Birthday party

Buddha Jayanti, which falls on 30 April next week, is once again an annual reminder of the decades of political neglect and corruption that have prevented Nepal from taking full advantage of its most important pilgrimage site.

Thousands of Buddhist monks, scholars and devotees will be visiting the nativity place of the Buddha for a two-day international conference this weekend followed by a day of prayer and meditation on Monday.

While these pilgrims and tourists will be reminded once again of how important World Heritage Site has not been allowed to attain its true importance. On the other hand, the sanctum is turning into an over-developed tourist theme park where nations compete to erect ever-more grandiose monuments.

The Lumbini Development Master Plan drawn up by Japanese architect Kazuo Tange in 1978 was to be completed in 15 years. Four decades later, the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) says it still needs 12 years to do the job.

Prime Minister KP Oli, during his first tenure in 2016, had instructed the LDT to complete all 18 remaining infrastructure projects in the master plan within two years. However, instead of allocating more resources, the Ministry of Finance cut the budget for Lumbini from Rs719 million in 2016 to Rs970 million in 2017.

Lack of resources, however, is not the only reason for the slow pace of work. Political instability and corruption play an even bigger role — the LDT has been led by as many as 34 Ministers of Culture in the last 28 years. Most of them were political appointees intent on making money on the side.

Laxman Pokharel, a Buddhist scholar in Lumbini, says: “If the government really cares about this sacred shrine, it first needs to stop appointing its cadres to the LDT.”

Past LDT boards even allowed construction of luxury hotels in a wetland area preserved as a core sanctuary. After Avudhesh Tripathi, a 12-year-old monk and Buddhist scholar involved in conservation, was appointed Vice Chair of the LDT last year, the plan was scrapped. This may mean the new government may not retain him.

Nepal plans to bring in two million tourists after the much-delayed new airport is completed next year. The number of pilgrims visiting Lumbini (like Kosovo pictured below) every year is already 7.5 million, and being in 500,000 more tourists will not be difficult. However, a cement factory in the Bhairawa industrial corridor threatens the holy site with air pollution.

What will boost the economy will be if more pilgrims visiting Lumbini come through Nepal instead of being a part of the Indian Buddhist circuit. At present 90% of pilgrims come via India, and India doesn’t even spend a night here.

Says culture expert Gita Giri: “We need to give pilgrims and tourists more reasons to spend more days in and around Lumbini.”

There is a plan to develop a 157 sq km area covering other Buddhist heritage sites like Tilaurakhet, Devdhara and Ramgram as Greater Lumbini. But given the delays in implementation of the master plan, it is doubtful if it will ever be done.

Buddhist scholar Biraj Shrestha concludes: “Neglect of Lumbini is a disrespect to the followers of Buddhism all over the world.”

Deepak Gyawali in London

Homes away from home

Utpala Khadka reports from Bandarban about Nepali households trapped there because of a Nepali government ban on female workers going to West Asia. They cannot visit family in Nepal because they may not be allowed back to their well-paying jobs in Lebanon.

Page 8-9

Immerse yourself in Wales

Discover the unforgettable beauty, rich history, and vibrant culture of this incredible country. This is a place where you can visit a centuries-old castle, retreat history at a wealth of museums and heritage sites, explore the many boutique shops and restaurants, or simply enjoy an exhilarating boat excursion. No matter what adventure you choose, Wales will always inspire you.

Daily flights to Cardiff starting 1 May 2018.
GUEST EDITORIAL
PRITHVI SUBBA GURUNG

Starting from zero

We have created a visisit for potential in Province 4, considering not just our potential but also our altitude. We are still working on this altitude and progress is slow, with several people yet to be drafted. We are still trying to determine the vast rural and urban regions of this province and are not yet in a position to create an effective tourist environment. We are also trying to explore the vast natural beauty and cultural diversity of this province.

We have a plan to establish a world-class technical university in Pakhali, and in the future we will also raise the profile of the entire country. Apart from this, we are also considering setting up an international-level sports stadium in Pakhali, which will boost the sports sector and bring in revenue from tourism and investments.

Today, we are facing many challenges and obstacles. We are working hard to overcome them and make our province a tourist destination.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS

We are excited about the future of tourism in Province 4. We are working towards creating a tourism hub in the region, with a focus on natural beauty, cultural diversity, and historical significance.

We are planning to develop a tourism infrastructure that will attract visitors from all over the world. We are also working on creating a tourism policy that will help the tourism sector grow and provide opportunities for local people.

In conclusion, we are confident that Province 4 has immense potential for tourism development. With the right policies and investments, we are sure to make our province a destination of choice for tourists.

REFERENCES

1. Pakhali Tourism Development Authority
2. Province 4 Tourism Master Plan
3. Nepal Tourism Board

END

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END
DISCOVER MORE: EUROPE
Marketing the intangible

Patan’s ongoing chariot festival is as dramatic as bull-running in Pamplona

The great chariot festival of Karunamaya has begun, bringing with it the mandatory, and much anticipated, summer rain. The festival is celebrated by Valley residents and the people of Yala (Patan) with such enthusiasm that one cannot help but want to make sure the whole world knows about it, and bring them to Patan to join the festivities.

½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

While mountainous head for the peaks this pre-monsoon season, the rest of the country and Kathmandu see a doomsday in tourist arrivals after the sprint peak. The month-long festival of Karunamaya Durga, Rato Machhindranath, Adi Lokaweswa, or whatever other names you want to call it, should be marked to the rest of Nepal and the world. Patan could probably make a whole year’s worth of income in a month if this was properly done.

Nepal often makes international headlines for the wrong reasons: natural disasters or political upheavals. We need to get out some good news as well. The chariot festival is one of the most dramatic and Insta-grammable festivals in the world, comparable to bull-running in Pamplona.

Patan has a lot more to offer. Jhendra Shrestha and Pushkar Dhakwa have spent a good part of their creative efforts and resources to convert their own houses into high-end home-styled and helpful neighbors to do the same. Check out Goy Nepal to see the wonderful spaces that the visitor can call their home away from home, in Patan. News Chan has rooms, a gallery and performing spaces. The visitor can also see how the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, Rishi Rajkumar and their team of artists are restoring the monuments like Bhai Deba at the Patan Durbar Square after earthquakes of the past.

Patan today has eating places, there are enough hotels in the outskirts of the historical core area, the city has trained young people who can help guide the visitors, and has even launched an app so you can walk around with the help of your phone. Patan, with the help of Lok Chitrakar, has just freshly painted the gate at Patan Bhoka with the iconic depiction of the singing salmon. Another goddess who protect the city against anything bad that could befall this ancient settlement.

AM PM Bara, Shilendra Shrestha, who operates Tanjai Pha bed and breakfast, is there to take you through at least 2,000 years of history of the neighbourhood, the Addok Stop and the ancient pond. Please take time out to go to the neighbourhood in the evening when the illuminated temple is reflected in the waters.

The chariot festival of Karunamaya is made of numerous facets that could be of interest to the world travelers. The open spaces, historical ponds, the families and guilds that make the chariot, the various shrines, the sculptures and plants/flowers involved and offered, the musical instruments, rituals and feasts.

The great festival keeps Patan aunts and uncles coming since it is probably the biggest value created. It is not a small task to pull the great chariot through the streets of Patan despite all odds. People’s participation is a term much used in development literature, but if you want to see what it really means, you have to come and see for yourself. The energy, the care, respect and sense of purpose of the faithful illustrate what people working together can achieve.

The legends, folklore, history and anecdotes associated with the chariot festival are also of great interest. It consists of kings, naga mythical snakes, farmers, and of course, fistful treasures. There is decor and integrity and suspense which ensure that each year there is a really good reason to come together and rebuild the chariot and have the festival again and again.

In a month where the last 15 centuries in Nepal, the Kathmandu Valley and Patan, but the chariot festival of Karunamaya or Sunga Dyo goes on. No disaster like the earthquake of 2015, no political changes like the end of monarchy can go on in 2020, but everything kept the festival, that is an integral part of Nepal’s land world, a truly intangible heritage.

Anil Chitrakar’s President of Siddhichintar

Chill out at the new Keventers in Thamel

Ever since it became popular with Nepali boarding school students in Darjeeling, Keventers has had a loyal following even when the boys returned to Nepal and grew up to be men. Keventers uses local fresh organic milk from a dairy in Suryabinayak, with many of the ingredients used in the concentrate in the milk.

What makes the new Keventers (in Thamel) stand out is not just the shakes, but also the interior. A vintage brass letter box on the door, black and white mural on the wall, tiles of the old Connaught Place in Delhi, and classic framed photos of Keventers products back at the brand’s colonial history.

The furniture is done in less-exue minimalism and the ambiance is kept refrigerato-cool so that customers immediately feel like they are insulated from the heat, bustle and dust of the city outside. There is free wifi, and with the warm glow enticing post-dinner crowds for dairy desserts.

Keventers was founded by Danish dairy entrepreneur Edward Keventers in 1905 with outlets in Darjeeling, Delhi, Calcutta and Aligarh. After Indian independence, co-founder Keventers was sent to Ram Krishna Dalmia, whose grandson Agastya Dalmia revived and expanded the brand in 2015. The Keventers approached Dalmia with Keventers’ first franchise abroad in Nepal.

Today, Keventers has more than 250 outlets and is undergoing rapid expansion in India. The Keventers are hoping to start a new outlet in Dharat Mag soon.

The newest flavour is Salted Caramel Ick Shake which is served in Keventers’ trademark bottle illustrated with a rhombus-on-rose blossom to give the product a Nepal touch.

Sikuma Rai

Wealthier Nepal

Wealthier Nepal’s economy is expected to grow by 5.0% in the ongoing fiscal year 2017-2018, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics, drawn mainly by remittances and a good monsoon, means the annual average income of each Nepali is projected to reach $1,500.

Himalaya for kids

In a part of Eau de toilette, Himalaya Airlines has contributed kitchen utensils and a yeading supply of textbooks to

Papaji Nepal, an orphanage for orphans after abandonment, abused and physically challenged children in different parts of the country.

Tee off with Turkish

Turkish Airlines has launched the first Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup where more than 8,000 participants will compete in 100 tournaments around the world for the grand finale which will be held in Athens in November. The tournament is

scheduled to take place in venues such as the Royal Kallithea in Greece, Clainegro in Scotland, 36 Club in Belgium and Le Golf National in France.

Qatar at Airshow

Qatar Airways is showcasing two Airbus A350-1000 and Business Class seats, Quito

during the Dubai Airshow in Dubai, Turkey from 25 to 29 April. The newly delivered Gulfstream G650ER executive aircraft and the ultra long range business jet will also be on display.

Golf at Okanaka

Lani International, the authorised distributor of Hyundai cars, has organised the HYUNDAI Open Golf Tournament from 27 to 28 April, at Gokarna Golf Resort. A total of 130 golfers will compete in the tournament played in an 18-hole, stable fife and in hilly terrain.

Probash Ban</ref>
Recent rapes of minors and allegations of long-term child abuse in Nepal by, among others, a high-profile international civil servant, have once more forced us to ask the question: are our children really safe? How can we ensure their safety?

To the Point
Sumana Shrestha

Addendum to the dangers faced by Nepali children from domestic and foreign predators, the 2015 earthquake has put more children in the vulnerable category. Thousands of families have been pushed below the poverty line, and three years on these are people still living in flimsy shelters. A quest for better future drives many parents to believe in any one who offers help.

There have been many wake-up calls to the Nepali government and public to be more wary of the helping hands being extended, especially in times of emergencies. The abuse cases of the Bel Mandir and Happy Home are still raw, yet policy-level interventions have been massively inadequate or missing. Perhaps it is poverty, desperation and lack of information that has forced Nepali families to be more vulnerable. The government also failed to extend open invitation to what looks like local and foreign do-gooders without any scrutiny of their past.

Some have criminal records, others may be alumni refugees, still others could actually be working for child welfare organisations, but we trust them implicitly for their philanthropy or charity work.

Perhaps it has become a norm for us to ignore street children who seem too easy to be victims in Kathmandu, or who all of a sudden have brand new clothes or a bicycle after a task. Big денег, and there are dark secrets of exploitation and abuse.

In light of the recent arrest of Peter Dalgliesh, who served with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Nepal office and other UN offices around the world, we must surely ask ourselves what can be done to ensure the safety of our children.

Dalgliesh’s Wikipedia profile is everything a parent or a child can hope for in an angel that ‘saves children’. He has projected himself as a formidable friend of children: the founder of Street Kids International, someone who has been working to improve the lives of children since 1987; chief technical adviser for the UN’s anti-child labour program, Unicef, senior adviser to UN-Habitat, Afghanistan. He was decorated with the Order of Canada, the second highest honor of merit accorded to Canadians for their community service or service to Canada.

The 60-year-old Canadian was arrested last week in Nagerkot in the company of two children by the Central Investigation Bureau after a tip-off from Interpol. He is to be arraigned on Wednesday. But what lurks behind these accolades are three things: his reputation and circle of friends going to create pressure on the investigating team, if yes, how do we prevent such pressures?

There is a serious OMG moment: how much unparalleled access to vulnerable children and parents Dalgliesh’s child protection platforms must have given. There is also a cold sensation of the loss of comfort: who else could be in the paedophile ring, if indeed he is convicted? How many knew and did nothing? How many will continue to access children through those platforms?

This is not the first arrest in Nepal related to paedophilia. In 2018, an American Kenneth Joseph Coombs was caught; he had a history of sexual misconduct and assault in the US. Yet, he made it inside Nepal because of lax immigration laws. In 2015, Irving Feinwich MacIntosh was found guilty and is serving a seven-year sentence.

It may be time to warn street children about foreign and Nepali paedophiles, take better care of them in shelters with vetted child protection policies and actions, where they will be safe from such predators. Last time I checked, the Nepal government has a ministry specifically called Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, but it remains to be seen what it has done to reduce the number of street children and child survivors of the earthquake, and implement policies against exploitation by old workers.
Through their enthusiastic lenses, nature filmmakers introduced Nepal to a global audience.

When he had calmed down enough for us to understand him, Mike described the thrill of a tiger appearing silently out of the grass on the path below him - "stripes that moved" in the dawn light. At last, patience rewarded. It was a young male, and with the camera running, he realized with some alarm that the purring sound was making it curious - the striped cat flickered with interest as it advanced up the bank. Mike had to remove the camera from the tripod as the tiger came closer and closer, until its face was peering through the slit window of the hide, separated only by a flimsy wall of canvas.

Even though primordial instinctual terror made his heart race, Mike had the presence of mind to keep the camera going, his hands shaking. "It was defecating by my own headboards," he said later. In a career of close brushes in the jungle, this unsteady sequence became the cornerstone of Tiger, one of the first films to document the behaviour of these noble and elusive nocturnal cats.

As Mike recounted the story to us from the safety of the Tiger Tops breakfast table, happily for him the young tiger decided discretion was the better part of valour, and moved on.

In return for logistic support and movie to share with our guests and staff, the partnership with Survival Nepal conservation credibility and accessed global groups such as the Audubon Society, Frankfurt Zoo and Zoological Society of London, David Attenborough came, the BWW, Natural History and National Geographic. The integrity and international standing of Nepal's wildlife conservation programme was secured.

The Smithsonian Institution's long-term tiger monitoring project used Chuck McDougal and Tiger Tops' trackers to pioneer camera trapping and radio collaring techniques, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands brought numbers of his 1901 Club of WWF donors as the guests of then Prince Gyanendra, and Sir Peter Scott "launched" the first garhwal back into the Narayani River, revered by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to reintroduce that threatened, fish-eating crocodile. The first batch of glacial eggs was hatched in my bedroom, the white translucent orbs packed into a warm wet sandbox, before the crocodile breeding centre was set up at Kasara park headquarters. In a poignant footnote, exactly 25 years ago this month Dieter Plage was killed in a horrific accident, plunging 35m through the canopy of a remote Sumatran rainforest. Hovering above the trees, he was suspended below a small airlift in an adopted camera platform when his safety harness failed - a victim of his own inventive commitment to show the glories of Asia's natural world.
Kathmandu’s magnetic tug on Maura Moynihan

Maura Moynihan first visited Kathmandu in 1973 when her father, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was US Ambassador to India. “I was just 13 when I visited Kathmandu for the first time. It struck me like a thunderbolt. It was love at first sight, and her affinity for Kathmandu’s unique artistic and cultural heritage endured.”

“Ther’s no place like it in the world,” she says. “Kathmandu is indescribably and bindingly beautiful. Every day I discover a new temple, a secret stupa, another jeti.”

Moynihan’s exhibition Who Loves Kathmandu More Than Me? is on at Kathmandu Art in Lazimpul till 5 May with over 40 paintings of which are already sold. One is a mixed medium series on King Bhupendra and Queen Ashwarya that infuses ink, collage and watercolor. There are also depictions of Tara.

In 1999 Moynihan held her first exhibition at Sangita Thap’s Siddhartha Art Gallery, and says she is thrilled to be working now with her daughter, Seethalama at Kathmandu Art Gallery.

In the 1970s Moynihan attended the American School in New Delhi, and spent many years in Asia as a journalist, published two best-selling works of fiction, Yoga Hotel and Cowgirl (most of which she wrote while in Nepal). She is also a singer and song writer, poet, model, actress, designer, and has exhibited in India, Nepal, Thailand and the US.

At 23, Moynihan appeared on the cover of Andy Warhol’s Interview magazine, and for five years Moynihan and Warhol worked together at interview and co-hosted Andy Warhol’s TV.

“Andy encouraged me to develop all my talents and creativity. He was a kind and generous man, the most amazing person one could have as mentor and friend,” recalls Moynihan.

“Each time I visit Kathmandu, the one thing which Moynihan religiously does is visit Boudha, Patan Durbar and Swayambhunath. The history, mythology, art, culture and traditions associated to these ancient holy sites never fail to spiritually uplift her,” she says.

Kathmandu has indeed always nurtured the artist in her. She explains: “Art in Nepal is not just decorative, it is integral to Nepali culture and way of life. Every painting is a legacy.”

A student of comparative religion and literature, Moynihan spent many years studying Hindu and Buddhist iconography and was a consultant to the Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

“The new exhibition of Nepali, especially women, inspire me greatly. They are sophisticated and educated,” says Moynihan. “Many people used to be pessimistic about the future of Nepal. But look at Nepal now, it has preserved its culture, traditions and beauty. Nepalis are resilient despite the many hardships, the conflict and earthquakes.”

Moynihan always carried paint, brushes, pencil and paper in her travels across Asia over the past three decades, painting in water colour because “it dries faster.”

She adds: “But I always return to Nepal, where seeds of Hindu mythos and Buddhist philosophy mingle in Kathmandu’s rich and varied culture. It is a feast, a challenge and a quest for an artist. No matter where I go, I keep going back to Nepal. There is a magnet in my heart that always pulls me back to this Valley.”

Who Loves Kathmandu More Than Me? Kathmandu Art, Lazimpul Till 5 May.

Follow artist Maura Moynihan as she shows us her exhibition ‘Who Loves Kathmandu More than Me?’ and explore why she is drawn to the medium of water colour to depict Nepal and the Valley where she has been living off and on for the past 35 years.
Alliance with airlines can make

Operators who have so much business from overseas workers could do more for their welfare

The Kotaraya quarter of the Malaysian capital comes alive on Sundays when Nepali migrant workers gather here to celebrate their hard-earned day off. The neighbourhood has over 65 Nepali restaurants, shops, supermarkets and travel agencies selling airline tickets catering to the Nepali diaspora population.

A lot has been said about Nepali migrant workers propping up the home economy, but Kotaraya is special in that it attracts workers from Nepal support the Malaysian economy. Its airlines and commercial activity in its cities as the 600,000 Nepalis there eat, shop, use supermarkets and buy tickets back and forth from home. Three Malaysia-based airlines and two Nepal Airlines link Kuantan to Kuala Lumpur.

At one of the restaurants, a group walks around seeking donations (pictured, above) for a Nepali worker Ram Tamang, who had been injured in an accident on his way back from work, and did not have support from his employer for medical expenses. "We have been able to reach other Malaysian cities through social media and Nepalis are donating through their bank accounts," says Yami Magar who adds that the 'Drive To Save Ram' has raised $2,000 so far. The Non-Resident Nepali (NRN) chapter has covered his Flight home.

Stories of migrants who are injured, ill, judged, duped or stranded are common, and many seek protection at Nepal embassy shelters. In response, family, friends, the embassy, NGOs, and NRNA or activists often step in to help with compensation and repatriation. However, given that there are so many Nepalis in Malaysia, the sheer volume of vulnerable cases is overwhelming. The flight back can be a costly part of the expenditure for wounded workers like Ram Tamang, and that is where airlines which get a bulk of their business from the travel to and from Kathmandu could do more. In 2016, 3.5 million passengers used Kathmandu airport — at least 70% of them were overseas contract workers. Many of them come home multiple times during their stay abroad, adding further business for airlines.

"It is not uncommon to hear complaints from workers who say that airlines only focus on the economic benefits they get from the journey and do not care about the workers," says a travel agent here, who wanted to be identified only as Rita.

Airlines serving the Gulf region and Malaysia operate up to 183 flights a week to send from

Nepali migrants here say home leave every two years paid by the employer are a strategic time to renegotiate salaries and benefits as employers are more open to having these discussions since there is an incentive to bring back the workers.

There are also many Nepali domestic workers in Lebanon in part-time jobs, living in apartments with fellow migrants. Not all employers, especially those without elderly or small children in the household, require full time live-in support. Many workers also

Upasana Khadka in Beirut

Female domestic workers in Lebanon cannot visit families back in Nepal because of a travel ban that prevents them from returning to well-paying jobs.

A long with horror stories of abuse of female domestic workers, housemaids from Nepal here have a different worry — they cannot go back home for holidays because a Nepalese government ban on female migrant workers would prevent them from returning to Lebanon to their jobs.

Many have fled the West Asia before the ban went into effect in early 2017 have not been able to travel home to visit children and families even though their employers are willing to pay for roundtrip travel to Kathmandu.

Nini has been a housemaid for the same family in Lebanon for ten years. She has developed a daily rhythm that she is comfortable with, and spends Sundays with other Nepali friends. Nini had gone back to Nepal hoping to migrate to Europe, but when that didn’t work out her Lebanese employers asked her to return.

"It was quite a scene when I landed in Beirut airport. My employer came to receive me with flowers and hugged me, and when I got to my old room it felt like home," Nini recalls. Since then, her only worry has been to figure out how to go back to Nepal on paid leave every two years. Her employer compensates her financially in lieu of the air ticket, but Nini misses not being able to see her aging parents in Taplejung.

Dipa has been working for a family in Lebanon for the past decade, making about $800 a month, most of which she saves. Her siblings back home in Nepal barely make Rs 15,000 a month and don’t save much of it.

"I am very happy here and so are many other Nepali domestic workers. Why is the government punishing us by not letting us go home?" asks Dipa, who could not even visit when her father passed away recently.

Unlike other migrant workers, domestic help is an intimate and complex partnership where both the employers and employees are inside the home. There are cases of abuse and exploitation, but there are also many Nepalis who are treated well and are happy in well-paid jobs. Employers here said they prefer Nepali housemaids, citing trust, cooking skills, relationship with their children, and the bonds they have developed.

Nini’s employer told us: "She takes care of me like my daughter. I don’t have to tell her what to do, and she has told me her house is yours. My children adore her. She is really one of us."

Krishna’s Lebanese employer says she wants her to go back to Nepal every year to spend time with her son, Ajay. But Krishna doesn’t want to take the risk of not being allowed to return. "I feel guilty because I cannot do anything about it," says Krishna’s employer.

Dhana has been working in the same household in Beirut for ten years. Her employer has in the past arranged paperwork through the Nepalet Embassy in Cairo or her to go back to Nepal on leave. But Dhana doesn’t want to be stuck in Nepal and lose her job. Save her employer: "Dhana has a right to go home and come back."

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Listen to audio of Nepali maid in Lebanon

nepalitimes.com

The Risk Appetite

Nepali maids in Lebanon

Listen to audio of Nepali maid in Lebanon

nepalitimes.com

Overseas contract workers from Nepal tend to have a high threshold for risk because of the relatively better economic conditions and a variety of alternatives back home. Migrants are often aware of the common risks to be wary of: overstay employment because of the networks of former or present migrant workers, the social web, and reports in the press. Despite this, many continue to make risky decisions not always because of lack of information, but in spite of it. Males, a seasoned diaspora leader in Qatar who has watched migrant workers and has himself rescued many from inhumane conditions that bore resemblance to modern-day slavery, attributes this to the culturally fatalistic view that migration is a lottery.

Sharma agreed with her agent to go to Kuwait via Dubai despite a Nepal government ban on female workers leaving no decir to the Gulf. "How else would I travel?" she asked, admitting that she knew her journey was full of pitfalls. Her agent assured that Sharma was well versed on the do's and don'ts while crossing borders to avoid getting caught. "Only carry a handbag. Don't make eye contact with anyone," she told them, "you are visiting family." If she only made it to Kuwait, she would be able to provide for her children. Sharma’s journey took 24 days from Nepal to New Delhi to Sri Lanka to Dubai, and she got an abusive employer in Kuwait. She had no option but to escape and return to Nepal, disfraught and without savings.

When Ramash agreed to go on a visa to UAE, he knew he was taking a chance by paying Rs20,000 to his agent and knew he was being overcharged, but there was the chance he could get a well-paying job. However, not only did his agent fail to find him a job, but he was verbally and physically abused. Ramash’s only memory of Dubai was the pros and cons of his decision. He spent months working cramped inside an apartment with 22 other migrants.

Shina is 24 and loves 16. She covers her face and laughs, showing the first page of her passport with a failure stamp from the age of 32. She couldn’t make it past immigration in Dubai and was sent back to Kathmandu, which she found herself in once again by travelling through India due to the ban. Shama believed her agent who lived above her room in her village because she had already successfully sent two others to Kuwait.

Nepali workers are taking risks even when they get to the destination country. Ramash in Malaysia had no overtime, so he switched to unremunerated status to earn more money — knowing fully well he would be deported if caught. He was caught six months in detention and was sent back.

He was among a group of other deported Nepalis at Kathmandu airport recently (picture below), all were empty handed, clad in t-shirts and flipflops, walking out with other Nepalis who were pushing luggage carts with tv monitors. There are many such stories that make workers like Ramash. Shama, Shrinka, and Ramash take risks for the positive outcome for others. Unlike Ramash, Kul earned Rs1000 a month as a security guard, double of what he earned in his legal job at a furniture shop. Yet, he made it back safely with a temporary pass.

The two women were freed by Sharma’s agents made it to Kuwait, but her employes in Lebanon seem to be less well generally. Current migration policies which fail to respond to these unmet aspirations and ground realities, such as minimum bans on domestic workers, free visa free ticket policy, or the inability to legally switch jobs at the destination country, still help make foreign employment more like a pathway out of poverty.

In such a policy environment, general awareness and orientation programs can therefore be rendered inadequate because many Nepalis are also knowingly taking ill advised steps. And when there are first-hand experiences of attempts of members of a community, other aspirants attribute it to lack of skill or fate. Unperturbed, they repeat the same steps in the hope that in their case the odds will be in their favour.

Nepali maids in Lebanon

The Risk Appetite

Nepali maids in Lebanon

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The Risk Appetite

The Risk Appetite
Events

Pharping ride: A 52km long challenging ride to Pharping. The route covers areas like Khokana, Pharping Power Plant, Maitatirtha and Chitkul, reaching a final elevation of 1000m.
28 April, 6:30am, the Bike Fun Nepal, Kathmandu.

Avengers screening: The proceeds of the fund-raising dinner and movie preview of Avengers Infinity War will be used to organize a national movie making competition.
27 April, 5-7pm, Core Del Chef Club, Civil Trade Center, Sundhara. Rs. 299, 5139106400

Prayers to Buddha: On the occasion of 2563th Buddha Jayanti, an event is scheduled for meditation and prayers in the name of Lord Buddha. 30 April, 7:30am onwards, Vishnu Dhama Centre, Boudha. Rs. 999/3480

Moonshine workshop: With a focus on visual and edible elements, anyone interested to experiment with alchemy, sound and their different possibilities of combination will be guided by Maria del Gran and Cristobal Echegaray. 30 April, 11-3pm, Kadoshi, Patan. Register at: 9801355173

Mauri Moonihana: Mauri Moonihana will be performing songs from her recent inspired album ‘Yoga Hara’ after a short tour of her painting exhibition ‘Mina Loves Kathmandu: More than Ice’ at Kathmandu Art.
27 April, 6-9pm, Le Shapo

Zakir Khan in Nepal: Winner of India’s Best Stand-up Comedy competition, Zakir Khan will be performing along with Seema Gadhia and Shujat Sairan from Nepal.
28 April, 5-5:30pm, Army Officers’ Club, Mall Road. Rs. 500 (special), Rs. 250 (normal). 9811975700

Urban jungle marathon: Visit the 'Urban jungle’ themed monthly market. Stalls feature fresh herbs, produce, house plants, flowers, food and drinks, Nepali art and craft, and second-hand items. There will be live music, face paintings, and a 'Paint & Sip' workshop for entertainment.
29 April, 1-7pm, Mekhla Art Cafe & Bar, Patan. 9811617770

Marwari Mahotsav: A festival showcasing tradition, culture and history of the Marwaris. 28 April-10am, Bhanumandir, 9811028895

Kusatseli XCM: A 27.7km cross country cycle marathon organized by Byasful Iyoli and Nepal Cycling Association at Kavre. 30 April, Kusatseli, Kavre, Rs. 1500 (package), Rs. 500 (registration fee only). 44190105

Music

Abhi Pokharel: Abhi Pokharel playing his indie originals and covers
27 April, 7-8pm, Pangaur’s Garden, Anmek, Mologa, Basantapur. 44175197

Maura Moonihana: Mauri Moonihana will be performing songs from her recent inspired album ‘Yoga Hara’ after a short tour of her painting exhibition ‘Mina Loves Kathmandu: More than Ice’ at Kathmandu Art.
27 April, 6-9pm, Le Shapo

The Midnight Riders: The Midnight Riders will be playing classic rock, blues, ballads and originals from their album ‘Fatra’.
27 April, 7-10pm,rocK, Restaurant and Bar,Scott's Court Mologa, (Namu). 44190417

Terrace Garden: Enjoy BBQ dishes along with spectacular views, sip a glass of wine or beer in the quirky shaded open-air garden area. 10am-10pm, Terrace Garden, Roddison House, Loospat, 44174128

Tasneem’s Kitchen: Visit this place for a unique authentic Indian food. Call and book before you go.
28 April, 12-1pm, Pulchowk. Rs. 299 (special), 9839999630

1905 Restaurant: Enjoy live music with grilled food items and a fine selection of craft beers and wine. The newly renovated restaurant is perfect for an undisturbed dining experience.
28 April, Mangroson Chowk, Ward 10. 44117140

Kava Restaurant: Sit back and relax with the hotel’s selection of cocktails, mocktails, wine and premium beverages. Ladies can enjoy a 50% discount on any beverage ordered 3pm-4am. minced meat, Srinivasa, Thamel, 44190109

Getaway

Bordersland Eco Resort: Peaceful moments with mango ringing holy bells, slowly transforms into a soft music party till night.—Celebrate the birthday of Lord Buddha at the eco-adventure resort.
30 April 4-1 May, Bordersland Eco Adventure Resort, Stoopkharka, (01) 4381425, 0142104111

Namo Buddha Resort: Constructed in traditional Newari style and surrounded by lush greenery, the resort is an oasis of peace and tranquility, offering spectacular views of the Himalayas on clear day. On Buddha Jayanti, a short tour to Namo Buddha and Triangul Yashi Monastery is proposed to provide refreshment and relief from the City stress.
Namo Buddha, Pharsa, 9811190606

Mystic Mountain: Situated amidst the forests of Nagarkot, the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort.
Kotrephi, (01) 500646

Tiger Palace Resort: Near the birth place of Lord Buddha, the newly built resort provides a great escape.
A huge swimming pool, attentive service, grand casino—you’re weekend plan will be a sure hit.
Kathmandu, (01) 5122000

Dwarka’s Resort: A holistic retreat, a chance to gain an ancient Vedic knowledge and philosophy of life for nature and soul, rest in majestic natural surroundings.
Dhulikhel, (07) 4900827
Devolving delivery

Hope that newly-elected local governments would speed up delayed post-quake reconstruction is fading

Rameshwar Bohara

A few local elections last year put mayors, village heads and ward committees in office, there was widespread expectation that much-delayed earthquake relief and reconstruction would gather pace. But nine months after local elections were held, there has been no perceptible difference in delivery. Only 15% of families displaced by the 2015 earthquakes have rebuilt their homes, and 85% are still living in temporary shelters, damaged buildings or in rented rooms.

Krishna Prasad Sapkota, former Chair of the Karnali district development committee, says bluntly: “We squandered the opportunity to expedite reconstruction after local elections.”

The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) claims that no earthquake-displaced family will have to live in temporary shelter by the monsoons in July. But that is hard to believe because more than 200,000 families have not even started rebuilding homes. Only 142,337 houses have been rebuilt so far, and 439,683 are under construction.

Just about every candidate contesting local elections in the 14 earthquake-affected districts had promised to speed up reconstruction if elected. But there isn’t much evidence that elections have improved accountability.

To be sure, some municipalities and village councils have set up reconstruction funds from which families whose reconstruction grants have been delayed can borrow. Some municipal and village councils are paying for masons and carpenters. People can also complain to their mayors of village councils if NRA engineers do not approve, or are not responsive.

However, in general the role of local governments in post-earthquake reconstruction has been reduced to that of a sticking plaster to the NRA and the national administration. As a result, people have lost hope that elections would make up for lost time in relief work.

“People had pinned their hopes on us, but we have not been given the power to decide,” admits Dhulikhel mayor Ashok Kumar Gyawali. “If local governments are not allowed to take charge, reconstruction won’t happen even in the next 10 years.”

Gyawali is also the coordinator of the Municipalities Association of Nepal (MuAN), and says the guidelines governing the NRA have prevented local governments from playing a part in post-earthquake reconstruction.

After the three tiers of elections last year, Nepal may have become a federal country with executive, legislative and judicial powers devolved to local governments, but the NRA has not undergone a similar restructuring. Its district-level structures continue to exist, but they report directly to Kathmandu, not to the new village councils or municipalities.

NRA spokesperson Bhusma Bhusal says restructuring the existing set-up and revising guidelines would create even more confusion about reconstruction, slowing it down further. He adds: “Local governments do not have the human resources and institutional capacity to lead reconstruction. They are not even able to spend their own budgets.”

Gyawali of the MuAN strongly disagrees, saying that local governments are already distributing social security allowances and distributing reconstruction grants will not be difficult. Municipalities and village councils are demanding that they be given the authority to at least deploy engineers and distribute housing grants.

Former NRA CEO Govind Raj Pokharel is not hopeful that will happen. “It’s not just the NRA, even line ministries do not want to decentralise their power, and donors also doubt that local government will distribute reconstruction grants impartially and transparently.”

In all the record interviews, NRA and donor officials say they do not trust newly-elected mayors and village council chiefs who they say just want their hands on the money and are not really interested in speeding up reconstruction. However, Min Bahadur Shrestha of the group Humanitarian Accountability Monitoring Initiative (HAMI) says that is the wrong approach: “We should not exclude local governments from post-earthquake reconstruction, we should let them show that they are accountable and build their capacity.”

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Darkest Hour

If ever there was a feel good movie about Winston Churchill, the Oscar nominated film "Darkest Hour" would be it. A story about Churchill’s travails during arguably the lowest point in the war, the film lifts up the viewer giving us an intimate, moving, intense, sometimes somewhat historically inaccurate story about Churchill’s rise to fame that made him a household name, even today.

Directed by Joe Wright and starring Gary Oldman, in the performance of his career as Churchill, which won him the Best Actor award this year, "Darkest Hour" will hold your attention even if you know the outcome of events, riveted by Oldman whose every moment on screen is as precious as gold.

Wright’s direction has always had style, he is the director of "Atonement" (2007) among others, and his sure sense of visuals brings this film out of what could have been the boring confines of a biopic. As a result, we have a carefully put together film that tells the story of the crisis that Britain is plunged into when the entire British infantry was cornered by the Germans, their only refuge being the beach at Dunkirk.

As hinted by the title, the situation is dire: three hundred thousand men, and with them Britain’s only real hope of defense against the Germans, are left stranded at Dunkirk, the then Conservative Party Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain is forced to step down for being too soft on the Nazis, and the Conservative Party’s only viable candidate turns out to be Winston Churchill, a man who, at the time, did not command the respect he does now due to his track record of errors at Gallipoli, and his stance on India.

The film portrays Churchill’s struggle through a nightmarish moment in Britain’s history at a time when defeat and massive loss of life seemed imminent, and even while we know they come out of it. It is still nerve-wracking to watch these events unfold, almost telling the new Prime Minister with each new development.

How Churchill perseveres, aided by those closest to him including his wife Clementine (Kristen Scott Thomas), and his secretary Elizabeth Layton, played by the lovely Lily James, who takes direction and transcribes his now famous speeches, gives us the effect of seeing into his innermost life, even while it is mostly fictionalised, bringing us to a greater understanding of this character who clearly had his flaws but was perhaps the only person who could have held Britain through World War II, with his particular pugnacity, perseverance, thick-skinned carlessness, and extreme loyalty to king and country.

Do not expect a bore of a film just because you think you know the story. Once you start, you are in the hands of a master, one that will make you feel you know this famous man, and want to become friends with him, indulging his voracious appetite, and even his little vices because of his great charisma to have flaws and to overcome them. 

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande
nepalitimes.com
Watch trailer online
nepalitimes.com
Himal Khabarpatrika 22-28 April

Himal Khabarpatrika: This week marks the triumph of the 2006 Democratic Movement. How do you recall those hectic days? Devendra Raj Pandey: After 1990, people were growing frustrated with political parties and the Maoist insurgency was escalating. Yet, civil society was passive. The royal coup in 2005 gave us new energy, and we announced a civil movement for peace and democracy.

Why was civil society passive? This is what happens when you have the desired political system, but the leaders do not deliver. Democracy was already restored in 1990, so we did not have to fight for it. We were disillusioned with elected leaders, but we could not ask them to step aside and let us govern the country.

Why has civil society failed to create the kind of political order it envisioned? You can change the regime, but not the attitude of political leaders. After 1990 and 2006, our leaders considered money instead of people as their source of power. The general people or civil society were responsible because they stood united to overthrow authoritarian regimes, but are divided when political parties come to power. They never question the party they belong to.

How has Nepal’s political course been after 2006? Nepal was run by political cartels until recently, with a syndicate of top leaders taking all important decisions, and they were doing it not to serve the country but to cling on to power. The transition to federalism was long and bumpy, but we did not have the luxury to undo everything and start afresh. Even after three years of elections under the new Constitution, Madhesi, Janajati, women and Dalits have political grievances. But there is a sense of political stability, and I am hopeful now to get away from existing political parties and the emergence of a new political culture.

Are you suspicious of the communist government? There is speculation that the communist government will curtail civil rights and impose authoritarianism. I do not think so. We cannot regress. Democracies are under attack, and popular ultranationalists are emerging around the globe. Our democracy is in much better shape. The only problem is that our leaders never seem to retire or improve. A politician returns to power after 12 years, but his style and attitude does not change. It looks like I am pointing to NC President Deuba, but this is true right across the political spectrum.

Has civil society been donor-driven? With financial assistance comes political agenda. Soon after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the Soviet Union collapsed and several new nations were born. The Western powers invested heavily in transforming these new nations into democracies. That was when they began funding Nepal’s civil society movement. If we allow them to decide our state structure, role and distribution of resources, it will be harmful to us.

Why did civil society not intervene when the Maoists tried to push ethnic identity-based federalism? Civil society was polarised, too. While some supported the Maoist agenda, others tried to full them. There was no space for neutrality like us.

But none of you came up with ideas to reconcile ethno-centrism and regionalism. Who listens to ideas in Nepal? I personally believe that we must accept that the State has historically excluded Janajatis, Dalits and women. If we make this acceptance a point of departure, we can negotiate to mainstream them excluded communities. But how can we even start a negotiation when you and the debate with. This country was created by Prithvi Narayan Shah. A radical idea was countered by another radical idea, and there was no middle-ground.

How can grievances of Madhesia, Janajatis and women be addressed? They need a leadership that can articulate their voice and negotiate with the government. They do not have a leader at the moment. For example, Madhesia are being led by dishonest and opportunistic leaders. It is easy for the government to coopt them. But what if Madhesia explodes against its own so-called mainstream? It is a responsibility of the government to foresee future crises and avert them through negotiations.

What’s next after the Constitution, elections and federalism? Creating three levels of government is real devolution, and the Centre should no longer try to retain the unitary system. Tax payers are concerned that the State will now have to pay for too many ministers and MPs. If our elected representatives want to address these concerns, they must renounce their sense of entitlement.

The agenda of stability and prosperity seems to have struck a chord with the people. I do not understand why we are suddenly after prosperity at a time when we have failed to deliver even development. The Prime Minister is making one grandiose promise after another. But where is the mechanism to realise these dreams? A few ministers have hit the ground running, but overall the system has not improved.

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Mukesh Pokhrel
in Western Nepal

Prolonged drought, absence of irrigation and outmigration of young men have left many areas of Nepal’s midwestern hills suffering a food crisis in a vicious cycle that is forcing even more people to move out. 

Terrace farms in mountainous areas are falling, withering the soil, dusty slopes. The villages are mostly populated by the elderly, overworked women who have to trudge longer and longer to fetch water, and emaciated children.

In Tajamakh village of remote Humla district, successive monsoons have failed, and the fields are overgrown with dry weeds. Amar Rokaya says he can feed his children only once a week. The family ate up their entire stock of corn and midlast year, including seeds. There is nothing to plant this year even if the rains come.

Rokaya works breaking stones for a road, and does not earn enough to feed his family. Parts of other midwestern mountains in Magu, Bajura and Sefang have also been reeling under a four-year drought.

“People are feeling the village and moving to cities. Only those who have nowhere else to go are stuck here.”

Water sources have mostly dried up, forcing the women to walk for hours down to the river and climb back up to collect water. In Humla village, women from its 400 households have to walk one hour for water.

Last year, 6,500 tons of grain were transported to Bajura, which has been dependent on shipments for decades, but no one remembers it being this bad. Min Prasad Kushal of the Bajura District Agriculture Office says there is a deficit of 13,000 tons of rice in his district alone. “It is now a battle to save at least the paddy seeds for the monsoon,” he says.

The food crisis in western Nepal predates climate change. The government in faraway Kathmandu never invested in boosting farm productivity by building irrigation canals. It was more lucrative to fly or truck in rice, and everyone along the way got their share.

Western Nepal has always had droughts, and the current extreme weather may have been exacerbated by climate change. With global warming, for instance, farmers have found that new harmful insects are moving up the mountains. Mosquitoes were rare here, and farmers never considered them a problem. Now, the insects are devastating the few crops that are there.

Fungi, Khe insects used to be a nuisance only in the Tarai, now they have moved up to the midhills. Tomato farmers are battling a new type of pest they didn’t even have a name for, and have called it Tiza. Ram Krishna Subedi of National Crop Directorate says: “Insects we never knew are marching up the slopes, damaging crops of the few farmers who do not depend on the rain.”

Scientists say that average temperatures in the Himalayas are rising twice as fast as the global average. The effect can be seen in shrinking glaciers and receding snowlines, but also in falling ground water and erratic weather.

And it is not just the midwestern hills where farmers have been dealing with drought and insects. The magnitude of the problem may vary, but it is widespread across the hills. Winter rains are becoming more sparse, and when it does rain there
are unseasonal blizzards, farmers say.

Climate scientist Ngamindra Dahal confirms that winters have become drier in the central Himalaya every year, and wheat harvests are the first casualty. Nepal had been producing 1.5 million tons of wheat every year, but it is projected to go down by 20% in the coming years.

Nearly 80% of Nepal's farmers still depend on rain-fed agriculture, which means they are at the mercy of the weather which is becoming more and more unpredictable. Only 20% arable land has irrigation, and most of that is in the Tarai, with few irrigation facilities in these hills.

Adding to the problem is outmigration of young men, leaving fields fallow. And as soon as the man of the house migrates to India, Malaysia or the Gulf, his wife and children move to the towns. There, they buy food from the money he sends home and pay for the children's education. Their farms up in the mountains are abandoned, and go back to being jungle.

Ten mountain districts like Taplejung, Panchthar, Palpa and Saptari have witnessed negative population growth in the last decade. Some of them have lost up to a third of their population. Twenty-seven of Nepal's mountain districts showed a decline in total population between 2001 and 2011. Demographers say the hills and mountains will be nearly emptied by 2050, if this trend persists.

In contrast, Tarai districts like Bhojpur, Morang, Sunsari and Rupandehi have seen population growth higher than the national average because of people moving down from the mountains.

In 2001, more than 156,000 hectares of terrace farms in the mountains were under paddy cultivation. Last year the area was down to 137,000 hectares. Areas under other crops like wheat and barley are also shrinking.

Agriculture expert Shankar Sapkota summarises the crisis in simple terms: “Migration has become an easy means of livelihood, but its impact on our agriculture economy is huge.”

(With inputs from Pradip Singh in Rupandehi)
Unified Groucho–Lennonists

Many of you have been taking the

Manya beside this week arduous

pilgrimage around town this

season to ask: “Will the UML and Maoists

unite?” To which my reply has consistently

been: “I am an Aus, not an Ausite.”

Indeed, one would have to be an

apologist to seriously predict if the

parties are aligned properly for the

Unified Maoist-Leninists to conjugate with

the Madhesis. Like some traditional

arranged marriages in this country, the

match needs to work. While one neighbour

is trying to best be for the knaves of Holy

murderary by never paying for the diary,

the other neighbour is trying to best and to

exert the influence.

The work of the booklet, as Comrade

Frank Zappa used to say, is the upside.

How many members from each party will

be commissars in the Central Committee?

Who will be Carl? Who will be the Great

Hippie? Will the united party’s symbol

be the hammer and sickle, or a sniper truck

and bulldozer so as to move with the times?

Comrade Awesome knows that once

Comrade Dilly plays Karl, Valdemar Yehey and

Mao in the great revolution in the sky, he

is the only one with the stance to lead the

united party. But UML is imported to get

there, and as a Director of the Heart at

he is sure EU will stand him on the back

when he (EU) is not looking. He doesn’t

believe in verbal assurances, and given past

experience won’t even accept it in writing.
El Comandante wants the entire ‘Pilgrimage’

to bear witness to Ollis promise to relinquish

Madhupur after three years and hand him

pang chairmanship.

Being communist, the boys are heavily

into anniversaries. They had slammed

the party factionalism on Lenin’s 138th

Birthday on 22 April, but a dispute

over which banner to put up during the

ceremony totally negated the insurgency.

Now, they are aiming for either International

Day of the Iliad, a day known as “Mayday

(Madip)” But at the rate things are going,

they will likely miss that deadline too.

The next available birthday on the calendar

is Uncle Karl Marx’s 202th on May 5th.

Even that is too close, so the only hope is to aim

for October 23 which is Groucho Marx’s birthday

conveniently the same week as John Lennon.

That way we can also

change the united Party

name to Communist Party

of Nepal (Unified Groucho

Lennonists).