Nature calls

After a cholera epidemic swept through Nepal in 2018, killing 300 people, mostly children, the government was forced to act. With help from UNICEF, it launched a campaign to make all of Nepal’s districts open defecation free. The drive has saved many thousands of lives.

A toilet is no longer just a place to relieve oneself, it has become a health facility. At the end of another National Sanitation Week, three more districts including Lalitpur have been declared open-defecation free. Nearly 97% of Nepali households now have latrines.

The campaign has shortcomings: many toilets are poorly maintained and lack water supply. However, Siddhi Shrestha of UNICEF says, “Nepal’s progress in sanitation is a global success story. It changed the mindset of people, a toilet at home became a matter of pride, more than just infrastructure.”

The health outcome has been dramatic. In 2011, nearly 7,000 children in Nepal died of diarrhoeal dehydration, and it was the third biggest killer of children under five. By last year, that figure dropped to less than 1,000.

But Bhushan Tuladhar of UN-Habitat has a word of caution: “While we celebrate Nepal’s success we also have to work on managing what has accumulated in the toilets.”

Indeed, pit latrines and urban sewage have now become serious health hazards across Nepal.

Kathmandu is one of 22 remaining districts still not open defecation free. The capital’s breakthrough and unparalleled growth has poisoned its rivers and turned the air toxic – making the city a symbol of governance failure. There are token cleanups and slogans, but no political will to address the crisis (see page 14-15). Smart choice are those which treat and recycle their waste. Kathmandu is not a smart city, it has become ugly and dangerous for its inhabitants.

Nepal urgently needs sewage treatment plants, and a mechanism for the removal, recycling and disposal of fecal sludge. In the absence of government initiatives, private entrepreneurs across the country are stepping in to set up collection services, and produce biogas and fertiliser from waste.

Says Aju Dangol of the Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO) “It is time to think beyond toilets. Unless human excreta is safely disposed, we will continue to face health risks.”

Sania Awale
GETTING OUR SHIT TOGETHER

At personal, family, community or national levels, we Nepalis are not very good at thinking about cleanliness and high hygienic standards. Waste management is not our forte. Littering is a national trait, we are generally programmed to dump garbage at our own doorstep, we let household sewage flow into the drainage system which empties into the river we worship. Jiscuit missionaries who were the first European travelers to go through the Nepali Valley on route from Tibet to India in the 17th century described the towns here as the dirtiest they had seen in their journey. In those days, that was saying something.

Recently, Kathmandu unilaterally opened defections in the streets within one generation. But other than that, we have regressed in every other aspect of urban management, acquiring an international reputation for polluting our rivers, poisoning the air, and tolerating scorchers.

Google Maps shows the top news items to watch in pollution outpatient garbage. Airport Kathmandu. Airport and this pop-up fecal toilets and a garbage building redolent with the odour of sewage. Kathmandu is no longer known as the city of temples with historic temples tower, but a dump with garbage landfills along a constantly leaking river, and air so toxic it is unbearable.

We spoke to entomologists, soil scientists, ecologists and governance experts to get to the bottom of this chronic malaise and pick up after ourselves. They said the problem is not confined to Nepal: disregard for waste management permeates发达 countries from Panama to China.

Are there cultural reasons that span religious, cultural and nationalities for this regional inability to recognize and handle waste? Is it the inherent Sattam in our societies? Does it have a gender angle in our patriarchies? Are individualism, greed and a lack of commonsens acts? Are we hardwired to allow our waste in our own waste?

Finding an excuse in cultural determinism for unhygienic behaviour is a cop-out. The reasons lie instead in the failure of education, coding of governance, lack of consciousness, in corruption and impunity. It is filthy politics that force people to live in filthy, dirty streets are a metaphor for dirty politics.

We are confronted with evidence of chronic state failure everywhere we move around Nepal: the putrid Bagmati government hospitals which spread infections instead of curing them, vehicle emissions that have made Kathmandu so toxic the daily pollution average is five times higher than the WHO threshold.

Nepal’s coldest temples are the dirtiest parts of our towns. Cremon street, instead of evoking transcendence and spirituality, familiarizes like carcasses. Dying forests in smog and smell of dead bodies, but the gods have been appeased, they go home bearing mounds of trash and the gory remains of sacrifices.

Cleaning up the Bagmati every Saturday is a valiant gesture, but also because it does not address the structural root of this pollution problem. Two weeks ago this newspaper printed an investigation into how plastic bag bans have been sabotaged by successive governments. These manufacturers enjoy political protection.

Plastic bottles are the new global scourge. We reported that Langtang Valley alone has millions discarded plastic bottles, used once and thrown away,TxQ not placing a value on the bottles, they are now being collected for recycling. To reduce single use plastic trash, Nepal needs to upscale such upcycling. This week, the world marks World Environment Day with the theme #BeatPlasticPollution. There is growing global awareness about ocean plastic that is killing marine life and consuming seafood.

AutoSick this issue Page 14-15 look at the government’s open-defecation free campaign which, although it has raised awareness and reduced child malnutrition, has concentrated on building latrines but not on sludge disposal and management supply. There is a danger they will spread the infections they were supposed to control.

A circulation is judged by the way it manages and distributes its waste. Ministers sweeping streets for TxQ cameras, or donning masks to test vehicle odors as a show for show. The government has to go far beyond wokeness with policy reform and its implementation.

Smart cities are those which have learnt to generate energy, products and food from a circle of raw materials from their waste. To be smart, Nepal’s municipalities do not have to reinvent the wheel. The solutions are all there. Just Google it.

What's trending

ONLINE PACKAGES

POOP POWER

Nepal’s odour crisis is not only detrimental to health and tourism. But how well is it affecting 12 per cent of the population who suffer from chronic conditions? How much do you know about the cause and effects of this crisis?

ADOLESCENTS SPEAK

Although Nepal has shown remarkable progress in child and maternal health, there are still a few areas which need to be addressed. What are the challenges faced by adolescents in Nepal and how can we support them?

NIGAD ON THE SPOT

Himachal Pradesh plans to make your dream airport in Pokhara and Bhairawa, not Nepal. Does Nepal need a 4th international airport? Om Astha Rai, (91,2). Many thanks to the Nepal Times for raising this issue.

Anil Bhattrai

A hub airport requires a strong national airline to feed passengers as a global network. Nepal Airlines would need to form a potential link between SE Asia, North America and Europe. But this market is already saturated, even Indian carriers cannot compete with Gulf airlines. A thought provoking read at a time when megajets are all the rage.

Fraser Sugden

Better develop both Simara and Janakpur airports instead of degrading the whole airport system of Nepal by building millions of trees for Nigad airport.

Bhaskar Gautham

Regarding safety, geography, weather and location, Nigad is a good choice. Planes cannot approach Simara runway from the Nigad. It can handle the biggest passenger jets like A380 from both sides. This is not possible in Kathmandu even with expansion. Nigad will significantly contribute to our economy.

Milan Neupane

CLASH OF CULTURES

False pride forces one into the corner (Clash of cultures in Bhaktapur). Sune Bhattrai, (90,3). The nationalisation of Nepal communists will push the country further behind. German insensitivity and objectsivity is commendable.

Nirmal Ghimire

Nepalis negotiating with foreign doctors have never been able to articulate their interests. Use of foreign materials and technology in rebuild monuments is a cultural imposition. It lacks local knowledge and is also not sustainable.

Alayna M Ball

Does Nepal need a 4th international airport? By Om Astha Rai

A letter to the editor, a letter to the editor. Here’s the story on the proposed fourth international airport described in the Nepal Times last week. Some argue that it is a bit of an overkill and unnecessary expenditure for the country. Others say Nepal has to think about its growth and development and competitiveness. The clash of cultures is still ongoing by giving online for the most trusted and commented stories this week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most commented

Most visited online page

Clash of cultures in Bhaktapur by Om Astha Rai

The cancellation of a 700 million German proposal to renovate Bhaktapur’s damaged monuments has yet again raised the question of reconstruction, and how this can be carried out. Before Nepal, the German Chancellory’s plan had focussed on the area’s cultural heritage who are much more involved in what they want. This story also provides an insightful online article. Visit nepalnews.com to read some of them.

Most popular on Twitter

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Nepali airport and expropriation will result in 1,600 hectares of land being divided, worth about $4.2 million. The land is supposed to be used for tourism development or turn into a national park.

Prithu Rana

The government has to be more careful in making tourism development plans. We need to be careful about how much land we need for tourism. There is a need for a clear vision and planning for tourism development.

Swaraj Nepal

The government has to be more careful in making tourism development plans. We need to be careful about how much land we need for tourism. There is a need for a clear vision and planning for tourism development.

Nepal Times

It’s a sad day when the Bhaktapur Central Square is to be covered in a certain historic museum. This project is worth more than $20 million.

Anil Angi

This is a happy day for many of us. Thank you for your understanding. This is not only a lesson for our cultural preservation but also for our social development and growth. Thank you for your understanding.

Weekly reader poll 413

Do you support the government’s large-scale expropriation projects?

Total votes: 129

Yes: 57%
No: 43%
I don’t know 9%

Weekly reader poll 414

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Nepali mothers and an Irish daughter
Nepal was far ahead of its neighbours in protecting the reproductive rights of its women

I am the daughter of a formidable campaigner for women’s reproductive rights. Decades ago, when such issues were not part of the playbook for development activists, my mother, a medical doctor, began organizing family planning programmes after seeing women die in childbirth, shifting from hospital work into public health.

She established health posts for maternal and infant care. She fought to convince her community of the rights of women and girls, including for access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education. And most important, she instituted a network of female health workers all over Nepal.

For a woman raised at a time when it was unusual for girls to be educated, my mother has travelled long distances. Not only did she fight for Nepali women to have a choice, but she ensured that her two daughters had the same privilege I was accorded.

I am myself now the mother of a daughter, who will soon enter childhood. She will then make her own decisions, including about her reproductive choices. My daughter is an Irish national.

So I spent the weekend of 26 May, during the Irish referendum on abortion rights, wallowing between crying with joy in one moment, and overwhelmed with anxiety about the outcome at another. My colleague Aslih Maudy, who is Irish, wrote movingly about her own experience of emotion and elucidation that weekend. And about the need for other countries to move toward that arc of justice for girls and women.

Many Irish women and men travelled back to Leedec to cast their yes votes. The hashtag HomeToVote was trending on Twitter that weekend. The resolve to give women rights over their bodies was quite incredible.

I write this not only because I care about my daughter’s rights, but because I believe that the rights of so many women and girls in Ireland will hopefully change as a result of this vote. But above all, I write this also because it is occasions like this that are so important to me.

Hats off
South Asian universities entered World Environment Day (1 June) by taking an agreement at the global scale every year since 1994.

**Valuable brand**

Bilal Khan is the ‘Most Valuable Brand’ of Turkey by Brand Finance, which has been researching and evaluating hundreds of brands at a global scale every year since 1994.

**Buckling up for Barca**

Ethihad Airways will be flying Abu Dhabi, UK and Barcelona five times a week on two new services EY352/3 from 21 November.

**Haji bass**

Tennis player Haji Bass and his family arrived in London for the big match at the All England Club.

**Child care**

SAAEC and UNICEF renewed a Cooperation Agreement to continue collaborating on issues related to awareness, action, development, protection and promotion of children in South Asia.

**Green hotels**

Marking World Environment Day, Hana Amman Resort and Spa enterprise Fish Tail Lodge, Parkuru and Jagaur Lake, Chitwan, turned the use of plastic bags and organized cleaning and tree plantation programs in their respective areas.

**Prabhakar Bank**

Siddhika Rai
Hiking with Jimmy

Col Roberts didn’t just pioneer trekking tourism in Nepal, he even invented the verb ‘to trek’

Little Sengalgy was fascinated by the birds, brightly coloured frugivores, garish impyan monkeys and strutting Chinese golden pheasants. His small fingers gripped the wire mesh of their cages whilst the sunbeams hit their feathers.

The speckled grey guineas fowl found in the rough grass of Col Jimmy Roberts’ Pokhara garden, and his flock of quail cashed nearby. The flinty peak of Mt Machapuchre gloomed in the high distance, and the red polamettia and orange marigolds struggled his land. Over the dry-stone wall, the murmur of Sherpa voices could be heard as they sorted Mountain Travel’s tents and camping gear between treks.

Col Jimmy enjoyed an eccentric retirement, in the same vein that he had lived an unusual life. Raising rare and endangered pheasants became his passion, and he introduced the delicacy of domestic quail eggs to the finer restaurants of Kathmandu. Next to the trekking depot, his stone house in Pokhara had been built to suit his needs and those of his Sherpa attendants – one open living room, no spare bedroom and an upstairs loo with the “best view in the world”, as he proudly told Princess Anne during her 1981 visit. Along with the pleasures, a succession of liver and white spangles were his preferred company.

Unmarried and solitary by nature, Col Jimmy was the only son of a Gurkha headmaster. He returned to South Asia after being sent “home” to school in England (King’s Canterbury, which I never heard him mention) and military training at Sandhurst. The product of a British Army career, he had a distinguished and highly decorated record in India, Malaysia and Singapore. He always said that the few women he ever met were limited to the sisters of fellow Gurkha officers.

Indeed, Jimmy went climbing. He pioneered Himalayan peaks in the days when access was constrained by tensions between China, India and Tibet, and visits to Nepal were “by invitation only”. As he put it: “At that time, for a mountaineer at least, the access of Nepal was far more potent than Tibet or Bhutan. And in the mountain book, only the chapter titl...”

He became a legendary Himalayan mountaineer and explorer, bagging many first ascents and setting to folly below the sacred summit of Mt Machapuchre. Disdaining to join John Hunt’s 1953 Everest expedition, which he himself had been shortlisted to lead, Col Jimmy helped with oxygen logistics than preferred to explore alone, making the first ascent of Mera Peak which he dismissed as “rather over 21,000 feet and not difficult”.

Jimmy first came to live in Nepal when appointed Military Attaché with the British Embassy Kathmandu in 1958, then stayed on. By the time my young boys were enthralled by his extravagant photographs in Pokhara, Col Jimmy’s mountain days were curtailed by artistic hies and falling health, and Mountain Travel had joined forces with Tiger Tops. But he could still describe every trek trail, twist, and turn from memory, and was relied on to compose the Sherpa naming as he understood upper Khumbu family dynamics better than anyone.

Without being able to walk them himself, Jimmy devised new circuits such as the Royal Trek for Prince Charles, which I recall for him with Pertemba Sherpa in 1980, and the Prince’s Trek south of Pokhara. His stature in Nepal was secure as the creator of the trekking industry and inventor of the word ‘trek’, derived from a South African Bantoo word meaning ‘an arduous journey on foot’. A shy man, often gruff and never profliate with words, his writing surprised with a poetical grace and elegant turn of phrase. The invention of the trekking business was Jimmy’s gift to the Sherpas, the people whom he greatly appreciated for their mountain skills but whose lives he saw as vulnerable from closed trade routes and cancelled expeditions of 1960’s geopolitics. In many ways one could say Jimmy dedicated his life to the Sherpas, ensuring that change brought them options and livelihoods. He wrote: “A wind blows across the highest of mountains of Asia and ruffles the trees on the crests of houses in the valleys below. Doors swing open and others slam shut.”

Mountain Travel was registered in 1964, and for four years Nepal’s only trekking agency. His first trek group were six American Indians to Everest Base Camp in 1965, and he worried about the impacts of expanding beyond his set of camping equipment for eight clients. Today there are 2,500 trekking agencies, nearly 200,000 trekkers and over 2,000 mountainers annually, and mountain tourism provides income and employment for many more Nepal.

Jimmy opened up Nepal’s network of trekking trails and hill villages to generations of walkers who might otherwise be daunted by the world’s highest mountain range. Debate rage about climbing expeditions, particularly on Everest, but there is no doubt that the country benefits from the royalties received, the jobs created and helicopters hired by this valuable long staying and goal-obessed section of Nepal’s tourism market.

It might have seemed like a more innocent age, but in his quiet way Col Jimmy was preoccupied about the changes to come. Just before his death in 1997 he worried about “dirty camp sites and trails littered with rubbish ... and crowds of tourists invading the peace of the mountain”. Even then, when Nepal’s visitors number hundreds of thousands a year, he lobbied for the advantages of quality high-value tourism: “Why are we selling our beautiful mountains so cheaply?”

“Trekking first brought me to Nepal, and the spirit of mountain hiking is lodged deep in the hearts of my two sons as part of the fabric of their childhood. Without Jimmy, and his stubborn persistence to realize his dream and vision, things would not have been the same.”

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Nepal, wherever you are.
A Nepali book is translated into English. Writer and translation researcher Manishree Thapa, who recently rendered Indra Bhakta Rai’s novel Aja Ramita Chhn into English, agrees that translation has given Nepali literature greater visibility.

“Indra Bhakta Rai’s work is so important as India’s best writers of his generation, but the language gap has prevented him from being read widely,” said Thapa. “Nepal just doesn’t have a high enough profile in the world, other than stories about disaster or trekking. I don’t think it is the quality of Nepali literature, but its powerlessness in the world that keeps it from being read widely.”

However, many others believe that it is not just translation at fault, but the overall quality of Nepali literature itself. “Nepali literature does not experiment so much with themes, techniques, structures,” said Narayan Wagle, whose book Pallapais Cafe was translated into English, French, Korean, and Spanish. “We must first read literature from other languages, so that we know what the world is writing and where we stand in that spectrum. Translation is not such a respected profession here, and unless translators find their work rewarding, a two-way exchange cannot flourish.”

With the recent publication of the first professional, peer-reviewed journal in Nepal, and Nepal Academy’s ongoing effort to publish a translator’s directory, one has reason to hope translation will slowly become more professional and popular. However, it might take longer for Nepal’s 100 or so local languages to get even that exposure.

“At another level, Nepal’s many languages have to struggle even harder. Maithili, the second most popular language in Nepal, is spoken by 31% of the people and is known to be one of the oldest Indo-European languages. The 14th century Maithili poet Vidyapati influenced later writers in many languages, but Maithili enjoys a far less realized status today.”

“Maithili continues to produce quality literature, but nobody gets to read it, sometimes not even Maithili readers,” noted Janakpur-based writer Brijendra Bimal. “Nobody wants to invest in Maithili literature because the market is so small. That could change if we provided mother tongue instruction in primary schools so that children grow up to appreciate, create, and invest in their own language.”

Exports of Newari, with 2% speakers and a prolific culture, agree that regional literature is losing out to modernity. “Newari writers have a problem: finding publishers, and then finding readers,” said Yogya Ratha Dhal, vice-chancellor of Nepal Bhais Academy. It may take a long time for Nepal to improve the quality and quantity of its translation and gain the world’s attention, but in the meantime, Rita Chaudhary says intra-language translations have great potential.

Chaudhary is director of the National Book Trust of India which does translations of Indian books into other regional languages. She said: “This way, regional literatures stretch one another.”

ManishreeThapa agreed that books in Nepal’s languages need to be translated into other Nepali languages, too: “Nepali’s literature in other languages like Maithili, Nepal Bhais, must be translated into Nepali so that Nepal’s literature becomes more inclusive and diverse.”

**WRITERS WITHOUT BORDERS**: Associate writer Rita Chaudhary (above), right in a panel discussion at the 22nd Nepal International Book Fair in Kathmandu last week.

Her book, Christmas Days reached a global audience only after it was translated into English.
A

Although Nepal has shown remarkable progress in child and maternal health, somewhat less attention is paid to the needs of adolescents in the 10-19 age group who make up a quarter of the country’s population. Adolescence is a critical developmental transition from childhood to adulthood which entails changes at all levels: physical, emotional, psychological, and social. These changes bring with them special health needs and risks.

Yet, the specific problems of this age group are overlooked by health care providers and the government. Surveys have shown that adolescent teenagers do not get answers about reproductive health, contraceptive use, or sexually transmitted diseases. Parents are not much help, either. I have irregular periods, and my gynaecologist just gave me medicines without explaining what was wrong. As I stopped taking them, I had irregular menses: I don’t know what to do. Who am I supposed to ask?” said 16-year-old Nacha Thapa who often misses school because of her condition.

All the girls interviewed for a recent Nyay Times focus group said it would have been much easier if there was a separate health facility for adolescents where they would feel comfortable and open to share problems, without feeling rushed or judged. Both girls and boys in the survey also said their schools did not explain poverty and reproductive health adequately.

“Our understanding is book-based. We know definitions and basic concepts which I cannot apply in real life,” said 17-year-old Sunita Adhikari. “I know what menstruation is, but I don’t know what is actually happening inside my body. I don’t know what causes cramps and how to ease it.”

Even in Kathmandu, there aren’t separate sections in hospitals, and teenagers are directed to adult doctors where they may be too shy to talk. Unsatisfactory treatment and lack of privacy are other factors.

Many teenagers will be voting age soon and preparing them for life’s struggles should be a critical part of the education they get. But because of the lack of guidance from parents and teachers, they turn to peers or the internet for information, both of which give inadequate or inaccurate information.

All this leads to mental stress and anxiety in many adolescents. A survey showed that one in every five teen in Nepal suffers from some sort of mental disorder, and suicide is the leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds worldwide. Cultivating a safe and non-judgemental environment for adolescents is therefore of key importance.

Dukshang Sherpa

Let’s talk about them: They want to know more about their health, but don’t have the courage to talk to anyone.

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Teenagers and counsellors share more about reproductive health – have anyone to ask?

Get to know what Nepali teenagers have to say about their experience as adolescents, and find out what they worry about the most. One-on-one interviews with young men and women who are caught between childhood and adulthood, and their counsellors.

“ITalk to my friends and older cousins, or go to Google to look up information, but I still cannot say that I know about contraception. We never really had in-depth lessons in school, and we never spoke about it at home.

The Nepal government developed a National Adolescent Health and Development Strategy in 2000 and revised it in 2015. In 2011, a National ASRH (Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health) Program Implementation Guidance and a National ASRH Communication Strategy were introduced. Adolescent health was also given priority in the National Health Policy 2014.

Nepal is well placed in terms of plans and guidelines, but there are big gaps in implementation. The Family Health Division has set up over 1,000 Adolescent Friendly Services (AFS) centres throughout the country, with at least 11 in each district. But only 16 are certified. In a recent visit, one of the clinics in Kathmandu was understaffed and adolescents did not have enough information about where it was located. None of the adolescents or school teachers interviewed for this article knew about government AFS centres, or counselling centres.

Brijendra Pratap of UNICEF says: “There is no mechanism for adolescent health care at urban areas. We need a multisectoral and coordinated effort. The government and development partners need to work closely.”

(Some names have been changed)
The struggle to save democracy and free press in the Philippines

Rameshwor Bohara
P. Manila

E
ev


even though it is a country with a liberal constitution and vibrant civil society which struggled long and hard against dictatorship, the Philippines is another proof of just how fragile these freedoms can be. The southeast Asian nation is a warning to Nepal that despotism is never too far away.

Just like Nepal, the Philippines has suffered a Maoist insurgency (see box). And although the conflict in Nepal ended after ten years in 2006, the New People’s Army in the Philippines is still fighting the world’s longest running Maoist war.

Philippine strongman Ferdinand Marcos was elected to power in 1965, but gradually took over and ruled as a corrupt dictator until he was overthrown in a People Power movement in 1986. In Nepal, the first democratically elected government was dismissed by a royal coup in 1960, marking the beginning of three decades of a partyless absolute monarchy which also ended in 1990 after a People’s Movement.

The oscillation between dictatorship and democracy in both countries has followed a parallel trajectory, which is why the populist despotism of the current President Rodrigo Duterte, who was elected two years ago, can be instructive to Nepal show just how easy it is for a democratic country to slide back into authoritarianism.

Duterte did what most elected strongmen do: exploit the disarray and corruption in established democratic parties, rible public frustration with nationalism, be outspokenly abusive towards the traditional elite, silence critics in media and civil society with threats, and use populist strong-arm tactics to control crime. In fact, Duterte was a Trumpian even before the United States elected Donald Trump.

As mayor of the Mindanao city of Davao, Duterte is credited to have cleaned up the city’s drug scene and violent crime. He promised to do the same throughout the Philippines if elected. He boasted of having personally killed drug pushers. The Filipino people, disillusioned with weak and corrupt rulers and fed up with drugs and crime, rewarded him with a landslide in 2016. His popularity rating is still above 80%.

The Philippine Congress is still debating the reinstatement of the death penalty but that isn’t stopping Duterte from ordering the police to hunt down criminals. There are no arrests, no charges, no trials, and police have killed 4,231 people since Duterte took office. And that is just the official count, human rights groups say the death toll exceeds 10,000. Many are innocent, or minor offenders.

I have interviewed retired police, and they confirmed the killers are not vigilantes, it is the police who plant evidence on the victims,” says Reuters reporter in Manila, Manuel Mogato. What Duterte is doing in the Philippines mirrors what is happening across the world: democratically-elected demagogues are abusing the state apparatus to silence critics. Manila-based advocate Johnny Goyos says bluntly: “A lot is happening now in the Philippines in the same scale, but there is no democracy. I could be silenced at any time.”

Duterte hasn’t stopped at suspected drug peddlers. Nine journalists critical of his war on drugs have been killed since he came to office, all shot by pillion-riding assailants. Journalists regularly get death threats, or are silenced with defamation suits.

Larry Que, publisher of Cebuano News, was the first journalist to be killed under Duterte’s rule. In his column, he had blamed the government for targeting the small fry involved in drugs while the wholesalers went scot free. The police officer accused of killing Que said he was ordered by the provincial governor. He promised to testify in court, but only if the slain journalist’s family paid him $191,000.

Duterte himself has delivered searing public speeches against journalists. The president got one of his priests to buy the powerful Philippine Daily Inquirer. Last year he took the critical news portal Rappler Philippines to court for violating invasion rules. Founded by former CNN correspondent Maria Ressa, Rappler reportres are now banned from the president’s press conferences.

“We are trying to be economically viable so that we can be politically independent, and if that doesn’t work, we will go to the people to support our public service journalism,” Rappler’s Gemma Ortega said. Government lacks money freely to lend Duterte’s detractors on social media, dubbing critics ‘anti-national’, and a section of the media tos the Duterte-style.

Malaysian journalist Faris Malam Mangabah of Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism: “Journalists’ lives are at risk, so is people’s right to know the truth. Journalists and human rights activists are polarised, which has amplified the threats to civic rights.”

Filipino Maoists

N isaya’s Maoist insurgency is weighed on for ten years and left a bitter legacy, but the rebellion in the Philippines as inspired by Marxism has been going on five times longer. And there is no end in sight.

A peasant rebellion known as the Huk (uprising) against Japanese occupation was violently put down with the help of the US military after the end of the Pacific War. June in 1945, the New People’s Army formally launched its armed struggle against the Philippine Army. Since then, nearly 5,000 people have been killed in the guerrilla war — half of them in an internal purge in the 1980s to eliminate suspected infiltrators.

President Aquino’s anti-Moslem policy, perpetuated by his Ministers who dominate politics, has led to low-intensity war. There have been numerous attacks and clashes over the decades, the violence flares once in a while, the guerrillas have been retreat to pockets in Luzon and Mindanao. But the conflict continues.

Satur Ocampo, 79, led the Manila negotiating team during the first talks with the government thirty years ago and now lives in Manila. He has renounced violence, but is still an idealogical supporter of the Maoist doctrine of proletarian people’s war.

Speaking to Nepali Times’ its hosted Melba Rama, Ocampo says the NPA has been crushed, but their revolutionary zeal is intact. They are ready to shed more blood, and the only way to end the war is to bring them back to the negotiating table.

“We should emulate what Nepal did 11 years ago with the peace accord,” Ocampo said. “The ball is in President Duterte’s court, he can end the war by fulfilling his election promise to reach out to rebel leader Teddy Ulian, and push for a social-economic transformation.”

President Duterte won in 2016, projecting himself as a ‘lawful’ and promoting to end the Maoist conflict through dialogue. However, on power, Duterte has made it a. On the matter of the Maoists involved in killing police and army personnel.

Rameshwor Bohara
P Manila

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Rob Cohen’s latest action film is a case in point about how sometimes perfectly fine films can bomb at the box-office.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

With a name like The Hurricane Heist, the film certainly doesn’t do itself any favours, and the cast, though very good, are relatively unknown. There are memorable cases of classics going up in flames at the box office. I suspect that last year’s dreamy, transcendent space opera Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets directed by the truly great Luc Besson will figure in the future as one of the major sci-fi classics of our time.

Not that The Hurricane Heist is a classic in any real sense. It’s just a decent action flick. Better than most in fact. That ought to keep spectators suitably rapt in their seats as the clever premise unfolds.

A category five hurricane is unfurling in rural Alabama, treasury agents led by the charming, immensely likable Maggie Grace as Casey Cethan, are transporting $600 million worth of old bank notes to a federal facility to be shredded, two brothers who lost their father in the last big storm are trying to make amends, traffickers look in their midst – and everyone gets caught up in both the hurricane and the heist as the world goes to pot.

The younger of the aforementioned two brothers, Will Rutledge (Toby Kebbell), is now a meteorologist in a nod to his tragic past, and as he and Casey serendipitously cross paths, they team up to face guns and odds and one really vicious villain to save the day.

What makes this film durable throughout is that it doesn’t follow the usual trajectory of action movies these days, and it thankfully does not wallow in a long fight right at the end.

Grace and Kebbell are great as action heroes, their chemistry together is strong and Grace in particular is a star in the making. While I do not mean to damn this film with faint praise, I will say that although I thoroughly enjoyed it, do not expect any thing more than an action filled ride with lots of surprises and special effects that show what a nightmare a natural disaster like that can be. So, while Thunder 2 is still in theaters here, save your money by settling back into the comfort of your home screen and relax into a few hours of pretty good entertainment.

Watch trailer online nepaltimes.com Watch trailer online nepaltimes.com

TRUE COMRADES: Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Yu Hui meets Prime Minister K.P. Oli at Baluwatar in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

#BEATPLASTICPOLUTION: Lalitpur Mayor Chhi Babu Maharjan pledges to ban plastic bags in the municipality from the fiscal year, during an event at multi World Environment Day 2018 at ICIMOD headquarters on Tuesday.

VISIT NEPAL: Minister of Tourism Rabindra Adhikari and Israeli Ambassador to Nepal Benny Gantz meet in Kathmandu, on Wednesday to discuss promoting Nepal as a tourism destination in Israel.

FLY TO ILAM: United Airlines sucked Sukhumi Airport in Ilam for the test flight by a Tara Air Twin Otter on Monday.

BASKETS: The Turkish Airlines Empowering League Wheelchair Basketball Championship started with the semifinals.Wheelchair Sports Association team and Phulchowki Army Club playing the final match on Saturday.
A girl from Kathmandu

Devendra Chh湍alal in Kantiapur, 6 June

In August 2004, when news of the massacre of 12 Nepali men in Iraq spread like wildfire, Kamala Thapa Magar nearly collapsed in her house in Bahundanda village of Gorkha district. Thapa’s husband, Jit Bahadur Thapa Magar, was one of the 12 Nepali migrant workers abducted and murdered by a terrorist group fighting US-led forces in Iraq. One of them was beheaded, and footage of others being executed was broadcast on international TV. Riots erupted in Kathmandu.

Carrying her 18-month-old daughter, Thapa, then 18, desperately sought help from labour recruiters to have her husband return, either dead or alive. But he was never found.

A photo of her walking through an unemployment slum with her infant daughter, published in Chicago Tribune, became an iconic image of that tragedy. Nearly 14 years later, Thapa, now 32, has reappeared in Kathmandu this week at the launch of a book about her at a book fair. She is the protagonist of *The Girl from Kathmandu*, the book by British journalist Cas Simpson.

Thapa, a seventh grade dropout, says: “I can’t read this book, but my daughter will.” Her daughter, Kirtika, now 15, is now in Grade 10 at a private school in Kathmandu.

Simpson tells the story of Thapa’s fight for justice and struggle to raise her little daughter. Simpson had previously exposed a web of agents, contractors, sub-contractors and security companies responsible for the massacre of Nepalis in Iraq.

Jit Bahadur Thapa Magar, Thapa’s husband, wanted to give his wife and daughter a better life. So, when he received an ad in a paper about a highly-paid job in Iraq, he applied to Moonlight Consultants in Kathmandu. They told him he could earn Rs 100,000 a month by working in a luxury hotel in Jordan.

Little did he know that Moonlight Consultant was actually the local agent of an American contractor involved in supplying cheap labour in the war zones of Iraq. The Department of Foreign Employment issued him a labour permit in June 2004, and he was taken to Iraq.

Back in Gorkha, his wife was growing anxious as there was no word from her husband. After 40 days, Radio Nepal broke the news that Jit Bahadur Thapa Magar was among the 12 Nepalis abducted and killed in Iraq.

At the launch of *The Girl from Kathmandu*, Thapa recalled the turbulent and traumatic weeks after her husband’s murder: “I thought any life was over,” she said.

After spending some time in Tulul Mehdi Ashram, a Buddhist shelter in Kathmandu, she found a purpose in fighting for justice for herself, her daughter, and all those who were widowed like her.

She earned money tailoring clothes in Kathmandu while others helped her file a case in a court against the American security company that hired her husband. Journalist Cas Simpson, American attorney Matthew Handley, and Nepali migration expert Ganesh Ghimire helped her.

The US court had asked Thapa how much she wanted as compensation. She told the court she wanted justice, not money. Her stand worked. The court forced the company to compensate the families of all Iraqi victims.

In the wake of the anti-Muslim riots following the massacre, the government banned Nepali workers from going to Iraq, but lifted it without explanation in 2010.

Today, Iraq is partially banned, and thousands of Nepalis continue to go there illegally. Thapa says: “I do not understand why Nepalis risk their lives going to Iraq, even though they are now fully aware of the dangers that lie ahead.”

Amending the 1950 treaty

Parshuram Kafle in Naya Patrika, 5 June

The two-year tenure of the Nepal-India joint committee formed to review the bilateral ties between the two countries and recommend ways to strengthen them is ending next month. But a consensus has not been reached on the main issue: how to review the 1950 treaty between newly independent India and the Rana regime in Nepal.

The External Events Group (EEG) will meet one last time on 29-30 June before its term expires on 4 July, but it will not be able to agree on the main points of contention between them. There is no agreement on the principles of the Nepal-India Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950.

There are four causes of the treaty which Nepal wants to amend but is still trying to seek India’s consent for:

Article 2: Nepal and India must inform each other of any serious tension or misunderstanding with any other neighbouring country.

Nepal argues India did not respect this clause when the latter went to war with China and Pakistan and saw the clause undermine its sovereignty.

Article 5: Nepal can freely import arms, ammunition or war material and equipment from or through India. Nepal has sought India’s consent to reprinting this clause, arguing that New Delhi took exception to Kathmandu’s decision of importing anti-aircraft guns from China in 1989, believed to be the reason India bestowed Nepal in 1950.

Article 6: Nepal and India allow each other’s citizens to participate in industrial and economic activity in their respective territories. They also grant each other’s citizens government contracts and concessions.

Nepal wants to revise this clause, arguing that such a provision will enable Indians to outdo Nepalis in their own homeland, while retaining the right of its nationals to work in India.

Article 7: Nepal and India must grant each other’s citizens the same privileges (like owning property and participating in trade and commerce in either country regardless of their nationality).

Nepal doesn’t want to grant this concession to a much larger country, but wants Nepalis to be allowed to own property in India.

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Toilet trained

As Nepal reaches the goal of sanitation for all, the next health challenge is to make latrines hygienic

Sonia Awale

Till recently, across many parts of Nepal, where people defecated was a matter of life or death. Sidewalks and streets stunk with human excrement spread disease and contaminated drinking water. The main killer of children in Nepal used to be diarrhoea dehydration.

But in the past decade, the rapid spread of household latrines in Nepal is an internationally recognised success story. And it has saved the lives of many thousands of children who would otherwise have fallen victim to water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, typhoid and cholera.

There is an inverse correlation between the increase in the proportion of households with toilets and the decrease in child mortality. In 1960 only 2% of homes had toilets, that figure has jumped to 97% today. In the same period, Nepal’s under-five child mortality rates dropped from 209 per 1,000 live births to below 33 today.

“The achievement in health outcomes of household toilets was in reducing diarrhoea incidence in the last five years, has been dramatic,” said Siddhi Shrestha of UNICEF.

Most of the progress has taken place after the National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan went into effect in 2011 following the diarrhoea outbreak in Janakpur that killed over 2900 folks, mostly children.

After that epidemic, the government also launched the Defecation Free (DF) Campaign in partnership with UNICEF which provided the technical expertise and money to build toilets district by district.

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) report there were 1.171 millions of children under five from diarrhoea dehydration in 2016 - a dramatic drop from nearly 200 millions in 1960.

To be sure, the DF Campaign has been criticized by some for spreading the very diseases it is supposed to control. The lack of water and poorly maintained latrines make them a credible for germs. The government had planned to reach the target of sanitation for all by 2017, but only 93 districts have been declared open defecation free so far. It plans to meet the goal by the end of this year, adding Lalitpur, Ramshap and Sankhuwasabha during the current National Sanitation Week.

However, experts say just declaring a district open defecation free does not mean it is free from water supply playing a critical role. In addition, the toilets need to be cleaned regularly to keep them hygienic. An evaluation found many latrines of substandard construction, not child or girl-friendly, were located near water sources, or were contaminated ground water. Open pits were buzzing with flies, which spread disease. Toilets in many schools and households were so dirty many villagers preferred to go out into the open.

“Having a toilet in every household and declaring a district open defecation free is a major achievement, but having a toilet is different from using a toilet,” explained UN-HABITAT’s Bhushan Tuladhar (see opinion below).

But as Nepal inches closer to the 100% household toilet target, another danger has already manifested itself: management of excreta that is overflowing out of pit latrines and septic tanks. There are only a handful of functioning faecal sludge treatment plants, even though emptying the sewers has become a booming business.

“It is only sensible that the toilets are not flushed,” said Ripin Dangol of Environment and Public Health Organization (EPHIO). “Unless waste water and human excreta are easily disposed, we will continue to face health risks. The next step is to gain awareness about proper disposal of waste.”

Toilets are now being thought of as part of a waste collection chain, starting from sewer interface, collection and transportation of the waste, followed by its treatment, disposal and safe reuse.

The current toilet technology that involves flush tanks using drinking water to resource literature, especially in Nepal where water is in short supply which suffers a chronic water shortage. Engineers worldwide are experimenting with the next generation of toilet designs that allow excreta to be burnt and converted into valuable energy source. They also alter the new prototypes to be affordable, work off grid so that the poorest communities have access to safe sanitation solutions, like bio-digester.

Sanitation expert Doula Kone of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was in Kathmandu recently for a meeting to approve a new standard ISO 36860 that set requirements for toilets of the future. They have to meet many criteria: destroy waste and kill pathogens, not use water or electricity, generate energy and water, cost less than Rs45 per use, and be easy to install and maintain.

“A new toilet that meets these standards will be a super vaccine,” he told Nepal Times in an interview. “A toilet is a health product so people won’t have to suffer or die due to the lack of safe sanitation anymore.”

A working model, for a future breakthrough in Nepal’s sanitation movement could be a new facility at an orphanage in Lalitpur, which treats household effluent, turning it into methane gas, fertiliser and water for the kitchen and vegetable garden.

Sanitation engineer Rastu Rajbhandari (pictured above at the Loblu treatment plant) said the system is still expensive, and there are challenges of location.

But she added, “This is an ideal solution for waste collection, treatment and recycling when everyone has a toilet. Future research needs to go into making it more affordable.”
FAECES OF NEPAL

The Sanitation for All campaign has helped save many lives, but as Nepal declares itself open-defecation free, pit latrines and raw sewage are the new health hazards.

Waste not, want not

Nepal solved one problem, and created another. After a successful campaign against open defecation, 97% of households in Nepal now have latrines. But what do we do with the waste that has accumulated in the pit latrines?

To solve the growing problem, the Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation passed the Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) framework for the collection, transport, treatment and disposal of waste in urban areas. For Kathmandu Valley, this will go hand-in-hand with the government’s plan to free the Bagmati of sewage by 2020.

A first-of-its-kind project at an orphanage in Luldhu outside Kathmandu gives a glimpse of how it would work. Septic tank waste is collected from households that pay for the service, transported to the treatment plant to be turned into fertilizer, methane gas and water.

The plant (right) was originally set up to treat waste at shelters after the 2015 earthquake by the German organisation BORDA, Environment and Public Health Organisation (SNPWHO), and Seligman Buf Gräns. A similar faecal sludge treatment plant has been built in Bardia.

The system treats six cubic metres of sewage per week, with separate solid and liquid units. It takes three days for the sludge to be treated and the water reused for irrigation. The rest flows into a digester to produce biogas, and the sludge takes 12 days to dry into edfuscent fuel.

Vegetables thrive in the nutrient-rich waste, and are enough to feed all 42 children and staff at the orphanage. Extra greens are sold in the market.

“We didn’t have sufficient warm water to farm in the past, now we can grow our own food, and cook with it,” says caretaker Surris Prasad Ghimire. With a price tag of Rs 67 million, the only downside for now is the cost, but that is because it is a prototype.

When biogas first spread in Nepal, 40 years ago, users were averse to allowing latrine waste to flow into the digester along with cowdung. By now there are 400,000 households in Nepal, and nearly a third of them process both animal and human waste. In addition, 100 Police stations, Army bases and jails use human waste to generate gas for their kitchens.

Explains Prakash Aryal of the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPCE). “It was used to be a taboo about handling toilets with biogas, but it is now easier to convince people due to the rise in awareness.”

Here come the smart toilets

In the last 20 years, humans have transformed communication, the human genome project has mapped the continents, yet in that time, toilets have remained the same.

Social taboos about defecation have delayed toilet technology from evolving beyond the western water closet that allowed humans to be treated inside homes. As a result, some sanitation and flush technology, toilet technology has remained unchanged for centuries.

Finally, in 2017, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Reinvented Toilet Challenge to provide safe and affordable sanitation solutions to 3.5 billion people worldwide who don’t have access to toilets. The idea was to stop open defecation with a clean alternative that would also prevent the spread of infections.

The Foundation’s specification was to re-invent the toilet that would destroy the pathogens in human waste, convert it into energy, and not need to be connected to the sewage network. Nepal is ready to take the next step by building toilets.

Nepal’s goal is for 100% households to have latrines by end-2018. But 22 of 77 districts, including Kathmandu, are still not open defecation free.

Nepal has a history of feeding human excreta. Gopal Singh Nepal in his 1965 book, The Newidea mentions that nightshin as fertilizer cost 50 paisa per 1/2 tum in Kathmandu Valley. People traditionally understood the value of waste; they realised it needed to be recycled, and had developed a system in which the private sector and waste generators worked hand in hand to manage this resource.

Urine was collected separately in bans, daygoes and container and emptied in nagaas, the ash pit. Our ancestors understood that nitrogen rich urine when mixed with ash or farm residue with high carbohydrate content made excellent compost.

The challenge now is to revive such traditional knowhow in this age. Social media has transformed communication, the human genome project has mapped the genome. Yet in that time, toilets have remained the same.

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INTELLIGENT POTTY: This solar-powered toilet that generates hydrogen and electricity. Designed at Caltech, it was one of the winners of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Reinvent the Toilet Challenge.

Blashnu Tuladhar is UN Habitat’s Chief Technical Adviser for South Asia.
Old smugglers

Homestay Minister Ram Brave a multi-tasker in a hurry, he wants to abolish all cartels, crack down on crooked contractors, overhaul the police, and most importantly for national security, stop allowing passengers from bringing in a litre of duty-free liquor each into the country. Doing a rough calculation on the back of an envelope which contained a wallet of kickbacks, Minister of Home Affairs found out that unaxed hooch making it to the market was costing the treasury $1 billion Roopie a year — meaning the Graminid منت had much less money to waste on cash handouts and paying for ministerial junkets.

Such cynicism is unwarranted. The Government is just trying to ensure that Nepal is self-sufficient in its consumption, and also reduce the trade deficit. If we may, the Axis has much better ideas. Nepal shares an open border with India and the two countries have age-old historical and cultural bonds based on the custom of not having customs for people-to-people transactions.

Gold biscuits are smuggled south, Belamis Thin Arrowroot biscuits are smuggled north. We expect contraband balls to Bihar, and imported water buffalo to meet domestic demand for justままめ. And, being a friendly neighbour, India declared its bordering states dry and prohibited the sale of alcohol. This has opened up new avenues to boost bilateral trade. Nepal imports petroleum from India, and in exchange Nepal smuggles out Old Smugglers. This means that Bihar is on the wagon, and Nepal is on the handicapped.

However, the current method of retail smuggling of rum and vodka both at a time is inefficient. Diesel tankers and LPG tankers are running empty to India, why not fill them up with premium brands Nepali spirit? But if we are really serious about increasing exponentially the volume of the duty-free diesel trade, we must extend the Indo-Nepal Petroleum Pipeline from Kosiyal to Kathmandu. That way, diesel, petrol and kerosene can be pumped up to Kathmandu’s gas stations, and at night, when no one is looking, we can send down vodka, gin, whiskey and beer in the opposite direction to thirsty Bihar. The beauty of it is that we don’t even need to pump the booster — gravity will do it for us, thus reducing the overheads.