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Nepal may be a federal state on paper, but the mightiest government in the country's democratic history is showing that it is extremely reluctant to share its considerable power with the seven provinces.

Chief ministers (CM) of all seven provinces are engaged in a tug-of-war with Singha Darbar, which is unwilling to devolve power to federal and local governments. Who wins this fight will determine the fate of Nepal's nascent federalism.

Six of the seven chief ministers had a huddle in Pokhara last week, in which they came up with a list of agenda points to take up with Prime Minister K P Oli. The CM of Karnali province could not make it because he was sick, but lent

his moral support. All seven were to take part in the first meeting of the inter-provinces council in Kathmandu early this week, but PM Oli cancelled the meeting at the last minute, apparently because he was not happy with the provincial bosses' assertiveness, despite most of them being from his own party.

The chief ministers then tried to meet Oli anyway, but after failing to get an appointment for three days, they returned to their respective provinces. Gandaki Province CM Prithvi Subba Gurung told *Nepali Times* on Thursday that the inter-provinces council meeting was urgently needed to clear major policy hurdles.

"The PM should take the initiative to hold these meetings so federalism can work. He should not

think that the chief ministers are ganging up on him," Gurung added.

The chief ministers have been sharply critical of Kathmandu for not supporting federal provinces and creating difficulties by delaying laws and not deploying enough human resources. The Constitution allows the Centre and federal provinces to jointly exercise some rights, but the chief ministers say they are undermined by the lack of laws.

The Constitution has also envisaged a Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission to enable federal provinces to collect taxes, but these have yet to take full shape, and federal provinces are still dependent on the Centre for their budgets. Government employees, including police, are also still

controlled by the Centre.

In Pokhara, Lalbabu Raut of Province 2 accused Kathmandu of treating federal provinces as "unwanted children". Raut belongs to the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal, which is backing the Oli government. The other six chief ministers are from Oli's own Nepal Communist Party, and this makes their near-revolt more meaningful. They may be with the PM on national politics, but cannot ignore the aspirations of their constituents.

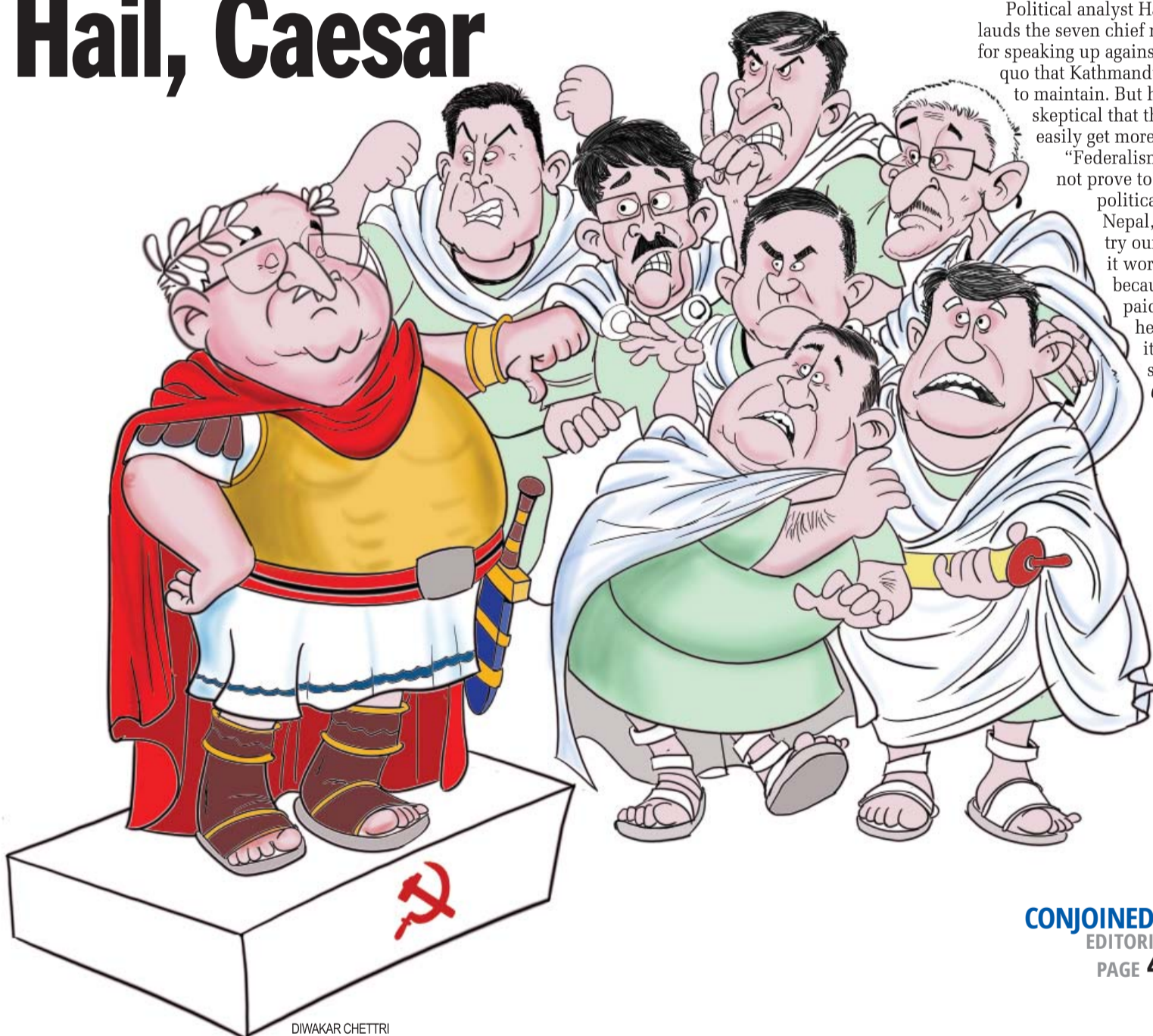
Federalism in Nepal seems to be threatened by the federalists themselves. The Maoists fought a bloody war to establish a federal republic, but their commitment to decentralisation is wavering. PM Oli was never personally convinced about the need to carve out federal provinces anyway, which explains his disinclination to devolution.

Political analyst Hari Sharma lauds the seven chief ministers for speaking up against the status quo that Kathmandu wants to maintain. But he is also skeptical that they will easily get more powers.

"Federalism may or may not prove to be a good political system for Nepal, but we must try our best to make it work, especially because we have paid such a heavy price for it," Sharma says.

Om Astha Rai

Hail, Caesar



CONJOINED TWINS
EDITORIAL
PAGE 4

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

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CONJOINED TWINS

In a recent meeting with editors of Nepal's mainstream media, six months after assuming office, Prime Minister K P Oli was grilled about fears the monolithic Nepal Communist Party he leads was drifting towards authoritarianism. Editors listed the government's recent moves constricting the democratic space.

The prime minister assured editors that his party had not deviated from its belief in liberal democracy, and maintained that his party was impatient to bring about an economic and political transformation of the country.

Prime Minister Oli appeared worried that Nepalis were apprehensive about the future. He asked the media not to spread hopelessness by harping on the negative, because the resultant instability would once more derail his government's efforts to steer the country towards prosperity.

For a leader dubbed the most powerful since Jang Bahadur, and a prime minister commanding two-thirds majority, Oli's sense of insecurity was puzzling. He hinted at forces intent on destabilising the country, and was reminded that those forces were within his own government.



In particular, it has been the Home Ministry, led by former Maoist Commander Ram Bahadur Thapa, that has been at the epicentre of most actions dragging Oli into controversy. A university vice-chancellor was prevented from flying to Canada for a conference, and abducted from the airport for interrogation at Baluwatar. A former child soldier was similarly prevented from boarding a flight to Thailand, on direct orders from Minister Thapa. A doctor who refused to sign a fake report for medical compensation was kidnapped by goons hired by the Home Minister's adviser. And, this week, a journalist was handcuffed and jailed for a report he filed (*pictured*).

Prime Minister Oli was the lightning rod in all these incidents. The way the crises are piling up, thick and fast, it would be logical to assume that someone is deliberately trying to undermine the prime minister. The PMO has taken the flak for the police's inability to resolve a high profile gold smuggling scandal, even though the investigations come directly under the Home Ministry.

The Kanchanpur rape case has been grossly mishandled by police, who seem

complicit in the crime, framing an innocent person and doing everything in order not to catch the culprit. Nepal's police was brazen about killing suspected kidnappers in a broad daylight, encounter-style, recently in the capital. The buck has stopped at Baluwatar.

The Oli administration's backing for provisions in the Criminal Code and the proposed Privacy Bill, constricting the space of free media, also casts doubt on the prime minister's assurances he will protect freedoms. It is surprising that a leader who has been jailed for the defence of democracy should, himself, now go on the offensive against a free press.

Let us remind ourselves that the NCP was created following an electoral alliance between the Maoists and the UML. The unification process itself was touch-and-go thanks to fierce bargaining for party leadership and rotational prime ministership.

Many in the ranks of both parties were against unity. In fact, the NCP has been described as a political party that was born with KP Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal conjoined at the head, but the two torsos are still separate.

All is not well in the NCP leadership.

Even while Prime Minister Oli has been suffering sustained attacks, and is being blamed for mishaps along the way, Dahal has been strangely silent. Not only has he not supported his colleague, he has publicly announced that the leadership of the NCP has been a failure.

Dahal is probably getting his protege and former comrade-at-arms, Ram Bahadur Thapa's Home Ministry, to undermine and embarrass Oli every step of the way. To be sure, as leader, the PM should know he is ultimately responsible for the conduct of his Cabinet and he has to take the blame.

Dahal, on a visit to Delhi this week, received a welcome almost worthy of a prime minister. Baburam Bhattarai asserted at a book launch last week that the real reason for India's blockade was not support for the Madhesi autonomy demand, but pressure on Nepal to roll back secularism from the new constitution. Is

there a connection between that and Dahal meeting a Hindu right RSS think tank in Delhi?

Dahal is now off to Beijing and it is clear he is positioning himself for succession by ensuring that North and South are fine with it. Within Nepal, especially within his own party, Dahal's strategy is to not let Oli leave a successful legacy.

The fear is that under Dahal, and given the history and ideology of his Maoist party, the NCP will be even more authoritarian and will consolidate some of the restrictions on Western agencies in Nepal (*see page 14-15*). The only check on this is to strengthen the hand of some of those former UML leaders in the NCP who have solid democratic credentials.

The NCP is a political party that was born with K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal conjoined at the head, but the two torsos are still separate.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Prime Minister-in-waiting, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, was in New Delhi this week, just as he was in India on a state visit as prime minister ten years ago this week. In a Comment in the 12-18 September edition of this paper (#417) Deb Mukharji, India's ambassador to Nepal from 2000-2002, had this to say:

The proposition of India as a threat to Nepal's integrity and sovereignty, first elaborated by the palace in the early sixties to justify its absolute rule, was later to be used by all mainstream political parties to a greater or lesser degree. The Maoists are no exception. But a continuation of the same approach, justified at times as reflective of the views of the people, does not lead to constructive engagement. Besides, a democratic framework in India and a vigilant press do tend to ask uncomfortable questions on such issues.

Unfortunately, it is likely that elements in Nepali politics as well as in India would look for signs of a cooling in Nepal-India relations during the prime minister's visit. One would hope that his openness and ability to face with candour the responsibilities of office would silence critics.'



ONLINE PACKAGES



WOMEN'S DAY OUT

Many say Tiji has entrenched the woman's secondary status in Nepali society, and some Tiji parties have become somewhat decadent and commercialised. But it is also a festival in which women infiltrate a patriarchal festival to subvert that very patriarchy. Go online to watch Nepali women let their hair down, and dance their troubles away.



ELEPHANT BOY

Go back in time to watch this 1993 MTV video shot entirely in Chitwan, Langtang and Kathmandu with its haunting music by Enigma. Find out the behind-the-scenes logistics that went into it in Lisa Choegyal's column on page 12.



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

MAYORS

Dhawalji has made not only physical changes in Nepalganj, but also created an upbeat atmosphere in the city ('Rana regime restored in Nepalganj', Kunda Dixit, #926). People look up to him as a man with a forward looking vision for the city and surrounding areas.

Marc McConnell

■ This is one man who can, and has made a difference - best wishes to him for the future - now to see other mayors follow his example ('A breath of fresh air in Thimi', Monika Deupala, #926).

Sue Chamberlain

■ Having a woman in high political positions is not necessarily "progressive" as we are learning from the deafening silence of such highly placed political leaders on the Nirmala rape case ('Jumla's great leap into the future', Krishnamaya Upadhyay, #926). Women who take orders from regressive men are not progressive.

Amulya R Tuladhar

■ Apart from different circumstances, we women face the same struggles ('Salma breaks her silence', Suresh Bidari, #926). And the irony is we are considered the generation of "empowered women." They say good things take time, let's hope there will be more "Salmas" out there, breaking stereotypes!

Mejume Gurung

E-WASTE MANAGEMENT

We would like to thank the writer for bringing to surface the long existing problem of careless handling of e-waste in Nepal ('What will Nepal do with its e-waste?', Sonia Awale, #925). We need to standardise and professionalise the disposal of electronic waste to prevent future health and environmental problems.

Doko Recylers Nepal

WHAT'S TRENDING

Six model mayors

A *Nepali Times* package highlighting select mayors that have set standards for integrity and vision was widely shared on social media, and was the most viewed video. If you missed it last week, you can still read the stories on *nepalitimes.com*, or watch the video on our YouTube channel, to find out what makes these six mayors exemplary.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Salma breaks her silence

by Suresh Bidari

Salma Khatun, deputy mayor of Pokhariya municipality of Parsa District, is one of the few Muslim women elected to such a post. Since assuming office, however, she has faced a lonesome struggle against domineering men constantly undermining her and questioning her character. This report was read in the thousands, and generated plenty of comments, with many readers showing their support. Go online for full report and a short film.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Since being elected to the deputy mayor of Pokhariya, Salma Khatun has been undermined and had her character questioned, all because she had an opinion of her own and dared to speak up despite being a woman. Read full story @nepalitimes.com

Mohna Ansari @MohnaAnsari
Brilliant no need to justify your personal life. Your professionalism & qualities that makes u role model that's your strength, commitment, capability, achievements, and engagement in the community. Go ahead Salma Khatun long way to go...@nepalitimes

manchala jha @JhaManchala
Salma Khatun, no need to give any clarification about your personal life in professionalism. Go ahead with more strength and power @nepalitimes

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Kathmandu Valley has 11 mayors, and the public's perception of most of them is not very inspiring. But Madan Sundar Shrestha of Madhyapur Thimi, who is turning his town into a health and education hub, is a breath of fresh air, writes @Monicadeupala.

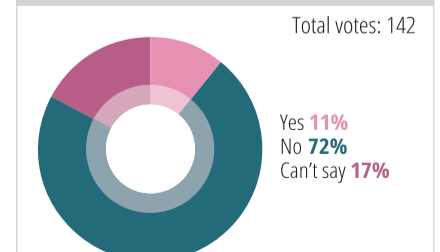
Sushma Joshi @joshi_sushma
A mayor in Kathmandu Valley who's actually working to improve people's lives instead of working to bury their heritage ponds and build malls! How extraordinary.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Jumla may be in the heart of culturally conservative mountains of northwestern Nepal, but it is most progressive: Chandannath is the only city in which both the mayor and deputy mayor are women. Krishnamaya Upadhyay profiles mayor Kantika Sejuwal

dipshikhagurung @dipshikha9
What a heartening read.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #927

Q. One year has passed since Nepal wrapped up its first local polls in two decades. Have the new mayors made a positive difference to your lives?



Weekly Internet Poll #928
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How confident are you that the people who raped and murdered Nirmala Panta will be found by the police?



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Nepal and Burma delay, dilute and deny justice

The failure of both countries to address past human rights violations impedes their ability to confront the present

Nepal's flourishing diversity of ethnicities, languages and cultures and its socio-cultural closeness to Burma made me feel at home as soon as I landed in Kathmandu recently.

Unfortunately, another similarity is that both countries have been mired in conflict and are trying to come to terms with truth and justice for past human rights violations. There is a lot the two countries can learn from each other.

Burma (Myanmar) was ruled by notorious military regimes for nearly half a century until 2011, when political liberalisation began. The UN and others have documented widespread and systematic human rights violations by the junta.

Burma has had the world's longest-running civil wars, and has seen continuous conflict between the government and many of the country's ethnic groups since independence in 1948. Both the military and ethnic armed groups have committed crimes including extrajudicial killings, forced displacement of entire villages, recruitment and use of child soldiers, destruction of property, and war rape.

The brutal suppression of pro-democracy movements, and violent crackdowns of protests, were common throughout this period of military rule from 1962 to 2011, resulting in thousands of political prisoners. The atrocities against ethnic minority groups continue to this day, with the violations against Rohingya people getting the most international attention at the moment.

In comparison, Nepal's conflict lasted a shorter period between 1996-2006, but the violations of human rights during conflicts in both countries are so numerous and egregious that the normal justice system is not able to provide an adequate response, which is why transitional justice mechanisms are needed.

After 2011, Burma's military rule was replaced by a military-backed civilian leadership. A comprehensive peace process with ethnic armed groups brought bilateral ceasefires moving up to a Nationwide Ceasefire in October 2015. The current National League for Democracy (NLD) government, elected in a landslide in 2015, has continued negotiations between government, military, ethnic armed groups and political parties. Even so, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) has been pushing Burma to provide redress to political prisoners and bring victim experiences into the national dialogue.

However, the process has been overshadowed by the accusations of a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslim population by the military which has forced some 700,000 refugees to flee to neighbouring countries. A UN report on 24 August was the strongest condemnation yet and called for top military figures to be investigated for genocide in Rakhine State and crimes against humanity in other areas. It recommended that the case be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Predictably, Burma's rulers rejected the report. Then, last week, a Rangoon court sentenced two Reuters reporters to seven years in prison for violating a state secrets act while investigating the atrocities against the Rohingya. Domestic and international right groups have condemned it as a crushing blow to freedom of the press and another setback for democracy.


Nepal's own 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement laid down the steps to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons, which were finally established in 2015. Even so, they are criticised for allowing the government to grant amnesty to perpetrators, they fail to meet international standards and are unconstitutional. The government extended its mandates for the second time in February, but has not provided them enough technical and financial support.

Both Nepal and Burma currently face the challenge of an absence of commitment and delays about the transitional justice process because of the lack of political will to acknowledge the past.

In Burma, the military did not want to uncover the wrongdoings of its personnel and discussion of massive human rights violations has been largely understood to be off the table during the transition and the peace process. This is because the current government says it is worried that raking up the past might reopen old wounds and deepen divisions further.

A similar narrative is being put out in Nepal as well, and this is largely the reason why the perpetrators of conflict-era violations keep getting amnesty without serving actual jail time or prosecution. Since former enemies are now the state, it is in their interest to delay, dilute and deny justice.

Victims, their families, and rights activists want them to be held to account, no matter what. The Nepal government recently began consultations on amendments to the Transitional Justice Act. While this shows the country may be going in the right direction, the notion that seeking justice impedes reconciliation is still there.

Justice and reconciliation should not be trade-offs, nor are they mutually exclusive. After periods of repression and conflict, burying the past for the sake of peace might seem desirable but is not sustainable in the long run. Transitional justice does not merely mean prosecution or reopening old wounds, it holds perpetrators to account and gives a change for them to offer apologies and acknowledgment. Nepal and Burma must remember that addressing past violations and recognising victims as rights-holders, fosters civic trust and the rule of law while promoting reconciliation. 

Naw Gladys Maung Maung is a political science student from Burma who was recently in Nepal.

COMMENT

Naw Gladys Maung Maung

Focus on agriculture and tourism

With the introduction of its Monetary Policy for 2018-19 in June, Nepal Rastra Bank intended to address the shortage of loanable funds and maintain financial stability, while focusing on production and infrastructure sector. With one-fourth of the year already gone, *Nepal Times* spoke with Govinda Gurung, CEO of Civil Bank about the outcomes so far.

Nepal Times: How has the new Monetary Policy fared?

Govinda Gurung: Federalism, political stability and the Monetary Policy for 2017/18 have brought opportunities for the banking sector, strengthening its risk management capacity and creating business opportunities. The policies allowed the banks to move ahead aggressively with service and expansion, which in turn led to increase in capital collection and profit. However, compared to capital, the boundary for business has not improved because of which there are challenges in maintaining balance between GDP and the capital.

Banks these days seem to be marketing auto and home loans a lot?

The analytical parameters to issue loans for automation and homes are very few and easy to conduct. The process includes verification of income source and few papers. So it is easy for us to market it.

What about education loans?

In countries like the US, the government has fixed a certain amount of salary for a graduate from a particular university. Even though salaries vary, it is all verified by the certificate. So banks do not have to go into detail before issuing a loan. Here, we have been issuing loans based on the parent's income, which we know is not the exact process.



SIKUMARA

And productive sectors?

Two sectors that can change the course of Nepal's economy are agriculture and tourism. But these need detailed analysis on more than 200 parameters – the entrepreneur's investment capacity, past background history, business skills and plans, financial integrity background, feasibility, tax regime, international market, available technology, to name a few. This takes more than 25 days with lots of complications to issue a loan.

Also, the concept of agro-business in Nepal is complicated. There are only a few with a master's degree who are engaged in farming. Even those who are willing lack necessary skills and a strategic plan. In fact, there are people who casually apply for loan without a proper research, just because they are aware of government's subsidy and loan policy.

Traditional subsistence farming systems in Nepal needs to be tweaked. Consolidation of land, irrigation systems, market linkage through transport and price stability play key role in supporting agriculture sector. Even if banks are interested in providing huge financial assistance, they cannot do anything other than micro-financing.

If policies are revised, Nepal has the capacity to export its products to countries like Singapore, where there is no land to farm. Remittance could be replaced with the capitals earned from agricultural export. Banks will happily invest in this sector as turnover is obvious.

And Civil Bank's plans?

Last fiscal year, the bank has earned Rs645 million net growth within a year. It is an increase of 85.2% from last year's net profit. We have achieved 34% growth in loan, 17% in deposit with total capital of Rs8 billion and total assets of Rs51 billion.

After my appointment as the CEO of the bank in July 2017, our portfolio of non-performing assets has decreased to 2.65% from 4.66% within 15 months. Currently, Civil Bank has customer base of 240,000, which is a 100% increase from last year.

Keeping in line with the policy of the central bank, we are planning to expand our network to 119 branches, up from 68, by the end of this fiscal year. Also, we have kept the option of merger acquisition open, keeping the primary focus on business synergy and profit synergy.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Power export

The Energy Ministry of Bangladesh is set to purchase 500MW from the electricity generated by the Upper Karnali scheme through the Indian power grid. The



Bangladesh cabinet this week approved the deal between the Bangladesh Power Development Board and India's Vidyut Vyapar Nigam, which will allow it to import electricity generated by India's GMR company through the 9,000MW Upper Karnali in Nepal.

Trip deal

Passengers of Qatar Airways who book between 10-18 September can enjoy discounts on flights, and Privilege Club



members can earn triple miles. The airline also offers special rates on hotels, car rentals and Al Maha 'meet and greet' services through online booking.

Migrant safety

Turkish Airlines and the UN Migration Agency have signed a long-term partnership



agreement to promote migrant rights and to train airline officials on trafficking issues. The two will also collaborate on migrant health and screening services.

Salam Kathmandu

Omanese budget airline Salam Air has started flights to Nepal, with a Muscat-Kathmandu



flight landing at the Tribhuvan Airport on Tuesday morning. The flights are handled by IME Group and will fly four times a week.

E-mobility

Mahindra & Mahindra has launched its all-electric sedan eVerito at the ongoing NADA Auto Expo 2018. The car can be fully charged in 90 minutes, with a range of 140km. The car is on display along with the recently launched



Next Generation Mahindra PikUp and the plush new XUV500.

An extreme ride

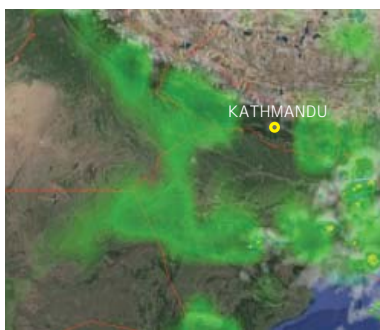
Hero Motocorp has launched its new premium motorcycle Xtreme 200R in Nepal, priced at Rs286,500. The motorcycle features an anti-lock brake system, and



BS-IV compliant 200cc air-cooled engine, producing a maximum power output of 18.4PS at 8000rpm and maximum torque of 17.1NM at 6500rpm.

NADA expo

The 13th edition of the Nepal Automobile Dealers' Association Auto Show kicked off on Tuesday at the Exhibition Hall in Bhrikuti Mandap. Inaugurated by Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatriwada, the six-day expo showcases the latest four- and two-wheelers.



The monsoon is still active over northern India and Nepal, although the intensity of rain and frequency of showers have fallen. Even so, since the soil in the mountain slopes are saturated, and even a brief shower can trigger landslides. The weekend will begin bright and sunny, but there will be cloud buildup with rain and even some thunder as the day progresses.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
25° 17°	27° 17°	27° 17°

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What can Nepal learn from Ethiopia?

This Nepali Ethiopian Airlines pilot offers a checklist



KUNDA DIXIT



DREAM COME TRUE: Capt Pradeep Shrestha in the cockpit of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner (above, left) says there is no reason Nepal airlines cannot replicate Ethiopian's success. Ethiopian's latest Airbus 350 (left) is named Mt Everest.

Nepal and Ethiopia have travelled similar trajectories as nations. Both are ancient landlocked former monarchies, both suffered ruinous wars, both struggle with governance and corruption, both are now vibrant democracies, but poverty and disease are persistent and endemic in the two countries.

Compared with Ethiopia, however, Nepal has a much higher GDP per capita, is ahead in the ease of doing business, and Nepal has made much more progress in improving health indicators.

There is one area in which Ethiopia is far ahead of Nepal, however: running a global airline. While Nepal Airlines is mired in government interference and mismanagement, state-owned Ethiopian Airlines is a reputed award-winning airline.

"What has allowed Ethiopian Airlines to fly high is that from the time of (former emperor) Haile Selassie, the carrier has been insulated from government interference. It is state-owned, but does not depend on the state," explains Pradeep Shrestha, a Nepali captain who flies for Ethiopian.

Having flown for Nepal Airlines for nearly four decades, Shrestha has a unique perspective for comparing the two countries and their airlines. He credits Ethiopia's former rulers, who saw the national airline as a global ambassador flying the country's flag, whereas in Nepal, politicians interfered with the national airline and sucked it dry.

Ethiopian Airlines was voted Best Airline in Africa last year and is the most profitable carrier in the region. The airline is the envy of other African nations because of the full autonomy it enjoys, despite being owned by the government. The airline has a fleet of 103 aircraft, including the latest model Boeing 777 and 787, and Airbus 350s, one of which is named Mt Everest. It has its own state-of-the-art maintenance hangar, and an advanced crew training school.

From the beginning, Ethiopian has set its sights on being a global airline and accomplished it with a deep sense of nationalism, commitment, and transparency. There was a time Royal Nepal Airlines also had vision, and was regarded as one of the best airlines in the region for its service and equipment. It was one of the first carriers in Asia to buy state-of-the-art Boeing 757s in 1985, which today would be like acquiring brand new Dreamliners.

"Actually, I believe we have as much potential as Ethiopian," Capt Shrestha told *Nepali Times*. "Ethiopian is leveraging the country's location, while Nepal can promote its destination."

Indeed, Ethiopian Airlines has pivoted its Addis Ababa hub as the gateway to Africa, offering connections to nearly 30 destinations in the continent for its flights from China, South Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Shrestha returned to Nepal after getting his pilot's license in Canada in 1982, flew Twin Otters, then Boeing 757s. He went back to flying STOLs for Kathmandu to remote area airports.

But when Ethiopian Airlines announced vacancies for pilots, he applied because his "dream was to fly Dreamliners". At first he flew Ethiopian 767s chartered to the U.N., and often flew Nepali peacekeeping forces from Sudan, Haiti and East Timor to a familiar Kathmandu airport.

Shrestha says he often wonders what Nepal Airlines would need to take off again. He thinks adding wide bodies would be the first step, but much more important would be visionary leadership, elimination of government interference, discipline, and a merit-based management.

He adds: "There is no reason why Nepal cannot do what Ethiopian has accomplished. I am positive about it." **Kunda Dixit**

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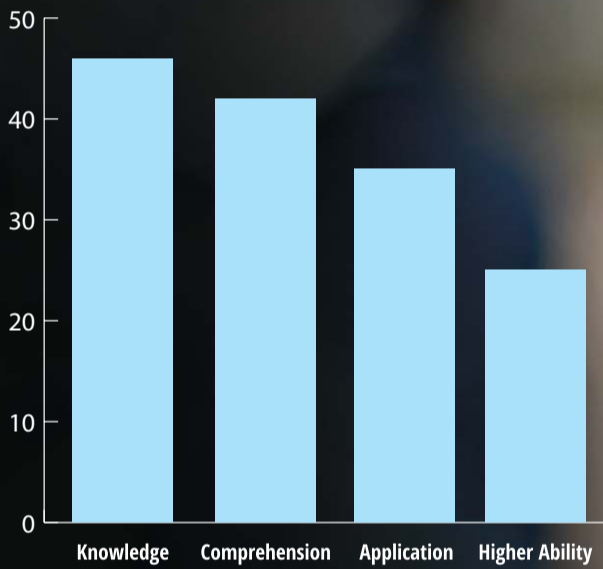




LEARNING LOW

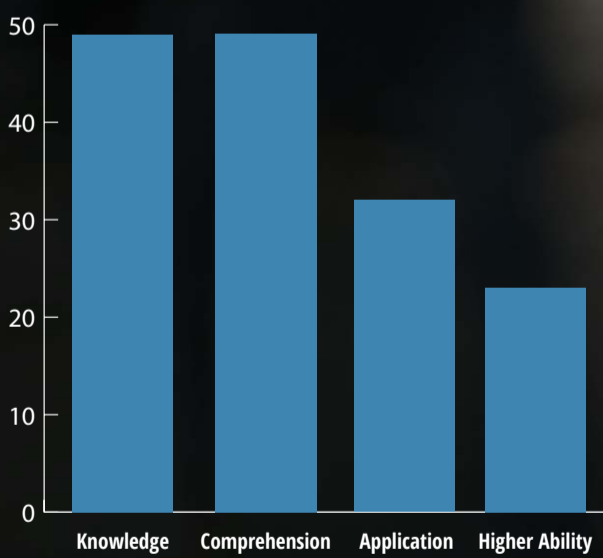
The 2013 National Assessment of Student Achievement (NASA) for grade 8 students shows that students' learning and cognitive abilities are, on average, below 50% for math and science – lower than the international average.

Learning achievement in math



SOURCE: NASA REPORTS

Learning achievement in science



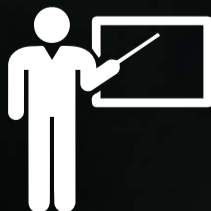
2017's NASA report did not use percentages to compare data with that of 2013, but this analysis shows a decrease in learning abilities in math and science

NUMBER OF STUDENTS



8,494,380

NUMBER OF TEACHERS



349,860

Teacher-student ratios
Basic Level: 1:29
Secondary Level: 1:27

Teacher-student ratios are satisfactory, and 90% of teachers working in community schools are trained. But that has not helped improve classroom learning.

After quantity, Nepal's education needs quality

Inadequate training of teachers and over-reliance on defective textbooks keeps learning sub-standard

Prakriti Kandel

Nepal has made dramatic improvements in literacy rates and school enrollment over the past 20 years. The same cannot be said for the quality of education, however.

Teacher training just focuses on how to use existing sloppily-produced text books to prepare for exams rather than the underlying philosophy behind the curriculum. Assessments are used to catch and punish students, rather than to understand if they are learning properly.

Though not perfect, educators agree that Nepal's curriculum is sufficiently good, and includes details about skills students need to learn in every subject. But ineffective implementation of the curriculum impedes true learning, and jeopardises the future of the country's young minds.

Most teachers are oblivious of the difference between curriculum and textbooks, so teaching primarily becomes making students memorise these books. Rajendra Dahal of *Shikshak* magazine says the domination of textbook-learning means that curriculum aims do not reach classrooms.

Textbooks have now become a part of the problem, perpetuating the gap between classrooms and the curriculum. Experts say a good curriculum should not be driven by textbooks or exams, rather by an overall vision that tries to identify the country's needs. Learning should be experiential and related to the students' world, and what they



PRAJEET BAJPAI

identify with.

Says one Nepali teacher trainer: "Present teacher training is only about how to use textbooks, not why and how to realise the goals of the curriculum. Teachers have to know how children learn, as well as the purpose and goal of the curriculum."

Beyond this, textbooks are often shoddy and mistake-laden, as well as poorly written and produced. When teachers focus primarily on such textbooks, the problem is compounded.

Students are therefore deprived of the experiential learning that comes from the world around them. Instead of embracing this, the education system dismisses students' reality and instills an illusion that rote learning from a textbook and sitting exams is a proper education.

"Classroom models must now change to better facilitate learning. Students themselves are a rich trove of knowledge, not just the empty vessels we have treated them as," explains Lava Deo Awasthi, former Secretary

of Education. He adds that teachers went through a traditional learning system themselves and have to unlearn the style they learnt at school.

The National Center for Educational Development (NCED) has been launching periodical teacher training programs, bringing teachers up to speed on pedagogy, using of teaching resources and conducting activities.

"Many teachers now have access to training, but teachers must also implement what they learn," says Diwakar Chapagain of NCED. "Teachers can give excellent model classes, but if one happens to stumble into a regular class of the same teacher, then the quality of teaching is not great."

Textbook improvement is just a component of overall quality of education. And teachers alone cannot be blamed, they need more support and training to help understand their roles.

"So the focus must shift to mobilising teacher training materials and library books to promote better learning," says Shanta Dixit of Rato Bangala Foundation, which is involved in upgrading the capacity of teachers in government schools. "Motivated teachers will not just paraphrase textbooks, but foster critical thinking and creativity to fulfill curriculum aims."

With local governments now in place, the opportunity to improve gaps between classrooms and curriculum is immense. However, Kathmandu has been reluctant to hand over power over education to local governments. ■

Examining examinations

Every year in June, there are news flashes about who passed and failed the high school SEE tests. But how good are these exams?

Evaluation was changed into grading system to make it more descriptive and holistic, but all that happened was that numbers were converted into letter-grades. Exams still fail to capture the true sense of a students' ability, and SEE questions are still primarily memory based.

The curriculum also provides guidelines for evaluation, and to receive an A+, a student must possess exceptional skills of 'problem-solving, creativity, critical expression and participation'. But exams do not measure any such abilities.

Many teachers and parents believe that good exam results indicate quality, so teachers teach to enable students to pass the existing exams, making them memorise facts and practice on past papers. But if exams themselves were to improve to ask analytical questions, students would do even more poorly because they are only taught to regurgitate text book content.



GOPAL GARTAULA

"Without teachers being trained to foster skills and thoughts in students, we are now limited to asking traditional questions," says Chandra Mani Paudel of the National Examinations Board.

Paudel says he has started work to change this by improving

questions so that they will measure application and thinking skills, beyond what is just memory-based. The Board has already started training teachers on better question-setting.

Paudel says he plans to completely change the existing

focus by empowering teachers, preparing quality questions and researching about how it affects students. He adds: "This is new and will take time. It will also need support from the Education Ministry to take it forward."

EVENTS



NADA Auto Show

Exhibiting and demonstrating renowned auto brands and components, the show is aimed at publicising technological advancements in the automobile sector. 14-16 September, 11am-6pm, Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall, 9851033448

Himalayan Art Fest

The festival focuses on the artworks of living legends and contemporary artists of Nepal with their paintings, paubha arts, prints, sculptures, installations, ceramic and photographs. Followed by performances of contemporary and theatre artists, musicians, art talk and creative activities for children. 14-15 September, 11am onwards, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, 9841211297

Chakati Bahas

A Chakati Bahas by Sixit Bhatta where he will briefly discuss on Harari's Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow, provocatively questioning and challenging our thoughts, actions, power and practically everything we thought we knew about being human. 15 September, 3-5pm, Martin Chautari, Thapathali

Ranjana Lipi workshop

Participate to learn Ranjana Lipi free at the live Calligraphy workshop 15 September, 1pm onwards, Dhwkhasi, Panga, Kirtipur, (01) 4250703



Amalgam 2018

Ceramic arts, paintings, prints, mixed media works and sculptures by 42 artists. Also learn ceramic raku techniques with Master Artist Gopal Kalapremi. 14-28 September (ceramic workshop: 8-9 September), 12-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4433930

Art carnival

Celebrating the talent of local artist, the festival brings to you an exhibition along with music, dance and hula hoop. It is a fund raiser for street dogs. 15 September, 2-7pm, Flavors Café, Taragon Museum, Boudha, 9843841778

Lightroom workshop

Enhance your skills on digital workflow and retouching by learning to use Lightroom effectively. Photo walks and reviews included. Anyone interested in photo editing can apply. 16,18,19 September, 3-6pm, 10am-1pm, 4-6pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, Rs1,500, (01) 5521812



Comic Con Nepal

Browse through more than 30 stalls, meet comic creators from across the globe, listen to the panel discussions involving various artists, writers and cosplayers, and participate in games and many more at the ultimate pop culture celebration. 15 September, 10am-6pm, Bhrikutimandap Garden, 9801221421

Emotional Intelligence

A workshop to increase your emotional intelligence for greater productivity and efficiency at workplace and manage stress and conflict, by international master trainer and coach Grant Herbert. 19-20 September, 9am-4pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, 9851241548

The StoryYellers

The 22nd session of The StoryYellers with YouTuber Ming Sherap, Co-founder of My Emotions Matter Bhawana Shrestha, Former Leadership Development Manager Drishya Gurung and solo traveller Sharmila Dhungana. 19 September, 5:30pm onwards, Club 25hrs, Tangalwood, Rs200 (pre-sale), Rs250 (door), 9851242128

MUSIC



Jonita Gandhi

Meraki Live series brings bollywood playback sensation Jonita Gandhi with Nepali artists Deepak Bajracharya and Jyovan Bhuju on stage. Hear Gandhi sing the 'Breakup Song', 'Sau Tara ke', 'Gilehriyan', 'Sayaani' and many other songs live in Kathmandu. 14 September, 5-10pm, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg, Rs2,000/3,000, 9802061119

Sun Down Affair 7

Soak in the stunning sunset view at Sun Down Affair's seventh volume this Saturday, with techno musician dotdat and Bullzeze by the hotel's pool, PRIVE for after party. 15 September, 2pm onwards, Soaltee Crowne Plaza and PRIVE, Labim Mall, Pulchowk, (01) 4273999

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. 20 September, 7pm onwards, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5543554



Switch on

Taking place in the rooftop, get electrified by the deep techno performance of PosterKidd along with the iconic views of Patan. 15 September, 5pm onwards, Cosy Nepal House, Sundhara, Patan, Rs500, 9841226397

Beatles night

The Beatles songs played on ukulele and bass by the band The Two. Bring back the 60s and 70s. 14 September, 8-11pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9849377915

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 14 September

Manmarziyan from the famed director Anurag Kashyap comes without much hype, but promises some interesting soul searching. It explores our changing times: in the world of casual relationships, who exactly is 'husband material'? Can anyone be trusted and can partners ever be completely honest with each other? Kashyap promises to read between the lines of society's norms to what people actually feel. The movie stars the Bollywood's latest star Vicky Kaushal with Taapsee Pannu, and Abhishek Bachchan in a leading, non-comic role after a long time.

DINING



Bubbly brunch

Enjoy live Shawarma and pasta at the hotel's garden with friends and family. Every Saturday, 11am-3pm, Shambala Garden & Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs1,500 (+taxes), (01) 4412999 Extn. 7508

The Bent Fork

This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Cozy evenings with family and friends. Try their signature Grilled Chicken Burger or Beef Burger. Bishal Nagar, 9802049888



Wine Dinner

Italian Sommelier Fraser Jones will highlight the evening's meticulously prepared four-course mushroom-themed menu with complimentary Zonin wines. Expect mushrooms, prawns, dates, cheese, lamb chop and chef's signature dessert. 14 September, 6:30pm, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, Rs4,000 (+taxes), (01) 5171234

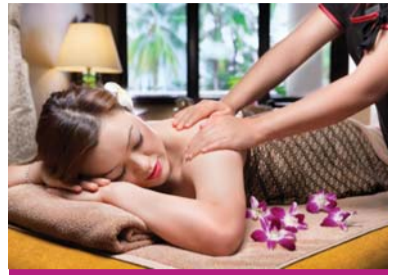
Saturday Family Brunch

Beat summer heat with a swim and bite into the fusion flavors of sea food, tapas and dimsum at the hotel's buffet brunch. Also enjoy a complimentary drink. Every Saturday, 12pm, The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat, Rs2,200 (adults), RsRs1,100 (children below 12 years old), (01) 4411818

The Dwarika's Hotel

Enjoy the Friday dinner with a special Nepali BBQ and drinks at the hotel with live cooking stations. Every Friday, 6:30pm onwards, The Dwarika's Hotel Kathmandu, Battispatali, Rs1,800 (+taxes), (01) 4479488

GETAWAY



Tranquility Spa

De-stress, relax and pamper yourself to a wide range of massages at any of the spa's nine branches in Nepal. www.tranquilityspa.com.np, (01) 4420424

Harmony Spa & Health Club

Amongst trees on the edge of a plateau overlooking Gokarna Forest and the grassed valley below, Harmony Spa combines therapeutic care within a natural environment impossible to recreate elsewhere. Included are a variety of rejuvenating courses, emphasizing Ayurvedic treatments within Ayura, the Adam & Eve, and Serenity massage rooms. 6:30am-10:30pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thali, (01) 4451212



Retreat at Damaar

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

Bandipur Kaushi Inn

Gather along 3 or more friends and drive to Bandipur for a quick weekend getaway before monsoon goes away. Also enjoy delicious breakfast and Nepali dinner. Bandipur, Tanahu, (065) 520083



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. Spend a night or two at the resort, which is reminiscent of beach resorts in Dubai and Thailand. Bhairahawa, (071) 512000

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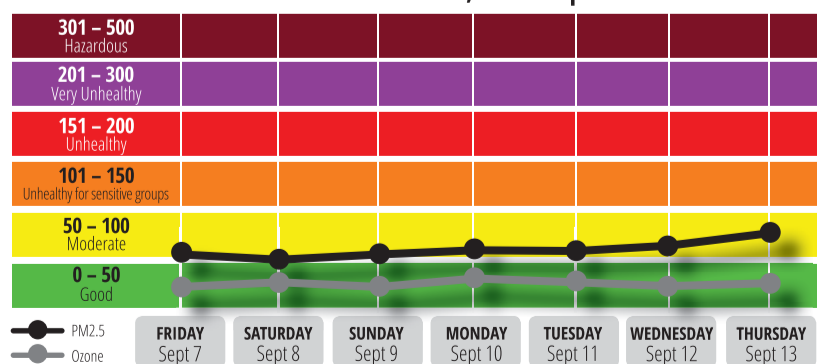
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AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 7 - 13 September



Despite this being the "best" time of year for air quality in Kathmandu Valley the levels remained in moderate and crept up this week on average, meaning that our lungs are still not able to breathe easily because the average daily levels of PM 2.5 particulates was in the 'Moderate' yellow band throughout. This trend will continue as the rains taper off. The source of these finest and most dangerous particles in the air are vehicular pollution, open garbage burning and brick kilns. But then there is also the ozone, which is high toxic and is directly linked to the exhaust gases mainly from the city's 700,000 motorcycles. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Kunda Dixit
in San Francisco

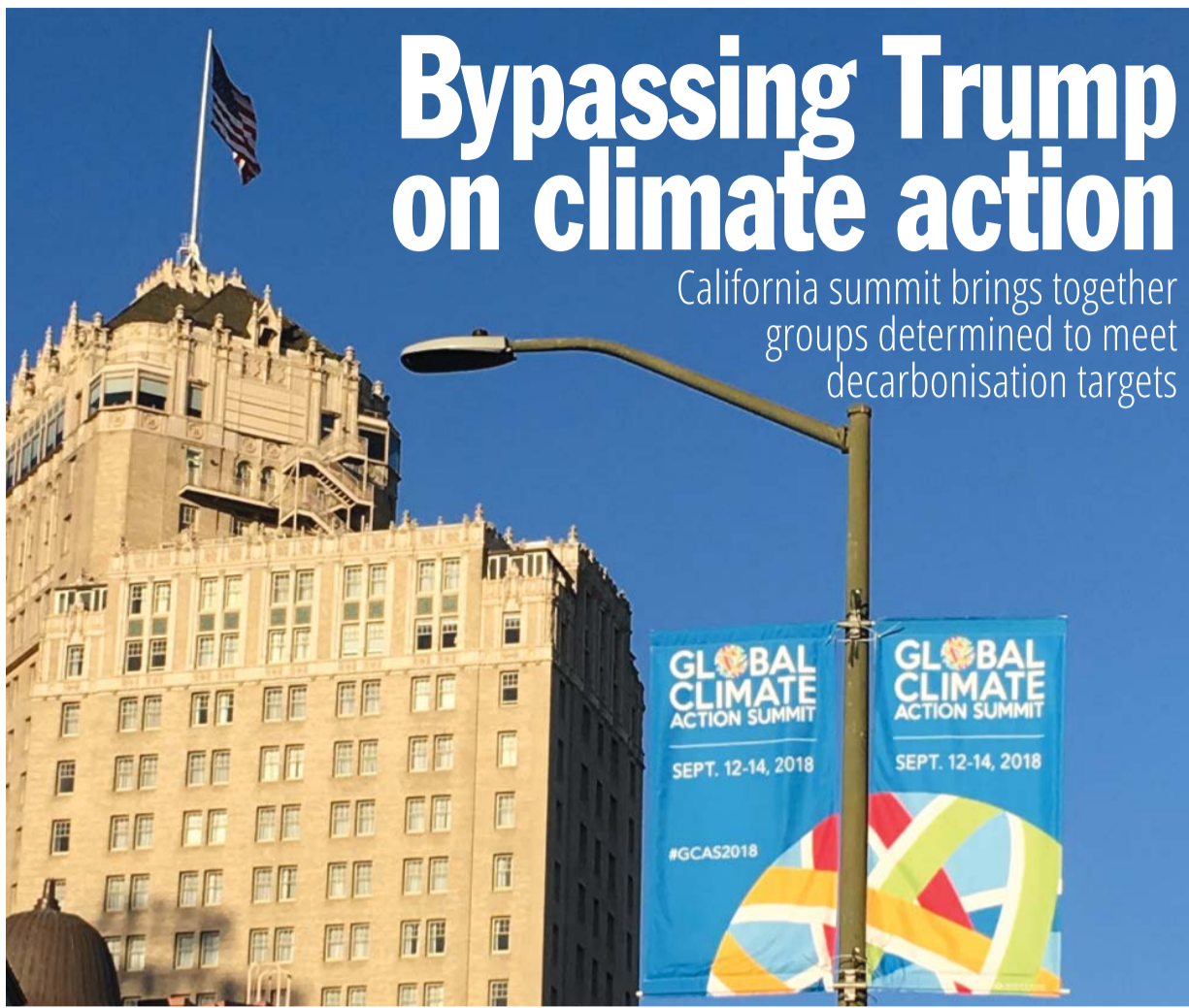
President Donald Trump may have announced that he intends to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, but the United States is still in.

US cities, states and big companies like the ones here in Silicon Valley have pledged to do even more to keep to decarbonisation targets agreed to in Paris in 2015, and have come together in an informal coalition calling itself 'We Are Still In'.

As the United States loses its leadership role in international negotiations, the country's agenda is being carried by this unofficial group in events like the Global Climate Action Summit that is bringing 3,000 delegates from around the world to San Francisco this weekend.

"The Paris climate accord is alive and well in the US because of this strong alliance of American voices from businesses, cities, states and universities committed to meeting greenhouse gas emission targets," says Adam Stern, executive director of Acterra, which works on local solutions to global warming in the Bay Area.

The Global Climate Action Summit is being co-hosted by California Governor Jerry Brown



KUNDA DIXIT

Bypassing Trump on climate action

California summit brings together groups determined to meet decarbonisation targets

California has some of the most progressive legislation on emission controls. Brown has set in motion action that will reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions to 40% below 1990 levels in the next 12 years.

In fact, Brown, Bloomberg, and other Americans, are trying to bypass Trump to try to save the planet from the catastrophic effects of climate change during a year when the planet has faced unprecedented extreme weather events.

Jerry Brown himself said in an interview this week to the *San Jose Mercury News*: "The Republicans, the deniers in Washington, the president, they are really deviant to the international norm. It's important that America maintain its climate actions through the states and the cities, private organisations and non-profits. We can't just let Trump undermine and sabotage America's part."

Silicon Valley tech companies are also taking a lead in green business. The Tesla plant is located in Fremont is producing electric cars, including the latest Model 3. Apple's new futuristic headquarter building and its outlets derive 100% of its power from solar panels on the roof, half the electricity at Facebook's open office in Palo Alto comes from renewable sources. Google last year said it was sourcing all its energy at its offices here and worldwide from solar and wind energy.

Says Adam Stern of Acterra: "Despite President Trump's efforts to withdraw the US from its climate commitments, the Summit will demonstrate an irrepressible momentum among businesses, cities and other sub-national governments, and civic leaders to fulfill the goals of the Paris climate accord." 🇺🇸



and New York mayor Michael Bloomberg. Also attending are former US Vice President Al Gore, Hollywood actors Alec Baldwin, Harrison Ford and Leonardo DiCaprio, as well as corporate leaders,

climate scientists and researchers. This is 'track two' on climate action and involves non-state and sub-national actors from all over the

world. In the run-up to the Summit, Governor Brown on Monday signed an executive order to make California carbon neutral by 2045. He also signed bills last week to block new oil drilling off the shores of his state, in defiance of the Trump government's move to open California waters to oil drilling.

Brown set up the Under2 Coalition that has got 200 local and national governments around the world committed to keeping global

temperature rise to under 2°C by 2050 as agreed to in Paris.

Besides the conference panels, the Summit will have demonstrations, side events including workshops on climate-friendly food industry, exhibits and tours. The Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise has docked at the port here to draw attention to climate action.

It is ironic that the Summit is being held in a country that is led by a climate denier. However



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The Eyes of Truth

Filming one of Asia's first ever music videos in Nepal with a young star



The blue sky was clear and early afternoon sunlight bounced off the glaciers, gullies and rock walls of the Langtang peaks, but the helicopter captain was keen to leave. He was concerned about the effects of altitude after several hours filming in the high meadow above Kyangjin



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Gompa. I could see the Hollywood team were groggy, hauling heavy camera equipment in the thin Himalayan air, and I was beginning to feel lightheaded myself.

Director Julien Temple called to us from across the hill: "Let's just try one more time with the flute players and local kids, but without the yaks and ponies." Laxman had a headache and his back hurt from carrying Rinchen - the young star - up and down the ridge on his shoulders, simulating the swaying movements of an elephant against the mountain backdrop.

Dazed with fatigue and breathless, the film crew once more realigned their gear, the local extras were ushered into position, silver reflectors were repositioned, the clap-board snapped action, Rinchen

set off regal on his fake elephant, and the cameras rolled for the last time that day.

I looked around as we quickly stowed the paraphernalia, thanked Thiley Lama, our Langtang fixer, and his friends, waved to the yak handlers and horsemen, and piled back into the big Russian chopper. We took off slowly, the rotors roaring and prayer flags flailing, as the squat stone monastery and small cluster of flat-roofed houses receded beneath us, dwarfed by the rampart of towering white peaks protecting the Langtang Valley. Soaring south, it took only a few minutes skimming above the hilltops back home to Kathmandu, but it seemed like another world.

It was spring 1993 and we were filming one of Asia's first music videos - the MTV generation was still in its infancy. *The Eyes of Truth*, a track from Enigma's *Cross of Changes* album, is a haunting electronic melody of buzzing bees, rhythmic chanting and wailing Mongolian shepherdesses. Julien Temple was among the first to pioneer the music video genre, his boyish looks belying a background with giants including David Bowie, The Rolling Stones and Sex Pistols.

Inspired by Buddhist iconography and the Valley stupas' all-seeing eyes, Temple and his wife Amanda had written a prescient

mini-saga about an abandoned boy brought up by elephants, then driven into an unknown world by environmental destruction, where he would be hailed prince of truth, before retreating back into the jungle with his pachyderm dependents. "*The Eyes of Truth* are always watching you." They asked me to arrange the film permit and logistics, as complex as any full-length feature, and to find the main character - a spiritual young boy with a generic Asian-Western look who was comfortable around elephants. That was easy. Both my sons Sangjay and Rinchen were at the British School in Kathmandu, and Malcolm McDougal was also put forward as a candidate - all boys blessed with an upbringing amongst the Tiger Tops elephant camps in Chitwan and Bardia. Four-year-old Rinchen, whose acclaimed Cowardly Lion in the kindergarten *Wizard of Oz* production had sparked acting aspirations, was thrilled to be selected. What could be better than to take two weeks off school, hang out with elephants, and be paid for it?

The pristine air quality and unbuilt vistas of Kathmandu Valley of the early 1990s enabled us to select locations and deliver *The Eyes of Truth* storyboard as originally envisaged in Julien and Amanda's script. Our film support team, fresh

from months working on *Little Buddha*, swung into action. For the ten-day shoot, hundreds of skilled Newari artistes, Nepali musicians and Valley villagers were dressed and rehearsed, domestic elephants from Chitwan and Kathmandu were booked and briefed, and Rinchen's costumes and jewelled headdresses were designed and prepared.

"I hope they can't see up my sarong." Little Rinchen clambered up Sita Kali's trunk, hanging onto her patient elephant ears. My favourite moment follows the honey hunter opening sequence, when the camera finds Rinchen, angelically asleep amidst falling leaves, lying on Sita Kali's massive body, resting supine on the forest floor. Thankfully her mahout driver and my boys' favourite jungle friend, Kale, was never far away off screen, controlling her with quiet voice commands. A pretty wife and baby from the Tiger Tops elephant camp were engaged for the Moses scene, during which the child is rescued from his floating cradle by kind elephant carers - the buoyancy of the woven basket caused us lots of problems.

At Bodnath, where Rinchen was filmed, enthroned on his zoo elephant dressed in silk and gold, pilgrims prostrated and made offerings, mistaking him for a real Rinpoche. Bungamati villagers

showered him with flower petals thrown from their upper windows, echoing a scene with Keanu Reeves in *Little Buddha*. At Bhaktapur, the clashing cymbals, drums and dancers brought the Darbar Square to a standstill, and a lovely sequence beside the river *chaityasat* Gokarna Mahadev was left on the cutting room floor.

The last day starts at 4am with loyal Laxman in attendance. After long hours of make-up, and hours as the centre of attention with his crew of new admirers, Rinchen descended reluctantly from his elephant and, looking around for Julien, asked: "And now, where's my money?"

Not only did *The Eyes of Truth* music video top the Asian charts for weeks, the poignant tune, familiar even today, became a Youtube sensation viewed by millions. We have used it at countless travel conferences and trade shows as a subtle sell to promote the variety and scenic splendour of Nepal - its succinct five-minute span perfectly captures the essence of Nepal's natural, cultural and adventure appeal. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Go online to watch music video of *The Eyes of Truth*.

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Melding expressions

In Sheelasha Rajbhandari's painting, a boar holds a big round object in its tusks as it emerges from the water. The image suggests Lord Vishnu's Varaha Avatar rescuing the earth, but look again and it is a woman rescuing a gas cylinder from an inundated city. The painting features in the 7th edition of *Amalgam* at the Siddhartha Art Gallery-- an example of how contemporary artists in Nepal are exploring its socio-political reality on canvas.

Mekh Limbu's vertical painting features houses stacked on each other leaving no space to breathe between them. Hitman Shrestha features portraits of people of all backgrounds set against documents they



are unable to read. The exhibition also shows how different artistic styles are evolving and melding as artists of different genres interact with one another. Two paintings by senior Mithila artist SC Suman veer away from traditional styles, and instead of depicting deities, show Kathmandu's congested life.

"Mithila art is changing and incorporating new influences, like every other art form," Suman explains. "I have painted my daily life as I saw it around Swayambhu: the crowded streets, the hustle and bustle, traffic, shops." There is experimentation not just in content but also in form. There are staged photographs, mixed media, installations, and sculptures incorporating non-traditional mediums. A two-day workshop on ceramic art was held by the senior ceramic artist Gopal Kalapremi. The exhibition brings together many senior artists established in their genre, like the ceramic artist

Kalapremi, printmakers Birendra Pratap Singh and Seema and Umashankar Shah, painter Shashi Bikram Shah, etc. It is also a rare opportunity to view artwork by the recently deceased Manuj Babu Mishra.

Amalgam began in 2007 and has been bringing together artists of different genres and generations ever since. Despite the presence of established artists, its aim is to promote young artists from Kathmandu University, Sirjana and Lalitkala Academy and visiting international artists, says the coordinator and artist Prithvi Shrestha. A special feature this year is learning raku ceramic techniques with master artist Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha.

Sewa Bhattarai

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Inventing a new enemy

Nepal's Communist rulers are stoking xenophobia to tighten their grip on power

Om Astha Rai

Politicians around the world need an enemy – real or fake. And if they do not have a foe, they will create one.

After overthrowing an unpopular king and making peace with an India that it demonised, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) seems to have found a new enemy: Westerners, particularly the Europeans.

Western aid agencies, experts and researchers have contributed immensely to Nepal's development over the last half century. They worked with Nepali partners to eradicate malaria in the Tarai, build highways, support community forestry, connect mountain communities by building suspension bridges, promoting tourism, and won the hearts and minds of many.

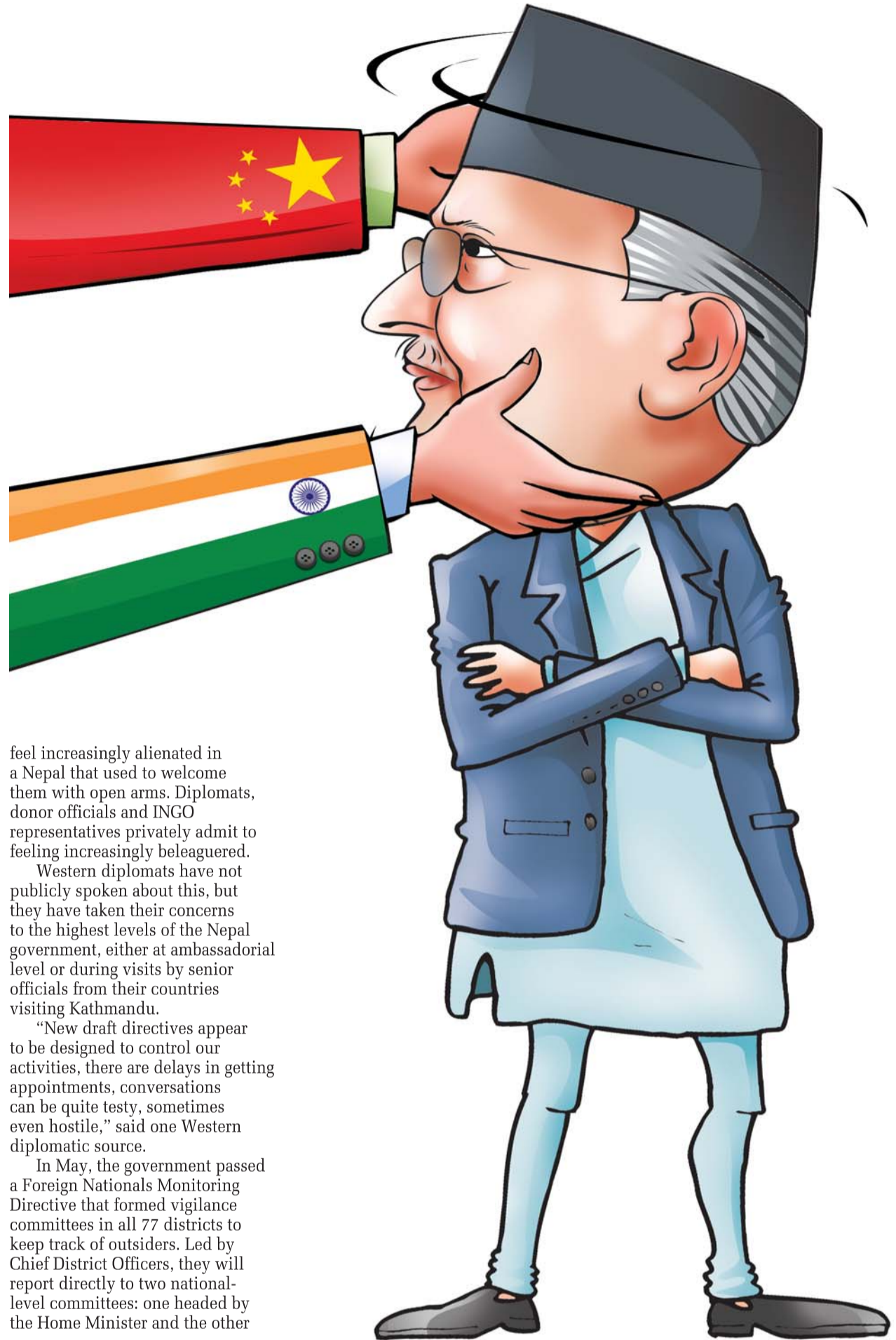
They also helped Nepal assert its sovereignty, first with the Anglo-Nepal Treaty of 1923, and later boosting its standing as an independent nation in the tumultuous aftermath of India's independence. The great powers

may have had a geo-strategic interest in helping Nepal during the Cold War, and after, but assistance from the Nordics, Australia and others, came with few strings attached.

Fast forward to 2018, and things are different. The rise of China and India (which also happen to be Nepal's giant neighbours) means that the influence of the West has waned. Indeed, Nepal's new Communist leaders have made it quite plain that their role model is the Chinese system. They seek Beijing's assistance in ushering in an era of prosperity by trying to rein in dissent.

In the past, India offered a counterbalance with its history of democracy and pluralism. But after the BJP came to power in Delhi, there have been worrying signs of extremism, democratic decay, and intolerance of dissent in the media there too. Nepal's rulers, now, even more openly seek India's support to attain and maintain their power.

All this means that the Western countries, agencies and citizens



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No to The Ugly

We cannot afford to ride on xenophobia and ultra-nationalism to be a closed and intolerant nation

When Nepal emerged from the century-long darkness of the Rana Era in 1950, society did not have the capacity to embrace modernism. The societies colonised by European powers had built up a middle class that



COMMENT
Kanak Mani Dixit

understood the opportunities and dangers of the market, statecraft and governance. But Nepalis had never been exposed to these influences.

One of the first foreign experts to work in Nepal was Toni Hagen, the geologist who arrived in the dying days of the Rana regime. He was followed by Westerners who helped Nepal in the fields of education, irrigation, public health, social sciences and scientific research. They helped with migration, malaria eradication, infrastructure building, development of tourism, etc.

B P Koirala himself wrote as prime minister in 1959 that it was thanks to Toni Hagen's reports and photography that he better understood Nepal. Over the decades, Western scientists and social scientists have alerted Nepalis to be sensitive to the country's demographic diversity and understand the geographical extremes. That is the history of the Nepal-West interface in the modern era.

All of a sudden, the political brass, the secretaries and some civil society stalwarts have been afflicted with xenophobia, particularly against overseas

development agencies and their personnel. The higher echelons of state seem obsessed with paranoia not seen in 70 years. Rather than elevate the country and benefit its people, this aversion will weaken Nepal's soft power, help make India and China more influential in national affairs, send the wrong message to tourists and foreign investors, and centralise rather than devolve power in a federalising Nepal.

Xenophobia comes conjoined with ultra-nationalism, the former is self-destructive and the latter only provides temporary relief. All of this may not be the result of a planned conspiracy, but without doubt it benefits the right wing and the ultra-left – helping the former to regain lost societal privileges and the latter in its goal of destabilising society by whatever means.

There is some causality in how select Western diplo-donor agencies proceeded over the past decade, while the ongoing paranoia is akin to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Over

Chinese NGOs are coming

At a time when Western aid agencies are finding it increasingly difficult to work in Nepal, over two dozen Chinese NGOs have arrived in the country to get involved in everything from health to disaster management.

The Social Welfare Council of Nepal and the China NGO Network for International Exchanges signed an MoU in July, paving the way for 26 Chinese NGOs to work in the development sector. Ironically, these are precisely the sectors that Western aid agencies have so far been involved in. Although Nepal has been receiving grants and loans from China ever since Kathmandu established bilateral relations with Beijing in 1955, the first Chinese NGO was registered here only after the 2015 earthquake. Soon, two more Chinese NGOs followed suit. Now not just 26 new Chinese NGOs, but all 200 members of the China NGO network can be involved in Nepal.

Durga Bhattarai of the Social Welfare Council Nepal says: "Like Western countries, China has now felt a need to enhance its public diplomacy in Nepal, and what could be a more effective tool to achieve that than reaching out to Nepalis through its own NGOs".



led by the Director General of the Department of Immigration.

Based on reports of the vigilance committees, the government can revoke visas issued to foreigners and even deport them if they are found to be 'harming social harmony'. Vague wording like this allows local officials and the government to go after anyone they do not like, and throw out activists or those critical of human rights violations on social media. Even before the law came into effect, a Kathmandu-based Canadian software engineer was arrested and deported for tweets that authorities said caused 'social unrest'.

Some of this sensitivity appears to be a reaction to the perceived increase in the activities of evangelical groups, some of them from Western countries. However, the government seems to think only Europeans and Americans are involved in conversions, whereas

the most aggressive proselytisation is being carried out by the Koreans and other Asians. In July, a Filipino and his Indonesian wife were deported for proselytisation.

Department of Immigration spokesperson Bishnu Upadhyay told *Nepali Times*: "Although conversions were already banned under the Criminal Code, it did not clearly allow us to deport foreigners involved in the crime. The new directive gives us clarity and authority to take action on missionaries."

Another directive that will restrict the activities of foreigners, even more, is the proposed National Integrity Policy, which seeks to bar INGOs from 'leveling unwarranted charges against Nepal ... and spreading hatred'. If passed, it will also prohibit INGOs from submitting reports to their international boards without first getting them approved by the

government.

This rule would effectively bar bilateral and multilateral agencies from publishing critical reports like the one that the European Union (EU) mission published in March that was critical of the electoral laws reserving seats for dominant caste groups. Nepal issued a strongly-worded statement asking the EU to 'refrain from making such uncalled-for comments'.

The government has also set in motion new visa guidelines to prevent foreigners on tourist visas from working in aid agencies, charities and volunteering. Now they need letters from the Home Ministry and the Labour Ministry to get work permits, which is usually fraught with delays especially if the organisations work on gender, identity, empowerment and human

rights.

In June this year, the UN refugee agency UNHCR sought permission from the government to celebrate the World Refugee Day by carrying out a series of public events, but permission was not given. Human rights activists were warned not to pressure the government to sign the 1951 UN convention on refugees, which would require Nepal to show more compassion to the Rohingya and other refugees.

There are indications that the government's crackdowns on Western governments and agencies is inspired by China, which closely monitors pro-Tibet activists in Nepal, and India which does not like Western human rights organisations based in Kathmandu monitoring the region.

Political analyst CK Lal says Nepal has always been a xenophobic state, it just became latent after 1990 but has been reawakened now by Nepal's rulers to tighten their grip on power.

"The Oli government is becoming increasingly more authoritarian, and xenophobia is an important tool for it to stay relevant," he says. Indeed, the NCP has already extended its control over constitutional bodies and has been threatening restrictions on the mainstream media. It now intends to silence civil society groups by squeezing their donors.

Nepali officials became

paranoid of Westerners after the conflict and the first few years of the peace process when the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) was seen to have a pro-Maoist bias with its reports justifying the revolution. The UN peacemaking body was then accused of radicalising a section of Madhesi and Janajati activists with demands for ethnicity-based federalism, and for highlighting 'structural discrimination' in the country.

In his 2015 book *Lost In Transition*, former senior UNICEF official Kul Chandra Gautam accused UNMIN of being 'so influenced by the circle of self-proclaimed progressives that it ignored and dismissed the views and advice of many Nepalis'.

UNMIN's activities ended up alienating politicians, activists and civil society leaders who began to see foreign funding or presence as a threat to their dominance. Prime Minister Oli, who was the main opposition leader during the Constitution making progress, was quick to sense this. He then deftly played the nationalism card, not just vis-à-vis India after the blockade but also against Western influence. His party's landslide victory legitimised the xenophobia.

Political analyst Hari Sharma first observed this shift clearly during the brief lull after the dissolution of the first Constituent Assembly in 2012. "That was when the Maoists began to discard their war-time agenda of identity-based federalism and even secularism," he explains, arguing that the Maoists never wanted identity-based federalism, secularism or even inclusion, they just used the slogans to mobilise the marginalised against the state. After the war ended, the Maoists needed a scapegoat to blame for their failure to push progress, and latched on the West.

Sharma says Nepalis have always identified with democracy, freedom of expression and tolerance, which are seen as 'Western'. Nepal's Communist rulers are breaking away from those values to be more aligned with the values and the politics of control in China, and lately India.

Says Sharma: "India and China are not our friends, they are our neighbours. We cannot choose our neighbours, but we can choose our friends." 🇳🇵

Nepali

the decade of political transition leading up to the new Constitution, many Western embassies, donor agencies and INGOs broadened the definition of 'development'. They got involved in identity politics and the peace process in a manner that further destabilised society and weakened democratic values.

Institutional memory is always a problem with the embassies and agencies, but some archival introspection is in order. Things came to a head with UNMIN and the tone set by its reports to the Security Council, which made Nepal resemble a pariah state. The Mission packed up in 2011 but the after-effects linger, as could be seen in the active resistance of some donor units to the local government elections of 2017.

Having elected governments in all three 'realms', Nepalis should today feel confident and open enough to digest comments and criticism about state and society. Instead, what we have is over-reaction.

Nepal can do without the 'foreign hand' paranoia which is a

populist tool of authoritarians (a la Indira Gandhi). The xenophobia will impact international solidarity that the country needs for its move towards a respectable place in South Asia and world. Across-the-board generalisations of the feeling of hurt can mean direct and indirect weakening of relationship with so many countries that have always meant well.

The United Nations has been a partner through Nepal's modern era and the intelligentsia as well as population at large have always prized this relationship. But UN officials today talk of being taken aback by the cold reception in ministries and at functions. Even considering the expanded role Nepal seeks in UN peace-keeping operations, more circumspection would be helpful in officialdom.

It is a truism to state that only liberal democratic values, marked by openness and self-questioning, can work to bring progress to a complex and diverse society such as ours. And Nepal should continue on its trajectory towards an even more vibrant society of

confident citizens, where our open visa regime allows the country to deepen its discourse with the world.

Drafting an 'integrity policy' that discourages INGOs and NGOs can only reverse the gains of participatory democracy. Rather than strengthen the government's capacity to monitor and call out malfeasance where it occurs, the tendency is to try and restrict civic activism and organising 'at source'.

Nepal and Nepalis need development cooperation, we need to connect with countries where Nepalis have migrated to, we need volunteers to come and help in our towns and villages, we need to rise to international opportunities rather than be forever preoccupied with internal crises. This requires replacing xenophobia with empathy.

The Ugly American is a novel that portrays the intolerant and arrogant avatar of American character of the 1960s. No Nepali wants to look at himself/herself in the mirror and detect traces of prejudice and chauvinism. 🇳🇵

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Hunkydory in the boondocks

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For best results, this column should be consumed with a slice of lemon, a dash of vodka and a pinch of salt within 100 days of manufacture. Management welcomes suggestions and complaints via email, which will be immediately deleted without being read. Anyone found to be taking any of this stuff seriously should go and get his and/or her head examined free of charge by a member of the Head Hunting Department of the Ministry of Infotainment and Commotion, and the Home Ministry.

And after that word of caution, which is mandatory under current regulations to protect our asses from being hauled over the coals under the new Criminal Code, we can plunge right into singing hosannahs about the grumblement. It has come to our notice that despite taking goose steps in course of the Great Leap Forward, there are still some naysayers out there who are moaning

and groaning. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Here we are, trying to liberate the public from getting depressed reading about more corruption in high places, more examples of rotten policemen, confirmation that the civil liberties are curtailed, and the nabobs of negativism are still complaining about the selection of songs on Nepal Idol. Pampered brats! Let's spank them.

We started collecting garbage at 8PM and now the neighbourhood dingo pack is complaining that we have deprived them of their midnight snack. We patched the potholes along the main thoroughfares at BIMSTEC, and shopkeepers are whining about speeding motorcycles. You give them an arm, and they want a leg.

Complain, complain, complain, that's all they ever do around here. Which is why the Prime Minister had to summon the editors to make them shut up, at which point the editors started complaining that they can't complain anymore. I'll tell you what is wrong with this country: there are just too many civilian liberties. How soothing it will be if we did not have to listen to media remind us day and night how bad things are. Then we could pretend everything is hunkydory in the boondocks.



The Ass

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