OCTOBERFEST

The festival in which we celebrate our rich heritage, it has a significance which goes beyond the place where it is observed. The festival is celebrated all over the country and the world. The festival is a time to remember our ancestors and to honor them.

Finally, he got his party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal to convince the PM from Sharma’s 7, Ramshik Manandhar, to resign if the resignation is approved by the party. The Prime Minister had said that he had been pressured to resign in the Upper House, a ministerial post and entry in the Supreme Court’s list.

We have come to expect such shenanigans from Nepal’s so-called Communists. There is precedent, when Dahal lost his seat in the Kirtipur constituency in 2013, and he was bound for sure defeat in Sima, the powers across party lines reportedly leaned on the winning UML candidate to look the other way while the Election Commission changed the score card.

The way they justified it was that if the Supreme Commander of the Revolution lost, he may be too tired off the way back to war and there would be no new Constitution. For the sake of preserving the peace, they had cheated.

Last Dussehra, an应邀恳求 all men, and Dahal and a few were in secret negotiations to forge an electoral alliance in parliamentary elections. The two parties needed each other: the Maoists to launder their war crimes, and the UML to ensure that a weak coalition would not topple again.

Amid the chief architects of the merger was none other than Pushpa Kamal. This, Kadga has in the news, and trying to pull victory from the jaws of defeat. The United Communists are factionalized, and coalescing around Oli, Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal. A monolithic party with a historic mission to attract most of its public support through封锁 colossal influence, this rather一团腐败 and a debilitating inability to deliver.

At a Dussehra, we have to try temporarily to forget our truths like those have kept this country back. We will press the pause button and contemplate all that is good in Nepal society, and remind ourselves about the things we can be proud of as a nation: the forbearance and strength of our people who are tolerant to the faults, the value we place on our hardwood freedoms, and that despite everything we have notched major progress in public health, environmental protection, and an empowered citizenry.

At a time when more than 15% of Nepal’s 28 million people live and work abroad, Nepal has become an important destination for the diaspora. Together with our shared history and the Nepalese language, Dashain is what binds Nepal together. This is not just a Hindu festival, it is a Nepali one. Wherever in the world they are, whether their creed or nationality, Nepalis come together as Dashain.

The festival has transcended its religious context to become a time for families, and for the nation itself to unite in common celebration, and revive our collective hope for the future. We have traditionally asked Paschumkarn, the pachyderm, to sit things right in this country. Maybe it is time to not leave everything to the Protector of Animals, but for all three levels of government, the opposition, Federal Parliament, bureaucracy and all citizens to make every effort themselves.

Finally, he got his party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal to convince the PM from Sharma’s 7, Ramshik Manandhar, to resign if the resignation is approved by the party. (Prime Minister Sushil is said to be against it), but certainly for that seat will be held next month. Manandhar is not unhappy, though. He actually appears victorious because he has just been promoted a seat in the Upper House, a ministerial post and entry in the Supreme Court’s list.

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Dashain Exhibition and Convention Centre on Saturday, in a parallel discussion on ‘Strategies and Initiatives Towards Qatar’s National Vision 2030’, Baker highlighted the airline’s growth and its strategic role in supporting Qatar’s economic development.

Study in Europe
The Delegation of the European Union to Nepal visit the ‘Study in Europe Fair 2018’, a higher education two-day fair at Maitighar Marg on Monday and Tuesday. Universities from 8 countries of the EU member states presented and interacted with aspiring students regarding educational, scholarship, and career opportunities available in Europe.

Top golfers
The final leg of the three-series Caroling Golf 2018 ended with Pradip Kumar Karki securing the top position in the Net.

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Bat caves and edible bird nests
How New Zealand and Nepal knewhow helped develop tourism in Borneo

A slender snake slithered high above our heads on the brown, semi-smooth wall and the brown, semi-smooth floor felt spongy beneath our feet, alive with golden cockroaches. But the overpowering sensation was the smell of bat guano, which carpeted the entire cave system.

Shafts of sunlight revealed swiftlets darting around their tiny nests and seagulls soaring over the cave ceiling. Clumps of dark, sticky droppings hung from dripping crevices, and logs of nocturnal hanging bats waited for dusk to leave the cave as we entered the evening’s routine.

A cornerstone of Sarawak’s tourism, Gunung Mulu National Park is a world heritage site with huge caves and karst formations set in the mountainous forest. Mulu boasts the largest cave chamber in the world, so big that it allegedly can accommodate 40 Boeing 747s. Explored in the mid-nineteenth century by British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (he of the Wallace Line and Charles Darwin’s theories) but mapped only in the late 1970s by the Royal Geographical Society, Mulu contains a massive underground network of over 150 km of wet cave passages carved for millennia out of porous limestone.

Despite Mulu’s unique epistemological ecosystem and surplicious credentials, I felt more comfortable in the rainforest outside, amongst the canopy of tall trees, early morning gibbon calls, and swarming hordes of insects. Dave climbed Mount Mulu, up steep slippery paths past the jagged limestone pinnacles and rare orchids wreathed in mist, but I never did. The so-called Garden of Eden was enough for me, a humid, hidden dell with moist foliage and a noisy waterfall enclosed by pockmarked cliffs.

Our most alarming encounter was accompanying the Sarawak national park director, Oswald Ruckten Tien, through the Mulu Great Cave system with a couple of armed park rangers. His petrol had been having trouble with the illegal collection of edible swiftlet nests, highly prized by the Chinese for making bird nest soup, outside of the carefully controlled season and Oswald wanted to see for himself. The illicit harvesting of the delicacy prevented birds from breeding and threatened the valuable trade, licensed to the local Bajau villagers.

As we entered the first Mafia cavern, breathtaking pinnacles of sunlit around the upper perimeter were slowly extinguished - tension hung palpable in the air as hundreds of eyes watched us from high on their precarious bamboo ladders. We kept close on Oswald’s heels, conscious of the hounds motorists and silent in the dark above us, our footsteps echoing as we penetrated to the inner caves, where the primitive waters tunnelled to habitation 40,000 years ago.

It was a never-ending sight of relief.

We were in Malaysian Borneo preparing a tourism master plan for Sarawak, and we drove with our expert to the sprawling suburban homes that would be our base for the coming months, they explained the project approach to their languid, logical Kiwi way.

We were a monitor study of many sectors, and the revolving team consisted of a roster of New Zealand professors, British biologists and Malaysian experts. To add, the itinerary of 40,000 years ago.

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Cyclone Titli has been categorized as ‘extremely severe’ and has sustained winds of 140 km/h as it makes landfall on the Odisha coast of eastern India as we speak. You can see its size in this satellite radar image (left). The cyclone will now veer northeastwards, and its outer tentacles will graze Nepal on Friday bringing blizzard conditions in the high mountains and driving rain elsewhere. The pre-Dasain showers could linger into the weekend, but it will be blown away quickly by prevailing westerlies. The persistent haze will also be blown off temporarily giving way to bluer skies and mountain views next week in time for Dasain.

KATHMANDU

In 2008, I returned to Kathmandu with an overwhelming desire to drive a car, but not just any car: a Porsche. Serendipity turned this dream into reality this week. In the parking lot of the Hyatt Regency in Kathmandu, there suddenly appeared 30 vintage cars worth $10 million in spectacular condition, including two 1925 Bentleys, a 1955 Chevrolet, half a dozen Datsun 240Zs, a 1959 Mercedes 220S, and 3 Porches 911s. They slipped in unannounced. The Nepal Tourism Board had no idea, and the country’s pre-eminent motor enthusiast magazine had not heard of the Endurance Rally Association’s Himalayan Adventure.

This was a golden opportunity to promote Nepal as a destination for high-end adventure tourism. If a group of millionaire adventurers can drive overland to Kathmandu, we can attract more of their creed to this beautiful country. None of the drivers had ever heard of Kathmandu’s Darbar Square, so we hijacked the rally in the name of Nepal tourism promotion.

There were two hurdles: pre-holiday traffic, which would mean at least an hour drive each way, and Hanuman Dhoka was pedestrianised. But a photo-op of beautiful cars parked in front of ancient temples would send a strong signal all over the world that Nepal is open for business.
PHOTO returns to KATHMANDU

The third edition of Nepal’s international photography festival is all set to kick off on Friday for a month-long festival of images. As a sign of the times, the shows will now invoke on gender, identity, as well as explore how patriarchy and sexuality affect power dynamics in societies around the world.

This year, the extravagance of images will spill over beyond Patan to Kathmandu. The walls and alleys of the two cities are once again plastered with photographs, projections, murals in preparation for the shows, exhibits, panel discussions and installations. They will use the visual medium to bring together the city and its citizens. Join its past with its present and future, and connect it all to the outside world.

“Photo Kathmandu is curating works on gender, power, identity, patriarchy and sexuality through its exhibitions,” says festival director Niyati Thapa Nakkebuddha.

The festival will be inaugurated by Minister for Women, Children and Senior Citizens Tham Maya Thapa on 12 October. There are 14 print exhibitions, four slideshow nights, 17 talks by artists and panel discussions, and eight workshops and exchanges, and mixed media residency programs. This year Photo Kathmandu will also host a South Asia Incubator program. The media residency is a platform where artists will work for a month on individual projects to showcase it at the end.

More than 50 national and international artists, including photographers, curators, editors, writers from 25 countries are taking part in the festival which the organisers estimate will get a million visitors. Artists and photographers from Italy, Germany, Bangladesh, China, United Kingdom, South Africa, USA, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Finland, Iran, Spain, Turkey, Canada, and Pakistan will be exhibiting.

Happy hippies

Thanks to her striking features, Teri was the ideal model for her Cohen’s experimental photography. She was a gifted artist whose work is yet to be recognised. Teri was seen with her Cohen and also in a more casual setting, with her violin and guitar and young men at Swallowtail.

The hippies were the page turners of Kathmandu. As a skater tinged with her glamour they were a constant sight. Through her art, Teri fulfilled the modernist role of a common woman.
Lucia De Vries

In the early 1970s, two women from very different backgrounds met in Kathmandu and became inseparable friends. Both were hippies whose unique stories will be part of the Prince Kothari Festival next four weeks. 

Peta Vujevic was a German actress, model and muse, a member of the experimental Living Theater and partner of American beat poet and photographer Allen Cohen. Petra and Peta traveled around to Nepal during the hippie era and settled in Kathmandu. Together, with former Velvet Underground drummer Angus Macbeth, the published books and magazines on one paper under the name "Barbora Maria Sandonnari". 

Peta acted as a model for John's hallucination photography, using Kathmandu as a 45 years ago in the backdrop. She experimented with different art forms and created notebooks filled with visionary drawings and writings, inspiring Nepal hippies like Jimmy Hua and Trilochan Shrestha and had a special interest in the ghastly supernatural. A THOUSAND WORDS: Vidhya Shercha on the road at the Khyang Restaurant in Jhochhen and the German actress Petra Vujevic who made Kathmandu her spiritual home. These and other photographs from the hippie era will be on display in "The Story of Kathmandu Festival". 

The Gangster of Love

Trilochan Shrestha was a hippie even before the word was invented.

Trilochan Shrestha was the son of Nepal's first hippie. Born in 1943 as the eldest son to a wealthy Newar family, he grew up in Jhochhen where his aunt lived. Trilochan used to skip school to swim in the Bagmati at Pashupati, and it was there that he met the Aghori Babas, a cult of Shaivite ascetics. They took him under their wing, and inspired the young boy to grow his hair and to smoke.

He was always an overexcited child, nowadays I would be diagnosed with ADHD. Ganga helped a lot, it cooled me down. For me, it is a herbal medicine," says Trilochan, who easily connected with the overland travelers.

I was a bit of a hippie before the word was invented. I was the babas of the twentieth century. I simply loved them."

With his Mediterranean complexion and easy going nature, Trilochan was mistaken for a Westerner, and the Western hippies in Jhochhen were intrigued by his ability to light a chillum. "You smoke like a chef," they told him admiringly.

Trilochan's first hippie friend was Sigh Finger Eddie, an American bohemian who was credited with popularising Goa as a tourist destination. Trilochan started living with a group of go-go girls, and the group's influence on him was strong.

The group would often hang out at the Khyang Restaurant in Jhochhen, which became a popular spot for hippies and tourists alike. Trilochan used to frequent the restaurant, and it was there that he first met Petra Vujevic.

When Nepal became a destination for overland travelers in the 1980s, a young man was ready: Trilochan Shrestha, probably Nepal's first hippie. Born in 1943 as the eldest son to a wealthy Newar family, he grew up in Jhochhen where his aunt lived. Trilochan used to skip school to swim in the Bagmati at Pashupati, and it was there that he met the Aghori Babas, a cult of Shaivite ascetics. They took him under their wing, and inspired the young boy to grow his hair and to smoke.

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The Gangster of Love

Trilochan Shrestha was a hippie even before the word was invented.

In 1976, under pressure from the US government, Nepal banned the use and sale of marijuana. Trilochan started a campaign to revoke the decision, and he was arrested with 30 other families. Although no drugs were found on him, Trilochan spent seven years in prison.

When he came out, the scene had changed. Marijuana had been replaced by hard drugs like "brown sugar" and heroin. A new breed of travelers started coming, but they went to Thamel. Trilochan went back to Pashupati and reconnected with his old friends.

He still lives "the hippie life" and practices sun meditation, which he considers to be his "new drug." Despite suffering two strokes, he still visits trance parties, dancing all night.

"Sometimes I look at myself and I think: Wow, beautiful, the child in me is still intact. I remain a hippie," he says. "I feel blessed having met many beautiful souls from all over the world. They taught me wonderful things."
No Dasain in Kalikot

Karnali mothers struggle to feed families as country prepares for the festive season

Seetashma Thapa
in Kalikot

More than 100 women have gathered outside the district hospital in Manma, the main town in one of Nepal’s most underserved districts. It was an exhausting journey for the women who were all pregnant or carrying small babies. They are here to receive rations of fortified cereal, attend nutrition counselling and get a health check-up.

As the rest of Nepal prepares for Dasain holidays with family gatherings and feasts, here in Kalikot, families struggle to feed their children. It is a silent, growing hunger that leaves children stunted and mothers anemic.

The special food not only helps prevent malnutrition in expecting mothers and children, but also acts as an incentive to attract women and caregivers to local health facilities so that they deliver in hospital and raise healthy babies.

With a red vermillion running through their hair and dressed in their best clothes, mothers as young as 14 have gathered to receive their cereal packs. No husbands accompany the pregnant wives, either because they are away working in India, or because they leave raising babies to the women.

Deep-seated patriarchy in the Karnali is one of the reasons for widespread malnutrition among children. Girls are married off early. Their bodies have not fully developed when they give birth. Children raise children. The teenage mothers suffer from anaemia, malnutrition and have low birth weight babies. This leads to a cycle of malnutrition: mothers give birth to stunted infants.

The Karnali has the highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the country with 54.6% of children undernourished. Despite poor nutrition, only 47% of women receive antenatal care and only half the children get a nutritious diet.

One of the mothers here is Basanti BK, whose husband left to work in an apple farm in India, promising to send his pregnant wife money. Seven months have passed and he has not heard from him.

Basanti was married at 14 and was pregnant soon after. “I did not know what to eat, there was no one to tell me, until I went to the health post. The fortified cereal gave me strength,” Basanti says. She also feeds it now to her nine-month son. Inhans and Rindu BK were also married in their early teens, and now have three children each, whom they are raising singly since their husbands are away. To earn extra money, they break stones by the highway even when pregnant and after delivery. Rindu’s six-year-old daughter looks after her baby sister while she works.

“When I took my daughter for her first check-up, they said she was malnourished and to feed her the nutritious food,” said Rindu, and after three months her baby is gaining weight and is healthy. Most women like Basanti, Rindu and Inhans in the Karnali are single mothers because their husbands are away. Besides raising babies, they do all the household chores, farm, collect fodder, and also work to earn money. They face discrimination from in-laws.

The terrace farms that wrinkie the steep mountainous are on rain. Crops are often destroyed by droughts, floods, hailstorms or landslides. Families then depend solely on cash they send home from India. Remittances, difficult terrain and poor roads mean higher prices for food.

The special fortified cereal is a service provided by the government with support from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) targeted at Nepal’s most vulnerable families. When they come to the health posts, staff counsel mothers about eating locally available nutritious food and they get to take home rations of the fortified cereal.

Says Pippa Bradfield, WFP Nepal Director: “Although food production in the Karnali is above average this year, women from single headed households and marginalised communities do not have access or the purchasing power to buy the food. The cereal fills the nutrition gap.”

Seetashma Thapa worked for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). More pictures online.
Two new galleries in town

Located in a corner behind the big bell in Bodhnath, Gallery LA (Lati’s Art) just completed its first year, representing Kathmandu’s thriving trend of little art galleries. This means galleries can be commercially viable, and artists themselves are at the forefront of the change, holding events and art exhibitions.

Gallery LA was founded by Laxman Raju Lama and Atishka Maharjan, and is holding an exhibition to celebrate its first anniversary. The gallery mostly features the works of young artists and fresh graduates; one work shows a long line of men holding umbrellas over their successors as each generation becomes more modern in outlook, another depicts mushroom clouds as disheartened with modern warfare, while a man who ties on different devil masks symbolizes confusion in modern society.

“We are trying to encourage young artists,” says Laxman Raju Lama. “Senior artists can make a living through their art, but the younger ones cannot give all of their time to creative work, and they paint only when they are commissioned to do so.”

Commercial art with mountain scenery have always sold briskly in Kathmandu, but selling creative expression has been more difficult. However, with more and more artists becoming enterprising, things are slowly changing. Gallery LA exhibits are priced at anything between Rs 1,000 to Rs 50,000. Monte Art Gallery in Maitighar was established last year and has garnered interest among art lovers and buyers in the area frequented by expats. Its ongoing exhibition, Ages of Painting, features Nepali artists from different generations, from Shashi Thapa to Bihari KC. The expressions range from severe line works depicting Kathmandu, to traditional Mithil paintings and abstract pieces. Realistic paintings of women outside traditional Newar houses depict ongoing innovation in Nepali art, with elements of traditional Mithils in modern compositions.

Sagar KC, amateur artist and founder of the gallery, agrees that art is exploring new frontiers of expression, but also cautions that it has a long way to go. “Several new galleries like Classic Art Gallery in Chakapsar have opened after we started out, and alternative venues like restaurants and theatres provide space to host art exhibitions, showing there is more interest. But Kathmandu still has a long way to go.”

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BABA GIRLS: A woman prepares a deep fried lentil patties, as customers wait in a traditional Newari eatery in Indra Chowk on Monday.

WINNING GLORY: Neelam Karki Niraula, author of Yechnaya, receives Madan Puraskar in Patan on Thursday.

NEW HEIGHTS: Turkish Airlines Country Manager Abdullah Turan Kenici is awarded by Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari on Monday for his contributions to Nepal's tourism and as official airline partner at the recent International Travel Bloggers and Media Conference.

FLYING HIGH: Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari presents the Personality Award to Suga Rana Komal, Managing Director of Nepal Airways during the 47th General meeting of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Nepal Chapter on Monday.

MAKING NOISE: Nursing students demand justice for Nirmala Panta and all other victims of rape and sexual violence during a demonstration at Mandala on Monday.
Nepal may be one of the most liberal countries in the region in safeguarding rights of transgender people, but it is yet to legalize same-sex marriage. New legal provisions have made it even more difficult for transgender couples to get legal status and live in dignity.

Nepal’s new Civil Code Act that came into effect in August has not criminalized same-sex marriage, but it defines marriage as an act of two opposite-sex people above 20 years of age accepting each other as husband and wife.

This provision, according to senior advocate Satish Krishna Kharel, has not just denied the existence of transgender people, it also means same-sex couples cannot get married legally, and they cannot live in without fear.

This is one step forward, two steps back. After the Supreme Court ruled in 2007 that citizens can choose their gender identity based on ‘self-feeling’, Nepal’s Ladakhi, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community has won a series of battles for equal rights. They can now register as a third gender for citizenship, passport, voter ID and even in the census.

But Nepal’s reputation as a tolerant, forward-thinking country in terms of the LGBT rights is now in danger not just because the Civil Code accepts only opposite-sex marriage, but also because this new Act contains several discriminatory provisions like only son or daughter (and not a third gender) are entitled to inheritance.

Nepal Times caught up with three transgender couples to find out how the newly-enacted civil code has shattered their dreams, and is affecting their everyday lives.

### Armand Rana and Artisha Rana

Armand and Artisha met on Facebook, and instantly fell in love. They have been living together in an apartment in Ladipatti for the last four years. Armand’s mother has accepted Artisha as her daughter-in-law, and Artisha’s mother also frequently visits them. They are happy that their families have accepted them as who they are, but they are disappointed that the government will not allow them to live as husband and wife.

Artisha is on hormone treatment to feminize herself, and says, “We want to get married and adopt a child, but the law does not allow us to live as who we are.”

### Dipesh Bhandari and Ani Lama

Ani Lama, 25, underwent sex change surgery in Bangkok six months ago, and it is now difficult to tell from her physical appearance that she was once a man.

But, long before changing her sex, she had started to live together with a man whom she first befriended on Facebook. For the last three years, she has been living as the wife of Dipesh Bhandari, a 27-year-old statistics officer at an NGO working for LGBT rights. Dipesh and Ani want to get married, and are waiting for the day when Nepal passes the law legalizing same-sex marriage.

### Anjel Lama and Saurabh Shrestha

Anjel Lama, 19, was born as a boy, but she always felt and behaved like a girl. Her name was Sakti Lama in her birth certificate. She has been living together with Saurabh Shrestha, 26, in Kathmandu for the last two years.

Saurabh and Anjel want to move to Australia as husband and wife, but they cannot get a marriage certificate because the new law only allows opposite-sex marriage. Anjel was crowned as the Miss Pink 2018, and is preparing herself to participate in next year’s international transgender beauty pageant in Thailand. But she does not have a citizenship certificate yet, without which she cannot apply for a visa.

She went to her home village in Kavre last year to apply for citizenship, and wanted to be identified as a third gender, but she was ridiculed and sent away.

Although some LGBT people have acquired Nepali citizenship based on their true identity after the 2007 verdict, this is still not possible for those whose identity was already marked either as son or daughter in birth certificates.
The sacrifice of animal sacrifices

Appeasing the gods through blood-letting may slowly go out of fashion

Ashish Mishra

Dasain is here again, a festival of shoplifting, family reunions, feasting and controversies. Pierce debates again rape online and offline about whether Dasain is indigenous or not, if there should be so many days off. But the loudest arguments in recent years are about the cult of animal sacrifices.

Millions of sheep, goats, cattle and poultry will be killed during the fortnight of festivities. Not all are ritually sacrificed, some are slaughtered by butchers to meet the increased demand for mutton. Many Phapas and their husband sell goats, sheep, chickens and ducks at the animal market in Kathmandu. She says: “Dasain sees a peak in sales. During other times of the year, we mostly supply animals to slaughterhouses, but in Dasain the animals are sold to local butchers.”

Most Hindu sacrifices do not involve animals at all, but vegetables or dairy products. But in Nepal, the Kali cult manifests itself in animal sacrifices which are not just killing for the sake of killing, but hold a larger symbolism. By sacrificing goats and buffaloes, devotees believe they are killing evil counter forces and evil spirits – humans are removing the animal instinct in themselves.

Cultural historian Madan Mohan Malla explains that sacrifices are a sign of respect to the Goddess Durga (in her various forms as kali, Bhasmari, Mali) to confront and defeat the Mahishasur buffalo demon. His killing is represented by sacrificing multiple buffaloes in front of Durga temple around Nepal at Dasain. Priestess Mahesh Maya Jha of the Chaar Narayan and Bhal Dega temples at Patan adds: “Human sacrifices used to represent the ultimate sacrifice – there was nothing to hold one back from attaining true liberation (moksha). But human life is too precious to be used directly for religious symbolism which is why the practice was replaced with animal sacrifices. As social consciousness evolves and the times change, the practice of animal sacrifice may also die out.”

But she is opposed to the protests against sacrificing animals and the ruling of the Supreme Court to ban animal sacrifices at the Gaijatra festival. She should have interfered as religious freedom is a constitutional bill of rights and the courts cannot start or end a custom. Such matters, good or bad, must be left to society.

However, the cult of animal sacrifices goes beyond religious customs. Webb Koons, Professor of Anthropology at University in Michigan, makes the case that sacrificing animals came about after humans evolved as natural hunters and possessed predatory instincts.

But as societies evolved and institutionalised religions developed, such taking of life for food came to be regarded as morally wrong as humans were capable of producing food through agriculture without the need for violence. Early civilisations therefore developed ritualistic sacrifices to the Gods to justify the killing of animals for meat.

The hunter instinct is deeply rooted in humans to this day, and most religions, tribal and mainstream, possess one form of sacrifice or the other. In Islam it is Qurbani, in Christianity the sacrificial lamb, and in Hinduism the Bull.

“Animal sacrifices are not unique to any one religion – it is a universal theme driven by our innate animal instinct,” says Koon.

In response to international activities against animal sacrifices, the Nepali government has outlawed the mass slaughter of animals in Gaijatra. Individual sacrifices of animals in Dasain are also being gradually replaced by buying meat from supermarkets or the neighbourhood butcher.

Says animal rights activist Subhi Shrestha: “Beheading animals at home makes children impulsive to violence, they get used to the sight of bloodletting. You don’t have to be a psychologist to know that this risks normalising violence in the minds of youngsters.”

The usual justification for animal sacrifices is that they appease the god and forestall whatever is to come. But given the mass scale and method in Nepal’s history, that argument does not seem to hold. More than 99 nobles were killed in the Bhandarkhal Massacre of 1806 that bought Bhimsen Thapa to power, 55 were killed by Jung Bahadur in the Kot in 1845, and the 2003 massacre nearly wiped out Nepal’s royal family.

Today, the Kot Massacre is still marked at Dasain by not violent rituals, but by the mass slaughter of hundreds of buffaloes, goats and birds.

Binge drinking during Dasain causes many cured alcoholics to suffer relapses

Sonia Awale

Poor pressure drove Sudip to start drinking at a young age. Soon, he was an addict and lost his job at a travel agency. His personal relationships soured and health deteriorated. He dabbled in various trades, but was often isolated from early morning.

He did sober up. When the earthquake of 2015, he was travelling with his infant son. The shock drove him to drink again. At first, he was coping with the trauma of his son, but nothing worked until he was in touch with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in Kathmandu. The challenge finally made it possible to overcome his own addiction.

“I used to find solution in drinking. Now, I know that not drinking is the solution,” says Sudip, now in his mid 40s and 15-months sober.

We caught up with Sudip during one of his meetings with AA in Patan this week where 23 men from their 20s to 60s were on hand.

While the oldest member spoke about how he had not had a drink for 15 years, a newly sober member talked about how difficult it had been for him. Each was met with applause.

Alcohol kills more than three million people across the globe each year and disables 5% of the world, mostly men. A recent report by the journal Lancet reported that no level of alcohol improves health, challenging the notion that moderate drinking is good for the heart.

Some 21% of men in Nepal are regular drinkers, less than 5% of women. The national per capita alcohol consumption among Nepali men and women is 2.2 litres, but increases to 28.8 litres among drinkers (66.2 litres per month). Nearly 1% of Nepal suffers from alcohol dependence, according to WHO, but this does not count homemade alcohol.

“While there has been an increase in alcohol consumption in Nepal and it is a bigger risk factor than smoking, air pollution or adulterated food. Plus it leads to an increase in crime rate,” says psychiatrist Raaju Shyaku at Patan Hospital.

The challenge is that cultural drinking is accepted, people use it as self medication, and social drinking has become the norm. Sales of alcohol shoots up during festivals like Dasain and Tihar.

“Alcohol-related problems cause a common cause of hospital admissions, and it is rising with liver cirrhosis and mouth cancer and infectious diseases,” says Buddha Bhakal, a psychiatrist at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

Binge drinking during festivals like Dasain are worrisome because that is when cured alcoholics are most susceptible to suffer relapse.

“Relapse is a trigger, a temptation for all the recovering alcoholics like us,” admits Sumeet Timelike, Chair of Alcoholism Anonymous in Kathmandu.

AA began in Nepal in 1970s and holds meetings six days a week at Patan Hospital, Teaching Hospital and Lagunchowk. There are currently 60 regular members.

Timelike himself struggled with addiction for 25 years and has been sober for the past 14 months.

“AA meetings are for those who

Festivals of Dasain-Tihar and other festivals are gradually becoming more gender inclusive

Sewa Bhattarai and Sabina Devkota

When Mina Gautam’s wife was pregnant with their second child, her older daughter came to her with a new toy: “I want a sister, someone to talk to,” her daughter said. Mina and Gautam have no one to entertain their “isha tika,” said the then 7-year old.

Bhai Tika is the day of Tihar when sisters and brothers bring each other and the year. On 14th of November, Gautam presented her daughter the cup to celebrate the festival, no matter what. When her wife in law gave birth to a daughter, the family welcomed 2 mixed babies, now 10 and 1, 5 days after each.

“Our daughters do not need to miss school because they do not have a bhai,” says Gautam. “They give each other gifts, pray for each other’s happiness. We even decided to make their bhai on the 16th.”

Bhai Tika is an opportunity for reunions and enjoyment of female identity. It is a yearly event at the festival, but in its time, it means much more in the festival of rudra Janshath, staged in eastern Nepal and India in spring. The festival also celebrates weddings, but it means women in the role of grandmothers of the house.

“Women pray for longevity and prosperity of their brothers, but brothers do not wish the same for their sisters, so the sisters are given less importance,” recalls the girl’s mother Usha Adhikari. The hierarchy is even more evident in the festival of rudra Janshath, staged in eastern Nepal and India in spring. That festival also celebrates weddings, but it means women in the role of grandmothers of the house.

“Seeing men as protectors and women as objects that need protector-promotes aggressive masculinity in society,” says Padma Paudel, 22, who has always observed rudra Janshath from her house.

With festivals like color-obsession in the Madheshi community, women face the challenge of their lives, but not daughters. Pashupati Terath, 56, a married woman says: “Financial traditions like these harm not only women but also men. Little 6-year-old sisters are sent to guard their younger sisters. If their sisters burden men then they cannot possibly carry. It is worse for
drinking is considered a habit, a coping mechanism to deal with stress, and therein lies the biggest problem," explains Zimmermann, who has noticed a rise in female alcoholics among his patients.

"At any given time, up to 10% of patients here are alcohol addicted, and most have damaged liver organs due to excessive drinking. But that is just a tip of the iceberg because those are only who come to hospital," he adds.

Alcoholism is especially prevalent in impoverished western Nepal, where rice is grown but the government sells it for sport to feed alcoholism among its patients. But we have not thought about the much higher price we are paying for treatment," says Bishnu Basnet of Benkhal Hospital in Ashiam.

The government adopted a strict policy for alcohol sales last year, making it mandatory for manufacturers to put pictorial warnings covering at least 25% of the bottle like in cigarette packs, and to use alcohol advertising. People under 21 are not allowed to buy alcohol products, and retailers cannot sell alcohol from 5AM to 7PM. While some rules have come into effect, the alcohol industry has fought back. Increasing the tax on alcohol has worked in most countries, but here it could force users to turn to undeclared materials. A complete ban in Bishnu has actually resulted in massive smuggling of Nepali-made beer and spirits across the border. Says psychiatrist Raju Shukla: "Alcoholism should be the number one public health agenda. If we can reduce alcohol consumption, it will remove many health issues.'