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#900

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Economic rumblings



LIGHTNING STRIKE: A thunderbolt lights up the sky above Kathmandu in the first storm of the spring season on Monday night.

BIKRAM RAI

When Nepal's two largest communist parties announced unification ahead of last year's elections, the Nepali Congress accused them of conspiring to impose an authoritarian regime.

As the election result showed, the people rejected that notion. However, with its two-thirds majority, the new coalition can amend the constitution at will. That the two leftist parties will form a united Communist Party has raised fears that they may become too powerful, become politically authoritarian, and introduce a command economy.

UML-Maoist leaders have often publicly praised ex-Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, and Prime Minister K P Oli is a fan of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew. The Maoists do not hide their admiration for China's rise.

Prime Minister Oli's pick of technocrat Yuba Raj Khatriwada as Finance Minister, while widely hailed, has raised business eyebrows

because of his backing for a greater role for the state in regulating the free market.

Sources say Oli is consulting other top UML-Maoist leaders about creating a separate development authority with a clear mandate to expedite big-ticket projects and regulate the private sector. UML leader Bamdev Gautam, chief architect of the communist merger, is likely to head this entity.

During a mid-term budget review this week, Finance Minister Khatriwada justified creating such an authority, arguing that it will fast-track delayed infrastructure projects.

Oli has moved quickly to make the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) more powerful by bringing two departments responsible for investigating tax fraud and money-laundering under his own

jurisdiction.

Oli's confidante Pradeep Gyawali, who sacrificed his chance to become Finance Minister, is said to be in line for a new portfolio that will interface between the PMO and Cabinet.

The UML-Maoist leaders know perfectly well that the people will boot them out in the next election if they do not deliver on their promise of prosperity, and seem to have reached the conclusion that the only way to accelerate development is to centralise control.

Economist

Keshab Acharya believes a powerful development authority will indeed streamline capital spending, and kick-start the economy. But other economists like Bishwa Poudel are wary: "A separate authority to guide development could encourage lack of accountability."

Om Astha Rai

MELTDOWN TO BREAKDOWN
EDITORIAL

BOTTOM-UP APPROACH
GUEST EDITORIAL
BY **SIDDHANT RAJ PANDEY**
PAGE 2

THE REGULATOR IS BACK
PAGE 24



900 Weeks

This edition of Nepali Times is #900 and marks a milestone in the paper's history as it moves towards more digital content. We are responding to our readers' increased preference for interactive multimedia packages with a newly-designed mobile-friendly website. However, as this print edition proves, the hardcopy is still going strong, and we will continue to provide cutting-edge journalism with world class production values.

-Editor



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MELTDOWN TO BREAKDOWN

Nepal is one of the few countries in the world that seems to want to stay poor. The government officially requested the UN ahead of a meeting this month to not upgrade it just yet from the list of Least Developed Countries because of fears of losing foreign aid. The reason may have been legitimate self-interest, but the way it came across in the media was that we want to remain beggars.

Now that the new government has been (partially) formed under the new federal constitution, the worry is not so much about political instability but economic bankruptcy. There have been enough warning signs along the way during the country's long economic downhill slide which we never heeded because our rulers were preoccupied with politics. Now that the politics has been largely fixed, there are no more excuses left to delay fixing the economy with a Marshall Plan for infrastructure-led growth.

The realisation seems to have sunk in with Prime Minister K P Oli who last week announced the second tranche of cabinet ministers. Its composition represented a compromise of interests and egos to placate the Maoists as well as to balance factions and aspirants within his own UML. Among the fairly predictable choices, one stood out: Yuba Raj Khatiwada for the post of finance minister.

In his previous tenures in office, especially as the governor of the Central Bank, Khatiwada showed he could take bold decisions even though they angered special

interest groups like real estate speculators. Khatiwada's appointment is still iffy because he is not an elected MP. Still, his appointment was widely hailed within Nepal and abroad.

Khatiwada faces a tough challenge. Remittances, the mainstay of the economy, is in decline even though the total number of overseas workers has not come down. This could either be because the dollar has weakened, or that most money is being remitted through non-banking channels, or both. Whatever the case, remittances are not going into formal channels to be invested into productive sectors. Imports have risen dramatically, especially of petroleum products. Last week, in a Himalmedia roundtable, CEOs of banks also pointed to the Rs 300 billion which the government has not spent on development that was stifling money supply (*see page 6*).

As Siddhant Raj Pandey of Business Oxygen argues in the Guest Editorial (*below*) monetary policy is in chaos, the combination of BoP and current account deficits is a double whammy. Khatiwada's first order of business would be to inject credit, promote investment and cut imports.

As we in Nepal know all too well: economic meltdown will ultimately lead to political breakdown. Which means the United Left's electoral promise of strong government and development will quickly unravel.



BHANU BHATTARA

GUEST EDITORIAL
SIDDHANT RAJ PANDEY

Bottom-up approach

With the advent of the Left coalition that has come with a clear majority, the general feeling is that there will be stability in government for the next few years paving way for consistency in policy.

With monetary policy in havoc and in the fiscal space with the macro-economy showing strains, the task of the new government in general and the finance minister in particular is daunting. The step of the Oli government in choosing a technocrat like Yuba Raj Khatiwada as finance minister has been the first smart move of the government, and shows the importance given to remedying the present state of economic affairs.

With mounting imports and deceleration of remittances leading to decline in the balance of payment and a current account deficit, Nepal needs to find a solution at the earliest. Our obsession with revenue generation through unleashed imports needs a rethink.

Last year, our agricultural product imports ironically surpassed that of petroleum product imports. A clear policy to encourage local industries with tax incentives and FDI would be a start. We import hundreds of megawatts of thermal energy at a substantial cost, instead, if we were to encourage solar farms that could produce half those imports at lower cost than the imported energy, we would be finding a solution towards import substitution as well.

In turn, we would not only be producing clean energy, we would be demonstrating that we have an alternative energy policy in place as well instead of only

being hydropower centric. However, with the recent announcement of Rs7.30 per solar unit as the purchasing price by the off taker, it becomes unviable for any investor to invest in solar energy, killing the initiative before it even sees the light of day.

Perhaps it is time to look at the bottom-up approach by investing and encouraging small and medium enterprises (SMEs). According to the Department of Industries 86% of businesses are SMEs contributing 15% to the GDP and employing almost 2 million people. These SMEs can be the catalyst to Nepal's development.

They are characterised by traditional methods of production and management. All they need is capital and technical expertise to scale up. Currently, there are quite a few private equity, venture capital funds in Nepal that are willing to fill that gap and invest with demonstrable impact in mind.

Now is the time to encourage these investors to help small and medium local enterprises boost their productivity, export their goods, create employment and at the same time encourage them to be transparent and pay taxes. The need of the hour is for alignment between the Government's vision and the private sectors expectation.



Siddhant Raj Pandey is
Chair and Managing Director of
Business Oxygen.

ONLINE PACKAGES



FLYING GARBAGE

Once known as the 'toilet paper trail', the trekking route from Lukla to Everest Base Camp has been cleaned up by women, local communities and an airline company. Go online for a video journey to the scenic Khumbu region and follow zopkios carrying sacks of trash down the trail to Lukla where they are airlifted to Kathmandu.
(Story: 16-17)



NEW NAMCHE

Namche Bazar gets a makeover with a newly renovated entrance and its happening main street. This week we take you to the cosmopolitan trekking town with new restaurants, cafes, shops and lodges to see for yourself Namche's phenomenal growth.
(Page: 14-15)

THE BITTER REALITY

Lex Limbu is brave. ('I'm gay and I'm not afraid', Sahina Shrestha, #899). But if ordinary people like us try to come out we get bullied, Only the famous get respect.
Manoj Gharti Magar

SIR ED'S JOURNEY

So very moving ('Hillary's 49th day', Lisa Choegyal, #899). It is wonderful that the perfect date was delivered. RIP Sir Ed.
Dawn Glynn

■ Real instability only came after the 1990 movement - 27 governments in as many years ('Oli here for good', Dinkar Nepal, #899). India and China will have to deal with whoever the Nepali people elect. Let's hope the *lampasarbadi*s realise this and finally act with some dignity and courage.
Pankaj Nepali

WELL DONE

You guys are the best in the business ('Kathmandu's silent spring', Sonia Awale, #898). Great report.
Sameer Ghimire

■ Glad to see that your excellent article regarding Nepal's own silent spring is being carried by the Society of Environmental Journalists website. Such good reporting!
Jon Swan

■ The reason the Mongolian eagle was not able to fly may be the transmitter is strapped to its back. The safety code for these devices are based on thermal heating of a large human. Smaller animals are not covered under the safety code as they cannot thermally regulate themselves like humans. Please take the transmitter off this eagle and give it a chance at having a normal rest of its life.

Melissa Chalmers
Electromagnetic Pollution Illnesses
Canada Foundation

SELF SUSTAINABLE MODEL

If the entire nation follows Bhaktapur's model, we will be a major tourist attraction like some of the South East Asian nations. ('Bhaktapur shows the way by rebuilding itself', Suyog Prajapati, #898).
Regendra Man Singh Basnyat

WHAT'S TRENDING

I am gay and I am not afraid

by *Sahina Shrestha*
Lex Limbu bares it all in a 17-minute long film posted on YouTube, about his sexuality, family and life. Our review of this poignant and powerful film was widely shared on social media and many applauded the UK-based Nepali blogger for his brave step in coming out publicly.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

No country for women

by *Shreejana Shrestha*
Nepal's peace process is over with the new government, but there is no closure for victims of wartime rape. Visit nepalitimes.com to read our investigative report on six conflict rape survivors from Kanchanpur, and watch them recount their ordeals and lament their endless wait for justice.

🐦 Most popular on Twitter



Who runs the world? Girls.

by *Sahina Shrestha*
"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." Read how five generations of women in a Kathmandu family have put a premium on educating daughters.

🔴 Most visited online page

Oli here for good

by *Dinkar Nepal*
The political scenario looks in KP Oli's favour and that is good for Nepal, wrote our columnist. Go online to read feedback and send in your own opinion.

💬 Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

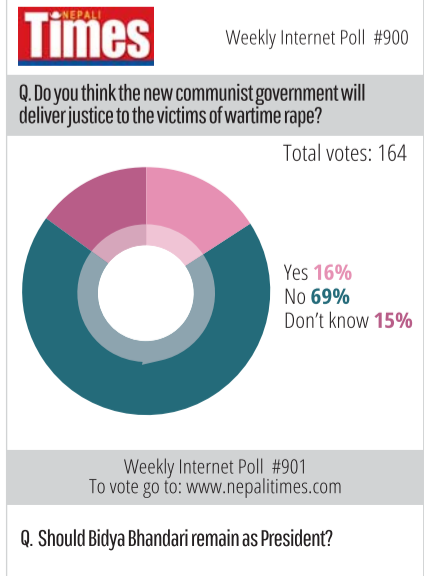
Nepali Times @nepalitimes Mar 4
"They went after murderers, but not the rapists." A conflict rape survivor narrates her story & recounts the endless wait for justice. For more case studies & full story: <http://bit.ly/2F7Ea73> @shreejanas reports from #Kanchanpur. #Rape #war #crime #Nepal #conflict

Saral Israel @saralsth Mar 4
The culprits should absolutely be brought to justice but I don't understand why the government needs to provide free health care and education to the victims and family? Compensation, yes, but everything else?

Sameer Rana @sameersbrana
Redressing egregious human rights violations like this isn't just about monetary compensation. Needs state's acknowledgement + comprehensive reparations (including healthcare and education provisions) to victims & their families who continue to suffer.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
#AQI The Saturday and Thursday (Holi) slight improvement in air Quality Index shows how much contribution vehicular emissions make to the concentration of suspended particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in size. Even so the AQI for those days are still in the Unhealthy band.

Madhur Sharma @MSharmaWBMS
Can we try doing something to get these highlighted so everyone can show their concern. This is all about everyone's health.





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Draining the swamp

The sight of a grassland where Rani Pokhari used to be exposes bureaucratic greed and lack of accountability

Nepali politicians are rarely in the good books of the people. They cannot seem to get anything right. But who will punish the slow, corrupt and over-protected bureaucrats?

It is these civil servants who are having the last laugh over the fiasco at Rani Pokhari. For those who haven't followed the saga of the restoration of this historic pond, here is a brief recap:

Reconstruction of the Balgopaleswor Temple in the middle of the pond started in August 2016 using concrete pillars.



TO THE POINT
Sumana Shrestha

This was before local elections, when Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) was run opaquely by bureaucrats who even managed to fool President Bidya Bhandari's PR team, by having her lay the foundation stone to launch post-quake reconstruction. What she was inadvertently agreeing to by her presence was a beautification plan that was in motion even before the earthquake damaged the temple.

The pond perimeter was draped in tarp and the construction site hidden from view. There was no public hearing or community engagement. When activists protested, chief engineer of Kathmandu Municipality Uttar Kumar Regmi argued that he was just re-using old construction material.

Regmi said he had permission from the Department of Archaeology (DoA) for his design, even though DoA Engineer Sampath

Ghimire promised traditional design and materials would be used in reconstruction. Giving into the public pressure and protests by activists, DoA chief Bhesh Narayan Dahal said his department would take charge of the reconstruction, and admitted to lapses.

By December 2017 activists had to again rally to save Rani Pokhari from a concrete perimeter wall that the KMC said was needed to 'beautify' the pond. Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya's remarks broadcast on Facebook live exposed complete lack of understanding in how traditional ponds are built, lack of faith in the people protesting, who where in fact trying to work with him, and his blind trust in a bureaucracy that made a complete fool out of him.

When the media and activists later prodded him, Chief Engineer Uttar Kumar Regmi said on camera he was only executing approved plans. The DoA's Engineer Sampath Ghimire admitted that DoA approved the use of concrete.

Demand by activists and even journalists for drawings, plans and contract details all went unheeded. Activists then sought to educate everyone on the traditional water management system, and demystify the 24-hour water in the stone sprouts. The KMC, DoA, and MPs were all invited, but only two MPs showed up.

Then something unexpected happened: the deputy mayor lead a team that padlocked the construction site. The mayor lost his cool and broke open the lock. All this high drama lead to some frenzied coverage in the media.

DoA Director General Bhesh Narayan Dahal went on national television to say the department never gave explicit permission



GOPEN RAI

to use concrete contrary to what his chief engineer had said earlier.

Finally, the mayor realised he has been misled by his own technical chief. It must have been hard to get slapped in public by the same people he so blindly trusted and defended. After the rude awakening, he rushed to consult experts and learned more about Rani Pokhari. MP Bhimsen Das Pradhan tabled a motion to halt the construction of Rani Pokhari which was approved by the Cabinet.

The mayor, deputy mayor, DoA's Dahal and the National Reconstruction Authority Secretary formed a male-only committee tasked to suggest options for reconstruction of Rani Pokhari within 15 days. The committee is heavy with bureaucrats and the same Sampath Ghimire who gave the original permission to use concrete. The

advisory committee includes politicians, but no activists. The mayor is back to square one because he is relying on the same bureaucracy that sank him with their greed.

In all this mess, media pitched the deputy mayor against the mayor: political heavy weights have tried to make the best out of this, and political minorities too have got a lot of momentum.


But the real question and the root cause of the problem remains: an over-protected bureaucracy. They seem immune to any prosecution. So, who will drain the swamp? Who will ask why Uttar Kumar Regmi lied that he had permission? How come Bhesh Narayan Dahal is still heading the Department of Archaeology despite his repeated failures to protect heritage sites like Rani Pokhari. How come Sampath Ghimire was not questioned about

permission to reconstruct using concrete, an assertion denied by his own boss on national television.


And most importantly, how did the tender to rebuild Rani Pokhari go to the same contractor twice? Who signed the cheque without proper approval from the DoA? Where is the math for the Rs30 million in tax payers' money for destroying heritage? Who will refund the public coffers that are filled by our VAT payments? Who gained financially from these deals? And why does it take the activists to ring an alarm bell, when DoA officials pass heritage sites in the heart of the city every day? It points to something much more sinister: collusion between the KMC, DoA and the contractors. The KMC has a Heritage Department, but the responsibility to rebuild Rani Pokhari goes to the Infrastructure Development Department.

The new Cabinet needs to swiftly investigate the bureaucrats. Heads must roll, tax-payers money refunded, and elected representatives must restore Rani Pokhari. Let us demand that Mayor Shakya, ministers, and newly elected representatives punish the destroyers of heritage, and the people demand greater accountability from their leaders. This must be the reason activists have filed a first of its kind criminal case against the DoA, KMC and the contractors. 🇳🇵

Sumana Shrestha is an aspiring Kathmandu-based entrepreneur and former consultant at the Boston Consulting Group, and a financial trader at Citigroup. She starts her fortnightly column TO THE POINT in Nepali Times from this issue.



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Emergency prep

The Ministry of Health and Nepal Ambulance Service have agreed to set up a training institute. The government has also



decided to pool ambulance services under a single operating number 102 Ambulance Service to manage an emergency call centre.

A Galaxy of benefits

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Speaker, Shikhar Insurance's 8 months breakage insurance and 16GB 4G data, 2GB every month for 8 months, from Ncell. Another option is of Easy EMI, provided by various partner banks.

Health first

Everest Bank in association with Norvic International hospital, organised a Free



Health Camp and Breast Cancer Talk Show Program on 7 March at its Branch Office

Women's week

Ford has announced a special offer for women drivers on the occasion of International Women's Day by giving special discounts on booking a Ford car and gift hampers for every female visitor at its showrooms across Nepal.



Reaching wider

Qatar Airways, through its latest global sales promotion, offered customers discount on flights to many new locations across its extensive global network, including the recently added destinations: Chiang Mai, St Petersburg, and Penang. The airline is launching flights to Thessaloniki and Cardiff in 2018.



Active senses

Turkish Airlines invites its passengers on a journey of discovery with its 'Five Senses' campaign by Dr Oz, and recently launched a commercial that celebrates the ability of the human body to excel in diverse conditions.



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JOHNNIE WALKER

Crunching the numbers on credit

Banks have run out of money just as businesses seek more loans than ever



“The NRB lacks clear policies to ease the credit crunch. It just blames us for the crisis saying we are lending to unproductive sectors. There has to be coordination between the NRB and us.”

Ashoke SJB Rana, CEO
Himalayan Bank



“The NRB blames us for financing the unproductive sector. But what is productive, and what is not? There has to be a clear indication.”

Ratna Raj Bajracharya, CEO
Sunrise Bank



“The largest chunk of the capital budget is spent only towards the end of the fiscal year. The tendency to spend the budget seasonally causes a credit crunch. The capital budget should be spent throughout the year.”

Bhuvan Kumar Dahal, CEO
Sanima Bank



“We have lagged behind India in digital currency. Since our economy is growing between two giant economies, we need to digitise our currency. Minimising the use of paper money is one way to ease credit crunch.”

Parshuram Kunwar, CEO
Janata Bank



“We must not solely rely on FDI to keep our economy afloat. Our capital budget should be injected into the market throughout the year, and bring money scattered across the informal channels into the banking sector.”

Janak Sharma Poudel, CEO
Global Bank IME



“We are branching out into rural areas to collect more deposits. But that will not be enough to end the problem. We must focus on spending more in productive sectors.”

Gyanendra Dhungana, Chair
Bankers Association of Nepal

Nepal's banks are reeling under a severe credit crunch at a time when industries and businesses, buoyed by the end to the political transition, are seeking more loans than ever to finance new investments.

The crisis has already hit the energy sector, delaying by at least one year several hydropower projects with a cumulative capacity of around 1,000MW. And it threatens to escalate into a full-blown liquidity crisis, affecting other sectors as well.

Credit crunches are a chronic crisis in Nepal. In 2010, when all commercial banks heavily financed real estate deals to rake in profits, they almost emptied their accounts. The real estate bubble burst only when the

Nepal Rastra Bank imposed a cap on bank loans for the unproductive sector.

Bankers now worry that the current credit crunch could last much longer than the one in 2010. But ex-Governor Yuba Raj Khatriwada, who fixed a ceiling on real estate lending, has joined the KP Oli-led communist government as technocrat Finance Minister, and he is expected to introduce a slew of measures to ease the crisis.

According to the NRB, commercial banks have already lent Rs1,952 billion of their Rs 2,207 billion deposits. This means people can still withdraw their money from banks, but there isn't enough capital for new loans.

Pashupati Murarka, ex-President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, puts it bluntly:

“The banks have all closed their doors to investors.”

As the credit crunch drags on, banks and the government are engaging in the usual mutual blame game. The government blames bankers for creating the problem themselves by releasing loans in unproductive sectors like real estate, automobiles and capital market.

An NRB officer *told Nepali Times*: “This is all because of greedy banks. They want more profits, and they lend money to profitable but risky sectors like real estate.”

But bankers blame the government for aggravating the credit crunch by not spending the development budget. Indeed, the government has spent only 22% of its Rs3.35 billion capital budget in the first

eight months of the current fiscal year, which bankers say has effectively frozen the cash and is the main reason for the current credit crunch.

But there are other factors at play. The banks are refusing to go for mergers at a time when the sector is crowded. Small and failing banks have two choices: merge with each other or increase their paid-up capitals to at least Rs8 billion each. Most small banks increased their paid-up capitals by releasing rights shares, and their shareholders took loans from other banks to buy those assets. So, a huge chunk of deposit went into the unproductive capital market.


The widening gap between money deposited into banks and the amount

investors are seeking is another factor. The end of the political transition has resulted in a huge growth of demand for loans not just in metropolitan cities but also in semi-urban areas. But the remittance inflow has gone down, making it difficult for banks to expand their credit reserves.

At the same time, the number of outbound Nepali migrant workers is declining and major labour destination countries like Qatar are in turmoil. This means that the remittance volume is unlikely to grow in the near future.

“Even if the current phase of credit crunch ends, there will be another phase,” says Parshu Ram Kunwar, CEO of Janata Bank Nepal. “This problem is here to stay.”

Ramesh Kumar and Sikuma Rai




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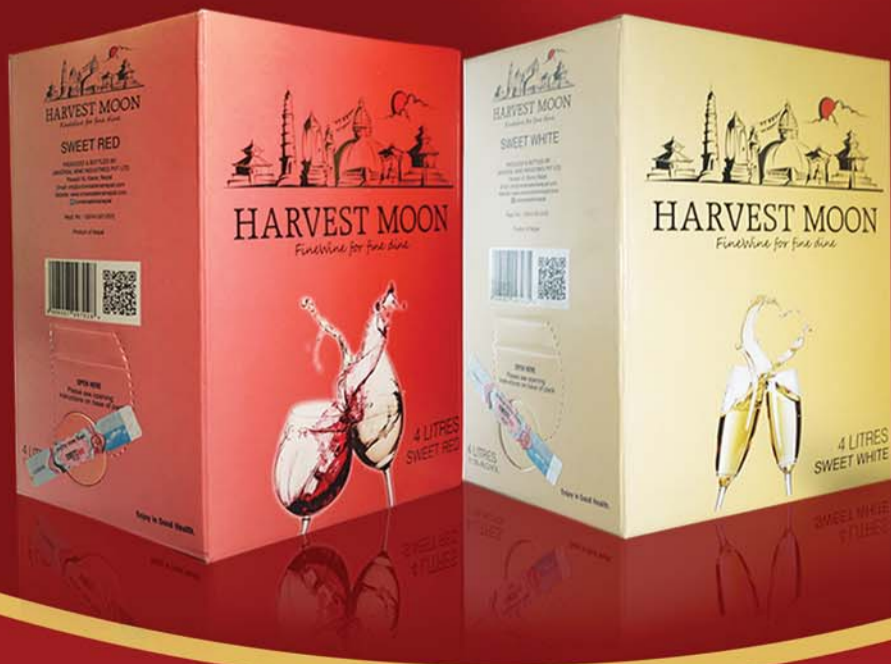


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Ban the ban

Barring Nepali women from working as housemaids in the Gulf is both unenforceable and harmful

Upasana Khadka

After high profile cases of abuse of Nepali domestics, the government has banned women from migrating for domestic work since early 2017. But outlawing it has driven recruitment underground, increasing the exploitation and risk for Nepali women. Women are still finding unauthorised ways to get to West Asia overland through India, or taking circuitous flights via Sri Lanka. Many end up being trafficked en route, and are abused or underpaid by employers.

Sarita has just returned from Lebanon, and was among the throng lining up outside the UAE Embassy in Lazimpat this week waiting to get her police report stamped.

“I will again go as a housemaid, what else?” says Sarita adamantly. Asked if she is aware of the blanket ban on domestic workers, she replies with a smirk, “There are ways.”

Hari is a recruitment agent and says the ways to bypass the ban are

“open secrets”. The government, recruiters, and migrants all know that outlawing overseas domestic workers has encouraged trafficking, and yet no one is willing to lift the ban.

Renu from Kavre has just returned from Kuwait after travelling there via India. She says: “I would have preferred to go for a company job, but domestic work did not cost me anything.”

Indeed, domestic workers do not have to pay recruitment fees, and in the few cases they do, it is significantly lower than the \$1,000 other workers have to pay for other jobs. This has made domestic work accessible even to the poorest Nepali women.

Rama is a local recruiter in Chitwan, who referred to herself as a ‘guardian’ of domestic workers as they make their risky journey overland via India to the Gulf. She tells the women to travel as unobtrusively as possible so they are not detected on the Indian border, and she escorts them until they fly out from Mumbai or Delhi.

Recruiters do not charge fees because they are compensated



UPASANA KHADKA

so handsomely by employers in the Gulf where there is such high demand for Nepali housemaids that most women are sold off as soon as they get there. Since the employer has ‘bought’ the domestic worker, the chances are higher of her being abused or not paid.

Recalls Renu about her ordeal: “At the agent’s office in Kuwait, we were treated like goats. Employers walked in and checked us out, haggled and handed cash to the agent on the spot. We were sold like livestock.” The women are treated rudely by the Nepali agent if

potential employers do not choose them. Women who are sent back by unsatisfied employers are treated even worse. Some get picked to be sold after weeks of waiting.

“My employer paid \$2,000 to my agent when she came to drop me off at the house a day after she had picked me,” recalls Laxmi whose employer called her a ‘buffalo’, physically abused her and did not pay her salary. She kept reminding Laxmi she had been purchased.

Domestic workers are already more vulnerable given the isolated

nature of their workplaces within the confines of homes. The ban was put into place with the right intention to protect the women, but it has made them even more vulnerable because the Nepal embassy has no information about them.

Despite the ban, women are still going to West Asia, and there are Nepali domestic workers abroad who are stuck due to the ban and cannot come home to visit families.

Rita, a mother of three, recently lost her 18-year-old eldest daughter in Butwal. Her employers offered



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to buy her a ticket home for the funeral. But she could not leave Dubai, fearing she would not be allowed to fly back.

“I have a huge loan to repay, and as a single mother, still have to take care of my two other children so how can I risk my job?” she sobbed on the phone from Dubai.

Rita’s relative, Indu, has been living in the UAE for the past eight years and last visited her family in Nepal two-and-half years ago. When her mother passed away last April, she could not come home. “We have good employers, we have good jobs that we want to keep, but we are stuck abroad because of the ban, what is the government doing about us?” she asks.

Unlike others, Nuna tried to be less risk-averse and bought her ticket, packed her suitcase, but she got cold feet after even the embassy dissuaded her. Nuna has worked with the same employer for three years and wants to continue. “You cannot imagine how bad I felt while canceling my

ticket,” she says.

Nuna, Rita and Indu all know there are ways to bribe airport officials in Kathmandu with expensive ‘settings’ or to travel through India, but they do not want to risk not being able to return to Dubai. They say conditions in the UAE for household help are much better, and that the ban should be lifted.

The Nepal government is negotiating Bilateral Labour Agreements for domestic workers with Jordan, UAE and Qatar which could improve pay and working conditions for women. However, this will not stop the unauthorised flow of household helpers to other destination countries with which there are no negotiations planned while current domestic workers will continue to feel stuck amidst the uncertainty. 🇳🇵

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RAMU SARKOTA

In women's shoes

When Noor Pratap Rana set up a factory to manufacture Hathichhap Chappal – an iconic footwear brand that captivated the imagination of an entire generation of Nepalis who grew up through the '80s, none of his employees were women.

The company that also produced Goldstar shoes, a brand which Maoist guerrillas wore almost as part of their uniform during the war, actually did not employ a single woman until half a decade ago.

Today, about 65% of workers at Goldstar shoes are women, and it is the same story at other footwear manufacturers. The Footwear Manufacturer's Association of Nepal estimates that at least 40% of its 20,000 workers are women, and this percentage is rising steadily.

Footwear manufacturers say they want to tackle gender inequality, but that is not the only reason – they are employing more women because they can't find men, and also because women are more efficient.

As tens of thousands of men left the country to work in Malaysia and Gulf countries, footwear manufacturers found it increasingly more difficult to find male workers. The number of outbound migrant workers was expected to decline after the end of conflict in 2006, but the political transition dragged on.

After the 2015 earthquake, the number of women employed in footwear factories shot up dramatically. Around 600 women were employed at Goldstar before the earthquake. This number has risen to 1,414 now – mostly uneducated women from the earthquake-affected districts who earn up to Rs 30,000 a month.

Manu Tamang, 22, has been stitching Goldstar shoes for the last five years. She says: "If I can earn this much staying with my family here, why would I need to work as a domestic help in some Gulf country?"

The Association's President Rabin Kumar Shrestha is confident that women will far outnumber male workers in the next couple of years: "We now have a responsibility to make our factories women-friendly."

Ramu Sarkota



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Sending investors to prison

Nepal's jails as a business opportunity? Not as far-fetched as it sounds.

Now that hydropower, education, health and tourism sectors have started attracting a lot of attention and capital, this may be a good time to start looking around for new areas for investment in Nepal.

Our jails have many problems, and most of them are systemic – the reason prisons are poorly-managed and under-funded are the same as



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

for many other areas. There are a lot more people who have to be in them, or will be going in. The number of people convicted by the courts but who are still at large run in the tens of thousands.

Which means that if the government was more efficient about convicting and apprehending criminals, there would be severe over-crowding in Nepal's jails.



However, this is also a country where the politicians who fight for public office often boast about the number of years they have spent

behind bars. Incarceration is a badge of honour.

Unlike in Singapore, where you cannot be employed if you were

convicted, here you can rise to the highest offices of the land. Political incarceration, and innocent people framed with trumped-up charges

have also given jail terms an aura of respectability. In fact, like colleges, jails can have fancy names so that detainees can brag about having served time there in their CVs.

For Nepal to develop and come out of poverty, a lot of individuals will have to be put behind bars. As Parliament at the centre and the federal provinces pass more and more laws, jails could actually be a good business – if not good for business.

Nepal may not be ready for privatised jails, but seriously, if we have done that with health and education there is technically no reason why jails cannot be run like hotels. The government can pay them occupancy rates and provide incentives for owners to put in systems so convicts turn themselves in.

Public and even private law enforcement officers can then do a better job of arresting and convicting criminals, thieves, bribe takers and givers, poachers, food adulterators, rapists, sex offenders, drug dealers and many more.

That will allow the rest of Nepal to focus on the economic development agenda. Jails would spawn a whole downstream economy of guards, cooks, teachers, and tailors. Jails could have an industrial area where embossed number plates are made, and they could be economic hubs and pay VAT like everyone else.

There could be a rate for occupied cells, a premium rate if the convicts wanted to have extra facilities and the government could even pay for the cells that remain empty as a form of subsidy.

Free of criminal elements, the rest of the country could then concentrate on building infrastructure, agriculture and industrial facilities with minimum disturbance and disruptions. If people still break the law, they would just increase the prison occupancy rates. It is a win-win.

In the long-term, if Nepal develops like The Netherlands, we know these facilities will all become redundant, and it will be good to convert them back into hotels. One may also want to consult the politicians who have been in prison as they may have ideas on how to improve the existing prison facilities.

'If you do not want to do time, do not commit the crime' could be a catchy slogan for a reformed prison sector that actually contributes to the economy instead of becoming a burden and a symbol of societal failure.

Donors, human rights groups, anti-corruption campaigners, those currently working to improve jails and prevent the spread of prison diseases should welcome this new investment opportunity. It is good to give local investors a headstart before foreigners show interest.

Development requires that good people have the enabling environment to work and excel. This means bad people have to be locked up and given a chance to become good citizens. Jails are an integral part of modern society and Nepal's jails are in a pathetic state. Why not start making our prison system a new investment opportunity. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc.

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Spring is definitely here, the jacaranda buds are popping out and cherries are blossoming. Up in the mountains there are even some rhododendrons in full bloom. We are also now entering the season of afternoon updrafts, which means buildup along the mountains. The weekend will see passing cloud cover, with chances of snow flurries and even isolated storms. Kathmandu Valley will only get passing cloud cover with a strong breeze in the afternoons.

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Periods of upheaval foster creativity, and make for rich literature on subjects like war, domestic violence, discrimination or social injustice. However, how to write about these issues for children in a meaningful way?

That is what Israeli author Smadar Shir (*below*) tries to do in her books for children: tackle heavy topics like war by writing about it through the eyes of a dog, giving it a refreshing angle, adding a little humour, and making it relatable at the same time.

In writing about violence for children, Shir falls back on her own family's experience. Much of her life has been spent amidst conflict and violence in a volatile region. Her 15-year-old daughter has already witnessed three wars, spending numerous nights in bomb shelters.

However, even in those bleak times Shir says her family continued to have faith and remained hopeful for better times.

"Even though it is just a tiny little ray of light, it will guide you through the darkness," says Shir whose books are happy, cheerful, colourful and fun to read. She says it is not a good idea to be preachy or sombre when writing about conflict for young children: "I don't write to educate. For that I can write an academic paper. I write to pass on my knowledge and experience to the next generation. I write to help children imagine futures."

Shir was in Kathmandu last month with another prominent Israeli writer, Dorit Silverman (*above*), as part of a tour of South Asian countries where they interacted with students as well as writers of children's literature. In Kathmandu, they visited several schools accompanied by the new Israeli Ambassador to Nepal, Benny Omer.

"It was a successful and enriching visit on both sides," Omer told *Nepali Times*. "It was an opportunity to exchange information and experiences and a wonderful way to

Imagining better futures

Two Israeli authors say children's literature can keep hopes up in difficult times



PHOTO: GOPEN RAI

strengthen cultural ties between our two countries."

Nepal-Israel literaryties go back to 1965, when then president of Israel had translated some poems of King Mahendra into Hebrew. Writers are currently working on publishing Nepali translations of some anthologies of Hebrew poems.

Silverman is the Vice president of the Hebrew Writers Association and has published 19 books, teaches literature at Israeli universities and is also a lawyer. In 2017 she won the Prime Minister's Award for Literature.

Smadar Shir is a popular author, senior journalist and songwriter and has written over 400 books for children and adults which have been translated into many languages. Her award-winning book *The Tenth Operation* is currently being translated into Mandarin.

Although both their children have been to Nepal to trek, it was the first time in Nepal for both authors. They had imagined Nepal only as a mountaineering destination, but

said they were fascinated by the culture and heritage of Kathmandu Valley.

"Nepal was much more colourful, beautiful, and lively than I had imagined, and I really enjoyed the momos," quipped Shir. Silverman found Nepali students bright and intelligent, and said: "We are very impressed by all the children here, I can confidently say they are the future of Nepal."

During their lecture and workshops at schools in Kathmandu, the two authors stressed the importance of childhood reading.

Said Shir: "When I read and write I build myself a better world. Reading gives me the opportunity to believe that things can get better. It enhances communication and allows for smoother interaction."

Silverman agrees, and added that reading empowers children to imagine and think for themselves: "It is great that children now have access to stories which are not just fairytales, but real stories which they can relate to, and which can help them deal with whatever the world throws at them." 🇮🇱

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Namche Bazar sets a fine example on the importance of community management of tourism for growth and development

Sherpaland gets a makeover

Duksangh Sherpa
in Solukhumbu

After a three hour straight uphill climb, visitors entering Namche Bazar are greeted by a magical sight: a natural amphitheatre in which the fairytale town is nestled.

The entrance has a recently installed row of water-powered prayer wheels, a neatly paved walkway, a brand new chorten and a water fountain to greet visitors.

Namche Bazar has got a makeover that makes the famous town even more charming as it welcomed the first trekkers and mountaineers of the Spring 2018 tourist season.

The renovation work had been delayed because of the 2015 earthquake which damaged a few building here and all the houses in Thame Valley, but is going to be completed by the summer. Even before that, the facelift has already helped recharge Namche's vibrant energy not only for the locals but also for tourists.

Along with the reconstruction, Namche has also upgraded its market area with new trekking shops, bars, bakeries, cafes, lodges and trekkers' stores. International brands like Sherpa Adventure Gear and North Face as well as the local store Sonam have outlets giving the town a new cosmopolitan look.

Namche has always been a bustling stopover for trekkers and mountaineers going up to Mt Everest, Gokyo, or doing the Renjo La and Cho La traverses. At a time when even Kathmandu had only a few good bakeries, Namche already had three: Herman Helmers, Everest Bakery and Namche Bakery catering to tired trekkers.

Some have unkindly dubbed Namche 'Thamel on the Hill', which does justice neither to Namche nor Thamel. Indeed, with newer additions such as Himalayan Java and a Japanese restaurant called Tomodachi, Namche is fast becoming more than just an acclimatisation stop, but a place to linger and enjoy the town's unique ambience and setting. You can literally get high in Namche at the Daphne Bar, Irish Pub and Liquid Bar. (Health Warning: Stay off

alcohol on the way up.)

After a tough trek to Base Camp there is nothing like lounging about at the Sherpa Barista, Café De 8848, Café Nirvana, Trek Away Café, Italian Lavazza and Illy for coffee and breakfast. Tourists also have a choice of over 50 lodges catering to all budget categories.

More than the shops and cafes what is really remarkable about Namche is its strong sense of community, and the way the Sherpa people have adapted seamlessly to modern ways while keeping their traditions intact. The dynamics of

the service industry have honed the legendary hospitality of the Sherpas.

Solukhumbu District now has a per capita income that is five times higher than the national average – an achievement that is not just due to tourism income but because of quality education, a community spirit and remittances from the Sherpa diaspora which makes the people proactive, independent, hardworking and resilient.

Locals here are organised, and there are management

committees for everything from garbage collection (*see page 16-17*), electricity production and distribution, town planning, drinking water supply and preservation of monasteries and cultural traditions.

Local involvement in the Sagarmatha National Park has made it a model for the co-existence of tourism and ecological preservation. Tourism income is ploughed directly into development and nature conservation, and now with locally elected village

council heads, there will be even more accountability. Already, local laws about seasonal harvesting of deadwood in community forests and a ban on wildlife poaching have been effective in reviving nature in the surrounding mountains.

Namche itself does not have ugly overhead wires (they are underground) and the streets are paved and clean. Along with the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, The Namche Youth group is also proactive in waste management and cleanup programs. Namche has a community hospital now with fulltime doctors and nurses. The new village leaders want to turn their attention to upgrade the education system as it only has one high school in Khumjung.

Namche has a reputation for being pricey, but that is because everything has to be either flown in to Lukla, or carried by porters and mules up from Phaplu. Unpredictable weather and transportation is a challenge for those running businesses. With the road network soon arriving in Surkhe, which is one day's walk down from Lukla, many here think prices are bound to come down. 🇳🇵

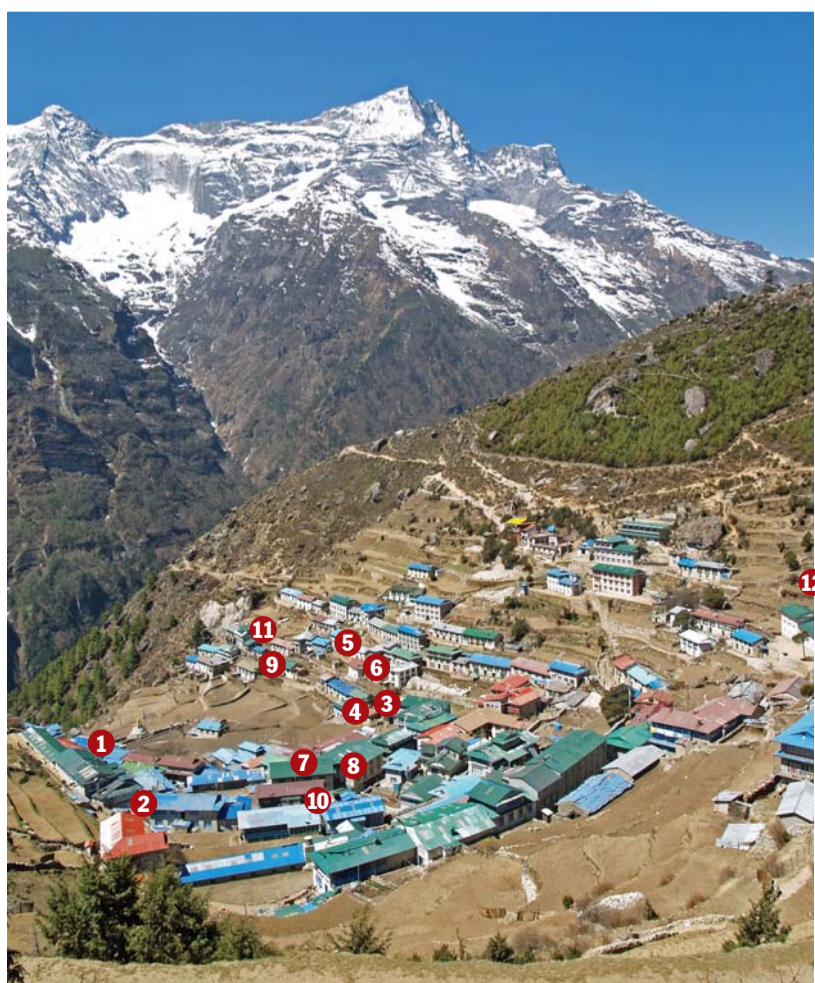


DUKSANGH SHERPA



NIGHT AND DAY: Namche Bazar is a bustling cosmopolitan place that is busy even at night. The town has got a facelift after the earthquake, with new water spouts, prayer wheel and chortens at the entrance.

BIKRAM RAI



- 1 Cafe Nirvana
- 2 Tomodachi
- 3 Cafe De 8848
- 4 Trek Away Espresso Bar
- 5 Himalayan Java
- 6 Sherpa Barista
- 7 Everest Bakery
- 8 Namche Bakery
- 9 Herman Helmers
- 10 Irish Pub
- 11 Liquid Bar
- 12 Sherwi Khangba Centre



Watch a short video of the bustling tourist town-Namche Bazar and it's recently renovated main entrance, along with it's happening market place.

nepalitimes.com



PHOTOS: LHAKPA SONAM SHERPA

Meet Lhakpa Sonam Sherpa

Even before people fly to Lukla, they will have seen stunning posters of Namche Bazar and the Upper Khumbu in Thamel. But few know the talented landscape photographer who captured those images: Lhakpa Sonam Sherpa, who has decided to stay on in his hometown while many of his contemporaries have left.

His Sonam Photography images do justice to the dramatic scenery of the Khumbu with the highest mountains in the world, the deep valleys and forested mountain flanks.

Besides his photography, Lhakpa Sonam is also the proprietor of Sherwi Khangba Centre in Namche, which has the Sherpa Culture Museum, Mount Everest Documentation Centre, a photo gallery showcasing Sherpa culture, a library and a hotel with

“When I lost hearing in 1980, after few years of hardship I began the cultural research work and started collecting old things which were mostly broken and also interviewed old Sherpa climbers most of whom had passed away by then,” Lhakpa Sonam recalls.

Sherwi Khangba is nestled above Namche’s busy hub in a tranquil and scenic spot with a traditional Sherpa house as the museum and a mani wall leading to a serene whitewashed chorten. Amidst the imposing ramparts of Mt Kongde and the fluted ridges of Mt Thamserku, the hotel’s patio and spacious lawn soothe the tired body and mind. Lhakpa Sonam designed the awe-inspiring property himself, and worked with local carpenters to implement the landscape elements.



authentic Sherpa hospitality. The museum alone gets more than 5,000 visitors a year and has become a mandatory stop for passing trekkers.

Educated at Khumjung Hillary School, Lhakpa Sonam was not able to continue his studies after he lost his hearing due to meningitis. But this has not deterred him from his photography and the relentless pursuit of culture conservation.

Inspired by his father who was a famous Sherpa climber, Lhakpa Sonam was motivated to start collecting information on Sherpa culture and the contribution of his people to Himalayan mountaineering. Although he joined several expeditions himself, he has always returned to photography and his hobby of collecting and preserving Sherpa artifacts.

Lhakpa Sonam’s work is never finished, items to be preserved, rituals to be revived – especially when younger Sherpas are leaving the Khumbu and settling in Kathmandu or overseas. He is still collecting antique Sherpa household utensils, textile, and items that have nearly all but disappeared.

Villagers thought he was crazy when he went around searching for vintage items, which they thought was just junk. Lhakpa Sonam recalls: “People thought maybe I went mad because of my deafness, but after I built the museum in 1990 people realised what I was trying to do and now they appreciate my work.”

Duksangh Sherpa





EVEREST GARBAGE Caravan

Women, local communities and an airline team up to keep the Everest Trail spic and span

Sonia Awale
in Solukhumbu

The first ascent of Mt Everest in 1953 and the first flights into Lukla Airport a decade later opened up the trekking trail to the world's highest mountain to the world.

The hiking route from Lukla to Everest Base Camp soon became so popular that it was known as the 'Toilet Paper Trail'. However, the route from this airport town all the way to the summit of Mt Everest today is largely litter-free thanks to a unique partnership between the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), mother's groups in villages along the trail, and Tara Air.

The first thing visitors notice once they step off the plane from Kathmandu are the spic and span stone-paved streets of Lukla. Further on, the trail has trash huts for burnable and non-burnable garbage all along the way. The collected plastic and paper is incinerated, while the bottles and cans are flown down to Kathmandu to be recycled.

Expeditions to Mt Everest have to pay a deposit of \$4,000 which is refunded only if the SPCC certifies that they have taken all their trash back down, there is a similar scheme for climbers on trekking peaks. Climbers say, the route up the Khumbu Icefall to the summit of Everest is cleaner than before.

Half a century after Edmund Hillary bought the land from Sherpa farmers for \$2,600 to build the famous airfield, Lukla became the gateway to Everest. But today the town is also the exit point for garbage to be airlifted out.

"At the beginning of the trekking and mountaineering season like now, our flights to Lukla are full, but they fly back mostly empty. So we thought we would support Khumbu's local cleanup campaign by flying the waste to Kathmandu," explains Umesh Rai, CEO of Yeti Airlines and its subsidiary, Tara Air.

Except of the occasional biscuit wrapper, mobile top-up cards and yak dung, the trail is surprisingly clean. Indeed, the Everest cleanup campaign is a working template not just for other trekking routes, but for the rest of Nepal as well. Villagers in the Shey-Phoksundo

National Park want to start a similar effort.

The SPCC was launched in 1991 by local communities under the guidance of the Venerable Ngawang Tenzing Zangpo, abbot of Tengboche Monastery. But it faced a problem of what to do with the rubbish. A Japanese group led by Junko Tabei-the first woman to climb Mt Everest- installed modern incinerators, and a ban on bottled beer 10 years ago reduced the volume of garbage. But there were still lots of bottles and beverage cans.

"We signed a three-year contract with Tara Air to move out the garbage free of cost, and this has been a significant contribution to our clean-up," says Maya Sherpa of SPCC.

Tara Air airlifted over 4 tons of trash in 2016 and 11 tons during last year, and the airline hopes to double that in 2018. The trash is collected door-to-door by mother's groups in villages along the trail, segregated, and the unburnable items are then carried by SPCC porters and zopkios to Lukla to wait for empty flights going back to Kathmandu.

"We are committed to seeing

TRASH TO CASH

- 1 Dhan Bahadur Baniya picks up plastic wrappers during his garbage patrol. He is employed by the Phakding Mother's Group to keep the trails clean.
- 2 Contents of a bin in a segregated trash site along the trail to Namche Bazar.
- 3 Dalamhu Sherpa of the Mother's Group in Phakding loads collected trash on to zopkios to be carried down to Lukla.
- 4 Eight zopkios carrying 60kg each of trash cross the Imja Khola bridge.
- 5 Sherka, an eight-year-old zopkio with it herder Dinesh Rai reaches Lukla airport with the caravan of garbage.
- 6 Sacks of trash stockpiled at Lukla waiting to be loaded on flights to Kathmandu. About 20 tons of trash will be airlifted by Tara Air this year.
- 7 The garbage from Khumbu is unloaded at Kathmandu Airport.
- 8 It is then moved to a scrap facility where it is segregated, compacted, and sold to recyclers.

the Everest region clean up and we will airlift all the garbage handed to us by SPCC and other groups," says Tara manager Funuru Sherpa, pointing at the white sacks stacked at Lukla Airport.

The campaign to manage garbage has also become a source of livelihood for many families. Dhan Bahadur Baniya moved from Okhaldunga to Lukla eight years ago and is now employed by SPCC to conduct garbage patrols in villages and along the trails. Dalamhu Sherpa of the Phakding Mother's Group says: "This clean

up works because we have SPCC and Tara Air all helping. We would not have been able to do it without them."

Pasang Sherpa, owner of Sherpa Guide Lodge in Phakding says she hopes her community has set the example for others by cleaning up the trails. She says, "Garbage has always been a big problem here. Now that the cans and bottles are being flown to Kathmandu, our villages are cleaner and healthier, and this helps tourism."

Last week, eight zopkios carrying 60 kg each of used bottles



and cans were being herded down the trail to Lukla. The trash caravan passed trekkers from all over the world walking in the opposite direction up the trail. The spring trekking season has started, and the lodges have been cleaned up for the 50,000 tourists expected here this year.

At Lukla Airport, Funuru Sherpa gets up before dawn to prepare his staff for the Kathmandu flights. The Dorniers and Twin Otters start landing on Lukla's short, sloping runway even before the sun comes up from behind the mountains. The planes keep the engines running while passengers get off and climb on, the luggage is unloaded and loaded, in quick ground handling that looks like a Formula 1 pit stop.

The later flights are loaded with the sacks of trash. One morning last week, Tara carried one ton of trash in two flights down to Kathmandu before the clouds move up and Lukla was closed for the day.

At Kathmandu airport, a team from the Blue Waste To Value recycling company is on hand to collect the garbage and move it to its facility in Balkot. There, workers open the sacks containing wine

and ketchup bottles, beer cans, torn tents, oxygen bottles, and even a broken cooking stove. The trash is further segregated and sold to recycling companies.

Besides managing the Everest garbage, Blue Waste also handles trash for major hotels in Kathmandu like Yak & Yeti and Hyatt Regency. Says Nabin Maharjan of Blue Waste: "By treating the garbage that is flown down from the Everest region we don't just keep the trails clean, we reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills here, clean up environment, and create green jobs."



Watch a video of zopkios carrying trash, as they pass the pristine Dudh Kosi and cross suspension bridges, on the way from Phakding to Lukla, from where the trash is airlifted to be recycled in Kathmandu.



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EVENTS



Yak Girl

Launch of a book, ‘Yak Girl: Growing Up in the Remote Dolpo Region of Nepal’ by Dorje Dolma, along with an exhibition of her drawings and paintings. Exhibition includes photographs by her Netherlands based artist sister Sumchog Kersbergen and paintings by their uncle Tenzin Norbu of Dolpo. 9 March, 1pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4433930

5K fun run

Run, jog, skip, cartwheel or walk your way around 5km of Patan’s back roads with over 1000 other women, girls, men & boys to celebrate International Women’s Day 2018. 10 March, 6:30am onwards, St. Xaviers Ground (back gate), Jawalakhel, Rs300, (01) 5522249, 9851184845

CEO summit & awards

An event in Nepal for business persons and professionals of South Asia to acknowledge, honor and celebrate their contribution and achievement. 14 March, 8am-9pm, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, Registration required: 981555788



Chekhov’s Three Sisters

A contemporary adaptation of Anton Chekhov’s Three Sisters directed by Rose Schwietz, underscoring the relevance of a play written nearly 120 years ago in Russia in present day Kathmandu. 9-18 March (except Mondays), 5:15pm onwards, Kunja Theatre, Thapagaun, Rs250-1,000, 9823567346

Marriage proposal

A theatrical act to raise funds to provide an equipped computer lab in Shree Chhepang Nimna Madhyamik Vidhyalaya of Gajur, Dhadhing. 9-12 March, 5pm onwards (also at 1pm on Saturday, Sunday and Monday), Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar, 9808610017 / 9841984392



Human rights film fest

6th Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival will be screening around 60 selected films made on human rights issues, mainly on gender equality, followed by discussions. For screening schedule, visit Human Rights Film Center’s Facebook page. 9-10 March, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikutimandap, (01) 4786486

Painting and print exhibition

A group exhibition of paintings and prints by 14 female artists on the occasion of International Women’s day. 9 March-30 April, 10am-5pm, Newa Chen, Kobahal, Free Entrance, (01) 5533532



Money expo

An event by Finlit Nepal on money management, finance and banking for young students and undergraduates, with an aim to provide financial literacy. 14 March, 11am onwards, Bhrikutimandap, Exhibition Hall, 9851179939

Social salsa night

Break forward with left foot, rock back onto right foot, step back with left foot, step forward with right foot. Now, for more join in the dance event. 15 March, 7:30-11pm, Calm Restaurant and Bar, Tangalwood, Naxal, (01) 4443904

MUSIC



Kutumba and KDD

Kutumba and Kanta Dab Dab performing live to raise funds for Echoes in the Valley, a biennial music festival hosted in collaboration with communities from other parts of Nepal and the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley. 10 March, 4pm onwards, Chandeswori Temple, Banepa, 9841226397

Unplugged Aawaj

An acoustic band playing cover songs of various artists. 9 March, 8-11pm, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, 9843410702

Sarangi Night

A traditional music night with Anugraha, accompanied with vegetarian and vegan dishes on the rooftop garden terrace. 9 March, 7:30pm onwards, Sarangi Restaurant, Chaksi Bari Marg, Thamel, 9813992602



Music fest

Zero Mile for electronic music and classical vocal fusion on Friday: Pahlenlo Batti Muni’s pre-album launch gig on Saturday: award winning band Joint Family Internationale for reggae music on Sunday. 9-11 March, 8/7/5pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chok, Rs500 (includes a drink), 9841226397

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 9 March

A Wrinkle in Time is based on a science fantasy novel written by American writer Madeleine L’Engle. It tells the story of a thirteen-year-old Meg Murry, played by Storm Reid. Meg, her brother and her friend meet three strange women: Mrs. Who (Mindy Kaling), Mrs. Whatsit (Reese Witherspoon) and Mrs. Which (Oprah Winfrey), who help them find Meg’s missing scientist father. The film, directed by Ava DuVernay, has engaging visual elements and a theme of family and togetherness.

DINING



Bao Xuan

Serves authentic Chinese cuisine. Try their Lantern Prawn which is a popular dish among their wide range of Cantonese, Hunan and Schezwan dishes. Soaltee Crown Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999

Mezze by Roadhouse

A happening Italian restaurant to dine in -almost always crowded. Darbar Marg, (01) 4223087

Rox Restaurant

An outdoor setting featuring a show kitchen with wood-fired oven and serves traditional home-style Southern European cuisine. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudhanath Stupa, (01) 4491234

Le Sherpa

Experience fine dining in Kathmandu with a glass of sparkling wine, good music, a four-course dinner spread, and chocolate desserts. Maharajunj, (01) 4428604



Embers

A large, cosy place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites. Try the traditional marinated boneless chicken kebab served with vegetable, rice and chutney. Krishna Galli, Pulchowk, (01) 5555306

Fire and Ice

For the most popular pizzas made with ingredients like hand-prepared pasta sauces. Thamel, (01) 4250210

GETAWAY



Kasara Resort

A luxury resort located in the lush setting of Chitwan National Park offering private villas with it's own pools. Chitwan (01) 4437571 / 4438570, kasararesort.com

Retreat at Damaar

A retreat for contemplators and creators in an undisturbed sanctuary to enrich and enlighten your inner self. Bethanchowk, Kavre, 9851052442, www.retreatdamaar.com

Shangri-la Village Resort

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Temple Tree

A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it also hosts three different restaurants to cater to your taste buds. Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 465819, www.templetreenepal.com



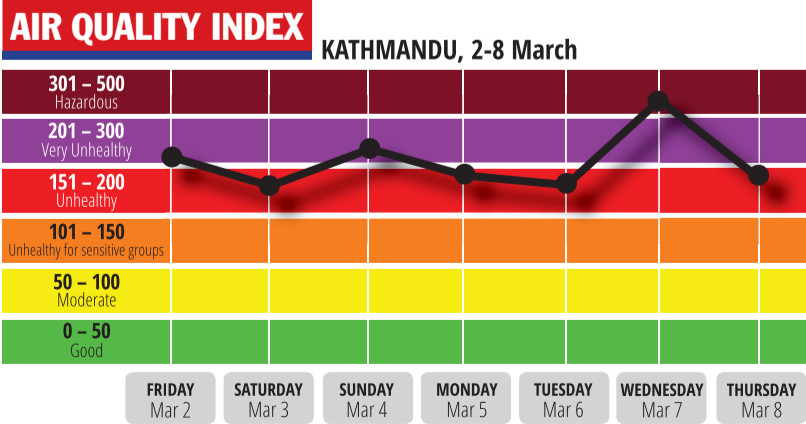
Hotel Annapurna View

The new boutique hotel situated at 1,600m offers sunrise, the Annapurnas, view of Phewa Lake, serenity, and luxurious accommodation. Sarangkot, Pokhara, (061) 620345, www.annapurnaview.com

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Elderly Care Assistant Fine and professional care by our qualified and experienced care giver.	Travel Support for Sick Clients Travel support for sick clients are provided by professional.
Appointment Management Apointment management with required doctors in different hospitals.	Equipment Rental & Drug Supply Drug supply at your doorstep and best quality medical equipments in rent.



The average Air Quality Index this week in Kathmandu was at its usual Very Unhealthy or Unhealthy level all week, with the worst periods continuing to be the early mornings and evenings. However, the air quality monitoring station at Phora Darbar recorded a spike on Wednesday to Hazardous. We cannot explain that, but it would be our good guess that it was due to monstrous traffic jams all over the city due to VIP motorcades. The fresh afternoon wind did clear up the air somewhat, but it just blew in pollution haze from the plains. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

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The Shape of Water

How does one begin to describe Guillermo del Toro's wondrous, magical new film *The Shape of Water*? While the bare bones of it is a deeply unconventional love story between a mute woman and an uncannily man-like water creature, the reality of the story is a delicate



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

fairy tale about why we fall in love, and why love can make us do things that we wouldn't ordinarily do. Since his beautiful and terrifying *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), there are a legion of fervent followers of his films because, quite frankly, no other mainstream director has the kind of bold cinematic, risk-taking vision that del Toro has repeatedly exhibited

ranging from films like *Hellboy* (2004), to 2013's heart-pounding *Pacific Rim* – a film that took action and special effects to another level, bringing del Toro's vivid, eccentric imagination to an audience who were spellbound. It is therefore astonishing and ideal that *The Shape of Water* won The Best Picture Award from the Academy last Sunday, considering that the film is anything but a conventional classic that Hollywood usually swoons over, even while it employs the tropes of a traditional love story. The story begins underwater in a tour de force of cinematography as the narrator prepares us for a tale of watery longing and loss. Quickly and efficiently we are then introduced to the mute but warm and incredibly emotive Elisa (the great Sally Hawkins, who was also justly nominated as Best Actress this year but lost fair and square to Frances McDormand), who lives

on her own next door to her best friend, Giles (the also amazing Richard Jenkins). The two look after each other as Jenkins struggles with his alcoholism and another secret while Elisa goes to work at night as a cleaner at a secretive government laboratory. Set during the Cold War in 1962, the lab is a cold forbidding place made warmer by Elisa's friendship with her feisty fellow cleaner Zelda (the lovely Octavia Spencer), who stands up for her silent friend whose main downfall is her dreaminess. Things start to change upon the arrival of a mysterious creature in a water tank -- one that is both vicious and tender, depending on who is dealing with him. Suffice to say that one just doesn't quite know what is going to happen next in this film that is wrought with such care, and laced with so much tension, supported by a cast of characters who are played by the best of the best when it comes to thespians. *The Shape of Water* is the kind of film which you watch while biting your nails, laughing with delight, feeling heartsick, all the while unsure of where it is taking you, until it ends, haunts you in your dreams and then makes you want to watch all the good bits over and over again. This is the stuff of dreams and nightmares both – bits of imagination boiled over from a savant's head and onto pure cinema. It is a film about outsiders, their friendships and their loves, told with the most sensitive heart. It is a real pleasure to finally see a film that deserves to win accolades after so long. 🇳🇵



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HAPPENINGS



RSS

PAPER WORK: President Bidya Bhandari files her candidacy on Wednesday at liaison office of the Election Commission in Kathmandu for the presidential election to be held on 13 March. Prime Minister KP Oli at right.



RSS

ALLAH HAFIZ: Pakistani PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi with Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatriwada at Kathmandu Airport on Tuesday before flying back after a two-day visit. Abbasi is the first head of government to visit Nepal after K P Oli became prime minister.



INDIAN EMBASSY

EARTHQUAKE HELP: India is partnering with UNDP and the National Reconstruction Authority to rebuild 50,000 homes in Nuwakot and Gorkha districts. An agreement was signed on Thursday in the presence of Indian Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri, Renaud Meyer of UNDP Nepal and Sanjay Mathur of UNOPS Asia Pacific.



GOPEN RAI

GET, SET, GO: The mayors of Kathmandu and Lalitpur Bidya Sundar Shakya (left) and Chiri Babu Maharjan (right) at the launch of Sajha's new wheelchair friendly bus route between the Valley's hospitals in Pulchowk on Wednesday.



FRENCH EMBASSY

THE ART OF FOOD: French Ambassador Yves Carmona (third from left) introduces the fourth edition of 'Gout de France/Good France' in Kathmandu on Tuesday to celebrate French gastronomy with local culinary twists and talents.



Your friends from Jawalakhel remind you to celebrate responsibly.

900 Weeks

This print edition of *Nepali Times* is the 900th issue of the newspaper launched 18 years ago. It first came out as a digital product, with the first hardcopy following on 19 July 2000. The paper's template by Indian designer Rustom Vania hasn't changed in two decades during which *Nepali Times* has had a ringside seat of Nepal's socio-political history: the conflict, palace massacre, the royal-military coup, ceasefire, elections, earthquake, blockade, right till the final formation of new local, provincial and national governments under the new federal Constitution this month. Looking back, we can see how the same personalities, conducting themselves in the same manner, still dominate politics. A visual recap of pages from the last 900 weeks:



The very first issue of *Nepali Times* covered Prime Minister Girija Koirala's visit to India. Indo-Nepal relations haven't changed much since. Nepalis still cannot decide what they want from India. And Delhi is still paranoid about Pakistan and China.

The royal massacre of 1 June 2001 saw three kings in four days. *Nepali Times* covered it as a crime scene investigation, concluding that Crown Prince Dipendra killed nine members of his family before turning the gun on himself.

As the Maoist conflict raged, *Nepali Times* reporters often ventured into the war zones to report on how the war was affecting ordinary Nepalis caught up in the violence. The coverage went beyond the body counts.

King Gyanendra's military coup on 1 February 2005 led to direct censorship of the media. *Nepali Times* and its sister publication, *Himal Khabarpatika*, came out with white holes in print where the Army had ordered cartoons and articles taken out.

The image of a student protester in April 2006 lampooning the king with a paper crown signified the beginning of the end of the monarchy, as the people increasingly saw Gyanendra as the obstacle to peace and democracy.

Nepali Times interviewed newly-elected Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal after he sent goons to attack and vandalise the publication's office in December 2008 after it exposed Maoist unions involved in an extortion racket.

Some Memorable Pages



#684



#672



#675



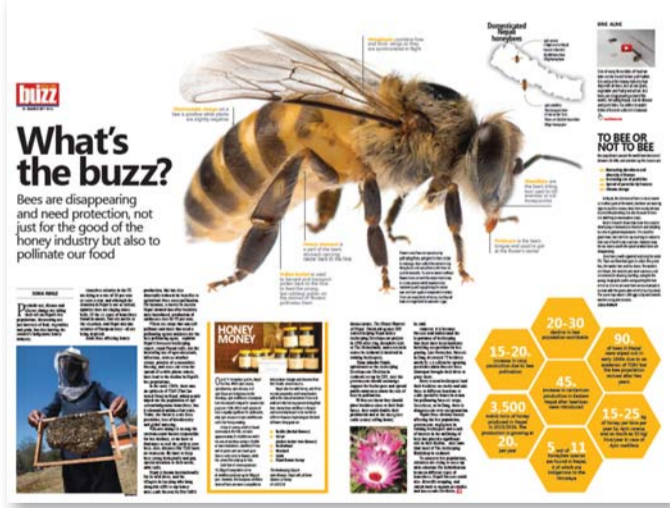
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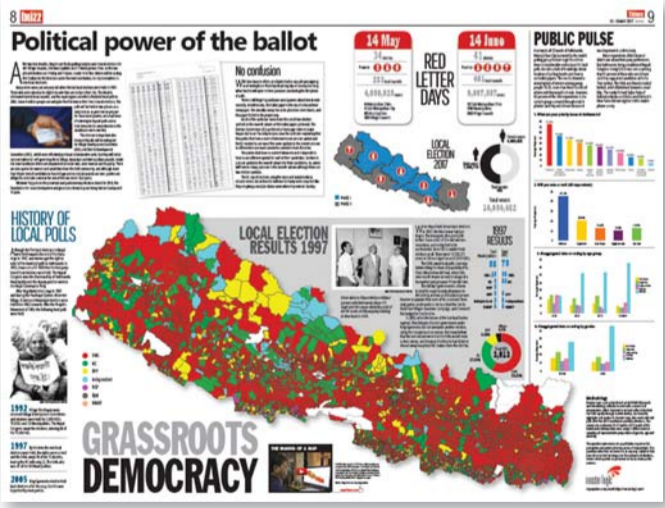
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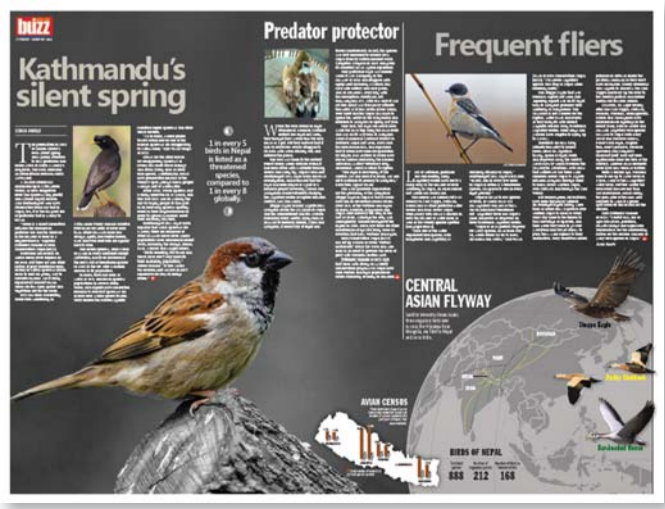
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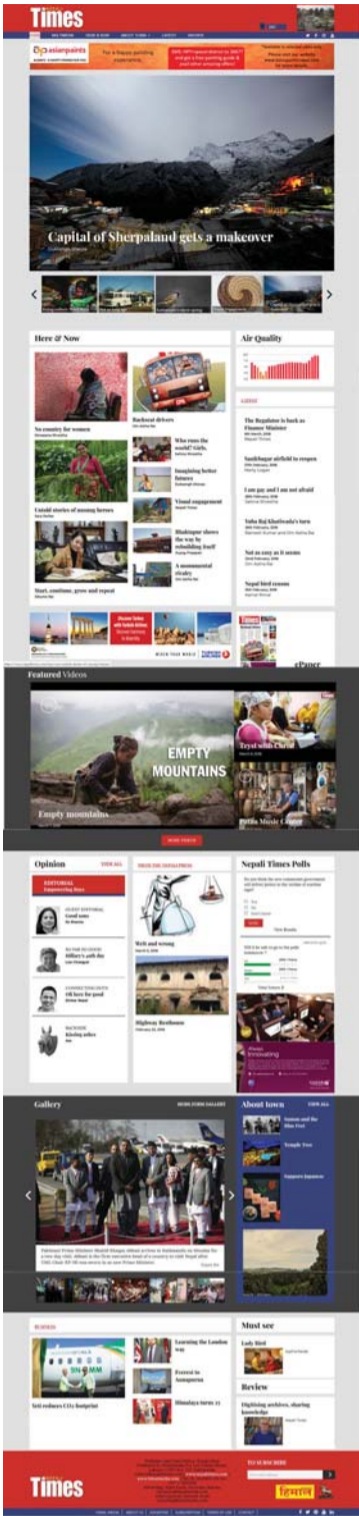
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#895



#898



New online design offers Times.com readers richer visual content

The online edition of *Nepali Times* had remained same for nearly two decades. Although this gave readers a certain navigational familiarity, a change was long overdue. The new online look will go live from Friday 9 March to coincide with the 900th issue of the paper. The redesign highlights the digital first policy which the *Nepali Times* has been following, and does more justice to its vivid multimedia content. The site also has new interactive options, an easy-to-swipe mobile version, and a valuable searchable archive in both HTML and PDF formats.

Site Highlights:

- New banner masthead contains weather, search function for the valuable *Nepali Times* archives.
- Drop-down menu provides easy access to current and archival content.
- Visual slider gives readers a glimpse of featured multimedia packages.
- New Here & Now section contains content that adds online visuals to print version of story.
- Air Quality Index has latest time-of-day pollution measurements for Kathmandu.
- The weekend weather forecasts will now be every 3-4 days with aviation and trek alerts.
- Click to flip through the pages of *Nepali Times* ePaper as if you were holding the hardcopy.
- Featured videos of the week with easy to click links to the *Nepali Times* YouTube Channel.
- Feel the people's pulse through *Nepali Times* weekly online poll, and vote yourself.
- Read the section From the Nepali Press to find out what the local language media is reporting.
- Follow our popular columnists and new ones with extra pictures and graphics online.
- The popular About Town section from the print edition has been expanded and is now interactive.
- The Gallery has additional photographs every day from events around the country
- Live webcam view of Kathmandu Valley added soon.
- If you like reading the Ass in print, here is the e-Ass.

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The Regulator is back

Ramesh Kumar in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 4-10 March

हिमाल

Prime Minister KP Oli has chosen technocrat economist Yuba Raj Khatiwada as Finance Minister just like Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao appointed Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister in 1991 — unexpectedly and disappointing other aspirants from their own parties.

Singh went on to serve as India's Prime Minister for two full terms, and Khatiwada has also not concealed his aspiration to rise higher in politics. Will Khatiwada emulate Singh's success? It depends on how effectively he will help PM Oli deliver his electoral promise of economic prosperity.

Khatiwada has been consistent in advocating for a greater role for the state in regulating the free market. As Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) governor, he discouraged banks from investing in unproductive sectors, prompting CEOs to dub him 'an anti-liberal authoritarian'. After being appointed as Finance Minister, Khatiwada has clearly hinted that he will be following his own principles. He told *BBC Nepali Service* that it would be pointless to encourage more investments in real estate, capital market and automobiles.

He told us that he is for reviewing real estate policies, arguing that land prices have been artificially inflated across the country. The Constitution defines land ownership as a fundamental right of citizens, but Khatiwada argues that the State is the ultimate custodian of the territory, and people are just borrowing it from the state. This is why after his appointment as Finance Minister, real estate owners and capital market brokers are terrified.

With his expertise in monetary policies and an ability to eloquently explain complicated economic issues, Khatiwada impressed all five Finance Ministers under whom he worked to push through banking reforms. Khatiwada is not only argumentative, but resolute and fearless. He froze Ajey Raj Sumargi's Rs2.19 billion after the businessman failed to reveal his income source. He did not back off even when Sumargi reportedly 'threatened to make CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki go after him'. It was Khatiwada who restricted TeliaSonera from repatriating capital gains from the sale of Ncell. He raised taxes on the import of luxury cars, and pushed through policies to maintain fiscal discipline.

His tenure as governor was widely hailed, but he is now in an even more powerful position. Unlike past Finance Ministers, he is in the right place at the right time. He will be leading the Finance Ministry for five years, and his party has formed governments not just at the Centre but in six of the seven provinces. With Madhesi parties by its side, the government will have a two-third majority to push through any economic reforms that Khatiwada comes up with.

A business lobby led by Ichcha Raj Tamang of the ruling UML was against Khatiwada's appointment as Finance Minister, fearing major upsets in real estate market. But Oli still went on to appoint Khatiwada, showing how much he trusts this technocrat. Khatiwada knows the economy inside out, and is expected to plug legal loopholes that businessmen have been using to evade taxes. Those who know him say that he cannot be easily tempted or manipulated by business lobbies. But that does not mean he is flawless, bearing criticism for promoting nepotism after transferring his son-in-law from Biratnagar to the ministry.

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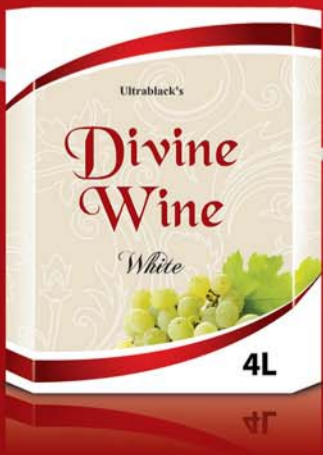
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#319, October 2006

#345 April 2007

#408, July 2008

#482, Dec 2009

#504, June 2010

#547, April 2011

#623, September 2012

1. Ensured the Southwest Monsoon arrived on time
2. Inaugurated 2 art exhibitions, 1 album launch, and 3 handicraft fairs
3. Patched an irritating pothole at Gyaneswor intersection.
5. Chairman Regmi smiled during photo-op with Chinese delegation.

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Asses

6. Took the trouble to publish this list.
#662, July 2013

The trouble with new year resolutions has always been that by 7 January of every year, we break them and resume snarling at our slightly better halves, pluck our nostril hair in public, smoke five packs of ciggies a day, and renew membership of the Nepal Bars Association and be a Famous Grouch.
#688, January 2014

Nepal's weekly requirement of petrol: 1,500 kilo litres. Nepal's weekly production of vodka, gin, ayla, thon and twant put together: 500 kilo litres. To get over the blockade, convert Nepal's stockpile of spirits into high octane fuel for internal combustion engines.
#779, October 2015

Non-government Organisations (NGOs), Quasi Non-government Organisations (QUANGOs), Fly By Night International Non-government Organisations (FLAMINGOs) and Maoist Non-government Organisations (MANGOs) are facing an acute

acronym shortage. This was revealed by All-Nepal Pro-Government Non-government Organisation (GONGO). "I don't see how we can go on like this," said General Secretary of INSECT. Outgoing chair of another non-government orgasm, HERPES, agreed: "This is an emergency."
#810 May 2016

The Nepal Embassy in Washington DC issued a statement: 'Nepal recognizes the effort by all steak holders in the Beef Belt, including the military industrial complex, climate deniers and creationists in conducting what appears to be at first glance a largely polarizing and broadly acrimonious presidential election. We urge all Americans to accept the results even though a #DOOFUS is a #POTUS. That's the way the cookie crumbles, folks.'
#859, May 2017

As the Chieftain Justice aptly pointed out the other day, and I quote: "There is complete freedom of expression in this country, there just isn't any freedom after expression. All journalists should be objective, that is to say they should have the same objective as us."
#892, January 2018



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