SUBHAS RAI

The last of the Teens
AYEAR WASTED

After ten years of blood and 12 years of trying to come to terms with why it was, Nepal had great hopes for 2018.

Last year this time, there was a sense of achievement and optimism. The first elections for three levels of government under the new Federal Constitution had been held. The UML-Maoist alliance swept the elections, and the expected unification of the two parties was supposed to mark the end of unstable coalition politics, and finally deliver development. We had a straight-shooting can-do prime minister who, despite falling health, had shown gumption and promise during improvements at Kathmandu airport.

One year later, much of the euphoria has evaporated. The past year has been one of missed opportunities, missteps, inaction and blatant blunders. Two months after the election results became clear, the lawmakers Nepali Congress prime minister finally stepped down and the two communist alliance parties, CPN-UML and CPN-MC, decided to co-opt their united party, and rotate the prime ministership.

Formal party unification took another month. Still, there was hope that Oli would hit the ground running, even if it was through showcase development, cleaning up the roads of the capital and launching major projects.

Alas, it may have been unrealistic of us to expect the same sepultures from the same parties to suddenly govern with accountability and efficiency. The Nepali people did not expect much, so they were not surprised to see no improvement in their lives. The roads were still dug up, the bus syndicates that Home Minister Ram Baburam Thapa promised to eradicate were still around, tanker operators were still sticking for the right to steal oil, the culprits who shleped with 33 kg of smuggled gold were never caught, nor were those responsible for the rape-murder of Nimrata Panta in Kanchanpur.

There were some bright spots, and these were mostly in sectors led by efficient and relatively young former UML ministers in the Cabinet like Rabindra Adhikari (Tourism), Govinda Rijal (Labour) and Yubesh Khatiwada (Finance). But even they are finding it difficult within their ministries to get the wheels of government to turn.

The rent-seeking state is so habituated to extortion and extraction that it has run into a wall in implementing its ground-breaking accord with the new regime in Malaysia to remove exploitation and costs for Nepali migrant workers. Adhikari, despite all his efforts, cannot go beyond cosmetic improvements at Kathmandu airport.

Khatiwada’s valiant efforts at fiscal discipline and capital spending are not yielding results, and this has resulted in a liquidity crisis that threatens the banking sector (See page 6).

If that is how honest politicians are prevented from delivering, one can imagine what is happening in the counties led by corrupt and ruthless ministers financing their pockets as if there was no tomorrow. The scottish list of impunity and abuse of authority is long and makes for thoroughly depressing reading every morning: ambassadors on the take from traffickers, journalists who humbly clear criminals ahead of their imminent retirement, absconding multiple murderers appearing on stage with the CCB or police, and a ministerial secretary demanding a Rs250 million bribe to release funds for the much-delayed Metanchhen project.

What is worse is that the public is now so cynical about official promises and data that these investigative reports do not even raise eyebrows anymore. Media exposure causes a brief flutter before society shuts up, and moves on.

We hoped to be able to wish our readers a happy new year 2019. But Nepal and Nepalis will probably just muddle through another 52 weeks.

We hoped to be able to wish our readers a happy new year 2019. But Nepal and Nepalis will probably just muddle through another 52 weeks.

Online packages

Manisha Kohli’s new life

By Ashish
Nepal’s Batukdev Ghimire and Manisha Kohli battled careers and war, and since they have written a deeply personal story of her struggle against the disease. Visit the Times.com career and women section at Nepali Times Studio.

Most read and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

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Tulsi Giri, 93

The passing of Tulsi Giri marks the end of an era in Nepal’s recent political history. Many fans and writers of Giri have written about his campaign that Western-style democracy did not suit Nepal. Gai Jambu to pen the obituary.

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Nepal, Inc in 2019

Outmigration will only stop if the government starts behaving less like a tax collector, and more as an investor

Duting a survey of the Manaslu Trail in northern Gorkha three decades ago, the noted botanist Yorya Bahadur Shrestha and I talked about developing such remote regions of Nepal.

“We had a full sense of just how many people and settle them outside the king’s road in Kathmandu,” I asked.

The good doctor is fond of his understated wisdom, and answered: “If we do not what you suggest, some day there will be a Nepali, but there may be no Nepal.

These remote areas of Nepal continue to receive services, allowances, and projects from the Nepali state at enormous expense. Donors pour money into these regions, and the cost of projects is high because of their isolation. The hope that the people there will stay in their villages and prosper is not a new one. In the Panchayat days, kings went on winter tours to these areas to be with the people. The royal entourage included the entire public machinery that travelled with the king, and unfortunately, left when he left. Last week, I moved upcountry from Biratnagar to Lam and Phidim with New Zealand-trained environmentalist Shalendera Thakali. The roads are good, there is access to government services, technical schools and banks have opened up. Entrepreneurs are looking to strike it rich through tourism, high value commodities, agriculture, and a range of energy projects.

Yet, the young are leaving in droves, and wealth also is moving out as soon as it is created. Men and women are moving to the cities, and many from these parts were in Tumelkhi in Kathmandu last week to celebrate Diwali. Their villages back home are empty.

How can we ensure that the hukum will stay alive with the sound of cow’s bell? Electoral officials have always sought greener pastures, so this is nothing unusual. Yet, under Nepal’s new federal map, we have seven provinces and 753 local governments – and they have been allocated more resources than ever before in the country’s history.

The government is fond of telling us how much more revenue it has raised, but it seems to be unable to spend it. And if they do, much of its effectiveness is questionable. The bigger question is will this be enough to keep Nepal in the remote regions of Nepal?

What is the central purpose of such spending? And how effective is it when delivery is still through bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, and teachers who do not really want to go there? Federal Nepal could be the answer, but not in the bundle of half-hearted people with a letter of appointment from Singh Durbar.

As we drove along the winding roads above the Tamor River, Thakali showed me the picture of a village north of Pokhara with one of the most stunning scenarios in the world. It was empty. This clan spent a lot of money for the upkeep of their deserted villages. There is money for caretakers, the expenses of keeping the livestock. All because it was emotionally justifiable to sell off ancestral homes and property.

Like many Nepalis, Shalendera Thakali has a plan: high-end tourism, energy project, and cultivating high value natural commodities for export. But for this to happen the government has to invest, it cannot just be a tax collector.

Let us hope that in 2019, all three levels of elected government are more accountable to every Nepali and start behaving like a shareholder of Nepal, Inc. Anil Chitrakar

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddhivin,5
HAVE BOLD TASTE
AND INTENSE CHARACTER
KEEP WALKING

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PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.
Banking on a course correction in 2019

A عليهم is what banks have been toing on in the last few weeks by engaging in a price war on deposits. One can understand the soup they are in. Higher interest rates do not elicit significant new deposits, yet they are compelled to raise the rates to retain what they have.

COMMENT
Suman Joshi

They will also be nervous about upcoming outflow from the banking system towards mid-January when first tranche of annual corporate income tax is due for payment. Depositors are happy for now but imagine the plight of businesses dependent on bank debt.

How long will the crunch last? There will be some relief once the government releases payments to vendors and suppliers of various goods, services and development work normally bundled toward latter half of a financial year. But judging by how banks behaved in the last three years, there is no guarantee the crunch will not resurface next October.

Bond sale solutions will not work any more. A strong medicating must now be administered. It will be painful in many ways, but banks will have to bear it themselves. There are fundamental issues with our economy and banking sector that have direct relationships with monetary equilibrium.

Here are examples of initiatives banks may consider without any support or concessions from the government or the central bank:

- **Ration credit.** Banks resorted to aggressive credit expansion following mandatory increase in paid up capital and in anticipation of rapid economic growth post-installation of a stable government. But their reading of monetary environment proved to be wrong again. Deposit mobilization has not kept pace nor has it aligned with growth in loan books. The only way forward is to direct credit flow into areas that will help productivity until the deposit-loan growth mismatch is corrected. The financial system is banking-heavy as alternatives like private equity and venture capital are emerging.

- **Expansion of formal economy.** There is no denying that the Nepali economy is growing, albeit driven mostly by private sector. Private wealth has multiplied in value and people are generally better off than they were. Whilst income disparity may have widened, there are reasons to believe that anticipated government spending on infrastructure and creation of enabling environment will help us continue to grow in the medium term. However, a significant part of the economy is in the shadows of formal transactions. The size of our informal economy is estimated at anything between 50 to 100% of the formal one. And we remain a predominantly cash economy. Regulations aimed at channeling financial transactions through banking institutions must be put to use effectively.

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The Chinese are coming

Two entrepreneurs prepare for the expected influx of Chinese tourists by educating them about Nepal

A sk a person in China about Nepal, and the answer is mostly that it is a happy Himalayan country of Buddhism and mountains. Jurin Zhao and Liang Ye have decided that is not enough for the 400,000 Chinese tourists that are expected during Visit Nepal Year 2020.

When they first arrived in Nepal as tourists themselves, the duo decided that the country had a lot more to offer. Many more Chinese would visit if they knew about the culture, history, art and architecture of Nepal.

Zhao and Ye have set up Himalaya Light Culture House in Katmandu to exhibit and propagate Nepali art, modern paintings, historical books and local handicrafts. By deliberately locating the former Foreign Street, now Thamel, the two wanted to reboot Nepal’s tourism brand among mainlanders.

It is easy to miss the signboard for Himalaya Light Culture House amongst the thankas and scarf shops, the momo eateries and bars in this street off Dharahara Square that used to be the haunt of hippies. Through a narrow passageway, after turning right on a sundek, is the Culture House.

“No wonder so few people visit our Culture House, even I sometimes get lost,” jokes Ye, who was at Bhatapur Square when the 2015 earthquake destroyed the monuments here, and remembers weeping when he saw the devastation.

For his part, Zhao has been to Nepal 18 times since 2013, and cannot seem to stop coming back. He was drawn by Kathmandu’s rich heritage, sculpture and handicraft, and decided to establish a new museum, guest house and restaurant here.

Zhao says that after the earthquake, many Chinese gave up their businesses and went back, so he had to start from square one. But now he is one of the most influential persons for trans-Himalayan cultural exchanges. Ye, 36, used to be a doctor, first came to Kathmandu in 2014, became a travel writer. “At first, I chose Nepal because of its tourism potential, but now Nepal is like my lover,” he admits, smiling.

After seeing the devastation in 2015, Ye started posting scenes of the damage on Chinese social media to explain that Nepal revered Lord Shiva the creator and destroyer, and saw the earthquake as part of another divine cycle. The post helped spread a huge response in China for relief aid.

Zhao has always been fascinated by Nepali modern art and wants to bring it to the attention of Chinese collectors. “Nepali artists are deeply rooted in their society, and their works carry socio-cultural meanings,” explains Zhao, “but the average Chinese tourist only knows about thankas and wood carving.”

Ye has been in Nepal long enough to understand geopolitical sensitivities.

“Nowadays, the relationship between China and Nepal is like friends while Nepal and India are like brothers,” he says diplomatically, “brothers can fight but will always be brothers. China will always be a close friend.”

Ye and Zhao say they want to go beyond government-to-government links to be China’s “volunteer envoys” to connect the peoples of China and Nepal.

In the past three years, Zhao has taken young Nepali artists to China, held exhibitions and discussions about paintings and music. Zhao’s father Zhao Jianying is a famous Chinese artist whose exquisitely detailed ink and brush paintings of Nepal’s mountains and Kathmandu’s temples have been exhibited in Beijing and Kathmandu.

Tourism in Nepal has gone through many phases: the world jettset discovered Nepal in the early 1960s, the hippies came in the 1970s, trekkers and budget travelers after that. Yu and Zhang perhaps represent a new breed of Asian tourists who are drawn by Nepal’s unique natural and cultural heritage, as well as its modern creativity.

Nuituo Zhang

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MANTRA Spa & Wellness

NORTHERN LIGHT: Justin Zhao (left) and Liang Ye discuss with their art gallery in Jorinch and Boudha. They call themselves “volunteer envoys” working to improve people to people ties between China and Nepal.

ZHONGGUO - NIBÖ’ER

Go online to watch video and interviews with Justin Zhao and Liang Ye explaining what brought them to Nepal. Not all Nepali has a lot more to offer to Chinese tourists.
The stupa of a new year

Nowhere better than lively and holy Boudhanath to usher in the new year

Sewa Bhattarai

Three elderly people look up with wonder and reverence, palms pressed together as they approach the Boudhanath stupa towering over them. Somam Yangtung Lama, Yangja Phuti, and Santen Lama (picture right) hailing from Humla, have undertaken a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the Kathmandu shrine.

"Boudha is the holiest place in Nepal, and I had never seen it," beams Yangja Phuti. "Now that I have finally seen it, I am overcome by its beauty and holiness. Now, I can die happy, and go straight to heaven."

Boudhanath has always been a sacred spot to Nepal’s Buddhists, whether Newars of the Valley, Tibetan Buddhists from the mountains, or from China.

The pilgrims from Humla had to walk for a day to Simikot, and then take a plane to Nepalganj and Kathmandu to get here, since Humla is the last district in Nepal not yet connected to the road network. But they say it has been worth the time and money.

This fulcrum of Buddhism was first built in the 5th century, according to Shangri Durji Lama, who heads the Lamas Department of Boudha Ghyang Gachi, the trust responsible for religious activities at the shrine. Boudha has been destroyed and rebuilt many times, including after the 2015 earthquake.

"The stupa stands on a four-layered platform, signifying the five elements of nature," Lama explains, pointing at the imposing monument. "The dome signifies the earth, while the eyes of the Buddha represent compassion and wisdom. The 13 tiers above it are the thirteen steps to enlightenment, and the cupola signifies the protection that the dharma gives. Finally, the spire represents Nirvana."

Despite being swallowed up by Kathmandu sprawl and ever-run by the Chabahil neighbourhood, Boudha retains its spiritual charm, with hundreds of devotees doing the ritual circumambulation, rotating prayer wheels, counting rosaries, or performing prayer rituals. Boudha has also grown as a tourist attraction for locals and Asian visitors who can be seen taking selfies.

Xin Liu, a tourist from China, is among them. "I once saw a picture of Nepal people many years ago. I loved their smiles. And it has always been my dream to come here," she says, between trying to take a perfectly timed shot of yoga at the temple.

Many Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and even Westerners come here, mixing tourism with pilgrimage, but for many foreign tourists Nepal is also an attraction because it is much more affordable. Chinese tourists, especially, say they find a Nepal holiday cheaper than anywhere else in Asia.

A temple by another name
Renaming Khasti by calling it Boudha removed an important identity of the shrine

Ashish Mishra

Until a few decades ago, the white dome of Boudha capped with its gilded tower and finial, and all-seeing eyes was so prominent it could be seen from all over the once-terra-cotta Valley.

Today, one of the country's holiest Buddhist shrines is overrun by Kathmandu's rampant urbanisation. The stupa itself is dwarfed by surrounding hotels, malls and apartment blocks. It has lost a lot more than its serenity; it is losing its uniqueness.

Boudha is said to have been first built by Empress Anchau's daughter who arrived in the Valley more than 2,500 years ago. Boudha is actually the Sanskritised name given during the Panchayat era in the 1960s. Its original name was Khati Mahachayati, which means 'great stupa of the dew drops', and there is an interesting story about how the name came about.

During the Lichhavi period (400-700 CE) the palace of King Bhrasmatuyya was located where Narayanhiti is today at Durbar Marg. The king had constructed three water spouts at the southern edge of the palace, but it did not give any water. Astrologers recommended a human sacrifice of a male possessed of all 32 perfections. However, only the king himself and his son had those attributes.

As the story goes, the next morning the king ordered his son to kill a man sleeping by the water spout. The prince did as he was told, and the water started running from the spouts. But he found out that the man he had killed was his own father, the king. Ridden with guilt, he consulted the priests about how to absolve his great sin.

They suggested that he should release a white bird from the top of Swayambhunath Temple and construct a stupa wherever it landed. The bird landed at the current location of Boudha.

However, there was no water to mix the clay for the construction of the stupa since Kathmandu Valley was suffering a prolonged drought. So determined was the young king that he instructed the people to harvest water by collecting dewdrops every morning.

Which is why, when it was finally built,
Go online to watch video about Boudhanath, and how the heritage site combines a lively cosmopolitan ambience with the original sanctity and tranquility of the place.

**UNDER BUDDHA’S GAZE**

The new addition to Boudhanath’s cosmopolitan ambience are the new Chinese eateries. Liu Xiao Ping runs Chengdu Kitchen and has been living here for six years.

“I had a restaurant in China, but business was too hectic. I heard of Nepal from my friends, so I came here. It costs me less in rent and salaries, and life is more peaceful,” says Liu, who serves spicy Sichuan dishes popular among Nepalis and foreigners alike.

Purna Rangoli, a Nepali restaurateur, speaks fluent Chinese and has named his restaurant Chengdu Noodles, with the signboard in English and Chinese.

“We get lots of Chinese guests from China, Singapore and Malaysia, and they say it is like the menu is in their own language,” Rangoli says. Boudha is proof that despite the chaos of a bustling city, the spiritual energy of the shrines has preserved its tranquility and sanctity. The tourists and pilgrims may enjoy its picturesque and family-friendly ambience.

The stupa was named Khasti, similar to other place names ending in “Kh” in Kathmandu such as Chalati and Kurinti – all made from millions of dewdrops. The name was changed from Khasti to Boudha possibly to make the stupa conform to the concept of a unified Nepali nationhood.

Today, Boudha’s original architectural space of a central dome surrounded by a circle of small mud houses is marred by taller buildings. Yet, such is the magic of the place that it still draws pilgrims and tourists from all over the world, especially after it was rebuilt following damage in the 2015 earthquake.

Boudha is not the only example of identity loss in Kathmandu. For instance, the name two Falchas in Nepal Bhasa means two rest houses built for travellers along the trade routes to Tibet. The name has now changed to Khasti which just means an even number of rest houses.

The name Jow Boudha Khaya is a name alluding to the practice of throwing rice as an offering. Today, both the practice and the name have disappeared and the place is called Jawalakhol.

The name Kist Gtso used to mean the ‘Elephant Stable’ from where the White Elephant (Jaljale) used to emerge during Indra Jatra. Its present name Khaja means ‘Bed of Nails’ which will not be found there.

A name change alters the identity of a place, and occurs when regime change throughout history and all over the world. In places like Khasti in Kathmandu Valley, they have also detached monuments, cultus and entire communities from their roots.
NEW YEAR 2019

New Year hike
A hike in the New Year and keep fit with a hike to Nagkantha through forests, flowers and a view of Kathmandu Valley.
Contact: Nepal Trek and High Adventure (01) 4820108 in Kathmandu, 0162898653.

New Year’s Eve

New Year’s Eve is a wonderful family celebration to ring in the New Year with friends and family. Here are some activities to enjoy.

The Gala Day
Live music, dances, poetry, games and other exciting activities to raise money for orphanages using zoo facilities. A fun-filled event for a good cause.
29 December, Hotel Ramee Pokhara, Ramee Dining, Pokhara, (061) 4451250.

Self Science
A session to reflect on yourself and help figure out your emotions and ideas. For all those wishing to make some changes in life, this will be a good place to get started on thinking about some important things.
29 December, 24-26, 9am to 10.30am, The Garden, Dhamshara, (061) 4829172.

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Arbitrary Experience
Musical performances by Ripul Chetri and the new band led by Sangeeta Suman and the elements to enjoy the last day of the year.
30 December, 9pm, Mobi Hotel, Thamel, (01) 4481886.

Kita Haru
Listen to Kita Haru for the last time this year and enjoy the evening with their fun tunes.
31 December, 12pm, Deux, (061) 4555041.

Sunset Vibes
Deep house beats at the yard will feature Tripas from 2pm and 6pm to 9pm.
29 December, 2pm, The Yard, Sonep, (061) 22885.

Tamru Losar
Gurung family will come together, dress up in traditional costumes and sashay en masse to folk tunes and make merry to mark the Gurung Calendar New Year and celebrate the festival as did as Nepal's colleagues.
31 December, Jalbire.

Kanchanpur diaries
A remembrance and fundraiser for two Vidhis who were injured during the fight for justice following the Nirmala Purohit case and murder case. The event will feature artists like 1941 AD, Abhisruth, Blue Car among the 10 different artists performing. All funds are to support the lives of victims.
30 December, 10pm, Ramee, Pokhara, and 9pm at Thamel, (061) 4829172.

Serendipity
Bing in the new year with a full range of celebration including live music by Mingma Tenzin and The Jazz Band, dance performance by Wild Popperz, Music by DJ August and DJ John, sassy smooth, a laugh and a lot more.
31 December, 4pm, 9909 Hotel, Lamos, (017441818, openpub@9909hotel.com)

New Year at Soaltee
Welcome the new year with an enjoyable night at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, including various performances by the lovely boys, and a flow of premium drinks, snacks and dinner.
31 December, 9pm, Rs 20,000 net (junior) and Rs 22,000 for adults, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu, (01) 4779695, 9671, (061) 482832.

New Year’s Eve
Base camp brings the sounds of Jure Mile to start the evening, and tunes by DJ Karan to finish off.
31 December, 2pm, Ramee or door, Nose Camp, Sonep, Thamel, (061) 4829172.

Fire and Ice
The best place for pizza lovers in town, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napulana pizza and doença of vegetarian and non-vegetarian visitors to choose from. A warm pizza will be the perfect, hearty meal on this New Year’s theme.
30 December, 7-9pm, Rs 2500 nett (single) and Rs 3000 nett (double), The Snowtop Turf, Dolakha Forest Resort, (01) 481570.

The ultimate countdown
Enjoy the last day of the year with an ultimate mix of new years, smash hits and a variety of drinks. There will also be music by DJs Will Bard, DJ Newa and Bollywood dancers.
31 December, 7-9pm, Rs 2500 nett (single) and Rs 3000 nett (double), The Gardiner Turf, Dolakha Forest Resort, (01) 481570.

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
A Newari-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of Bhaktapur. The culture, bazaar and art at the gate of the hotel.
Suryabahini, Bhaktapur, (01) 4871582.

Bathali Village Resort
A small, cozy inn with a Bird’s eye view of green terrace fields dotted with adobe painted houses.
Poonkha, Khes, 061-987077277.

Barahi Jungle Lodge
The first jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overleakad Chitwan National Park. Spacious guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Magasal, Chitwan, (061) 4854139.

Buddhist New Year
Wishing you a harmonious New Year.

Poonkha, Khes, 061-9870772772.

Kathmandu Valley

GETAWAY

Club Himalaya
For amazing mountain views and a refreshing weekend escape, special packages available for Nepalis and expatriates.
Nepalgunj, (061) 441562.

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Kathmandu Valley

KATHMANDU, 21 - 27 December

OUR PICK

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New Year at Soaltee
Welcome the new year with an enjoyable night at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, including various performances by the lovely boys, and a flow of premium drinks, snacks and dinner.
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The Café offers a lavish buffet dinner to ring in the New Year with a glass of sparkling wine or a Pepsi product.
*Complimentary entry to Rox Bar
Event: New Years’ Eve Buffet Dinner
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Grand dessert buffet will be laid in the lobby

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**Love and Loo**

It is a sight repeated tens of millions of times every morning across northern Indian gudwara of women carrying water pots making their way to the fields before dawn to decontaminate. They need to do this before daylight, and ahead of the sun.

The off-Bollywood movie Toilet: Ek Prem Katha begins with women carrying lanterns and pots dangling behind buses. But this morning there is a slight complication: an ‘ere-trouser’ passes by driving a tractor and the women are caught in the headlight. They freeze and hurriedly cover their faces with the pauls of their saris. Director Shoo Narayan Singh plunges directly into the ugly reality of India where 300 million people still defecate in the open, an act that is especially risky for women. He uses satirical humour to tackle a serious taboo.

Toilet tells the tale of 37-year-old Kashay Sharma who dreams of getting married but cannot unless he finds a girl with two thighs that are of similar length, as per the requirement of his priest father. He is also made to marry a black buffalo in an attempt to rid him of a fault in his horoscope. But after meeting outside a train toilet, Kashay immediately falls for Jaysi Joshi, who eventually reciprocates his feelings. Kashay makes a fake throne for Jaysi to want to get his father's approval for marriage. But the very next morning after their wedding, Jaysi, a graduate from a well-to-do educated family, is shocked to find that Kashay's house does not have a loo.

Initially Kashay does not understand what is the big deal. Why doesn’t his new wife socialise with the other lota women at dawn? She refuses, so he tries to convince his orthodox father to make a latrine inside the house. Dad thinks that would be sacrilegious. Kashay then comes up with hilarious temporary solutions to stop Jaysi from ultimately leaving him, but we won’t tell you what they are.

Toilet is not just about the lack of latrines. At a deeper level it deals with India’s entrenched patriarchy, the almost orthodox belief of religious fundamentalists, bureaucratic disinterest and corruption. Which is all very familiar to us in Nepal, albeit less pervasive.

The film was one of the highest grossing Hindi movie ever, but has already come and gone in Kathmandu theatres in 2018. Those who missed it can stream it now.

This movie will probably be more effective than thousands of editorials and public service announcements to stop open defecation. Toilet is entertainment cinema at its best, communicating a public health message while addressing the underlying social contradictions.

Younav Abrov Anupam Kher as the self-confessed ‘dirty mind but clean hearted’ uncle of Jaysi, and Divyaendu Sharma playing Kashay’s brother add the much-needed comic relief to this at times preachy film. Sudhir Pandey as the father of Kashay deserves a special mention for his brilliant characterisation and a distinct Hindu priest set in his ways. Relative newcomer Arthi Prathap has stage presence as the sari-wearing Jaysi. Akshya Kumar as Kashay is perfectly cast, if a little too old for the part.

Toilet does suffer from the typical Bollywood plot-holes: too many happenstances and ironically larger than life events for a movie inspired by a true story. But it is still a stark portrayal of a society whose mores are more prized than toilets.

*Sonia Awaal*

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**FIRE AND ICE PIZZERIA**

Fire And Ice first opened its doors in Kathmandu in January 1995. It immediately became a very popular restaurant amongst travelers, climbers and local residents as the place to meet for a morning cup of coffee expresso, or later on in the day to share stories and travel tales with friends whilst savouring delicious Pizzas, Pastas, Organic salads, desserts and even a Grappa after Dinner.

Come and join us at Fire And Ice and Enjoy a little piece of Italy here in Nepal!!

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**BEING DIPLOMATIC**

Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali addressed the Asia Society Policy Institute in Washington DC last week, Nepal's Ambassador to the United States Atul Khak, is at left.

**SUFI FOR WOMEN**

Ambassador of Finland to Nepal, Perni Anttiinen and Maria-Noel Vezde of the UN Women signed an agreement worth $4 million to support women's economic empowerment, political participation, and poverty reduction in Nepal.

**REBUILDING IN PHOTOS**

National Reconstruction Authority CEO Sudhir Gyawali at a photo exhibition to mark MRIA’s 3rd anniversary at the NAGA Art Council on Wednesday.

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**UNMASKED**

A girl inspected an unfamiliar costume at the first Shukla Gandaki Festival organised by Federation of Nepal’s Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Danepucha, Tanahun, on Wednesday.

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**DHARARA RESURRECTED**

A replica of Dharara is built for visitors to Bardiya's regional agriculture, tourism, and industrial trade fair.
Melamchi delayed by government extortion

Brash Thapa in Kathmandu, 24 December

Just as the much-delayed Melamchi water supply project neared completion with 95% of its tunnel construction completed, it is once more in limbo. Every politician in the past few years has been promising the citizens of Khatmandu Valley quick access to water supply from the project. The dead line has been pushed back repeatedly for the last 10 years, and the latest official completion date was mid-February 2019.

The Italian contractor had asked for Rs 1.6 billion compensation for delays caused by the earthquake and Indian Blockade in 2015. A Dispute Resolution Board decided in October to award the contractor Rs 350 million, and to pay the amount by 10 November. But when the money did not materialise, the contractor said it could not continue the work and wrote a letter to the ministry saying it was withdrawing from the project.

The talk in the ministry is that Secretary of the Water Supply Ministry Gujendra Thakur and Suraj Rij,kernel of the Melamchi Project were ‘bargaining’ with the contractor for kickback. Secretary Thakur has a reputation for even forcing subsidiaries in every ministry he has worked in to pay up to be evaluated positively. The contractor refused to fork out any kickback. Thakur and Rij then resorted to pressure to sanction the compensation payment.

Thakur even complained to Prime Minister Oli that the contractor was going to flee the country with Rs 2 billion. Oli ordered action to be taken against Cooperativa Montecarlo e Cementiri di Ravenna (CMCR), Italian and other nationals from the project who were going home for Christmas. Holidays were stopped at the airport and these passports confiscated. Thakur himself accompanied Police on a raid in a hotel in Thame where some CMCR staff were staying.

The extortion and corruption of this large sum is bound to have a negative impact on Nepal’s investment climate, besides further delaying Melamchi. Thakur even called Nepal’s top companies, offering them new contracts to complete the project.

The tunnel work is nearly finished, but the headworks construction has not even started, and this will take another year and a half. Thakur’s plan was to award this contract to someone else, by more than double its cost to Rs 4 billion.

There is also evidence that Secretary Thakur is working with the knowledge of Minister Bishnu Magar. It is a shame that a bureau chief has such a high profile corruption everywhere he goes. Thakur should be in charge of a National Pride Project like Melamchi.

Campaign in Melamchi is not just corruption. It is a crime against the people.
MADRID—Sadly, 2018 will not be remembered as a year of political and diplomatic success. Throughout the international order had already begun to erode in 2017, the global political environment became downright chaotic, combustible, and hostile this year. That is no coincidence, as these are perhaps

the three adjectives that best describe the United States under President Donald Trump.

Since January 2018, when the Trump administration announced tariffs on imported solar panels and washing machines, the year has been marked by an escalating trade war, waged primarily—but not exclusively—by the US against China. The ongoing tariff disputes have seriously undermined the World Trade Organization and deepened mutual distrust in Sinino-American relations.

For its part, China this year eliminated presidential term limits, a move that President Xi Jinping’s so-called new era will end the period of collective leadership ushered in by Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, which were themselves a corrective to Mao’s cult of personality. This move could also herald a further deviation from Deng’s trademark foreign-policy restraint.

Similarly, Russian President Vladimir Putin was re-elected in March, to no one’s surprise. Under Putin, Russia has been re-emerging as a geopolitical force. And yet, its economy is essentially stagnant, owing in part to its excessive dependence on hydrocarbons. In the absence of Putin, much of Russia’s wealth has been transferred to offshore accounts.

The Kremlin’s recent decision to blockade Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov may also have been designed to boost Putin’s domestic approval rating, among other goals. The danger now is that both the US and Russia will cease to implement the 1997 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, posing a new and acute threat to Europe in particular.

Meanwhile, the Middle East has continued to serve as a battlefield for some of the world’s most violent conflicts. Though the Islamic State is on the march, it is far from defeated—contrary to what Trump has claimed—and the death toll in Syria’s civil war continues to climb. Likewise, the humanitarian calamity in Yemen has deepened, though negotiations that ran again in 2018 have at least resumed and made some progress.

In Afghanistan, what is widely regarded as the longest-running war in US history continues, and it is estimated that the Taliban now controls more territory than at any time since their government was overthrown in 2001.

The US has withdrawn its support for the axis of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which it regards as a bulwark against Iran. In May, the Trump administration moved the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. That same month, it abandoned the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and announced an aggressive re-imposition of sanctions.

Moreover, by siding with the Saudi government over its own intelligence agencies in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October, Trump has made clear that opposing Iran and purchasing US arms is one of the quickest ways to his heart. The result of his broad approach to the Middle East has been to empower military leaders throughout the region. In fact, Israel and Iran this year engaged in their first-ever direct military encounter.

Trump has also contributed, in one way or another, to the advance of populism around the world in 2018. In Latin America, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and Brazilian President-elect Jair Bolsonaro have shown that populism can encompass diverse ideologies. In October, Italy’s government instigated a conflict with the European Union by proposing a budget that defied EU rules. Italy’s leaders justified their policies in the name of an updated interpretation of sovereignty, one similar to that of the United Kingdom’s Brexiteers, whose bankruptcy has left the UK’s future shrouded in uncertainty.

There were a few positive developments in 2018. Certainly, the rating of relations between the US and North Korea, and the even deeper rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea, should be welcomed. Much credit belongs to South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who used the occasion of the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang to reach out to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Trump’s subsequent move toward diplomacy—which led to his historic summit with Kim—should also be applauded, though his administration has yet to achieve anything more than symbolic progress toward denuclearization.

The result of the US midterm elections was also good news. Democratic control of the House of Representatives means that, from January 2019, there will be more checks on Trump’s policies. In the Senate, a recent resolution condemning Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the murder of Khashoggi, and another to end US support for the Saudi campaign in Yemen, passed with bipartisan support.

In Europe, the prospects for 2019 will depend primarily on three factors: Brexit, Chancellor Angela Merkel’s and French President Emmanuel Macron’s push for EU reform, and the European Parliament elections in May. Those who oppose democracy have had a good year. But they would be mistaken to think that those who uphold them have lost the will—and the ability—to cultivate a spirit of cooperation. © Project Syndicate

Javier Solana was EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Secretary General of NATO, and Foreign Minister of Spain.
12 years later, justice is a mirage
A proposal to go out of the transitional justice impasse splits the victims' movement

Sewa Bhattarai

Two years after the end of the conflict in 2006, victims groups were hopeful that the new government would set aside the conflict with a just and moral resolution. The Conflict Victims’ Common Platform (CVCP), an umbrella body made up of activists and groups working for peace, had led the campaign for a new peace process aimed at addressing war crimes that would include victims, the government, and political parties.

This proposal was rejected by the government and the victims’ movement. The government had already formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission for the Investigation of Enforced Disappearances and Abductions (CIDAP) to investigate war crimes and the disappearances and abductions of victims. An informal victims’ group was formed to discuss the issue, with the government and victims’ groups initially welcomed it, but it was soon clear that the Transitional Justice Act was insufficient, allowing pardons, amnesty, and proposing open-air jail and community service as punishment to perpetrators.

The CVCP had proposed a new high-level mechanism as a way out of the lack of progress by the two commissions, constitutive laws, and expecting greater involvement of victims and stakeholders. “Other components of the peace process like the constitution and the army integration succeeded because political parties took ownership of these initiatives, but that is lacking in the two commissions, which is why they have stalled. We want a space where they can be accountable,” said Suman Baskari, a former minister of CVCP and a supporter of the mechanism. Baskari’s father, Mahendra Baskari, a teacher and human rights activist, was executed by the Maoists in January 2003.

However, a faction led by Ram Baskari, Diwakar Subbaria, and others did not participate in this discussion. Instead, they met with the government and demanded that the truth and reconciliation be lifted from the platform. They argued that this would result in the victims being pardoned, which would lead to a general amnesty, and the investigation would be taken over by the TRC.

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The officers and men of the Nepal Army and Police, on one hand, and the Maoist leadership and cadres of the PLA and the Party, on the other, have the most to fear from a serious enquiry into such of the many thousands of alleged incidents and instances of human rights abuses and war crimes. It is unjust, and those who speak for them and protect them, who bear the greatest responsibility for the blockage of the peace process, the perpetration of the suffering inflicted by the victims and their families, and the injustice done to them. And for the fact that the conflict still breeds from this running wound.

Successive governments have failed to provide necessary support to the two Commissions to enable them to act effectively as constitutive independent bodies, immune from the pressures of vested interests and particitipation of those who are responsible for initiating such action. They have been responsible for initiatives to undermine due process within Nepal.

No effort was spared, for example, by the government of Nepal, to influence or even try to subvert the trial in London of Colonel Lama who was accused by two Nepalese torturers, the British police and Crown Prosecution Service (Fujitsu) had charged him with war crimes. Eventually, that trial was brought to an inconclusive halt when the CPS withdrew its proceedings against Colonel Lama.

Also, the so-called ‘international community’ has failed to provide any meaningful support at all in the completion of the peace process started by the CFA, signed on 21 November 2006 and taken forward over the next two years—and even supervising any part of its implementation (like integration via UNMINI) – has tended all too often to regard transitional justice as an ingredient to the peace process rather than a necessary component that belongs to the peace process and the victims and the victims’ movement together with the government was impeded, the latter were responsible for prosecuting them. The fixing of the two commissions by the government at the end of 2013, and the government has not yet decided to extend its mandate, or address the CVCP demand.

GADLY SEDEDON

THE TIMES

If it is just over 12 years since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed, it is almost a decade since the completion of the peace process started by the CFA, signed on 21 November 2006 and taken forward over the next two years—and even supervising any part of its implementation (like integration via UNMINI) – has tended all too often to regard transitional justice as an ingredient to the peace process rather than a necessary component that belongs to the peace process and the victims and the victims’ movement together.

The international community has seen transitional justice as a barrier to the peace process rather than a necessary part of it. It has failed to provide necessary support to the two Commissions to enable them to act effectively as constitutive independent bodies, immune from the pressures of vested interests and particitipation of those who are responsible for initiating such action. They have been responsible for initiatives to undermine due process within Nepal.

The two commissions have not been as successful as they hoped to be in recovering war crimes and human rights abuses from the past. They have not been able to do this to the satisfaction of the victims, who have been slow to accept the commission’s findings. The commissions have been divided in their approach and their conclusions have not been accepted by the victims.

The victims’ movement has not been able to use the commissions’ findings to bring about change in the way the country is governed. The commissions have not been able to bring about a change in the way the country is governed. The commissions have not been able to bring about a change in the way the country is governed. The commissions have not been able to bring about a change in the way the country is governed. The commissions have not been able to bring about a change in the way the country is governed. The commissions have not been able to bring about a change in the way the country is governed.

The commissions have been divided in their approach and their conclusions have not been accepted by the victims. The commissions have not been able to bring about a change in the way the country is governed.
Tulsa’s sons

Dipak Gyawali
in Rupendehi

Dipak Gyawali, member of the ruling NP in Simana village in Rupendehi district. Below her, Tulka Prasad, her husband Pubindra and two sons Durga and Tulbina. Pubindra was killed in action. Tulka Prasad is still alive. During the war, the poet used to be of Maoist artists. Maoist propaganda abounded in the village. She lost her husband Pubindra a year before the family moved from the village to the city.

She has not devoted herself to god, helping others. Her husband Pubindra was killed in a battle in the last battle against the Maoists last week. He was a senior Maoist activist in Kathmandu. He has been a senior Maoist activist in Kathmandu. He was killed in a battle near the village in Rupendehi.

It has been nearly 25 years since Tulka Prasad lost her two sons, and says: “I will not be the first person to walk in through the door and call out to me.”

Tulka Prasad’s daughter Kamla’s brother-in-law was killed by the Maoists. She has a twin sister, who died in the battle. She was a school teacher. Tulka Prasad received 62 million from the government as compensation for the loss of her siblings. Adding money from her savings, she has spent up to 100 rupees on the funeral. She has donated a new jeep to the children of her siblings, and a scholarship for students who cannot afford school fees.

For her part, Tulka Prasad is living in Kathmandu. She has diabetes and other ailments, but cannot afford medical treatment. She has no other income besides the Rs 1,000 single woman’s allowance.

“After my sons were disappeared and killed, their commanders haven’t bothered to call. They didn’t even tell me in Kathmandu,” she says. At a recent family wedding, she saw young men who were as old as her sons would be if they were still alive. She came home, and looked at the photographs of her sons for a long time. She cried and wept that night.
Do we really need a new year?

There are unconfirmed reports coming out of the Office of the Astronomer General that, if all goes according to plan, the Earth will complete yet another orbit around the sun on Tuesday.

If this rumour turns out to be correct, it calls for a celebration. After everything we humans have done to wreck the planet, it looks like the planet is doing just fine, spinning merrily on its axis oblivious to climate change, species extinction, wars and Donald Trump. It is still orbiting the sun without any care in the world.

However, as responsible citizens, we must ponder: Is it really such a good idea to embark on a new year at this point in time? Do we actually need a brand new year? What’s wrong with the old one? Can we individually and collectively take another 365 days of this?

At the rate things are going, the new year is going to be a lot crappier than the last one. At least we were getting used to being miserable 2018-style, now, in the new year we will have to get used to a whole new set of unfamiliar events. What if they complete Melancholy? Imagine the shock to the system. What if the Sankhu Road is paved? How will we ever deal with a six-lane highway from Thankot to Kalanki? How will we handle an upgraded Kathmandu Airport?

So, to cope with new year surprises, we should petition The Higher Up Authority to please let us continue with 2018, and leave things the way they are.

However, as a full back, in case our petition is rejected, we better be ready with our 2019 new year resolutions. Here are mine:

1. I am going to get myself a life membership of the Nepali Bar Association Pvt. Ltd. And that is probably where you will find me during 2019 nursing a large Famous Grouse on the rocks. And I am going to make sure I always see the glass as half-empty, so I am eligible for a refill at Happy Hour.
2. I will cut down on carbs by cutting the cake into smaller slices before eating it.
3. I hereby resolve that in the new year I will not work harder than I have to, I will not do today what I can do tomorrow.
4. I will hold my head high in 2019 and tell all Enghlish they needn’t bother trying to destabilise our country, we’re doing that just fine by ourselves.
5. I will stop giving cash bribes to get stuff done. In the interest of transparency, palms will be greased strictly by account payer cheques.
6. I will not waste time aimlessly surfing the net on my phone in 2019, I’ll do it on my PC.
7. I will stop drinking and driving. I will stop driving, and only drink.
8. I will stop smoking two packs of cigarettes a day (I’ll just breathe Kathmandu air.)
9. I will stop using bad words. WTF, I’ll just use internet slang like STFU, LMAO.
10. I will continue to make myself a complete Ass of myself every week in 2019.

The Ans