Prime Minister KP Oli’s media blitz this week taking full credit for a social security scheme for private sector employees was an attempt to shore up his sagging image. But can Nepal’s sagging economy afford this ambitious scheme?

Many across Nepal woke up on Monday morning to see the prime minister’s stern visage staring at them from jacket covers of broadsheets, kemp posts and street banners. They did not know what hit them. The ads and posters just said that a ‘new era’ had dawned in Nepal, and the government was fulfilling its promise of protecting the working class.

Prime Minister Oli was trying to take credit for an employees’ social security scheme that was designed by previous governments. The real reason the Oli government tried to take full credit for initiating the social safety net through such pompous publicity sponsored by private companies may be that he has his eye on the next elections in 2022. But what architects of this campaign don’t seem to realise is that public memory is short. In fact, going by social media backlash against the publicity stunt, most seem to see it as an unseemly attempt to distract the public from unsealed crimes and other failures to keep promises.

There are also doubts about whether the new social security scheme will yield a political dividend like earlier allowances for the elderly, single women and the disabled. Analysts say private sector employee pensions may not be a surefire hit because implementation of such a giant scheme is fify.

The plan is to provide social security to private sector employees and reduce the fiscal burden of social security allowances. But economist Rishikesh Paudel says it still leaves out millions of Nepal in the informal sector, there is a risk that it will increase the government’s fiscal liability.

It is an excellent scheme on paper, but we need to see how it will be implemented," he said.

Under the scheme, private sector employees will have to deposit 3% of the basic salary of each employee (15% by works and 20% by company) into a government-owned Social Security Fund (SSF) which will assign a special number on registration. After depositing money into the SSF for 15 years, private sector employees will be entitled to life-long pensions just like retired government employees. "They and family members will be eligible for other facilities like medical expenses. Conditions apply."

But only 3.4 million Nepalis are employed by private businesses. They will be covered by the scheme in the first phase, but the much larger number in the informal sector who are in much greater need of social security will be left out.

Because of this scheme, employers will now have to pay a little more than what they have been paying for provident fund and gratuity. But it will be a monumental challenge for the government to bring every private employee into the program. The 2022 elections are too far away, and the obstacles too many for this week’s saturation media bombardment of Nepal for the Communist to exact a political payback.

Om Astha Rai

NATURE Special

NATURALLY NEPAL
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Cranes, nature and godliness in Lumbini
PAGE 6-7

More trekkers, more trees No smoke without fire
PAGE 8-9

It’s a jungle out there Nature without borders
PAGE 14-15

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NATURALLY NEPAL

A cross the world, human societies are suffering a growing nature deficit. The march of consumerism and economic globalization has come at an enormous cost to the local and global environment. Much of the change is irreversible on a civilisational scale. River systems destroyed by dams, landscapes mutilated, a cascade of extinctions and climate collapse.

Nature is invaluable, it cannot have a price tag. Our culture and religion regards nature as sacred. Nature matters to us because of its emotional value, and the health benefits of being amid it cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

But modern economics puts a monetary value to nature, it can be bought and sold without factoring in its intrinsic value. We are not required to calculate the cost of its destruction when evaluating its worth. An Environmental Impact Assessment of a project tries to calculate the impact to nature of infrastructure or development projects. There are attempts to push a cash value to “natural capital” and ecosystem services. But these are narrow attempts to measure something immeasurable and priceless.

The crisis of the anthropocene is rooted in governments, businesses and sections of the public regarding nature as free and limitless. This is why native forests have been logged until there is nothing left, smoke and emissions are pumped into the sky and filled with toxins, river beds are mined, and the earth is warming because we are burning all this fossil carbon.

This issue of Nepali Times carries a Special Package on nature conservation in the Tarai national parks. The results of the tiger census this year showed the encouraging result that Nepal was the first country to attain the target of doubling its tiger population from four years ago of 206. The number of tigers has jumped from 206 four years ago to 385, with most of the increase in Bardia National Park. Tigers had nearly disappeared in Bardia after the Nepal Army was pulled out of anti-poaching duty during the conflict. But numbers have soared from 18 ten years ago to 87 today. This is a phenomenal achievement.

But, the reason tigers are important is because they are at the top of the food chain and protecting them protects everything else in the ecosystem. But as our stories on page 14-15 indicate, predator-prey balance can throw the entire system off kilter.

The problem in Bardia is that while the tiger population has increased, there has been a serious decline in prey density and this presents a danger to the new tigers. Predators that venture outside the park to seek livestock, thus weakening the villagers’ support for nature conservation.

Nepal’s tiger range spans the open border with India, which means wild tigresses move freely back and forth. The resurgence of tiger numbers is a valuable resource on both sides of the border have increased the problem of human-wildlife conflict as well as attracted cross border poachers.

The success of tiger conservation was achieved through India-Nepal cooperation, and the new challenges must also be addressed jointly. Grass is palatable to deer species are not so common because of the water table going down because of the flow of the Karnali River being diverted by boulder mining upstream. This has benefited grass, but not deer.

Climate change has also made monsoon season stranger, large herbivores used to trample on the tall grass and allow deer to get to the tender shoots underneath, but Bardia’s once thriving populations of wild bison and nilgai have disappeared. Tigris numbers can be increased further if there is enough of the right type of grass.

Tigers need prey, prey need grasslands, grass needs moisture, but humans have dammed and watered. The web of life links everything in an ecosystem together, and we need to understand this for nature conservation.

Nature has intrinsic value, even though government may try to put a cash value to economic value. For Nepal, nature must be valued also because it diversifies biodiversity, provides ecosystem services, and support our sense of self-worth. Nature should not just be protected in national parks. Our urban areas need to be rewilded as well.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Times issue #193 on 15 November 2009 carried a column by Bish Subedi, the mother of Mana Subedi, 14, who was raped and killed in the jungle of Bandipur in the Rasuwa area. She interviewed the victim’s sister for this column and tells her story for the first time.

I thought that I would feel just when the story comes to the public. But now that I have told the story to the public, I feel good. I was just worried about the story being spread without my consent. I am happy that my story is being told and I am grateful for that. I am happy that the justice for my sister will be done soon.

But the media, many human rights activists and journalists have also taken to my story. They have spoken out and of justice for my story. I have felt comfortable in telling the story. I am happy that the story is being spread without my consent. I am happy that the story is being spread.

We need to take the guilty to court so that they are tried and then given some punishment.
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Every watt of electricity saved is twice the power generated

half full
Anil Chitrakar

Today, we change light bulbs to LED, get ‘five star’ energy efficient refrigerators, use rice cookers and induction stoves. All this also has a lot to do with saving energy. Just like our grandparents. At a recent event organized by the Town Development Fund (TDF) for local government leaders to help them plan electricity usage, conduct energy audits and look at financing options for local energy efficiency, it became clear that a watt saved was not a watt generated. It was two watts generated.

The reason energy saved is twice generated is the escalating costs of power projects, leakage, pilferage, system losses, over capacity of equipment, wastage, negligence, sub-optimal use of equipment – all at the demand and supply end.

Local governments have to pay for street lights, water and sewerage pumping stations, buildings and offices, space heating and cooling, garbage collection and other vehicles. The bills add up quickly. With elected leadership in 770 local governments, energy saved will not just mean more money for others but can also help meet more pressing needs.

Some may argue that this is not on top of our priority list. In reality, given the escalating costs and the fact that many Nepalis depend on regular electricity supply, it would be the right thing to do.

The TDF is proposing an award for the most energy efficient local government. Only 3% of our energy needs come from electricity. 10% from petroleum and the bulk from biomass (see page 8). But no one has forgotten the Indian blackouts and how it was used as a geopolitical bargaining chip. We can all do our part by conducting simple energy audits at home and our places of work to find where the leakages, wastage and inefficiencies are and then invest in minimizing them.

The payback period for investment in energy efficiency is very quick.

Markets can and do change people’s behaviour. During difficult times like prolonged road strikes and natural disasters, everyone looks for efficient ways to cook, light up, heat and pump. Experience tells us that shifting rooms to the

A villa in Thamel

New high-rise hotels are sprouting like mushrooms all over Kathmandu, and particularly the trunk of Kathmandu is seeing a boom in new hotels, shopping centers and restaurants.

But every now and then, a new place emerges in this already crowded neighborhood to cater to the needs of travelers and travelers who show the giant new hotels belonging to international chains. One such hotel is a 21-year-old neo-classical building called Thamel Villa.

The new boutique hotel, located in the heart of the bustling Thamel, has a lot of history behind it. It was the house Copper Mansion Hotel, the pre-commercial fightingimer of the 1960 and 1990 movements, was both in and out where he was not languishing in prison.

It was originally built by Bhandu Ramchandra Limbu, one of the sons of the Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher, and was later bought by Singh’s mother Sunamuni Shumsher Singh. (in 1963).

Unlike many old properties which are renovated from top to bottom, Thamel Villa remains true to the original ambience, stunning carvings and lavish decorations, and staying true to its Lima era aesthetics inside out.

After the 2015 earthquake, many Lima structures were designed to trem down, it is my mission to preserve history along with the old tuck, and I took Thamel Villa under my wing," says owner Tripa Gurung, who also manages property in Makalu and Jacamar.

The restoration has been extensive, and shows clever design elements. Thamel Villa is a two-storied house with eight different styled rooms. There are single rooms with ensuite bathrooms and spacious beds, attics, corner balconies and sitting rooms. Indeed, Thamel Villa can serve as a cozy apartment hotel.

After a decor hark back to the Lima era blended with new elements like clay pots, wooden furniture and minimalistic furniture. The hotel is an elegant amalgam of sophistication and local heritage.

Gurung has perfected the art of turning old homes in comfortable b&b’s for travelers to Nepal. He has restored the historic D/R’s home in Jumla and the Tikta’s home in Kathmandu, the company for the New York City. The hotel has been launched with a 200-room 5 star hotel.

Festive fares

Turkish Airlines has introduced easy one-way and return fares for passengers flying from Kathmandu to selected destinations in Europe, Africa and Turkey to celebrate Christmas and New Year. The plan is valid from 1 January 2019 and fares start from Rs 101,500 (excluding taxes). Contact: 01) 4026937 / 4026936

Perfumes in Doha

Qatar Airways and Perfums Christian Dior have launched a Dior Les Parfums Podium at Hamad International Airport,

New JICA Chief

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) the Yutaka Asakura is a new Chief Representative for the Nepal Office, taking over from Sakuram, Asakura, who was the Director General in JICA.

Festive fares

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BIZ BRIEFS

Smart banking

State of Kathmandu is offering a flat 10% discount on NTC, Ncell mobile top-up done from its mobile banking app, SIKU Credit, for limited time. Top-up is available for both Android and iPhone users and can be sent to check account, get transaction status, transfer balance between more than 40 banks and many other services.

Powerful DG

Mahindra has announced its entry into the higher-kW diesel-generators (DGs) with the launch of its new range of 22KW and 30KW Mahindra miller-series engines, along with SIKU compact & portable gensets. The range of DGs are engineered to meet heavy duty performance and fuel efficiency.
Why does the credit crisis keep repeating itself?

Bankers met at a Himalmedia Roundtable last week to discuss the recurring credit crunch

Nepal’s cyclical credit crunch has re-emerged yet again, forcing the economy in the doldrums and pandering that the country is not likely to achieve its target of 6% growth this fiscal year.

Banks are not lending any more. Bankers are avoiding big loan seekers and new infrastructure projects are not taking off.

Hydropower investor Gyaneendra Lal Pradhan says: “Almost all banks have shut the door on borrowers.”

Commercial banks have already lent Rs157 billion in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, and they do not have any more loanable funds. One of the major reasons behind the current liquidity squeeze is the government’s failure to spend its development budget.

When Nepal got a strong and stable government after years of war and political instability, banks had hoped that development budget would now be mobilized more efficiently and they would not face a crunch in the middle of a fiscal year.

However, even the strongest government ever with a technocrat Finance Minister has failed to fix the problem of spending the bulk of its expenditure only towards the end of a fiscal period. This has resulted in the scarcity of loanable deposits for the third year in a row, turning it into a chronic banking crisis.

The government has collected Rs600 billion in revenue so far this year, but only Rs245 billion has been spent. And the largest chunk of expenditure is for recurrent expenses, which does not help ease the credit crisis. Almost Rs50 billion remains unspent in the state exchequer.

But experts say the government’s inability to mobilise development budget is not the only major reason behind the recurrent credit crunch.

At a Himalmedia Roundtable last week, bankers blamed the government for not spending its development budget efficiently.

But they also admitted that there are other factors at play. Excerpts:

Ashoke SJB Rana
CEO, Himalayan Bank

Govinda Gurung
CEO, Civil Bank

Bhuwan Dahal
CEO, Sanima Bank

Ashok Sherchan
CEO, Prabhu Bank

Kiran Kumar Shrestha
CEO, Rastriya Banijya Bank

The political transition may have ended, but the banking sector is still in transition. Banks have been forced to increase their capital ratio and take stricter and even impractical measures to collect customer details to help the government combat money laundering. This has hampered deposits at a time when there is a huge demand for credit. And imports have surged like never before, further compounding the crisis. It has become the new normal to lend up to 78% of loanable deposits within the first quarter of a fiscal year. This is scary.

Commercial banks have not been able to manage their assets and liabilities effectively because Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) has not properly followed the guidelines of the Basel II framework, which requires financial regulators to put different credit-deposit ratio rules on different types of deposits. For example, if we have long-term deposits, we should be allowed to lend more. But we have a universal credit-deposit ratio of 80% for all kinds of deposit.

The informal economy is huge and the largest chunk of money spent in last year’s elections did not come to the banking system. Almost 90% of remittances withdrawn from banks does not return to the banking system. So we need to inject money circulating in the informal economy. For this, the NRB should review the cap on cash transactions. If it is increased to Rs1 million from the current cap of just Rs1 million, more money will flow into the banking system. Efficient mobilisation of capex alone will not fix the problem.

As a government-owned bank, we are not facing a crisis like commercial banks. But we are also affected. Only 40% Nepalis have access to banks. A majority of people, especially in villages, are not being served by the banking sector. Rural people tend to deposit money for longer periods than urban people, so banks must branch out into villages to increase their deposits. The government has made it mandatory to open branches in all municipalities and village councils, but administrative areas of some village councils are so large that we must open branches in each ward.
Lumbini’s unholy mess

The struggle to save the Buddha’s birthplace from human greed and bad planning

Om Astha Rai

The Buddha was born under a tree, got enlightenment under a tree, and passed away under a tree. So, when Japanese architect Kenzo Tange drew up a master plan to develop Lumbini, he left 60% of the project area as a ‘primeval jungle that has been more or less intact since the Buddha was born here. But the reality is now turning into a Buddhist Disneyland, with huge concrete structures popping up everywhere as communities in the region vie to build more mesmeric shrines. There are now 32 monasteries and temples within the core area of Lumbini, and that number keeps on growing. Several Buddhist countries and institutes are pressure the Nepalese government for permission to build more concrete structures within the core area.

Last year, over 1.5 million pilgrims and tourists visited Lumbini from all over the world, a 20% increase from the previous year. This year, the number is expected to exceed the 2017 figure.

And after the new Tribhuvan International Airport (named Gautham Buddha International Airport) is ready by end 2019, the number is expected to shoot up even more, so developers in the area are hoping to make the most of the US$2.8 billion project.

Taking the lead in this is a young Buddhist monk named Jh hall Ball. He has spent years protecting the world’s wetlands through images brought to Lumbini.

New York-based ecological artist and activist Jillian Ball is not a film-maker. But her activism to protect the world’s wetlands through images brought her to Nepal and Lumbini.

After meeting a young Buddhist monk in Nepal, she was inspired to make a film on the wetlands of Lumbini, which have been a home to Sarus cranes since the time of the Buddha. Sanctuary, her debut documentary, is not a high-end film, but a silent loving attempt to highlight the threats from developers and human activity to the sacred Sarus cranes. Shoot with an iPhone and a point-and-shoot camera, Sanctuary also uses stills and

Buddhist Disneyland: Lumbini is fast turning into a Buddhist theme park with concrete structures popping up everywhere.

A proposal to build luxury hotels in the last remaining wetlands of Lumbini have threatened Sarus cranes (right), which have a deep meaning for Buddhists.

The cranes’ wetland habitat. But he says the threat to the wetlands of Lumbini, the habitat of Sarus cranes and other species, is still severe. Mettappa introduced a phased Lumbini Conservation Project to preserve greenery and sanctity of the Buddha’s birthplace. In the first phase, the Sarus cranes will be secured and studied, a five-star meditation centre will be developed into a nature centre in collaboration with International Crane Foundation. George Archibald of the Foundation visited Lumbini this week, and he is monitoring the project. (See Interview enclosed.)

In the second phase, the area enveloped by Kenzo Tange as a lush and green jungle will be restored as Lumbini Rain Forest and the third phase will start closing up development by making Lumbini pollution-free.

Says Mettappa: “We have an obligation to preserve Lumbini’s wetlands, trees, Sarus and greenery for future generations and it is possible only if everyone joins or supports our efforts.”

Shooting Sarus

New documentary profiles the attempt to protect the sacred cranes of Lumbini

The crucible of the Buddha’s life, teaching and enlightenment is Lumbini. But the development of the site has been controversial, with critics arguing that it is being commercialised at the expense of the environment. A new documentary, Sanctuary, directed by Jillian Ball, a New York-based ecological artist and activist, highlights the struggle to protect the wetlands of Lumbini, home to the rare and endangered Sarus cranes.

The documentary, which will be screened at the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu on 1 December, 5:30-9PM, aims to raise awareness about the threats to Lumbini’s biodiversity, and the need for a balance between development and conservation.”

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Cranes, nature and godliness

George Archibald is Co-founder of the International Crane Foundation and was in Kathmandu for the consecration of the crane sanctuary in Lumbini. He spoke to Nepali Times this week. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: What explains your fascination with cranes? How did it begin?
George Archibald: When I was eight in Stillwater, Nova Scotia, I heard a radio broadcast on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation about the nesting grounds of whooping cranes. It was about a male and female crane that had flown 2,700 miles from Texas to their breeding ground in Canada. Since then I have been trying to find out everything about cranes. Eventually, at Cornell University, I did my doctorate on the evolutionary relationships of cranes. I found out that very little was known about cranes around the world, and that if somebody did not do something, we would lose many of the crane species. What is it about cranes that makes them so charismatic?

Cranes are the tallest birds, they pair for life, they dance to develop pair bonds and they have call that carry for miles. There is nothing a crane does that is not graceful. They are important in so many cultures as symbols of long life, and so are wonderful brand ambassadors for conservation programs for wetlands and for grasslands. They migrate across continents, and show how we all share in the global environment.

What is the significance of the Sarus crane to Buddhism, and why is the Lumbini wetland important?
Lord Buddha’s cousin is said to have shot a Sarus, and he was very moved when its mate tried to help the dying crane. The scene changed his life by inspiring him to seek a better way. The Sarus should be revered by all Buddhists. Lumbini provides wetlands in which Sarus can nest and rear their young.

Worldwide, what is the status of cranes, especially of the migratory ones?
There are 15 species of cranes, 11 of which are threatened, including the Sarus. The extremely rare migratory cranes have been strictly protected and are slowly increasing, but wetland habitats for them are still limited. Hunting of cranes in Central Asia has destroyed the population of Siberian cranes that wintered in Iraq. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, there was shooting of cranes, and the last birds were seen there in 2003. Siberian cranes are now gone from the flyways that took them from Iran and India. But we have a beautiful flock of 4,000 that winters in China but they are now critically endangered because the single lake where they winter is threatened by a dam. The battle goes on – in certain areas it is eliminating hunting, in others it is preserving habitat and in some places, it is both.

How important is the Himalayan ecosystem for the protection of migratory and resident crane populations? The Himalayan ecosystem is on the migration route in millions of thousands of Demisee and Eurasian cranens. In Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh of India, high altitude wetlands provide winter habitat for the endangered black-necked cranes. It is possible there are one or two pairs of black-necked cranes breeding in wetlands beside lakes in Sikkim.

The Indo-Gangetic plains are some of the most densely populated regions of the world, and is suffering water-stress. How do we balance human needs with the need to protect endangered wildlife? Sarus cranes and a plethora of other aquatic birds often breed on agricultural fields in regions where the Hindu faith is practiced. Large water birds and humans live in harmony in areas where Hindu values and traditional agricultural practices survive. In regions where industrial agriculture is practiced, biodiversity decreases.

Why a crane sanctuary in Lumbini?
The Lumbini crane sanctuary is a small area which provides an opportunity for pilgrims to learn about what pure nature is and how it can be protected. The Sarus is the ambassador of that message.
CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Ajaya Dixit

The use of petroleum products is a distant second at 12.5%, while electricity and renewable sources like solar power account for about 1.8% and 2.5% of the total energy used.

This energy mix exerts an unfair burden of cost and environmental effects on the people living in the region. Since the early 1980s, many hotels in Nepal have been using smokeless fuels to cook and improve the air quality. However, there is a growing trend towards the use of electricity for cooking.

Nepal needs to be careful about the use of biomass in its energy mix. While it is a natural source of energy, it has several disadvantages. It is not as clean as other sources and can contribute to air pollution.

The government of Nepal needs to develop and promote alternative sources of energy. This will not only reduce the impact of biomass on the environment but also help in reducing the cost of energy.

The government of Nepal is also focusing on improving the forest cover in the region. This will not only help in reducing the impact of biomass on the environment but also help in protecting the forest resources.

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carrying incredibly heavy loads chat with friends and family. Trekkers lodges advertise Wi-Fi service with more emphasis than their hotel rooms.

At the monastery in Tham, a young monk in a maroon chuba and matching down jacket showed me band-lettered 600-year-old books with ancient Tibetan calligraphy. He interrupted our conversation to take a call on his smartphone.

One troubling trend is the increasing reliance on long mule trains to transport supplies. Travelling in trains of 20 or more, they start up dust on the trail and leave an overpowering stench of waste. Locals are discussing a proposal to build a cargo cable car from Lukla to Namche.

The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee is removing garbage and human waste from Mt Everest. Base Camp is supposed to be cleaner, and recycling bins are common along the trail. Yet, there is still extensive litter because packaging waste is accumulating faster than it can be disposed of.

Meanwhile, Nepal is racing to develop its hydroelectric capacity, and one consequence could be that rivers flowing from the Sagarmatha National Park could be dammed. This World Heritage Site deserves permanent protection.

How residents, local and national authorities manage the Khumbu’s environmental and energy resources amidst pressures of growing tourism and hydro development will determine if the region can have a sustainable future.

Adam Stern is an American environmentalist based in California.


The photo in Namche, 35 years ago, and yak dung drying in Phakding today (below and right).

A Sherpa lodge in 1983 burned firewood in smoky clay stoves, the walls are blackened and a propane carrier is turned into a kerosene lamp. Gas stoves have replaced the mud chula today (below).
GETAWAY

Dwarika’s Resort

A holistic retreat, drawing on ancient Hindu yoga knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings.

(shikali, 9716834)

Retreat at Damaar

A beautiful landscape, an environment to relax and create a memorable stay in an undisturbed sanctuary to reignite and enrich your inner self.

(damau, 9711656)

Peacock Guest House

Located in a historic Heritage Site, 3-5 minutes walk from building blossoms splendid views of the Durbar Square and the Shiva-Parvati temple.

(shikali, 9716819)

Borderlands Eco Resort

Enveloped in the natural Himalayan splendor, the resort is located a mere three hours north of Kathmandu. A quick getaway to wild nature—celebrate the weekend for eco-adventures.

(bordelands, 9712012)

When the Chocolate Runs Out

Internationally renowned master of Buddhist Vajrayana Robina Courtin will lead a workshop which explores the connection of the role of meditation on the edge of the Shikupul National Park.

(robina, 9712025, 9716826)

KATHMANDU, 23 – 29 November

AIR QUALITY INDEX

Previous writers, there used to be a peak (12-14) and pollution hour. This week’s data shows that AQI remains in the ‘normal’ range at all hours. Air quality is next to nil for all hours yet. This is now going to be the pleasant winter season. Due to high concentration of PM2.5 in the air caused by volcanic emissions being trapped on the Valley floor due to inversion, AQI is hovering at just below 200 all the time. Expect a spike when the wind is at its least or rain brings the air in from distant areas. Sunlight meets its fate, but air is also safer. Follow the AQI measurements on www.epa.gov, or at https://aqicn.org

10

EVENTS

KTM trail race/walk

Walk or race at a rate of 1k in 1hr or 7k, 26 for children, around Sujalbhanjik to pump up the joc for Christmas.

1 December, 9am onwards, Sujalbhanjik, Swayambhunath, 9715128908, ktmtrailrace2018@gmail.com

Food and livelihood security

A PhD student of environmental studies, speaks on current situation for food and livelihood security in Huina and Saurik, identifies the main challenges faced there, and explores opportunities and solutions for it.

30 November, 9am, Vidya Mandir Auditorium, 9716646709

Bird watching

1 December, 7am, Sundarbal, 9716615130

A Christmas affair

Karma Coffee’s 4th with their traditional mulled wine session, accompanied by soothing live music with Florence Shank and a kikko baking session for kids by Tenting Yagya’s Tea Time.
30 November, 9-7pm, Karma Coffee Nepal, 9716550500, Register or baking session, kikko@karmacoffeenepal.com

Sound of Existence

A solo exhibition by artist Mishal Lal Shrestha at the Dash-Laxmi Art Space featuring contemporary Nepali art and artists.
30 November – 6 December, Dash Laxmi Art Space Hotel, Thamel, 971671606

Music

Omar’s Picks

Our Pick

2.0

Open 8 in Kathmandu, 10th November

This South Indian movie starring the supernatural Raja Rani is tipped for being the most impressive Indian movie ever. Directed by Shankar, this hit film follows the female lead and Aditya Kumar in the role of Velu Raz, a yogi who turns into a hound for the execution to destroy the evil religions through vigilance, because of him supernatural powers are given. His performance is the role as Jai Ram. Since South Indian movies are currently quite popular, audiences there too expect to release as well.

Dining

The Diplomat

Experiencing Lavishus culinary delights at the hotel’s Indian and Continental restaurants, without compromising on comfort. Vegetarians have favored for their Spinach and latai cutlet, lamb Chops, 4th floor, Kathmandu, 9716711000

Kta Haru

The fun and fan band Kta Haru performing their songs from the album ‘Sing Namjo’ and more with Shaun & Shrestha and Paskal. Only original music here.
30 November, 6-10pm, Malaka, Vasant apurti, 9713388962

Kristina Allen

Known in Tirupur, India has been sung and playing the guitar and singing songs from the age of 8. She is here in Kathmandu for 4 nights, 30 November onwards, shows Camp Outdoors, 6300, 9712365937

Navneet Aditya Walha

Enjoy a folk musical night with Walha, the daughter of singer Lingka Hira Devi Walha from Sargul and Sargul Christmas gifts at the night market managed by The Local Project Nepal and the new addition to the Exile Community, Central Star.
30 November, 6-10pm, Foster Club & Bar, Jhoolkot, 9715008100

Bricks Café

A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar with sophisticated wooden interior providing a complete family environment.
Umednath, Lamosang, 9714455530

Kimff

More than 70 films from 31 countries will be screened back-to-back, in the presence of filmmakers, film enthusiasts, artists, scholars, journalists, artists and mountaineers.
Kimff will include a discussion forum, guest lectures, exhibitions of books and photos and inauguration art works. Visit their website for schedule.
7 November, Roopesh Webby (Box-Club) and Nepal Tourism Board (Box-Club), 9714443099, www.kimff.org

#sprouaints

A special issue of the journal SHIKHU and exhibition ‘sprouaints’, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
3-31 December, 10am onwards, Alliance Francaise Kathmandu, Patan, 9716025721

The Wayward Daughter

Independent filmmaker Anjali Singh and political columnist Nikesh Suli will be speaking about the book ‘The Wayward Daughter: A Kathmandu Story’ by Shrawati Chakravorty at the launch.
1 December, 4pm, Sala Moya Kendra, Patan Bhik, 971536944

Bartika Eam Rai

The young Nepali singer who gained popularity with the song ‘Emotional’ in the YouTube video around the world, and is here in Kathmandu for a gig.
30 November, 9am onwards, Sugurpul Restaurant, 6300, 9712365843

Happy Singh Da Dhaa

Enjoy the ultimate Desi Dhaa experience with a rich variety of local delicacies cooked to perfection.
23 November – 7 December, 630-8000, 971201277, Bhal Dhal Bhat, Sankhu, Garden Terrace, Southern Cacau House, 9716755999

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Ukhapa’s Chulo

Ukhapa’s Chulo has a variety of dishes to offer. Garlic chilis grilled at this cozy restaurant is a die to try.
9 November, 9715242896

[times]
Justice delayed and denied

Quest for truth and justice in daughter’s murder has driven Nirmala’s father to insanity

N epal was shocked by the rape and murder of Nirmala Panta in Kathmandu on 26 July, but with the crime unsolved and the perpetrators still at large, the news has begun to fade from the headlines.

However, Nirmala’s parents had been taking part in a sit-in outside the Kanchenpur District Headquarter here in Mahendranagar. Two weeks into the protest, Nirmala’s father Yagya Raj Panta started showing signs that the strain was taking its toll on his mental health.

On Saturday morning, Yagya Raj was showing increasingly erratic behavior and the family decided to take him to Kathmandu for treatment. His wife Durga Devi Panta and others related to get him up to Dhangadi airport, but he was too aggressive and could not be pacified to board the plane.

“They behaved in quite a different manner: they were disrupting the place and vandalising the premises of the protest,” said Shreshtha Chand, one of the human rights activists in the protest.

On the morning of 24 November, Yagya Raj Panta was justice for a mobile phone, shooting away visitors, and looked very agitated.

He was agitated towards strangers, pointing at bags and asking if there were bibles in them, claiming there was a conspiracy to murder him. Activists tried to pacify him, and when Durga Devi Panta threatened her husband some water from a thermos flask he thanked her like she was a stranger, shook hands with her and asked people around him to take a photo.

Exactly 117 days after her daughter was raped and murdered, it was clear that Yagya Raj Panta had lost his mind. He not only tried to take off his clothes, but also beat and scratched people who came near him. Some of them needed to have their hands bandaged. The incident people took of him went viral on social media.

Nirmala Panta went missing on July 26, and her body was found thrown in a sugarcane field near her home. The inability of the Police and the Home Ministry to resolve the issue, that their attempt to destroy evidence, frame an innocent person with the crime and what looked to many like a case of the Police trying to protect the criminals, has outraged her family and human rights activists. They said the mental strain was too much to bear for Yagya Raj Panta, and he stopped.

The distressed Nirmala’s family members are increasingly concerned that they are losing not just one but two persons to this tragedy. Yagya Raj’s sister Bhagirathi Bhattacharya says she has lost hope for her brother. “My niece is already dead and gone, but my brother is alive. And I doubt we will still have him if this stress continues.”

She has also been spending the cold nights at the sit-in in an open tent across the road from the District Headquarter building. There are some pillows, mattresses, blankets, and an electric line from which to charge mobiles and heat up water in bottles, and not much else. Photos of the deceased Nirmala line the wall, walls and surroundings.

“Ever since this protest started, he has not been himself. He sees photos of his daughter everywhere, a lot of people come and say many things, it was just too much for him to bear,” says Bhattacharya, whose brother no longer recognises her.

Yagya Raj’s wife Durga Devi looked harried not just from the struggle for justice for her daughter’s unsolved rape and murder, but now by her husband’s deteriorating mental health.

“I don’t think we will ever get justice,” Durga Devi told us last week. “If the government wanted to give us justice, it would not have destroyed the evidence. I had lost hope right then. But now, this long protest for justice is taking our remaining health and sanity as well.”

Yagya Raj and Durga Devi are now at Kathmandu, but the protest vigil in Mahendranagar continues, and people from all over the country (including Hiša Iyami and Gowinda KC) have come to show solidarity. The media coverage and sustained protests have led to accusations that it is politically motivated instead of being a campaign for justice.

Home Minister Ram Babu Thapa said recently: “Hundreds of women were raped before Nirmala and continue to be, but they do not attract so much notice. We solve 95% of those cases. The media coverage is politically motivated.” Actually, only 44% of rape cases last year resulted in convictions.

Here in Mahendranagar, it is clear that Justice is driving the protests more than politics. Yagya Raj’s second with Laxmi Panta is at the sit-in in the District Headquarter, and says: “My husband wants justice. Now that he is not here, I cannot just pack up the tent and leave.”

With justice a distant dream, others have chosen to focus on more immediate concerns like Yagya Raj’s mental health and Durga Devi’s peace of mind. Activists helped take them to Kathmandu for treatment, and the group #jagatmatrikhas is attempting to shield them from the media glare.

Durga Devi is also worried about her other two daughters. The elder one is 15 and preparing for her SSL exams. She has had to divide her time between taking care of her daughter and joining the vigil in the day. Adding to the grief and bereavement of losing Nirmala is the burden of family responsibilities.

Her life was already upside down since Nirmala’s murder, but having her husband hospitalized has added to the stress. The fight for justice for Nirmala Panta has taken a heavy toll, and it looks set to derail the health and sanity of the family as well.
Amrita Acharia in charity drive

Amrita Acharia has joined the online appeal for funds for the charity Choraha that has rescued 147 trafficked and displaced Nepali children from slavery and abuse in India.

The 31-year-old Nepali-Ukrainian actress is based in Norway and acted in HBO’s Game of Thrones. UK tv series The Good Karma Hospital, the Norwegian tv series Rapport and in the forthcoming animation The Missing Link.

Says Acharia: “My father was educated, and he made sure we were educated and taught self-respect. When we moved away from Nepal, it was that education that gave us stability and the chance to follow our dreams. I love it that Choraha works on empowering young girls after these experiences, and gives them tools rather than just rescuing and dumping them in an orphanage”.

Acharia was born in Kathmandu but her family moved to England when she was seven and after spending some years in the Ukraine, attended High School in Norway where her father is an obstetrician. She is now looking forward to going back to Nepal after 16 years to visit Choraha’s facility in Thanktal.

Most of the rescued children are boys whom Choraha has reunited with their families who had not heard from the boys in years and had come to believe them to be dead. Most of the children had left home in search of work before being trafficked, apprehended by the Indian authorities and late rescued and brought back to Nepal.

Some of the children were runawayaways from domestic abuse whom Choraha funds through vocational training and into good employment. Choraha last year rescued Nepali girls from a notorious children’s home in Mussafirapur where at least 34 residents were gang raped by care home officials and outsiders. These girls are currently supported at Choraha’s child trauma management centre alongside a growing number of domestic child rape victims.

“We’ve only just begun” says Choraha Founder and CEO (ret’d) Philip Holmes. “We know that there are still scores of Nepali children trapped in Indian institutions and the Mussafirapur case has brought into sharp focus just how dangerous those centres are for children.”

With Brexit, Choraha is feeling the effects of a financial squeeze in the UK charitable sector. Which is why it is launching ‘The Big Give’ online Christmas appeal. For one week, only from noon GMT on Tuesday 27 November, all online donations are automatically being doubled in value in the charity’s main annual fundraising drive.

Says Holmes: “The truth is that some of the rescued children are so young that they even lack the vocabulary to describe what has been done to them. That is heart-breaking, but I have been encouraged and inspired by how Choraha-Nepal has risen to the challenge.”

To see Amrita’s video appeal and donate to Choraha through the Big Give, visit www.choraha.org
Govt, not employers, responsible for employees

Shreedhar Golchha in Kathmandu,
27 November

The contribution-based social security scheme announced by the government this week is an important step towards delivering social justice, and it is expected to protect people employed in the private sector.

Under the new scheme, private companies will no longer need to pay for provident fund and gratuity of their employees. Instead, they will have to deposit 33% of basic salary of each employee – 26% from the employer and 7% from the worker – into a government-owned social security fund. Private sector employees will get their pension and other facilities from this fund.

The employers will now have to pay 1.67% more than what they have been paying for provident fund and gratuity of their employees. But we employers are not unhappy. Our only concern is an adjustment of the government-fixed basic salary of employees. About 330,000 people are currently employed by businesses, and they will all be covered by the scheme in its first phase. But will the mechanism for the social security fund be able to serve such a huge number of clients, and won’t the government now have more liability? When the informal sector is also brought under this scheme, the number of beneficiaries and their deposits will increase 10 fold. Can the government afford this outlay?

The money deposited into the social security fund will keep growing. Where and how will the government invest this money? As of now, the employers’ provident fund and gratuity are controlled by not just government agencies, but also the employers. Employers cannot withdraw their money without a letter from the employers. Under the new scheme, employers need not keep records of provident fund and gratuity. The money will be controlled by the government.

The government will now be solely responsible for social security of private sector employees. The employers are just responsible for adding the 20% of basic salary.

What if the government loses the data of employees registered in the social security fund? How will the employers recover their money? The government now has a legal structure for social security, but it should not waste time in developing an administrative and technical structure to implement this scheme.

Shreedhar Golchha is Vice Chair of Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

On the newspaper: “You still don’t see the government” (a) Drunken man! (b) No idea.

Indran Sanyal in August, 20 November
The number of tigers in Nepal will soon double, but what will they eat?

Kunda Dixit
in Bardia

To increase tiger numbers, you need prey. Prey need grass. Grass needs water. The tiger may be at the top of the food chain, but its fate is linked to the deer population which in turn depends on the abundance of grass, and which in turn hinges on the availability of water.

Nowhere else in Nepal today are there intimate linkages within an ecosystem as stark as in Bardia National Park, which has seen the population of its tigers increase dramatically from 19 in 2009 to nearly 87 today.

With Chitwan National Park nearly saturated with tigers, it is largely because of Bardia’s success that Nepal is set to become the first tiger range country in the world to exceed the target of doubling its population of big cats by 2022.

But, there are clouds on the horizon. An adult male tiger needs a vast territory of 100 sq km to roam in, while a female needs about 20 sq km. And each individual needs to make at least one kill of a deer-sized animal a week.

But the prey density in Bardia has declined sharply from 93 to 77 per sq km just in the last five years. This is due to an increasing tiger

Nature without borders

India and Nepal can cooperate in crossborder conservation

Sewa Bhattarai
in Valmiki Tiger Reserve

Parsa National Park has 18 adult tigers today, up from seven in 2013. In Chitwan, tiger numbers have increased from 91 to 93. In Banke National Park it went up from 4 to 21, and from 56 to 87 in Bardia National Park.

Across the border in India, there have been similar increases. Here in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, the number of big cats has gone up, but the exact count will be known after an ongoing Indian tiger census is completed. There has been a similar increase in Kaziranga National Park.

However, greater tiger populations along the India-Nepal border have increased the threat of cross-border poaching and human-wildlife conflict.

“Our conservation efforts will succeed only if we see Chitwan, Parsa and Valmiki Tiger Reserve not as separate territories but as a complex,” says Alok Sinha, Range Officer of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar.

“We are collaborating with Nepal to ensure that we provide animals what they need, and do not duplicate efforts. We communicate almost on a daily basis, bypassing bureaucratic procedures that would take months.”

Both India and Nepal are now getting communities on both sides of the border involved in conservation. The two governments, with the help of World Wildlife Fund (WWF), have installed solar-electric fences to stop animals from entering villages, distributed biogas and LPG gas to reduce use of firewood, promoted livestock management to reduce encroachment into forests, and formed Rapid Response Teams (RRT) and Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units (CBAPUs).

Last year, when several rhinos from Chitwan were swept into India by a flood, residents of Bualwadi village in Bihar rescued some and returned them to Nepal.

Recalls one of the villagers, Santosh Kumar: “The rhino was in the field, and we called the Forest Department which tranquillised it and sent it back. Previously, if we saw wild animals in our village, we would try to shoot it away, injure it, or even kill it.”

Since Nepal committed to doubling its tiger numbers, it began habitat management, protection, and community engagement, many of which have to be implemented side by side with India. Along the border in Chitwan and Parsa alongside India’s Valmiki Tiger Reserve in India, there are Nepal Army guard...
JUNGLE OUT THERE

Take a trip to Bardia National Park which has become a hub for research to ensure that deer have enough grass so tigers have enough prey. Travel across the border to India to see how the two countries cooperate in conservation.

tapatimes.com

JUNGLE LAVA: Kamala Lama lives in Parsa near the Indian border. She has forfeited her gold chain, but still fears leopards and tigers. Villagers in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have erected tall grass walls to attract deer to support the tiger population.

No fence—sitting on conservation

The gray night-time wildlife video shows a tigress approaching an electrical fence designed to keep wildlife from crossing strips outside the Bardia National Park. There is a small gap where the tigress gets a check on the truck, and retreats. In another clip, the same elephant retreats, and knowing that the tigers are not in the area, she wades in cold water to cool down the cement pillar. Through trial and error, the smart elephant has learnt that neither

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452x585
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Animal instincts

Dhano Nepal became known across the world as the highest per capita consumer of instant noodles (Spamaur’s announcement: ‘Rash pack’ is worshipped in high grade single-use plastics that will take 10,000 years to self-destruct) we used to be renowned for the diversity of our flora, fauna and forests.

From political invertebrates in our Animal Kingdom to the business convos that populate the Tribhuvan Landscape, Nepal’s flora is no longer on the endangered list. But it is now on the list of what can be conserved. We have to be vigilant and be able to recognize a Greater Himalayan Red deer from Tawny when we see one. We should be equally at home in the Singh Durbar Lion Sanctuary and Sugh Durbar Tiger Reserve. Below is a useful guide for wildlife enthusiasts that can be cut out for easy reference.

Greys Langur (Semnopithecus):

Handsome and clever, solitary and without scruples, spends much time bringing for (ivy) and (tan) until, in case and, but mainly (tail). Habit makes the perimeter of his domain by springing red pork (and) along the borders of power.

Himalayan Red Panda (Ailurus franklini):

Red and exclusive, roosts on the jungle canopy with obsessional ‘ways to the undergrowth to dig for hidden snails. Once thought to be merely exotic, but has made a dramatic comeback being. Range: Everywhere, but nowhere.

Wild Bull: Gnarled maniacs. Erratic and unsteady. Erratic and unsteady, the Ringneer Road. Superb powers to knock people unconscious at 10 paces. Habit: such a wild bull, he ‘snails them’ away while being silent and absolutely as a bull does.

Barking Deer (Hippotragus niger):

Gigantic, with loud barking call; magnificently at stature. Male and mature, commonly found alongside large gatherings. Cute, Venisonus appetite, can even gobble hard cork.

Lesser Eurasian Red Hare (Lepus timidus):

Rains towards (hair), trusts at night, scrawling bottom: red with ‘snails’ when extreme of heat is broken for its wheezing, blood-curdling sound of “Yip Yip Big Pop” (language), Sense of ground, sudden from there.

Sloth bear (Melursus ursinus):

Indolent and sluggish, sleeps during the day with head on desk at ‘snails’ location, emitting distinctive snore. Approaches with care, can be avoided. Bred itself. Crass, appraised form of the ‘snails’ range.

Wild ass (Equus ferus):

Presents to be avoided. But is assured. Please write to the author after correspondence in a weekly column.

The Ass

Fight For Your Environment. Inspire.
Go Higher Than You’ve Ever Dared To Go.

16

30 NOVEMBER – 6 DECEMBER 2018

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