India watching from Nepal

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s BJP has suffered a shocking setback in assembly elections in five states, none of them in the Hindi heartland. The defeat is comparable to the debacle faced by President Donald Trump in November’s mid-term polls in the US.

The loss of crucial states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh this week is a severe blow to the BJP’s Hindu cried agenda. The party was seeking communal divisions, but the election results appear to have backfired. This setback has made many analysts rethink BJP’s chances of winning in next year’s general elections.

In 2014, Prime Minister Modi led his party to a landslide with promises to transform living standards of ordinary Indians. Modi, however, was constantly afraid in his first year, busy being a global statesman. When he returned to New Delhi after one such visit, Indian media even headlined: ‘Modi Visits India’.

Prime Minister Modi was the first Indian leader to visit Nepal in 17 years when he came to Kathmandu in 2014. Since then he made two more visits, including pilgrimage to Janakpur and Muktinath this year. The visit to India was a step towards improving relations between the two countries.

However, Modi’s ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy turned out to be a success for Nepal because of the peace talks between the government and the NSM. In 2013, it stopped energy and essential supplies as well as upset earthquake relief at the border.

We have to analyze how India’s policy on Nepal changes depending on whether the BJP or Congress is in power in New Delhi, and prepared for it,” cautions Nepal’s former ambassador to India, Bhik Bahadur Thapa.

Under Modi’s powerful National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, India’s Intelligence Bureau (IB) called the shots in Nepal rather than the other spy agency, RAW.

This election was a referendum on Modi, and the Indian electorate has reminded him that they prefer better living standards to slogans of populist Hindutva.
THE NEW NORMAL

I t does not matter who advised Prime Minister KP Oli about attending the Asia-Pacific Summit in Kathmandu last week organized by the Korean University Church of Sinchon Myung Moon. He should have refused to go. Even if he had been bold enough to tell other Asian leaders what he was thinking, just placing his name on the invite list should have made it clear to both his people and others who were tuning in, unprocessed by the international community: Cambodia’s Hun Sen and Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi.

As Oli got himself elected again this year in an another staged election, and the former Khmer Rouge guerrilla who has brutally silenced critics as Asia’s longest-ruling prime minister, Aung San Suu Kyi may still retain her Nobel Peace Prize, but she has been stripped of numerous other international awards for her refusal to condemn her government’s extermination of the Rohingya minority and imposing jowling on those who covered it.

Nepal’s entire political leadership, including even President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, has itself by reinventing the much-disputed evangelical cult that has been known to buy political influence in soft states around the world. Seeding Nepal’s entire political system on stage with Mosin figures was not just shameful, but an embarrassment to our own reputation and isolation with a shadow of us all once again.

A promotional video made by the Church boasts about how it has the backing of Nepal’s political leadership. It shows clips of UNIL leader Madhav Kumar Nepal on an Asia-Pacific Summit in Kathmandu airport tarmac to welcome the group’s ‘True Mother’ earlier this year, and other leaders receiving ‘blessings’ from her. (Go out and meet them.)

Moon’s Unification Church and Universal Peace Federation (UPF) has nearly 15,000 members and dozens of branches across Nepal. It has also bankrolled various political parties to give (its chairman and head of the Nepal Peace Council) Park Ji Kyung Nak Thalbal a Peace and Reconstruction Minister in successive coalition governments in the past few years. Thalbal is known as Nepal’s top politicians and MFs on frequent and lavish junkets to Korea.

The Oli administration has been hapless about getting its timing right even when it makes positive moves. It expanded the PR advantage of signing the mesh-vaunted Trade and Transit Treaty with Beijing earlier this year by installing a controversial head of the Nepal Telecommunication Authority on the same day. Headlines about the appointment

Dawnh and the consequent expansion of the Nepali public sector with a strong mandate is not good news for Nepal’s long-suffering people who have waited out two decades of conflict and transition.

The weakness and critical need for an elected government with a strong mandate is not good news for Nepal’s long-suffering people who have waited out two decades of conflict and transition.

Nepal’s 73-year-old constitution was promulgated three years ago, elections were announced and one with and the three levels of government have all been in office for nearly a year. When are we ever going to be normal? The war has been over 12

The weak and critical need for an elected government with a strong mandate is not good news for Nepal’s long-suffering people who have waited out two decades of conflict and transition.

Years ago, the Nepali Parliament passed on November 6, 2007, the Fundamental Right to Education. It had been in the public domain for more than a decade, and the basic core of it was to provide free, compulsory, and universal education for all children aged 6 to 14. Since the law was enacted in 2017, there have been fears from a number of angles, including those of the local government, many communities, and NGOs.

The law was enacted with the idea of ensuring that every child, regardless of their social background, has access to education. However, the implementation has been slow, and there are many challenges to overcome. Some schools still rely on fees to pay for textbooks, uniforms, and other expenses. There is a widespread lack of proper infrastructure, including classrooms, toilets, and playgrounds. As a result, many children are forced to drop out of school, and the quality of education is often compromised. The law was enacted to provide free, compulsory, and universal education for all children aged 6 to 14. Since the law was enacted in 2017, there have been fears from a number of angles, including those of the local government, many communities, and NGOs.

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We are beginning to see the full economic impact of connectivity in Nepal

A<br>frica marked the end of World War II two weeks after Europe because it took that long to get out the messages that the war had ended. Months after the end of World War II, Gurkha soldiers were still in the jungles of Burma looking out for Japanese troops, unaware that a peace agreement had been signed. When British officers asked them how they found their way back, one of them produced a road map of London. Today, they would use Google Maps.

In a recent episode of James Gordon’s The Late Late Show, the CBS late night talk show had to make a real effort to explain to younger members in the audience what is a “letter”, “envelope”, “postage stamps” and “mail boxes” were. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi elaborated on his connectivity strategy in an address to Nepal’s Parliament on his first visit to Nepal in 2014 with the acronym “HIT” - standing for highways, information and transmission - lines. This week, the number of people online throughout the world crossed 4.9 billion – more than half the global population. It took 100 years for the first billion people to say “bello” on a landline phone. In the early 1990s, the only way to get a phone line in Nepal was to pay a hefty bribe or to register a company and get a landline.

So India, the joke to the old days was that 5% of the population had phones, and 95% was waiting for a dial tone. And across the border in India “SDD, STD” were ubiquitous acronyms because long after Nepal’s telecommunication went digital in the 1990s, India still had analog phones under the “Be Indian, buy Indian” philosophy.

Then it was cyber cafes, and now even those have been replaced by smartphones.

In Nepal, the government does not distribute free mobile phones, and there are no donor funded projects subsidizing these devices. Yet everyone, rich or poor, has a phone. On the other hand, the government with donor support has been building toilets and providing free materials and training. Yet, many people are still defecating in the open.

No one runs a literacy program on how to use a smart phone, yet everyone seems to know how to use one. Connectivity is clearly more important for people than toilets. There is a willingness to pay for connectivity, but that does not seem to apply for anything else. Nepal currently has full phone coverage and 72% have access to the internet.

Now that access is less of an issue, the content and what people use connectivity for is up for debate. The Home Ministry blames the rise in rape cases across Nepal on online pornography. Booking.com, e-commerce and Nepalia seeing family members across the globe on Viber or Skype are all obvious benefits. China’s next grand leap forward is to skip credit cards and go straight to the mobile phone payment.

The government now wants to provide online services hoping to fight corruption by reducing human contact. People now go online to pay bills, check a recipe, find offices and meeting locations, check on the people they are about to meet, do research, find images and to show off selfies with celebrities.

You can listen to a great lecture, read archived articles in far away literatius, video chat and negotiate deals. One wonders how the world even functioned when we were not online. The earthquake of 2015 taught Nepal to make a shift a shift from a downloading society to an uploading one. We simply do not upload enough, but things are changing due to the social media and the trend of sharing images online.

It will be interesting to analyze the data to see how many photos will be uploaded in this week’s weddings. And the results will probably show that just like the global digital divide is narrowing due to mobile connectivity, so is the digital divide within Nepal.

Anil Chitrakar is a President of Shishir Bank.

BIZ BRIEFS

Growing Turkish
Turkish Airlines’ passenger and cargo traffic results for November 2010 showed that the airline reached 8.1% load factor. The passenger growth trend also continued, reaching 5.5% in billion travelers.

Sustainable energy
A new World Bank report analyzing global progress on sustainable energy policies has revealed that the number of countries with strong policy frameworks for sustainable energy use has more than tripled in the last decade.

Trade in 2019
A new report from the UN has analyzed the impact of a US-China trade war. It notes accelerated restrictions on trade goods and services, and more reservations on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which saw a 4% drop in 2018. The United States-Chinese tensions between the two countries have caused supply chain and diminish investor confidence.

Rugby Festival
2500 people participated in a rugby festival organized in Lumbini last week as part of the Rugby World Cup 2019 Trophy Tour of which Nepal was the last destination of it.

Sanima insurance
Sanima Life Insurance organized a blood donation program at its head office in Kathmandu.

Qatar World Cup
Qatar Airways was part of a draw that determined the groups in which the 32 qualified nations will play for the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup. The tournament will be held across nine French host cities from 7 June to 7 July 2019. In May 2017, Qatar Airways became the Official Partner and Official Airline of FIFA until 2022. This partnership will also give Qatar Airways extensive marketing and branding rights at the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar.

Tuscon in Nepal
Laser Entertainment, the sole authorized distributor of Hollywood films in Nepal, has launched Tuscon 2019 edition. The new Tuscon comes with features providing improved pacing, convenience and luxury, and the driving technology employed are based on rigorous safety measures. Some features are premium surround sound, 7” LCD touch screen and side airbags.

Women Migrants
The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens organized a two-day symposium to discuss opportunities for women migrant workers who have returned to Nepal. Migration and gender experts discussed government in federation, recognition of women returnees migrants, and the social implications of migration on those left behind. The participants also called for political commitment to a strong roadmap that makes migration safe with respect towards women’s rights to freedom of choice and mobility.
Not just social security

Nepal needs a rights-based approach to transform unequal social structures, not piecemeal schemes

Josh Glover

The Nepal government’s announcement of its social security scheme for formal sector workers this month has once again thrust social protection policy into the political spotlight. While such schemes can be important social policy instruments, significant concerns have been raised about the scheme and previous policies, particularly regarding government’s ability to fund and implement them.

Now more than ever, it is important that social protection policies and programs effectively address issues of marginalisation and vulnerability that underpin social inequality and injustice. Marginalisation is deeply ingrained into Nepali social, economic, and political practice. Lines of exclusion across caste, gender, religion, geography have resulted in complext, multidimensional poverty. When poverty is extended over long periods of time, it negatively affects ability of people to graduate from individuals and households to community and government levels. Ultimately, the cost of not addressing vulnerability is home significant.

Vulnerability is exacerbated during times of economic instability, and in Nepal it is caused and exacerbated by politics, natural disasters, inequality of labour and income, and so on. Vulnerable individuals suffer double jeopardy, and tend to experience a heightened spirit of wretchedness if left unattended by governmental intervention.

Governmental responses to vulnerability through social protection policies and programs have improved the trajectory of the country’s transformational politics. Social movements, government restructuring and changes to legal and constitutional frameworks have shaped how marginalisation and vulnerability are addressed.

Today, major parties recognise the political value of adopting social protection elements into their policy platforms. Alongside the recognition of the political significance of social protection policies, there is also growing appreciation of the positive impact of these policies for the country’s development. Despite this, major policy and institutional repertoire protection efforts in Nepal.

It may be useful to analyse the effectiveness of Nepal’s social protection schemes by considering the following two main approaches:

- Equality-based approaches provide blanket security to the entire population. The best examples are many of the labour market regulations, which regulate working conditions, occupational safety, worker rights, and minimum wages.
- Equity-based schemes assume that all people are alike and have the same needs. However, this assumption of homogeneity ignores the fact that some groups experience marginalisation and vulnerability more acutely than others.

Equality-based schemes recognise various types of vulnerability and marginalisation and employ targeted strategies of redistribution. An example is Nepal’s Disability Grant, which targets persons with disabilities to ensure greater social inclusion and economic independence.

Most of the budgetary allocation in Nepal’s Social Security Board is directed toward equity-based social assistance and allowance programs. This reflects the evolving political understanding of equity and equality, policy shifts increasingly seeking to incorporate targeted (instead of universal) strategies. However, since Nepal’s universal schemes play a significant role in protecting the vulnerable, it is vital that the government pursues both equality- and equity-based strategies.

Equality- and equity-based approaches seek to address poverty and marginalisation. However, these social challenges are symptomatic of the underlying root problem of societal injustice. For durable effect, it is important that the root problem is targeted, not just symptomatic manifestations. It follows, therefore, that policies that limit themselves to equality- and equity-based strategies are likely to be inadequate.

A justice-based approach seeks to go beyond addressing economic marginalisation and vulnerability, and instead understand and confront social injustice. Social protection policies are but one tool that governments can use to address vulnerability and marginalisation, justice-based schemes are integrated with other programs to transform unequal social structures.

There is a decided gap in Nepal’s current social protection framework with respect to well-designed, justice-based schemes. However, there are some encouraging examples that show signs of progress from an equity-based to a justice-based approach in social protection policy.

The Emergency Cash Transfer Program, for example, leveraged the government’s existing social assistance registers and provided two cash transfers targeting the people who had likely been left most vulnerable after the 2015 earthquakes. What makes this program significant is that it was formally incorporated into the emergent Social Protection Framework of Nepal, which gives an otherwise isolated transfer program an integrated dimension.

Federalism and inclusive nation-building introduced by the 2015 Constitution has set a decisive inflection point for addressing social injustice in Nepal. Not only are 31 fundamental rights constitutionally entrenched, Parliament has moved to enact legislation to apply them. The agenda to see social justice embedded throughout society is, at least in theory, a top priority for the government.

However, like other public policy initiatives in Nepal, social protection has been historically constrained by inadequate policy design and poor implementation, resulting in a slowing of progress and an inability to achieve parity of laws and social protection in South Asia and elsewhere. The country’s social protection policy and social protection framework has significantly hindered the country’s ability to reduce injustice through policy instruments such as social protection.

Fears surrounding the history of inadequate program implementation arose again last week after the announcement of the private sector social security scheme. The scheme is generous and consequently ambitious. Regardless of intent behind the announcement, the success of the program is contingent on how well it will be implemented. The costs involved are significant and the private sector has not reacted well to the potentially huge increase in wage burden. How the program will be financed remains an unanswered question.

As a social security scheme that will undoubtedly benefit the informal sector, the majority of Nepal’s workforce, it is hard to see how this additional levy helps reduce injustice in society.

Josh Glover, Ph.D, Melbourne University, and intern at 9th Foundation in 2018.
Sangmin Kim

Nepalis are into everything Korean: television and music, cosmetics and cuisine

Sutima Silwal is from the younger generation of Nepalis that is addicted to Korean pop music and television serials. She has taught herself to write her name in Korean, and introduces herself confidently in Korean. Like many of her peers, Silwal did not learn all this in class, but on YouTube and Facebook. This week, she was attending another cultural event organized by the Korean aid agency KOICA, in Patan. She never misses any of them.

"I can read, speak and even write Bangla a little bit. I love everything about Korean culture, and want to visit. It will be my dream vacation," she said, while Brak Hyeongsung of KOICA’s volunteer program looked on.

“We are amazed that today’s event has an even greater turnout than expected,” Hyeongsung said, adding that his agency would look for a bigger venue next time.

With the growing popularity of K-pop worldwide, the Oxford Dictionary officially added the term ‘K-pop’ in 2012, defining it as Korean pop music and culture. Like the rest of Asia, the tsunami of Korean soft power has also washed shores in Kathmandu. 4,000km away from Seoul.

Even before the recent Internet
nepaltimes.com

Go online to watch video of a Korean cultural event in Kathmandu, and listen to fans of K-pop talk about what attracts them to Korean culture, and why Korean soft power is spreading across Asia.

LITTLE KOREA IN KATHMANDU

Nepal and Korean K-POP staff pose with big smiles at a photo zone decorated with a night view of Seoul city at a K-POP event in Patan on Monday (above).

Kiara, 22, always carries a range of Korean beauty products in her bag (below).

K-Town

boom in Nepal. Korean television serials like "Dear My Miss Ang" (2003) or "Winter Sonata" (2002) starring BoA Yongguk were already popular through DVD rentals, and "Blooms over Flowers" (2009) became the rage among younger Nepalis attracted by glamorous young Korean stars. Suddenly, the young Kathmandu crowd started dressing, acting, moving, and having the same hair styles as their Korean idols.

"Five years ago when I started this shop, Korean cosmetics were not as popular as American or Indian brands," says Komal Thapa of Daom Cosmetics in Darbar Marg. "Today, K-Beauty products are catching on and customers come asking for items they have searched online."

Thapa says the reason for the new fashion trend is the popularity of K-pop music and movies. "Our customers look for skin care products and BB cream to achieve natural beauty like Korean actresses or singers," he explained.

A salesperson, Nilam Rai, who is working in Misomi Cosmetics Nepal at Lalit Hotel, uses more than ten K-beauty products from eyeliner pencils to blushstick. Rai says "I do not like heavier makeup because it irritates my skin. But Korean cosmetics like Missha and The Face Shop are good for me."

With the proliferation of Korean restaurants in Kathmandu, and more Nepalis returning from Korea, the spicy and strong flavor of Korean food also seems to appeal increasingly to the Nepali palate.

Korean sit-down meals, such as Kim-bap,度-丼 and 丼-丼(spicy rice cakes) are the popular menu items in Korean Kitchen Picnic in Kathmandu. A kitchen staff, Sonu Lama says 89% of his customers are Nepalis.

At one of the tables, 18-year-old high school student Priyanka Shrestha, who says she loves spicy Korean cuisine, and comes here once a week with friends. She is also a big fan of K-drama's and Korean actors, especially Kim Hyun Joong who played Yoon Eun Hye in "My Secret Flower.

Neha Timmnnaker and Shira Maharjan are co-administrators of the fan group BTS ARMY in Nepal for the Korean boy band, BTS, and recently held a charity event to raise money for the Nepali community: "We posted about donating to those fans on our Facebook page, and many ARMYs chipped in, so we decided to collect clothes and fund," Timmnnaker told us.

BTS ARMY has also collaborated with other K-pop fans to hold a "Flood Donation Campaign" in August. The inspiration comes from BTS which has lyrics with messages like "Love yourself even though the world does not recognize you."

Says Maharjan: "We are very inspired by BTS, we will continue to do more fundraising campaigns."

Erika Bajracharya is an art and design student and is hooked on K-pop just like her school mates who listen to BTS songs and dance to its music to de-stress.

"I am surprised K-pop has become more popular than Bollywood and Western culture. K-pop just feels more natural here," Bajracharya says. "The aesthetics of K-pop with storylines in its dance and lyrics is very creative. It helps me grow up as a person."
In 1974, Broughton Coburn lived up to a Gurung village on a ridge at the eastern edge of Simikot District, and reached the next to the treacherous trekking path had been assigned by the Peace Corps to teach at a high school. The trekker found lodging for Coburn with a 75-year-old widow who lived alone with a cat, a some chickens, and a wide backyard. Aama was more surprised by the sudden appearance of a man an unusual figure, and Coburn spotted the transition by helping Aama with her daily chores.

Aama did not have children, and Coburn was not certain how long the three years out last. A relationship can bond grow between them, and Coburn trained in a basic photo portrait of Aama’s life, Nepal’s life as a life-time of a Marginalized Woman, and Aama in America: A Passage of the Heart: The life of an Aama in the United States.

Coburn recently revisited Aama’s village of Katra after 33 years. Aama died in 1999, at age 67. When her only daughter, Sita Maya died two years ago, he vowed to return to the village and visit her. In the generations ago the Aama were still alive, she would visit a new great gran daughter.

Broughton Coburn in Syangja

I connected first with Rusham, one of my students from 44 Ayurewans. In a coffee shop in Kathmandu. He is now working at an NGO and had not been back in his village for eight years.

"It’s not the same there," he said. "There is something missing." Most villages and Aama’s descendants were no longer there. Thugna, Aama’s only grandson, had found work with the police in India and his son is in the Indian Army. Mala, Aama’s eldest granddaughter, married again and moved to Pokhara.

In a quiet alley behind the shambled griness of Pokhara’s Buri Bazaar, was a two-storey concrete house with an ornate metal gate. Muli, who had known as a young girl, grandly served tea and juice and red carpet. For her husband, daughter, sister and her in-law, she launched into selective recollections of how small the village children were of me, initially, and my hilariously awkward manner of eating, smiling and speaking.

"Things have changed a lot," Gota Muna said, "and a lot, Gota Mima." Mula said, as if searching for some news from the village to share. The relatives lined up and we quickly clicked away with our smartphones. "Remember that chunky camera you were always putting plastic film strips into," asked Maia. "And Aama said that her lifespan might shorten if you took too many photos of her. We, nowadays we’re the ones taking all the photos."

"If you make it to Syangja Bazaar in time, Gota Mama, you can catch the morning jeep that will take you up to Kolma village," Muli added.

"I’m thinking I’ll just walk from the bus," I said. "You can’t," she said flatly. "What do you mean, can’t?" I said.

"There is no trail anymore. Everyone travels on the road."

Kolma

From the roof of the bus, the airy perch I had always preferred, fresh landslides appeared like ink splatters cast upon the Syangja hills. Everywhere, mad scribbles of old how dirt roads recklessly even the smallest hamlets.

I walked along the road that paralleled the small Khola, then searched for the trail at the base of a 500m vertical climb to Kolma stands. The hillside was crisscrossed with crude switchbacks. Mula was right. The old trail could be seen only by broken fragments of a civilisation that walked.

By cell phone I connected with Aama’s granddaughter, Saiulli and Kanchi, and they converged on the dirt road to guide me to their homes. After food and tea we walked on the road to Aama’s village. Kanchi mati, as I struggled to get my belongings. "The old stone stairway that I trekked each day to school was mostly overgrown, superseded by the road on the hillside above."

"Walking on the road takes longer than on the old trail," I objected to no one in particular. "Yes," Kanchi admitted, "but the trail is not the easy people go, anymore."

The smiling headman, warmly gracious and purposefully urban, greeted us above Aama’s village. "We have electricity," he pointed to the wires, "and now water flows in pipes to cisterns here. No need to get water from the spring below the village as you used to do for Aama with a naumol and dhanak."

From the school on the ridge, a half hour walk from Aama’s village, I jeeped past each morning for the district center, where villagers could cash remittance checks and purchase food and supplies, mostly imported from India. As the headman said, no one really needed to work very much, anymore. I privately sensed that village development was a consolation prize for those who had stayed behind, a rationalisation for the uncomfortable absence of so many of the village youth. The village looked like a village, but there was something missing, as my student Rusham had hardly suggested. Corn and millet are still cultivated in the fields, and those we not (mostly women, middle-aged, and older) appeared well adjusted to a daily routine, and content.

With fewer youth to tend them, the diminished need for draft power and manure fertilizer, and fewer mouths to feed, there are not as many livestock. No vehicle came or left the village while I was there. Water overflowed the cisterns.

One villager confirmed what social scientist Karsh Gurung has noted about Nepal’s village today: women carry coppers of their parents to the cremation site on the ridges, and even light the funeral pyres in the absence of some who, tradition dictates, must perform this task. Kanchi told me that many of the weddings, rituals, and festivals have reconvened at the Kolma-Tahan Samaj in Pokhara. Gurung poked to marry Gurung, and some meet each other through Facebook. In 1974, the high school on the ridge had 500 students, today it is half that number. The students now saw largely Bhutias, because most Gurungs study in Pokhara, or further afield. As early as the 1980s, Aama had noted that young people were losing interest in subsistence farming, and home-grown skills such as roof thatching, or hand-hewing a wooden pole, were no longer being taught. Now, I wondered, will the youth recruit a subsistence when the demand for foreign labour ends? My resistance to the future, and
In 1974, Peace Corps volunteer Broughton Coburn arrived in Kolma village in Syangja and was hosted by a 70-year-old widower. Aama died in 1991, but Coburn ended up writing two books about her. He recently returned to Kolma after 37 years. Watch video story depicting the changes he saw.

Suniti and Kanchi stepped from the dirt road to the leaf-strewn trail that meandered to Aama’s house. I could hear Aama saying, as she did when I showed up after months of work in Kathmandu, that she had premonitions of my arrival. Perhaps, somehow, she could perceive that I was again coming to see her.

Pushing through a thicket of weeds, we pulled up to a crude path that nestled the space where her house had stood. I cut down my backpack and, avoiding nettles, walked about quietly, mumbling to myself like an explorer deciphering an evergreen Mogran rain. At low wall, the crumbling foundation of Aama’s house, appeared in the shadows. I took some photos while pummeling my way through a reverse sort of future shock, resurrecting the colours and bundle and the sounds and smells of decades earlier.

Kanchi and Satili stood silently, their heads tracking my movement. They clearly sensed my confusion and sadness. “If you had stayed in the village, Gora Mama, it would not be like this,” said Kanchi softly.

Aama’s house

A Tear formed in my eye, and I mentally fast-forwarded wild scenarios of local marriage, village projects, beautiful living, and Buddhist practice. But I was not the only one who had left. Kanchi and Suniti’s brother and sister and most of their relatives had also left. We were all participants in something much larger than all of us.

What had not diminished during the past 45 years in Aama’s village was the boundless hospitality. My inability to graciously decline had changed, either, nor could I any better explain why I had to leave. Suniti and Kanchi begged me to stay.

“My family awaits me,” I told them tearfully, girdling with mala. They replied: “Then, next time bring your wife and daughter and son.” I promised. And I will.

the present, was beginning to seem idyllic and futile. The ancient barista were being reclaimed by weeds and shrubs. In places, tall trees had emerged where corn used to grow. Trees are not a bad thing. Alpokdo Claim. The countryside was a semi-natural landscape, courtesy of limited markets and opportunities. Some spoke of the potential for cash crops such as coffee or walnuts in the fallow fields. If hillside farming was someday mechanised, might the land be converted to commercial agro-enterprises? Nepal imports approximately a billion rupees worth of food products every day.” Ganesh Gurung had told me. “Now, even China is looking to export grains and other food products to Nepal.”

I recalled what Resham, my student from the 1990s, had told me, that in the old days, hill people were embarrassed to be seen buying rice in the district centre. It was an admission of defeat, signalling that they were unable to support themselves. Nowadays, that sentiment has flipped; if people are stilling the field and growing their own food, it means they do not have relatives working overseas to send money to buy provisions. They are regarded as failures.

Resham said: “One day, just maybe, as people retire or become aware of towns and cities, they will return to the peacefulness of countryside.”

The reverse migration trend may not have begun, but the shifting sentiment will make it forever possible. Perhaps out of my own nostalgia, or hope, I sensed that Resham, Malla, Kanchi and Suniti shared a vision of village revival too — the return of family and the re-engagement of the cycle of rituals, festivals and seasons.

The present moment might be something of a holding pattern, a faded or transition following death, prior to rebirth in a very different incarnation, one humming with commerce and communism. And hopefully community.

nepaltimes.com
EVENTS

Together Apart
The documentary Together Apart showing the story of two Bhutanese migrant workers will be screened in Nepal as part of the Global Migration Film Festival.
16 December, 2-4 pm, SMM Nepal, Baluwatar, (01) 4279545, info@inista.org

sprouArts
Allan sproull Kathmandu is bringing a special human rights exhibition, sprouArts, which is jointly produced by the U.N.V.A and a trend-comic journal SPROQ on the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
14-15 December, 10 am to 5 pm, Alliance Francaise, Paschim, (01) 3985221

Kathmandu: My Fascination
An exhibition of graphic artist Purbah Shrestha’s pop-art slide screen prints, illustrated with a sound installation. Shrestha captures the Westness of Kathmandu city by using various graphic styles.
14-22 December, 10 am to 6 pm, Alliance Art Center, Paschim, 5681147716

Nepal Art Now
A pre exhibition of the best works of Nepali contemporary and traditional art. These pieces will be preserved in one of the most renowned ethnographic museums in the world, We Trust Culture, in Vienna in 2019.
14-21 December, 10 am to 6 pm, Nepal Art Council, Bader Mohal, (01) 4270075

Phulchoki Day Hike
Enjoy a serene hiking experience through the lush, sub-tropical forest trail of the Phulchoki Hill.
15 December, 6:30 am to 6 pm, 9847132694, bhasmichael9@gmail.com

Christmas Market
The final edition of the Loka Projekt Nepal’s Christmas market for 2018. Don’t miss the opportunity to explore exciting products.
15 December, 4-8 pm, Bose Camp, KumariBazar, 9847128697

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Enjoy a serene hiking experience through the lush, sub-tropical forest trail of the Phulchoki Hill.
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MUSIC

Reggae with JFI
House of Music offers its JFJ for 2018 with reggae music by joint family international. The band’s Virgin tourists song will be a great way to end the week.
14 December, 9:30 pm, 6:400, House of Music, Abid Mogh, Thamel, 9847197755

Christmas Concert 2018
Kathmandu Watchers is bringing a festive night of music and dancing featuring international artists Abraham Bhaduri, Dushyanth Salim, Mani’s Tivijadas, and Jeek Chalal.
There will also be performances by the K.C. Elementary Diploma students from 4 to 5 pm.
22 December, 6-7 pm, Mallik, Jessnath Lollgop, 01-5226862

Barbecue at Hyatt
A special way to enjoy Sunday afternoons with barbecue and international cuisine accompanied by a bottle of chilled beer.
The hotel will also be live band and dramatic shows like The Greatest Escape with comedians. The resort also offers coco-nut ice cream and Jimbaraya Ice and topped pineapple ice cream for that sweet tooth.
23 December - 27 December, 12 noon-8 pm, 250/++, The Bar, fitness lounge, (01) 4427725

Shangri-La
A New Year’s Eve Package with a lavish gala dinner. Also spend the night at the hotel with a complimentary buffet breakfast on January 1, free wifi in room and other attractions.
31 December, 6:30 pm, Shangri-La, (01) 4412999

Thistle Triangle
Thistle’s special Polo party will be at triple chicken and any item from the European menu at half price.
Mahanagari Bhawan, Mahagun, (01) 4492346

Fire and Ice
One of the first places in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice offers genuine Nepali pani poda and some vegetarian and non vegetarians dishes to choose from. A warm pani will be the perfect, hearty meal on a cold winter day.
Thamel, (01) 420210

Bungtal
A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar great for a casual get-together with colleagues and friends. Vegetarian options is finger licking good.
Mallah, (01) 4412359

GETAWAY

Royal Singal Hotel
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Lo Gatson, (01) 4447650, 4469451

Shivapuri Hills Cottage
Treat yourself to a 90 minute ayurvedic massage at Nirne’s Spa, followed by a healthy lunch at the cottage.
Shivapuri Hill, Budhanilkantha, 9847137077

Grand Noting Hotel
Bilena yourself in a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides a spacious room with western bathroom, a large balcony with views of the golf course, monorail and deer, and not to forget, the garden.
Gandaki, (01) 4510210

Hotel Barahi
Treat yourself at the Barahi and indulge in the exquisite pastries at the German Bakery on the hotel premises.
Lakeside, Patan, 987-4869174/95926

The Old Inn
The Old Inn is reminiscent of black and white Tudor buildings in England; the cobblestone, picket-fence and main street is elegant, and there is the breathtaking view of the Central Himalaya from Annapurna in the west to Langtang and beyond in the east.
Bhaktapur, (01) 247120

Show Room: SBD New Plaza, Putalisadak, Tel:4245402

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KATHMANDU, 7 - 13 December

AIR QUALITY INDEX

This week has been the worst so far this season in terms of average daily 2.5 micron particulate concentration in Kathmandu Valley. This is because of stagnant air in the mornings and light to moderate winds in the evening/night. Although the asthma seasonal toll is borne by every poll producer and took heavy toll from respiratory issues during the evening rush hour. Earlier air and cloud cover over the weekend could make matters worse. Check this site for air pollution monitor at www.mqUC.org to decide whether to engage in outdoor activities in the coming days.

https://mq.uc.unh.edu/emphasis/air-quality-monitor/
Nepal Mandal in Manhattan

The Met ends its exhibition of five ancient Vajracharya crowns from Kathmandu Valley

Kanak Mani Dixit

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presents ‘Over 5,000 Years of Art: Spanning Cultures and Time Periods’ in its galleries, and for a year till the exhibition closed this week, it displayed a unique facet of Kathmandu Valley’s Vajracharya Buddhist heritage. ‘Crown of the Vajra Masters: Ritual Art of Nepal’ presented five heirlooms of the Vajracharya clan of the Nepal Mandal (Kathmandu Valley) in a small gallery. The tiara crowns made of gold-plated gilt copper with repousée medallions carrying the images of the Five Dhyani Buddhas (Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhara, Amitabha and Amogasiddhi) were beautifully spangled.

The mukutas sparkle with semi-precious stones, turquoise and coral, and each has half a thunderbolt sceptre (vajra) at the tapered top. The way the crowns follow the contour of the wearer’s head from temple to forehead just above the brow is distinctive of this genre, but each of the five on display is different from the other.

It is not that The Met is lacking in cultural items related to Nepal, some of which have arrived here through the back door, so to speak. A year until the exhibition (Ramesh Dhungy) gained access to the storage space of the Museum and toiled with the work. The Lost Heritage: Hindu and Buddhist Art of Nepal at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2019).

Nearly 40 years ago, the venerable Lama Ugen Dorje (Phubkhetsang Rimpoche) personally presented a full set of the nine instruments of the Nepali saumati baya folk orchestra to the Museum’s permanent collection.

The exhibit of crowns which date from the 12th to the 18th century was curated by Jake Gyu, who heads the South East Asia section at The Met, and also the museum official who came to Kathmandu in early April to return two statues that were found to be stolen (a standing Buddha and Uma Maheswari).

The Vajracharya are the masters of the thunderbolt sceptre (vajra), and the crowns the priests wear during rituals Gyu describes as one of the most spectacular symbols of Buddhist ritual in Nepal. Donning these crowns is central to Vajrayana rituals, transforming the wearer into a perfected being, a bodhisattva.

The Met exhibition described the devotional use of the crowns, their iconography and stylistic evolution. The pieces preserve memory of the earliest Buddhist traditions going back to the 5th century, as far back as the mural portraits of Ajanta and Ellora where we find figures wearing comparable headdresses.

It is entirely possible that the crowns of Kathmandu are descended from a line of tradition that goes back to those worn by the nobility depicted in those murals. The ancient Hindu and Buddhist statues of gods and goddesses from the Valley and other parts of South Asia also show them wearing similar headdresses.

The Vajrayana tradition itself started in the 8th century in the region encompassing today’s Bihar, Bengal, Odisha and Nepal, and gained momentum for about four or five centuries. Vajrayana weakened in the Ganga plains and Odisha around the 15th century, and the Valley became the natural refuge for the tradition. “The Valley remains today the centre of the Vajrayana tradition, and the Vajracharya community provides continuity in the ancient practice,” says Gyu.

It is worth considering how these crowns left the Valley and joined the collection of The Met. There is an inscription in one mukuta which says it was made in the year 1145 CE. Two of the pieces were actually held by the Museum’s section on Tibetan art, where they have been stored as Tibetan war helmets. It was only in preparation of the exhibition that the Museum officials realised they were Vajracharya crowns.

While these five crowns ended up spotlight in a New York museum, in the Sachs Hall Supreme Offering ceremony to set the deity on the Buddha-path.
Nepal Art Now to Vienna

The Weltmuseum Wien, one of the most renowned ethnographic museums in the world, is organizing its first-ever kind exhibition to showcase the best works of Nepali contemporary and traditional art to a worldwide audience. Nepal Art Council, a national institution founded in 1962 to promote the arts and artists in Nepal, is the home-country partner and collaborator for this project.

The Nepal Art Now Exhibition is scheduled for 11 April – 15 November 2019 in Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and home to the great一汽museum companions of the arts.

This exhibition will include 100 art works by 37 Nepali artists and will be the first major exhibition of Nepali art outside Nepal. The selection has been carefully curated by Christian Shweingruber, Director of the Weltmuseum Wien and assisted by Nepal Art Council. It will be showcased at the Weltmuseum, which used to be the Hofburg Imperial Palace.

The project was canceled in 2016, by the then Prime Minister, who was co-organized by the Nepal Art Council and was assisted by Nepal Art Council. The exhibition will include original art works by the premier artists dating from the 1950s, the senior and the young emerging artists of today will complement and enrich the collection,” Rana said.

Some of the art works are commissioned expressively for the Vienna exhibition, while others were borrowed from collectors and the artists directly. The art works are embedded in the culture and traditions of Nepal but also discuss and probe into current international issues and social concerns, giving them a global relevance.

Art historians emphasize the amazing influence of art works by European masters in the evolution of contemporary art in Asia. The exhibition will demonstrate the cultural cross-pollination and serve to highlight the Nepali scene that builds on the country’s traditional art forms fused to modern influences and techniques. The curators say that the works of Nepali artists underline the coming of age of Asian contemporary art that now compares well with the best works in the West.

While the art works (like the tripod bowl) by Sunil Shrestha will dominate the exhibition, some outstanding sculptures and a few representive pieces of traditional metal, wooden and stone art will also be on display in Vienna to demonstrate and inform the international art community and visitors that these genes of art forms occupy equally important and vibrant space in the art of Nepal. A rare show exhibition will be held at the Nepal Art Council on 13-21 December before the pieces are flown to Vienna.

Nepal Art Now Pre-Exhibition
Nepal Art Council
Rabin Wagle
13-21 December

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FLYING YOGI: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath being greeted by Province 2 Chief Minister Lalbabu Raul and Indian Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri in Jawalpaur airport on Wednesday.

FOND FAREWELL: Chinese ambassador to Nepal Gu Hongping a farewell call to Nepal’s Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali, in Singh Bahadur on Friday.

SNOWED UNDER: The season’s first snowfall blankets Simikot in Humla district this week. Daily life came to a standstill, flights were canceled, and students had a hard time giving exams due to the cold.

PROMOTING MOUNTAINS: Bidya Devi Bhandari and Kamal Kumar win the Nepali Panorama Best Documentary Award at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival on Tuesday for their film ‘The Man Who Died Once’.

CLASS OF 2018: Irogram College, affiliated to the London Metropolitan University, organized a graduation ceremony last week in Kathmandu where 261 students were conferred with degrees.
Changing the headlines on migration

By signing the Global Compact on Migration in Marrakesh this week, Nepal commits to move beyond rhetoric to action.

The road to the Global Compact on Migration in Marrakesh this week has not been smooth in a politically tense global environment as an anti-migration wave is fuelled by nationalism and xenophobia. On Monday, the United States, Australia, Hungary and some other eastern European states said they would not participate in the Compact.

Among the issues Nepal will have to start examining is the exodus of Nepali migrant workers. Despite the high volume and remittances, India as a destination country has been overshadowed by Nepalis migrating to the Gulf, Malaysia and overseas. With all its complexities, informality and its sanctity, India is the elephant in the room in Nepal’s migration discourse.

The GCM will take up this long-overlooked issue because by adopting the Compact, both Nepal and India are committing to make migration safer, orderly and regular, none of which characterises migration between the two neighbours at the moment. On the home-front, too, Nepal’s elected local governments are well placed to take ownership and begin keeping records of India-bound migrants.

Extreme stories shape the Nepali public’s perception on migration, from stories of unassailable abuse at one end, to tales of migrants-turned-millionaires on the other. While important, perhaps the average migrant also deserves attention, the ones who go abroad for a few years, get the jobs they were promised at the salary agreed, remit frequently, and come home better off than when they left.

These uneventful and mundane experiences may be the stories of a majority of Nepali migrants, but fall through the cracks in media coverage of the issue. Because these tales never make it to the headlines, the risk is that only the ones of extreme hardship or reward shape public opinion on migration.

One female domestic worker return from Malaysia told me: “There is a perception that if you have returned as a domestic worker, you are in trouble because you engaged in sexual activities, even if unwillingly.”

Moving anecdotes and ad-hoc generalisations about migration can have grave consequences. Administrative data on legal migration data, but provide an incomplete understanding of its nuances. They miss out on important facets like the actual terms of employment and recruitment costs, the reality of undocumented workers, social costs and the state of the returnees.

They also do not account for opportunity costs and counterfactual – are migrants really choosing to overlook equally good earning prospects in Nepal as is increasingly believed in Nepal? Or are these views shaped by anecdotes that cannot be generalised?

All this matters because curbing migration has public appeal in Nepal, even though research and evidence show that as countries develop and incomes grow, migration too increases to a certain point before falling at an income per capita of between PPP$3,000–9,000. Nepal is only at the early stage of development, and far from this threshold.

Curbing unsafe and un Rewarding migration should, however, be a policy concern and there are many initiatives in Nepal aimed at addressing these. A rigorous evaluation of these programs and a culture of evidence-based policymaking, however, has remained weak and deserves more attention.

When migrants are so desperate to travel abroad, asking them to slow down to consider all alternatives and to be better prepared, is often too challenging. However, Korea proves that aspirant migrants are willing to spend months learning a language and preparing for an overwhelming visa application test if it promises a secure future.

The same cannot be said about training programs for other countries where investing in skills has not always guaranteed a better outcome. Even if uptake has improved for pre-departure training, how much are off our migrant workers who have taken these classes? Without honest and rigorous evaluation, we will not know what works and what does not. We then risk becoming complacent and replicating similar programs.

The Global Compact on Migration offers somewhat more clarity on how these safeguards can be made operational. For example, it seeks out of the box thinking like the Global Skill Partnership model which will directly involve employers and governments in destination countries in training, both in the curriculum design as well as financing.

Such a skill partnership pilot initiative can also allow for a home-based track that would enable stayers to benefit from such programs. The Compact offers the Compact for such practical purposes and innovations rests on us.

At this stage, it is still unclear how the Marrakesh agreement will help address the lapses in Nepal’s migration governance. In such cases, we are yet to see if and how the Global Compact on Migration can complement our ongoing efforts so that it is not limited to rhetoric.

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The science of learning

Nepal’s schools need to add STEM-based instruction to prepare the country for the future

Prakriti Kandel

Now that school enrollment in Nepal is approaching 100%, attention has turned to unlocking the quality of instruction and keeping the curriculum in tune with the times with a stronger focus on science and mathematics. This is because STEM education that integrates science, technology, engineering and mathematics in experiential-based learning is now needed in every profession.

With the convergence of technology, all appliances and applications need hands-on technical experience. However, most education in Nepali schools is still light years behind with rote-based textbook learning of stereotyping and irrelevant content.

“A focus on STEM education can unleash students’ creativity, and it begins with small steps,” explains Ireti Arogundade, who was involved in STEM education in Nigeria. Hands-on STEM learning is not about fancy equipment, but how we can use the simplest of materials to encourage students to think and create.

Ishqib used paper cups to make rudimentary robots that could make sketches, and says STEM instruction is missing an ‘A’ for art, and the acronym should actually be STEAM. She says future careers will depend on a blend of science, technology, arts and humanities, and they have to be able to adapt for jobs of the future.

Robotic Association of Nepal’s Manoj Jha adds: “Even if students make simple lamps, they can innovate electricity, design-thinking, and create useful products.”

Starting schooling with the basics of science, technology, and mathematics can radically improve learning. And adding ‘art’ in STEAM encourages students to enhance their 4D creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication.

By working on projects like designing automatic street lights using photoresistors, or wearable tech with solar-powered LEDs, school-going children come up with solutions for real-life problems such as food-safety and energy efficiency.

In 2015, research has shown that STEM education must start early, from primary school or even younger, to lay foundations of necessary thinking skills and learning culture.

The Nepal government has been talking about creating child-friendly schools, which also entails an engaging learning process. But in most government schools, especially in remote areas, teachers are unable to align learning with experimental activities, and are often unaware of the latest technological advances. Moreover, there is pressure on them to finish a rigid course for the supposed supreme measure of success—exams.

The process of change must start with a new government strategy to prioritise STEM education across the world have recognized the importance of STEM, and have taken steps to include it in their education system.

Finland has a strong emphasis on STEM philosophy in learning. A research-based master’s degree is a prerequisite for all teachers, who in turn work to foster inquiry and problem solving skills. Since 2004, technology was included in the craft curriculum that encourages students to design and create products. Standardised tests do not dominate learning, and teachers are given time to thoroughly plan classes.

STEM education is also big in Singapore. In 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, “To the best of my knowledge, I don’t know of any country that has put as much emphasis on STEM education as we have.”

South Korea has focused on STEAM (the ‘A’ is for art) to engage students and inspire creativity. Teachers receive STEAM-specific training and a study by KOPEAC revealed that students in STEAM classes showed greater interest in all different elements of science, and demonstrated enhanced creative thinking skills.

South Korea has focused on STEAM (the ‘A’ is for art) to engage students and inspire creativity. Teachers receive STEAM-specific training and a study by KOPEAC revealed that students in STEAM classes showed greater interest in all different elements of science, and demonstrated enhanced creative thinking skills.

When he was US president, Barack Obama launched the ‘EdTech to Innovate’ project that worked to train 100,000 STEAM teachers and increase federal investment in STEM. Obama said in 2013, “How do we create an all-hands-on-deck approach to science, technology, engineering, and math? We need to make sure that a priority to train an army of new teachers in these subject areas, and to make sure that all of us as a country are lifting up these subjects for the respect that they deserve.”

In China, there is a nationwide effort for a comprehensive STEM education system from policy-making right down to curriculum reform and teaching innovation.

STEM education is encouraged in Switzerland and Germany, where students engage in hands-on experiments and activities in class. Ireland released a STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026 which presents objectives, actions and implementation of policies for STEM education in the country.
Innovating in Nepal

Mahalakshmi Pun (above) does not just talk about science education, the Magsaysay Awardee has been working hard to retain Nepali technical talent in Nepal through his National Innovation Centre.

Just like he himself returned to Nepal from America, he wants Nepali scientists to come back to nurture science and engineering graduates to become entrepreneurs and bring economic growth. Pun’s Centre still lacks adequate funding but is already supporting a range of projects in science, engineering and technology which includes medical drones, alternative animal protein resources for poultry and an e-commerce platform.

Pun says reversing the brain drain is a tough task, but there are measures that can be taken without much money to improve the chances of retaining Nepal’s science-minded students. “These have to be laboratories, equipment and tools for professionals to work in. Mentoring is another important element to help youths to teach their potential,” but the main ingredient is transferring your passion to the students,” Pun told Nepali Times.

Suyash Shrestha, a Nepali particle physicist at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, notes that Nepal’s schools need to attach a premium to hands-on experimentation in schools. “Nepali education puts a lot of emphasis on deriving and memorizing ”class” type material.” He says, “Stimulating them to get an answer, and to test exams,” Shrestha says in an interview. “There is not enough emphasis on experiments. For example, students don’t even experience laboratory work till Grade 11.”

Beyond this, school leadership plays a vital role in steers the philosophy of learning, provide support structures and ensure accountability. Most government schools that have done well have done so because of the activism of their leadership.

In Dhading’s Bhutheswor village school, principal Ram Chamunda Acharya worked consistently to foster responsible empathy in teachers for quality education so that the school even succeeded in attracting students from other schools. But Acharya also realises the team is limited on STEM education, and is concerned that teachers themselves may not have adequate training to pass on that knowledge. He thinks there should be a way to attract not only postgraduate and graduate science students to public schools but also encourage support teachers to improve the quality of instruction.

Pun says the Council of Science is an ongoing process to tighten up in funding and that attempts to give young scientists a chance to build up, do the few Nepal who have achieved notable scientific breakthroughs have done so after going abroad.

With this unprecedented growth in all STEM sectors, there is rising concern about how Artificial Intelligence will affect the future job market, removing options available today and creating new ones that do not even exist yet.

The fact that there are young Nepalis involved in cutting-edge scientific research across the world proves that given the opportunity, they could be contributing to STEM-related fields back home. Many brilliant Nepali scientists have gone on to work in organisations such as NASA and CERN, or have made breakthroughs in transplant surgery or astrophysics.

If students had more opportunities starting at a young age in school, many more could in future achieve even greater success. STEM education is not an absolute solution to the crisis in Nepal’s education, but it is a significant gap which if filled can empower students to find jobs, and be innovators.

Green STEM

A

fter decades of emphasising environmental education, Nepal’s Curriculum Development Centre under the Ministry of Education is seen quickly gaining traction to remove Health, Population and Environment (HPE) as a compulsory subject, and integrating its content into other science and social studies subjects.

This controversial move, it is feared, will detach students from environment-related exposure during their high school education, especially at a time when pollution, global warming and water scarcity are such important topics with impacts on health.

However, government curriculum developers under pressure from some donor agencies arguing that HPE has not been very effective because, like other subjects, students have been just memorising concepts like biodiversity and conservation without understanding them – just so they could write long answers during examinations.

Proponents of environmental education, however, say that with climate change, air and water pollution, deforestation and rapid urbanisation becoming serious national and global crises, far from removing the subject, Nepali students need to understand it even more in-depth.

Reshu Aryal works at Isabell Outdoor Learning Centre outside Kathmandu that gives students an immersive outdoor learning experience.

“Children today need medical awareness about building climate resilience. They need to learn about the human rights connection to the environment, and about the natural resourcefulness of Nepal to be innovative and create a sustainable economy,” she told Nepali Times.

Incorporating the need for environmental protection as a strong element of STEM would empower students to amalgamate science, technology and engineering to create sustainable solutions, Aryal added.

By combining environment and engineering, for example, Nepal’s future professionals would not treat environmental protection as just an afterthought in infrastructure and health projects. Activists argue that adding nature and environment studies into STEM will dilute their importance at a time when sustainable development should be Nepal’s primary focus. Instead, they advocate more intense training of teachers for hands-on field instruction of environmental subjects and nature studies.

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समय तथा समय प्रसिद्धि नियमित

सुचारू तथा प्रसारण विभाग
The Ass

A ny arriving or dear departed passenger at Kathmandu Airport will have noticed that after Nepal was selected to be one of the top ten most popular destinations for tourists in 2019, the authorities here have made a real effort to spruce up the country’s one and only aeronautical gateway. Improvements are visible from the moment one lands to the time one’s flight out is cancelled. At a time when there is so little good news to cheer us up, it is especially heartening to note that the airport is not congested anymore. This is because of the government’s well-executed plan to make the terminal building so inhabitable that Tribhuwan International Airport was voted the world’s worst airport third year in a row. The ploy worked: people just stopped coming. Vital! The over-crowding problem was solved.

Similar ingenious tactics have been employed to resolve the problem of nearly three weeks without news. Senders with a nose for news will remember a time when, inadvertently, passengers using toilets in the terminal became terminally ill.

The concentration of ammonia and hydrogen sulphide inside the inexplicably named ‘rest rooms’ were designed to closely approximate the atmosphere of the planet, Uranus. (An appropriately named planet, I might add.)

There has been a huge improvement in the toilet situation, as we discovered during a recent inspection. Large signs have been placed at the doors of urinals and arsenals; ‘Flush, Fix Repairs’. In one bold stroke, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has cleverly removed the retic. ‘We figured that if no one uses the toilet it will not smell,” explained the CAAN Spokesperson speaking from behind a surgical mask on condition of complete anonymity.

There have been other visible improvements. Recently, arriving passengers must have noticed that priority parking has been removed from just outside the arrival area down to Ringroad Road. This entails passengers having to make a steep descent down a 30° incline with luggage in tow to get to waiting vehicles. The Spokesperson said this was to provide arriving tourists an authentic first impression of Nepal, and to ensure that their trip begins the moment they get out of the airport. Thus giving them more value for money.

Great care has been taken to maintain Nepal’s international brand as a top adventure destination. Arriving visitors are provided no assistance at all and have to figure out the deliberately-complicated arrival formalities for themselves. This is to test your survival skills, emotional maturity and patience and to separate the wheat from the chaff. For instance, if you lose your temper after a two hour wait at immigration, let’s be frank, Nepal is not for you. If you can’t handle that, how do you expect to survive a one week wait in Laxkia for a flight out?

It is to preserve Nepal’s unique heritage that while all other airports in the world have metal detectors before you get on a plane, here we check for metal after you land. A new Metal Free Zone has been declared recently in the arrival area after immigration, and this is to deter anyone wearing gold rings and/or bangles from smuggling such contraband into the country. Those with 333g of gold in their false bottoms can bypass this silly screening and be whisked away straight to their waiting armoured SUV’s outside.

Another test is to see whether you can wait in multiple lines without blowing a gasket. After your plane has had to wait in line for one and half hours to land, and another hour waiting for a parking bay, you have to queue up for the e-vite line, the visa payment line, the immigration line, the gold smuggler detection line, the baggage line, the line to have your baggage tagged and the taxi line.

And you have to get into the same lines in reverse order to get out of the country: 1st e-vite line, check in, escalator line, immigration, 2nd e-vite line, line to enter the pre-departure sauna chamber, the x-rayed pat-down line, the full body massage line at the ramp located 6” down Nepali air space if you are flying to Indira, and your plane has to wait in line for start-up clearance giving you the chance to earn more ground miles.

All these queues are designed to give departing visitors a lasting impression of just how disciplined we are as a nation. And don’t you dare come back; we don’t want the congestion at our airport to give the world a bad impression about Nepal.