Political quagmire

The Nepal Communist Party came to power promising prosperity, and the path to that goal it said was through mushroom communications systems, railways, fast trains, inland waterways and international airports.

The residents of Kathmandu, however, grapple daily with a much more mundane problem: negotiating the muddy quagmires of the capital’s roads.

Commuters have a choice: dust or mud. Roads are flooded with water that turns into boggy booby traps (below). Last monsoon, a schoolgirl was swallowed up by a swollen drain. The video of another girl swept away by a flooded road and rescued after went viral.

Kathmandu’s streets are a death trap. One year after elected mayors took office, there has been no improvement.

Politicians pretend to crack down on contractors whom they themselves protect. The people are fed up, and have started ridiculing grandiose promises of monorails and expressways.
A few months ago a group of transitional justice advocates and experts from Colombia came to Kathmandu, sharing their country’s experience in post-conflict reconciliation with Nepalese government attorneys and human rights lawyers. Colombia’s ability to resolve its post-FARC conflict is in part due to its productive interaction with victims of the conflict and the International Community for not adhering to accepted human rights treaties, of which Nepal is signatory. It has provisions for blanket pardon of war criminals, but families of conflict victims have doubts that, even with the new changes, they will ever get justice.

The draft amendment is heavily influenced by Colombia’s “restorative justice” practice, which focuses on reconciliation and reparations rather than punitive measures. Even so, the amendments are much better than the existing law (The Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act 2014), which is full of loopholes allowing former guerrilla commanders and state security personnel to go scot-free.

The proposed law is an improvement because it is broadly in tune with a 2015 Supreme Court verdict on a case filed by Sunita Adhikari, whose father was dragged from a house he was teaching and executed by the Maoists in Lamjung in 2002. The Apex Court had denied amnesty for perpetrators of four types of crimes: extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, rape, and torture. This means Maoist cadres who tied, Adhikari to a tree and shot him in the heart can be taken to the court. The army officers detained, raped and killed 14-year-old Samita Kunwar in Kavre in 1996 to avoid prosecution. Forerial or security personnel charged with similar atrocities cannot be prosecuted.

However, just like the existing Act, the draft amendment is so loophole laden that it can be abused by powerful politicians to get themselves off the hook. For example, if used by Parliament into law, it will allow transitional justice bodies to reduce the severity of sentencing if perpetrators both agree to the investigation, or apologize and express a commitment to not repeat their crimes. To put it more precisely, if robbers are convicted of abducting and murdering a civilian and slapped with a 10-year term, they will have to spend only four years in jail. And the draft amendment also has provisions for “open government” or “community service.” While criminals could easily walk free even if found guilty, and there won’t much to show what constitutes “community service.” Will joining a political party and consulting poles be defined as “community service”? The Act makes no mention of elbow room.

This is exactly why conflict victims are reluctant to accept the draft amendment: they suspect that culpable politicians will cunningly manipulate the law and thus keep them off the hook. They are seeking some foundational laws based on which justice can be delivered. For example, they want to know whether all will get 75% discounts in sentencing, or if there will be some determining who deserves reduced punishment. They want to know whether convicted criminals will be able to walk free.

After waiting nearly two decades for truth and justice, families of conflict victims were not ready to give the draft a second thought. They know they have much work ahead. Some do not expect the government to do anything, so they have given up even demanding justice. The former states are now the state, and they do not want to revisit wartime atrocities. The main opposition NC is led by someone who has been long in the ámbito delitos. In 1998, he has been negotiating peace talks with the Maoists. Conflict victims have always pinned their hopes on the United Front which was not directly involved in the war and played a strong role in advocating for transitional justice before the 2006 ceasefire. But the UML, no longer exists, and conflict victims have subsumed themselves and their conflict-era atrocities into the merged Nepal Communist Party.

Prime Minister K P Oli, who also co-chairs the new party along with ex-Maoist supremo Prachanda Kanak Dahi, has been working hard on his justice commitment for conflict victims. He recently endorsed the law and said that the Supreme Court decision to bifurcate Kakrishi Dhusal, a convicted murderer Oli has been pressing Dahi to arrest one of the main leaders in the murder of Krishna Abhikari, whose mother Gangamaya is in frail health on her hospital bed. Regularizing the UML’s restorative justice formula in good faith could work in Nepal if conflict victims were backed by society with political will, and a strong civil society. But they are all alone, and the state is indifferent to their pain.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The Editors in Nepal Times seven years ago for work (MAI, 27 June 2003).

I dealt with the new government’s approach to poverty. Sounds cliché here.

There’s much to say about the political display that we saw and will see in the past two years. Disappointed online with this simple party solution in the end, it’s time we examine why the party, the politics will always be associated with the group of economic.

There’s a question that Nepal’s regime change also represents an ideological type. There will be a lot of popular. No matter who comes to power, is suited or unqualified voters (with haters). Please keep your political out of the economy.

It’s always a difficult to know what the right thought the country was not clear, but there’s a significant determination in the understand the consequences and sympathetic consequence in the long run.

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RPALINA XAKOS

Online Trends

Amar National

In the last days of this week, the power of internet has brought about an astonishing change in the way people react to each other. The use of social media platforms has exploded, allowing people to express their opinions and connect with others on a global scale. The power of the internet is undeniable and its impact on society cannot be ignored.

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*STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER*
The state of play

When the hammer is the only tool you have, every problem begins to look like a nail. In the game, it looked like Messi was the only tool they had. But a toolbox consists of a set of implements, not just one hammer.

Secondly, there is a realisation when goals begin to mount that the ‘goal’ is not going to change. The rules of the game are not going to change, the fields are set, the time allocated and referees see all going to remain the same. Then the teams are also going to ensure that final play is unlikely. What needs to change is the way the game is played.

Melnik famously said: ‘Insanity is repeating the same process hoping for a different result’. NCP from Argentina then? Can we only rely on a ‘Messi’ to get us where we need to be? Can we continue to play the same game? Do we need to develop new tools? Is it time to change the way we play?

What Nepal's entrepreneurs need is a level playing field where they can compete. They want a regulator who ensures fairness. Whenever there is room for discretionary powers to be misused, they want to see a technological intervention. In winning teams, the 11 players are there on the basis of merit. They are not there because of some cultural or political aspect, what part of the country they come from, or who they know in the political arena.

Anil Chitrakar Knighted Sir Thomas More

Young change makers

Environmental pollution is not Nepal’s only problem. It is also a global issue. Citizens around the globe share social, economic and developmental problems. If our situation is the same, our destiny is also the same. So, we have no choice but to unite and solve our problems together. We have to think beyond our surroundings and become world citizens.

These words are not from an erstwhile lawmaker, but from Ankik Sangroula, a Grade 8 student of Mount View School in Bhaktapur. An initiate at the Buddhist retreat, Hotel Yak & Yeti, his speech left the room full of adults speechless.

Sangroula is one of the students monitored by Connecting Classrooms, a joint initiative between the British Council and the Department for International Development (DFID). The program is designed to cultivate knowledge, skills and resilience in young people so they can live and work in a sustainable environment. Working off the beaten track of academic system, the initiative equips students around the world to foster national and international friendships.

It also inspires young people to make positive contributions locally and internationally. For example, in Bahundanda, Morang, eight toilets were built by students from Makalu School without any support from donors or local banks. They gave an alternative to villagers who previously used riverside as a bathroom where they were sometimes bitten by snakes or chased by the police, but now they have an alternative. The local village council and the rest of the villagers followed their steps by constructing more toilets.

The Open Delegation Epuliation Project was one of the Council’s successful Social Action Projects conducted in Nepal’s schools. The project’s students and leaders initiated a series of dialogues with local leaders and teachers about the importance of viability and leadership.

The event where Sangroula gave his excellent speech was ISA, one of the best-known events of the British Council under Connecting Classrooms that recognises students showing strong commitment to enriching students’ lives and making a significant contribution to national cultural and global issues.

Though, WA IA have learnt to use the knowledge we get from books to solve problems around us. Before, we just read books and listened to our teachers. But now we learn by doing,” says Sangroula.

Nineteen other schools were awarded and four were re-accredited for the year 2017/18 during the event, out of 42 schools from 14 districts. The award, in its 6th edition, is endorsed by the Department for International Development.

Connecting Classrooms has taught about students to teachers on how to work in different countries to improve teaching and learning experiences through school partnerships and policy dialogues, recognising and rewarding progressive schools and encouraging students to lead initiatives. It also provides core skills training to school leaders and teachers on how to make the profession more effective and impactful.

Sikama Rai

Token of Love

Conceiving on 45th anniversary in Kathmandu, Thai Airways conducted an entertainment program at Center for Disabled Children Association, Workshop followed by lunch along with distribution of gifts, stationary, computers, printers and some cash to the lucky.

In-flight net

Turkish Airlines, in co-operation with TürkTelekom Vodafone, allowed passengers to access WiFi and media content via their personal electronic devices in the airplane.

In-flight internet

New crossovers

Lamborghini, the self-styled flagbearer of Italian automotive industry, since 1963, the brand has been driven by a combination of dedication, reach and consistency in advertising strategy.

Infinity display

Sailings, formerly launched new Galaxy M3 and A1 plus at Rs 49,495 and Rs 70,190, with 16GB and 32GB respectively, displaying giving 15% more display only without internet for the device price. The physical button

Promo Bank
Trade tit-for-tat
How should Asia respond to Trump’s trade war?

This month President Trump launched the opening salvo of a trade war by unilaterally imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum imported into the country from the European Union (EU), Canada and Mexico.

Canada immediately warned it would announce retaliatory measures. The EU and Mexico have their guns loaded. The US and China are also at the brink of a trade war. On 15 June, Trump announced tariffs on $50 billion worth of Chinese goods and warned that any retaliation by Beijing would trigger another round of tariffs on Chinese goods. But China struck back within hours, slapping the same amount of tariff on American imports, from agriculture and seafood, to cars and energy products.

Hopefully the worst can still be avoided, but the experience of the 1930s and the subsequent Great Depression suggest that trade wars can have serious economic and social consequences on the entire global economy. The IMF has warned that Trump’s new import tariffs pose a stark threat to the global trading system and will ultimately damage the US economy.

In addition to startling trade wars, Trump’s trade policies are undermining the post-World War II rules-based multilateral trading system established by the US itself, as the hegemon, with the co-operation of other Illuminated countries mainly in Europe.

Under the auspices of GATT and its successor the WTO, globally tariffs had fallen to record low levels, the volume of international trade had expanded, bringing unprecedented economic prosperity all over the world. Seventy years on, the Doha Round has stalled and some of the WTO rules and exceptions to the rules need to be revisited. But instead of reforming the institution, Trump has threatened to withdraw the US from the WTO – which could happen, if the WTO rules against the recent metal tariffs the US imposed on national security grounds. The US is also undermining the WTO by refusing to appoint new judges to the WTO Appellate Body, securing it of bias against the US. The WTO has traditionally appointed judges based on consensus among its members. Perhaps it is time to change this method to save the rules-based system.

At the recent G7 summit, with a single tweet from Air Force One while flying to Singapore, Trump drove a deep wedge between the US and other countries that traditionally consider themselves Washington’s closest allies, having cooperated closely with the US to help build the post-World War II rules-based trading system. The summit was a fiasco.

The future of the G7, which is supposed to be an oversight body for global matters including trade, is therefore uncertain. Contrary to what Trump had said at the recent Davos meeting that “America First does not mean America alone”, the G7 is now being described by many as G6+1.

The European Union countries and Japan, China, and India should unite, resist, and speak up in favour of the WTO. They should also cooperate more closely in resolving issues, for example, on agriculture, trade, and in reforming the WTO. One reform proposal is that the WTO should address the 21st century trade issues that are ‘behind the border’ such as rules for investment protection, intellectual property and regulations on product standards and their harmonisation.

Global value chains or parts and components trade now comprise about 70% of global trade. Currently the WTO focuses on 20th century trade issues such as tariffs, quotas, and subsidies. It is the mega-free trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and, to a lesser extent, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that are focusing on 21st century trade issues.

It is also time to start thinking of replacing the G7 with the G20. Of course the G20 is not perfect and there is a need to enhance both its ‘input’ legitimacy – its exclusive nature and lack of broader representation – and ‘output’ legitimacy – its ability to strengthen international cooperation and come up with solutions. But it is the only forum where, in addition to the G7 countries, systematically important emerging markets have a representation and vote. The G7 members once ruled the world but now their share of world GDP is declining from about three-fourths in the 1990s to about one-half currently. The G7’s share of world population has also declined from about 22% to 15% during the same period, with aging populations in most countries. On the other hand, the G20 accounts for 85% of the world’s GDP and over 60% of its population. It could well save the global trading system from the depredation of the go-it-alone tendency of the US.

Pradumna B Rana is Associate Professor at the Centre for Multilateral Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (SRIS), Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.
Sewa Bhattarai

Nepali theatre business is not doing well financially, but you would not be able to tell here in the alleys of Teku, home to Kastri Theatre and the drama group Katha Ghar. Despite being hard up, new theatres are rolling out productions thick and fast.

It all started with Aarohan Gurukul, established by actor-director Sunil Pokharel three decades ago, which later became the first private theatre to stage plays with multiple performances. Besides Kastri, Kunja Theatre and Purush Ghar have recently sprang up in Kathmandu, and there are more than 50 theatre groups across the country, including theatre halls in Bagha, Pokhara and Monar.

Three drama groups are building theatres in Pokhara alone, and many institutes like Akato Studio and Shilpee in Kathmandu conduct classes.

Kathmandu hosts frequent theatre festivals. This month Nepal Academy's Rang Utsav honored 13th-century Maitilli playwright Jyotishwar and Shilpee Theatre held its Tamang Drama Festival. Former theatre artists like Min Bahadur Bham, Dayakant Bhai, Khagendra Lamichhane, Meenu Prashan and Sunil Malla have even migrated from the stage to screen, starring in Nepali films.

"It is good to see so many youngsters in theatre who understand film, music, art, and even the connection between space and performance," says senior playwright Abhi Subedi. "Their interest seems to be in re-interpreting history and depicting the inequalities and cruelties in society."

Plays like Court Martial questioned the caste system and hierarchy in the military. Hareret reinterpreted a classic story from a woman protagonist's perspective. Rasmandu ko Pani imagined the life of Lakhan Thapa and Manakamana Devi. Abhidhik portrayed Nepal's famous princess who was married in Tibet. Airti Dass and Kumala depicted feudal oppression and forced migration, Jayanaya Adhikari Lekhnath Agrawal enacted the journey of Birusree Nepal's fighting World War II.

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PROBING QUESTIONS: Junda Akh is a parrot of a transfigurer (play), while Nepal's parent theatre Gurukul has stages many earlier (up and up).

Nepali theatre has come of age, with plays that ask probing questions about social injustices, discrimination, and modern ethical dilemmas. Junda Akh portrays a transfigurer person, the adaptation of Vagis Memonogues brought the private lives of women into the public sphere, while 30 Days of September sensitively tackled child abuse.

Despite these vibrant themes, however, Nepali theatre still struggles with originality. Few of the plays are new, and directors seem to prefer Shakespeare, Moliere, Tagore, or even Lu Sin to home-grown drama. There is a general lack of technical knowledge of stage production.

"Nepali theatre lacks research, which is impeding its growth," explains pioneer theatre artist Sunil Pokharel of Aarohan Gurukul. "Different ethnic groups have diverse performance cultures in Nepal, we need to mine these cultures so that we can produce more original, Nepali style plays."

Strong folk performances and cultures are evident in Janakpur, where Mithila Naityakala Parishad, one of the oldest theatre groups still active, draws from folk traditions and attracts big audiences in every performance. But it struggles with not having its own home stage. Gurukul, one of the first to have its own theatre, but the hall was destroyed in 2015, followed by the closing of Theatre Villas in 2016 and Theatre Mall in 2017. At ticket prices of Rs 100-300, the income just does not justify the expensive land theatres are housed on. A few groups like Sarvanam, which has its own space, theatres exist and have to constantly worry about their future — which doesn't do much for creativity. Dozens of groups have to turn to staging plays in the six or so theatres Sunil Pokharel limits himself to just two plays a year because of space constraints.

"Theatre's main problem today is that it lacks institutional support," says Abhi Subedi. "There is no degree course on theatre in Nepal's universities, and little government financial support to produce plays." Pokharel says corporate sponsorship would do the trick and make up for the shortfall in ticket revenue, but there isn't much of that.

Despite difficulties, artists find Nepal's close, intimate theatres, where the audience can hear the performers breathe on stage very impactful. Says Pokharel: "There is an audience with the money, in any profession. And if you think you want to take to the stage, you have to be prepared to survive the harsh reality of theatre."

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All the men and women merely players

Nepali theatre struggles to survive even while it stages plays about everyday struggles
Drama in real life

Sangita Uranw describes the first time she saw the inside of a theatre. "I was only six years old. I was so curious and I wanted to watch the play. But my parents were afraid that I would be scared," she recalls.

Uranw, 22, is the first professional actress from the Uranw, a remote and neglected Tamang community. Few in her native Kurchet village of Susar are educated, and rarely do women leave households. Uranw's story, therefore, is itself drama in real life, and provides an example of how previously unseen sections of society are now actors on the national scene.

"I was interested in acting from a very young age, dressing up and performing at home," recalls Uranw. She got her first break as a child actor in a play produced by Susar Village Development Committee. Uranw was selected for the role of a toy crab that speaks to a little girl in the play.

"I was put in charge of the crab's costume and I had to move around on stage," says Uranw.

When Chimtai Yuban, director of Shilpika Theatre, went to Susar to give theatre training, he spotted 14-year-old Uranw's potential talent and offered her a three-month scholarship in Kathmandu.

"At first my parents were worried about where I would stay, what I would eat. But my parents thought I would be safe. I did not have to leave my family, but I was learning something new," says Uranw.

Uranw, whose parents are farmers, has struggled to get the education that she deserves. She has to work in the fields and also help in the household chores. Uranw's dreams are simple: she wants to become an actress and have a good career.

"When I was younger, I used to think about becoming a doctor, but now I want to become an actress," says Uranw.

Uranw's dream is to perform in the state theatre, which is the highest honour for an actress in Nepal. She wants to perform in plays that are relevant to the community and help other Uranw youth.

"I want to show that Uranw youth can also be successful in the field of arts," says Uranw.

Uranw's journey is not easy. She has to face discrimination and prejudice from the larger society. But she is determined to overcome these obstacles and make a name for herself.

"I want to prove that Uranw youth can also be successful in the field of arts," says Uranw.

Uranw's story is a testament to the power of theatre and the potential of every individual, regardless of their background. She shows that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve their dreams.

She found that particular story in the life of her friend, who had a difficult time after her mother passed away. The 30 minute solo performance was easy for her at first, but showed her dedication and passion for the craft. It was praised for capturing the essence of life in the Uranw community after being staged at Shilpika Theatre and travelling to Morang and Jhapa. Her family, including her mother, attended the play in Biratnagar and were proud to see her perform.

While she learns and works at Shilpika Theatre, Uranw is also attending college and is grateful for her family's support. "The most important thing for them is that I am getting to study. And as long as I continue my education, they will not complain," she says. But for Uranw herself, theatre always comes first.

Over the past three years she has worked in six plays and feels there are many other Uranw youth who have the talent to be on stage and also succeed in many other fields. She says: "There were no actors from the Uranw community, but I succeeded because of my family's love and support. There are many others like me, and they can excel in whatever they want to do if they get the opportunity."
Duksangh Sherpa

When he saw a fitness video that was giving incorrect information, Sushant Pradaan decided to make his own. That little clip led to a whole new YouTube channel and a popular Kathmandu gym, The Physique Workshop. Today, three years later, Pradaan is the most popular Nepali fitness vlogger around.

“I never thought my channel would be so popular, so fast. It is proof that the people’s awareness of fitness is increasing. They are prioritising health,” says 27-year-old Pradaan.

The word ‘gym’ used to be associated in Nepal with bodybuilding, mainly for men. The idea of going to the gym was to pump iron and have bulky muscles. Today, the concept has changed to overall fitness and wellbeing for men and women of all ages.

And Kathmandu’s new gyms have stepped up to meet that demand with places like The Pump, Platinum Fitness, Fitstop Fitness, The Physique Workshop and Gymbhata. Reflecting their playful names, the places offer cardio, weights and workout plans for people with different fitness goals, from insanity, yoga, High Intensity Interval Training, cardio kick-boxing, weight training, callisthenics, functional fitness to CrossFit and more.

One common aspect of all venues is that they were started by people passionately into fitness, long before it became fashionable to be a gymista.

NO excuses!

The easiest excuse not to exercise for most people is “I’m too tired.” Yes, there are people who do not make time for workouts but even less for hours to frequent their favourite gym.

Raul Moktan of Gymbhata in Mahabirgunj says some of his members come every day from as far away as Bhaktapur and Thame.

Age is another factor people cite as an excuse, but there are people over 70 who work out regularly and are fitter than people half their age. Ageing is a natural process, but how one ages is controlled by food habits, lifestyle and lifestyle.

“Start now to build a healthy body which will support you till the end,” advises Moktan, whose Gymbhata is open from 5:30 am to 10 pm every day.

There is no excuse for not taking responsibility for your own health.

Fitness does not necessarily mean visiting a gym. Workouts can be done at home, following a trainer’s instructions.

But in case you are not sure about kids starting a structured fitness routine, you could follow a combination of basic body weight movements such as squats, lunges, push-ups, pull-ups, burpees and planks. Working on your major muscle groups, these movements are not only effective and time-efficient, but also easy to perform anywhere, anytime.

So are you ready to amp up your fitness and energy levels?

“I don’t see myself doing anything else. This is what I am most passionate about,” says Raul Moktan, co-founder and executive director of Gymbhata Muay Thai, and a professional boxer himself. He gives his members a wide variety of fitness choices from combat training to callisthenics, and high intensity interval training to spin classes.

When gym guru Sachit Pradaan, a veteran of Kathmandu’s gym scene, first started going to the gym, things were different. “All we had were basic free weights in a very simple space. There was no detailed guidance, the way it is available now,” he says.

Sachit and his younger brother Sachin have been training for over two decades and have learned about fitness through years of experience and self-study before they opened Platinum Fitness Club. “People now are better informed. From YouTube videos to workout programmes, everything is available on the net,” adds Sachin.

Gym members are people like Sheetal Rana, principal of Focolario School, who makes time from her hectic schedule to work out regularly.

“The most important benefit is that it makes you efficient by helping you de-stress while making you fit to deal with day to day challenges,” says Rana.

Staying fit is more important than ever because of the polluted environment, our stressful sedentary lifestyle, and unhealthy food habits.

“Throughout human history, physical activity has always been an important part of our lives. Movement conditions our body, sharpens our minds, keeps us alert and efficient throughout the day,” explains internationally certified trainer Ashish Yakhumba of The Pump, Nepal’s first CrossFit and callisthenics gym, who has trained clients aged 15-90 years, from athletes to people with disabilities.

Says Yakhumba: “There is no excuse for not working out. You have to give at least 30 minutes to yourself every day, for your own wellbeing and overall health. Movement and exercise is one of the most underated forms of medicine and meditation.”

The stamina to workout

The global popularity of functional training has made it popular in Kathmandu. The Pump and Gymbhata Muay Thai was one of the first to introduce such a workout which, unlike conventional fitness regimes, stresses training with exercises like sit-ups, press, bench, plate rows, and 10R. Functional training improves our day to day activities by building strength, stamina, endurance, flexibility and mobility. It emphasises on our core strength and muscle movements.
Events

Bird watching
Enjoy birding at Talbhate, Bird Conservation Nepal, which is hosting a gathering of over 60 species. The event aims to promote conservation awareness and encourage visitors to contribute to the protection of threatened species. Join the event on 29 June at 10 am. For more information, contact Bird Conservation Nepal at 45323630.

Nexil's night market
Join in for an open-air market featuring local food, live music, and a unique variety of handcrafted items. The market will be held at the Nepali Temple, Lalitpur, on 29 June from 6 pm to 10 pm. For more information, contact Nexil's Night Market at 45323630.

Shake talks
Register for the talks on "The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Technology Impact and Data Security." Discussing technology and its impact on crime and society are Mr. Kailash Paudel, data security expert, and Mr. Namrata Kailash, crime prevention specialist. The event will be held at the Nepal Telecommunications Authority, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Shake Talks at 45323630.

Conversation club
Meet new friends and talk about various topics in a friendly environment. The club will meet at the Nepal National Museum, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Conversation Club at 45323630.

Kea talks
Join in for a talk on "Telugu Film Industry: Challenges and Opportunities." The event will be held at the Nepal Academy of Performing Arts, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Kea Talks at 45323630.

Beer and BBQ
Enjoy an evening of drinks and food at the Beer and BBQ event. The event will be held at the Nepal International Cricket Stadium, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Beer and BBQ at 45323630.

Music

This Matter of Culture
A June discussion on the impact of culture on modern society, globalization, and society, featuring a panel of experts. The event will be held at the Nepal Academy of Performing Arts, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact This Matter of Culture at 45323630.

MUSIC

The Yard
Catch up with friends and family over a glass of wine at the restaurant with a scenic view of the peaceful garden. The event will be held at the Yard, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact The Yard at 45323630.

GETAWAY

Lake View Resort
Stay 2 nights and 3 days at the resort's beautiful scenery and enjoy the comfort of the modern rooms. The event will be held at the Lake View Resort, Pokhara, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Lake View Resort at 45323630.

Shangri-La Village Resort
Enjoy a 2-night and 3-day spa package at the resort, enjoying the peaceful atmosphere of the resort. The event will be held at the Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Shangri-La Village Resort at 45323630.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 22 - 28 June

Event: Pilgrim's March

The most talked about event of the year, the Gorkha's March, is a reenactment of the historic event. The event will be held at the Gorkha Museum, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact The March at 45323630.

Gokarna Forest Resort
Enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the forest and participate in a nature walk. The event will be held at the Gokarna Forest Resort, Pokhara, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Gokarna Forest Resort at 45323630.

Bhotekoshi overnight
Stay at a beautiful resort, and enjoy a scenic walk along the Bhotekoshi River. The event will be held at the Bhotekoshi Resort, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Bhotekoshi Overnight at 45323630.

Yatri Suites and Spa
Pamper yourself with a relaxing massage and spa treatment. The event will be held at the Yatri Suite and Spa, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Yatri Suites and Spa at 45323630.

Gangnam Galli Barbeque
Enjoy a BBQ with the locals and try the delicious food. The event will be held at the Gangnam Galli Barbeque, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Gangnam Galli Barbeque at 45323630.

Rock nights
A special concert featuring some of the best local bands. The event will be held at the Rock Nights, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Rock Nights at 45323630.

Sarangi Rhela
A talented artist performing traditional Sarangi music. The event will be held at the Sarangi Rhela, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Sarangi Rhela at 45323630.

Satyarn Night BBQ
Enjoy a special BBQ with live music featuring some of the local bands. The event will be held at the Satyarn Night BBQ, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Satyarn Night BBQ at 45323630.

Nirita and Pritika
A live performance by some of the best local bands. The event will be held at the Nirita and Pritika, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Nirita and Pritika at 45323630.

Kutumbia
A traditional folk band performing some of their best-known songs. The event will be held at the Kutumbia, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Kutumbia at 45323630.

Halla session
A special session featuring local bands and artists. The event will be held at the Halla session, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Halla session at 45323630.

The Nagas
An illustrated talk on the fascinating Nagas tribe and their modern-day myth. The event will be held at the The Nagas, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact The Nagas at 45323630.

Monsoon fest
A festival featuring food and live music. The event will be held at the Monsoon Fest, Kathmandu, on 29 June at 7 pm. For more information, contact Monsoon Fest at 45323630.

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Clothes glued to my skin with sweat, I have no idea how I’m going to finish the day’s trekking, let alone do 50 more days of it.

Sunk in sweat, sweating my first mouthful of dal bhat, the more than 130kg of weight on my 1.8m frame seems heavier than ever. Manil Himal, viewing point and Annapurna Base Camp are my group’s destinations, both “manageable”-size I was told. Like my dal bhat, I took the advice with a grain of salt.

This time last year I excused myself from the trail, claiming I would not be able to see the country by looking at my feet trekking uphill. But it’s time to atone for that idle sin. I also want to prove something to myself, and others: anyone can do it.

One hour later, on our journey to Forest Camp from Dhampus via Poon Deurali, both my guide Bikash Tamang and great friend Luke Burgess are having their doubts.

“Can you keep going? If we’re going to go back, I have no idea how our minds up now.”

Reezy, steep, peary, pokey—however you describe us large men, you don’t see our clothing sizes in Thamel for a reason. Most abdominal fellows don’t trek, if they do, they walk up to Poon Hill to later claim Machapuchare’s summit.

Floppy characters, my two counterparts are concerned. I am, too. I entertain the prospect of turning back—thoughts equally shameful and scary. I steel myself for the swelling, climax, a dose of sweets jammed down my throat (a lifetime first) and I slope uphill behind them. I have no understanding of my surroundings, only the colour of the sky, I keep focus on my heavy feet. And we make it, in my counterparts’ relief.

My frame has made it up this hill, and I hope it’s gaining momentum.

The next day we surge, buoyed by a rapid rise to Low Camp, and reach High Camp. My slow approach to the hills seems to keep us going, and see me named The Yak and Despacho (Spanish for slow-witted). My body lifts as we slowly mount the hill, and I start to stretch my surroundings.

The third day was as hard as the first, squashing any sense of cockiness I might have gained the day before. Trekking at 4.30am to catch the sunrise, still digesting last night’s dal bhat, I get used to the hurt. The elevation does nothing to me, but the trail does. All I feel is exhaustion, but the views from 4,200m are worth it. The final step onto the prayer flag adorned platform is my Neil Armstrong moment, without a giant leap for mankind—just tears. Weeping at such height is an interesting experience. A combination of hyperventilation, exhaustion and altitude, it’s hard to describe.

Now the prospect of reaching ABC seems feasible. From Naya Pul to Dhaul Ganga, through Chhomrong to Bhami, my left knee takes a beating. Nepal’s up-and-down terrain makes my suspension squeal. Pain, fear and vertigo be damned however, it’s impossible if the desire is there, according to my guide. So, with a snifty new ‘natural’ walking stick, I keep walking. A diet of dal bhat, spicy masala tea, instant coffee, and at least six litres of water each day is the perfect octane for this descent New Zealand’s Taha.

The final day of the ABC trek pales in comparison to Machu, however the altitude is felt a little more by all. Walking in the clouds, with local mountain dogs guiding us along the way, the slow and steady climb from Machapuchare Base Camp seems light in comparison to the almost vertical Machu.

Touching the welcoming sign released, once again, a stream of sweat from my face ducts—this time I don’t care whether it is out of exhaustion and pride. I’ve proven my point.

Nobody in good health has an excuse not to trek in Nepal, and no one should pass on the opportunity as ones foolishly did. Until one has trekked this country they won’t understand why. Those that have, however, do understand how spirit-affirming and life changing the experience is. It is something that brands itself in minds forever. Also, the point is proven: the corpulent conquer can trek, even if he is twice the weight of the average Nepali.

Thomas Heaton is a New Zealand journalist, food writer and enthusiastic trekker.
OCEAN'S 8

When Debbie Ocean (Sandra Bullock), the sister of a well-known con-man, is being released from jail, she claims she will lead a simple life, just paying her bills and all that. We immediately know that this is not true. The rest of the movie, where she masterminds a grand jewellery theft, is similarly predictable — but no less enjoyable. Directed by Gary Ross, this all-female sequel to its popular eponymous heist-movie franchise is a fun ride with women who kick ass.

As Ocean gathers an odd group of women, from her old partner Lou (Cate Blanchett) to the elusive hacker Ribbons (Thandie Newton as mysterious Nitre Ball who refuses to give her real name), a lot of racy stereotypes are in play: the assumption, carelessly thrown around, that all Russians are hackers or an Indian girl Amita (Mindy Kaling) who is frustrated that she has no past (brubhad) — an Asian street hustler Contagio (Awkwafina) who looks straight out of martial art movies, and many more. Out to prove the point, women can be as cunning as men, the movie is not subtle.

Helena Bonham Carter, as the diagnosed designer Rose Weil, is particularly effective, going off into dances and coming back with sudden exclamation to turn out to be just the right thing to say. Tammy (Sarah Paulson) has an eternally pinched expression as a florist trying to appear normal for her kids, adding to the drama. How the women convince their scraggly, topless actress Diane Kruger (Anne Hathaway), to fall into their plans at the glamorous Met Gala is a bit tricky. But what do they do when Kruger (is the real Diane Kruger watching?) turns out to be not as brainless as they expected?

The movie has plot holes and glitches here and there, some beyond credibility, but the stellar cast works quite well together to make sure you are not bored, with twists and turns until the very end. And last but not the least, the insurance investigator (James Corden) manages to steal the show with his witty remarks, despite the boring, stoic role he is burdened with.

In a move where there are voices being raised for more visibility and stronger roles for women in films, movies like Ocean’s 8 come as a welcome break. Here we see women being smart, strong, brainy, skilled, enterprising, calculating, victorious, and not polycenholised in eyecandy roles. Not saying they are not beautiful, however. But – despite the overdose of glamour and fashion (including a cameo from Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour) — the way they look is notcentre stage here, which is a relief. The eye candy here is a Debbie’s ex-Claude Becker (Richard Armitage), and we are fine with that.

Sure, we need more movies that pass the Bechdel Test, but is that enough? This movie throws up a question of what was meant by higher visibility of women. Do women on screen have to do all the borderline negative things that male heroes do to be considered successful? That then brings up the general question of whether glamorizing crime is OK, no matter if it is men or women. The answer is that this is a Leave-Your-brace-at-home kind of movie. Enjoy the ride and forget about it afterwards.

Sewa Bhattarai
Levy on foreign workers

Hari Karki | Kathmandu, 25 June

Nepal has set new labour guidelines in motion, taxing foreign workers from working here without a work permit. Indians are immune to the new rules thanks to the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, but their names and other details will be documented. However, other foreign workers, Indians too, will have to pay a levy of Rs 20,000 for six months, and Rs 30,000 after that.

Companies or businesses employing foreigners, including Indians, must notify the Labour Department about their non-Nepali workers. Also, they will have to pay a fine double the amount of levy. Officials claim they will start a labour audit, which will help fine the companies that violate the guidelines.

Officials claim the new guidelines, which have been published in the Gazette this week, are in line with international practices, and guarantee social security of foreigners just like Nepalis. They say foreign workers are entitled to provident fund, gratuity and other facilities just like Nepalis.

Foreigners hired as technical experts can work up to five years in Nepal, but others cannot work here for more than three. The guidelines also make it mandatory for Nepali companies to introduce a plan to gradually replace foreign technical experts by transferring their expertise to Nepalis. And the number of foreigners hired by Nepali-based companies should not exceed 5% of the total staff volume. However, the new labour guidelines do not apply to diplomatic agencies or entities operating under a specific agreement with the government.

Modern Arniko

Gunsen Lamsal in Naya Patrika on 25 June

Ten years ago, Manjul Mittei (Harial) of Mumbai announced he would donate 1000 stone statues to the state. But for the past one and a half years Manjul has been committed to a different project: building the world’s largest sculpture of Buddha, in Japan.

“One upon a time, with his remarkable craftsmanship Arniko earned Nepal international fame. Centuries later, we have the same opportunity again,” said Manjul, who himself has been called a ‘modern-day Arniko’ since news broke of his involvement in the world’s tallest Buddha statue. Japanese hotelier and social worker Osamu Okura found out about Manjul through Nepali engineering students in Japan, and approached the artist with plans to build seven statues of local deities, including the 68-foot-tall statue of the Buddha. Three other Nepali sculptors, Biswokarma, Ramsudha Pandit and Gunsen Kati (picture), are working day and night to carve the statues into a cliff at the famous tourist district of Kamado, 90km outside Tokyo. The project is 30% done, and will take another six years to be completed.

Despite the challenge, the Nepali sculptors are glad to be a part of the historic project. But their work often reminds them of Nepal’s unusual potential. Tall cliffs, abundant natural resources, and home-grown talent make Nepal a better site for such construction. “But unfortunately, politicians employ Chinese artists for large-scale projects,” said Manjul, who recently returned to Nepal for his holidays.

After the statues are complete, the Japanese government plans to include the site in the World Heritage List, which will also put contemporary Nepali sculpture on the map, said Manjul. He found out early on his trip that many in Japan were misinformed about the birthplace of the Buddha, and available textbooks were misleading. “We aren’t only building the tallest statue of the Buddha, but also letting the world know about his Nepali origin,” he said. Meanwhile in Nepal, his wife Kautila, also a professional sculptor, is helping sculpt the 1,000 statues promised at home. While they haven’t progressed as much as they would have liked due to lack of funding, the couple have opened the Urubari Statue Museum with local support. So far they have sculpted statues of 100 famous personalities. Once Manjul is back from Japan, he said, the artistic couple plans to work together to achieve their ultimate goal.

“We will surely gift 1000 statues to the state, and make our dream come true,” said Kautila.
Proposed amendments to Nepal’s Transitional Justice Act still let perpetrators off the hook

Om Astha Rai

Laxmi Khadka of Bardiya and Nanda交付 Dalal of Bageshwar were on the same Nepali–Kathmandu flight on a scruffy afternoon in 2004. Two are still united in a quest for justice, but they held opposite sides during the war.

While Khadka’s husband was kidnapped by Maoists in 2003, Dalal’s husband was detained by police in 2002. They never saw their husbands again. Their husbands vanished at the hands of opposing sides, and both now seek truth and justice.

Their common cause has allowed the two women to develop a strong bond. They often travel together to attend programs held by Conflict Victims Common Platform — an umbrella body of the families of those who disappeared and whose disappeared during the 1996-2006 Maoist war.

Dalal, 45, calls Khadka, 50, didi (elder sister), and they spend hours talking about not just their missing husbands but also about other immediate matters like places, food and home. While in Kathmandu, their child, a stepson, Moustik Adhikari, sympathizes: “I thought everybody in Nepal — Massiot was my enemy, but my views changed when I met Laxmi didi and women like her.”

Khadka smiles, and passes a white slice to Dalal as they wait for a phone call from a lawyer in Kathmandu. She says: “Politicians turned us against each other during the war, but we are now together to fight against them.”

Once in Kathmandu, they learnt that the bill was finally in place to amend the 2014 Transitional Justice Act, and the government wanted their quick comments on it. They are aware that the contents of the bill and its wording will directly affect their lives, but they do not know how to react.

Relatives of conflict victims like Khadka and Dalal have been given just two weeks to discuss the draft amendment. Human rights groups had opposed the 2014 Act, which they said did not meet international standards and had provisions of blanket pardon for those accused of war crimes.

The government took four years to come up with the amendments, and now wants to pass it as soon as possible. Victims’ families say there is too little time to even understand the 25-page document laden with legal jargon.

Suman Adhikari, son of Muktinath Adhikari who was executed by Maoists in Lamjung in 2002, says: “We cannot make head or tail of the draft amendment in such a short period. The government must give us a simplified and summarized version of the bill, and more time to study and debate it.”

The way the government is hurriedly pushing through the new bill shows suspicion that it just intends to get it done and over with, denying transitional justice to conflict victims. Law and Justice Minister Shrestha Bhadur Tamang has claimed that the new bill is “pro-victim”, and it will solve all conflict-era crimes. But conflict victims and human rights activists say the bill could actually be “pro-perpetrator”.

To be sure, the draft amendment has addressed the four fundamental principles of transitional justice: truth, reparation, conviction and commitment to not repeat war crimes. It is also largely in tune with a Supreme Court verdict, which is against granting amnesty to perpetrators of gross human rights violations: extra-judicial killing, torture, enforced disappearances and rape.

But the new bill has taken a nod out of Colombia’s ‘restorative justice’ system, which focuses on reconciliation and reparations instead of punitive measures. It guarantees conflict victims the right to reparation, but it also proposes to reduce jail terms by up to 75% if perpetrators help the investigation, apologize and express a commitment to not violate human rights in future. Even if the accused does not admit to the crime, sentencing can be reduced up to 60% depending on the condition in which the incident took place.

For example, if an ex-guerrilla or soldier is convicted of kidnapping and murdering a civilian and is slapped with a 20-

When our son was

A translated excerpt from a chapter ‘Death of Justice’ - a memoir of Gangamaya Adhikari, who is on the third week of her hunger strike at Bir Hospital, demanding her son’s murderers be brought to justice.

It was Thursday 3 June, 2004. We used to keep earnings from the sale of produce for our in-laws, and this time our youngest son Krishna wanted to take the money to Chitwan to hand it over to his grandparents.

Krishna had travelled to Chitwan for the first time a year ago with his father. My husband was not sure if he would be able to travel alone and worried that carrying all that cash would be unsafe. “It’s best that I go. You might get lost,” he said.

But Krishna had made up his mind to go, and also got his SLC results while he was in Chitwan. That sounded reasonable. Our elder son Nore Prasad was also home at the time. He tutored village students who had failed their exams. On the morning of 3 June, he left home early for classes. I was cooking rice, Krishna was preparing to leave for Chitwan.

“Mother, I am going to be late if I wait for you to finish cooking the vegetables,” said Krishna as he helped himself to the yogurt I had set. I had a lot of household chores myself and fodder grass to cut. So I told Krishna to finish the rice and yoghurt while I left for my work.

Krishna was neatly dressed in a crisp shirt and white pants when he left. His father had handed him Rs. 20,000, saying that Rs. 15,000 was for his grandparents and Rs.5,000 was for him to buy whatever he wanted.

“I don’t want much besides a new pair of shoes,” said Krishna, who had himself saved Rs 4000 working in the farm and saving from his little money. It was not even 6AM, but the sun was already up in the sky.

On his way, Krishna stopped by the school where his elder brother was tutoring his students. The two spoke briefly before Krishna continued on. His brother ran through the classroom window as Krishna walked away, not knowing it would be the last time he would ever see or talk to his young brother.

Had we known that Krishna was travelling to his death, I would have kept him safely hidden within the walls of our
Those convicted of war crimes could end up spending less than a year behind bars.

The new bill also introduces the concept of “open prison” and “treatment centre” for convicts, meaning murderers can even spend their reduced jail terms at home or in “social work”.

“If this is how those who took away my husband will be punished, I don’t want justice,” says Laxmi Kholas. The two ex-Maos who kidnapped her husband are roaming free. “I want to continue living with them even after they are convicted, there will just be more bad blood.”

Renu, the elder sister of Rohul Paudel, says the new bill is full of vague provisions that can be used to deprive the victims of the amended transitional justice act and indirectly allow perpetrators to go free.

critical

Forty years after the civil war, the landscape of the capital is dotted with farmers and their children who are part of the community who have lived through the conflict. The peace process has been slow and contentious, with the government and Maoists still divided on the issue of transitional justice.

The new bill, which aims to amend the transitional justice law, has been met with mixed reactions. While some see it as a step forward in the process of reconciliation, others fear it could be used to impunity.

The bill, which was introduced in Parliament on Thursday, is set to be voted on next week. It will be the first major reform to the transitional justice law since it was enacted in 2015.

The bill includes provisions for the release of certain categories of prisoners, including those serving less than five years, after serving one-third of their sentences. It also allows for the release of prisoners serving more than five years, if they have served at least half of their sentences.

The bill also includes provisions for the rehabilitation of prisoners, including the provision of vocational training and education.

Critics of the bill argue that it could be used to release criminals who have committed serious crimes, and that the provisions for rehabilitation are not sufficient to ensure that prisoners are truly reformed.

The government has defended the provisions, saying they are necessary to ensure the smooth functioning of the justice system.

The bill is expected to be debated in Parliament on Friday, and is likely to be passed. The government has expressed its determination to implement the transitional justice law as soon as possible.

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Gut feeling

The burning topic this week is the rainy season that is upon us. The monsoon gets a lot of bad press for its mud, leeches, diarrhoea (verbal and gastrical) and flooded streets that swallow up Mantras. It is time we used these unique waterpoints to rebad the Monsoon in the new Visit Nepal Year 2026 campaign. What the new slogan lacks in a Monsoon Madhesi Promise, it is incumbent upon us to start cushioning up the rains, and use its hidden potential to attract visitors from areas of the world where rains are rare.

Here are some catchy slogans concocted especially for this occasion:

"Visit Nepal: It Rains Cats, Dogs, As Well As Water Buffaloes"
"Play is Wet Your Bed in Nepal"
"Take the Rains in the Rain"
"It Never Rains in Nepal, It Pourrs"
"Wholly in Waking"

Welcome to Nepal and have 10 kg in 10 Days, or your Money Back. Conditions Apply. If in Doubt, Consult Lawyer and/or Gastroenterologist. View Print: Contact Diagrams and Trigger a Lantern Uprising. "Visit Nepal and Cultivate a Gut Feeling."

Fans & Favs

Be that passionate fan to cheer for your favourite team this season.