Prime Minister K P Oli has hit all the right notes in his first two weeks in office, first by forging a UML-Maoist unification deal, inducing some promising faces into his cabinet, and then by trying hard to include Madhesi figures.

He chose economist Yuda Raj Khatiwada as Finance Minister, sidestepping other senior but inept ministers for the post. Khatiwada’s appointment has been hailed by many as the right move, and a recognition of the fact that the country now faces not a political crisis, but an economic one. Khatiwada is someone who could set right the wrong monetary policies, profligacy and misplaced priorities of the previous NC-led government.

Khatiwada is seen by some as having a socialist bent, and is expected to take some drastic actions: restricting credit flow into unproductive sectors, curbing imports, and getting the economy cranked up. Oli promised prosperity, and Khatiwada is the right person to deliver that.

The 7-party UML-Maoist deal last week cemented the unity between the country’s two largest communist parties, promising a stable government for five years. Once the two parties register Nepal Communist Party (NCP) at the Election Commission, Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal will find it difficult to oust Oli. He needs at least 40% of seats by his side, but around 70% of the unified party will be supporting the government.

Oli and Dahal have also struck closer to a deal with Umeendra Yadav, the leader of the fourth largest party in the Federal Parliament. After Yadav joins the government, the ruling coalition will have a two-thirds majority which will give Oli the leverage he needs to remove all constitutional hurdles to deliver on his promises of stability, prosperity and good governance.

Political analyst Krishna Khanal says the Oli government now cannot fail because there will be no excuse if it does. The NCP could then easily win another election even if it fulfills only 20% of its promises. His prophecy looks realistic because the main opposition, NCP, does not seem to have realised why it failed, and its leaders are busy blaming each other.

But the Oli government might end up promoting crony capitalism, disappointing people once again. Both UML and Maoist leaders have openly demanded with dubious businessmen in the past, and these lobbies have shown signs they are capable of modelling in politics to scuttle economic reforms.

There are too many backseat drivers in the united NCP bus, which will be jointly driven by Oli and Dahal for the next five years. The road itself is pitted and in drastic need of repairs.

Om Astha Rai

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EMPOWERING BOYS

It is an accepted truth that the best return on investment in development expenditure is when money is spent educating girls. Indeed, the main reason Nepal made dramatic progress in improving mother-child survival, or achieving a rapid decline in the total fertility rate was because of the doubling of the female literacy rate in the past 20 years. All this has happened despite having witnessed two decades in a war zone, poor governance, and unaccountable corruption in service delivery to the needy.

Now, as we embark on a hopefully new era of disillusionment and accountable politics, Nepal is facing a slow second-generation problem: a persistently high dropout rate for girls at Grade 5, the stage of full-scale marital age of marriage for women that hasn't shown expected improvement, or very low participation of women in decision-making positions despite affirmative action clauses in the new Constitution. There are also worrying signs in Nepali society of an increase in domestic violence, rape, and abuse of women. In fact, there appears to be an indirect causal link between the rise in female literacy rate and incidence of domestic violence. It is as if while education has empowered girls, given them more confidence, made them more outspoken and independent, the boys have become lazy. They haven't been able to handle more assertive female family members, or young women. The rise in literacy rate, therefore, hasn't made much of an impact on Nepal's entrenched patriarchal culture - in fact it seems to have ingrained conservative values.

It seems to us that time has come to promote interventions in the education systems that don't just prioritise improving enrolment rates, but also in making the school curriculum more gender-sensitive. The still predominantly male teachers in the school system need to be trained and be made aware, so they behave in a manner that is sensitive to gender equality issues. In short, the solution to gender justice may lie in empowering boys.

Socialisation of Nepali boys and the cultural norm they pick up along the way, they grow reinforces gender stereotypes, embeds their sense of entitlement, emboldens male voices derived from power relations, and further embeds patriarchal norms. In short, the malaise is male.

As Election Commissioner Ila Sharma eloquently argues in her Guest Editorial, “It is now time to focus on boys and men. Despite an inclusive Constitution, we have seen that the participation of women is still token and ceremonial. The new Cabinet may have just two women out of 17. It is shocking. The way male and costume-dominated bureaucracies still treat women and minorities. Citizenship laws that discriminate against the offspring of single mothers is a glaring national offence and needs to be urgently set right.

Victims of war rape have been denied compensation and justice by the state (See investigative report: page 14-20). Despite a aggressive political structure and a societal system stacked against them, there are many Nepali women who have risen up through the dint of hard work and determination. We present some examples (page 8-9) in our special coverage in this issue to mark the International Women’s Day.

In this regard, please support the campaign ‘#PressForProgress’"
DANCE WITH THE

HOLI COLOURS

WITH TURKISH AIRLINES
Oli here for good

It would be naive to assume that there will be no international meddling, but for the moment the new prime minister will be left alone to face the consequences.

Oli stood against India, and that blocking of huwa was translated into nationalism in Nepal at election times. That, along with some other sound political calculations in forging alliances, catapulted Oli to the high position he occupies today.

The changed political scenario in Nepal has put India on the backfoot, as even Indian commentators have noted. It has given Narendra Modi bashing in Delhi another good reason to pile up his foreign policy. Modi is blamed for pushing Nepal into China’s lap. Nepal is trying hard to break away from the total dependence on India for connectivity, this has always been the biggest leverage for the southern neighbor which has not always honoured the responsibility that comes with the privilege.

Displaying exemplary political acumen and diplomatic forte (fortitude) during the Blockade, Oli took a stand against India even though he had a reputation in the past of cozying up to Delhi. What prompted this reaction in September 2016 was the Indian foreign secretary almost threatening him to ‘dilute the constitution’.

I am gay and I am not afraid

Many shared it, praising his courage for coming out in public. It is slowly but surely generating a discussion on acceptance, acknowledgement and equality in the social sphere.

Although Nepal’s new Constitution recognises the rights of LGBTIQ, and a section of society is comparatively tolerant and open-minded, a considerable majority is still homophobic. Notice, many from them are afraid to come out, fearing the worst.

Limbu’s brave step in publicly coming out is surely going to help others like him in Nepal to come to terms with their own sexual identity, and accept themselves for who they are. But more importantly, it will also help the families, friends, neighbours and others associated to homo sexual people to understand the fears and concerns of their loved ones.

Since the video was released, Limbu says he has had an overwhelming number of people write to him. Messages of support and appreciation are pouring in from people who have shared their own stories with him, whether it’s about their sexual orientations or the challenges they have faced in their social and personal lives.

Limbu says he had a part to play in the video. He says, “What if nobody watches it?” He wanted it to be seen as many as possible as people in general are not aware of the importance of being able to freely express one’s self and to live a life that is true to your nature.

In the two days since its release, the video had already been watched more than 20,000 times on YouTube.
Start, continue, grow, repeat

Young Nepali women entrepreneurs share their experiences in starting successful businesses

SIKUMA RAI

Stage 1: Start

Natty for your Nari, an online portal for household healthcare service. This was the winning idea pitched at the Global Startup Weekend in Kathmandu on February 13 by a team of women.

Digital marketing agent Ashwarya Pradhan’s ‘Nari button’ was selected as the ‘top 10 highest voted idea’ out of more than 100 ideas put forward by four other women members from the participants including Mansi Rana, a graphic designer, and Pristhumi Shrestha, a business student. Ninka Khilot, a project manager and Ashwarya Shrestha, a software engineer at Froebel’s Lotusimg Technologies also joined to create a model website for the startup weekend.

“We all had our own areas of expertise. So, instead of assigned work to each other, our team cooperated and still relied on our own project,” says Pradhan.

The team is attempting to find a niche in entrepreneurship to establish a nursing service as a sustainable practice in Nepal. Startup Weekend introduced their idea to the wider market, and the team will be going to Pabbi for the main Global Women’s Meet on International Women’s Day, where they will have a chance to find angel investors or donors.

Stage 2: Continue

After the success of her first jewelry collection, which was part of her final undergraduate project, Ishita Adhikari is ready to launch her second collection of brass jewelry. Featuring bracelets, earrings and necklaces, Ishita’s first collection even included the traditional architectural elements. For the second series, she borrows inspiration from traditional elements in which she works with craftsmen from Kalimpong to implement her designs. Ishita had always known that she wanted to become a jewelry designer as a teenager. A girlhood tradition, used to teach her about gems and she worked on her jewelry skills at Kathmandu University. “During my early teenage years, I used to observe customers’ behaviour and judge if a certain jewelry suited the person or not.”

Stage 3: Grow

From age 13, Ishita Adhikari started being independent by tutoring pupils at school. She learned personal finance management and decision making, and now 25 Ishita works at the ‘I company Balderi, looking after operations. She also collaborates with Makeit2 go organise workshops such as Shell for young women entrepreneurs.

“The world of IT really fascinates me. I am constantly pursuing innovative ideas whether it is cake or maternity health information, through technology and digital ventures,” she says.

Ishita recently participated in a competition where she pitched her idea of a profit for profit maternity health and information mobile application, Matu Mat, where she became a semi-finalist.

Stage 4: Repeat

For Sunita Nirmahal, the sole purpose of starting an agriculture-based magazine was to ease the struggles of her friend who worked in the field and dispel the lack of information about agro-business. An idea that stemmed from a simple tea conversation has now turned into a venture in which Nirmahal works with her husband, Dhamal Khanal.

After much research and two trials, the first issue of Krishi is Probhodh was published in December 2017. Despite the growing demand and need for such magazines, there were difficulties along the way to alter the perspective towards farming and make it a sustainable profession.

Realising the lack of provisions for farmers, she started her Krishi Udyog magazine to bring in new ideas, AGS farming. She has also started Green Mark and Agri Centre to promote the sale of vegetables and farm produce. She is now working on CoolSat, a cold storage and processing facility.

Says Nirmahal: “The first venture always takes longer. But after that it gets easier and easier.”

AWAKEN THE BEASTS

Conquer any terrain.

TATA MOTORS

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DEALERS: Blagga 01-149053, 9445543418, Bhaothrayo 9853034880, 9857024258, Birathag 021-4643920, 9862713782, Birung 050-619182, 985527682, Bittamote 023-543927, 984317393, Bhumini 071-43770, 9857031299, Dhanagadi 091-417383, 981710825, Dhairan 053-533043, 9810270291, Dong 082-562161, 9857857779, Domahi 065-562161, 9866018176, Gaighat 051-405283, 980732922, Hetauda 9853032157, Jamakpur 041-327999, 981749777, Lahan 053-526245, 9818885199, Narayangadh 053-525109, 980273312, Nepalganj 051-515136, 9856020910, Pokhara 9846-50597, 985602078
Hillary’s 49th day

The climber’s ashes were scattered on waters off Auckland on the holy day of the Sherpa commemoration in Nepal

High on the Valley rim I was walking through rough country when I happened to discover the memorial park at Kakani, in search of a suitable film location. It was a good find and I was relieved it was shrouded in clouds. My mobile rings and it was Andrew Beetham from Wellington.

"Just confirming arrangements for the scattering of Sir Ed’s ashes on the Molokai coast in the Bay of Islands," Andrew said.

Andrew had decided to organise the scattering of Sir Ed’s ashes in New Zealand. I was delighted.

"I’ve arranged the scattering in the Bay of Islands," Andrew said. "The date has been set for the 26th of October. Would you like to come with me?"

I agreed and began making arrangements for the trip.

The day of the scattering arrived. The weather was overcast and the sea was rough. The ashes were scattered into the waves and a memorial plaque was placed in the water as a tribute to the great explorer.

The plaque read: "In memory of Sir Edmund Hillary, a true New Zealander, who dedicated his life to exploration and discovery. May his spirit live on in the hearts of all who knew him and those who will follow in his footsteps."
Who runs the world? Girls.

Five generations of women in a Kathmandu family underline the importance of educating daughters

SAHINA SHRESTHA

In a quiet and leafy cul-de-sac off of a side street in Bag Bhar, five generations of women live together and continue to inspire each other every day. Chandras Kumari Joshi is 103 years old and learned to read and write at a time when educating girls was regarded as unnecessary. Her daughter-in-law Angur Bada Joshi is a prominent social activist and as the founder of Padma Kanya College, a pioneer in higher education for women.

Her grand daughter-in-law Rupa Joshi is Head of Communications at UNICEF Nepal, and her great grand-daughter Priya Joshi was a wildlife researcher who gave up her studies to teach women to make things through her Maker Keti initiative. The family recently welcomed a new member, Priya’s 3-week-old daughter, Kasika Siddhi Bajracharya.

All the high-achieving, independent women in this multi-generational clan credit the education they received and family support as the reason they succeeded.

"Women need to be educated because they are the ones who run the world," explains Chandras Kumari, whose father Norgamguru Bishara Raj Pandey made sure all his nine daughters received the same education as his only son.

Chandras Kumari was 15 when she gave birth to her son in 1930, the year she became a widow. When the time came for her to find a bride for her eleven-year-old son, she welcomed nine-year-old Angur Bada into the family.

"I promised her father I would bring her up as my own daughter," remembers Chandras Kumari, still sprightly and sharp despite her years.

Even when others in society told her that educating girls would bring her misery, she made sure her daughter-in-law received the same opportunities as her son. She adds with a glint in her eyes: "I am a stubborn person and was adamant that she go to school."

Despite Kathmandu's patriarchal culture, Angur Bada Joshi persevered and became the first Nepali woman to get an LLB from Banaras and a BL from Oxford University.

When she returned to Nepal, she was appointed principal of Padma Kanya, becoming the first woman in the country to head a school college. She went on to groom an entire generation of women.

"Women create life. She is responsible for the upbringing of the child. It is imperative that the mother is educated, educated, and empowered," says Angur Bada.

Rupa Joshi was barely 17 when she was married, and 5 years later became a mother. "I was perfectly happy staying at home but they pushed me to pursue my studies," she recalls. Rupa went on to do her masters in journalism from the University of Southern California.

While Rupa was away in America, Chandras Kumari took care of her great grandchildren like she had done so many years ago with her own grandchildren. "It was easier for me to concentrate on my studies knowing that my children were in good hands back home, without that support, backup and understanding, it wouldn’t have been possible," she adds.

Growing up, Priya Joshi never felt the pressure to become a doctor or an engineer. "My siblings and I had the freedom to choose what we wanted to study," she says. "I am lucky to have the experience and lessons from so many generations. And now my daughter will hopefully have the same," she adds, as Kasika sleeps soundly on her lap.

The women all agree that it was education that made the family what it is today. Says Rupa: "Education teaches you to respect each other’s point of view and thoughts, whether it is from a daughter-in-law to a mother-in-law or vice versa. That is one reason we live together in such harmony."

WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE

Nepalis have produced generations of strong and independent women. Education is essential for women to gain a voice and have the education that enables them to achieve the potential they deserve.
Visual engagement

Nepal’s nature and culture connect in a month-long art exhibit

Culture is intricably interwoven with nature in Nepal, but this connection is being slowly lost. Indigenous groups are being forced away from their cultural and natural heritage because they are undervalued by a globalised economy, and poor domestic planning and governance.

Natural resources that could be sustainably harvested are disappearing rapidly as fast as the people who are skilled in using them. The 2015 Earthquake accelerated this loss – both in monuments as well as intangible heritage like festivals and community cohesion. Much of the reconstruction has been generic, cultural spaces and neighbourhoods have lost their charm.

Several artists from Nepal and around the world have responded to this steady erosion of nature and culture by engaging with local populations in innovative ways. The vision of these artists transforms aesthetic opportunity into social outreach and liberated dialogue, and some of them even help improve livelihoods.

One collective in Janakpur demonstrates women’s empowerment through group dynamics in painting and street theatre. The Mithila people adapt traditional architectural clay paintings to native Johni handmade paper. Loss of natural area is combined with the loss of respect for natural forces in a technological world. Both the cultural practices that were based on nature and the resources that sustained them are vanishing.

An American artist living in Nepal collaborates with community members across caste lines in Mustang, establishing a rural learning centre. Her work facilitates artist residencies and environmental education, exploring alternative approaches that are directly engaged with indigenous, local knowledge systems.

American curator Lilian Boll was moved to organise the exhibition after meeting several artists during visits to Nepal where she was involved with an ongoing project at the Lumbini Crane Sanctuary.

“Three diverse artists share many concerns and creative ways of working with distinct populations which have inspired me. The art we make reflects the complex threats development poses,” she says.

In Boll’s case, video, photography, and objects relating to the Srus Cycles come together in an exhibit of the symbiosis between an endangered sacred bird and local villagers who have lived amidst Lumbini’s wetlands for over 2,500 years.

She shows that Buddhism has an inherent respect for nature that is being undermined as Lumbini becomes a mass tourism destination. Renewable Metteyya and the Lumbini Social Service Foundation are working to halt environmental destruction that affects humans as well as wildlife in Lumbini, which already has some of Nepal’s worst pollution. Joseph Beuys’ concept of Social Sculpture provides a framework for a wide range of practices as an exhibition in a contemporary art context. Some artists function as organizers, actively uniting participants. Some facilitate training workshops for rural people to cooperatively transform livelihoods. Locally gathered clays, plant substances, and dwindling horizons are reflected in painting, sculpture, media, and performance.

Sustainable attitudes are finding along with traditional skills, self-sufficiency is replaced by global markets. When an ethos based on biodegradable materials shifts to plastic, the waste stream brings destruction all over the land and oceans. Culture, natural landscapes, and material resources required for daily village life are then at risk.

The exhibition at Targore Museum will be accompanied by parallel events and performances. A catalog on the exhibition has been published, documenting the perspectives of the curator and artists which places the work squarely within the ambit of contemporary art and social practice.

This unique exhibition seeks to move beyond digital traces of engagement; it offers opportunities to share resources, approaches, and experiences.
EXHIBITS

1. Shyam Badan Shrestha and Natural Resource Development Center
2. Jessica Kair and Margha Foundation
3. Gris de la Chesnaye and TGB Lives Project
4. Ashmina Rani and Nexus Arts
5. Karim Shrestha and A Social Critique
6. Claire Burkett and Janakpur Women’s Development Center
7. Lillian Hall and Lumini Social Service Foundation
8. Gopal Das Shrestha ‘Kalprem’ and Kalpana Cemanies
**EVENTS**

- **Local Mini Market**
  Visit the bi-monthly mini market which features local products that are unique, creative and high-quality.
  3 March, 10am-5:30pm, The Blvd Hotel, Chakraban Rd, Thamel. (01) 4486101

- **The Awesome Human**
  Motivational seminar organized by Working As Angels fund for mental health management and sanitary and outdoor training in Nepal.
  Speakers: Armita Gajwali, Ardi Chitrakar, Brunika Shrestha and Prashanta Manandhar.
  3 March, 7am-8pm, St. Jam’s, Monarghat, Air 4998910

**MUSIC**

- **Suman and the Blue Fret**
  Original music incorporating ethnic Nepalese instruments Sarangi, veena and Western styles of contemporary blues.
  2 March, Jam-Zen, The Old House Restaurant, Durbur Rd, Air 4981710

- **Kanta Darb Dar**
  The 2nd event of the month-long Basa Camp, a music festival featuring Kanta Darb Dar, a bitar, basa and percussions trio from Nepal with unique contemporary compositions creating unusual fusion between Eastern and Western melodies.
  3 March, 7pm onwards, Base Camp, Outdoor Lounge, Asia Treasure House, Bhaisepati

**DINING**

- **Sapporo Japanese**
  Serving Japanese food & drinks: cookow for hirashus, sukiyaki, ramen, gyoza and teriyaki. The menu is seasonal.
  Air 49384588

- **Belle Ville**
  The café introduces its new breakfast menu — try their fresh and delicious pancakes, sausages, and special egg dishes for breakfast and lunch.
  2 March, Kom-Jam, Bhaktapur. (01) 4481166

- **Chez Caroline**
  Authentic ambiance, marvellous French food, glorious sunshine and more. Quiches, tarts and sandwiches on the menu.
  Babor Mohok Reykjavik, (01) 4482100

- **Muliwakch**
  Select your special dinner from their Ala carte menu. Their fish steak with lemon butter sauce is soft, juicy, nutty, and rich in nutrients.
  Babor Mohok Reykjavik. (01) 4482900

- **Pauline’s Garden**
  A nice place in the heart of Kathmandu offering friends and Italian cuisine as well as Nepali dishes. Enjoy their variety of spreads, salads and soups.
  Bhaktapur (Closed on Monday), (01) 4222831/80839575

**GETAWAY**

- **Retreat at Damaar**
  A retreat for caravanners or creators for an untroubled sanctuary to enjoy and enlighten their inner self.
  Besh<dowal, Kose, 361/10, 3642422. www.retainadomar.com

- **Himalayan Horizon**
  A paradise away from the busy and well trodden tourist trails, set with high standard of comfort and luxury.
  Hotel Himalayan Horizon, Bhaktapur. (01) 4482605, www.himalyanhorizon.com

**ART MARKET**

- **Saiwa in Nepal**
  Known as Fish Four, Saiwa is an Indian pop rock band from Mumbai who will be performing classic Bollywood songs. Joining along are Nepali artists Laxmi, Ganga Suman, Sampurna and Sushil & Pratama.
  3 March, 7pm onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, Prashupatinath Rd, (01) 4799408

**PHOTO EXHIBITION**

- **Photo exhibition on human rights and women empowerment**
  For the 6th edition of Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival, organised by Human Rights Film Centre.
  7 March, 10am onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, Prashupatinath Rd, (01) 4799408

**Sisterhood Gathering**

- **A gathering for all moms to connect, relax, heal and rejuvenate while well-led volunteers take care of the children.**
  Highlights: therapies including sauna, cooking with frequency music, food and drinks, homemade wellness products, group meditation, children’s workshop and fun music.
  8-10 March, 7am-9pm, Q5 Wellness, 48171399

**INTERNATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL**

- **International Folk Festival**
  Be a part of the 5th edition of the festival promoting culture and tourism. Dance together with the participants from 11 different countries sharing their culture.
  3 March, 7:30pm, Bhanumtar

**NEPAL DEATHFEST**

- **Bigger death metal music fest of South Asia where bands from different countries will be giving their bestest performances.**
  Bands: Nilded Solde, in the flesh, Ignominious, Seguementa, Breeding Machine, Oligar, Ornament, Assassin and more.
  3 March, 7:30am onwards, Purple Haze Hotel, Banepa, Air 4988001/80839732

**GETAWAY**

- **Temple Tree**
  A peaceful place to stay, compete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it also hosts three different restaurants to cater to your taste buds.
  Gokuldev, Lakeside, (01) 4458307, www.templetreemanali.com

- **Pokhara Grande**
  A welcoming spot to escape from the scorching heat, a massage parlour and spa to liven up your day and a gym to release stresses.
  Pokhara Grande is a great place to unwind.
  Lakeside, Pokhara, (01) 4484210, www.pokharagrande.com

**TANGALWOOD**

- **Boutique apartment hotel offering award-winning standard of service in the heart of Kathmandu.**
  Tangal, Kathmandu, (01) 44888885, www.tangalwood.com

**SAPPORO JAPANESE**

- **Serving Japanese food & drinks:**
  Crispy for hirashus, sukiyaki, ramen, gyoza and teriyaki. The menu is seasonal.
  Air 49384588

**GIVEAWAY**

- **The Vesper Cafe & Restaurant**
  Enjoy mouth watering delicacies along with a range of excellent wines they serve.
  The special menu consists of Cabo Solad, Roasted Pumpkin Soup, Roasted Turkey and Crema Blu Llue.
  (01) 5046819

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

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The Saturday and Thursday (9th) slight improvement in Air Quality Index shows how much contribution vehicular emissions make to the concentration of suspended particulate matters less than 2.5 microns in size. Gas as the AQI for these days are all in the unhealthy band. The reason is the local winds, open garbage burning and crop burning carried out during the days.

**Untold stories of unsung heroes**

Digital book profiles Nepali women for whom uncommon grit was a common trait

**SARA PARKER**

Over the past 30 years I have worked with Nepal's field of gender and education. Although a lot of progress has been made, much more needs to be done. The gender movement has grown with events such as 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Women of the World Festival amplifying the voice of activists.

One of the initiatives in Nepal in Shrawana Tihar's Celebrating Womenhood Award which recognizes women in the name of the nine female goddesses and represents powerful women from all walks of life.

The award goes beyond the well-known faces among women empowerment activists, advocates and NGO leaders to local women from various backgrounds. The award spotlights women who have contributed and impacted their communities and nation, but are not included or accepted as serious leaders and change makers, when in fact they are creating change that everyone is aspiring for.

Six journalists fanned out across Nepal to collect stories of 50 women to include in an inspiring e-book containing untold stories of unsung heroes. The digital book will be launched online on International Women's Day on 8 March.

Through their work and life they have contributed to shaping the thoughts and actions of generations to come. Their grit has helped bring about a shift in conventional mind-sets and ideologies regarding the role of women in Nepali society. This is the time to promote and benefit from their stories.

The book includes a diverse range of experiences of women from different backgrounds, and shows that there is no one narrative of gender or women in Nepal. It also shows that we do not just need to celebrate women who work to directly tackle 'gender issues', but should also focus on those, who through their work set a positive role model for young girls.

These are testimonials of the power of individual agency as a means to overcome oppression and stigma on many levels.

Zubeda Khatur's husband supported her to go to school despite the fact that he was ridiculed by the wider community. Today, she has not only passed her SSL but plays an active role in the local Muslim Namaste Community group. Her determination shows how important it is for men to encourage and participate in empowering women.

Gulab Devi's activism in Saptari has played an important role in bringing positive changes in her community by challenging discriminatory daily wages for women. She is active in many fronts and despite not having any education herself, she did not let this stop her from challenging social stigma and working for equality.

Ram Devi Tamang overcame the stigma attached to becoming a widow at 22 and started a tailoring unit to earn money to sustain herself and to train other women. She became a local champion for gender equality and has now become the Deputy Mayor of Namobuddha Municipality in Kanch, setting a positive example to all women in Nepal.

Laxmi Timilsina was related to buy fertilizer to a shop owner and this led to her feeling depressed about being treated unfairly. This, coupled with her position in the family led her to start an organic farm movement which serves as an example to all. Her story shows that it is important to work in different sectors like agriculture to make women more independent.

Trilpa Lungee Magar not only overcame discrimination for being stipend due to polio, she also completed her Bachelor's education despite not having access to a wheelchair at Patma Kanya Campus. She then worked as a pilot before becoming a nursery teacher and establishing the Nepali Children's Association (Nepal Women and Girls Disabled Society).

Haridevi Koraiya, despite professional singing been seen below her social class, she sang, wrote songs that captured the situation of women in Nepal, and has now recorded over 45 albums, her songs inspire other women by spreading the message of self-reliance and independence.

Renu Sharma (aborted) with Kamala Upreti and Ashsharaha Baraket of The Women's Foundation work to rescue, rehabilitate and counsel women and young girls on a daily basis. Over the last 30 years they have worked tirelessly to help thousands of women in Nepal, yet have remained out of the limelight.
Lady Bird

Greta Gerwig’s funny, sweet, kind-hearted feature Lady Bird has been nominated in the five most prestigious categories for the upcoming 90th Academy Awards on 4 March this Sunday — for those interested in still watching this irreverent comedy. There is a Best Picture nomination.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pandi
along with one for Best Director for Gerwig, and two nominations for Susanne Bier for Best Actress as the Wise ole. Yet another nomination has been reserved for the great Laurie Metcalf in the Best Supporting role as Lady Bird’s complex, warm-hearted, hypercritical mother Marion McPherson.

At a young American actor, writer, and now director, Gerwig has come far. Hailing off starring as an impulsive towards the beginning of her career, and now reaching perhaps the apex of her development with yet another Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay for Lady Bird’s, excellent, bold script.

This is a classic American coming-of-age film about a young girl named Christine who insists on being called Lady Bird for the sake of her own individuality. While there are moments of great beauty and real transcendence in the film, aided by some exceptional writing by Gerwig, this is essentially the kind of high school film that resonates mainly with an American audience, even while the carefully written chemistry between Lady Bird and her mother Marion ensures it captivates the older people as well. The other travails of Lady Bird, such as being born to a lower middle class but still privileged family, going to a Catholic school, and living in Sacramento will fall flat in the eyes of young Nepali teenagers who probably have angst of their own (as do all teenagers) but not to do the same kind of extreme individualism that is seemingly an American trait which does not quite manifest to the same extent around the world — not even to Nepali teenagers who are struggling to find themselves and undoubtedly see themselves as unique in that struggle.

It is therefore unfortunate that such a fine film should have such a narrow range, with little symbolism and, aside from Metcalf’s beating Marion, few powerful archetypes to appeal to an international audience. We have become so used to the insistent Americanism of the mainstream that most of us watch films about American life without questioning how little these films who against our own. Cinema is meant to be universal, but without a far-thinking director to weild it, the films become as narrow as the director’s viewpoint.

This is perhaps an unfair criticism of Lady Bird, a film which does not pretend to be more than it is a family drama about a young, callow girl with a good heart who goes through their share of teenage screw-ups. A shame that these promising young American directors, like Gerwig, and her partner Noah Baumbach (the film-maker who made the equally impressive The Squid and the Whale in 2005) do not look outside their world for the wealth of stories that could be told, were there a will.

Watch trailer online nepaltimes.com

NEW PORTFOLIO
Matmala Yadav, Minister of Commerce and Supplies, Ram Babu Gautam, Minister of Home Affairs and Schwab Nakash, Defense Minister pose for a photo with President Bidhya Bhandari, Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Prime Minister KP Oli after the swearing-in ceremony in Kathmandu on Monday.

CHEERS: Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and US Ambassador to Nepal Aruna J. Viglio during a reception to mark the 72nd anniversary of Independence Day of the United States of America in Kathmandu last Friday.

HAPPY HOURS: Indian Ambassador to Nepal Manjeet Singh Puri and his wife Namrata Puri pay a visit to Prime Minister KP Oli at his residence in Baluwatar on the occasion of Diwali.

KEY TO HEALTH: The construction team hands over the new building to the Bajajpata Hospital administration in Kathmandu on Wednesday. The building will house the outpatients department of the hospital.

FLY HIGH: Australian Ambassador to Nepal Peter Creme Built, Qatar’s Ambassador to Nepal Yousef Mohammed Alwail and Qatar Airways Country Manager, Mr. Jaswantkumar have attended the launching ceremony of the Airways’ inaugural flight to Canberra, capital of Australia on Tuesday in Kathmandu.
Writ and wrong

Nepal. The government had barred Ncell from repatriating the profit until a capital gains tax linked to company’s sale by TeliasSonera to Axiata was settled. But Ncell moved the Supreme Court on 17 December, and CJ Pranjul acted the very next day to pave the way for Ncell to take the money out of Nepal.

Advocate Om Prakash Aryal, who shot to fame by filing a writ that eventually brought down the dreaded head of the anti-corruption watchdog in 2017, says: “Justices are now delivering verdicts so fast it is as if they have promised to settle all tax cases before they retire.”

The Supreme Court also swiftly delivered an interim order in another case involving Ncell, benefiting billionaire Upendra Mahato’s Synergy Nepal Company.

Concluding that Synergy Nepal undervalued the transaction of Ncell shares, the IRD had instructed the company to pay an additional tax amount of Rs 3.25 billion. The court delivered the verdict for this case in just two days.

The Supreme Court settled another high-profile money-laundering case in just three days, baffling everyone who thought the justice system in Nepal was slow. Nepal Bhasa Bank (NBB) had not allowed controversial businessman Ajay Sumari to bring in $21.3 million from Cyprus for four years, questioning the source of his cash. Sumari filed a writ at the Supreme Court on 4 February, asking for permission to bring his money. On 6 February, the court ruled that there was no legal basis and reasons for the Central Bank to freeze Sumari’s money.
SPOILS OF WAR

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
in KANCHANPUR

The Tharu woman’s daughter is nearly 15 years old. That is how many years have passed since she was raped by a group of Royal Nepal Army soldiers. That is also the number of years she has waited for justice.

She thought the culprits would be caught when the war ended, and that they would finally be taken to court when the Maoists were elected to power in 2008. She waited throughout the 11 years of political transition for truth, justice and compensation.

“I get very anxious about my past because I am not guilty. I have neither been compensated, nor have those who did it to me been caught,” says Chaudhari, her eyes burning with fury.

Her husband was away when 25 soldiers drove up in a van, entered her home and beat her up. “Then they took turns to rape me,” she recalls. “I am lucky to be alive.”

She battled the ensuing trauma on her own, adjusting to ostracism by her community which got worse when she got pregnant.

“I have spent a lot of money on my treatment. I could do with a little help, the government should tell me once and for all if I will get compensation or not, since others have,” she says.

Nepal has come a long way after the war ended in 2006. The monarchy was abolished, there were two elections to Constituent Assemblies that framed a federal secular constitution. Under the peace process the Maoist guerrillas were demobilised, some of them were integrated into the Nepal Army. For many the political transition is over, but not for war survivors like Chaudhari here in the plains of western Nepal which saw massive human rights violations by both sides.

Wartime rape victims are off the government radar, abandoned by their husbands, ostracised by their families and society. The state, which is made up of the warring sides, has excluded rape in the interim relief process and in transitional justice.

There is a lack of data on wartime rape because many victims are still afraid of social stigma. There is a lack of social protection, and many are poor. The statute of limitation, that has now been extended to six months, has been another hindrance.

Advocacy Forum-Nepal alone has documented and worked with at least 250 cases of conflict rape. Around 300 cases have been registered at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where Madhavi Bhatta says, “First the registered rape cases need to be established through investigation and later we will recommend them for separation.”

When asked about how long that will take, she replied, “The process will definitely take years since the investigations have only just started.”

Last August, the UN’s human rights committee for the first time intervened in the wartime rape case of Purina Maya and urged Nepal to investigate it. Although it was a landmark decision, there has been no response from the government side.

On Friday, Sec of Advocacy Forum Nepal says the government has always ignored the demand for justice and reparations from wartime rape victims.

Nepal’s political transition is over, but there is no closure for victims of wartime rape.
“I didn’t kill myself for the sake of my children.”

I had been married for just six months when I was raped. The soldiers came in three vehicles, beat me and then raped me in turn. They suspected we had hidden weapons. My husband and in-laws threw me out of the house even though I was pregnant. I got married again. Now, my current husband also says he would have never married me if he knew about the rape. He is a drunkard. If I hadn’t been raped, I would be raising a happy family now. I feel most miserable when people mock me. I often think of committing suicide, but I don’t have the courage. I am surviving just for the sake of my children. I approached the government for compensation, they made me go everywhere. In the end they said there is no compensation for rape victims.

“My body can cope with any pain.”

After the rape, my husband has been mistreating me, he accuses me of having affairs. Initially, he supported me saying whatever happened wasn’t my fault, now he is ashamed of me. I lost my dignity and happiness. I was raped by two soldiers who entered our home, and forced me to undress. I was so afraid I could not even shout for help. Other victims of the insurgency have received compensation but I haven’t got anything. I try to have positive thoughts, but I am haunted by the rape every day. I have health problems, I feel displaced and frightened. My husband beats me up, but having survived the rape, my body can cope with any pain.

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Kissing ashes

Draught situations need drastic remedies. And if there is one thing we have learnt since Nepal shed the Rana yoke, it is that our rulers need to be kept under constant surveillance so we as people can figure out where they are and what they are up to.

Since the election results were known three months ago and before the new government took over last week, however, bureaucrats had suddenly become hard to find. The reason we can’t find them is because they are stalling us.

They blend into the underground, hunt nocturnally and sleep in the daytime, making a killing every day; they avoid contact with other humans, and stay invisible in the urban jungle where they put our money where their mouth is.

There are two ways to track down the location of the servents of the people. One is to make it mandatory for all gauged officers beforehand and thereafter to be radio-collared so that their whereabouts can be tracked by satellite telemetry. Some lefty section officers have put on added flesh as their careers progressed, so it may not be easy to wrestle to the ground and hold them still long enough to strap on the radio collar. In such cases, it may be necessary to daze them with a tranquilliser gun before attaching the radio device on their individual.

An easier way may be to embed new units of the art microchips subcutaneously into the tissue behind their ears. These come in with inbuilt SIM cards allowing the officer in question to be GPS tracked through satellite telemetry. It is during political transitions between two governments that the civil service embarks on its annual migration. One way to trace their whereabouts is to install camera traps that will be triggered by motion detectors along routes that they frequent. For example, one bureaucrat who was supposed to be on an inspection of Province 7 has been caught on a videoclip taped on Sol 9 in Bangkok.

For example, earlier this month the Secretary of the Ministry of Constructive Corruption disappeared from radar screens. Luckily, he had just been radio-collared so we could trace his migratory route to revenue-generation technique in this country ever since.

Manjusha was told he could not take his Chitwan safari unless he first paid his debt to unconcerned authorities, and slip another wad of sheep’s to higher up authorities. Good thing Manjusha had brought along plenty of small denials for just such a contingency, otherwise we might still have been under water.

Squeezing fellow citizens dry is a quintessential Nepali custom that has been passed down from one generation of Nepalis to the next, right up to the present day. It works on the very simple socialist principle of taking from everyone according to her ability and giving to anyone according to his or her good. This leaves the playing field, spreads the wealth around and makes us, as a nation in the throes of development, to make rapid advances towards utopia.

Nepal is way ahead of other countries in the region when it comes to extraction and extortion. But there is no room for complacency. We have to ask ourselves: is there a Darbar Square still untainted, a past still permitless, a tourist still unguagged? Are there businesses that have still not been shaken down? The long and short answer to these questions is: you bet. Devolution to the provinces opens up finds possibilities for lacuny and plunder.

Australia. Earlier, the well-known head of a constitutional organ was tracked by a GPS locator on an intercontinental migration to Canada via Mauritius and Monaco. This is a record for the longest migration undertaken by a Nepali mammal.

Meanwhile, reports are coming in of satellite-tracked civilian servants persuading fellow Nepalis to spontaneously part with their cash out of their own free will. These donations could be voluntary (and we have no reason to believe they are not) in which case they may be part of the voluntary Mr. Zedding left for his protests in his last will and testament (“Go forth and kiss their a**es, but give me my cut”).

There is actually nothing new in all the give-and-take that is going on in broad daylight hours in and in full view of the law enforcement agencies, even as we speak. In fact, extortion has been a national