Hail to the Chiefs

The European Commission (EU)’s statement that Nepal’s inclusion policy is flawed because it reserves quotas for Rana-Arya and needs to be revised to promote equality, has stirred a hornet’s nest from Kathmandu’s increasingly assertive ruling class.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on Wednesday dubbed the statement a direct challenge to constitutional provisions and warned the EU to refrain from making such “uncalled-for” comments in future.

Many influential politicians took to Twitter to denounce the EU statement as interference in Nepal’s internal affairs (page 28). Even Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai weighed in against the EU (page 28). Some even went as far as to blame the EU for trying to stoke ethnic strife. Others, however, argued that well-represented clusters like Brahmin/Chhetris do not use quotas, it is the excluded groups that need affirmative action. But these voices are muted, and some activists previously known for aggressively backing greater representation of Madhesis and Janajatis have remained consciously silent.

This is not the first time Nepal has reacted strongly, but Kathmandu seems to have found a new assertiveness in the past few years in immediately countering statements from foreign powers that it thinks interfere with its domestic affairs.

The state is reacting to public intolerance of foreign advice on sensitive matters like inclusion, federalism and secularism in the constitution. In 2015, when European envoy met Madhesi activist CK Raut, MoFA sought clarification from the EU Ambassador Monique Taussek. In 2014, British Ambassador Andrew Sparks was abruptly recalled after saying Nepal should have the right to change their religion.

Relations with India also hit rock bottom during and after the Blockade of 2015. New Delhi’s decision to block UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, and Nepal’s refusal to let the Human Rights Council enter Nepal’s airspace, were key issues.

The decline of the Maoist party and the rise of conservative forces also seem to have emboldened Nepal’s politicians and the bureaucracy to confront foreign powers on the issue of social inclusion, decentralization, human rights and transitional justice. Many in Kathmandu’s corridors of power thought this would reduce their power and privileges, and started openly challenging the UN and western embassies.

Although the federal and republican constitution is now a fait accompli, there is much more openness to assimilation and pressure from western donors towards more inclusion of the marginalized. The EU statement this week was just the latest. Says Madhesi activist Tula Naryan Sah: “After the Maoists surrendered to the NC-UNE, cohort, Madhesi parties were the only ones pushing the progressive agenda, but even they have now surrendered by supporting the K.P.OG government. This has emboldened conservative forces.”

Om Astha Rai

Mixed blessings in Mustang
Climate change has unleashed floods, but also allowed apple and vegetable farming in what was used to be a desert

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Em-powering South Asia

Energy is a critical ingredient for prosperity, and can be a catalyst for deeper regional integration. Energy security is a critical issue for South Asia, which is home to nearly one-fourth of the world’s population and where economies are growing at an average of nearly 7% each year. But South Asia’s GDP per capita is less than one-third of the global average, and per capita energy consumption is far below the rest of the world. Living at a deficit in need of increasing economic growth, industrialization, an increasing population, and an uncertain future. All of these issues increase the demand for energy.

There have been several positive developments in energy cooperation in recent years: for example, India and Nepal have signed a 300 MW power project to be implemented in the near future. This is just one of many initiatives aimed at improving energy security in South Asia.

Guest Editorial

ALAINA B. TEPLITZ

We are committed to fostering connections between Central Asia and South Asia, and our relationship — through shared perspectives, cultural exchanges, and educational programs — is growing stronger by the day.

What actually happened

Thank you for trying to put together this graphic about what probably happened to flight 931. I can’t help but wonder what happened and if you could tell me a little bit more about it. I’d love to hear all about the details.

Shabir Abass

This article should have come out the very next day after the crash. We were left wondering about all sorts of possibilities, but not the impact on Gadhafi before the actual crash of the aircraft. This accident is not about 0.2% or 0.2% any longer.

Ananta Agarwala

Nepal needs an alternative international airport (Kathmandu) that is more accessible and has better connections. The existing one is not suitable for major international flights.

Prakash Joshi

The proposed international airport in Nepal with wide roads connecting to Kathmandu, must now be a priority.

Ramesh Shrestha

What is really needed first is an emergency response system on standby 24 hours a day at the airport, with trucks that can actually put down fires. Not the helpless army and police with no equipment. So many lives could probably have been saved otherwise.

Mo Lampa

Women Leadership

Excellent portrayal of the upcoming young women leaders who will change the world. “Win-win for women” Narmada Sharma, 915.

Karuna Datta
“SEE, HEAR, TASTE, SMELL, TOUCH. EXPLORE YOUR SENSES. WIDEN YOUR WORLD.”

Dr. Oz
Minting money by minting money at home

Why are all our passports, currency notes, licenses and car plates printed abroad?

In a country where citizens are fond of flag-waving and public displays of nationalistic fervor, no one seems to be overly concerned that we are dependent on the outside world for our passports, bank notes, stamps, driving licenses and now even embossed car plates.

Can we not demand that the government buy, establish and operate a national mint and security press so that we can create jobs, protect our national interest and make all Nepalis proud of the “Printed and Minted in Nepal” brand?

Our grandparents took great pride in wearing necklaces made of minted gold coins called saar which had their birth year and all other important events in their lives marked on them. In those days, they could go to the national mint called takarsaun where Sitalara used to be and get the coins made. Gold and silver coins are minted on special occasions like coronations and Buddha’s birthdays, and people buy them as investments.

The mints in gold and silver and special stamps have attracted people because they regard these as long term savings. Many of us have mint from past coronations and the birth anniversary of the Buddha in our collections. Postal stamps are now steadily becoming extinct, but they still have value because of collectors worldwide. Nepal stamps on postcards could still be a great tourism promotion idea.

Nepal prints or uses foreign software for its passports, currency notes, postage stamps and now even our driving licenses, new citizenship cards, our embossed vehicles number plates, FAN cards, bank debit and credit cards, gold and silver coins. There is no reason why these cannot be done in Nepal.

Given the inefficiency, mismanagement and the corruption at the Janak Education Material Centre in Tansen, we may even see children’s text books also printed outside Nepal. Already, many private school text books are not just printed in India but also written there.

So what will it take for Nepal to have its own secure press and mint (backdate again)? Why would anyone oppose such an initiative? Will the media be mobilized by vested interests to create a perception that security printing cannot be done in Nepal? In a matter of just 18 months for a donor or a middleman of some foreign company, we should be encouraging Nepali businesses to take up these jobs.

The old takar at Sundari can be modernized, and even operate like a museum where students can watch the minting process from open galleries to understand how currency and passports are printed. The facility could have a gift shop where people could buy new bank notes and coins, and the press and mint can be solely managed by differently abled Nepalis who could get gainful employment and send a strong message of inclusion to the rest of Nepal and the world.

The only challenge is will the culture of opacity and secrecy also mean that the head of such a security printing facility will be a political appointee? Can someone be found who can rise above party politics and serve the nation with dedication and honesty?

The new bank notes could partly be made of hemp and jute fibre to make them durable.

Other countries may even want to use these traditional Nepali paper fibres and there could be a profitable export market.

When the prime minister is given the first bill to sign ceremonially when he takes office, why do we not demand that they make a decision that will be kept in the history books?

The word “revolutionary” has become a cliché in Nepal, but a well managed security press and mint could be a truly revolutionary advance for Nepal.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddhartha Bank

 halfway

Men’s fashion in Nepal

Kathmandu has a lot of well-branded clothing stores which wear branded apparel, but surprisingly, there weren’t any high end clothing stores or men’s apparel in Nepal. Most of them had to shop abroad in India, Singapore and Thailand for apparel.

This is when Rupsah Pandey realised the market potential for international men’s clothing business in Nepal, and in 2012 opened an outlet for the worldwide brand, Da Milano Halla, in Kathmandu.

Pandey extended his venture with a brand like Celio, Rosso Brussels, Indian Terrain, and Louis Phillip. The franchise stores in Kathmandu have both formal and casual apparel, along with accessories like wallets, belts, carry bags, laptop bags, watch cases and, most importantly, shoes — the most aspects of men’s fashion.

Pandey owns 21 international brand franchises in Kathmandu, with plans to open one a month for a new addition within those months.

“Our customers are mainly office and business men. Therefore, out of 60 sales in a day, 30 of them are always formal clothing,” says Rupsah Pandey, adding, “that is also because Nepali men’s choice of casual dressing is quite close to formal.

With a team of four, two males and two females, Pandey continually researches the market on customer demand, behaviour and accordingly on what he finds, he selects a mix of local and international array of freshly showcased products.

Pandey says that currently, the availability of brands such as men’s sets from men’s clothing brands like for a Multi Brand Outlet — a mail with franchise stores of multiple apparel and accessories brands not just for men, but for women, kids and elderly people as well.

Opening such an outlet is Pandey’s dream project for which he is searching for a 743-929 square meter space in a happening area of Kathmandu. Sikumma Rai

Funding federalism

The World Bank on Wednesday approved a $50 million credit to support Nepal’s transition for fiscal federalism and improved public financial management.

The bank also approved $70 million credit for the Phase 2 of the Rural Electrification Bank.

Turkish expansion

Turkish Airlines has decided to expand its fleet with three new planes from Boeing and Airbus. Of these, there will be a hybrid in 2019, 14 in 2020, 10 in 2021, 12 in 2022, 11 in 2023 and 7 in 2024. A total of 30 787-9 aircraft will be purchased from Boeing and 30 A350-900 aircraft will be sourced from Airbus. The aircraft will be operating out of Istanbul’s new airport which is scheduled to open later this year.

Sporty Qatar

Qatar Airways announced a new five-year partnership with friendly football club Bayer Munich AG, describing the team as its platform partner until June 2023. In a press conference at international fashion’s fashion week regulator. The airline, which has a reputation for excellence and reliability, is looking to boost its profile in the region by targeting the growing expatriate community.

Remit easily

Millions of Nepalis in the ever-growing non-banking financial company to extend money transfer services from India to Nepal has

Qatar Airways announced the airline’s expansion plans and new destinations to 2018 – 2019

Leasing A-Series

Qatar Airways announced a new A350-900 that will be leased from Singapore Airlines, the A350-900 is being delivered to the airline in early 2015.

Qatar Airways is set to launch its first long-haul transatlantic service to New York in June 2014. The airline has announced that it will operate a twice-weekly service between Doha and New York-JFK, with a stopover in Brussels.

Indian Wells

Qatar Airways has announced that it will launch a non-stop service between Doha and Indian Wells, starting in March 2015. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Abu Dhabi.

Qatar Airways is also set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Tel Aviv, starting in June 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Cairo.

Qatar Airways is set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Lima, starting in July 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Houston.

Qatar Airways is set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Buenos Aires, starting in August 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Miami.

Qatar Airways is set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Cape Town, starting in September 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Durban.

Qatar Airways is set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Antalya, starting in October 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Athens.

Qatar Airways is set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Hollywood, starting in November 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Los Angeles.

Qatar Airways is set to launch a non-stop service between Doha and Mexico City, starting in December 2014. The service will operate three times a week, with a stopover in Guadalajara.
Heard that a foreign mission issued a condemnable diktat against ‘reservation’ for a certain caste groups in Nepal! The Constitution written by the Nepali people does not include the word ‘reservation’, it just states ‘proportional inclusive reservation’, which is what it should be. If you cannot tell sugar from bullshit, you better shut up.

Baburam Bhattarai, Ex-Prime Minister

As Maist ideological, Bhattarai was foremost among those who planted the seeds of identity politics in Nepal. After the 2006 ceasefire, he actively backed ethnicity-based autonomous federal provinces. The trick worked, and more Janajatis and Madhesis stood up against the State. As President of a committee responsible for sorting out thorny issues during the Constitution drafting process, he had advocated for quotas for Madhesis and Janajati climbers, and not for the Brahmin/ Ghettoi. Bhattarai quit the party he founded to set up the Naya Shakti in 2015. Bhattarai has now made a dramatic U-turn, and political analysts say the former prime minister’s course correction is a result of his party’s electoral debacle. While Bhattarai won last year’s election from Gorkha-2 constituency, his new party did not win any parliamentary seat elsewhere.

“The Khas-Arya did not trust Bhattarai because he was once against them,” explains Madhavi rights activist Tulu Nycyun Sah. “But the Madhesis Janajati did not trust him either because he signed a constitution that discriminated against them.”

Sah says Bhattarai has made a calculated move, knowing which direction the wind is blowing. “Why would he otherwise criticise a statement that simply says Khas-Arya are already well-represented?”

The Khas-Arya have won about half the seats in Parliament through direct elections, and 30% more through proportional representation. This makes their presence in the House more than double the percentage of their actual population.

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Five ‘funny’ things about Nepal

People often ask me how the United States compares with the for-profit sector. And the pay is lower in the US, compared to Nepal. As long as not-for-profit organisations pay more than the for-profit sector, the role of NGOs is more important. And if they are in a position to help people, it is a very significant thing.

1. Not-for-profit organisations pay more than the for-profit sector. And the pay is lower in the US, compared to Nepal. Its role in the Nepal government is more important.

2. Like in Silicon Valley, everybody wants to be an entrepreneur in Kathmandu. Everybody wants to make it big. The only unfortunate part is, most of the kids in urban areas don’t really get a job until they are well out of their college or university years (excluding some amazing kids who are working and paying their own bills while studying). If most people want to be entrepreneurs without ever having worked for someone and are mostly still dependent on their parents’ allowances, who will hire to work on their idea? It must be quite an expensive on the job learning method. I’ve worked with few tech companies – some quite large, some small – the turnover rate is quite astounding. I still have very little clue as to what is driving the turnover rate to be so high. And large tech companies pay more than the not-for-profit sectors even at the entry level.

3. Certificates: All students seem to be driven by the need to get a certificate. Most people who have worked in my social initiatives have probably found that their dismay that I don’t give out certificates. I just tell them that the work they will do is worth their time and if I have fun, I will be giving them some allowance. Are the certificates so important when one applies for a job or higher education? What is driving this funny need for certificates?

4. Internships need a new name or do they? I am not sure if it is because the term has been overused in Nepal as an excuse for free labour, or if students have been properly introduced to the concept of apprenticeship. A senior mechanical engineer friend of mine who was working at a small company in a project. It turns out the students wanted 1 to 2 lakhs per month salary to intern with him. I am glad he eventually shared his first internship experience with the students. But in Europe when he went to intern with another company, he had to pay for the program because he would be gaining more than he would be giving.

Apprenticeships / internships mean you value what the person has to teach and you are really ask for that persons’ time.

I used to run lunch orders for my desk in my first job. That is basically going to each person and saying can I order lunch for you? Pick it up and deliver it to you, and on the other hand from you, and pay the restaurant, while you work.

And in exchange, maybe after about a month of doing that for you; you would stay for 10 more minutes and show me that cool excel functions that you would save me four hours. Running lunch orders was the easiest thing I could do to get people to give me their 10 minutes. And this was the way all the first years got to by to learn the ropes of the job.

This was a productive way of learning, because it was 10 minutes each day for a month or more to teach those 10 minutes.

5. The number of conferences in entrepreneurship, women empowerment and development, WOW! What is even more amazing is finding the same set of speakers, NGOs and social leaders, at any set of aspiring entrepreneurs attending most of the events. How do these people work on their startups which are so passionate about and still manage to attend the endless events? Is it for networking, business sales, another opportune moment to catch a potential fundraiser or maybe a free beer? Whatever the reason may be, we are all amazing time management skills folks have here.

Sumana Shrestha

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Sumana Shrestha is an aspiring Kathmandu-based entrepreneur and a social media marketing professional. She writes this column, To The Point, in Nepal Times every fortnight.
In an unassuming office in Kathmandu, electrical engineer Mahabir Pun tests the prototype of Medicopter Nepal, a company he founded to provide medical supplies in remote areas of Nepal.

Pun's National Innovation Centre (NIC) tests medicopters to treat patients in remote areas.

Pun's vision is to build an office and NIC to be an incubator and start a "micro Silicon Valley" for startups.

The NIC is also helping Nepali scientists grow crops for medical use, produce a new brand of health drink, and set up solar and biogas plants.

The NIC has plans to build drones for fun, as a green project, and for environmental monitoring.

For example, Pun is working on a project to provide medical supplies in remote areas of Nepal.

Pun's enthusiasm for innovation and his passion for medical supplies inspired the NIC to develop a new brand of health drink, which has been successful.

The NIC plans to expand its operations to other areas of Nepal, including the mid-hills and the Far-West.

Pun believes that by creating a sustainable business model, the NIC can provide medical supplies to remote areas of Nepal.

The NIC is committed to providing medical supplies in remote areas of Nepal, and they believe that by working with local communities, they can make a positive impact on the quality of life in these areas.

For more information, visit nepalitimes.com.

Watch a short video on how young Nepali engineers are working to create locally manufactured drones to provide medical supplies in remote areas of Nepal.

Lucia de Vries
Mixed blessings in Mustang

Mukesh Pokhrel

I t hardly rains in Upper Mustang, the district of Nepal located beyond the Himalaya which sits out into the Tibetan Plateau. Rain is rare here, and floods even rarer. So when the stream next to his village of Tim burst its banks five years ago, it was the first time 80-year-old Karma Gurung had ever seen a flood.

The heavy rains and flood had killed a migrant worker from Lamjung, and few livestock. “It came suddenly, without warning and I lost 15 cows, ten goats and two horses,” recalls Nurbu Gurung, pointing to how high the muddy water and boulders had reached.

Kunju Gurung lost a chunk of his nearby apple farm, which used to earn him Rs100,000 a year. Today, there are only huge boulders and sand where these used to be fruit trees.

Flash floods, which used to be rare in this part of the Himalayan rain shadow, are becoming more frequent as weather patterns become more erratic. In the past decade, the people of Mustang suffered winter droughts, unseasonal snowfalls and cloudbursts.

The geology of the area is made up of prehistoric deposits of sand and boulders, and with no trees to hold the soil together, these are easily dislodged by heavy rains.

It was 1 Jan 2015 when it started raining heavily in Marpha village along the Kali Gandaki. The monsoon rains were not due for another three weeks, but the heavy storms dropped a huge amount of rain in the surrounding mountains, sending a wall of liquefied mud down a tributary of the Kali Gandaki.

“It had been raining heavily, and all of a sudden there was this tremendous noise so we knew the size of houses were washed down in a sea of mud,” recalls Bhakti Huncha, 77. The flood damaged 25 houses in Marpha and the scar of the flood can still be seen from the village.

A few months later in August, floods came again and destroyed houses and fields in Long village. Indeed, floods have become commonplace in what used to be a dry Mustang.

Villagers here say the weather has “gone mad” in the past 20 years, and blame the wrath of the gods.

Few here have heard of global warming and how scientists now believe it has made extreme rainfall and occasional periods of drought more common.

Climate expert Ramesh Dahal explains: “There is increasing evidence that global warming has lead to more cloud build-up along the Himalaya, and this is leading to intense storms and creating erratic monsoonas and winter rains in Mustang.”

Besides flash floods, the uncertain weather is also affecting local crops like buckwheat, barley and corn. Farmer Chiring Pemba Gurung of Long village says his harvests have gone down by half in the past two years.

“Winter snow is good for the spring crop, but for the past two years we hardly had any winter snow, and when it does snow it comes in the spring planting season,” says Chiring Pemba. Ironically, while the weather is creating havoc, long-term change in the climate has allowed vegetables and fruits to grow where they previously could not. These are now apple farms in Upper Mustang.

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Mustang, and farmers are switching to cabbages and cauliflowers, which used to be unheard of. “There never used to be apple trees up there, now you can have orchards in Jharkot, Kihanga, Dhe and other areas of Upper Mustang,” says Bhiktinshu Adhikari who is helping farmers here through the Apple Farm Centre.

Meanwhile in the famous apple growing areas of Marpha and Tatopani to the south, new diseases like red spider mites, woolly aphids, and white grubs have destroyed many orchards. “It is getting too hot for apple trees in Marpha, and the regions of upper Mustang are becoming more suitable because of climate change,” Adhikari explains. Chiring Penma Gurung planted

Plants move up the mountains to escape the heat

Global warming is melting the Himalayas twice as fast as the rest of the planet, and the most vivid proof of this are the rapidly shrinking glaciers and the receding snowline. However, there is another less evident trend, and that is the movement of native plant species up the mountains to escape the heat.

Recent research in the Indian and Nepali Himalayas examined plants growing from 60m above sea level up to 6,000m, which showed an upward migration of plants as global warming increased average temperatures across the mountains.

Sub-tropical woods and ferns growing in the low valleys of Sikkim and Kashmir are now found in higher elevations. The journal Nature recently reported that the flowering and fruiting cycles of pear and apple trees have changed over the last 50 years as have their size, colour and taste. Pine species in the Himalayals Himalayals have moved 1,000m up the slopes in the last three decades, the magazine said.

Many of the species which cannot adapt by moving higher could eventually become extinct. There is also an upper limit to how far plants can move since there is too much variation at extreme altitudes to support plant life.
Clothes exchange
Get rid of your old clothes at Ammamaya and celebrate spring with music, food and beverages at the cafe.
23 March. 1p.m. Modalee Shopping Mall, Jomtien. (035) 221 201.

Bird Watching
Enjoy bird watching at Centara Grand, Botanical Garden.
24 March. 7:30am-12:30pm. Soi Gamma Bus park, 038133125-6. 089-1576727.

Japanese Solo Theatre
Master翔子 and Margarita, a solo theatre of Shoka Theatre, photographed by Kei Iake, presented in Nepali by the Embassy of Japan.
24 March. 4pm onwards. Kanyi Theatre, Thapapelan, Petchaburi, 038137117/1 038228680.

Tharu Literature
A talk by writer and journalist Krishna Surabhan on Tharu language and literature, its influence on the Tharu identity movement and its current status within Nepal's new federal structure.
23 March, 4pm. Queen's Cave, Jomtien. (038) 5293794.

Women's trade expo
Women entrepreneurs from Nepal and other countries will showcase their products and services, ranging from handcrafts to fashion and organic agricultural products.
21-23 March, 10am-6pm, Heritage Garden, Stewem. 038488275.

Farhan Akhtar
The versatile Bollywood artist, Farhan Akhtar, who made his singing debut in the 2015 film Zoya Factor, will be singing hit songs for Kathmandu crowds.
7 April, 2-3pm. Hyatt Regency, Boudha. Rs2,000 (adult), Rs300 (children). For Tickets: 01 5109777.

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Storiesellers-comedy show
Laugh out loud at the Storiesellers special stand-up comedy.
24 March, 8pm onwards. Citi Courtyard, Targal, Rs350/500 (pre-booked). For Ticket: 089-2070941.

Night market
Visit the night market at Le Sherepa when the restaurant's garden comes alive with street food, market stalls, entertainment, art and craft and organic products.
23 March, 4pm-10pm, Le Sherepa, Maitreya, (038) 4208804.

Phodwala & The Author
Solo indie artist Rajan Shrestha, also known as Phodwala and electronic music producer Naro Shaipa, also known as The Author, will be performing during the weekend.
23 March, 8pm onwards. Rice Camp: Orchard Village, Annapurna Hotel, Rs500, 0894229597.

Adrian Padrhan
Adrian Padrhan and His Band performing their hit numbers live.
23 March, 8pm onwards. The Bottle Club, Coconuts, 0389951000/55. 0823005550, 038306508.

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Connection live
Reggae, blues, funk and jazz—Carnival performing live in the house of music.
23 March, House of Music, Amrit Mahal, Melam. 01 5107512.

Pandora’s Jukebox
Lumbelewon route, Kotmandu Nepal, Deprive, The Yellow Melody and ASM sharing the stage to perform their original music scores.
30 March, 7pm onwards. Club 25 Hours, Langkloon, Targal, 01 5107607.

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Embers
A spacious yet cozy place serving a blend of Continental and Nepali favours. Try their traditional marinated chicken kebab served with vegetables, rice and chutney.
Kishore Gold, Patum, 01 5555556.

Olive Garden
Decorated with green items and bright pops of colour, the Olive Garden prides itself a fine dining experience with its Italian menu featuring sauces, salads, pastas, pizzas, main course and more.
6-10pm, 8pm onwards. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. (01) 4414818.

Grand Norwood Hotel
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer, and not to forget, the garden, Gokarna, (01) 4920169.

Grand Norwood Hotel
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious bedroom with adjoining bathroom, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer, and not to forget, the garden, Gokarna, (01) 4920169.

Kahori
Nakir Indian restaurant, offering various exquisite cuisines ranging from Punjabi, Kashmiri, Awadhi and Rajasthani along with popular Vegilatt delicacies.
7-10.30pm, for dinner. Sameera Crane Plaza, Tolochan, for reservation. (01) 477999.

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**Water of the ages**

The irreplaceable loss of Kathmandu Valley’s historic hiti

Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

The ancient trade route between India and Tibet cut diagonally through Kathmandu’s city core. At its northern edge was the historical gateway to the city through which Newar merchants passed on their way to and from Lhasa.

Today a yellow concrete-and-glass commercial block stands on the spot just northwest of Ratna Park. The structure was built right on top of Sanga Hiti, the centuries-old sunken spout that stood there till 59 years ago. “This was the spot where families bid heartfelt farewell to the merchants when they left on perilous journeys across the Himalayas to Lhasa. There is no trace of this historic landmark today,” explains tourism expert Gyanendra Ratra Tuladhar. The Tibetan trade thrived for centuries until the Chinese annexation in the 1950s. Considered one of the greatest technological achievements of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation, hitis were traditional stone water spouts built inside conduit basins below ground level, where drinking water flowed non-stop. The water was piped through underground channels made of Gadda Cha, a type of water-tight clay.

The sources used to be in a complex network of aquifers, ponds, rivers or natural springs on the outskirts of the valley. This intricate web of water channels helped the valley’s kingdom thrive and to support dense urban populations.

Today, many of these hitis have dried up due to aquifers being covered up, and underground waterways blocked by buildings and other infrastructure.

When Sanga Hiti went dry, locals forgot its historical importance, and it was covered over to be converted into prime real estate.

A local football club then laid claim to the land, and eventually obtained permission to build its club house on top of Sanga Hiti in 1981, permanently burying its glorious history. The lower floors of the building are now rented out to shops, while the football club has offices and a meeting hall on the upper floors.

Soma 80m to the south is where Bhaktahiti was discovered just below the surface in 1984 during the construction of an underpass. Water was still flowing from the spout when it was unearthed. The spout dates back to 621 CE and was originally called Vastra Hill (Eastern Spout).

Bhaktahiti was among seven water spouts in the area, and was first buried during the construction of Tundikhel in the 1890s. The underpass construction went ahead, and Bhaktahiti was filled over a second time.

The lower portions of the basin of Tundhara Hill at the southeastern end of Darbar Marg is still moist with ground water today. Local apathy and official neglect have turned the historic waterspout into a wasteland. Engineering student Rehti Nepali studied Kathmandu’s 7th century Gaurikunda, 2 km east of Darbar Marg, and says it dried up only a few years ago when large buildings went up in the vicinity.

“We must study and fully understand the physical structures that were built with very little technical resources compared to today, during the Licchavi and the Malla periods, before they all disappear,” Nepali says.

Despite many hitis in Kathmandu going dry or filled over, there are still a handful of these historic spouts that provide water to this day to communities in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. Maha Hiti is one of them, and it lies at the opposite southern end of the ancient trade route that once bisected Old Kathmandu. Crystal clear drinkable water still flows out of its concrete stone spout day and night.

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Red Sparrow

Jennifer Lawrence has become a megastar, and while at 27 she is still too inexperienced to be the next Meryl Streep should anyone really be as good as Streep! she is ever versatile, constantly changing the kinds of roles she picks, pushing her boundaries in a way that is impressive, and the trait of a truly great artist. Occasionally she misses, like in 2017’s truly awful Mother! a shamelessly indulgent piece of exploitative cinema by the usually sensitive Darren Aronofsky. But her willingness to work for an unconventional film-maker like him shows the get that she first exhibited in her break-through role in Deborah Grant’s intense thriller Winter’s Bone (2010), a film to find and watch if you have not seen it yet.

Seven years later, Lawrence is capable of commanding films that are vehicles for her talent, underlining her elevating presence on screen. With Francis Lawrence’s ambitious Red Sparrow this actress shows that she can play a number of different aspects of a character without the showiness that can be annoying in the likes of the Johnny Depp and the Leonardo DiCaprio who insist on calling attention to their apparently multidimensional talent.

Red Sparrow itself is a paced, classic thriller with a streak of violence. Using the current cold war with Russia as a premise, the film tells the story of a prima ballerina, Dominika Egorova (Lawrence), who loses her dream of dancing after a terrible injury outage. Used by the state who installs her as an agent (the great Joely Richardson) over her head, Dominika ends up joining the ‘Sparrow’ program, a rigorous, wholly unethical exercise designed to turn men and women into professional ‘honey pots’, but much worse, teaching them skills of manipulation that are both humiliating and deeply damaging to both, executor and recipient.

Dominika excels; she is tough and smart, and her survival skills take her through a series of orders and missions that bring her in close contact with other dervish Sparrwos, a handsome CIA agent, Nick Nash (Joel Edgerton), and a corrupt 133 bureau agent.

The film takes its time, so those who expect the adrenaline pumping of an Atomic Blonde (2017) kind of film will perhaps be disappointed. But this story, based on the 2013 novel by Jason Matthews, is actually a first rate thriller, albeit, to those who are attuned to the inherent sexism in Hollywood, pretty skewed in terms of its exploitative tendencies under the pseudo-guise of empowerment. Luckily, aside from a few misguided moments, this does not last, and Dominika compels the viewer and the characters within the narrative like the star that she is.

Laced with a strong cast including the legendary Jeremy Irons and the immensely talented Matthias Schoenaerts, Red Sparrow stayed in my mind long after it ended, creating a nostalgia for its world, and the characters in it. I wanted to know more about what happens to them next, I ended up caring deeply about their lives. I would say that is the trait of a good film.  

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EUROPEAN UNION
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION NEPAL 2017

THE YEAR OF ELECTIONS: The head of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Nepal, Zeljko Zuna, presents the final report on the provincial and parliamentary elections in Kathmandu on Tuesday (see page 12).

DEAL SEALED: Left to right KISCO’s Vivek Sharma and David Molter. Parents of the German Embassy and the Windhorse from CE after signing an agreement on Himalayan transboundary cooperation in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

NATION’S PRIDE: The captain of Nepal’s cricket team Paras Khadka returns to a hero’s welcome at Kathmandu Airport on Monday after his team qualified for international one-day cricket.
**Quotable quota**

A European Union (EU) mission has asked Nepal to not allocate Preparatory Representation to the Khapa-Arpa community, arguing that it is already well-represented and does not need reservation.

Unveiling its final report on the three tiers of polls that Nepal held last year, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) forwarded its final report to President Bidhya Bhandari on Tuesday in Kathmandu saying a quota for a well-represented community is against international principles of equality. The mission said that affirmative action should be taken only in reserving quotas for under-represented communities.

Nepal’s new Constitution has guaranteed the highest caste Khapa-Arpa people a representation in proportion to their population. Sikkim states’ experience requires political parties to ensure representation of at least 31.2% Khapa-Arpa in Parliament.

The EU in its statement also reminded the main political parties not to forget the larger category of indigenous groups. The mission said that the present Constitution should contain an inclusive representation of all the communities. The government should adopt its own criteria for indigenous groups and not allow others to be made on their behalf.

The EU statement against the constitutional rights of the Khapa-Arpa community was unexpected, unnecessary, unrealistic, and unhelpful. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must caution the EU against playing the seeds of dispute and dividing the Nepalese people.

**Diplomatic indecency**

ABC, Nepal, 20 March

Some newly appointed ministers have met the Indian ambassador without officially informing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), which has taken a dim view of these meetings. Indian ambassador to Nepal, Manoj Sinha, was not informed about meetings this week, and each minister sat down with him for unofficial conversations.

Nepal issued a diplomatic code of conduct in 2017, discouraging ministers and bureaucrats from meeting with foreign diplomats without the knowledge of the Foreign Ministry. If ministers and bureaucrats cannot inform the MoFA in advance, they have to later submit their notes of these conversations to its institutional memory.

The code was issued after complaints of ministers and bureaucrats harboring representations of foreign countries for personal gain. Since ministers have been frequently touching the code, and this week’s untoward meeting were just the latest example.

Four newly-appointed Aviation Minister Prakash Jha Khadka and Finance Minister Ramchandra Paudel have submitted a written document to the cabinet, saying they agreed to meet the envoy after the latter dropped in to his office to congratulate him. “That’s it, nothing more”, he said.

The ambassador told his Aryama, “Our political leaders seem to be unaware or do not care about proper diplomatic conduct and its sensibility.”

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**Sick airport**

Deipa Gautam in Kathmandu, March 14

When the US-Bangla air crash at Kathmandu Airport last week, Nepal’s only international airport was closed for nearly three hours. Several aircrafts remained on hold in the sky, ultimately returning to Lukla and Chulo.

Gaston Buddha’s International Airport has been complained in Bhaktapur by December 2017 as previously scheduled, those planes could have landed there. However, even in just four months remain of the extended deadline, only 53% work has been completed so far.

Fortuitously at the Ruggo part of airport construction, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has threatened to pull out of the project. In Wednesday, an ADB team led by Nepal Country Director Malhotra Kusumchandra observed the progress. Based on his recommendation, the ADB will confirm whether to pull out.

Sooner the outside officials who have been given up hope, and are most likely to call it quits. The ADB has sanctioned 9540 million in grant and 642 billion in loan for the 46.12 billion project. The airport expansion can actually be started if the ADB decides to pull out.

But the CAN is hopeful that the ADB will not take the drastic step. “We will do our best to convince the ADB that this is a profitable project,” CAN spokesperson sundara Shrestha says. “But we will not let this project die even if the ADB pulls out.”

The Chinese company which won the global contract to build the airport that will save Lumbini billions of investment, the Blackfriar and frequent delays for the delay in the project. But the dispute between the Chinese company and its local contractor is the real reason why only 53% work has been completed so far.

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Om Astha Rai
in Kavre

Sita Yongju, 23, has a two-year-old daughter, and recently stopped using contraceptives even though she is not planning to have another child. She says she doesn’t need her birth control implant anymore because her husband went away to work in Qatar two months ago.

Yongju visited a health post in Reyal village of Kavre to remove the birth control implant that she had inserted last year. The tiny device prevents births for five years, and does not need to be removed even when users abstain from intercourse. But many Nepali men want their wives to stop using contraceptives when they leave for overseas work.

“My husband thinks I could sleep with anyone if I use contraceptives in his absence,” Yongju frankly admits.

An estimated four million Nepali men of reproductive age work abroad, and their wives back home generally see no need for contraceptive implants, preferring to use short-term methods like condoms, pills and injectables when their husbands come home on leave. Like Yongju, those using IUDs and implants remove them as soon as their husbands go away again.

Demographers say this explains the riddle about why Nepal’s fertility rate has been going down despite contraceptive prevalence rate remaining low.

When Nepal conducted its first-ever nationwide health survey in 1996, only 26% women were using modern contraceptives. Within ten years, it had nearly doubled to 44%, but has leveled off since. The contraceptive prevalence rate actually declined to 43% in 2015, when the last National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) was conducted. Even so, the fertility rate that measures the average number of children per couple has been going down – from 6.6 in 1996 to 5.1 in 2006 and 2.3 in 2015 (see graphic, overhead).

Demographers were initially puzzled by the drop in the fertility rate despite contraceptive use rate flattening. But an analysis in 2013 suggested a correlation between male out-migration and contraceptive use. Another analysis is now underway, which will probably confirm the impact out-migration of men may be having on contraceptive use and fertility rate.

“If we consider only women who are married and living with husbands, we find a high contraceptive prevalence rate,” explains Sharmi Paudel, a demographer at the government’s Family Health Division. “This rate is low only because lots of women generally do not need contraceptives when their husbands are away.”

However, experts warn that Nepal’s declining fertility rate may not mean that population growth will reach replacement level – one in every four married women still have an unmet need for family planning. A third of young married women aged 15-19 do not use contraceptives, making them more vulnerable to unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion.
population decline

The mix matters

When Nepal launched its first population control campaign in the late 1960s, its
population was only 15 million. It was growing at 3% per year because the fertility rate
was nearly 6 children per couple. The only contraceptive that women had then was to get
their partners to use condoms. Most men did not like using them, and women did not have
any control over reproductive health. The pill could have given women freedom to limit or
space their children, but not at its side effects.

However, sterilables like Depo-Provera and IUDs were introduced and today the government
provides five types of contraceptives for free, and conducts health camps offering permanent
family planning methods like male as well female sterilisation. But many other contraceptives
like emergency pills and female condoms are available only in private clinics, and most rural
women cannot use them even if they want to.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) says Nepal’s women are aware of the
benefits of having fewer babies, but face barriers in accessing contraceptives. Health facilities
often run out of contraceptive stocks, and there are not enough trained health workers to provide
long-term contraceptives like implants and IUDs.

A UNFPA assessment showed most health posts provide only condoms, pills and injectables
because of the lack of trained staff. Only one third of the facilities provide all five types of modern
contraceptives including implants and IUDs. In most villages, women
have to choose between oral pills or
Depo-Provera, which they cannot use if there are side effects. Male
or female sterilisation is available occasionally, and most women
complain their husbands do not want to use condoms.

With rising female literacy, the number of women opting for
traditional family planning methods is also going up. In 1996, only 3% of
married women used such natural methods, now it is 10%. However,
the NSH 2016 showed that 62% women using the rhythm method
are not using contraceptive did not have an accurate knowledge about the
ovulation cycles.

Nepal’s target is to increase its contraceptive prevalence rate by 5% by 2020, but it is far from
that goal because of male migration, the preference for natural methods, and family
planning services being scaled back due to a drop in U.S. funding
after the gag rule was lifted. The United States has
traditionally been the main
supporter of family planning
projects in Nepal, through
organisations like Marie Stopes
International that provide abortion
services.

Beth Schlachter, Director of
Family Planning 2020, who
recently visited Kathmandu to
take stock of Nepal’s progress,
says: “The US gag rule might affect Nepal’s family planning programs if organisations
delivering safe abortion services here do not find other resources to supply contraceptives.”

Since Nepal is poised to
become an “aging” society by
2030 and an “aged one” by 2050,
there is an ever growing need
to scale up family planning.
For the country to reduce its
dependency ratio and reap the
demographic dividend, many
more women must have easier
access to a much wider range of contraceptives.

Kristina Blaha at the UN
Population Fund (UNFPA) says
Nepal needs a strategy that
targets mass poverty and
impoverishment. She says
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Broken news

Robot to Replace PM
KATHMANDU – Nepal this week became the first country to have a robotic head of government, with Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli instructing his day-to-day duties in a silicon humanoid with artificial intelligence.

The Right Honourable Robot will at first be enthroned with simple virtual reality tasks such as cutting ribbons, lighting lamps, delivering keynotes and, operating, crucial ministries of federal provinces. After that, the E. the Automation will be given more challenging tasks like nation building.

Since the prime minister’s first foreign visit is such a sensitive issue, Nepal will now have two identical prime ministerial robots. Which means that while one of them is on a visit to New Delhi, the other one can be in office. This way, no critical decisions will be missed, and Nepal can keep both neighbours happy, sources said.

Tankers On Strike
HEPATON – Tankers lining up to demand a price increase and demand reservation of their right to operate oil trucks up to 20% of the fuel, while the drivers claimed there was much more evaporation and the most consumed several international traders that Nepal was signatory to, including the Convention on the Suppression of the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, the Agreement on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the Agreement on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Nepalis Migrating To The Moon
KATHMANDU – Nepali Engineer Joy Thapa has become the first Nepalese to buy a plot of land on the moon, according to reliable sources at Facebook.

He got his deed certificate after sending $150 to a Nigerian merchant who had earlier offered a souvenir lunar blast site to the people of Nepal. He planned to recruit Nepali contract workers, and blast them into outer space.

Now he says, “Total income is coming in from Kickstarter and from the apartment. I will buy a ticket for the联合’s September 25th trip, and will explore the Moon surface on a joint expedition with NASA.” Thapa had earlier hoped to sell the plot at $1 million.

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Mr. Anish Tamang