their accounts department to pay documentary makers who submitted blank CDs. If 10,000 copies of pamphlets were printed, the bill submitted was for 100,000 copies.

The Election Commissioners approved all fake and forged bills, claiming their cuts. And media houses that refused to give them kickbacks were not given public service announcements.

As a result, voter education was an ineffective as many as 1.7 million votes were invalid in local elections. More than 1 million and 4.5 million votes were invalid in parliamentary and provincial elections respectively.
With new airport, Pokhara

Much delayed project would transform tourism and the economy of Central Nepal

ZIYU LIN
in POKHARA

The land for Pokhara’s new international airport was acquired 40 years ago, and has since been used as a pasture for livestock. But as heavy, earth-moving machinery finally start preparing for construction of the terminal building and levelling the ground for the long runway, there is hope in the city of a surge in economic activity.

The 200-hectare expanse on the outskirts of Pokhara is fast becoming engulfed by the suburbs of Lekhahati Municipality as speculators buy land along the highway and access road. The east-west aligned runway will be able to handle medium-range aircraft and allow direct flights to major Indian and Chinese cities, as well as offer migrant workers from Central Nepal direct access to Malaysia and the Gulf.

The project was stuck because of the lack of political will in Kathmandu and controversy over awarding the US$216 million contract to Chinese company CAMC Engineering, with the loan coming from China’s Exim Bank. The price tag was deemed to be double what a similar airport in Bhairawa will cost to build.

The first order of business for CAMC is to reinforce the perimeter fence because villagers are still bringing their water buffalo and cattle to graze through holes in the wire mesh.

Chandra Kanta Baral and Lok Nath Baral say their families have used the field for grazing since their childhood days. But they are happy there is going to be a modern airport in their neighbourhood.

“It’s fascinating to see how busy the machines and workers are at the construction site,” says Baral. “I will have to find a new place to take my buffaloes, but we are waiting for the economy to take off.”

Two water tank trucks are driving around the site 12 hours a day, spraying water to reduce dust, and engineers say they want to make sure there is minimum disruption and harm to the environment from the construction.

The 3.5-km runway design is already visible on Google Earth, some 1km east of the existing domestic airport. The safety area

It is the small details that give you the big picture.

High Quality Precision Printing with State-of-the-art Equipment at Jagadamba Press.
HEAVY-LIFTING: Earth-moving equipment has been arriving for the last two months, according to the SITA director, Bishweshwar singh, who said the work was on schedule. However, the airport is not yet operational and it will take some time to complete the work. The project is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

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Tourist workers

People in Pokhara spent four long decades waiting for an international airport to be built, but even after China's EXIM Bank agreed to finance the US$236 million project two years ago, construction could not begin. Work was slow because China's EXIM Bank, which has the contract, cannot get working visas for its skilled and semi-skilled staff. The company has applied for 150 visas, but the application is languishing in bureaucracy, slowing progress in construction.

"It's like moving a mountain," says a relieved Yamin Shrestha, executive manager of the airport. The airport is expected to be completed by the end of the year, according to the SITA director, Bishweshwar Singh, who said the work was on schedule. However, the airport is not yet operational and it will take some time to complete the work. The project is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

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Wake up

I
e today’s weekly feature column yours
tuly will be making some very important, timely and relevant points, if I may say so myself. So I am glad that all readers
turned up and gave me your undivided
attention. Thank you.

It pains us to say this but it has come
to our notice that some readers don’t
read. Many of you have been observed
skipping entire paragraphs while purusing
these lines. Others have even been seen
unconscionably swiping their mobile phones
under the table while pretending to read the
back page. And some of you have actually
done it while reading this staff.

Isn’t that what this is?

What does it take to get some
respect around here? Don’t you know it
is impolite to fall asleep while I am trying to
communicate with you? We take great
deal of effort to fill these pages with content
enriched from 18 years, and we don’t
want people dropping off unconscious
all over the place.

At a time when the country is struggling
ahead to a stable and prosperous future
after elections, it is mandatory for all citizens
to be alert and to exercise their freedom
to read what the Ass has to say even if,
like today, he may have nothing major
to impart. So, the least you can do is show
some country and pretend to read this
make-believe column and pretend to like
it. Let’s do a word count here, 345. Doc.
Another 210 to go.

As the Christian justice aptly pointed
out the other day, and quote: “There is
complete freedom of expression in this
country, there is not just any freedom
after expression. All journalists should
be objective, that is, to say they should have
the same objective as us.”

He went on: “In other words, it is all
pools down to how we internalise the
trade of the changing judicial paradigm.
Are we just paying lip-service here to end
degree reformers or are we empowering
journalism and readers, and communities
in the long-term? And we may well ask:
how are we going to institutionalise the
money-making agenda of the courts
if that doctor keeps refusing to eat? We
have to rise above partisan and personal
cases to the party line with a holistic
bottoms-up approach in order to make
our ends meet while the going is good. The
overall aim should be to guarantee all aspects
of society so that the present
pulp-juice delivery can be
awesome sooner rather than later.”

The Ass