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BIKRAM RAI

Starving for justice

On the 26th day of his 15th hunger strike, his longest yet, the Government was finally close to meeting most of Govinda KC's demands, to make health care affordable and accessible for all Nepalis, by removing corruption from the medical education sector.

But not close enough. The last sticking point was KC's demand that no more medical colleges would be allowed in Kathmandu Valley for 10 more years, which the Government was not willing to sign off on categorically.

KC's latest fast was due to the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) government, with its near two-thirds majority in Parliament, trying to hurriedly pass the Medical Education Bill without pledges previously agreed to, from the campaigning doctor's previous hunger strikes.

With KC's health deteriorating, public opinion was overwhelmingly on his side. The Government's

negotiation team, led by former House speaker Subhas Nembang, by Thursday evening agreed to most of the doctor's demands. But as night fell, it was touch-and-go once more, with negotiators going through several revisions of the draft agreement at the Prime Minister's residence in Baluwatar.

KC has said his demand for a moratorium on medical schools in the capital was to ensure teaching hospitals were evenly spread out in the country. But powerful figures in the ruling party are known to have stakes in new medical colleges waiting for licenses in Kathmandu.

The Government agreed to a list of other demands, such as medical colleges not becoming affiliated until they had operated their own hospitals for three years, and a single university should not be allowed to license more than five medical colleges. Other demands included Medical Education Ordinance being implemented to

the letter, all officials including the acting deputy be appointed to the Medical Education Commission, and a common entrance test be conducted.

KC started his most recent fast in Jumla after Kathmandu's Maitighar Mandala was declared a no-protest zone. He agreed to be flown back to Kathmandu but only after police raided the Karnali Academy of Health Sciences, throwing tear gas and firing rubber bullets. KC also wanted the Karnali Academy to be upgraded to enroll MBBS students.

There had been no dialogue between the two sides after KC was taken to Kathmandu from Jumla on 19 July, with the Government actively seeking to discredit KC's fast. It claimed he was being manipulated by opposition Nepali Congress and Bibeksheel Sajha, with one minister even saying the hunger strike was part of a "grand design".

KC has signed 11 agreements with the Government in the past eight years, and it appears he

wanted this fast to be make or break. Given the financial interests of the medical-political nexus, however, the NCP will be under pressure from investors to renege on any deal. KC likely suspects this; so even if he calls off this hunger strike, it is not likely going to be his last.

Sewa Bhattarai and Ramu Sapkota



BREAST IS BEST

More Nepali mothers now exclusively breastfeeding babies for better health.

SPECIAL COVERAGE

World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August

PAGE 14-15

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

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TWO-THIRDS EMPTY

The Oli administration is arguably the strongest government Nepal has had since 1990. It wields de facto control over the legislature, executive, the judiciary and the security agencies. In addition, the constitutional organs are heavily influenced by the Prime Minister's Office. With a two-thirds majority, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) is virtually oppositionless.

Which is why, given its stranglehold on power, it is surprising the government is behaving like it is a fragile coalition on the verge of collapse. Recent actions and pronouncements by the Prime Minister and his supporters to lash out at critics show that the Communists have a low tolerance for criticism. Instead of being two-thirds full, the government is behaving like it is running on two-thirds empty.

This week, at a close-door meeting of a media club loyal to the government, both Prime Minister Oli and Prime Minister-in-waiting Pushpa Kamal Dahal blamed the messenger: exhorting reporters to go all out against detractors, enticing them with government advertising as reward.

Information Minister Gokul Basnet, a former journalist himself, axed an NTV talk show after the anchor grilled him on live television. When Bhaktapur was inundated earlier this month, ruling party MP Mahesh Basnet in Parliament denounced

when a policeman was hit in friendly fire, Police deliberately spread fake news that he was dead -- as a pressure tactic to force Govinda KC back to Kathmandu.

To be sure, the government is behaving no differently than all previous ones in shifting the blame, faulting anyone but themselves, and smearing hunger strikers by accusing them of being politically manipulated. It is a national trait to play victim, after all.

This is a pity because PM Oli was given an overwhelming mandate as a prize for having stood up to the Indians. Since then, he has united his party with the Maoists, won infrastructure deals with China, patched up with New Delhi, raising hopes that he would be as statesmanlike domestically. Half a year on, that euphoria has nearly evaporated.

All is not well within the NCP, either. Former UML leaders have expressed misgivings in private that the ex-Maoists are out to trip up the Prime Minister. Indeed, at every step from the government's failure to rein in transportation syndicates, to the non-investigation of gold smugglers, or the unfulfilled pledge to punish the corrupt, the buck has stopped at the PMO. Dahal is in the sidelines, biding his time, and letting Oli stew in his own juice.

Oli has a reputation for being a sharp-tongued and shrewd politician, and he probably knows the blame is being heaped



BIKAM RAI

There are signs Prime Minister Oli is finally acting to correct his over-reach. Are these silver linings, in otherwise dark monsoon clouds?

those poking fun at the Prime Minister on Facebook, threatening to book them under the cyber crime law. Government lackeys have unleashed trolls, and spread fake news on social media to discredit critics.

The NCP started it all last month by leaning on the President to grant a Republic Day pardon to convicted murderer Bal Krishna Dhungel. The state is thumbing its nose at war victims seeking truth and justice, and establishing impunity as the new order of business.

The PMO then went on to ban all demonstrations in so-called 'restricted areas', reversed appointments made by the previous Nepali Congress government, stopped the vice-chancellor of the Sanskrit University from travelling to Canada and bundled him to the PMO for interrogation, and ex-guerrillas kidnapped a doctor at the Trauma Centre who refused to sign a letter certifying them for handicap compensation, on Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa's orders.

When Govinda KC took his hunger strike to Jumla, the local government fired rubber bullets and teargas inside a hospital. And

on him. Which is why he seems to be finally acting to correct his over-reach.

He convinced Gangamaya Adhikari to call off her hunger strike. That crisis will not be over until the other person accused of killing her son in 2004, Rudra Acharya, is extradited from Northern Ireland. Interpol has put out a Red Corner notice, but the UK government wants reassurances he will not face torture and capital punishment if sent back.

Interestingly, the UK acted much more swiftly to detain Nepal Army Col Kumar Lama at Heathrow in 2013 for wartime excesses. And no assurances on capital punishment and torture have been sought from the Americans this week for the extradition of two UK nationals accused of terrorism charges.

The government also finally became proactive in negotiating with Govinda KC, who called off his 15th fast on the 26th day of his hunger strike, on Thursday evening. Law Minister Tamang has stepped down after an outcry over his derogatory remarks about female Nepali medical students in Bangladesh.

Taken together, these are silver linings in otherwise dark monsoon clouds.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepal's first ceremonial president was elected this week ten years ago. And although the post is ceremonial, it was a bruising competition between the parties that portended what was to come. Columnist Prashant Jha wrote this in his column Plain Speaking in the *Nepali Times* issue of 25-31 July 2008, #410:

No one has come out clean from the presidency fiasco. The Maoists tried to fool all the people all the time. Girija Prasad Koirala's ego and obstinacy held the country hostage. Upendra Yadav confirmed suspicions he is a political opportunist who wants MJF to be a kingmaker.

What is certain is that the realignments spell bad news for the peace process, democracy, constitution-writing, and even Kathmandu-Madhes relationship ... unless the more fundamental aspects of the peace process, governance and state-Madhes gap are addressed, it may be premature to characterise Nepal as a 'post-conflict' country.



ONLINE PACKAGES



BREAST IS BEST

Breastfeeding prevents breast cancer deaths, decreases hospital admissions by up to 72% and increases children's IQ by 3 points. Investing \$1 to promote breastfeeding yields \$35 in economic terms. Watch this short video by UNICEF Nepal that shows the benefits of early and exclusive breastfeeding. *Story on page 14-15.*



UPCYCLED ART

Who would have thought that beautiful art can be created from hospital waste? But some youngsters have created exactly that at Kanti Children's hospital, Nepal's only government hospital for children. Go online to watch the artists at work, as they spread positive vibes where it is most needed. *Story on page 7.*

WHAT'S TRENDING



Kleptocrats of Kathmandu and Kuala Lumpur

by Ramu Sapkota and Alyaa Alhadjri
This investigative crossborder reporting on how politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats in Nepal and Malaysia colluded to rob more than Rs5 billion over five years from Nepali migrant workers sparked a public outcry in both countries. Former Malaysian Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamid has offered to be investigated and Malaysian firm Bestinet Sdn Bhd has denied any wrongdoing. Visit our website to find out how Nepalis were systematically looted.

Most visited online page

Most commented

Risking his life to save lives

by Kunda Dixit
Medical care should be affordable and accessible to all. In one sentence, that is all Govinda KC wants on behalf of Nepalis. Then why is his hunger strike a direct challenge to PM Oli? Click on *nepalitimes.com* for the answer.


Most reached and shared on Facebook


Parkour Dinesh, Nepal's gravity-defying policeman


by Sahina Shrestha
Parkour is a relatively new sport in Nepal, and most haven't heard of it. Yet Dinesh Sunar from Khotang has set two Guinness World Records for the sport. Get to know more about Nepal's very own Parkour champion and watch a short video of this gravity defying policeman.


Most popular on Twitter


QUOTE TWEETS


- 

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Plastic bans have failed again and again in Nepal. Will penalties and fines work? For a comparison of several countries that have successfully reduced plastic use with innovative methods, read our report <https://www.nepalitimes.com/from-the-nepali-press/a-plastic-republic/> ... #followup
- 

pigreen @pigreen1
various methods have been used in the UK to reduce the use of non-recyclable plastic in particular by targeting the practices of supermarkets and other retailers, to some effect. In Nepal, government, retailers and consumers must all play their part.
- 

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Feeling pressed for space in congested Kathmandu? Take a look at Narayanchaur, a model for urban revival in Naxal. @duksangh finds out how local activists got together to revive a space that used to be a garbage dump.
- 

Rensje Teerink @RensjeTeerink
Having lived right in front of this park for 4 years, it's uplifting to see that it continues to be well maintained. It's such an important green space for the people of Naxal.
- 

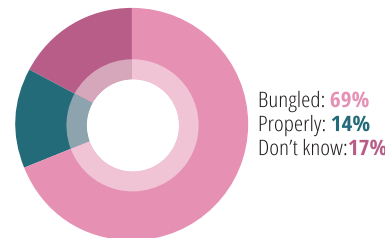
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
What do you think of the way Dr. Govinda KC's hunger strike has been handled by the government?
- 

Bishnu Bhattarai @BishnuTweet Jul 20
This question is wrong. It should be, "Should the government nationalise all medical colleges and hospitals so that Dr. KC's concern for all Nepalis ends happily ever after?"

Times Weekly Internet Poll #920

Q. What do you think of the way Govinda KC hunger strike has been handled by the government?

Total votes: 168



Weekly Internet Poll #921
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think this is Govinda KC's last fast?



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Publisher and Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
Associate Editor: Om Astha Rai | Design: Kiran Maharjan
Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
Marketing: Arjun Karki, Surendra Sharma rachanas@himalmedia.com | Subscriptions: Santosh Aryal santosh@himalmedia.com
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A post mortem of Nepal's

Mallika Shakya's new book *Death of an Industry* holds important lessons for the country's trade

Sewa Bhattarai



PHOTOS: GARMENT ASSOCIATION NEPAL

After the 1990 restoration of democracy, and at the cusp of a new millennium, globalisation arrived in Nepal with a bang. Call centres catering to international clients sprang up, travel and tourism boomed, Nepal's started migrating overseas for work, and made-in-Nepal carpets, garments and pashminas started being exported all over the world.

Weavers, tailors and workers needed for the factories flocked to Kathmandu Valley, feeding its rapid urbanisation. Nepal seemed to be living the prediction of Francis Fukuyama, who declared capitalism to be the end of history. It was also the end of geography.

But Fukuyama was proven wrong, the global economy was hit by multiple economic crises and recessions, and Nepal's export market collapsed. In her book *Death of an Industry*, Mallika Shakya traces the history of the rise and fall of Nepal's garment industry.

It all started in 1974 with the

American Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) which allocated quotas to garment imports from developing nations. Its actual intent was to protect its domestic industry, but it suited Nepal well and a garment manufacturing industry materialised almost overnight, becoming the country's fourth-largest export at one point.

When the MFA finally lapsed in 2004, Nepal's garment industry collapsed. Shakya takes issue with

how this demise was considered natural, even inevitable, by the state, and how workers were left to fend for themselves. Most opted to migrate to the Persian Gulf, fuelling another industry.

"The state felt well grounded, technically in its assertion that the industry collapsed because it could not compete in the global market. It was felt that if it was not good enough, it did not deserve to live, and the state felt legitimacy

in ignoring the plight of millions employed by the industry,' Shakya writes.

For Shakya, the garment saga epitomises 'the hegemony of neoliberalism', which became mainstream in Nepal in the 1980s with World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), and after 1990 with the free market principles.

An industry once made up of 1,200 firms now has only 50,

and survives on orders that have no other takers. Apparel exports from China, India and Bangladesh flourished even after the MFA because cheap labour made them more competitive. Nepal's products were up to 30% more expensive in comparison.

However, for Chandi Prasad Aryal of the Garment Association of Nepal, it was not just a question of free market competition. "We need state support to make our

So, you want to be a Chartered Accountant?

The stereotype of Chartered Accountants is that they are boring. Lower pass rates and tedious subject matter, where students juggle numbers, have made many opt out. The prospects of national and global employment and an appealing salary have, however, attracted many hard working and dedicated students to Chartered Accountancy.

The British accredited Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) is a global professional body that provides authorised 3-4 years course in 178 countries. The British Council held the first ACCA exam in Nepal way back in 1977 with just one student. In 2014 Nepali colleges started offering the certified course, and an ACCA Nepal Head was elected. Demand grew after that, with the number of ACCA students rising to 2,700 in 2018.

"After moving towards federalism, Nepal has great potential for economic growth. This means banks, financial institutions and businesses have started reaching out to many parts of the country. The demand for local experts is increasing, creating job prospects for CAs," explains Rabin Katwal, ACCA Nepal Head (*right*)

Nepal makes up a very small percentage of the total 188,000 ACCA members and 480,000 students globally, but Nepali students and working members have been making a mark, says Katwal.

In 2017, Rejika Maharjan, a student from The British College,

topped the P3 Business Analysis Professional Association of Chartered Certified Accountants paper, ranking her number one in the world. Out of around 600 ACCA accredited Nepali members, over 100 are working in Canada, Australia, West Asia and Europe. Since ACCA is a global degree, the job prospects give global mobility to its members from any part of the world.



ACCA NEPAL


The ACCA course includes 14 papers on applied knowledge, skills and strategic professions, integrating ICT, AI, digital learning and strategic business leadership. After exams, students need to gain 3 years of experience in accounts, finance, audit, management, business consultancy, taxation, corporate governance, marketing or financial reporting. They need to also complete 20 hours of online training on ethics and professional skills modules to have full

accreditation.

In the case of audit practice in Nepal, every CA member, including ACCA, needs to go through exams of Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nepal (ICAN). Even though ICAN is a qualifying body, it also regulates the profession, unlike in other countries.

ACCA in Nepal does not yet include Nepal's tax system and regulations. That gap, however, has been bridged by colleges offering ACCA courses, by providing training and knowledge periodically. The British College, National College of Accountancy, CC School of Accountancy and Survey International Business School provide ACCA courses currently.

Because of the lengthy process of qualifying and registering as a professional CA, many students tend to opt out in the middle of the course. Katwal, an ACCA member himself, believes hard work, dedication and continuity is all that is necessary, as Chartered Accountancy is one field of study that has an objective marking system.

And for those who believe CA is uninteresting, Katwal responds by saying: "Skills demanded for professional accountants will be completely different in the future: mundane calculation will be automated. So CAs need to fulfill roles in communication, leadership, and complex decision-making, which cannot be solved with AI. This will never be boring."  **Sikuma Rai**

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HK to Seattle

Cathay Pacific has announced that it will launch a new non-stop service from Hong Kong to Seattle from 31 March 2019. This



will directly link the Asian hub with the West Coast of the United States four times a week, via Airbus A350-900 aircraft.

Neo narrow-body

Turkish Airlines now has its first narrow-body aircraft: A321neo. Produced at the Airbus facilities in Hamburg, the modern addition has flexible cabin configurations and an eco-friendly concept, reducing



nitrogen oxide emissions by 50%, and noise by 75%. The airline will operate the plane with 20 seats in business class and 162 in economy.

TripAdvisor Award

Thai Airways received the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award for 2018, ranking



it as one of 11 best airlines in the Travelers' Choice Major Airline Asia category. The travel website, with over 350 million members worldwide, based the award on tourists' reviews over the past 12 months.

Best bank award

Nepal Investment Bank won the award of 'Nepal's Best Bank' from *Euromoney* magazine's Awards for Excellence 2018. The



bank, with more than 870,000 customers, has paid-up capital of Rs10.65 billion and Rs20.94 billion of core capital and assets, worth more than USD1.5 billion.

NIC bancassurance

Acting CEO of NIC Asia Bank Roshan Kumar Neupane and CEO of the National Life Insurance Bharat Basnet have signed

a bancassurance agreement to provide the bank's customers all insurance facilities of Surya Life Insurance, via its 233 branch network.

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garment boom



products competitive in the world market. Governments in India and China give 11-16% export subsidies to garments, and that makes their products cheaper. Without that, our products will always be more expensive,” he explained.

Avinash Gupta, an apparel-industry researcher with Kathmandu based think tank SAWTEE, agrees that countries like Bangladesh benefitted from state support. “There was credible effort from the state through duty refunds, tax concessions, back to back Letter of Credits, bonded warehouse, training trips among others,” he says. “No manufacturing sector in the world has expanded without technological learning, and this almost always has been a function of industrial policies.”

History also shows that industries have not developed with just a laissez-faire policy, and the state always has a role to play in industrialisation of now-developed countries like Korea, China and Taiwan. In Nepal though, the garment and carpet industries went through boom and bust cycles, but were left to fend for themselves.

“In our neighbouring countries, such industries get state support in the form of land on lease and bank loans at low rates. Such support, and economic diplomacy to secure the right of seaport access for a landlocked country are necessary to make us competitive,” says Ram Bahadur Gurung of the Central Carpet Industries Association Nepal.

Nepal’s pashmina export is another industry that boomed, then collapsed. It is still relatively well placed with its trademarks registered in 47 countries, but struggles to raise annual sales above Rs5 billion. “Our sales are based on fashion, and we cannot predict the ebb and flow of fashion in our markets. The state needs to help us send our young designers abroad to study, so that we are able to break into the design sector,” says Durga Bikram Thapa of the Nepal Pashmina Industries Association.

In her book, Shakya cites how one garment factory tried to climb the supply chain hierarchy by sending a young scion abroad to study design. He realised that gauging global fashion trends set by a handful of influential European designers was beyond him, and declared his years of learning wasted. That is still the case in Nepal’s garment industry, where the design, size or fabric are all decided beforehand.

Workers in Nepal’s garment industry were desperate enough to accept extremely low pay for arranging cut cloth, sewing the main body or the hands or the neck parts, quality checking by measuring against the size specifications as much as six times, and cutting the extra threads off

the finished product. Shakya calls this the ‘penultimate satanic mill of faceless proletarianisation’.

Workers had no creative inputs, no share of the profits, and their highly specialised skills were useless elsewhere. So, they had nothing to fall back on when the industry collapsed and western buyers simply gathered up their

RUN DOWN: Products for some well known brands like Gap and Walmart are still made in Nepal. However, the industry that consisted of 1,200 firms has now shrunk to just 50, and survives on orders that have no other takers.

profits and took their orders elsewhere. They had no inkling as to why the industry came and went, or how it left Nepal’s environment polluted and increased urban poverty.

Shakya returns to this theme of the helplessness of the Global South again and again in her book. Nepal is small fry on the world stage with no clout in matters affecting its citizens. Even while the US government and the World Trade Organisation decided the MFA’s time was up, factory owners in Nepal fell back on fatalism and conducted religious rituals to ward off the curse.

Nepali businessmen did try to lobby for an MFA extension, but

could not even find someone to table the bill in the US Congress. After the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 in Bangladesh in which nearly 3,000 workers were killed, all of South Asia suffered from the negative western media coverage of exploited workers in dangerous sweat shops. The international media fell back on an orientalist view to blame lax building standards and corruption, ignoring that it was the end of the MFA had forced countries to be competitive by cutting corners.

Shakya denies her book is angry or pessimistic in tone, and says she offers alternatives. Since the garment export business was created by global economic factors, the feeling here was that it was beyond Nepal’s control. Hence, its loss meant nothing to Nepal. Although the industry initially attracted Indian investors using Nepal’s quotas, over time the factories were populated by Nepal’s poor, and owned by Nepalis – and they suffered when the MFA lapsed. The alternative to this outlook, Shakya says, lies in policies that take ‘human economy’ into account, where the welfare of workers is priority.


Nepal’s prolonged political transition is now replaced with ruling Communists who have promised economic prosperity through political stability. The country’s planners should read



Death of an Industry
Cambridge University Press, India
162 pages, NPR 950

Shakya’s book to learn lessons from the recent past – the main one being finding alternatives to pervasive global neoliberalism that she says has done more harm than good to Nepal.

Asked what she hopes her book can achieve, Shakya told us: “Agencies like the WTO, World Bank and countries like the US are powerful, but the bigger problem is our own lack of imagination, in believing in the supremacy of market forces over state regulation, competitiveness over social justice. It is about time we in Nepal questioned the hegemony of neoliberalism in global economic policies.” 🇳🇵



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KEEP WALKING



We may not be a very happy nation at the moment, but just wait a few more months for Dasain.

1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

Whatever the reason, many Nepalis are unhappy, and more and more are beginning to organise to address the cause of their unhappiness. Social media is full of stories and images of Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović flying economy class to the World Cup in Russia, and standing in the rain to hug her sweaty team. This was in stark contrast to the travel style of our own President, who leaves monstrous traffic jams in her wake wherever she goes, as well as



Nepali society is now polarised between the people who won the elections, and the

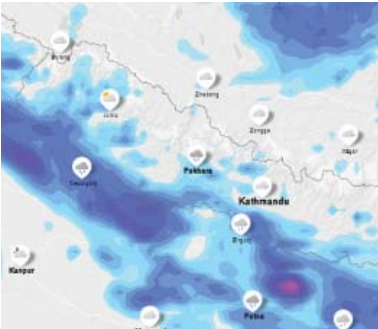
We may need to wait a bit before we carry out the Happiness Survey. Right now Nepalis may have hit the rock bottom in Gross National Happiness. But by Dasain, we will be a happy nation again. What a difference a month makes. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc

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Capital of Sherpaland gets a makeover



PHOTOS: HEALTH TRANSFORMED BY ART

The art of healing

Unique project fills corridors of hospital with paintings

Sewa Bhattarai

A child looks on intently as Shradha Shrestha paints the blank walls of Kanti Children’s Hospital at Maharajganj. “Look at aunty painting a tiger on the wall,” says the child’s mother. In fact, Shrestha is painting a giraffe.

Shrestha and Kiran Maharjan were busy at work for the past few months, painting the walls of Nepal’s only government hospital for children. The young patients, their parents, doctors, nurses, and staff came by to watch them work, offer feedback, and give suggestions. As the murals slowly took shape in the busiest corridors, the colourful paintings raised spirits and added some beauty to an otherwise grimy hospital.

Shrestha and Maharjan are part of the ‘Health Transformed by Art’ project that has

been trying to bring the therapeutic value of art into Kathmandu’s hospitals with support from Siddhartha Art Gallery.

“Art is usually seen only in galleries, so we thought, why not bring it outside - to hospitals, where the power of art, and its engagement and expression, is very much needed?” explains coordinator Shristi Shakya. With Raju Giri and Anoj Subedi, the group chose nature as the theme for its healing potential, and they picked Kanti Children’s Hospital because its patients hail from all over the country.

Speaking at the opening of the exhibit, art critic Abhi Subedi explained the purpose of art had always been for mental and spiritual wellbeing. Following the 2015 earthquake, many art groups went around affected areas, conducting painting workshops for children. When they returned to their classrooms, students were told to draw their experiences as a means to deal with trauma.



The results showed how art provided a medium for children to articulate their feelings and find some relief from stress. Still, art’s therapeutic value had not been recognised in Nepal, and its potential for healing was not a widespread concept.

For this project, art therapist Lajja Dixit first trained 11 artists on art therapy. They then conducted art-based therapy workshops in the cancer ward. After that, team members Raju, Shristi and Anoj collected non-hazardous hospital waste like bottles, caps, containers, tubes for installation art pieces. Waste from Kanti, Norvic, Manmohan, Om, Grande, and Gangalal hospitals was sterilised and sorted, then upcycled into installations by artists including students from Kathmandu University and Shrijana College of Fine Arts. It would have otherwise become landfill.

Working in a government hospital had its challenges: not only did the the team have to wait for six months just to get permission, the

artists were not allowed to work during the doctors’ rounds. This meant working until 11PM. The results are there for all to see: a colourful, bright orange phoenix soaring above a statue of Queen Kanti, and tiny birds in blue, red and yellow hanging from the ceiling.

The works also carry subtle messages concerning the politics of medical care, and how it should be affordable and accessible to all Nepalis. Mekh Limbu’s installation displays a row of tiny medicine bottles, but instead of labels they have pictures of Nepal’s herbs. The piece is a commentary on how the people suffer from a lack of drugs, despite Nepal being rich in medicinal plants.

Hospital director Ganesh Rai is happy with his hospital doubling as an art gallery: “I don’t know much about art, but a lot of people have complimented me on the fresh look of the hospital. It spreads positive energy, which is helpful for the children.”

Siddhartha Art Gallery hopes to continue this project in other hospitals around Nepal. “These are cynical times, but idealism, hard work and integrity of the artists have brought us this far,” says the gallery’s director Sangeeta Thapa, whose own recent health scare was an impetus for the project.

“As I was lying in a hospital, I would get calls from the artists every day. They asked me to decide on one thing after another, shared their problems, their ideas,” said Thapa, as she broke down in tears at the inauguration. “It was difficult for me to handle all that but it came to mean so much to me, personally, as well. This project to heal others has ended up healing me, myself.” 🇳🇵

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The Tamu Trek

A new hiking route retracing the heritage of the Gurung people is the new trekking



Jit Gurung in Lamjung

Anthropologists have long known that most of Nepal's indigenous people settled along the southern slopes of the Himalayan mountains in waves beginning more than 1,000 years ago. But what were their exact routes? Where did they establish the first villages?



The linguistic affinity between the languages of the Gurung, Tamang, Thakali and Manang peoples have led experts to conclude that they may have travelled from Tibet across the mountains to settle below the Annapurna and Langtang ranges at about the same time in history.

Recently, a group of Gurungs from the Tamu Dheen Association of UK travelled to the base of Lamjung Himal to retrace the heritage of their people, among ruins of 14th century settlement at Kohla Sonthar. The route from Besisahar to Ghale Gaun, Bhujung, to Kohla Sonthar and down to Pokhara via Tangting and Sikles, is now being promoted as the Tamu Heritage Circuit. (*See map, overleaf*)

The historical and archeological site is a pilgrimage for the Tamu (Gurung) people in Nepal and its diaspora now spread across the world. It is a sacred ancestral site that all Gurungs must visit at some point in their lives.

Jit Gurung is a native of Tangting and is currently serving with the United Nations in Darfur, Sudan.

Day 1

After a six-hour bus ride from Kathmandu to Besisahar, the first stop is the Tamu/Gurung Museum where visitors pay respects to a statue of Harka Gurung (*below*), the famous Nepali geographer who was among the 23 killed in a helicopter crash in 2006 at Ghunsa in Kangchenjunga. Also killed was Chandra Gurung, the pioneer environmentalist who helped establish the Annapurna Conservation Area.



Harka Gurung's birthplace of Ngadi is also his burial site.

Then it is up the dirt switchbacks to the bucolic village of Ghale Gaun (Kuinli Nasa in Tamu) which has become

The Gurung Herit

a staging point for scenic treks in the area. This is where the Ghale rulers from Kohla Sonthar first settled. The last Ghale king was Ghyalpo Rajalke, and there is a statue in his honour near the ruins of his palace (*right*). Local cultural groups perform for visiting tourists with *naumati baja* and traditional Gurung dances like *Ghanto*, *Sorathi*, *Pachyu* and *Ghyabre*.

Day 2

From Ghale Gaun (*below*) to Bhujung is a pleasant ridge hike, but there is now also a motorable road. Bhujung has homestays and the locals are extra hospitable to



visitors. The trek to Kohla Sonthar starts here, and it is a steep walk along the trails, with the clouds often drifting in and flowing across forests of rhododendron and oak draped with orchids. Stop over at Samiro Kuna for the night by the side of a gurgling brook.

Day 3

The next day is a steep climb to Kobaro Hill at 3,300 and then down to Ngasi Kharka for the night stop, a meadow where villagers bring their livestock to graze during monsoon. The walk is arduous, but the scenery and tranquility of the forests with rhododendron in full bloom more than makes up for the fatigue.

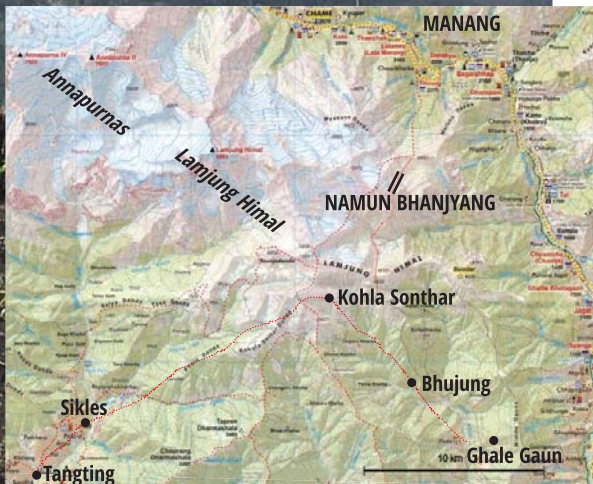
Day 4

It is a hard walk of a few hours from Ngasi



Trail

destination this autumn



Heritage Circuit



Kharka to Kohla Sonthar, the final destination (*right, below*). Vegetation has partly taken over the ancient ruins of Gurung ancestors.

Day 5
The route from Kohla Sonthar to Sikles (Chiuli Nasa) is not well trodden and the trail down to the Madkyu Khola is steep and rough.

It takes all day to finally get to the picturesque village of Sikles, where hikers will sleep like babies. Silkes is used to trekkers, and there is always a cultural troupe at hand to provide music and dance in the evenings, in one of the many lodges.

Day 6
Those with some time on their hands can take this as a rest day and explore Sikles



and its environs. After the rainy season, the town will offer some spectacular 360 views of the surrounding forests.

Day 7
From Sikles it is a short hike down to the Madi Khola before climbing up again to Tangting (*above*) with its spectacular views of Annapurna 2 and 4, and the huge hulk of Lamjung Himal. Locals can do the walk in two hours, but it may take four hours for visitors. Nearby is Nauju Danda where

ancestors of the families in Tangting are believed to have come from. The hill top is a historical and archeological site with even better views of the Annapurnas.

Day 8
The last day is a bumpy jeep ride to sub-tropical Pokhara, with its pubs and cosmopolitan restaurants.



KOHLA SONT HAR

Kohla Sonthar (also called Kohla Sonpre Toh) is an ancient settlement of the Tamu/Gurung people, believed to be the last collective settlement of the ethnic group before its clans dispersed and migrated to lower elevations in the Gandaki region. Located at 3,300m, it is believed to be where the Gurungs settled after crossing from Tibet and Manang over the Annapurna and Lamjung massifs and traversing Namun Bhanjyang. (*See map*)

The ruined settlement is divided into three sites: Tu Kohla, Mu Kohla and Pa Kohla. A cave (Jyomso Nu) on a rocky outcrop at 3,800m, to the north-east of the main settlement, is believed to have been a monastery for nuns. The lower Mu Kohla has the ruins of at least 50 houses, and a larger ruin which is believed to be the meeting hall (Chonja Dheen) in the former palace of the Ghale kings.

Amidst the ruins there are remnants of water mills, grinding stones, a pole-like relic possibly belonging to the stables, and a large stone which is believed to have been used by the village crier to make announcements (*above*). A team from the University of Cambridge and Nepal government studied this site in 2000 and concluded that the Tamus must have lived here between the 11th and 14th centuries.

Kohla Sonthar bears a striking similarity to the 15th century Inca ruins of Machu Pichu in Peru, and should also be declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This was a view strongly endorsed by the Chief Minister of Province 3 Prithvi Subba Gurung and Professor Jag Man Gurung, at a recent program in Sikles which passed a resolution to protect the historic settlement from vandalism and souvenir hunters.

Kohla Sonthar has the potential to be developed as the main attraction on the Tamu Heritage Circuit, starting at Besiahar and ending in Tangting. This would not just be a pilgrimage for the Gurung people, but also an important historical attraction for visitors from the rest of Nepal and abroad.

ALL PHOTOS: JIT GURUNG

EVENTS



Farmer's market

A perfect place to shop for fresh and healthy food, catch up with friends and family, or simply relax in the garden, this is a food lover's haven.
Saturday, 8am-12:30pm and Wednesday, 4-7pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajganj, (01) 4428604

Night market

Art, food and a unique variety of handcrafted items of high quality from across Nepal.
27 July, 4pm onwards, NexUs Culture Nepal, Maitri Marg, Patan, (01) 5522393

JPT Nights 4.0

Comedy by Aayush Shrestha and Kshitiz KC and spoken word poetry by Saurav Tiwari.
27 July, 6pm onwards, Aalishan Lounge & Bar, Hattisar, 9801191094 / 9860880509

Indigenous Resurgence

A Social Science Baha lecture by Mark Turin outlining inspiring Indigenous-led partnerships defining and shaping contemporary Canada, he shares how Nepal can follow its example.
30 July, 5:30pm onwards, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, (01) 4472807



Mr. Fox and the School Boy

An imaginative story of a kind fox and a school boy who develop a friendship and share concern over the degrading environment. Written and directed by Che Shankar, and produced by Garden Theatre.
27-29 July, 5:30pm onwards, Kausi Theatre, Teku, 9851200052

Inspirational talk

An inspiring and interactive session by Enterprise-Nepal Business Accelerator, featuring the story of successful entrepreneur Saurabh Jyoti, Director of Jyoti Group of Companies and Chairman of Syakar Company.
27 July, 4-7pm, One to Watch, Pulchowk, (01) 5523948

Beyond Visible

A photography exhibition by Conci Mazzullo that features parallel routes from Mustang, Nepal and Sicily, Italy.
27 July, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, (01) 4220735

The Past is Present

Exploring the relationship between memories and places, Canadian artist Wayne Johnston revisits 10 cities, including Kathmandu, that have impacted his life. A presentation of his writings and drawings, Ten Cities: The Past Is Present.
28 July, 3:30-4:30pm, Quixote's Cove, Jawalakhel, (01) 5536974



Total lunar eclipse

Register to witness the longest lunar eclipse of the 21st century and get to meet and learn about eclipses from the people at NASO.
27-28 July, 11:30pm- 4:30am, Nepal Astronomical Society- NASO, Prayag Marg, Rs100, 9818734326

Saturday Night Comedy

Spend the night laughing as Sandip Chettri, Aayush Shrestha, Rajina Shrestha and Yozna Thapa Magar take centre stage at Saturday Night Comedy.
28 July, 8pm onwards, Durbar, Durbar Marg, 9818414131

Venture Talk

Register for a Venture Talk with Dip Prakash Pandey, CEO of Shikhar Insurance, on the future prospects of the insurance industry and its impact in business. Connect and learn from the man behind one of Nepal's leading insurance companies.
29 July, 4:45-7pm, Nepal Tourism Board Hall, Rs200, (01) 5537089

MUSIC



Reggae KTM

Dance KTM Dance's Reggae edition is here to make you sway ,with musical performances by Riddim Funktion and Kathmandu Killers. Riddim Funktion is a reggae/ska/afrobeat band founded in Calcutta now based in Pune.
28 July, 2-11:55pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs300, (01) 5528362

Jazz night

Enjoy Friday night with some jazz at Places. The vegan restaurant and bar brings local Jazz bands to play along with food promotion and special offers on selective beverages.
27 July, 7-10pm, Places Restaurant and Bar, Thamel, (01) 4700413



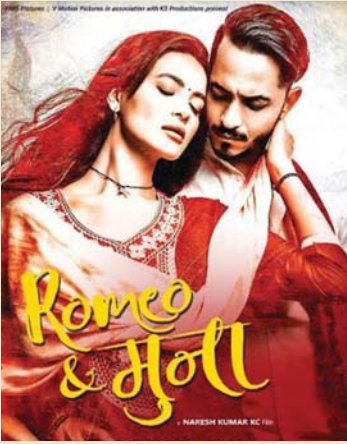
Classical full moon

Teacher's Day will be celebrated with devotional classical music: a flute recital by Nagendra Rai accompanied by Jagannath Dhaugoda on tabala, vocals (duet Dhruapad) by Bishal Bhattarai and Ino Ube So; accompanied by Tetsuma Kaneko on pankhabaaj, vocals (Dhruapad) by Umesh Pandey, accompanied by Manoj Gautam on tabala and vocal by Shree KC accompanied by Manoj Gautam in tabala.
27 July, 5-9pm, Kirateshwar Sangeetashram, Pashupati area

Free music workshop

Robert Jordan and Derek Beckvold, two American music educators, are giving free lessons on composition, with an overview of the musical, social, and political outcomes of the jazz tradition through the lens of six US icons.
28 July and 4 August, 5-6pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5543554

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 27 July

Ved and Muna are from two different worlds and have contrasting personalities. But somehow their worlds collide and they cannot ignore the presence of each other in their lives. Dramatic events take over and suddenly they have to be apart. But unlike Romeo and Juliet or Muna and Madan, will these two end up together? The movie Romeo and Muna, directed by Naresh Kumar Kc, starring Vinay Shrestha, Shristi Shrestha, Prajwal Sujal Giri and Menuka Pradhan, is a unique take on the classic love story.

DINING



Barbeque Brunch

Enjoy Lebanese Shawarma, Hyderabadi Biryani, Mongolian or Japanese Teppanyaki, Tibetan Momos, Italian Pasta and Nepali Thukpa with friends and family accompanied by live music, swimming, raffle draw and exciting door prizes at Gokarna Forest Resort.
Every Saturday, 12pm onwards, Courtyard, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali, Rs3,500/2,500 (adult), Rs3,000/2,000 (children), For prior reservations: (01) 4451212

Family Brunch

Bite into the fusion flavour at the hotel's buffet brunch after a dip in their pool.
Saturday, Fun Café, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat, Rs2,200 (+taxes, adults), Rs1,100 (+taxes, children), (01) 4411818

Achaar Ghar

Satisfy your cravings for home-cooked meals along with the various choices of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations.
Jhamsikhel, Pulchok, (01) 5541952

Sapporo Japanese

Experience typical Japanese food and drinks at the restaurant known for homemade fresh noodles like ramen, udon, soba and more.
Anamika Marg, Baluwatar, 9803445405



1905 Restaurant

Enjoy live music along with grilled dishes and a fine selection of craft beers and wine.
Narayan Chaur, Naxal, (01) 4411348

Prazada

Enjoy Prazada's selection of chilled draught beers in the lush garden with aromatic food and special pizzas accompanied by relaxing music on Fridays or a Pop-up market on Saturdays.
Baluwatar, (01) 4410473

GETAWAY



Retreat at Damaar

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

Hyatt Regency

Overlooking the Japanese garden, the hotel's spa offers a tranquil retreat to rejuvenate and relax the body, mind and soul. Try an Ayurvedic massage, Shirodhara or enjoy a personal Yoga lesson for a traditional therapeutic experience. Packages available: *Mountain Path, River Path and Forest Path. 30% off for treatments between 9am-2pm, Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudhdha, (01) 5171234*



Tiger Palace Resort

Dance away your stress at the resort's pool party and enjoy the day with BBQ, burgers, ice creams, cocktails and more. Special summer offers for Nepalis and foreigners are on. Spend a night or two at the resort, which is reminiscent of beach resorts in Dubai and Thailand.
Tiger Palace Resort, Bhairahawa, Rs9,000 (Nepali)/ Rs26,500 (Foreigner), (071) 512000

Mystic Mountain

Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort.
Nagarkot, (01) 6200646

Park Village Resort

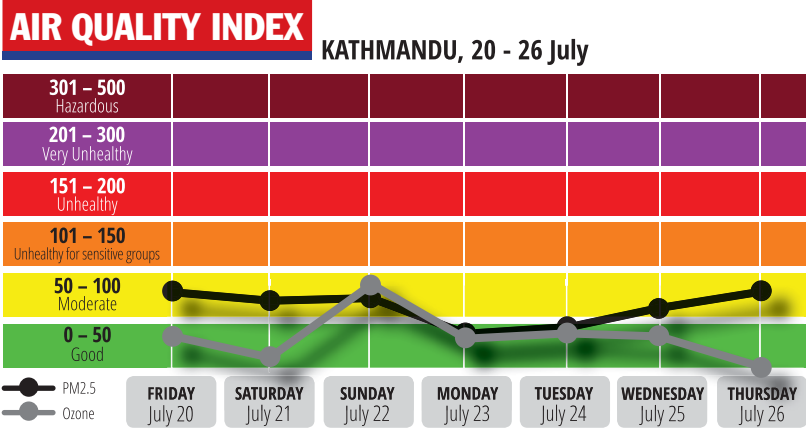
A romantic candle light dinner or an overnight stay at the resort to keep up the romance amid a hectic schedule. Pamper yourself and your partner in the lap of luxury with the resort's special package.
Budhanilkantha, Rs5,000 (dinner, per couple)/ Rs9,000 (stay, per couple), (01) 4375280

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From last week, the *Nepali Times*-US Embassy weekly Air Quality Index (AQI) graph contains two parameters: particles below 2.5 microns (PM2.5) and ozone (O3). The fine particles are contained in mainly diesel emissions, roadside dust, soot from garbage burning, and brick kilns. The off-season for brick factories combined with rains have brought down PM2.5 consistently to Good or Moderate levels. Ozone is a byproduct of the gases given off mainly by motorcycles, and are concentrated at street level. For live hour-by-hour measurements, go to [www.nepalitimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/)
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Absolute power numbs absolutely

Nepal's Communist government is behaving like a bunch of unhinged, insensitive hypocrites

Politicians of all hues everywhere tend to suffer from short-term memory loss. It is a coping mechanism to wiggle out of their past pronouncements.

Here, the leaders, ministers, cadres and apologists for the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) have viciously targeted Govinda KC, who has been fighting for much-needed reforms in Nepal's medical sector.



COMMENT

Damakant Jayshi

They have questioned KC's motives for his latest indefinite hunger strike, his 15th, which began more than 23 days ago. The government's frequency and intensity of attacks has increased as it feels growing pressure from mainstream and social media. The frustration of the comrades is palpable, as seen in the indecent comments by Bishnu Rimal, chief adviser to Prime Minister Oli, and the blatantly derogatory remarks by Sher Bahadur Tamang, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, for which he had to resign.

Prime Minister Oli, himself known for his sharp tongue, has led the charge in vilifying KC. He is behaving more like a politician on the verge of losing power than a leader commanding a two-thirds majority in Parliament. He and his henchmen complain of an opposition *gherabandi* (siege) – the common recourse of Nepal's Communists when they have to defend the indefensible.

Instead of using its super majority in the House to honor promises made while in opposition or just before the elections, Oli and his comrades display their cluelessness and expose an obsession for protecting special



BIKRAM RAI

interest groups, and their own egos.

NCP's middling politicians ran bad private hospitals, so they naturally incurred losses. They now want to make up those losses by being allowed to run lucrative medical colleges, which will fleece students, who will go on to fleece patients when they become physicians.

Social media has exposed the hypocrisy of it all – how Oli, his party colleague and former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, as well as leaders of other parties, fly to Thailand or Singapore for their own treatment.

The Mathema Committee Report, prepared by credible experts, suggested ways to

improve the country's ailing healthcare system, and KC wants the recommendations to be implemented in letter and spirit. None of the Communist leaders or their apologists have come up with an argument against the recommendations. Character assassination is their final stand.

KC has had to resort to serial hunger strikes during the tenures of all the main parties in the past decade. Ironically the NC, which did nothing to address KC's demands when it was in power, has joined the pro-KC protests. Therefore, it's a bit rich for the likes of Sher Bahadur Deuba and Baburam Bhattarai to now cry crocodile tears while posing for

selfies at KC's bedside. Gentlemen, why didn't you implement the agreement you signed with KC when you were prime ministers?

Then there is Narayan Kaji Shrestha who blamed the 'neo-liberal' Nepali Congress for backing KC's protest. How many times has his own party, before dissolving into the UML, formed coalition governments with the selfsame neo-liberals? Shamelessness is part of a politician's job description, but this takes hypocrisy to an entirely new level. In the end KC had the moral high ground.

The NCP's latest argument is that by fasting for three weeks, KC is 'interfering' with a sovereign parliament's rights to enact laws.

Really? When hospital tycoons like Durga Prasai control your party, the talk of sovereignty rings pretty hollow. Why don't Oli and Dahal trust their own party's Manmohan Hospital, instead rushing off to Bangkok and Singapore for treatment? KC's crusade is precisely to make Nepal's hospitals good enough to treat Oli and Dahal.

Citizens, the true sovereign in any functioning democracy, have the right to resort to any kind of peaceful protest. Remember, it is they who elect you and can boot you out. The NC and RPP (N) should not try to hijack KC's *satyagraha* for their political ends – this will undermine KC's sacrifice and give ammo to the government.

The NCP is right in accusing the NC of politicisation of KC's struggle. So what is stopping it from implementing its own past agreements with KC? Why give the NC the opportunity to weaponise the KC hunger strike?

The Communists have shown, with their two-thirds, they want to throw their weight around. But a single doctor, by refusing to eat, has brought it down to its knees. The Comrades would do well to remember a party's goodwill can vanish if they become authoritarianism. Remember the Karki vs Karki in 2016: the NC wanted to protect Lokman Singh Karki, the man who ruthlessly ran his own fiefdom as CIAA head. But the party had no qualms about attempting to impeach Chief Justice Sushila Karki.

No wonder the NC was whacked so badly in last year's elections. And that's a lesson the Communists should take heed of. Now that there is a deal, let KC's 15th hunger strike be his last for medical reform. 🇳🇵

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ISLE OF DOGS



Twenty years into the future in a dystopian Japan, the cat-loving authoritarian Mayor Kobayashi of the city of Megasaki calls for a hasty quarantine and banishes all dogs to an offshore trash island. He uses the fear of a snout fever epidemic and an outbreak of canine flu to convince humans to part with their pets. Scientists like Watanabe say they are near to finding a vaccine, but the first to be exiled is Spots, the loyal bodyguard of Atari, an orphaned nephew and ward of the despotic Mayor. The dogs are transported to the landfill island by cable car and go feral. Meanwhile, 12-year-old Atari hijacks a small plane and flies to the island in search of his lost dog. He crash lands on the garbage and encounters a pack of ‘scary indestructible alpha dogs’ Rex, King, Duke, Boss (who are former pets) and Chief (an ex-stray). Together they go on an adventure-filled quest to locate Spots. Chief nearly goes astray again upon being besotted with show dog Nutmeg, while they all fight off a dog-catcher squad equipped with a rescue drone. Chief has a reluctant but eventual

bonding with Atari. Meanwhile back in Megasaki, Mayor Kobayashi plays on populism by spreading the fake news that Atari was kidnapped by canines in order to further inflame anti-dog sentiments. By this time, Watanabe has found a cure but is put under house arrest and later poisoned. American exchange student Tracy Walker of the student body suspects foul play and a brewing conspiracy. Will the pack of misfits find Spots? We won’t spoil it for you, but the plot is almost secondary to this beautifully rendered stop-motion animation movie. Despite the often ghoulish visuals, the film is packed with sharp wit and emotion. Some graphic scenes including the sight of a bitten-off dog ear early on, violent fights in clouds of dust, and a human kidney transplant sequence are all morbidly fun to watch. The background score of *taiko* drums compliment the story line as the plot thickens. The puppet studio has superb picturisation and is meticulously constructed, with fine details in the trash heap like scorched computer keyboards, cathode-ray tubes, and even a

mountain of discarded *sake* bottles. The movie is also a subtle satire on the Hollywood apocalcysm genre, and at a deeper level one can see the allusion to populist demagoguery where the dogs are analogous to the racist characterisation of immigrants in certain western democracies. We can see where political ‘dogmatism’ in the portrayal of the ‘other’ can lead societies, even democratic ones. A cast of characters including Bryan Cranston, Edward Norton, Bill Murray, Jeff Goldblum, Bob Balaban, Scarlett Johansson and Liev Schreiber dub the dogs whose ‘barks are rendered into English’.

Isle of Dogs is the 9th feature film and second stop-motion venture for the director Wes Anderson of the critically acclaimed *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Tenenbaums*, and the 2009’s Academy winner *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. *Isle of Dogs* has already won Anderson the Silver Bear for the Best Director earlier this year. The only criticism could be the director’s choice to not include subtitles for human Japanese characters, but even here we can understand why Anderson doesn’t want to distract from emotively hearing Japanese with reading English subtitles. And it works, we don’t miss not understanding all the Japanese. *Isle of Dogs* has come and gone in Kathmandu theatres, but readers can still catch it on the Net, or on your next flight somewhere.  **Sonia Awale**



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com 



BIKRAM RAI

RESIGNED: Minister of Law Sher Bahadur Tamang resigned on Tuesday after his controversial statement regarding Nepali women studying medicine in Bangladesh. The debate on medical education put the government on the defensive.



KIRAN BHATTARAI / RSS

FAREWELL CALL: Home minister Ram Bahadur Thapa meets American Ambassador to Nepal, Alaina B Teplitz, at Singha Darbar on Wednesday. Teplitz completes her three-year tenure and is being posted to Sri Lanka and the Maldives.



ROSHAN SAKPOTA / RSS

MAKALU IS ALSO HERE: Nepal Airlines’ second wide-body Airbus 330-243 named ‘Makalu’ landed in Kathmandu on Thursday morning. The new aircraft is expected to start scheduled operations with its sister in the fleet, named ‘Annapurna’.



TOURISM MINISTRY

FLYING HIGH: Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Rabindra Adhikari and newly appointed Japanese Ambassador Masamichi Saigo met in Kathmandu on Sunday. The Japan Government has expedited the process to restart regular flights between the two countries by Nepal Airlines.



NEPALARMY

ARMS AND LIVES: Chief of Army Staff of the Nepal Army Rajendra Chhetri inaugurates a new military hospital in Nepalgunj on Monday. The hospital was built with resources from the Nepal Army Welfare Fund.

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What's so funny?

Cartoonists in the Nepali language press have been obsessed with Govinda KC's hunger strike, which ended after 26 days on Thursday. They used the fast and the government's initial dismissiveness and high-handed response to ridicule Prime Minister Oli. They lampooned the medical mafia, the Police's use of fake news and force, and the government's half-hearted attempt at dialogue.



Man: The dialogue with Dr. KC went well. We told him that the Zee Cine awards will be held in Nepal.

Rabin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 26 July



Poster: Fast-unto-death for Reforms in Medical Education

Bag: Medical Mafia

KP Oli: We have come to save you. We will get down to negotiation later.

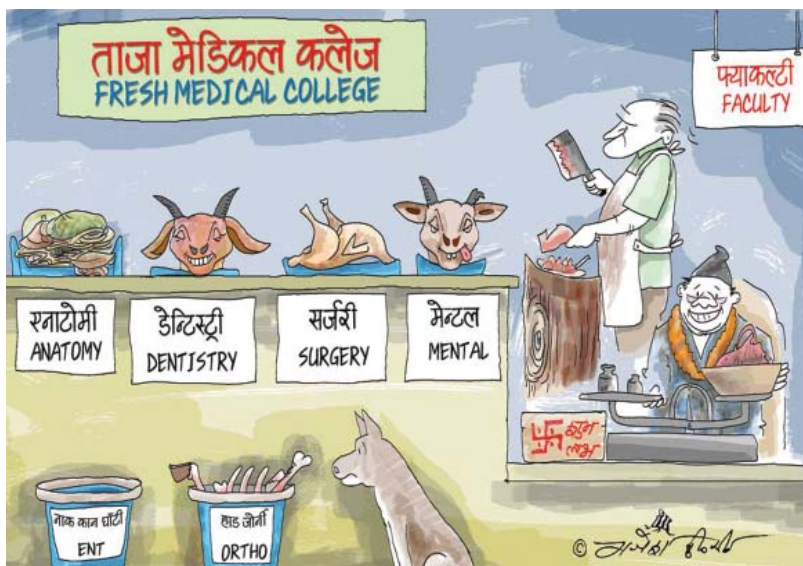
Batsyayan in *Kantipur*, 20 July



Headline: Use of force inside hospital

Man: They are drunk on red rice

Basu Kshitiz in *Annapurna Post*, 20 July



Rajesh KC



KP Oli: Stand up. Take a leap. And catch the bird! (Alluding to the fecklessness of the NC)

Vulture: Medical Mafia

Rabin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 20 July



Doctor to Prachanda and KP Oli: The large intestine is clogged up with red rice. It will be hard to be responsible politicians. (The two shared red rice with tycoon Durga Prasad)

Rabi Mishra in *Naya Patrika*, 21 July



Poster: Please Stoop To Enter

KP Oli: I have two thirds, you hear? I ain't stooping.

Abin Shrestha in *Kantipur*, 26 July



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Back to the nipple in

More Nepali mothers now exclusively breastfeeding babies for better health

Sonia Awale

■ **Avinashi Poudel, 30**, is a mother of two, including a 10-week baby boy. She only breastfeeds her baby, and has supportive in-laws and a mother friendly environment at her workplace. But seven years ago when she was a first time mother, she was not aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and her first baby did not get enough of her milk.

■ **Rama Thapa, 23**, moved to Kathmandu from Tanahu after she got married. She now has a six-month baby boy, and feeds him food supplements because she says her own milk is not enough. Her family and friends told her the baby needs the formula to grow up strong and healthy.

Nearly seven out of every ten Nepali mothers still exclusively breastfeed their babies, but some families are turning to supplements because of inroads by baby food manufacturers. Ironically, mothers in western countries where those baby food alternatives were first introduced, have returned to exclusive breastfeeding.

Nepal is among the countries that are already above the World Health Organisation (WHO) target to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in babies' first six months to at least 50%, by 2025. However, because of aggressive marketing by baby formula brands, Nepal has set its own national target to increase exclusive breastfeeding to 80%.

"Nepal has set a good standard in breastfeeding but we need to sustain it and make further progress, this requires policy implementation and monitoring," says Pradiumna Dahal, nutrition expert at UNICEF Nepal, who is worried that not all health workers are aware of the benefits of breastfeeding.

The use of breast milk substitutes is so widespread that health professionals in the Far-West are prescribing bottled milk in hospitals. Baby food is a burgeoning industry, and salesmen often target hospitals, doctors and nurses with inducements to prescribe babies substitutes for breast milk.

After a huge international outcry against Nestle and other baby food supplement manufacturers, the WHO adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes to promote breastfeeding. Nepal passed the Substitute of Breast Milk Act in 1992 to control the sale and distribution of breast milk substitutes. It penalises health professionals pushing and manufacturers promoting baby food formulas.

But while the \$70 billion global baby food industry has seen sales plummet in Western countries, as more mothers embrace breastfeeding, modern lifestyles and higher purchasing power has pushed families in developing countries to use infant formulas.

Recently, the Trump administration exerted pressure to dilute the clause in a resolution to promote and support breastfeeding at the World Health Assembly in Geneva in order to promote the interests of infant formula manufacturers. The US delegation even threatened Ecuador that it would terminate military aid if it voted for the resolution. Washington could also cut funding



PHOTOS: NSI

for WHO, the UN Population Fund and other agencies involved in promoting breastfeeding, reproductive health, contraceptives, abortion and even vaccination programs in developing countries, including Nepal. (*See adjoining box*).

Allowing infant formula manufacturers unrestricted access to the domestic market threatens to undo decades of effort in Nepal to reduce the infant mortality rate and promote maternal health.

"We have been working to promote breast milk and convinced a large proportion of mothers in Nepal to exclusively breastfeed. However, we have not been able to regulate the activities of the manufacturers of breast milk substitutes," says Bikash Lamichhane at the Department of Health Services.

Nutritionist Aruna Uprety says that despite the government's claim that the rate of exclusive



breastfeeding has increased, breast milk substitutes are used widely, even in government hospitals. Manufacturers are known to reward clinics and doctors promoting and prescribing their infant formulas.

"Breastfeeding is engrained in our culture, we don't need foreign experts to teach us its significance. We just need to create awareness and provide an enabling environment for women to be able to breastfeed," Uprety told *Nepali Times*.

Indeed, health officials say any future cuts in American funding for maternal and child health should not make a big dent on efforts to

promote exclusive breastfeeding in Nepal.

In 2016, the government set up a system to monitor the use of breast milk substitutes in each district. But with new federal and provincial structures in place, and confusion about the role of district health offices, experts are worried that the monitoring system will not be effective.

A survey in 2011 by the Institute of Medicine showed that despite the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, there had been no action to control and regulate breast milk substitutes and producers and the distributors were found to be violating the Breast Milk Substitute Act. The study also noted that the promotion of breastfeeding was not prioritised and awareness was limited to token functions during World Breastfeeding Week.

Studies have shown that counselling, awareness and

legislating paid maternity leave increased the rate of exclusive breastfeeding, and had an immediate impact on maternal and infant health as well as the overall economy. (*See chart*)

Says UNICEF's Dahal: "We need to encourage more women to breastfeed. That means adding breastfeeding corners in our work places and providing maternal security in the form of sufficient leave."

The Department of Health Services is planning to inaugurate a breastfeeding corner at its own office in Teku to mark World Breastfeeding Week (1-7 August). UNICEF is supporting the government to set up 30 baby friendly hospitals, and train counsellors and other personnel. The Ministry of Health is also preparing to extend the duration of paid maternity leave from two months to six, to improve maternal and child health. ■

Nepal

Nepal has scored dramatic success in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates over the few decades, and USAID has been one of the biggest bilateral backers for family planning, reproductive health, maternal and child health projects.

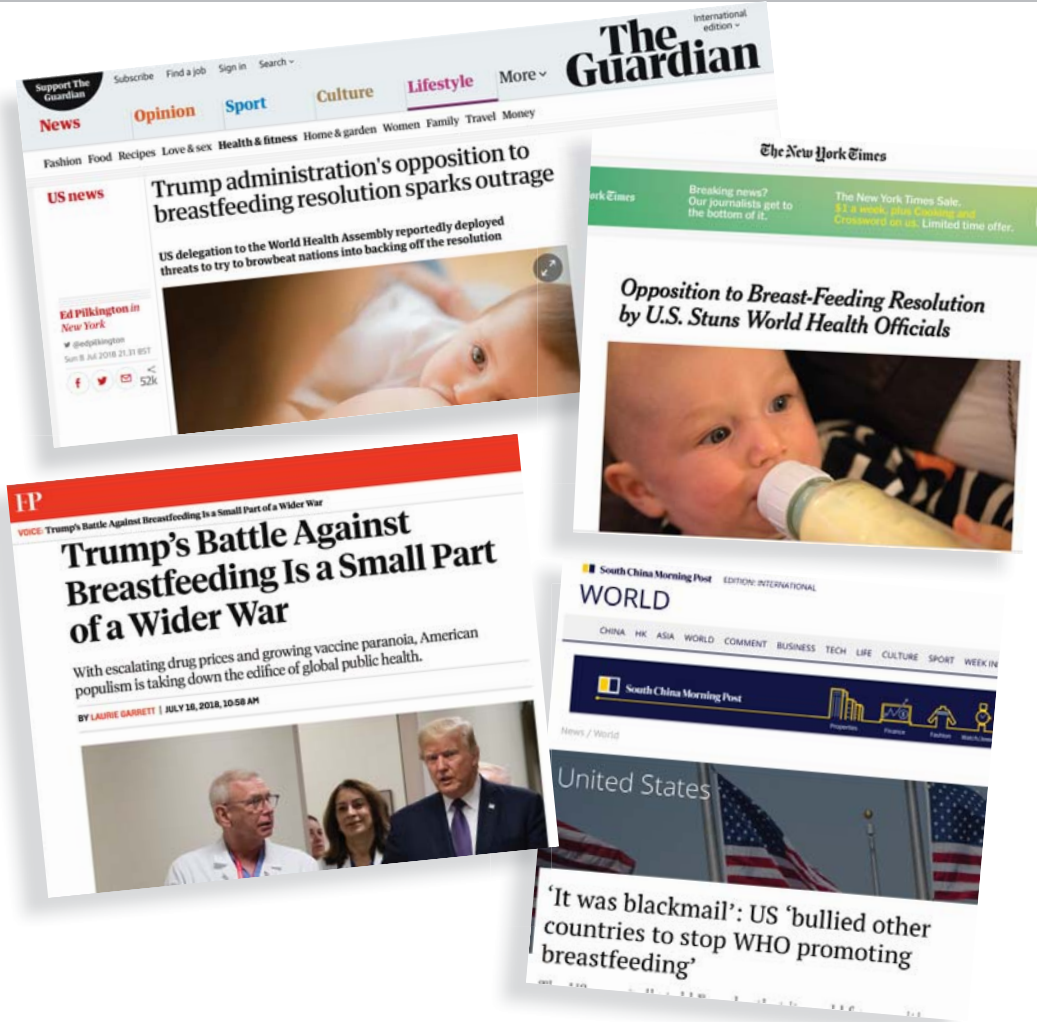
However, funding for these programs has often been affected by successive Republican administrations because of a strong conservative lobby for the Global Gag Rule, which seeks to end American aid for contraceptive promotion and abortion.

The last time it was in effect, during the Bush Administration, mobile clinics providing reproductive services to rural Nepal were discontinued. The Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) lost \$400,000 in USAID-funded contraceptives, which represented two-thirds of its total stock, and a further loss of US\$100,000 per year that supported reproductive health clinics.

President Donald Trump has renamed the Gag Rule as ‘Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance’ after restoring it in March 2017. Despite its new name, it is actually stricter, even targeting breastfeeding and vaccines.

“The Global Gag Rule is not new, what is new is that it has come back with added force under Trump and can have devastating consequences on Nepal,” explains public health expert Aruna Uprety. “By pulling money out of abortion, they are going to increase unsafe abortions and end up killing more women. It is against human rights.”

Just a month before the 2015 earthquake, the Nepal Government made a commitment to increase the family planning budget allocation by 7% annually. It partnered with international and private organisations to meet the target, but most of these partners are likely to loose a chunk of their funding.



The Trump tremor

“Our government already lacks resource to meet the commitment. With the US pulling out, the gap is only going to widen,” says an official working in family planning.

A US Embassy spokesperson said the United States remained committed to helping the welfare of women and children in developing countries: “The Protecting Life in Global Assistance policy has not reduced funding for women and children’s health by one dollar. USAID works together with the Government of Nepal and other external development partners, including multilateral partners, to coordinate interventions, synergise, and reduce gaps. USAID has strong working relationships with both UNFPA and WHO in Nepal.”

Although family planning is a small component of the aid budget for maternal health, the cuts are biting. The EU and Nordic countries have stepped in, but their contribution does not meet the shortfall.

At the recent World Health Assembly in Geneva, the United States wanted to dilute a routine agreement on breastfeeding, amidst a global outcry.

The United States delegation wanted to water down the resolution by removing a call

on governments to ‘protect, promote and support breast-feeding’ and another clause calling for restrictions on the promotion of baby foods.

“What happened was tantamount to blackmail, with the US holding the world hostage and trying to overturn nearly 40 years of consensus on the best way to protect infant and young child health,” Patti Rundall of the British advocacy group Baby Milk Action was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying.

The uproar set off alarm bells in Nepal, where donor support has been critical in trying to meet the target of getting 80% of mothers to breastfeed by 2022.

The US Embassy clarified that improving nutrition among mothers, infants, and young children was still an important public health priority for the United States, and it remained committed to working with WHO and other stakeholders to improve health and nutrition through “cost-effective and evidence-based” measures.

But, the spokesperson added: “While the United States recognises that breastfeeding and provision of breast milk is best for all babies, we recognise not all women are able to breastfeed for a variety of reasons. These women should have access to full and accurate information about breastfeeding, the benefits of breastfeeding, and safe alternatives when breastfeeding is not possible.”

Some experts contend that cuts in funding would not affect the breastfeeding campaign, and Nepal did not need to be dependent on donors anymore.

“Even if the US cuts funding, Nepal is capable of going ahead on its own. Awareness here about breast milk far exceeds any opposition from outside, it’s just that the government has to own it,” says former WHO public health expert Rita Thapa.

Aruna Uprety agrees, but adds that the Americans have played cleverly on a woman’s choice not to breastfeed: “This distracts from the fact that mother’s milk is the healthiest for babies.”

The conclusion is that Nepal is perfectly capable of maintaining its momentum not just on breastfeeding, but also on protecting maternal and infant health with or without outside help. 🇳🇵



Awareness and education can double exclusive breast-feeding rates in societies. Paid maternity leave can increase breastfeeding rates by 50%. This directly helps the national economy, and the health of mothers and babies. Breastfeeding:

- Prevents breast cancer deaths
- Reduces infant diarrhoea by half and respiratory infections by one-third
- Decreases hospital admissions by **57-72%**
- Children's IQ increases by average of **3** points
- Investing **\$1** to promote breastfeeding yields **\$35** in economic returns

SOURCE: LANCET

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Politically correct place names

As behooves the golden era of prosperity and stability with the Oligarchy at the helm, the gobblement is mulling the alteration of the names of important landmarks, streets, parks and airports around Nepal and the capital.

Obsolete place names hark back to Nepal’s feudal and autocratic past, and we need names that are more suited to these despotic times.

Although Nepal itself never had the pleasure of colonising anyone (except the recent acquisition of a suburb of Doha which we wrested from the Mallus after a brief but fierce struggle) it may be a good idea for us to follow this international trend in changing place names just for the heck of it to prove that we are not being left behind, and we are marching in goose-step with the times.

Some gender-sensitive people have drawn the Ass’ attention to the fact that there is a male-bias in the words Himalaya and Man Sarovar, and we should start referring to the world’s greatest mountain range as Heralaya. Similarly, the holiest lake shall henceforth be renamed Person Sarovar.

After all, so many of our peaks are named after women, like Mount Annapurna, Mount Ama Dablam, and Mount Everest. Yes, I see you have raised your hand. Of course, Sir George was a guy, silly, that was just to test whether you’re still awake.

But the gender police has a point, so with permission from the Manpower Department (recently renamed Department of Horsepower) we will no longer refer

to Manang and Manakamana as such in tourism brochures, but as Womanang and Humanakamana.

There have been half-hearted attempts in our country in the past to rename towns after deceased national figures, but this campaign soon ground to a halt because we ran out of expired illustrious personages. We shouldn’t let this deter us, there are still thousands of famous people who were hale and hearty at presstime Thursday, and thousands of towns out there waiting to be renamed:

Old Name	New Name
Khumjung	Hillaryganj
Mai Khola	Mao Khola
Modi Khola	Modi Khola
Kanti Path	Shining Path
Bhaktapur	Chimmi Bhattapur
Rampur	Rambahadurpur
Rani Pokhari	Jarsap Musical Fountain
Bagmati	Plasticbag-mati
Chakra Path	Prachanda Path
Pradarsani Marg	Baburam Bypass
B&C Hosital	Red Rice, Inc
Bhedasing	Prakash Man Singh
Jawalakhel	Jawaharlal Khel
Maharajganj	Presidentganj
Handigaun	Hundigaun
Narayani	Naryankaji
Kopundole	Coupon Toll
Thankot	Thank God
Taksar	Taskar
Bhaisepati	Rangopatri
Bishnumati	Sinomati
Sikles	Sickles
Surkhet	Phuket



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