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MONIKA DEUPALA

PAGE 8-9



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SORRY STATE

Now that the leaders of the awkwardly acronymed BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) are in the process of departing from Kathmandu after their fourth Summit, it might be the time for a post-mortem.

The greatest achievement for Nepal from the Summit, as far as ordinary citizens of some parts of the capital are concerned, is that at least some of the muddy roads got paved, and the ugly dumping sites got fenced off.

By the weekend, Kathmandu will be limping back to the old normal: traffic jams, decrepit roads, crumbling sidewalks, a grubby jungle of brick and concrete. And people will once more go about their daily lives, resigned to the fact that through feudalism, absolute monarchy, dictatorship or democracy, nothing will really change in this country.

No matter how many potholes were hurriedly patched, colourful gates erected, or flags allowed to hang limply above the motorcades, there was no hiding from visitors the rot within. The Thai leader reportedly refused to join the retreat in Gokarna despite the PMO's prodding because of the poor condition of the road.



The state of Nepal will influence the way the Nepali state is treated by our neighbours and the international community.

What a sorry state Nepal has become with its decomposing democracy, eroding rule of law, impunity, cheap populism, a pandemic of corruption and dilapidated infrastructure. All the more glaring because we have a powerful ruling party with full mandate to fix it all if it wanted to.

It might be best to call a moratorium on any future summits or high-level international conferences in Kathmandu until we get our own house in order by cleaning up the city and the politics. No matter how good our hospitality or how far-reaching BIMSTEC resolutions, the state of Nepal will influence the way the Nepali state is treated by our neighbours and the international community.

BIMSTEC was set up 20 years ago as an alternative to SAARC, which got ensnared in India-Pakistan acrimony. The new sub-regional body tried to 'look east' with a focus on trade and connectivity by dropping Pakistan and adding Thailand and Burma,

and picking up Bhutan and Nepal along the way. Getting South Asia's plodding elephants to hobnob with Southeast Asia's sprinting tigers, however, has not been as easy as first envisaged. Even so, linking the northeastern quadrant of South Asia through connectivity, energy grids and trade could be beneficial for all members.

Geopolitics, and the deepening polarisation between China and the US-India axis could put a spanner in the works. Beijing's Belt Road Initiative competes with its emphaiss on connectivity. BIMSTEC was India's way of sidelining Pakistan, and the military exercises of its member states in Pune next week is meaningful.

There are other sub-regional initiatives besides the Dhaka-headquartered BIMSTEC. One of them is BCIM that evolved out of the Kunming Initiative and brings China's Yunnan in an economic sphere with Bangladesh, India and Burma.

When politics got in the way, countries in the sub-region tried to find a concrete do-able alternative and set up the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) motor vehicle agreement. But even for something as simple as this, it looks like India's suspicions about

vehicles from Bangladesh and Nepal having unhindered passage through its territory, and Bhutan's reservations about being swamped by Indian trucks has blocked progress.

Despite all the effort being put into cross-border regionalism, however, it is in bilateral economic links that there has been most progress. Even on something as logical as a China-Nepal-India trans-Himalayan railroad, the agreements so far are separately between India and Nepal, and Nepal and China. President Xi Jiping has said he wants a quadrilateral deal with India, Nepal and Bangladesh on connectivity, but New Delhi is not ready to play ball. The energy grid agreed to in Kathmandu will be a test to see if BIMSTEC is really different from SAARC.

Despite Nepal's poor image, being a member of any regional or sub-regional grouping, however moribund, is an advantage. There is strength in numbers where there are two hefty neighbours right next door.

ONLINE PACKAGES



NEW NEPALGANJ

Being the gateway to Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimages, Nepalganj is a city on the move. It has a new airport, new six-lane highway, new mayor, new railway, new casinos and new hotels. Watch the video to see how the city is gearing up for the influx of tourists by investing on advanced infrastructure. Story: page 4.



GOLDMINE OF TRASH

E-waste made up of electronic items like computers, mobiles, batteries has become a serious health hazard in Nepal, too. Not only is it difficult to recycle and resell, but India and China have also banned e-waste imports. Take a tour in this video to the e-waste collection and processing warehouse of Doko Recyclers in Sano Thimi to get a sense of the scale of the problem. Story: page 8-9.



For more videos on health, environment, culture, heritage and Nepali politics, subscribe to the Nepali Times YouTube Channel.

COMBATING RAPE

Community and government line agencies should work together to identify the criminal and take all possible measures (Editorial, #924). Abuses should be controlled and capital punishment should be enforced. The government alone cannot solve the problem of rape!

Radhakrishna Lal Deo

TED ATKINS

This is very sad news ('Ted Atkins killed in Climb', Kunda Dixit, #924). Ted inspired many young air cadets and staff in the U.K. over the years. Ted will be massively missed.

Rep Frost

■ Ted was a great friend of mine who was a part of the UK's Royal Air Force AF Mountain Rescue Team. This is a great loss.

Simon Brown

PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

A huge congratulation to Anobha Gurung on her achievement ('Nepali scientist returns to pinpoint hazards of dirty air', Sonia Awale, #923). Even bigger congratulations for having the heart of a lion. Let us hope that she will not be swept under the rug but given the opportunity to work further on air pollution in Nepal.

Ram Kirantee

NEED MORE INFORMATION

Very good information on the least studied species ('Clouded future for the Clouded Leopard', Yadav Ghimirey, #922). I would love to read more in upcoming issues to better understand this elusive cat.

Dipesh Pyakurel

WHAT'S TRENDING



Justice for Sale

by Tufan Neupane

This investigative report about a rape victim's age being changed in the birth certificate so that the powerful perpetrator could escape punishment for raping a minor and other cases was seen by most readers this week. With protests for justice in the Kanchanpur rape case not subsiding, the story generated a lot of outrage. Go online to read the story and join the debate.



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Most popular on Twitter



Ted Atkins killed in climb

by Kunda Dixit

A report on the death of mountaineer and oxygen systems engineer Ted Atkins, who was killed in a fall in the Dolomites, was the most read this week. Ted Atkins also wrote regular columns for Nepali Times, and was an adventurer through and through. Tributes online.



Most visited online page



Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @nepalitimes

Barpak, the epicentre of the earthquake three years ago, also became the epicentre of reconstruction. It used to be a living museum of Gurung culture, are those cultural aspects retained in the reconstruction? Shiva Uprety reports from Barpak.



Richa Adhikari @riadnp

So sad. while developed countries are looking to save their heritage and culture, Nepal with rich culture is losing everything for the lack of creativity



Pbwdc @pbwdc

Excellent piece. What I love about this article is that it captures in a nutshell our idea of development and reconstruction as a numbers game. Dev orgs & Nepali govt ought to re-envision and reimagine that outlook completely @Hello_Sarkar @UNDPNepal @kundadixit @ILO_Nepal



pigreen @pigreen1

How sensitive is the mass reconstruction supported by the NRA to cultural and related aspects of 'building back better'?



Mahesh Sharma @Thikthak

There are many such 'lost in Development'



Nepali Times @nepalitimes

Sushil Gyewali has been reinstated as the chief of National Reconstruction Authority, its fifth chief in three years. Gyewali speaks to @omastharai about his plans for working differently to speed up the reconstruction.



Mohan Chand @MohanBChand

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10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The page 1 story in *Nepali Times* #415 (29 August–4 September, 2018) showed how little things have changed in the geopolitics of the region in the past decade. As Kathmandu hosts the BIMSTEC Summit this week, it is a good time to re-read Mallika Aryal's dispatch from New Delhi ten years ago:

By ignoring Indian concerns and accepting Beijing's invitation to the Olympics closing ceremony last week, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal set alarm bells ringing here. Indian politicians and foreign policy bureaucrats tried to play down Dahal's 'China card', but the military-intelligence establishment, the opposition BJP and some hawkish commentators have voiced concerns about China's growing influence in India's neighborhood.

'Prachanda's Beijing sojourn merely confirms the subcontinent's shifting balance of power in China's favour,' wrote the Indian Express in an editorial on Tuesday, a view echoed by other influential commentators here. 'Prachanda's departure from Nepal's natural logic for a strong relationship with India can only be understood in the context of Beijing's new powerplay in South Asia.'



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Energy-saving Soaltee

Group’s new hotel in Nepalganj sets the standard in energy efficiency

Known for its pioneering role in high-end tourism in Nepal since the 1960s with its five-star Soaltee property in Kathmandu, the group has taken another step by setting up Nepal’s most state-of-the art green hotel.

The new Soaltee Westend Premier in Nepalganj stands out for its elegant architecture and interior design, but it is what is in its basement that is more interesting: a computerised system to manage electricity, temperature, water, and waste that is ecological as well as economical.



“We wanted to take our pioneering role in Nepal’s hospitality industry to the next level, and set a new reference point for what hotels in Nepal should be,” explains Soaltee Crowne Plaza GM Upaul Majumdar, showing visitors the hotel’s heat exchangers.

Instead of energy-intensive central air-conditioning in Nepalganj where summer heat hits 45°, the hotel uses radiant pipes to send cold water at 8° to cool walls and floors of the rooms. In winter, the pipes carry heated water. This keeps the entire hotel enclosed in a climate-controlled cocoon.

With additional measures like insulation, temperature calibration, even Otis elevators with regen drives, the hotel saves 75% on its monthly energy bill. Rainwater is stored in the 550,000 litre underground tanks, ground water is recharged, toilet effluent is treated for recycling so there is no sewage outflow, and even the exhaust air from the kitchen is filtered before being released.



KUNDA DIXIT

“Instead of just announcing that we are green, from the design phase we planned to do it properly,” Majumdar explains, “it is expensive to be environment friendly, but we realised that in the long-term it can actually save you money by cutting down on waste.”

Soaltee Nepalganj is the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified Silver Category hotel in Nepal, a designation awarded by the US Green Building Council for following strict energy-saving and eco-friendly criteria.

The border city had no five-star hotel, but is on the cusp of a boom because of international flights to Delhi starting from January, the prospect of a surge in Indian tourist arrivals, pilgrimage traffic bound for Mt Kailash, the potential for a modern conference venue, as well as a surge in Nepali tourists.

Majumdar, who was voted Asia’s Best General Manager Hospitality at the recent CMO Asia in Singapore, said Soaltee’s management saw the business potential in Nepalganj, but also wanted to invest in human resources.

It has partnered with GATE Vocational to set up a hotel training institute in its premises to prepare staff not just to meet its own needs, but raise professionalism in the hospitality industry.

Says Bibek Poudel of Gate Vocational Westend: “The quality of human capital is low in Western Nepal, and we found out that there was a demand for trained staff at new hotels in Nepalganj, and there are enough jobs here to absorb all our graduates.”

The hotel is packed this season with Indian pilgrims waiting for flights to Simikot and on to Kailash in Tibet. The hotel had a soft opening in January is offering a promotional rate of \$50. 🇳🇵

Nepalganj gets moving

With a six-lane highway joining the city to Kohalpur, plans to upgrade to a Metropolis, international flights starting soon from its expanded airport, a railway station connecting to India, and new hotels and casinos coming up, Nepalganj feels like a town on the move.

Adding to the excitement is the city’s can-do mayor, Dhawal Shumsher Rana of the RPP, who was re-elected last year and immediately set about improving Nepalganj’s crumbling roads,

drainage and its poor image.

The city suffered an economic setback when it lost out to Butwal as the capital of Province 5, but Mayor Rana is lobbying hard to declare Nepalganj a Metropolitan City by merging with Kohalpur.

“Come back in a few more months, you will see a different Nepalganj,” says Rana proudly as he supervised a road widening on a recent rainy Saturday.

Feeding the boom is Nepalganj’s emergence in recent years as one of the most popular gateways to Kailash in Tibet for Indian pilgrims. (See map). Devotees from all over the world travel to one of Hinduism’s holiest sites, and the easiest route is through Nepalganj. Pilgrims also fly via Kathmandu and Lhasa, cross at Kerung, or go via India.

The Nepalganj route entails taking a plane to Simikot, changing to a helicopter to Hilsa on the Tibet border, and then driving by SUV to the sacred Lake Mansarovar. Half the 15,000 Indian pilgrims to Tibet every year take the Nepalganj route, and this week, hotels here were full of pilgrims waiting for flights to Simikot delayed by bad weather.

“Indians prefer to go via Nepal because the trip is smoother, the routes through India are very basic,” says Yash Thakur of Explore India Tours, which organises



pilgrimages for Hindus from India, South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, the United States and Britain. “If there is more support from Nepal, we can take 20,000 more pilgrims to Kailash via Nepal every year.”

Prakash Shrestha of Explore Kailash has been arranging pilgrimage packages since 1996, and says if infrastructure bottlenecks are fixed, a lot more Indian tourists would prefer the Nepal route because they can also visit Pashupati or Muktinath.

“There aren’t enough helicopters, the weather delays flights, Nepalganj has good hotels, but there are few facilities in Simikot or Hilsa,” says Shrestha.

There is also anticipation in Nepalganj about Buddha Air flights from Delhi starting in January which are expected to bring Indian tourists to the city’s new casinos, as well as Indian trekkers to Rara and Dolpo, which have air connections from Nepalganj.

“Nepalganj is going to be a multiple hub. We are going to expand Nepalganj airport, extend the runway and apron and upgrade the terminal building,” says Mayor Dhawal Rana, “and in a few years we will also have a railway station connecting to India.” 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit



Travel to Nepalganj to see how the city is expecting a boom with a new airport, new mayor, new railway, new casinos and new hotels. The city has become the preferred gateway for Indian pilgrims going to Kailash.

nepalTIMES.com

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS



Flying with profit

Turkish Airlines announced a significant increase in its total revenue during the first half of the year by an approximate 30% compared to the same period last year. Due to the increasing demand and revenue, the airline managed to up its net operating profit from \$17 million to \$258 million, in spite of increasing fuel prices.



Mahindra’s XUV

Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd launched its premium SUV, the plush new XUV500, featuring a bold new design, luxurious interiors and higher power, enhanced suspension, a quieter cabin, electric

sunroof, new smart watch connectivity, 7 inch. touch screen infotainment with GPS navigation, Arkamys enhanced audio and much more.

A thank you note

Teach For Nepal acknowledged its partner banks and corporate institutions, at a dinner event, for their support in addressing education inequality in Nepal. “In the last six years we have been able to create amazing impact in the children’s education with the help of various corporate partners and individual donors,” said Shisir Khanal, CEO of Teach For Nepal.



Joint vision

Shreekrishna Nepal, Joint Secretary of International Economic Corporation Coordination Division (above, right) and Faris H. Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Manager signed a financing agreement of \$15 million for the Integrated Public Financial Management Reform Project, which aims to strengthen the government’s public finance and accounting management plans.



Nepal-India followup

On the margins of the BIMSTEC summit, PM KP Oli and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi signed two agreements, on railway and the movement of bulk cargo from Indian ports to three border points between Nepal and India, following up with the agreements done during the visit of Prime Minister Oli to India in April. On Friday, Modi is expected to hand over a 400-bed Dharmashala built for pilgrims at the Pashupatinath Temple premises in Kathmandu.



NIB in Pashupati

Nepal Investment Bank inaugurated its seventh extension counter in the vicinity of Pashupatinath under its CSR program, aiming to assist in collecting donations from devotees to the Pashupatinath Temple.

Turning outrage into justice

Is it time for Nepali women to also learn jiu-jitsu like the Sufragettes?

The Kanchanpur rape case should go down in history books as a landmark that brought long awaited changes to Nepal's justice system, how it is implemented and delivered, and how rape is reported in the media.



COMMENT
Sumana Shrestha

In early 1900s when women all over the world were waking up and rising up against patriarchy and were demanding their right to vote, some women in Britain started to train in jiu-jitsu.

Martial art came in handy while dealing with male vigilantes who believed women should be harassed or beaten to submission, and the police who did the same to protesting women. The Women's Social and Political Party (suffragettes) was formed in 1903, and two decades later, finally, women over 21 won the right to vote.

Republic of rape

We are in 2018 now, and it is not just women fighting for women, but men are also joining the marches for justice. Rapes do not only happen to women. And in a land where we have to fight to even register a case, the chances of abuse of an irreversible penalty like capital punishment is high.

Let us demand fast track courts, a well-funded and well-trained prosecution arm of police, safe houses for women, compensation for victims, and (not or) harsh punishment for the perpetrator. Let us also call for counselling services for rape survivors and efforts to remove stigma of rape. There should also be stricter punishment for those who obstruct justice regardless of their political clout or position in the police or bureaucracy. Here is what each sector can do:

Major opposition party

It is shameful to politicise the rape of a minor on the street to try to get some airtime and harass



BIJAY RAI

the government. Each party has served in government when there were rape cases. You did very little then, so if you really want to be in the news, then fight it out in Parliament to which you were elected. If you want to join the protests in the streets, leave your political baggage and flags behind. Fight for the right as a citizen, not as a party hack.

Ruling government party

A compensation of Rs1 million is not what the victim is looking for. Ask yourself: is that your price tag on the life of a child? Where can they go to heal? What is the Ministry of Women and Child Development really doing? What is the Home Ministry doing in Kanchanpur? If you believe the opposition party is fanning the flames, why weren't you quick off the mark to address the problem? Why did you let it drag on to the point where it could be politicised?

Development agencies

Examine which activist group or government agency you fund and ask for a statement of solidarity from each of them for better implementation and delivery of justice and stricter and swifter laws. Your mandate doesn't need to explicitly state that you will be an ally of the rape victims and survivors. It is assumed.

Nepali citizens

Rapes do not only happen to Nepali women, men are also raped. You don't need to have a mother, sister, daughter, aunt to empathise with the cause. If someone needs to be shot dead to demand justice, then we really have no hope of expecting swift and stern action

against perpetrators of other crimes as well. If you do not like 'dollar wallas', then create a rupee funded organisation that will fight for the cause.

The culture needs to stop

objectifying women, and releasing block-blusters in which women

have no role except to play a love interest of the 'villain' or 'hero', with no will, no voice, no part at all in a plot in which men are rewarded with love and marriage for stalking a woman. Fight for women not because you think they (we) are weak, but because we want a just society. We want a society that will take responsibility for safety for everyone at all hours.

Media

Cover this as a trend, not an event to be forgotten. Keep following up.

Protestors and activists

Women in Britain 100 years ago were beaten, force-fed when they went on hunger strikes, and it took them almost 25 years to get equal voting rights. They passed the baton to a new generation of leaders, and kept fighting. In Nepal, it may take more petticoat protests, but the next generation of leaders must be groomed. Civilisation always progresses, but in the meantime, Nepali women may also need to learn martial arts to protect themselves.

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Pilgrimage to Copenhagen

... to track down the Indian-born son of American missionaries who first built Tiger Tops in Chitwan

Mette Rolff’s Nordic blond hair was pulled back neat against the nape of her neck as she gazed across the Copenhagen skyline from her apartment window. “I loved the Chitwan jungle, but it was a trying time.” She smiled evasively, but the understatement did not hide the pain behind her eyes. “But life has moved on, let’s not dwell on those

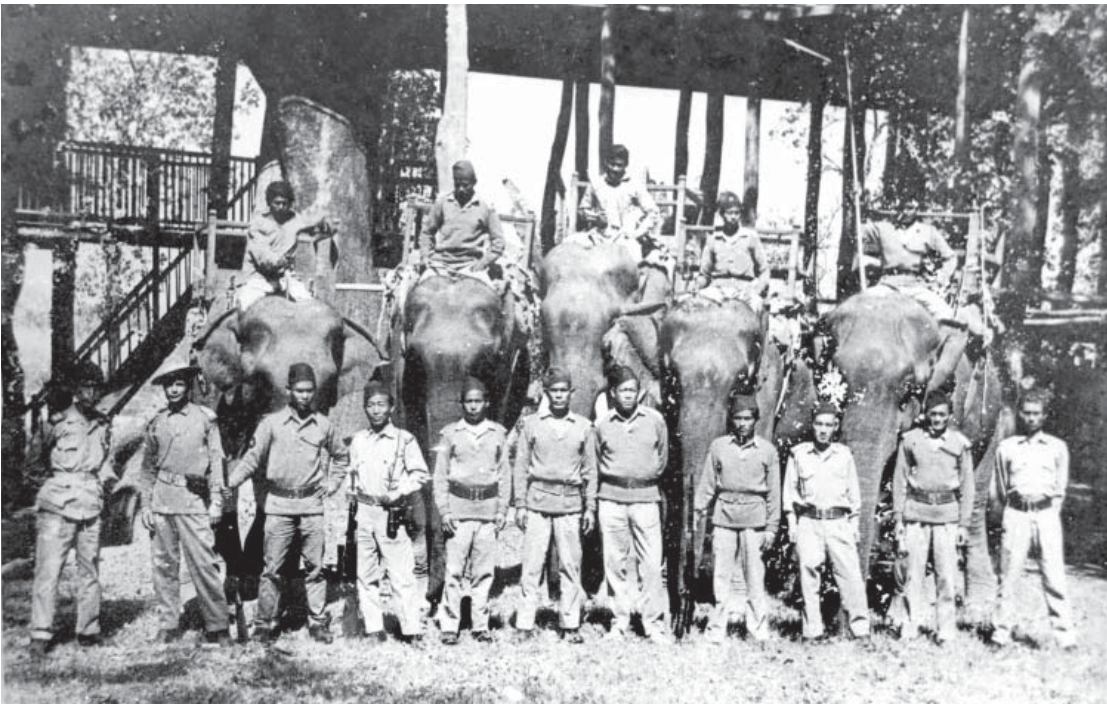


days.” Turning to me she crossed her delicate ankles and once again blocked the conversation, shying away from sharing any indiscretions with her young visitor.

I was visiting Denmark ostensibly to promote Nepal, but was hoping to glean from Mette more about her time in Chitwan during the early 1960s, married to John Coapman, the Indian-born son of American missionaries who had first built Tiger Tops Hotel, as it was then called. Never having met him, I had a shadowy image of a big blustery man with a rifle slung across his shoulders, a sort of South Asian Hemingway figure without the charm or the writing.

How did this stylish slender old lady, dressed in soft tweed and pastel cashmere against the summer evening chill, come to spend several years in a remote rhinoceros sanctuary and Rana hunting reserve in southern Nepal? I wasn’t getting very far. Graciously hospitable in her modest cosy home, and helpful with travel agents and media contacts, in lilting Danish cadence Mette made it clear that her colourful private life was off limits.

There were many gaps in the story but it seemed pretty glamorous to me, a wide-eyed twenty-something, curious about the eccentric cast of expatriate characters that composed Nepal’s tourism history. Rumour and innuendo featured a dramatic and clandestine escape from an abusive and jealous husband. The narrative



went that Mette had to sneak off to Kathmandu airport and freedom carrying only a small handbag so as not to raise the choleric Coapman’s turbulent suspicions – with a casual wave that she was “off shopping”, trembling she walked away from her entire Nepal life.

Inger Lisanevitch, Boris’s Danish wife, provided illicit support and Elizabeth Hawley was a lifelong admirer. She was running Tiger Tops’ Kathmandu office for Coapman. “There were so few people around it was easy for me to help him out -- he was a ‘difficult’ man”. Elizabeth’s fingers made the quotation marks. “Mette was wonderful, the poor thing.” Elizabeth had no time for the CIA conspiracies that clung to Coapman, nor his boast that King Mahendra had died in his arms whilst on shikar in Chitwan.

It is hard to imagine what life must have been like for Mette, alone and allegedly confined to the staff bungalow whilst her bullying husband constructed the Africa-inspired conical roof of the main lodge and the first four treetop bedrooms in a spreading silk cotton tree. Two Dallas oil millionaires with a penchant for big game

hunting, Toddy Lee Wynne Jr. and Herbert W. Klein, had found the Chitwan site whilst out shooting tiger with their ‘white hunter’ guide John Coapman, and contracted him to make it happen.

Smooth river stones were collected for the floor, and wood, bamboo and grass were cut from the forest for walls and thatched roofs. Set in a clearing overlooking the Reu River near the Rapti confluence, from her locked room, on a fine day the Himalayan peaks shimmered on the horizon but at night the dense jungle din must have been daunting.

How John and Mette came to be married in the first place is a missing chapter of the tale, but by November 1965 they received the first Tiger Tops guests, five Americans, who landed on the grass airstrip of Meghauli in a chartered Royal Nepal Airlines DC-3. Early photos show military-style uniforms, with guns, kukris and lances carried by shikari guides and elephant drivers to ward off the perceived threat from fierce wild creatures.

The story switches to a cold evening in a New York brown stone at the 1971 annual dinner of the

Explorers Club in East 70th Street, and a chance meeting between the Texan owners and AV Jim Edwards, a former banker and Pan Am salesman with the gift of the gab and a fledgling hunting company in Nepal. Tired of their errant and unreliable manager Coapman’s colonial fantasies, fuzzy truths and a business reeling with debt, Jim persuaded the two Texans that he and his business partner Chuck McDougal were perfectly placed to take over the ailing management and realise their dream of creating Nepal’s pioneer wildlife tourism venture, in return for part ownership. The deal was done.

Jim’s selective memory and talent for exaggeration has probably embellished accounts of the Tiger Tops Nepal takeover, but after that conversation in New York, John Coapman was fired, leaving death threats and unpaid bills in his wake. Mette had long gone.

Jim liked to say that the new management took off “with a roar”. With no communication system to alert the Chitwan staff, Jim, Chuck and Elizabeth Hawley arrived in February 1972 unannounced and

ATTENTION: Tiger Tops during the Coapman era (cca 1965) showing only four top rooms in the *simal*/bungalow, and staff dressed in military-style uniforms

John Coapman tiger hunting in Chitwan in the 1960s.

on foot, walking miles along jungle tracks, wading rivers, and carrying a case full of cash to salvage the situation. There is no doubt they found a sorry spectacle of starving elephants, unpaid salaries, broken vehicles and crumbling buildings. Jim claimed that food was so short on that first visit that they had to share a tiger’s kill.

John Coapman never again reappeared in Nepal and so was unable to defend his dubious legacy that faded into uncertain legend, even as Tiger Tops prospered. But we all stayed in touch with the much-loved Mette and her elegant but precarious life in Europe. She did not return either, but there were intriguing whispers about a generous English Duke and other Danish dalliances. But I never dared to ask. 🇬🇧

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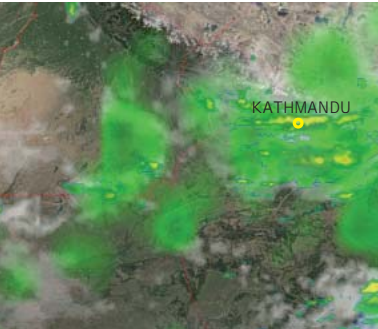
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A massive monsoonal trough is sitting over northern India, and the wind currents are supplying it with water vapor from both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. This mass of warm moist air condenses as it rises up the mountains, and now with dropping temperatures the precipitation has been copious. The rain will be incessant into the weekend, although there will be some break in the clouds in the mornings.

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Moving mountains



Lucia de Vries first saw the majesty of the Himalaya in Gilgit of Pakistan 25 years ago, and fantasised about becoming a Himalayan explorer. The Karakoram was mesmerising and mysterious to this young Dutch woman, and she dreamed of expeditions to unknown peaks. She wanted to follow the footsteps of the early Dutch missionaries Samuel van der Putte who travelled to Lhasa via Nepal in 1720, and Petrus Rijnhart who was killed in Tibet in 1898.

De Vries herself was at the Jokhang temple in Lhasa when Chinese troops fired at demonstrators, and soon after nearly died when she got lost during a blizzard in Tibet. She was rescued by nomads, but her frostbite was so severe she had to be hospitalised in Austria.

“I gave up my dream of exploring the Himalaya and decided to be an arm-chair Himalayan traveller,” recalls de Vries, who first came to Nepal in 1988, and then decided to move here in 1992. “My main motivation was to do something more useful in life using my journalism skills, and to learn more about Buddhism and Hinduism.”

She worked with the environmental group NEFEJ on its publication *Haka Haki*, set up a publishing house for children’s books and

wrote from Nepal for the Dutch and Belgian media. With friends, she established Animal Nepal in 2003 to take care of abandoned dogs and pets.

De Vries decided to commemorate her 25 years in Nepal with an anthology of writings from the Himalaya that had inspired her. The volume *Mountain Bound* contains material by everyone, from the 19th century British surgeon Henry Amrose Oldfield to the Japanese explorer monk Ekai Kawaguchi, and right down to the American climber Arelene Blum – all people whom de Vries admires for their courage and pioneering journeys of discovery.

‘For someone who grew up in a country whose horizons are unmarked by any kind of elevation, located partly below sea level, living in the Himalaya was not an obvious choice,’ de Vries writes in her Foreword to *Mountain Bound*.

De Vries has grown to love Kathmandu Valley, and the familiar silhouette of ‘Champadevi and her sisters’ as well as the snowy ramparts to the north that are almost home. However, she laments: ‘Kathmandu today is a far cry from the place I fell in love with three decades ago.’

Her beloved Himalayan mountains are being ravaged by bad roads, unregulated

urbanisation, and with climate change the mountains are more vulnerable than ever before.

The book is a tribute to the Himalaya, and the 46 explorers (all European, except one Japanese) who were moved by the mountains to write in awe about them. The excerpts from 19th and 20th century are by ‘missionaries, mountaineers, mystics and mercenaries’.

The earliest writing is by the Tuscan Jesuit Ippolito Desideri, whose account of his journey to Lhasa in 1716 is included in the book because it was published in 1904.

For those overwhelmed by the available literature on the mountaineering, culture and history of the Himalaya (or don’t have the budget to buy all the books) *Mountain Bound* is a useful primer. You get a glimpse of the adventures of people like William Kirkpatrick, George Mallory, Peter Matthiessen, Edmund Hillary, George Schaller, or Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, so that you can always go and buy their books if you liked what you read. There is a useful glossary of the source books at the end.

Lucia de Vries has slipped in one of her own writings (The Winds of Chait) to the anthology, which is a haunting profile of a Dalit Maoist guerrilla, Chandra, who was

killed by the Army in an unnamed village in Central Nepal. It is one of the most nuanced reportage of the Maoist conflict by a western journalist, and peels off the layers of caste, class, social injustice, state neglect and violence that lay at the root of the conflict.

This last paragraph from the chapter is a lyrical portrait of the Nepali landscape during the war years: ‘Walking the trail towards the village, Chandra must have looked up at the mud houses, huddled together like sleeping dogs. His eyes must have trailed along the ridge ... to the flowering fruit trees of his ancestral home. He must have noticed the freshly loughed fields, rich golden brown, waiting for a new life.’

Kunda Dixit

Mountain Bound
Writings from the Himalaya
Edited by Lucia de Vries
Vajra Books 2018
ISBN 978-9937-623-91-9

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What will Nepal do

As purchasing power

Sonia Awale

Heaps of discarded CRT monitors and keyboards are stacked one above the other. Tube lights, lamps and PVC panels are piled up at another corner. Old printers, television sets, cassette players, refrigerators, heaters and even laundry machines are piled high in a tangle of cables.

Here at the Doko Recyclers' warehouse in Sano Thimi, a staff in protective gear is hard at work segregating a new batch of electronic waste collected from Kathmandu neighbourhoods. A technician is trying to repair a laptop, but most other items are set aside to extract valuable metals for reuse.

The warehouse is already bursting at the seams with more than 55 tons of electronic waste that have been collected in just the past year after it was set up.

Yet the mountains of batteries, computers and electronic items here represent only the tip of the iceberg. Most e-waste in Nepal is just dumped with the rest of the trash at landfills.

The disposal of electronic waste like toner cartridges and mobile phones is particularly challenging as they have negative recycling value and contain hazardous material like mercury, lead, lithium, and heavy metals like cadmium and nickel.

"We don't know what to do with them. As of now we are holding the waste and trying to find a solution to manage it," admits Pankaj Panjiyar of Doko Recyclers. "We have to find a sustainable solution to manage electronic waste before it becomes too big of a problem to handle."

Worldwide, some 45 million tons of electric and electronic waste was produced last year alone, and this has been increasing at 7% a year. According to a study carried out by Nepal's Department of Environment, Kathmandu alone discarded 18,000 metric tons of e-waste last year.

Another survey earlier this year by Kathmandu University's Subodh Luitel found that e-waste makes up almost 0.5% of the total municipal waste in Kathmandu, which is close to the global average. That may not seem like a lot, but much more is discarded without the knowledge of the Municipality.

"At the pace we are moving, it is guaranteed to be a major crisis," warned electronic waste management expert Keshav Parajuly at a workshop on e-waste last month in Kathmandu.

Increasing purchasing power, planned obsolescence of electronic gadgets and the lack of strict regulation on disposal has eroded the Nepali culture of repairing, reusing and recycling, according to Sanjay Golcha of the Him Electronics.

"On average, Nepalis change their mobile phones every 15 months. More than 6 million phones are imported every year. There has to be a mechanism for their disposal," he added.

Countries in Europe and East Asia are introducing

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) that requires consumers to pay a disposal tax at the time of purchase of any electronic good, and manufacturers and importers to take back the end-of-life product to be safely disposed.

Lead and lithium batteries from inverters, vehicles and solar systems make up a large portion of the e-waste in Nepal, and it saw a surge during the decade of severe power cuts. Nepal has accumulated an estimated 25,000 tons of battery waste, of which nearly 10,000 were from inverters and 8,000 from solar systems.

The Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (APEC) plans to establish a semi-automated recycling plan for lead acid batteries, but experts say it is too little, too late. Electric vehicle use is rising, which means very soon there will be a bigger problem of managing lithium ion batteries that power cars, laptops and smartphones.

The Solid Waste Management Act 2011 addresses industrial and hazardous waste, but there is no separate mention of e-waste. The public is left with only one option: to sell e-waste to scrap dealers. But recyclers cherry-pick the most valuable waste, and this involves unsafe dismantling, extraction of useful metals, and dumping of the hazardous waste in landfills, contaminating the soil, groundwater and rivers.

The government doesn't have any plan on e-waste management as of now, says Safala Shrestha of the Department of Environment. However, a new Hazardous Waste Regulation is being drafted, which addresses the control and management of e-waste, and a ban on illegal import of electronic goods.

Nepal is a signatory to the Basel Convention that prohibits trans-boundary movement of hazardous waste, unless a country has no local solution for disposal.

Nepal has been exporting most of its e-waste to India, where printed circuit boards and other electronic waste are chemically treated to extract precious elements like gold and silver. Cities like Moradabad and parts of West Bengal are known as 'goldmines of trash'. But with India and China cracking down on e-waste imports, Nepal will now have to import recycling machines (like bulb eaters that remove mercury from fluorescent lamps) as well as other e-waste, which is still being taken across to India.

"There is no prioritisation for electronic waste in our legislation and that is the biggest challenge," says Eriko Shrestha of Swarthmore College in the US who is researching electronic waste. "The best temporary solution is for our government to negotiate with neighbouring countries, particularly India, to ease the ban on Nepal until we have a more viable option."

Electronic waste is also an opportunity for Nepal to generate income from local resources, in turn to be used to process and treat the trash. Precious metals from electronic components can be recycled to contribute to the national economy. Public, policy and corporate level awareness is an integral part of e-waste management.

"We need to build our own processing plant here rather than exporting what is essentially a goldmine. We can then reuse and recycle and set up an ecosystem of a circular economy," solid waste



expert Sumitra Amatya told *Nepali Times*.

Ideally, e-waste should be separated from municipal waste and allocated a different landfill site. But with Kathmandu's only landfill in Okharpauwa filled to the brim, Nepal Investment Board in partnership with NepWaste, a Finnish joint venture, is working on a project to collect waste from Kathmandu and process it at Banchare Danda to generate compressed natural gas, electricity and fertiliser. The project was proposed long ago, but has been mired in bureaucracy.

Said Pankaj Panjiyar of Doko Recyclers: "E-waste is a global problem that needs local solutions. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, but learn from other countries which are doing it sustainably."



Visit the collection and processing warehouse of Doko Recyclers in Sano Thimi to gauge the seriousness of Nepal's hazardous e-waste crisis. Hear experts tell us that after India banned e-waste imports last year, e-trash is piling up and Nepal needs to urgently come up with a solution.

nepalitimes.com

PILING UP

E-waste

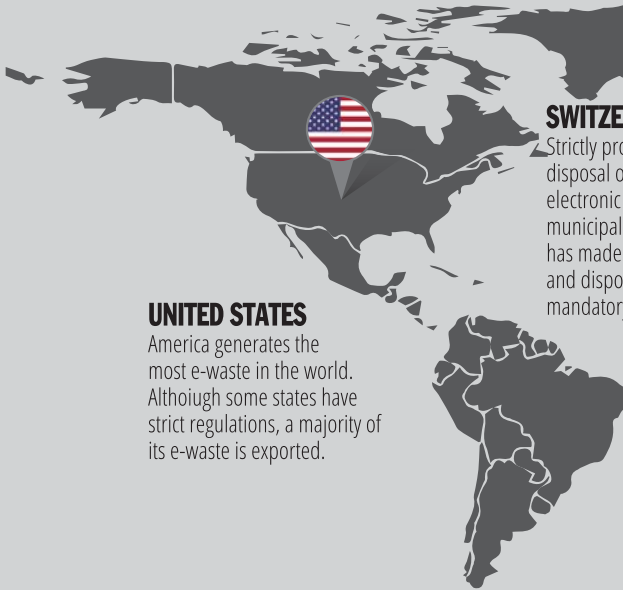
TOP 10

kilotonnes of e-waste/year

China	7,211
US	6,295
Japan	2,139
India	1,975
Germany	1,884
UK	1,632
Brazil	1,534
Russia	1,392
France	1,373
Indonesia	1,274

e-waste kg/person

Norway	29
UK	25
Denmark	25
Netherlands	24
Australia	24
Germany	23
Iceland	23
Switzerland	22
Sweden	21
France	21



UNITED STATES
America generates the most e-waste in the world. Although some states have strict regulations, a majority of its e-waste is exported.

SWITZERLAND
Strictly pro disposal of electronic waste, Switzerland has made municipal e-waste management mandatory.

o with its e-waste?

ver rises, Kathmandu faces the problem of electronic waste disposal



SONIA AWALE



e legislation around the world

DENMARK

A 2006 producer responsibility scheme makes manufacturers responsible for disposal.

IRELAND

Prohibits the export of obsolete goods with no value, and take back system for electronic waste.

GHANA

Known as the e-waste dumping ground of the world, the country now has tax on imported second-hand electronic goods.

INDIA

Introduced Extended Producers Responsibility in 2016, and imposed the ban on imports of all e-waste last year.

CHINA

China is among the largest importer of e-waste. Has imposed a ban on 24 types of foreign garbage, including electronic waste, since last year.

THAILAND

After the Chinese ban, Thailand became the new dumping ground for the world's electronic trash. But it will ban 432 types of e-waste within six months.

...meanwhile in Kathmandu

Official imports of electronic items which ultimately end up being e-waste



MOBILES



TELEVISIONS



COMPUTERS



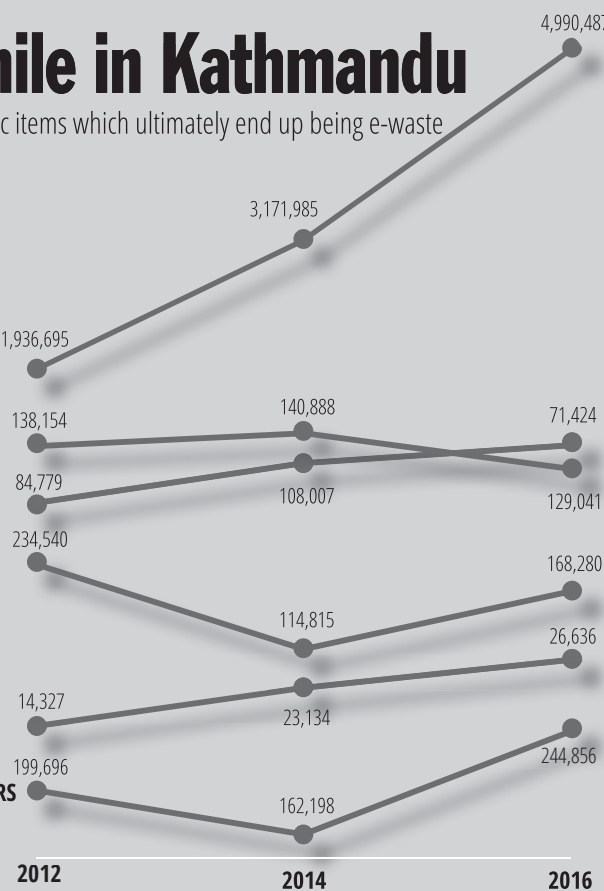
LAPTOPS



WASHING MACHINES



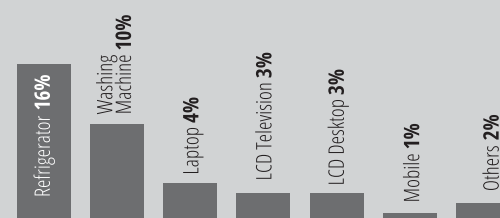
REFRIGERATORS



CRT Desktop 31%

CRT Television 30%

E-waste generation (in tons) from household waste in Kathmandu Valley



EVENTS



Critical mass KTM

A call out for cyclists to gather at Kathmandu Darbar Square for a short ride around the streets to mark presence and reclaim the streets.

31 August, 5:30pm, Basantapur

NexUs night market

Art, food and a unique variety of handcrafted items of high quality from across Nepal.

31 August, 4pm onwards, NexUs Culture Nepal, Maitri Marg, Patan, (01) 5522393

Muna Madan

Directed by Sabin Kattel, Muna Madan, an epic poem by great poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota will be performed at the theatre.

31 August- 11 September, 5:30pm onwards, Shilpee Theatre Nepal, Battisputali, (01) 4469621, 9815356568

Movie screening

Free screening of Terra Libre, a documentary film by Gert-Peter Bruch, a journalist, director and founder of Planet Amazon. The film narrates the fight of indigenous peoples trying to protect the Amazon rainforest from mega dams. Live online conversation with director and refreshments follow.

3 September, 5-8pm, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Pulchok, (01) 5009221

Scooter exchange camp

Drop by to upgrade your petrol vehicles to a NIU.

3 September, 11-3pm, GAA Hall, Thamel, 9801230009



Base camp pot luck

Bring your favourite home cooked at the huge pot luck party and get to taste others' dishes as well.

1 September, 6pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyles, 9841226397

Moksh fest

Chill out in the garden with live acoustic music and Chef Bijay Lama's multi cuisine stalls. Do not worry about the kids as there will be a separate recreation corner including art center, palmistry, bouncing castle and toy train.

1 September, 12pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 9851103899

Umangexpo

A free one day event to celebrate with young female entrepreneurs: their ideas, products and the impact they have created with the help of EmpowHER 2018. Also featuring: made in Nepal products, food and game stalls.

1 September, 2-5pm, Bikalpa Art Centre, Pulchok, 9851147776



Godawari Running Fest

Run, climb, crawl and wrestle to test your strength, stamina and teamwork at Nepal's first obstacle race. Register to participate in one of these: TNF Ultra Run 50k, SUUNTO Trail Run 30k, LA Sportiva Trail Run 15k, TNF Yeti Run 5k, TNF Kids Run 2k.

8 September, 6am onwards, Godawari Football Ground, 9841907889, 9813927909, 9841226397

Venture talk

Discussing on the investment dynamics and share market landscape in Nepal to maximise returns; Managing Director at Hathway Investment Nepal and Chairman at Nepal Investors Forum Ambika Prasad Paudel will provide you with needful insights.

4 September, 4:45-7pm, Nepal Tourism Board Hall, Pradarshani Marg, Bhrikutimandap, Rs200, (01) 5537089

Urban choreography

A four-day intensive workshop by Rishi Sufi, a young hip hop dancer from Delhi, back with different kinks and techniques.

4-7 September, My Dance Zone, Pepsicola, Kadaghari, Rs1,000 (pre-sale)/ Rs1,250 (door), 9813488461

MUSIC



House of Music

The Elements and Ankit Shrestha ft. Robin Neupane will be playing their originals live for good weekend.

1 September, 6pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, Rs250 (pre-sale)/ Rs300 (door), 9841382504, 9849831493

JPT night

A night full of different genres: underground and deep house music, urban hip hop, moombahton and dancehall, Bollywood, uplifting and progressive psychedelic, played by various DJs.

31 August, 6pm onwards, Club OMG, Thamel, 9843399842



Sun Down Affair 5

Soak in the stunning sunset view at Sun Down Affair's fifth volume this Saturday, with SEQU3L and DJ Ana Lilia.

1 September, 3pm onwards, Level 3 and PRIVE, Labim Mall, Pulchok, (01) 5536513

Jammin Thursday

Meet fellow musicians and play a few tunes with them, or just enjoy listening to artists jamming and hang out together. A place for budding musicians and music lovers.

6 August, 7pm onwards, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5543554

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 31 August

A man meets a girl he likes, but he only gets to meet her once a year when she visits the town for a certain festival. Gradually he realises that she is not a woman but a ghost, who likes to lure men away, leaving behind only their clothes. How does he deal with her? Starring Shraddha Kapoor and Rajkumar Rao, this horror movie directed by Amar Kaushik is based on a true urban legend in the villages of Karnataka.

DINING



Imago Dei Café

The menu Nourish by Imago Dei features limited option for each weekday, yet thoughtfully created with a healthy balance of nutrition and 500 calories approx. Healthy food was never so good.

Nag Pokhari, Naxal, (01) 4442464

The Bent Fork

This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Cosy evenings with family and friends. Try their signature Grilled Chicken Burger or Beef Burger.

Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

Starry Night BBQ

Enjoy Shangri-la's Starry Night BBQ with live performance by Tattwo band every Friday.

7pm onwards, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat, Rs2,000 (nett per person), (01)4412999

Utopia

Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel's noisy streets, Utopia features Newari dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines.

Ekantakuna, 9849592412



Taza

The restaurant brings a bit of Middle-Eastern flare to Kathmandu with its all Syrian items. Shawarma, falafel, hummus, kebab—everything is fresh and finger licking. Now, Taza also has a kiosk at Labim Mall.

Pulchok Lane, 9860960177

Fire and Ice

One of the first pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napolitana pizza and dozens of variants to choose from. But we recommend the paesane, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon.

Thamel, (01) 4250210

GETAWAY



Gokarna Forest Resort

The resort is a numinous paradise, thick with century old trees rustling out natural tunes and great restaurants for fine dining. Golf anyone?

Thali, (01) 4450002

Barahi Jungle Lodge

The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.

Megauli, Chitwan, (01) 4429820



The Fulbari Resort & Spa

The ultimate getaway in Pokhara, Fulbari is far from everything but at the centre of all that matters.

Pokhara, (061) 432451

Shangri-La Village Resort

A 2-night and 3-day special package at the village resort. Let the monsoon bring out the madness in you before comes the Autumn.

8-30 September, Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs7,499 (offers available), (061) 462222



The Old Inn

The B&B is reminiscent of black and white Tudor buildings in England, the cobbledstoned, pedestrianised main street is elegant, and there is the breathtaking view of the Central Himalaya from Annapurna in the west to Langtang and beyond in the east.

Bandipur, (065) 520110

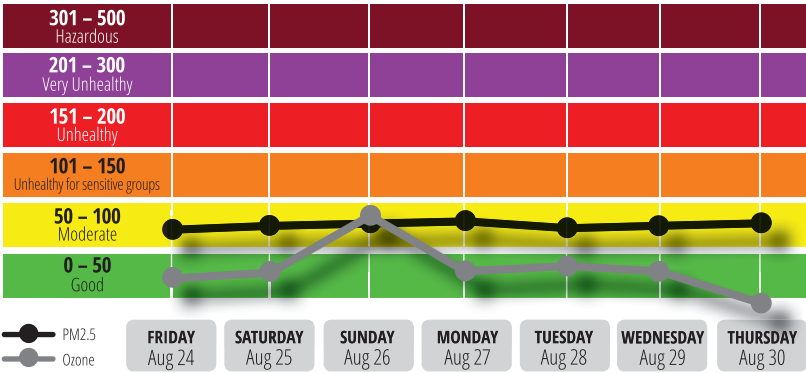
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Appointment Management Apointment management with required doctors in different hospitals.	Equipment Rental & Drug Supply Drug supply at your doorstep and best quality medical equipments in rent.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 24 - 30 August



The incessant rains this week have kept both the PM2.5 and ozone concentration in the air in central Kathmandu low. But the hourly breakdown as seen in the live pollution updates on nepaltimes.com show that the harmful particulates and gases pick up as soon as the rains stop and the traffic intensity increases. However, Thursday and Friday should see better Air Quality Index because of restricted traffic due to BIMSTEC Summit.

https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/



¹Sucrose. As per Codex Guidelines. Lite Horlicks is a nourishing beverage to be consumed as part of a daily diet. Lite Horlicks contains Acesulfame Potassium. Not recommended for children. Contains artificial sweetener and for calorie conscious.

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- सूचनाको हक प्रयोग गरी सम्बन्धित र सार्वजनिक सरोकारका सूचना मागौं ।
- सूचनाको हक नागरिकको मौलिक अधिकार हो ।
- प्रत्येक नेपालीलाई सार्वजनिक निकायको सूचना माग्ने र पाउने अधिकार छ ।



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सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग



RATNA KRISHNA SHRESTHA / RSS

BACK TO KATHMANDU: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by Defence Minister Ishwor Pokharel in Kathmandu as he arrived on Thursday morning to attend the fourth BIMSTEC Summit.



MONIKA DEUPALA

ON THE MOVE: Newari communities in Bhaktapur play *Gunla Baja* on the occasion of Janai Purnima full moon on Sunday.



MONIKA DEUPALA

BOOM: Locals in Patan mark *Saparu*, the festival of death and rebirth with a Lakhe Dance. The day is also observed as an occasion for satire so citizens can let off steam.



BIKRAM RAI

GAY PRIDE: Members of LGBTIQ community in Nepal and their supporters participate in the annual Gai Jatra Gay Pride Parade in Thamel on Monday.



QATAR AIRWAYS

BEST AGENT: Qatar Airways country manager Jaya Prakash Nair and Senior Manager of Indian Sub-Continent Naveen Chawla award the Best Agent Award 2017-2018 to Osho World Travel Nepal at Radisson Hotel on Sunday.

Really smart phone



Just before the seventh generation of the Galaxy Note series hits its anniversary month, Samsung launched its most awaited Galaxy Note 9 a week ago at a grand event in New Delhi. Recognised for innovation and introduction of the phablet concept, the South Korean smartphone company brings forth its upgraded eighth model specially tailored for business and corporate users.

Samsung Galaxy Note 9 is a premium smartphone that keeps up with the busy life of users between work and play. It has a 4,000mAh battery, the largest ever on the Galaxy phone flagship that, after rigorous tests and certifications because of public memory of phones that caught fire, guarantees day-long power.

It comes with an expanded onboard space of 128GB, along with 6GB of RAM and a microSD card can also be added for an extra storage of up to 512GB. With its 10nm processor, Water Carbon Cooling system and on-device AI-based performance adjusting algorithm, streaming and downloading have never been so stable and fast.

The Note 9 may not be too much of a novelty for some users in terms of daylong battery life because this feature had already been pioneered by Chinese Huawei and Xiaomi a year ago. However, loyalists of Galaxy Note series prefer to differentiate the smartphone for its stylus which the company resurrected, and it is evident that Samsung does not want to disappoint them.

Like in every Note series, the S-Pen is the signature feature of the eighth generation too. But what began as a mere tool for writing and drawing has now turned

into a powerful device that expands the capability of a smartphone.

For the first time, the smartphone is built with Bluetooth LE wireless technology, allowing the owner to use the pen like a remote control to launch and operate apps and features. As it lasts up to 200 clicks or 30 minutes on a single charge (taking only 40 seconds to charge fully), users can take photos, present slides, play, pause and record audios and videos and much more. App developers can also use this feature to their advantage.

The stylus is backed with another inventive feature of Samsung DeX, an HDMI adapter, for a PC-like experience. The large screen concept which the series highly popularised works well in this case, as users can work on presentations, edit photos and videos, watch favourite shows, or simply connect to a TV or monitor for a fully functional dual screen mode.

Compared to the S-Pen, all other features are nearly invisible, but they are important. The camera has a scene optimiser, which can identify flowers, sunsets, foods and birds. The flaw detector analyses and notifies about any potential issues in the photo. It also detects blinked eyes and blurred images. Users can take sharper images even in a low light.

What smartphone geeks still feel concerned about is the price. The Note 9 is selling for Rs109,900 which is the highest for its flagship series. But as the company provides an array of offers and gifts, pre-bookers can exploit the benefits.

Surendra Sharma in New Delhi



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Gagging the press in i

Added up, the Communist government’s recent moves are aimed at muzzling the media

Sewa Bhattarai

It has only been two weeks since Nepal’s new Penal Code criminalised photography (Section 295), slapped heavy fines and jail terms for recording conversations (Section 293), and announced strict punishment for sending, receiving or using online data (Section 298). Another privacy-related bill in Parliament will prohibit people from publishing personal information of public officials. But it has already had a chilling effect across the Nepali media.

A person who ridiculed the prime minister on Facebook was tracked down and arrested for photo-manipulating the prime minister’s photo, which violates Section 295 of the Code. Editors of *Nagarik*, *Annapurna Post* and *Kantipur* were summoned to the Press Council for interrogation.

Photojournalist Usha Titikshu was taking a photo of a damaged CCTV camera at an airport recently, when she was stopped. “Don’t you know the new rules about not taking photos?” she was warned.

If enacted earlier, the new laws would have forced editors to spike their recent investigative reports on the Chief Justice’s doctored certificates, photos showing collusion between top politicians and medical college owners, and stories of corruption in high places.

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists last week issued its Godavari Declaration demanding that the provisions be immediately rescinded. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters without Borders (RSF) and others all condemned the move, demanding that Nepal adhere



to the international standards and principles of freedom of expression.

Although the constitution guarantees press freedom as an inviolable right, the laws try to enforce constitutional provisions protecting a citizen’s right to privacy more strictly, even extending it to public figures.

Press adviser to the prime minister and former editor Kundan Aryal admits that a free press is important, but says the Nepali media has failed to self-regulate. “Journalists do not rein themselves in, they feel free to make derogatory comments, especially about women. It is necessary to regulate

the press,” he told *Nepali Times*.

Such talk has already had a dampening effect, with editors and reporters now more wary of publishing information in the public interest. The fear is that the laws are so broadly defined and open to interpretation, anyone can be hauled over for anything.

The crackdowns started coming thick and fast after the Nepal Communist Party government was elected to power in January: it consolidated the surveillance arms of the state in the PMO, proposed restrictions on advocacy through the National Integrity Policy, and banned popular areas for protest.

The death of democracy

What Shahidul Alam’s arrest reveals about the political climate across South Asia

On 5 August, Bangladeshi artist, writer and organiser Shahidul Alam was interviewed on Al Jazeera about student protests triggered by the deaths of schoolchildren run over by a public bus.

Alam said that the anger of the protesting



COMMENT
Aditya Adhikari

youth were not just with the transportation sector but the dire situation of the country as a whole. He outlined a litany of everything that was wrong in Bangladesh: “The looting of banks, the gagging of the media, the extra-judicial killings, the disappearances, the need to give protection money at all levels, bribery at all levels, corruption in education.”

That very day, security personnel in plainclothes arrived at Alam’s Dhaka home in the middle of the night and took him away



Installments

UNDERPASS: It looks like you forgot that there is now a new law that forbids disclosure of the private information of public officials.

Vatsyayan in *Kantipur*, 25 August

Photographer Chandra Ale of *Onlinekhabar* recently faced questions when he was at Kalimati vegetable market where traders had locked up government inspectors. “A person asked me if I had permission to take photos. He followed me, and forced me to delete my pictures,” Ale relates.

Photojournalist Usha Titikshu thinks there is a systematic plan to gag the media. “Threats to journalists are more common across South Asia, and we have not connected the dots to see that the same is happening in Nepal,” says Titikshu, citing the rape and deaths of journalists in India and the arrest of noted Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam (*see below*) who is being mistreated in jail. “We see our own government moving towards similar intolerance in Nepal.”

Ujjwal Acharya, South Asia coordinator of IFJ and digital media watcher says: “Today one thinks twice before posting anything on social media. By the looks of it, the government intends to curtail all kinds of expression, especially investigative journalism.”

Says *Nagarik* editor Gunaraj Luintel who answered an unprecedented summon from the Press Council: “It was overstepping its mandate, even asking me to explain a mistake in print to the parties involved. The council is only supposed to promote ethical journalism, but it has become an arm of the government. The aim is to increase censorship in a planned way.”

Narayan Wagle, editor of *Kantipur*, was also summoned by the Press Council for the first time in his 30-year career, and says the it has outlived its usefulness.

“The practice in democratic countries is that the government does not monitor the press. The press monitors itself through a code of ethics. But in Nepal, a new law about the Press Council is in the offing, which proves the government wants to further tighten the noose around the press.”

Bikas Karki, president of Photo Journalists’ Club, agrees that the government’s real intention is control: “The Constitution has become like the elephant’s tusks, it is there just for show. The laws are the real teeth inside, which bite.”

Nepal has gone through censorship before. The Panchayat system banned political parties, and the royal palace strictly controlled the press. In 2005, King Gyanendra tried to take the country back to those dark days. Some say the new Code is even worse than the Panchayat.

“There were threats then, but they were verbal or even unspoken,” recalls photojournalist Gopal Chitrakar, who started out at *Gorkhapatra* during the Panchayat. “I don’t remember such draconian measures. These new rules are in writing, they are backed by the law. That gives them legitimacy which is more dangerous.”

Kundan Aryal reassured us that the Code and laws can always be amended. But this does not convince journalists who say the laws that restrict media freedom are inherently anti-democratic, unconstitutional and remove its check-and-balance function. Laws that are broadly defined are even more dangerous, and can be a path to authoritarianism. 🇳🇵

The right to say the emperor is naked

Satire flourishes best and is most prolific when there are controls on free speech, and Haribansa Acharya should know. He says he performed his most fulfilling and creative skits during the Panchayat.

“Saying ‘*17 Sa!*’ out loud was banned, since it was the year of King Mahendra’s coup. So we got away by saying ‘the year between 16 and 18’,” remembers Acharya. “We also called Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa ‘*Gham*’ instead of Surya. We played cat and mouse with the censors, and it was more fun and creative. Today’s satire seems to lack that art.”

cannot elsewhere, therein lies its power to question authority,” he adds.

Some have noted that this year’s Gai Jatra seemed subdued, with fewer shows. On social media, there were comments that satirists had already started self-censoring because of the new Criminal Code.

Satirist Manoj Gajurel, who has made a career out of lampooning kings, prime ministers and guerrilla commanders, says: “Humour has a social responsibility to carry the people’s message to authority when it refuses to listen to direct communication.”

However, an elected government now wants

to take away that right of Nepalis to poke fun at power. Section 306 of the Code specifically prohibits ‘satire’ and categorises it under libel, and Section 295 prohibits caricatures.

“I feel a great sense of dread,” admits cartoonist Durga Baral, who went underground during the Panchayat but continued to produce cartoons under the pen-name Batsyayan, despite threats. “Freedom of expression is our basic right, and if we are not free to speak out, it all gets bottled up inside.”

Nepali cartoonists

are pushing back. Last week, Rabin Sayami drew a savage cartoon that tore the government to shreds over its callousness in not investigating the Kanchanpur rape case, and killing a protester. It depicted a smiling Pushpa Kamal Dahal and a smug Prime Minister Oli with a smoking gun in his hand (*above*). The rapist holds a bloody knife, and has his back turned. Two photos of the rape victim and a dead protester hang on the wall.

Sayami was warned by friends to be careful, and that he might be sent to jail. He says the cartoon was a test: “To see if we are still a democracy.” 🇳🇵



Satire, in fact, seems less necessary when there is full freedom, but it is a lifeline during restrictive times. Even during the absolutist Rana and Shah reigns, the royals knew citizens needed to let off a little steam. So, they allowed one day in a year on Gai Jatra (on 27 August this year) when people had freedom to say anything.

Culture expert Tejeswor Babu Gongah remembers Gai Jatra revelers burning an effigy of the Panchayat, an act that would have people locked up on any other day of the year. “Humour is one space where you can raise issues that you

without any explanation or warrant. When he was presented before court a few days later, he was limping and had to be held up as he walked. (*Go online to watch video.*)

He had obviously been tortured in custody. Soon after, he was charged with Section 57 of Bangladesh’s Information and Communications Technology Act (ICT) for ‘spreading propaganda and false information against the government’. Alam was denied bail. If convicted, he could face a seven-year sentence.

The blatantly unjust and politically motivated arrest of Shahidul Alam has been widely condemned and there have been petitions for his release from all parts of the world. The attention this case has received partially has to do with Alam’s extraordinary achievements and his international fame.

As a photojournalist, he has received widespread acclaim for revealing that the marginalised are active agents rather than victims, and his visceral depictions of state brutality. But Alam is equally known as an institution builder and a mentor for younger photojournalists. He founded the Drik Picture Library photo agency, the Chobi Mela, one of South Asia’s most prestigious photo festivals, and the Pathshala South Asian Media Institute which has trained hundreds of photographers, including those from Nepal.

But the case has far-reaching implications that go beyond Shahidul Alam as an individual, and even beyond Bangladesh. The arrest has to be seen in light of worrisome trends that have begun to afflict large sections

of the world, including many countries in the South Asian region.

Broadly speaking, this has to do with the attack by the state upon what is often called ‘freedom of expression’. In recent months, governments in South Asia have tried to criminalise all criticism of the government, both by publicly prominent personalities and by private citizens expressing themselves on social media.

In Bangladesh, several people have been arrested for posting or sharing comments critical of the government on Facebook. The government there is planning to replace the notorious ICT act with even more draconian legislation. In Myanmar, journalists reporting on the Rohingya crisis have been arrested and charged with violating the Official Secrets Act.

In the past week, several high profile activists and intellectuals have been arrested in India in what is clearly a vendetta on the part of the government. And in Nepal too, the government has passed legislation that would prevent journalists from reporting on state activity.

Governments have claimed that such measures are necessary to preserve national security. In order to maintain their power, rulers in the region have tried to instigate nationalist sentiments among the population. Organisations campaigning for greater justice have been vilified as tools of foreign countries.

The intention behind these efforts is clear. Governments want to establish their own

interpretation of history and current events as the only legitimate one. They want to be left free to bulldoze decisions without having to confront independent civil society groups. And in the process, they are trying to create populations that are fearful, inward looking and xenophobic.

The campaign for the release of Shahidul Alam is not just about an individual who has been unjustly persecuted. More broadly, it is a campaign to resist the steady encroachment upon democratic space across the region. It is a campaign against a narrow-minded nationalism and the arbitrary use of power. A campaign that stands for tolerance, the rule of law and the rights of the most marginalized people.

During her visit to Kathmandu for the BIMSTEC conference, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would do well to realise that her government has only lost international legitimacy by arresting Shahidul Alam. His immediate release will be an important first step towards restoring the Bangladesh government’s credibility.

Other heads of government visiting Nepal should similarly recognise that attacks on journalists and members of civil society only serve to increase hostility and anger towards the ruling authorities. Dismantling legislation that impedes the right to free expression will be necessary if states are to regain the trust of their populations. 🇳🇵

Aditya Adhikari is a journalist and author of *The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution*.

CODE WORDS

While Nepal’s journalistic community is up in the arms about the latest Criminal Code, lawyer Madhav Basnet says it is not as worrying as perceived, for the following reasons:

- The 1990 Constitution was the first one to clearly mention the right to privacy.
- Nepal has a long history of laws against slander and libel, even in Jang Bahadur’s Muluki Ain of 1853.
- The Criminal Code does not specifically mention any profession like writers, journalists or photo-journalists.
- The conduct of journalists is covered by other laws related to the media, which remain unchanged. The Criminal Code mentions that it will not supersede laws relating to specific professions.
- With social media, it is not just journalists and photographers who take photos, collect and disseminate information, but everyone. The Code is only prescribing limits for them.
- The law, however, does apply to journalists if they are not transmitting through the mass media.
- The Criminal Code is not the guarantor of freedom of expression, the Constitution is. That freedom is not without its limits, and the limits are also mentioned in the Constitution. However, nothing can take away that freedom. And if any law seems to infringe upon it, then there are Constitutional remedies.

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Hugging HOGs

One thing that gets the sharks in gobarmnet all excited about SAARC Summits is that they can award contracts bypassing and underpassing due process to erect arches heartily welcoming guests to The Country of Marx, Lenin, Mao and Buddha, patch potholes in the middle of rush hour, and paint sidewalk railings in driving rain. The contractors make a killing, and grabberment officials laugh all the way to the ATM.

The same is happening this week with the Bifsteak Summit when HOGs (heads of government) hugged each other after descending on us like a ton of bricks. And what a windfall it has been for our national economy. Complete income figures are still being tallied, but Nepal's Multi-dimensional Poverty Index is estimated to have grown by 0.75 percentiles just on the wealth that has been created by sub-contractors who worked night and day, rain or shine, through hell or high water, to put up corrugated tin fencing around Tin Coonay, adorning it with artistic depictions of the national flower, the knational knife and various endangered wildlife hunted to near extinction. Pity, because if it hadn't been for the fence visitors could have caught a glimpse of Nepal's own Bermuda Triangle.

The Mandala has been decorated at night with flashing outdoor fairy lighting, which means the City Fathers have finally given a green light to declare it a red light district in honour of the visiting dignitaries.

But there was a fly in the oinkment: HOGs didn't have a venue for their Bifsteak Retreat. There was a strong lobby from certain financiers to have it in Gokarna Forest Resort (Motto: "It is a jungle out here.")

However, given the state of the road, and since the Thai leader is reportedly prone to carsickness, the PMO proposed to fly everyone out on the Army's MI-17. But despite the proven warhorses being flown by Nepal's battle-hardened pilots, HOGs all took a rain check, and beat a hasty retreat to Soaltee's spa where they are taking a collective soak even as we speak.

This was really bad news for people living on Sankhu side because they thought that their road would be finally fixed. Now, it looks like they will have to wait 12 more years for the next SAARC Summit for the potholes to be repaired.

The important take-away from all this is that Nepal's economic diplomacy henceforth should concentrate on hosting more international conferences in Nepal (Motto: 'We Have the Sherpas for Your Summit') and spread the venues around the country so that all municipalities get a chance to be equally spruced up. Here are some possibilities:

- World Summit of Rogues and Tyrants
- Asia-Pacific Smugglers Summit
- International Conference on Impact of International Conferences on Climate Change
- South Asian Summit of Constructive Corruption
- Regional Conference of HOGs Terrorising the Press into Submission
- Summit of Re-aligned Nations
- Shark Summit 2032





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