HOW MANY MORE? MUCH LONGER?

A pandemic of gender-based violence has left deep scars on Nepali society which will take a long time to heal. It has exposed a deep-seated culture of misogyny, patriarchy and impunity. Editorial: page 2

Sushmita Das (right) recovers in a hospital in Kathmandu this week after a neighbour in their village in Rautahat, Rambabu Paswan, poured acid on her and Samjhana, her elder sister, for refusing his advances. Samjhana died on Monday after suffering agonising pain for a week. Coverage: page 14-15
CORROSIVE CONDUCT

There is an argument that there has not been an abrupt rise in the number of rape cases in Nepal, it is just being reported more now. It is difficult to say what is worse: that it used to be hidden, or that victims and their families are coming forward to complain to the police.

That is because the high profile cases of rape and abuse in the past few months have shown that the police is actually involved in protecting perpetrators, falsely accusing the innocent, destroying evidence, and covering up the truth. Combined with cases of recent encounter killings, the actions have led to serious concern of the public’s confidence in the police. In fact, there may be many victims now who are not going to file a complaint because they fear harassment and intimidation.

As we reported last month, the number of reported rape cases in Nepal has increased by 30% in the past year. It has multiplied four times in ten years. There have been 408 rape and attempted rape complaints brought to the police since the horrific murder of Nimla Punta in Kanchanpur on 26 July.

A special committee assigned to investigate the case, while accusing the district police chief of covering up, came no closer to naming the suspect.

The police have been equally ineffective in tackling a surge in copy-cat acid attacks in the past two weeks. The shocking case of Samjhaana Dasi in Rutaulah has once more exposed the culture of misogyny, patriarchy and impunity that pervades our society. Most perpetrators are still going free.

There are also hundreds of women who are tried and convicted. There are also mothers-in-law and the conviction that they will never be protected.

There is also a burning desire for revenge. In the past few months, there have been three cases of people pouring acid on a person because they are the same is as in rape, and often it is to take revenge for rebuffing an advance.

There is worse: that it used to be hidden, or that women who commit gender crimes, but by mothers-in-law and the conviction that they will never be protected.

There are also layers upon layers of pent-up grievances against injustice and discrimination. Stricter measures on the purchase of acid, and monitoring its use may be a deterrent, but as long as the root causes of gender-based violence remain, potential perpetrators will simply use another tool to attack girls and women.

There is also urgent action needed to make the laws against acid attacks at least as strict, if not stricter than the ones for rape, bride-burning and other cases of violence against women. At the moment, perpetrators only get a maximum of 5 years in jail. They seem all fired up if convicted of carrying out an acid attack.

Women against violence is a manifestation of the pervasive patriarchy in our culture. Misogyny is sanctioned by religion, tradition, and cultural norms. Insulting women is taken as a joke. We have to look deeply into a society to question values that we as a population seem to have come to accept as normal.

Despite the new Constitution, the scale of injustice in Nepal is still skewed. The persistent gender based violence is the result of pervasive impunity, where men, powerful people, upper castes, urban dwellers, appear to have more protection from prosecution for crimes than women, lower castes, the poor, and weak.

It should be the state’s non-negotiable duty — to protect women from violence in the public sphere, and to draw red lines for any form of violence, including domestic violence.

We are hearing about horrendous cases of violence against women in the world when we have a poor record in granting women citizenship rights, in protecting our mothers and sisters against crimes.

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AN ACID TEST

News of rapes, acid attacks and domestic violence make it to the front page of the media every day. The perpetrators have often been accused of misogyny, patriarchy and culture of impunity in the country that sends the message to would-be criminals that they can get away with easy murder. So it only goes to show the need for the challenges ahead.

In this issue on pages 2, 3-45.
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Where are you going this Dasain?

Dasain-Tihar used to mean family and feasting, but more Nepalis are now travelling abroad for the holidays

Sikuma Rai

When immigration officials at Dubai or Kuala Lumpur airports saw a green Nepali passport they automatically used to look for the work permit. But with the number of outbound Nepali tourists on the rise, they now turn the pages for tourist visas.

Kathmandu airport is busy these days: the arrival concourse is packed with Nepali migrant workers who have started returning home for holidays and across the hall there are throngs of Nepali families flying out for foreign vacations.

It is not just individuals and families taking flights to Malaysia, Singapore, Bali or the UAE. Nepali companies are also offering employees subsidised Dasain-Tihar holidays as an incentive.

One of many such groups this week is a Kathmandu company taking its 106 employees, divided in two groups, for a five nights and six days retreat to Vietnam.

“The vacation season has just started and we are pretty busy. No holiday for us,” Jambunay Shrestha of Natra Tours and Travels, which recently organized that tour, and a trip for 125 Nepali employees of a health care company in Bangkok.

Many travel agents, which used to specialise in organizing sightseeing and trekking for inbound foreign tourists in Nepal, now say more than half their business is from Nepalis spending holidays abroad.

Nepal tigers now number 235

The Nepali government announced the total number of wild tigers in the country had reached 235, nearly double of what it was in 2009. This means Nepal has achieved the first target of doubling its wild tiger population adopted at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010.

Nepal conducted a tiger census between November 2017 and April 2018 with camera traps. The last tiger census in 2013 had estimated the tiger population at 98.

“Our commitment to the Global Tiger Recovery Programme gains now ground with Nepal’s growing tiger numbers and a successful implementation of Nepal’s Tiger Conservation Action Plan, and protecting tigers is a top priority for the government,” said Bibekha Neupane, Secretary of the Ministry of Forest and Environment.

However, the number of tigers in Chitwan National Park has recorded a decrease, mainly because of overcrowding and overlapping territories.

However this was more than made up for by the increased wild tiger numbers in Bardia, Banke, Sukhla Phanta, Parsa.

“Every tiger counts, for Nepal and for the world, and Nepal is only a few tigers away from our goal to double tiger numbers by 2022,” said Ghan S Gurung, Country Representative of World Wildlife Fund.

Nepal’s tiger conservation program is being helped in Bardia National Park by the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation. DiCaprio is also chairman of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) US.

Said DiCaprio: “Nepal has been a leader in efforts to double tigers within its own borders and serves as a model for conservation for all of Asia and the world. This significant increase in Nepal’s tiger population is proof that when we work together, we can save the planet’s wildlife – even species facing extinction.”

Nepal was the first country to achieve global standards in managing tiger conservation areas, an accreditation scheme governed by the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CATS).

With four more years to go, the TX2 goal of doubling tiger numbers globally can only be achieved if all the tiger range countries step up and commit to a similar level of excellence.

In May this year, Nepal celebrated a new benchmark with the achievement of 365 days of zero poaching of tigers over five occasions between 2011 and 2018.
and the volume is growing. Many travel agencies reported up to 15% growth in outbound passengers from last year, while 56-year-old Nastri saw 30% growth.

In the last fiscal year, Nepali outbound travellers spent Rs8 billion against Rs7 billion spent by foreign tourists in the country over the same period. The travel industry expects this year to be even better than last year for both inbound and outbound tourism.

“People have started making use of their savings to explore and travel to new places in the region and beyond,” explains Shrestha.

One of the most popular destinations is Singapore because of its combination of shopping, recreation and beaches. Cheap air fares offered by Nepal Airlines, Thai Airways and Thai Lion are a factor, although the need for Visa is a downer. Nastri says that more than half the inquiries by Nepalis on social media about spending their holidays abroad this season are about Thailand.

Singapore is the number 2 most popular destination because of its rich offerings for families, shopping and visas on arrival. With Indonesia now also offering visas on arrival for Nepalis, Bali has also become popular for its exotic Hindu culture and famous beaches.

Europe and the US were popular this summer, and many have booked autumn holidays in London over Easter. Thai Airways to and from Kathmandu on Qatar Airways in August were to the UK, and 26% to the US. Students and families settled abroad often call their parents over on visit visas. Airlines which arrive full in Nepal for the trekking season offer discounted fares on their return flights, making tickets affordable for Nepalis.

Turkish Airlines carries Nepali outbound tourists mostly to Istanbul, Greece and Paris (with a return ticket from Zurich) for which the demand is increasing every year, says the airline’s Renju Singh. “We have added connections to more destinations, and cheaper fares make more holiday travel possible for Nepalis,” she adds.

Because of a direct seven hour flight, Istanbul has emerged as a popular destination and is in the bucket list of many Nepali tourists. Turkish culture and the Bosphorous bridging Asia and Europe are the attractions. Nepal

have even discovered Cappadocia, the historical region in Anatolia, famous for hot air balloon rides.

Turkey now offers daily direct services to Istanbul, and being the only European airline serving Kathmandu offers no-visa entry for Nepalis travelling to Europe or the United States wishing to spend a few days on their way out. Turkish Airlines has bookings from two Nepali tour groups of 20 passengers each for this Davisen period alone.

The other surprising destination is Russia, with Nepalis still going there to see the World Cup stadiums. “Moscow is popular among Nepalis, and the chief attraction is Lenin’s mausoleum,” says Padam Kattel of Aces Travels, which is booking 200 customers there with stopovers in Dubai this Davisen. While a holiday in western Europe can cost more than Rs350,000, Russia is only half of that.

Along with Moscow, Aces Travels introduced Baku in Armenia as an affordable new destination for Nepali holidaymakers last year when it handled 1,500 outbound Nepali tourists to Russia and Central Asia.

There was a time that the only Nepalis on ocean cruisers were the Gurkha guards and housekeeping staff. More and more, Nepali passengers can also be seen on ships. The most popular holiday cruises are from Singapore to the Malacca Straits, the Mediterranean and the East China Sea. ZEST Holidays is the sales agent for Star Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line, and it says there has been an exponential growth in Nepali passengers.

As for those who insist on spending Davisen-’Tihar with families in Nepal, travel agencies are offering winter holidays in the Southern hemisphere: Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.
I was not at all concerned about the rising wind but my headhunting companions were alarmed. They hurried with increasing urgency along the blistering forest trails, glancing nervously up at the swaying treetops. It took me some time to appreciate the danger of falling branches from the towering trees of the Borneo rainforest. Strong winds are rare, and loose foliage crashing to the forest floor would be lethal.

I picked up my pace behind their inky tattooed calves, but it was not until we reached the riverside clearing and their longhouse home that they relaxed. That stormy afternoon was the only time I observed those consummate forest dwellers till at ease in their environment.

The former warriors of Sarawak, one of two states that comprise Malaysian Borneo, had skills decorating their tribal homes, especially the ones visited by tourists. To survive in the remote rainforests along the mighty river arteries of tropical Borneo required communal living under one roof in wooden longhouses—extra rooms were added as the family expanded and everyone shared the wide ground. The ritual practice of headhunting, displaying enemy scalps as a rite of passage and prestige, had long been extirpated under the rule of James Brooke in the mid-nineteenth century, an eccentric British adventurer who appointed himself Rajah of Sarawak. His white-cantilled fort on its green mantled mound still dominates the riverside capital of Kuching.

My indigenous headhunting friends, more correctly known by their Malay Iban and Dayak tribal names, were disappoisingly dressed in modern t-shirts and shorts, their longhouses modernized with single bulb electricity and corrugated iron roofs. They did still carry intricately woven baskets as backpacks and traditional guards for water, and used blowpipes for hunting birds and small animals in the rainforest, although there were no longer any naked tattooed torsos, animal skin headchiefs, beaded bodices or colourful boduussuits decorated with tal, feathers. Their self-sufficient lifestyle included collecting medicinal plants and leaving secret messages along the path—a knotted grass or broken twig—to signal local conditions such as “I am hunting in this tract” or “two cows are grazing nearby,” and we came across lovely offerings to appease the jungle spirits, despite the influx of Christian missionaries post World War II. Busyb cotton 'Mary dress' worn by their women betrayed their influence, and we came across painted statues of Jesus and an occasional church—even a newly constructed 'cathedral' on a hillside clearing close to the Kalimantan border.

It was 1989 and the reason we were walking the backblocks of Sarawak was to research potential adventure activities for tourists—longhouse visits, hiking, river trips, waterfalls and wildlife walks—to supplement the beach resorts and quickly colonial history and Chinese culture. We had been asked by the State government to prepare a tourism master plan for Sarawak. Lee Clark and Dave Stanford, founders of Tourism Resource Consultants Wellington, had just won their first major contract, and asked me to be responsible for the marketing aspects. My experience with Nepal eco-tourism had helped us with, along with their New Zealand national park tourism planning backgrounds, but the research and marketing consulting job and I was terrified. Lee was the brains of the team, making me cringe at his white-board panic, and Dave the adventurer was an energetic kindred spirit in the field. As Dave and I negotiated the stream on a tenner bamboo pole bridge, we were distracted by the whoosh whoseh sound of a flock of hornbills and a dazzling flash of bright yellow billy—Borneo has eight species of hornbills, their straight wings and wedge-shaped tail look like a child’s drawing of a bird in flight.

Trying to sleep on the longhouse floor that night, after a measure roof of rice and banana with our headhunting hosts, defecating rain hammered the tin roof and the hard floorboards were unyielding, but it was the cold that bothered us most as the temperature plummeted during the night. It never occurred to either of us to cuddle up.

Next morning, we visited the remote border post between Malaysia and Indonesia, not much more than a village of wood houses with thatched roofs, where a dusty guard in a simple uniform told us that precious few foreigners tried to cross here. These clammy jungles, tangled riverine and dripping dipterocarp forest had been the scene of European warfare during the Indo-China Konfrontasi of 1963 and 1966, when Nepali Gurkha camp bridge, we were fighting alongside British forces. It must have felt a very long way from home.

Hanging out with the headhunters

How experience in eco-tourism development in Nepal came in handy in Borneo

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Miss Nepal’s mission

Sewa Bhattarai

Sunitkala Khatriwada is on a whirlwind tour to the remote village of Bharta in Mauwane (picture), where she is building a health post, to London for a fundraising dinner, and stopping over in Kathmandu on route to China.

Nepali Times caught up with her to find out what Miss Nepal 2018 has been up to since her coronation in April.

The reason Khatriwada is into post-earthquake reconstruction is because she is also an award-winning architecture student. She wants to complete a health post in the Chepung village of Bharta before the Miss Nepal World pageant in November as her entry for the subtitle ‘Beauty with a Purpose’.

“I have always been passionate about architecture, and the earthquake opened up a huge need for architects. While we rebuild, we have to take care to preserve our traditional architecture and make sure the cities are well planned,” says Khatriwada.

She expanded on the concept of healing by design: how a well-ventilated hospital room makes a patient feel better. The Mauwane health post is a learning experience, as she finds out the nitty-gritty of transforming this concept into reality. She had initially hoped to finish construction for Basantapur, but the cost has doubled because the site is so remote that it is expensive to transport construction materials there.

So, she is busy with fundraising dinners and approaching corporates, while the costs keep going up. Now, she is helping build a road to the village which had none. The village is now accessible, but the monsoon has delayed work. The foundation for building has finally been laid, and Khatriwada hopes to complete it soon and hold a health camp before the Miss World pageant.

“A health post is for treatment, but prevention of diseases is just as important,” explains Khatriwada, who herself spoke to villagers about basic hygiene like hand washing, showering, and building latrines. The village has a high level of malnutrition among children, complications from early marriages and rampant superstition.

At present, villagers have to walk for two hours to reach the nearest health post, and Khatriwada knows there are many villages which are as much in need as this one.

“This is just the beginning of my work in philanthropy and architecture. Eventually I want to use my fame to build more of what Nepal needs, whether it is health posts in remote areas, or schools and homes in disaster zones,” she adds.

After her year as Miss Nepal ends, Khatriwada plans to focus on philanthropic architecture through her One Home Foundation. This is actually what attracted her to Miss Nepal, to use the celebrityhood for a good cause, not necessarily its glamour.

“This is a platform where you get famous overnight, and then it is up to you how you use that fame,” she explains. “I want to use it to become a change maker. In fact, the whole reason I am excited about participating in the Miss World pageant is so I can make global contacts to help me continue my work in architecture.”

Nepal has never won the Miss World title, though Sujana Shrestha bagged the Beauty with a Purpose title in 2013. This year, all eyes are on the competent and confident Shrinkhala Khatriwada, and Nepal will be cheered her on. ☎️
Life and living in remote Humla

Easing the daily struggle of families in a region of Nepal

Jocelyn Powelson in Humla

“Jal grhaeth” is a greeting heard often in the Far West and Karnali regions of Nepal, and it is a way to wish each other success in life, livelihood, household, and family.

Here in Masar village above Kawadi Khola, on the border between Humla and Bajura districts, a strenuous two-day walk from the nearest road, it is a daily struggle for people to meet basic needs.

Historically, people have flourished as traders, using goats and sheep as pack animals to carry grain from the plains up to Tibet, and bartering it for salt on the plateau. But the region now suffers from food insecurity, health problems, and lack of livelihood options.

The reasons include the end of the Tibet trade, the emergence of roads and markets, a decrease in livestock numbers caused by new grazing restrictions, the destruction of local infrastructure during the Maoist insurgency, and an increase in population.

Most now farm for a living, but agricultural yields are low because of the steep terrain, lack of irrigation, destruction of crops by pests, and antiquated technology. Most families can grow enough food to last only four or five months of the year. For the remaining, they must purchase or borrow food. But cash is scarce, so people rely heavily on subsidised food and loans.

The nearest health post is a two-day walk away, time that farmers cannot afford, particularly during the busy harvest season. Tuberculosis and gastrointestinal illnesses are pervasive and exacerbate the symptoms of malnutrition.
Many homes do not have toilets, and hygiene is poor.

Women and the lower castes are especially disadvantaged. Women have limited mobility and control over household resources, and Dalits have very little land or education, and suffer discrimination.

"I do not even know if we are Nepali citizens ... we Dalits are neglected and oppressed. We have little property, nobody looks after us, not the government, not the organisations, not the gods," says Radhik Lakrai.

Kathmandu has neglected this part of Nepal, abandoning its people. The elected village council chairman Bagdad Malla said: "We have little budget, but a lot of work to be done. We do not have roads, and transport makes things expensive.

Everyone’s priority here is more roads so farmers have access to services and markets. Roads will also make it easier for government and NGO staff to be more effective.

Said local Rajabhadur Budha, "We have a lot of resources, from our fields and natural resources. If there was a road, we could sell them. There would be more people travelling here, and more business. Without the road, there is no development."

As roads and markets become more accessible, communities here need to add value to their products so they are marketable. Some possibilities include cultivation and processing of medicinal and aromatic plants and high-value mushrooms or bees, production of wool handicrafts, cheese, honey, and sustainable harvesting and processing of forest products. These activities need minimal external inputs, and can be achieved through skills training, mentorship, and micro-grants.

Sustainability farmers need help to improve work efficiency and reduce the labour burden. Harvests can be increased with irrigation, bio-pesticides, greenhouses, and community seed banks. Improved technology such as better water mills, electricity, reliable mobile network, and fuel-efficient stoves will make work easier.

There is an urgent need for better health care and education. Existing health posts need maintenance and medicines, and additional health posts are required in remote areas. Hygiene education and encouraging women to use health services for deliveries and check-ups are also important.

Women and members of 'lower' castes must be prioritised in these activities and in accessing technologies, micro-loans, and other resources.

Currently, service delivery and other development activities are sporadic and ad-hoc. Sufficient resources must be allocated to allow for long-term, consistent engagement with the community. Outcomes should be regularly monitored and evaluated for lasting improvements.

As Nepal urbanises, fewer and fewer people in the rest of the country understand the struggles in places like Marjaur village. The first step to rectifying this is education and awareness of the living conditions of rural Nepalis and the acknowledgement that they, too, have the right to a secure and healthy life.

It is only when the needs and hopes of Nepalis who have been historically and systematically disempowered are properly incorporated into national policies and development plans that we can wish the people in places like the Kavaudi Khola valley “best wishes”.

Jocelyn Powelson is a freelance researcher from the United States who spent three months in Kathmandu this year.
Kathmandu’s Little Kabul
Afghan refugees struggle to rebuild their lives in Nepal

Gopal Gartaula

W hen Mohammed Daoud fled Afghanistan in 2014, he did not know where he would be headed. All he wanted was to keep his family safe from the never-ending violence in his homeland.

Daoud, a 44-year-old mechanic from a village near Kundahar, first came to India with his wife and four children and then on to Nepal. He paid $6,000 to an agent who brought his family to Kathmandu by bus.

Daoud owned a sprawling house and a garage back home. Here in Kathmandu, he works as a mechanic for someone else. His family lives in a congested room near the Kathmandu bus park.

Despite this, he is happy his family is far away from bombs and bullets.

“I may not be able to feed my family well here, but I do not have to live in a constant fear of losing them,” he says.

His four children were born after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and grew up caught in between American bombings and Taliban terror. They watched many die in gun battles, bombs and in drone attacks. It was rare for them to see someone die of natural causes.

“Only after coming to Nepal did my children know that people can also die naturally,” Daoud explains.

Most Nepalis have heard about refugees from Tibet. Few know that there are also Afghans who have settled in Nepal. Like Daoud, most have come to Kathmandu from New Delhi after hearing from others that life is relatively easier in Nepal.

The UNHCR has identified 53 Afghan asylum seekers belonging to 13 families in Kathmandu, and all of them live in the Shimkulpo neighborhood of Kathmandu, which has become Little Kabul.

Murtaza Zahirly, 34, owned a welding machine factory in southern Kundahar, and was doing brisk business until he was forced to close it down because security forces saw it as a place where the Taliban insurgents could make weapons. Three years ago, a relative was killed in an American drone attack in another village. His father and brother reached there to pay their last homage. On the way back home, their car was blown up by Taliban insurgents. Zahirly, left all hope, and paid $10,000 to a trafficker to get him to Nepal via New Delhi. He says: “Had I not left Afghanistan, I would have probably committed suicide by now, if not killed in an attack. I was mentally disturbed after seeing so many deaths and losing my livelihood.”

But life is not easy in Kathmandu, either. Zahirly’s wife is suffering from a neurological disorder. But he does not have money to pay for her treatment. House rents, school fees, food prices and everything is expensive, and they do not earn enough.

The government in Nepal has not granted refugee status to the Afghans, but it does not count them either. Being undocumented, however, they cannot apply for regular jobs or run their own businesses.

Most Afghan refugees in Kathmandu are from Kundahar, but there are some from Helmand and Kabul as well. In an unfamiliar city, nearly 2,000km from their homeland, Afghan refugees miss their homes, friends and relatives.

Mohammad Arsif Ahmadi, a 53-year-old jeweler from Kundahar, says: “We do not have homes to go back to. They are gone.” He made gold necklaces, bracelets, anklets and earrings, but his shop was blown up four years ago.

Ahmadi wept the day he left his hometown for good, and his eyes welled up as he told us in his rented room in Kathmandu: “Everything was reduced to ashes. I now just have memories. And I am learning to live in a new place, remembering the times when Afghanistan also was at peace.”
New life for Khagendra B Basnyat

Some people cast a shadow larger than life, and Khagendra Bahadur Basnyat was one of them. Not only did he establish Nepal’s first organization for people with disabilities, but he was also responsible for entities that we take for granted today, such as a Ministry for Social Welfare. This week, his brother and former ambassador Singh Bahadur Basnyat released his biography of the extraordinary Nepali, illuminating a life full of struggle and compassion.

Organizations Basnyat founded, the Nepal Disabled Association (NDA) and Khagendra New Life Centre (KNLC), have earned renown for sheltering people with disabilities. In Kathmandu, the NLC complex provides a facility for treatment and rehabilitation so that they can live an independent life. The premises have also sheltered other organizations like the Ryder Children’s Home, where severely disabled people can live. SOS Children’s Village, Nepal Orthopaedic Hospital and Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children, and the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre.

The journey was not easy, and the brother faced the struggle of the early days when Khagendra Basnyat was afflicted with a rare hip disease that confined him to a bed for the rest of his life. He was a man of humble means but had a sharp intellect, and made a living as a private tutor. It was in a meeting of the NDA in 1973, in the dingy quarters of his residence, that New buildings, and established a Ministry for Social Welfare. He died in 1977, but his friends and family gathered on Monday at the launch of his biography to remember the man with fondness. He was full of compassion, and it was this quality that led him to achieve so much in one lifetime despite his limited physical abilities,” said Buddha Basnyat, a nephew.

In his book, Singh Bahadur Basnyat sheds light on that compassionate side of an intelligent, curious, and persistent man. He remembers how his brother was inspired by benevolent personalities such as Karamat Khan, Abdul Gaffar Khan, and his lifelong mentor, the Dalai Lama, who emphasized compassion. He often quoted the Guru (“good deeds lead to more success”) which motivated him to accomplish things that have far outlived his life. This book tribute by his brother gives us a glimpse into the enduring strengths required for such outstanding deeds, and is a source of inspiration.

Sewa Bhattarai

ALL THE GLITTERS: PM KP Oli and wife Radhika Shrestha with President of the United States Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump during a reception for world leaders participating in the 73rd UN General Assembly.

GURKHA CONNECTION: Prime Minister KP Oli and his British counterpart Theresa May met at the United Nations headquarters in New York on Wednesday.

SMALL TALK: Prime Minister KP Oli and Canadian PM Justin Trudeau signed an agreement to establish a bilateral consultation mechanism between Nepal and Canada at the 73rd UNGA in New York on Tuesday.

ROAD TO DEMOCRACY: Prime Minister KP Oli speaks on Nepal’s transition to democracy during an interaction program organised by the Asia Society and moderated by former Australian PM Kevin Rudd in New York on Tuesday.

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Fox guarding the coop

Kantipur, 24 September

Three contractors, who have violated multiple deadlines and failed to complete government projects worth billions, are now members of a parliamentary committee responsible to monitor and evaluate progress made in government infrastructure projects. It was already a case of conflict of interest when Hari Nayan Ranuyari of Pappu Construction, Jhinchiri Lama of Lams Construction and Bishadev Singh Lama of Hindung and Thoker Company were elected MPs last year. Now, these three MPs-contractors have been nominated by their respective parties as Members of the Development Committee of Parliament whose job is to monitor infrastructure projects and take action against contractors who fail to finish work within deadlines.

We have an absurd situation where Ranuyari and the Lama duo control a parliamentary committee which is supposed to punish the very companies they own. Ranuyari is an elected MP representing the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (PFN), a Tarai-based party supporting the KP Oli government. The Lams were nominated MPs by the opposition Nepali Congress.

Ranuyari’s Pappu Construction has recently become a notorious symbol of non-performance, especially after a boat carrying 29 people capsized in Lalitakaya river of Kavrepaline district in August, where Pappu took the money but never completed the bridge over the river four years ago. As luck would have it, the ill-fated boat hit a concrete pillar left uncompleted by Pappu. Five people were killed and 21 others were rescued alive.

Pappu has left many other government projects incomplete, or it is taking too long to finish them. An arrest warrant has been issued against Pappu’s Chair Sumit Ranuyari for negligence that caused the Kalpana boat tragedy. But his MP-father and the company’s real owner, Hari Nayar Ranuyari, is now in the parliamentary committee.

Jhinchiri Lama’s company bagged the contract to repair the Chabahil-Jorpati-Sankhu road. But it was never completed, forcing thousands to wade through the muddy road every day. A restive protest at Gokarna temple for BMSTSC leaders was cancelled last month after Thailand’s Prime Minister refused to travel through this crater-filled road. But Lama is now in the powerful parliamentary committee, and his company is unlikely to be ever punished for this and other incomplete projects.

Bishadev Singh Lama’s company was supposed to complete construction of a bridge in Nawakot last year. But only 35% work has been completed so far, and he has not met deadlines in other projects as well. The Department of Roads says he has not completed projects worth Rs 12 billion even after multiple deadline extensions. He is also in the committee that is supposed to investigate contractors like him. Parliament’s guidelines and Code of Conduct bar the MPs from participating in parliamentary debates over the issues related to them. With three three contractor-MPs, there is a clear case of conflict of interest.

Blaming capitalism for rapes

Kathmandu, 27 September

Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa has blamed capitalism for increasing rape cases in Nepal, promising socialist is the only way to effectively control such crimes.

A parliamentary committee has invited Thapa on Wednesday to share the progress made in the months-long investigation into the Arima rape and murder in Kathmandu on 28 July, and dozens after rape cases reported thereafter.

Thapa did not inform the committee about perpeters in the Arima murder, or how often police are not catching them. Instead, he delivered a long speech about feudalism, capitalism and socialism as if he was addressing a meeting of his own Communist cadre.

On TV: Another rape! Another murder! Another rape! Another murder!

Mac: Wuxing is in Western desecration, he spread capitalism. Turn it off. Problem solved.

Aish Srestha in Kathmandu, 27 September

Thapa, an ex-Marxist guerrilla commander, said: “There are still remnants of feudal culture in Nepal, and capitalism is thriving, which are promoting ideas of violence against women.”

He went on to add: “Capitalism breeds and sells women as commodities. In capitalist countries, there are rapes and prostitution. Look at the US and India, for example.”

He added: “Rapes are not new in Nepal. It is not that such crimes are occurring only after this government was formed. More rape cases are being reported these days because there is now more awareness.”

Thapa argued that Nepal must be a socialist country to stop rapes. “We do not have a self-sufficient economy yet, and capitalist capitalism is on the rise. We must break these existing socio-economic structures. The government alone cannot control rape, people also have to be aware.”

After denouncing capitalism as the root cause of rape culture, Thapa argued that technology, alcohol and drug abuse were also parting factors. “We need control pornography and drug abuse. Crimes are often fueled when people are drinking,” he said.

A few female MPs from Thapa’s own party reprimanded his argument. Nepal Communist Party (NCP) MPs Revina Sharma and Vinita Subedi argued that capitalism objectively rules in Nepal, even culture. MP Bipasha Subba demanded that Ms Thapa and other leaders are not only to protect women from being raped.

MP Sugata Shahi sought a law of owning the government to capture regions to prevent rape. “In response, a senior另有Leader Minister said: “That is an innovative idea.”

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DAUGHTER SLAUGHTER
More unspeakable crimes against women drown Nepal in sorrow
I

I was raining hard that Tuesday night on 11 September in Tikaudamrup of Rautahat. In the Das family home, teenage sisters Samjhana and Sushmita told their parents they were going to bed.

The thatched roof, single-storey house had three rooms, one where the two sisters slept and another for their step-mother and younger sister. Their father, Jadolal Das, and his son walked to the family’s pool room that they rented to locals.

Sushmita remembers being woken up about midnight by her sister’s screams. Then she felt a burning pain in her own hands and body. Neighbours rushed to the house on hearing the sisters’ cries, their step-mother was confused and did not now why the two were screaming.

After the neighbours figured out that this was an acid attack, they took the sisters to a tap and washed the burns. The girls were rushed to Kirtipur Hospital in Kathmandu after a local hospital said treatment was not possible.

Both sisters withstood in pain throughout the bumpy seven hour ride all night to reach Kathmandu at 9AM. Samjhana remembers her sister lay bandaged and covered in a blanket in the Intensive Care Unit nearby.

The heart monitor was beeping, and there was the sound of rough breathing. A visitor called out her name. She replied “Mojju” in a trembling voice. It was too painful for her to talk. She had burns over 35% of her body, including her head, chest, back and face.

Plastic surgeon Surendra Hajur said he had made 100 calls to Samjhana over the fortnight prior to the attack. Samjhana confirmed to her father that Paswan was the attacker, and he would call her often to propose to her. [See box]

On Monday 24 September, at the age of 18, Samjhana das died of serious burns. Doctors had performed three surgeries, and although they tried their best, they could not save her life. She was taken back to Chandrapur and cremated on the banks of the Bugmati, the same river that flows down from Kathmandu Valley.

The girls’ mother is back from Malaysia and is looking after Sushmita in Kirtipur Hospital. Police have detained Paswan, and are conducting further investigations to charge sheet him.

PahiLOPOST.COm

Sambhava Das lies down from Kathmandu Valley.

The family had some savings, but those are just the ones reported to the police, the real figure may be higher.

Another day, another acid attack

On the very day that Samjhana Das died because of her burns in a Kathmandu hospital, two other young girls were attacked. Both were set upon by their neighbours, bimal Sripali, 37, and Binita Panwar, 34.

As a teenager, Rambabu Paswan, who had told us the sisters were going to bed, was caught off-guard. Police said Sripali had confessed to the crime, and said he went to Birgunj to buy the acid.

On the same day in Paharka, Shriya Sutar, 10, was found dead in Kodiki village. She had gone to the market to buy biscuits.

The two victims are Indian girls, while Sripali’s attacker, and Paswan, who has already confessed to the crime, are both Nepali. Police said Sripali had confessed to the crime, and said he was drunk and stoned. Two days earlier, in Nawalparasi, a teenage girl was raped while returning home from festival. The police caught two teenager suspects.

A Nepali Times investigation shows 418 girl and women have been attacked or raped in less than three months all over Nepal [see map, above]. But those are just the ones reported to the police, the real figure may be higher.

A father’s story

I

From a Pool Centre which is about a kilometre away from the house.

My son and I sleep there because there isn’t enough room at home.

That night, I said bye to my family after dinner and left for the pool room with my son. It was raining heavily and I could barely sleep because of the noise on the roof. At around 3AM, I woke up, saw my wife and all I could hear were her cries. I woke up my son and we rushed home.

I took my injured daughters in a borrowed scooter to nearest Chakor Hospital.

For two hours, the doctors applied medicines and bandages on the burns, but then suggested that I take them to Kathmandu.

An ambulance driver helped me out.

The next day, detectives found acid burn marks on Paswan’s fingers. I went to the ICU and asked Sambhava if Paswan was the culprit. She nodded. “Yes.” She told me haltingly how Paswan used to stalk her, and call repeatedly to proposition her.

Paswan was arrested from the premises of the hospital in Kathmandu the next day, but no one came for him.

Samjhana died. We took her back to her hometown for her funeral as her friends could say their last goodbye. All I want now is for Paswan to be punished. Why is the government not doing anything when crimes like these are happening every day to daughters like Samjhana?

(As told to Monika Deupala)
Thinking big

Nepal may be a small country, but we don’t have small minds. We dream big, mainly because our rulers are day-dreaming a lot. These are virtual hallucinations and extraordinary nightmares which they immediately turn to the implementation stage upon waking up.

Now that he has met Trump, PM Oli has no time for petty little things like completing the Mahakali project, fencing the Jarul-Jalaura Swag, constructing the Wing Road or Saikhy, or picking up the package at Jajarkot. He is obsessed with much larger things.

Being a country with vibrant state-owned communications, Nepal is poised to take the Greatest Leap Forward so far into the Wild Blue Yonder with projects like the Colombo International Airport, the Republican Town, the Trans-advance of 54 corridors and 82 roads. Oli, or Lama Creation SHR, is not content in constructing the bridge at Til Khume deep in the forest.

Being a country, the PM gave the Nangal Shiva Corporation the green light to build a Nepali version of the Titanic and launch by December. With only two months to go, the Corporation has issued a global tender for a paddle boat.

Nepal has also announced plans to build six or seven conduits from the Cushing Command Post to Mars to plant the hammer and addle there. Since it is called The Red Planet.

Thank Carlsberg It’s Friday
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