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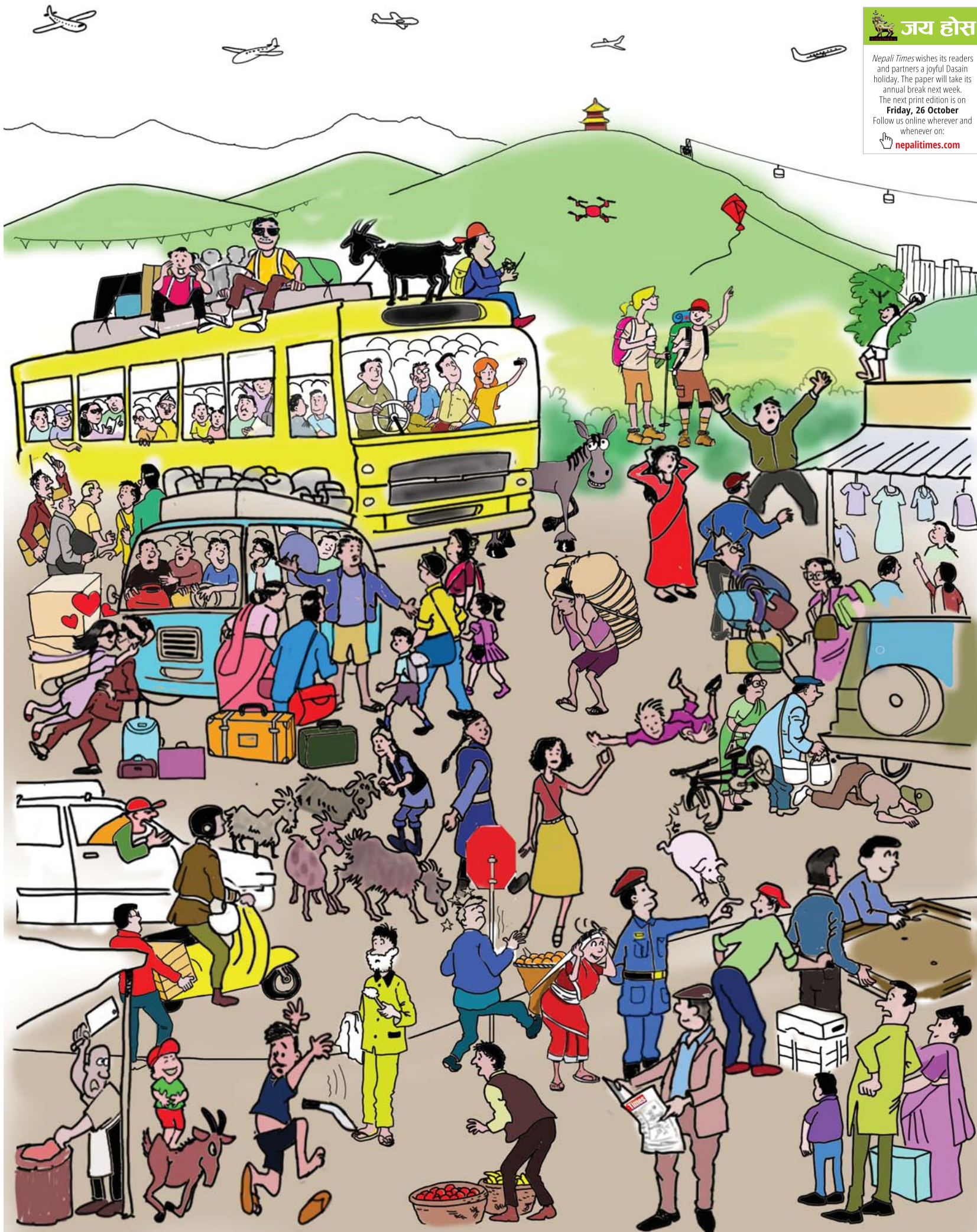
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जय होस

Nepali Times wishes its readers and partners a joyful Dasain holiday. The paper will take its annual break next week. The next print edition is on **Friday, 26 October**. Follow us online wherever and whenever on: nepalitimes.com

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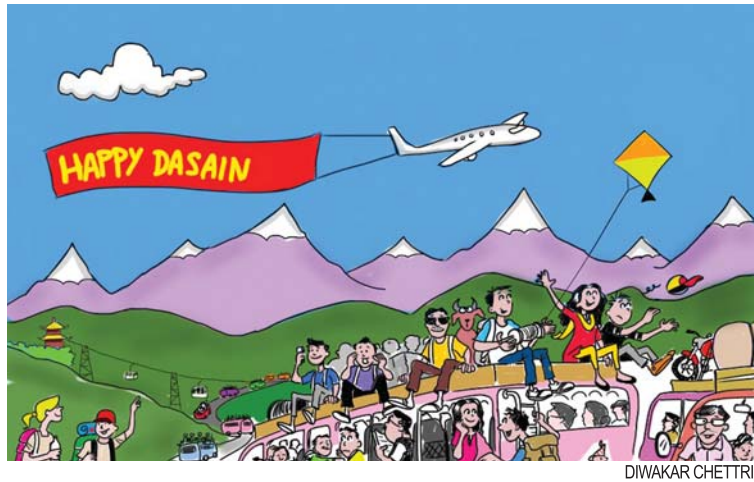
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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

OCTOBERFEST

Like all festivals in whichever religion, Dasain probably has its origins in pre-historic harvest rituals. The rains are over, the sky is blue again, the terrace farms sway with the gold of ripening paddy. Our animist ancestors worshipped the sky, rivers and mountains and revered the passing of seasons. The myths of the triumph of good over evil and the killing of the water buffalo as an epitome of evil were added on later by insitutionalised religion.

This Dasain, it has gotten harder than ever before to differentiate between good and evil. There is so much fake news flying about that the lines between right and wrong are being blurred. Nothing is what it seems. The murder rape of Nirmala Panta has forced the government to act, but it acted by suspending two police officers for destroying evidence. But on whose orders were those two junior cops tampering with the crime scene?

Comrade Bamdev Gautam lost his Bardiya parliamentary seat in last year's elections. But electoral defeat never deterred anyone in Nepal to remain in power. So, with a little bit of help from fellow-Communists in the ruling party, he tried to convince MPs in Humla and Piuthan to give up their seat, but after they balked, Gautam's desperation began to show.



Together with our shared history and the Nepali language, Dasain is what binds Nepal together. This is not just a Hindu festival, it is a Nepali one.

Finally, he got his party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal to convince the MP from Kathmandu 7, Rambir Manandhar, to resign. If the resignation is approved by the party (Prime Minister Oli is said to be against it), by-elections for that seat will be held next month. Manandhar is not unhappy, though. He actually appears victorious because he says he has been promised a seat in the Upper House, a ministerial post and entry into the party's central committee.

We have come to expect such shenanigans from Nepal's so-called Communists. There is precedent: when Dahal lost from his Kirtipur constituency in 2013, and was headed for sure defeat in Siraha, 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 so ticked off he may go back to war and there would be no new Constitution. For the sake of preserving the peace, they had to cheat.

Last Dasain, unbeknownst to many, Oli and Dahal were deep in secret negotiations

to forge an electoral alliance in parliamentary elections in November 2017. The two parties needed each other: the Maoists to launder their war crimes, and the UML to ensure that a weak coalition would not be toppled again by India. The plan worked brilliantly, and the alliance won a thumping majority. The two parties went on to merge a few months later after Oli and Dahal agreed to be co-chairs and take turns being PM.

Among the chief architects of the merger was none other than Bamdev Gautam. This Dasain, Gautam is back in the news, and trying to pull victory from the jaws of defeat. The united Communists are factionalised, and coalescing around Oli, Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal. A monolithic party with a historic majority has squandered most of its public support through feckless indecisiveness, threatening talk, unparalleled corruption and a debilitating inability to deliver.

This Dasain, we have to try to temporarily forget ugly truths like these that have kept this country back. We will press the pause button and contemplate all that is good in Nepali society, and remind ourselves about the things we can be proud of as a nation: the fortitude and strength of our people who are tolerant

to a fault, the value we place on our hardwon 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 29 million people live and work abroad, Dasain becomes an important time for the diaspora. Together with our shared history and the Nepali language, Dasain is what binds Nepal together. This is not just a Hindu festival, it is a Nepali one. Wherever in the world they are, whatever their creed or nationality, Nepalis come together at Dasain. The festival has transcended its religious antecedent 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 Pashupatinath, the patron deity, to set 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 a serious effort themselves.



10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The post-Dasain issue from ten years ago (#421 of 17-23 October 2008) looked at what the parties needed to do after the holidays. There was a constitution to write, the Maoist militia to demobilise and integrate into the national army, and political infighting to sort out. Not much has changed, not even the cast of characters, as this excerpt from the page 1 story shows:

'The friendly mood of the festive season seems to have affected the top leaders of the NC and the Maoists, who have been using tea party diplomacy this week to patch up differences. Even the body language of the troika (UML's Jhalnath Khanal, the NC's Girija Koirala and Maoist Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal) at the UML tea party on Wednesday was of bonhomie and camaraderie.

Although sharp differences remain, both within parties in the coalition and among each other, there seems to be a realisation that progress on governance and constitution-building can't happen in an atmosphere of acrimony and politics-as-usual. NC leaders have said they have no intention of bringing down the government "for the next six months" but Koirala rejected overtures from the Maoists to join a consensus government.'

ONLINE PACKAGES



FESTIVE INDULGENCE

Alcohol kills more than 3 million people every year around the world, and is a leading cause of injuries. Sale of alcohol shoots up during festivals like Dasain and Tihar, and people indulge in binge drinking. Watch a former alcoholic speak about his battle with addiction and hear expert suggestions. *Story: 14-15.*



A DASAIN FEAST

How about adding a lighter touch to the otherwise carnivorous bingeing this festive season, with Nepal's favourite veggie dishes? Join us in video we prepare a Dasain feast with *Gundruk bhatmas, alu tama, kalo dal and alu gravy*, and try these recipes at your own homes.

WHAT'S TRENDING



On thin ice on the Khumbu

by Kunda Dixit
Global warming is melting the slopes below Mt Everest, and this visual story with aerial photographs and video of the Khumbu Glacier was by far the most popular content from last week's *Nepali Times*. The story was shared widely on social media, and the video was the most popular on the paper's YouTube channel. Go online to read and view video about the receding snowlines and shrinking glaciers.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook
- Most visited online page
- Most popular on Twitter
- Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

-
- Nepali Times** @nepalitimes
For a dramatic glimpse of how #GlobalWarming is changing the landscape of the #Himalaya, there is nothing like an aerial perspective. Nepali Times got a chance last week to take these striking images of the terrain below Mt #Everest @kundadixit
-
- marty logan** @martydlogan
It's striking, and frightening, to see how this land of snow and ice in #Nepal is turning brown. The drinking water of more than 1 billion people downstream is also affected. #climatechange
-
- Anobha Gurung** @AnobhaG
These striking images show one of the many impacts in the #Himalaya. We must act now. Thank you @kundadixit @SoniaAwale @nepalitimes

-
- Nepali Times** @nepalitimes
Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change. However, the inability of circulation models to capture Nepal's climate dynamics means it is difficult to project rise in temperature and changes in rainfall. @dixit_ajaya writes
-
- Rebecca** @Re_be_cca
Reaching out to climate affected people is also another challenge in Nepal. The climate change knowledge rarely reach the climate vulnerable people.

-
- Nepali Times** @nepalitimes
#Editorial Although Nepal is a role model in the community-based DOTS process to cure TB, researchers say a more active case detection method is now required. This calls for an increase in Nepal's annual TB control budget of \$18million. #tuberculosis
-
- Mingmar G Sherpa** @DrMingmaSherpa
The existing system before DOTS was much better. There was no free supply of medicines from the government then. DOTS expansion would create more Multi Drug Resistant (MDR) TB. Nepal is model for MDR & XDR TB creation.

CLIMATE CHANGE

I am deeply shocked by your pictures from below Mt Everest. My first trek there was in Nov 1967 and have been back there in 80s and 90s. But it is hard to believe the barren landscape you show now.

Hans Hofer

■ Brilliant work. (On thin ice in the Khumbu, #930, Kunda Dixit) I hope this marks the beginning of many in-depth scientific studies to follow. What are we, the world, going to do about global warming that will obviously impact a huge swathe of the global population?

Akhilesh Upadhyay

■ Thanks for the awareness. I am sure I have burned less carbon than my foreign friends. May the Mighty Himalayas Prevail.

Anup Gupta

■ Powerful article and photos -- nothing like it. So impressive and informative and depressing.

Jon Swan

■ Why should an average Nepali (whose annual per capita CO2 emission is about 1/15th of a Swiss) and who lives in a country over 2/5th of which is covered in forest pay for climate impact? Shouldn't polluters pay?

Himamshu Ghimire

TB

Good to see this focus on TB -- its prevalence and its potential eradication in Nepal (TB, Sonia Awale, #930). My son is a paediatrician with qualifications in infectious diseases and a specialist researcher on TB, currently based in Cape Town, South Africa. I shall be sending him copies of these very interesting contributions published by the *Nepali Times*.

David Seddon

DASAIN VACATION

Why don't we spend our Dasain vacation in Nepal's hill stations like Ilam, Pathibhara, Atharai, Manang, Mustang, Dolpa, Rara/Mugu, Karnali? We could have campfires, take tents, and hire catering. We should also look at this avenue to promote domestic tourism.

Indra Sitoula



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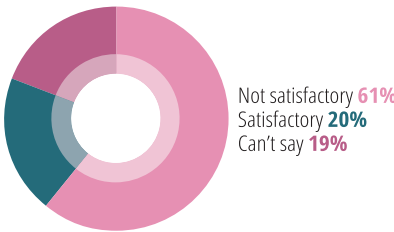
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Weekly Internet Poll #931

Q. How do you rate the performance of the Finance Minister so far?

Total votes: 140



Weekly Internet Poll #932
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Are our festivals patriarchal?



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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Budgetary support

The Government of Nepal and the World Bank signed two agreements totaling \$200 million as budgetary support for critical reform programs in Nepal's financial and energy sectors. The first agreement with a credit of \$100 million will finance the Fourth Financial Sector Stability Development Policy Credit and the second will support the First Programmatic Energy Sector Development Policy Credit Project.

Economic strategy

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Akbar Al Baker addressed key government, economic and business leaders on the opening day of the International Products Exhibition and Conference 2018, at the



Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre on Tuesday. In a panel 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 held the 'Study in Europe Fair 2018', a higher education two-day fair at Hotel Annapurna 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 last leg of the three-series Carlsberg Golf 2018 ended with Pavitra Kumar Karki securing the top position in the Nett

Section with 300 points and Prithvi Malla becoming the Gross Champion of the series with 490 points. This tournament was opened to amateur golfers from across the nation and was played in a Stableford format with ¾ handicap.

7 million passengers

Turkish Airlines recently announced its load factor results for September which reached 83.4%. The passenger growth



trend continued in September, with the total number of passengers carried going up by 1%, reaching about 7 million passengers. The airline's international load factor increased by 2 points to 83% and domestic load factor increased by 2 points to 87% approximately.

Air ambulance

Hop Himalaya, which previously operated as Makalu Air, has introduced a new air ambulance service for medical evacuation with modern medical equipment on board. With their base in Pokhara, the airline has two pilots and three co-pilots to fly a Cessna Grand Caravan C206 and a C208B aircraft for the service.

100 cars a day

Go Ford streamlined its distributor channels across the country to deliver 100 cars to its customers in one day on the occasion of Ghatasthapana, ensuring that customers enjoy the festive occasion in their brand new Ford car. Customers also availed special cash discounts, gifts worth Rs50,000-2,50,000, and a chance to visit Switzerland.

prabhu BANK

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Bat caves and edible bird nests

How New Zealand and Nepal knowhow helped develop tourism in Borneo

A slender snake slithered high above our heads on the damp rock wall and the brown guano floor felt spongy beneath our feet, alive with golden cockroaches. But the overpowering sensation was the smell of bat droppings that carpeted the massive cave system.



Shafts of torchlight revealed swiftlets darting around their tiny nests stuck with saliva securely onto the cave ceiling. Clumps of dark, leafy undergrowth hung from dripping crevices, and legions of nocturnal hanging bats waited for dusk to leave the cave in a swirling smoke spiral, swapping places with the birds returning home for the night. I shivered in the hot dank air as we passed stalactites clinging to the ceiling, a palette of pastel hues.

A cornerstone of Sarawak tourism, Gunung Mulu National Park is a world heritage site with huge caves and karst formations set in a mountain equatorial rainforest. 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 Russell Wallace (he of the Wallace Line and Charles Darwin's nemesis) but mapped only in the late 1970s by the Royal Geographical Society, Mulu contains a massive underground network of over 150 km of watery cave passages eroded for millennia out of porous limestone.

Despite Mulu's unique speleological ecosystem and superlative credentials, I felt more comfortable in the rainforest outside, amongst the canopy of tall trees, early morning gibbon calls and unrelenting throb of insects. Dave climbed Mount Mulu, up steep slippery trails past the jagged



THE CULTURE-IST

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 Bracken Tisen, through the Niah Great Cave system with a couple of armed park rangers. His patrols 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, licenced to the local Iban villagers.

As we entered the first Niah cavern, twinkling pins of torchlight 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 hoards motionless and silent in the dark above us, our footsteps echoing as we penetrated to the inner caves where prehistoric relics testified to habitation 40,000 years ago. Striding back through the heavy stillness, it was only when glimmers of daylight signalled we were nearing the exit that I

breathed a sigh of relief.

We were in Malaysian Borneo preparing a tourism master plan for Sarawak, my first big consulting job in 1992. The night I landed in Kuching was hot and close. Les Clark and Dave Bamford met me at the airport and as we drove beneath the flame trees to the sprawling suburban home that would be our base for the coming months, they explained the project approach in their languid, logical Kiwi way.

It was a monster study of many sectors, and the revolving team consisted of a roster of New Zealand professors, British biologists and Malaysian experts. To add credence, Jim Edwards made a cameo appearance to share his Nepal wisdom 'You have to

be clever', as did the urbane Neil Plimmer, former head of PATA and chief of New Zealand tourism. We sat around the polished acres of oval conference table with closed curtains and humming air-con in the State Secretariat whilst Les presented the strategy to our Malaysian client Datuk Chin Jew Bui who listened, fingers steepled and eyes hooded.

Les and Dave sailed the murky swamp of Sarawak politics with Kiwi innocence, relying on rationalism, transparency and honest hard work. I came to admire their equitable un-Asian approach, refusing to haggle in the market and insisting on washing up despite a housemaid. Their trusting natures sometimes came across as naïve and there were a few casualties – a bank account was emptied, kitchen plates were thrown, and voracious ladies tried to take advantage. But the New Zealand partners' pragmatic approach seemed to resonate with clients and more jobs followed. I did not realise it at the time, but for me this was the beginning of a 25-year work association with Tourism Resource Consultants (TRC), and a deep connection with their country.

Tenzin and our young sons joined for a Borneo trip up-river in a native motorised dug out, a hazardous craft as was demonstrated when my husband stood up and tipped over into the shallows, much to the hilarity of Sangjay, Rinchen and the entire watching village.

The proboscis monkeys' weird red noses leered as we cruised cautiously up the Kinabatangan river, and the orphaned orangutans in Sepilok rehabilitation centre gazed down at us sadly from their tree platforms. A coconut throwing competition with the Bamford twins in the garden of our Kuching house proved to be the holiday highlight for the boys. 🇲🇾





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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 swept off temporarily giving way to bluer skies and mountain views next week in time for Dasain.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
24° 13°	24° 14°	24° 13°



Bentleys in Basantapur

How vintage cars arrived at Kathmandu's ancient Darbar Square for a unique photo-op



PHOTOS: MICHAEL KOBOLD



Michael Kobold

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 \$10million in spectacular condition, including two 1925 Bentleys, a 1955 Chevrolet, half dozen Datsun 240Zs, a 1959 Mercedes 220S. And 3 Porsche 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.

Preoccupied with forthcoming holidays, tourism people told us not to waste our time, it would take a month to get permission. We had four hours. Nepal Police pistons heads were much more excited: "Thirty vintage cars in Kathmandu? Really? We are on our way."

Before long, a police escort guided the vintage vehicles through gridlocked traffic, radioing ahead to clear intersections. We made it to Darbar Square in under 15 minutes. There, a friendly official recognised the historic importance of the two Bentleys and granted us free passage. Near New Road, Nepal's oldest retired fire trucks dating back to 1919 were in good company.

"This is one of the coolest things I have ever done in my long career as a rally driver," said Bill Cleyndert of Norfolk in England.

"It is something you only see in movies. It is like we are filming Mad Max Revisited Kathmandu or The Nepalese Job," added a visibly excited Daniel Spadini, a Swiss watch manufacturer and proud owner of a blue Citroen DS20.

Christof Ley of Frankfurt said later he would love to join the fire truck expedition. Next morning, as the Endurance Rally proceeded on to Chitwan, social media was ablaze with hundreds of posts from participants and spectators.

"Nepal is the land time forgot," an official from Nepal Airlines once told me. "Things here happen at their own pace. They just have a way of working out." This is sage wisdom while waiting for our fire truck expedition which has been waiting for sponsors to pay shipping costs. My team and I had been waiting, hoping that one of the countless gods would eventually send us a sign.

One of those signs was the Endurance Rally on Darbar Square this week. The world came to know once more that in Nepal, things have a way of working out. 🇳🇵

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In the early 1970s, two women from very different backgrounds met in Kathmandu and became intimate friends. Both were ‘hippinis’ whose unique stories will be part of the Photo Kathmandu festival next four weeks.

Petra Vogt was a German actress, model and muse, a member of the experimental Living Theater and partner of American beatnik poet and photographer Ira Cohen. Petra and Ira traveled overland to Nepal during the hippie era and settled in Kathmandu. Together with former Velvet Underground drummer Angus MacLise they published books and magazines on rice paper under the name Bardo Matrix Starstreams.

Petra acted as a model for Ira’s hallucination photography, using Kathmandu of 50 years ago as the backdrop. She experimented with different art forms and created notebooks filled with visionary drawings and writings, inspiring Nepali hippies like Jimmy Thapa and Trilochan Shrestha and had a special interest in the aghori



When Nepal became a destination for overland travelers in the 1960s, one young man was ready: Trilochan Shrestha, probably Nepal’s first hippie. Born in 1945 as the oldest son to a wealthy Newar family, he grew up in Jhochen 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.

“I was always an overexcited child, nowadays I would be diagnosed with ADHD. Ganja 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 hippie before the word was invented. Hippies are the babas of the



A THOUSAND WORDS: Vidheha Shrestha on the roof of the Ying Yang Restaurant in Jhochhen and the German actress Petra Vogt who made Kathmandu her spiritual home. These and other photographs from the hippie era will be on display in Freak Street as a part of the Photo Kathmandu festival.

The Gangster of Love

CAPTION: Trilochan Shrestha’s collection shows him as a handsome hippie (*left*), photographed in Kimdol and Pokhara, with girlfriends, and as a baba, conducting his daily fire puja.

He is also seen with a Walkman at Hanuman Dokha, listening to *Talking Heads*.

with overland travelers in Kimdol below Swayambhu, cultivating three longterm relationships with Western women, with whom he fathered two children.

Trilochan tried various drugs, starting with LSD and magic mushrooms, got addicted to coke but managed to kick the habit.

In 1970 Trilochan and his Spanish partner Curry Ojeda opened Ying Yang Restaurant in Jhochhen. An artist at heart, he created an unforgettable design with drapes, funky lights, and the best sound system in town.

“Ying Yang was a magic place, it was the only club in Nepal at the time and it had a view on the old palace and the souvenir market. It became Freak Street’s main meeting point and I was somehow in the middle of it all,” Trilochan recalls.

‘On cleverly devised, carpeted levels and in an atmosphere of vermillion, and

baba cult, skulls and cremation grounds.

Ira and Petra’s home in Yatkha became the hangout for itinerant bohemians to share their passions. Petra, nicknamed Cleopetra, used to organise the occasional ‘Be-In’ -- gatherings of hippies for ‘goat head soup parties’ which she did not attend herself.

Petra’s friends William Forbes and Susan Burns, who still lives in Nepal, remembers her as dressed mostly in black and purple, never leaving the home without her dramatic outfits and make up. “She was a foreboding person who lived in a small world of which she was the queen,” Burns remembers.

But Petra had a softer side too, which is evident from her correspondence with friends. Among her close acquaintances was Vidheha Shrestha, a rare Nepali hippini. At various times Vidheha lived with Ira and Petra, and modelled for Ira.

Vidheha was born into a well-to-do family in eastern Nepal and was educated in Darjeeling. With her sister, she ran a boutique in New Road catering to foreigners.

Through Petra and Ira, Vidheha met countless other artists, participating in wide-ranging discussions on every imaginable subject. They opened up this whole world for me,’ she said in an interview with Mark Liechty, author of *Far Out, Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal*. Vidheha credits Petra and Ira with showing her a world of possibilities ‘that I could have never gotten from my own family or society.’

Wearing short skirts, drinking, smoking and spending time with hippies, Vidheha broke every norm, and paid a price. She was ostracised by family (relatives crossed the street to avoid her), got addicted to heroin, and later kicked the habit.

In the late 1970s, Petra moved to India to spend time with aghori babas, and is now believed to be a nun with the Brahmakumari in Europe. Vidheha became a semi-professional jazz singer and died of cancer in 2010. Her son Yanik is a well known Rj in Kathmandu. 🇳🇵

Trilochan Shrestha was a hippie even before the word was invented

gilded gloom, seekers of bliss drift through before dinner beers, meals and after-dinner joints,’ wrote Desmond Doig about the place. At Ying Yang, people could dance any time of the day and stay late. The place never seemed to close, remembers a regular, Susan Burns: “Trilochan had all of us trapped in there.”

Trilochan used to invite Pashupati sadhus and beggar children to the restaurant to give them free food. When Trilochan registered the Ying Yang he put Jhochhen as its location, with ‘Freak Street’ in brackets – immortalising the name.

He says: “I was a freak myself, so I figured it was a good name. I never thought it would become so popular.”

Trilochan feels hippies have been misunderstood, and were not given due credit. He says: “Freak just means ‘different’. We are all born freaky, but society wants to put us in a box. Hippies just want to get out of the box and create a peaceful, creative society.”

Trilochan went on to become a successful tourism entrepreneur, but also a black sheep of his family. “It was painful to listen to people criticising me for being a hippie who ruined the family reputation. What did they expect? That I would drive a Rolls Royce and live an artificial life?”

Lucia de Vries

Trilochan Shrestha’s photo collection is featured in ‘Something Big and Glorious and Magnificently Insane’ exhibition as part of the Photo Kathmandu festival in Jhochhen, 12 October-16 November.

EVENTS



Fulpati

The seventh day of Dasain is dedicated to the seventh form of Goddess Durga, known as Kalratri. A holy *Kalash*, banana stalks, *Jamara* and sugar cane tied with red cloth are brought to Hanuman Dhoka from Gorkha. A ceremony is observed with 10-15 minutes of celebratory firings of weapons.

16 October, Tundikhel

Maha Ashtami

The most fierce manifestation of Goddess Durga – Kali, is appeased through sacrifice of buffaloes, goats, hens and ducks in temples throughout the nation on the eighth

day of Dasain, Maha Asthami. Newars also celebrate “Khadga Puja” and worship their weapons.

17 October, Basantapur Darbar Square

Maha Nawami

On the ninth day, official military ritual sacrifices under the gunfire salutes are held at the Kot courtyard, as it is believed that the defeated demon armies hide in the bodies of animals and fowls. The god of creation, Vishwakarma, is worshiped and hence tools, equipment, and vehicles are offered the animal and fowl blood, for safety and well-being.

18 October, Taleju Temple, Hanuman Dhoka

Bijaya Dashami

The most important day of Dasain is observed by receiving *tika* and *jamara* along with blessings from elders. On this day, Goddess Durga won over the demon Mahisasur, and Lord Ram won over demon Ravan, according to the scriptures. After the fall of monarchy, President of the country has been offering tika to the public.

19 October, Presidential Residence, Maharajgunj

Photo Kathmandu



The public life of women

A multi-chapter exhibition that memorialises women's pasts in the belief that their historical visibility will advance the case for liberation.

12 October-16 November, 11am-7pm, Nepal Picture Library

Islands of our bodies

A multimedia project inquiring into the body of women through abstraction, fantasy, and reality.

12 October-16 November, 11am-7pm, Kaalo.101, Nagbahal, Patan

There are no homosexuals in Iran

Laurence Rasti from Switzerland explores the concepts of identity and gender, and seeks to restore the face of Iranian homosexuals

(stuck in a transit zone) which their country stole from them.

12 October-16 November, 11am-7pm, Pimbahal, Patan

The Independent Chronicler

Celebrating Shreedhar Lal Manandhar's wide ranging and influential career which has served as an inspiration for generations of Nepali photographers.

12 October-16 November, 11am-7pm, 1st floor, Chhaya Center, Thamel

The Lightning Testimonies

A multi-channel video installation by Amar Kanwar that reflects upon a history of conflict in the Indian subcontinent through experiences of sexual violence, and transports us beyond the realm of suffering into a space of quiet contemplation, where resilience creates the potential for transformation.

12 October-12 April, 11am-7pm, 6th floor, Chhaya Center, Thamel

Magic Days

Slideshow and talk by Jimmy Thapa, William Forbes and Susan Burns, moderated by Paavan Mathema. The three used to frequent Jhochhen in the 70s and each in their own way took part in the 'hippie scene'.

13 October, 11am-12pm, Falcha Restaurant, Jhochhen

MUSIC



Oceantied

Ranging from dark and frenetic, to upbeat, Oceantied's palette of sounds spans the genre spectrum easily, with a generous helping of beats, funk and fat bass lines. Ranzan and Bknot for supporting acts.

12 October, 10pm onwards, Club 25 Hours, Tangal, 9801057602

Pre Dasain bash

An upbeat night to welcome the festival of blessings, with DJ Suraj and DJ Rajju. Get your party moods on!

12 October, 7pm onwards, Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 42717123



Suvas Agam & friends

Special Ghazal and Sufi night with Suvas Agam & friends in the garden, just for Dasain. Reserve your seat to enjoy the music with a good glass of chilled wine along with delicacies like chicken satay, blue cheese salad, cheese platter, organic pizza and more

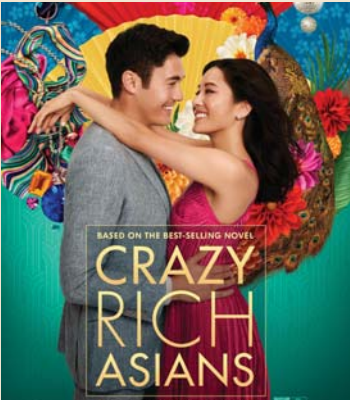
12 October, 6:30pm onwards, Pauline's Garden, Baluwatar, (01) 4221537

City in a state of jazz

Eric Carranza from Minnesota performing his 2018 LP Excessive - “Flared Opinions”, which he recorded with small recording devices, synthesizers and drum machines.

19 October, 8-10pm, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, Rs300, 9841226397

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 9 October

This movie based on the economic growth of Singapore has been causing a lot of debate for many reasons. It stars an all Asian cast, which is rare in Hollywood, and is being seen as a harbinger of diversity in films. But many have also criticised that the rich boy-poor girl romance is not a very original story. Either way, the movie directed by Jon M.Chu and starring Constance Wu, Henry Golding and Michelle Yeoh is worth a watch for a glimpse into the lifestyle of extremely rich Asians.

DINING



Evoke Café & Bistro

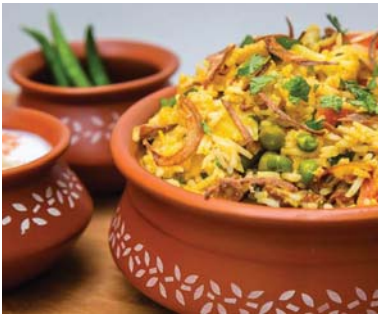
Designed to cultivate your minds, arouse sensations and awaken the soul, the ambience here is as amazing as the food. Try their paneer picata, for instance.

Jhamsikhel, 9851111051

Dasain Beer Fest

A casual event for all the beer lovers who want to explore more wide range of beers from different parts of the world. Unwind yourself with beer, Nepali spicy snacks and continental appetizers.

13 October, 1-8pm, The Yard by Oasis Garden Homes, Sanepa, (01) 5532965, 9851095046.



The aromas of Awadhi

Savour the authentic delicacies through a mesmerizing peek into the royal flavors and culinary heritage of Awadhi, the land of Nizams where the authentic Mughlai preparations of Nawabi kebabs, curries, biryani originated.

12-15 October, 7-10:45pm, Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, (01) 4273999



Buingal

A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar great for a casual get-together with relatives and friends before Dasain. Vegetarian sekuwa is finger licking!

Maitidevi, (01) 4421393

Empire Restaurant & Bar

Enjoy Stuffed Potato Croquette, a classic French dish, for lunch or dinner at the restaurant serving vegan as well as meat food items.

Kupondole Heights, Bakhundole, 9801112311

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. Varieties of massage and therapy to loosen up for the festive season.

www.tranquilityspa.com.np, (01) 4420424

Shangri-La Village Resort

The village resort welcomes Nepalis and expats to celebrate the festive season with mountains and lakes. A 2 nights 3 days package at the resort with unlimited buffet and discounts offer spa services and food and beverages.

12 October- 10 November, Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs19,888 (per couple), (061) 462222



The Fulbari Resort & Spa

The ultimate getaway in Pokhara, Fulbari is far from everything but at the centre of all that matters. A short getaway for those who do not celebrate Dasain.

Pokhara, (061) 432451

Bandipur Kaushi Inn

Gather along 3 or more friends and drive to Bandipur for a quick weekend 1 night, 2 days getaway this Dasain. Also enjoy breakfast and Nepali dinner.

Bandipur, Tanahu, (065) 520083



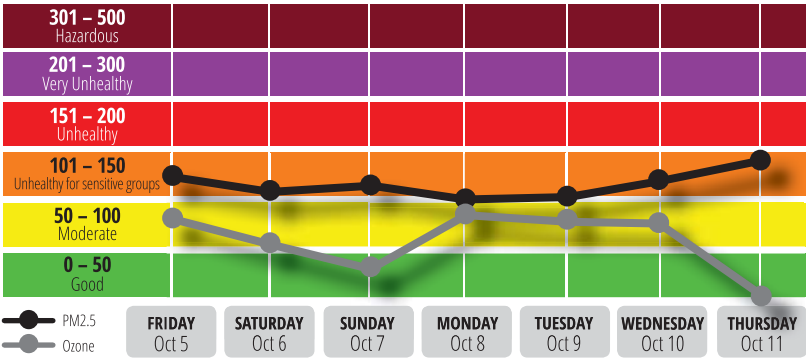
The Famous Farm

The three-storey boutique hotel in the subtropical Middle Hills, west of Kathmandu, is Nuwakot's best kept secret along with the historical palace of the district. This little traditional house has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share.

Kuwapani, Nuwakot, (010) 413044

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 5 - 11 October



Dasain began with daily PM 2.5 particulate averages staying in the “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” Orange Band all week. This was due to the heavy traffic and the increased vehicular exhaust ahead of the holiday season. Lower night temperatures also trapped the pollution at ground level. In the 36 hours till Thursday morning, the hourly readings at Phora Darbar went into the Red “Unhealthy” range for the first time in months. For live pollution readings go to [www.nepalitimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/) <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

No Dasain in Kalikot

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

Seetashma Thapa
in Kalikot

More than 200 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, gnawing hunger that leaves children stunted and mothers anaemic.

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 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



SEETASHMA THAPA



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 54.5% 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 she 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.

Ishara and Bindu 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. Bindu'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 flour," said Bindu, and after three months her baby is gaining weight and is healthy.

Most women like Basanti, Bindu and Ishara 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 wrinkle the steep mountains depend on rain. Crops are often destroyed by droughts, floods, hailstorms or landslides. Families then depend solely on cash their men send home from India. Remoteness, 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 Bradford, 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 healthy food. The cereal fills the nutrition gap."

Seetashma Thapa worked for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). More pictures online.

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PATA NEPAL CHAPTER

FLYING HIGH: Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari presents the Personality Award to Sugat Ratna Kansakar, Managing Director of Nepal Airlines during the 42nd General meeting of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Nepal Chapter on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

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.



MONIKA DEUPALA

WINNING GLORY: Neelam Karki Niharika, author of *Yogmaya*, receives Madan Puraskar, in Patan on Thursday.



BIKRAM RAI

BARA GIRLS: A woman prepares *bara*, deep-fried lentil patties, as customers wait in a traditional Newari eatery in Indra Chok on Monday.



TURKISH AIRLINES KATHMANDU

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

Two new galleries in town



MUSIC ART GALLERY CAFE

Located in a corner behind the big bell in Boudha, Gallery LA (Let's Art) just completed its first year, representing Kathmandu's rising trend of littler 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 Bajra Lama and Anisha 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 disenchantment with modern warfare, while a man who tries on different devil masks symbolizes



GALLERY LA

confusion in modern society. "We are trying to encourage young artists," says Laxman Bajra 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 Thamel, 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 Rs5,000 to Rs500,000. Music Art Gallery Cafe in Jhamsikhel 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 of different generations, from Shashi Shah to Bidhata KC. The expressions range from severe line works depicting Kathmandu, to traditional Mithila paintings and abstract pieces. Realistic paintings of women outside traditional Newar houses depict ongoing innovation in Nepali art, with elements of traditional *paubha* paintings 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 Chakupat 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." **Sewa Bhattarai**

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One step forward, two steps back on same-sex marriage

Gopal Gartaula in
Himal Khabarpatrika,
23-29 September

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Nepal may be one of the most liberal countries in the region in safeguarding rights of transgender people, but it is yet to legalise same-sex marriage. New legal provisions have made it even more difficult

Nepal's new Civil Code Act that came into effect in August has not criminalised 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 Lesbian, 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.

Nepali 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 Lazimpat 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 feminise 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**

Angel Lama, 19, was born as a boy, but she always felt and behaved like a girl. Her name was Sabin Lama in the birth certificate. She has been living together with Saurabh Shrestha, 20, in Kathmandu for the last two years. Saurabh and Angel 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. Angel 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 passport. 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.

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KUNDA DIXIT

The sacrifice of animal sacrifices

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

Aashish Mishra

Dasain is here again, a festival of shopping, family reunions, feasting – and controversies. Fierce debates again rage 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 sacrifice.

Going by previous trends, almost a million goats, sheep, buffalos and poultry will be killed during the fortnight of festivities. Not all are ritually sacrificed, some are slaughtered by butchers to meet the increased Dasain demand for meat.

Maya Thapa and her husband sell goats, sheep, chicken and ducks at the animal market in Kalanki. She says: “Dasain sees a peak in sales. During other times of year, we mostly supply animals to slaughterhouses, but in Dasain the animals are sold for household sacrifices.”

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 buffalos, devotees believe they are killing self-centredness and malice – humans are removing the animal instincts present in themselves.

Cultural historian Madan Mohan Mishra explains that sacrifices are a sign of respect to the Goddess Durga (in her various forms such as Kali, Bhawani, Mai) to confront and defeat the Mahisasur buffalo demon. His killing is represented by sacrificing multiple buffalos in front of Durga temples around Nepal at Dasain.

Priestess Mohan Maiya Jha of the Char Narayan and Bhai Dega temples in Patan adds: “Human sacrifice used to represent the ultimate sacrifice – there was nothing to hold one back from attaining true liberation (*moksha*). But human life is much too precious to be left to religious symbolism which is why the practice was replaced with animal sacrifice. 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 sacrifice at the Gadhimai festival. “There should be no interference in religious traditions. Protests and the courts cannot start or end a custom. Such matters, good or bad, must be left to society.”

However, the cult of animal sacrifice goes beyond religious customs. Webb Keane, Professor of Anthropology at University of 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 *Bali*.

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

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

Says animal rights activist Sujan Shrestha: “Beheading animals at home makes children impervious to violence, they get used to the sight of blood-letting. You do not 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 gods and replace human bloodshed. But given the massacres and wars in Nepal’s history, that argument does not seem to hold. More than 90 nobles were killed in the Bhandarkhal Massacre of 1806 that brought Bhimsen Thapa to power, 55 were killed by Jang Bahadur in the Kot in 1846, and the 2001 massacre nearly wiped out Nepal’s royal family.

Today, the Kot Massacre is still marked at Dasain not by non-violent rituals, but by the mass slaughter of hundreds of buffalos, goats and birds. 🇳🇵

Go easy on the booze this

Sonia Awale

Peer 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 inebriated from early morning.

He did sober up. When the earthquake struck in 2015, he was travelling with his infant son. The shock drove him to drink again.

Sudip has been in and out of rehab, but nothing worked until he was tasked with organising 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 meeting with AA in Patan this week where 23 men from their 20s to 60s were seated in rows. While the oldest member spoke about how he had not had a drink for 10 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 every year around the world, mostly men. A recent paper in 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, but only 1.5% of women. The annual per capita alcohol consumption among Nepalis is 2.2 litres, but increases to 28.8 litres among drinkers (36.2 litres in men). Nearly 1% of Nepalis suffer



Binge drinking during Dasain causes many cured alcoholics to suffer relapses

from alcohol dependence, according to WHO, but this seems to be an underestimate as it does not count homemade alcohol.

“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 Raju Shakya at Patan Hospital.

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

“Alcohol-related problems are a common cause of hospital admissions, and it is rising with liver cirrhosis and mouth cancer and

infectious diseases,” says Buddha Basnyat, a physician 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.

“Dasain is a trigger, a temptation for all the recovering alcoholics like us,” admits Samir Timilisina, Chair of Alcoholics Anonymous in Kathmandu. AA began in Nepal in 1970s and holds meetings six days a week at Patan Hospital, Teaching Hospital and Lazimpat. There are currently 60 regular members.

Timilsina himself struggled with addiction for 25 years and has been sober for the past 14 months. “AA meetings are for those who

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

Sewa Bhattarai and Sabina Devkota

When Deepak Gautam’s wife was pregnant with their second child, his older daughter came to him with a worried look. “I want a sister, but someone told me to wish for a brother. Otherwise I will have no one to celebrate Bhai Tika with,” said the then 7-year old.

Bhai Tika is the last day of Tihar when sisters and brothers bless each other, and this year, it falls on 9 November. Gautam reassured his daughter she could celebrate the festival, no matter what. When his wife Usha gave birth to a second daughter, the family started a new tradition: their daughters, now 10 and 3, put tika on each other.

“Our daughters do not need to miss *tika* just because they do not have a brother,” says Gautam, “they can give each other gifts, pray for each other’s happiness. We even decided to rename Bhai Tika as Tihar Tika.”

Bhai Tika is an opportunity for reunions and celebration of sibling affection. There is a growing sense that like other festivals, it prioritises men and the rituals entrench a gender hierarchy.

Festivals of



BIKRAM RAI

“Women pray for the longevity and prosperity of brothers, but brothers do not wish for the same for their sisters, so the sisters are given less importance,” explains the girls’ mother Usha Acharya. The hierarchy is even more evident in the festival of *raksha bandhan*, marked in southern Nepal and India in spring. That festival also celebrates siblings, but places men in the role of protectors of their sisters.

“Seeing men as protectors and women as objects that need protection promotes

aggressive masculinity in society,” says Pallavi Payal, 27, who has always celebrated *raksha bandhan* with her sister.

In other festivals like *jitya* celebrated in the Madhesi community, women fast for the longevity of their sons, but not daughters. Says Indian feminist scholar Kamala Bhasin: “Patriarchal traditions like these harm not just women but also men. Little six-year-old brothers are sent to guard their teenage sisters. It places burdens upon men that they cannot possibly carry. It is worse for

holiday season



KUNDA DIXIT

have realised their problem, want to quit but are unable to do so. We share each other’s stories and draw inspiration from that,” he explains.

Senior cardiologist Prakash Regmi at Bir Hospital is busiest this time of the year. Patients with Holiday Heart Syndrome, a condition with abnormal and high heartbeat due to excessive drinking, crowd his clinic. They need immediate treatment, or may die due to heart failure or stroke.

“Our mentality that festivals cannot be celebrated without booze needs to be wiped out,” says Regmi.

Mark Zimmerman has been practicing medicine in Nepal for 32 years, and has found alcoholism to be common, but difficult to treat.

“It is a disease, but excessive

drinking is considered a habit, a coping mechanism to deal with stress, and therein lies the biggest problem,” explains Zimmerman, who has noticed a rise in female alcoholics among his patients.

“At any given time, up to 10% of patients here are alcohol related, and most have damaged 3-4 organs due to excessive drinking. But this 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 sent by the government to tide over food insecurity is often distilled into bootleg alcohol. Until six years ago, Accham was a dry district, but that led to the sale of spurious liquor, leading to a huge disease burden.

“Alcohol is a major source of revenue generation. But we have not thought about the much higher price we are paying for treatment,” says Bikash Gauchan of Bayalpata Hospital in Achham.

The government adopted a stricter policy for alcohol sales last year, making it mandatory for manufacturers to put pictorial warnings covering at least 75% of the bottle like in cigarette packs, and to ban liquor advertising. People under 21 are not allowed to buy alcoholic 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 unsafe moonshine. A complete ban in Bihar has actually resulted in massive smuggling of Nepal-made beer and spirits across the border.

Says psychiatrist Raju Shakya: “Alcoholism should be the number one public health agenda. If we can reduce alcohol consumption, it will remove many health issues.”

sisterhood

women, of course, because it entrenches their secondary status in society.”

Women are barred from rituals if they are menstruating, which reinforces their ‘impure’ status. Many women then blame themselves for ‘spoil the festival for everyone’.

Nirmala Bhetuwal, 40, of Jhapa checks the calendar before Dasain, wondering if she will have to spend it in a corner. She has been taking hormone pills to delay her periods during major festivals at great cost to her health. Her husband has no idea she has to put herself through this.

“Thank god these medicines exist, otherwise, the festivals would be soured for everyone,” says Bhetuwal.

Dasain and Tihar also come with added chores for women already over-burdened with day-to-day work.

Saraswati Niraula, 48, of Tehrathum has not visited her parents during Dasain for ten years because she is too busy making festival arrangements for her husband’s family. She says: “My Dasain starts a month ahead, I walk seven hours to get the white clay to decorate my house. Then I beat rice for sel-rotis, and prepare for the Dasain feasts.”

Dasain this year falls on 16-20 October, and men spend time in family reunions, card games, eating and drinking, while the women are usually busy cooking and cleaning up. Nepali women have traditionally accepted these unwritten rules as ‘their work’.

Gender rights activist Meera Dhungana says discrimination prevails because of the sense of duty instilled in women by society: “The women’s economic, social and educational status, which are still low, are at

the root of discriminatory festivals.”

Activists say that Nepal’s festivals must now change with the times, and many men have also begun to ask these questions and advocate for change.

Men Engage Alliance, a group formed in North America in 2004, found its way to Nepal in 2007 and since then, has continued to raise its voice against the culture of masculinity.



“While we worship women as goddesses during Dasain, they are barred from many Devi temples. Yet, the burden of organising the rituals lies disproportionately on women,” says Kapil Kifle, former South Asia coordinator of the alliance. “It benefits men if they share the labour. If a man portrays himself as an intimidating head of household, he may escape the work, but will not be loved. Men who help out at home gain the affection of family members.”

As more young women are educated and their socio-economic status improves, things have begun to change. They now participate in rituals that were forbidden earlier, including last rites of parents. Families now make time for women to also enjoy festivals.


“Men rarely visited their in-laws during Dasain in the past, but it is now the norm,” says Usha Acharya.

Pallavi Payal also believes things are changing for the better. Women now fast not just for their sons, but also daughters during *jitiya*. And her inclusive *raksha bandhan* and bhai-bahini tika is not so rare anymore.

Says Payal: “People used to accuse us of distorting culture and tradition, but our parents insist that we should celebrate our sisterhood as well.”



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