The ship of state

The ruling Nepal Communist Party, formed by the union of the former rebel Maoists and their erstwhile UML enemy, has squandered nine months of its five-year tenure. Prime Minister Oli has publicly blamed his own party for undermining the government. He said recently, “Our party’s leaders and cadre are silent when the government is being criticised.”

That butt appeared to be aimed at his Co-Chair and prime minister in-waiting Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his former Maoist comrades, who neither support nor reassure the government. It is as if Dahal is letting Oli stick his ship, patiently waiting for his turn at the helm in 2023.

Analysts blame the NCP’s debacle largely on Prime Minister Oli for being out of touch with reality, and making wild and hollow promises. But the other reason is that the two constituent parties in the NCP still have not reconciled their widely different political cultures.

Says a senior UML leader: “After the unification, we thought we could make the Maoists in our image. But we are now behaving like the Maoists used to.”

Indeed, the NCP is now run by the two Chairmen who rarely consult each other, or the rank and file. The UML’s tradition of close consultation among the senior leadership is gone, and its strong nationwide cadre network has not been replaced with a new party base.

The NCP’s much-delayed Standing Committee meeting this week brought the UML-Maoist fissure into the open, with Oli facing much of the criticism.

The meeting acknowledged the delay in truly uniting the two parties, and said it would take steps to correct that. The question is: will it narrow the distance between Capt Oli and his Cadre?

Rameshwar Baburau
FIXING WHAT AIN'T BROKE

Despite the mountains of problems in this country, and the list of urgent to-dos that the government and its officials tend to get bogged down trying to fix things that aren't broke.

In this edition of Nepali Times we carry two reports. One is of the unique eco-tourism conservation project in the Annapurna that has become a model for other parts of the world. The other is Nepal's successful effort in protecting forests over the last four decades by handing over their management to local communities.

Both success stories have some things in common: local, community-owned projects and the jobs they made them into integral part of local development. They are also brilliant examples of grassroots democracy at work, where elected sub-local committees collectively decide what is best for the people, for nature and for the economy.

These accomplishments of the post-1990 democratic era survived the NC-UML polarization, ten years of war, and leftist coalition governments, and the instability of the post-conflict decade. But now both are threatened by the utter obstruction and disorders wrought by ill thought out federalization.

The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) project was conceived by naturalist guru like Hemanta Mishra, Chandra Gurung and Mingma Sherpa. Nepal could not adopt the national park model because, as the most densely populated mountain region in the world, its wilderness areas had villages embedded in them.

Mishra, Gurung and Sherpa came up with the novel idea of forming the Annapurna area into a model zone where nature could flourish in harmony with human habitation, indeed, conservation could lift living standards of the inhabitants. Tourism income was ploughed into making households energy self-sufficient, in upgrading agro-forestry, replacing firewood in lodges, maintaining trails and building micro-hydro plants.

The concept has worked brilliantly since 1985, retaining its main feature of conservation with a human face. The result can be seen in the lush regrowth of forests, the proliferation of wildlife, and in the relative affluence from tourism of villages in Manang, Mustang and Kaski.

Agriculture is alive. The Annapurna Circuit now has a motorable road up to Manang village on one side and to Muktinath on the other. The Annapurna Base Camp trail now extends its carrying capacity in the peak season, new trails like Khopra and Manang struggle to cope with a new influx.

The other success story is Nepal’s community forestry exercises. It is a vivid example of how just one piece of legislation combined with grassroots democracy can directly help preserve the natural environment. The program nearly doubled the country’s forest cover in the last 69 years, and this was solely due to the dedication of the 25,000 local forest committees all over the country.

But now, both the Annapurna Conservation Area and the community forestry project have seen collared headlines with Nepal’s new federal structure. There is utter confusion about who is going to manage projects like ACA and community forestry: will it be rural municipalities, provincial governments, Singh Bahadur, or all three?

The 16 rural municipalities in the Annapurnas have been too young, for most of the last month, demanding that ACA hand over the project to them. They complain about tourism fees not being used as local villages, and strict rules about cutting trees, building roads and new hotels. The National Trust for Nature Conservation which manages ACA is under pressure to deliver on the federal government’s promise.

A new Forest Bill seeks to fulfill the rights of the community forestry users group to sell forestry products on their own. The Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) is in arms, but in the absence of clarity about who owns and can manage forests, there is a danger that it will be just head-plunged.

With delusion of political power under the new federal structure, it also seems like there has been decentralisation of corruption. Since it is the same political parties at the village and provincial levels, the kleptocracy has trickled down to local governments. Instead of handling control of forest conservation to rural municipalities, it has been prudent to retain sub-local users group at the grassroot.

Allowing Forests to be harried when corruption is so pervasive will only open up protected areas to wholesale logging, as has happened with open fishing in the river ecosystems.

Nepal cannot afford to squander its hard-earned gains in conservation by trying to fix something that is not broken. It will be like flushing the baby out with the bathwater.

ONLINE PACKAGES

MANAGING ANnapurna

Following the successful Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation has changed its legal status to Nepal’s provinces arising from the Annapurna Conservation Area Act. It has been too young to manage state-level (i.e., provincial level) and international government’s commitment to Nepal’s showcase project. This means that the idea that has mere words and values will find.

SOCIAL TREKKING

Just our reportage is a shot for the hearts below Annapurna is known about community based tourism that is necessary for the benefit of local community through tourism, and learning about the local culture and agriculture. Story page 8

MECHANICAL WOMAN

Originally a home made from Taiyaki, Amrita Barad has been inspired by the art of miniature maintenance, a principle presented in a man known. While working on her workshop in Timay, she took a break and asked about her struggles and her children for the last year. Story page 2.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The Commission of Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) has completed 85% of its task of detailed investigation of evidence and testimonies from victims (Justice in transition, David Solic, #490). The Investigation Preparation Team to interview allegations perpetrators handled by me has already been formed, which will complete its tasks within a month. Bishnu Pathak

Boudhanath

Great information piece (A temple by another name), Ashish Mishra, #490). I think the KMC should start reinstating the original names of places.

Bob Shrestha

Known as Janhdi Khatro in (the temple, in the legend of legendary Statue is alive and tall of the Tilalaya (The statue of a million wilewak), Sewa Shattara, #490).

Gyume Dorjee

Always amazed that this oasis of tranquility exists in the middle of bustling, chaotic Kathmandu. Mismail Upadhyay

It’s a divine place. We loved our visit there. Tracey Doane

WHAT'S TRENDING

The Chinese are coming

Two entries remain popular for the expatriate influx of Chinese tourists flocking them about Nepal. Nepaltravels.com now Justin Jan that Punti look has made it to almost all Chinese and natural and cultural packages, as well as more solid amongs to Chinese tourists.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

12 years later, justice is a mirage

The shift of two contributory in international war crimes is in limbo. More than one billion people has still not given official recognition, of a thousand一件s in the last week. A great time to break the trend.

Most commented

Most popular on Twitter

QUOTE & TWEETS

Nepal Times @nepaltimes Nepal Times @nepaltimes A great time to break the trend. More than one billion people has still not given official recognition, of a thousand一件s in the last week. A great time to break the trend. A great time to break the trend.

Chandra Prasad @ChandraPrasad Pradeep’s words which were nice and delicate come to our eyes. We must continue to follow his advice.

Raj Shankar @RajShankerND Pradeep’s words which were nice and delicate come to our eyes. We must continue to follow his advice.

Bishnu Pathak @BishnuPathak Nepal’s shoulders to lead the job of reinvestigation. We must continue to follow his advice.

Paivo Mathena @Paivo_Mathena Nepal’s shoulders to lead the job of reinvestigation. We must continue to follow his advice.

Sudha Vaidya @SudhaVaidya Sudha’s shoulders to lead the job of reinvestigation. We must continue to follow his advice.

We all must stand as one – need to come to an agreement. We all must stand as one – need to come to an agreement.

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491

Weekly Mirror #491
Nepal living beyond its means

Binaya Banjara

I n 1991, India’s foreign exchange reserves almost emptied when the country’s balance of payments collapsed. The Central Bank eventually arrested a full-blown crisis, but poverty in India increased in the years that followed. Manmohan Singh was finance minister, and he introduced dramatic economic reforms that unleashed India’s economy and has been the foundation of its growth.

Today, Nepal is at the risk of facing the same crisis India experienced three decades ago. There is a net outflow of foreign exchange, as remittance income fails to keep pace with the growth in imports, mainly petroleum.

Nepal’s foreign exchange reserves currently can sustain only 7 months and 26 days of imports, compared to 14 months and 3 days as recently as 2016. (See graph) Nepal Rastra Bank also calculated that in the first four months of the fiscal year, Nepal’s balance of payments deficit stood at Rs8.4 billion and in just the last month it increased by Rs12 billion.

“The current rate of increase in the balance of payments deficit will be a huge crisis in the future,” warns Bikays Naik Khadka, an ex governor of Nepal Rastra Bank.

Nepal’s foreign exchange reserves are the most unreliable income source because it can easily be affected by political tension and conflicts. Nepal’s remittance income is also not plugged into productive sectors, and is mostly used up in paying for imported consumer goods and energy. Some 65% of Nepal’s total import bill is paid through remittances, while exports constitute only 6% and investment only 17% of Nepal’s annual foreign exchange income that is used to pay for imports. But even with all these sources combined, Nepal cannot meet 12% of its import bill, which is what is losing to the balance of payment deficit. The country has been forced to dip into its foreign exchange reserves to meet the gap.

In the first four months of the current fiscal year, Nepal imported goods worth approximately Rs64 billion while exports were only worth Rs29 billion. Even through there is a tremendous difference, finance minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada admits that what worries him more is the gap in the service sector. Most of the current outflow is for energy and vehicle imports, while there is also a huge outflow due to students, medical patients and Nepalis vacating abroad. Nepali tourists spent Rs48.3 billion abroad in the first four months of this fiscal year, but foreign tourists spent only Rs42.5 billion in Nepal during the same period.

This deteriorating balance of payments deficit may compel the government to adopt a restrictive monetary policy, but economist Dr Shekhar Acharya explains that this will mean only two choices for the government: Either the government must nationalize foreign loans, or reduce imports to prevent the outflow of hard currency.

“The easiest step would be to borrow, but ex-governor Bhattacharya notes that adhering to the strict conditions of the donors might be very painful for Nepal as it has been for other countries. Moreover, the crisis may also lead to policies to stymie Nepali trade, and limit imports to only basic goods.

The CEO of Nepal Rastra Bank Niranjan Thapa had said “If the balance of payments deficit and growth of imports continues at the present rate, we may not be able to import even the goods needed for development projects.”

It is accepted practice that an import-dependent country without a sustainable source of foreign currency needs to maintain foreign exchange reserves for at least six months of imports. With the Nepali Rastra Bank’s policy to maintain foreign exchange reserves to last at least 8 months. If not, depleted reserves can put pressure on Nepali fixed exchange rate with Indian rupee currently at Rs106. If that happens, there will be ruinous capital flight to India, as has occurred in the past. Ex-governor Krishna Baburam Bhattarai says that the government and the central bank still have time to remedy the situation by limiting imports of luxury items. But it would lead to an expansion in the black market.

Earlier this year, when the government applied quantitative restrictions on the import of sugar, the price immediately shot up by Rs6 per kg. Worse, if there is a devolution of the Nepali rupee it will make inflation even more difficult to tame.

Exports advisors that while the central bank needs to be free from political interference to stabilize the economy, the government and the central bank must also exercise options. In the longer term, there is no other way but to attract investment and improve the competitiveness of the Nepali economy and increase exports.

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**Shades of celebration**

Korean professional pet groomer Reem Park has won the Best Corporate Travel Program for Business Traveller’s “Best Pet Service Provider: Business Traveller’s” category. The pet groomer was invited to the United Arab Emirates by Global Travel magazine.

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**Fast car**

Honda Nepal organized the very first racing championship in Nepal so far in which 35 enthusiasts participated in the two categories: CBR 250 and 140-165 cc. Cash prizes of Rs5,000 and Rs2,000 were awarded to winners who also be representing Nepal in the upcoming Honda India Dream Cup.
Viral videos of 2018

Nepali Times takes you back to the most popular videos of the past year on its YouTube Channel. Go online to watch them all over again.

1. A KIWI TAKES TO GUNDRUK
Most Nepal's love gundruk, it is almost our national dish. But it's rare to find a foreigner enjoying its strong aroma. New Zealand journalist and writer Thomas Heaton didn't just make Gundruk sandwich from itchy, but also relished eating it. This video was the most widely shared and commented in 2018.

2. US-BANGLA PLANE CRASH
A US-Bangla bombarder Q-400 aircraft from Dhaka to Kathmandu crashed at Kathmandu airport on 12 March killing all 67 passengers and crew. Among them were Nepalese medical students returning to Nepal after completing their studies. This recording of the conversation between the pilot and Kathmandu air traffic control shows that the Captian was incorerrent and disoriented during the flight's last moments. The clip was shared by over half a million readers, and generated vigorous debate about the nature of the crash.

3. FIRE AND ICE
This video of the Khumbu by Kunda Dixit provided dramatic proof of the impact of global warming on the glaciers in the Himalayas. The film was widely shared among the international scientific community, mountaineers and gained a lot of attention.

4. BARTIKA RAJ
YouTuber sensation and IIIT-based singer-songwriter Bartika 'Sam' Raji was in Kathmandu for her first Nepali concert tour, and spoke to our reporter Shristi Bhattarai about her new full-length album, her childhood, the therapeutic power of songwriting and her future plans. Her fans were delighted, and flooded the Nepal Times feed with best wishes for the star.

5. THE BOY GODS OF KATHMANDU
We took all hearts of Kathmandu's Living Goddesses. But much less visible than the Kumari are the male gods Ganesh and Bhairav who are also worshipped and join the chariot procession of the king goddess during Indra Jatra. Sahani Shrestha followed the deity of Kathmandu on their daily routines at school and home, and in the festival.

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INTERNET and Digital TV
Remembering Boxing Day 2004

After four days on a trek, news of the tsunami sounded like the end of the world.

The Twin Otter banked steeply as we came in to land amidst the green hills of Pokhara Valley. As usual in small planes anywhere in Nepal, with every bump we tilted not to think about the too-many “incidents” that characterize flying in the Himalayas. Pokhara has had its share.

I had been waiting beside the runway in 2000 when Princess Anne’s RA F aircraft had to gybe just before touching down to avoid a pair of circling dark kites – the air force pilots were far from amused by the near-miss. The Princess Royal was on her second visit to Nepal and her first to the newly built Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, where she and her entourage stayed for several nights whilst visiting British Save the Children projects.

Despite arriving us amused at our Lodge covered in dust from the security vehicle that insisted on preceding her up the unsuitable gravel road (cautious of Maniist insurgents), and suffering another near-miss with a cockroach in her lunch box (it went to the legamb British Embassy First Secretary instead), her visit went well.

Heroes and dogs were safe topics during dinner, and she regaled us with a story about advising the Queen to overcome Granny’s (the Queen Mother’s) refusal to see a doctor about a suspected broken collarbone: “You should have called the vet, she won’t mind seeing the vet.”

But this trip in December 2004 to Pokhara was a lot less royal and in more relaxed, consisting of my immediate family – five siblings, their spouses, kids and our mother – a group of 23 ranging in age from eight to eighty years old gathered in Nepal from our scattered homes in UK, US and India. It was Boxing Day, the European name for the day after Christmas with its uncomfortable connotations of more feudal times when boxes of food were distributed to the poor and needy.

Jaded from Christmas indulgence and an early start, our flight delay at Kathmandu’s crowded domestic lounge was a relief as we battled with pokkars and travellers on the wobbly plastic seats, dressed in our still pristine hiking gear. It was late morning before we reached Pokhara and the white peaks were partly wreathed in clouds. The engine gave a final roar as we safely broke to a stop, and waited for the door to open.

The plan for our annual group was a five-day camping circuit through the foothills around Pokhara, New Year amidst the scenic splendour of Pokhara Lodge, then south to Chitwan for the last leg of the hike. Nepal has something for everyone, adventure activities to appeal to all three generations, and quite an effort to get everyone together.

Greeting our support team at Pokhara airport, excitement was high as we sorted the luggage, retied our bootlaces and gathered up the ever-annoying younger cousins. My boys were the oldest cousins and local hosts, though Rinchen looked like something out of Twelfth Night, dressed in striped yellow tights.

We said a distracted goodbye to our old friends, the Bergers, who by chance had been delayed with us at Kathmandu airport – Billy and Claire with their two daughters were looking forward to a precious and peaceful few days together by the lake. As the US government disaster specialist, William Berger spent his time jetting to catastrophes all over Asia, advising on US strategic response, and briefing officials and even the US President. Despotsphically phlegmatic in domestic, earthquakes, floods, eruptions, drama were Billy’s staple, addicted to the adrenaline of his calamity-focused career. Claire had a gentle smile, glossy straight hair and her own career in the State Department – their postings did not always coincide.

The Berger daughters had grown up in Kathmandu at the American School. It was Billy who gave me an early glimpse into the trials of teenage parenting – with a very grog to admitted that his daughter had made him promise not to recognize them if they chanced to meet in Thamel.

“When we are old and friends don’t speak to us, that’s OK. You are too embarrassing!” was the instruction. “What am I? Crevic or naiver?” Billy was agosto.

The Berger family’s retreat in Pokhara lasted only minutes before Billy was recalled to disaster duty, returning on the next flight to Kathmandu. Claire and the girls yet again condensed to time without him. But we had already4 rushed off in our Mountain Travel bus and, without communications, it was days before I realized any of it. Mobiles and connectivity were not a feature of trekking in these days, and our jelly group of noisy brothers and sisters and their fractious kids enjoyed five days of innocence in the Manasquirals. We fainted hills, we paused to glory in the views, we tripped along the trails, we laughed and gazed up the steepier climbs, we encountered by the tanked-like forests, we camped in termite fields, we washed our faces in bowls of warm water – and all the time we were totally unknowing of the horror that killed more than 230,000 people across 14 countries.

It was only on the last day of our hike that we could tune into BBC World Service on the radio. Normally after days in the wilderness one returns with weary disdain to beating the same old news, nothing has changed. We were camping by a Gaurungi village with cows munching in their timber stalls and the blissful of the kitchen clearing away tea as we settled into the evening camp routine.

We looked at each other stunned and confused. Without context the news made no sense. It sounded like the end of the world. The Himalayan sunsets streaked across the sky as we placed together the horror of it all, triggered by a 9.1 magnitude earthquake off the northern tip of Sumatra in Indonesia. We had been wundering since 26 December into blissed ignorance of the terrible drama that had befell most of Asia. We had completely missed the devastating tsunami in history.

It is the small details that give you the big picture.
Anita Tamang was a homemaker, and was struggling to find a job to supplement her income. One day ten years ago, she enrolled in a motorcycle repair workshop at a vocational training centre in Thimphu. Her instructors found her to be a crack for mechanics, and encouraged her to take it up as a profession. She started interning at a repair shop, but the pay was not good and her male colleagues did not trust her skills.

“They made me clean the workshop, and I was not allowed to repair bikes,” she recalled. Disheartened, Anita started work at a factory assembling two-wheelers, and realised she had a passion for motorcycles.

She wanted to start her own repair shop, but banks refused to lend her money. Finally, with a loan from a foundation, Anita could fulfill her dream of owning her own motorcycle repair shop in Thimphu.

Originally from Thulo Phakhar village in Sindhupalchowk, Anita Tamang was gifted with strong workmanship and dedication to detail – both praiseably shown in her work and motorcycling endeavors. She also had close family bonds with two brothers, Pradip and Buddha, and a younger sister, Roma. Pradip and Roma help Anita as mechanics, and Roma also studies education.

In the beginning, customers used to approach Pradip first because they thought he was the chief mechanic. “People ignored me, did not trust a woman. They thought I was joking when I said I could fix their bikes,” Anita recalls.

Now, Anita helps other interns from the vocational centre where she learned the craft. But often they never finish their internship, drifting to other jobs.

“I like to teach motorcycle repair skills, where you need to identify the problem before taking the bike apart and must struggle with this,” says Anita who would like to open her own motorcycle repair shop, and perhaps integrate it with a cafe where her customers can relax while their bikes are repaired.

Anita also intends to learn English, and expand her clientele, exploring new business prospects. Punding is a problem, and the bureaucracy does not make it any easier.

She says: “I want to do more, and I know I can achieve more with financing. I would like to learn how they maintain bikes in other countries and bring these new perspectives and techniques to Kathmandu.”

Taylor Mason

MECHANICAL WOMAN

Visit Anita Tamang at her motorcycle workshop, and watch her as she works. Don’t miss her talk about her struggle to make it as a profession-preceded bike, a small business, and all the obstacles she had to overcome. Also, find out about her dreams for the future and her plans to expand her business.

expattimes.com

Anita and the art of motorcycle maintenance

Local woman uses her skills to repair bikes in Nepal. She is passionate about her work and dreams of opening her own shop.

TATA MOTORS

Introducing the NEW TIGOR

The sedan for the stars!

Following the decision by Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation to charge fees also for Nepali tourists visiting the Annapurna Conservation Area, a 3-way tug-o-war has erupted between local, provincial and federal governments to control Nepal’s showcase project. Visit scenic Ghandruk and hear from locals and tourists what they think.

A fire-damaged forest was leased out to local communities to protect and manage 60 years ago, Nepal’s community forestry program has won international praise for restoring the country’s tree cover. Barren hillsides have been replaced by thick forests, wildlife has returned, and farmers have prospered because of ample firewood and fodder. The 2015 Forest Policy Act put the concept of community forest on a national scale, but it is still being managed by the local communities. The government’s handover was delayed by the war, during which ACA’s offices were attacked and set on fire.

Head of ACA in Ghandruk Budhir Kukeli underlined the sentiment of the situation, blaming it on local heads. “All this can be resolved with just one meeting of local elected representatives and local committees,” he said. However, locals from Lwang Ghalel have gone to Pokhara with their grievances which includes lifting ACPA’s restrictions on local development and infrastructure projects, to allocating tourism revenue in proportion to where income is highest, and to remove the bureaucratic hurdles in harnessing forest and water resources.

“We are giving them one last chance to address our demands, otherwise we will also take action,” said Ram Gurung of Lwang Ghalel. Representatives of this scenic village below Machachepur sent a petition to the federal government in Kathmandu last week demanding that the management of ACA be handed over to local governments.

The Annapurna massif stretches nearly 770km from Manaslu in the east to the Kali Gandaki, and is Nepal’s biggest natural reserve spanning 16 rural municipalities. It has some of the greatest altitudinal variation on the land surface of the earth. From below 1,000m above sea level, the terrain rises to more than 8,000m, giving the region its rich biodiversity.

Nepal’s conservation pioneers like Hemanta Mishra, Chandra Gurung and Migma Sherpa together with experts like Kathrin Fuller of WOFS-US put together the concept of a conservation area—distinct from a national park so that locals could use tourism revenue for nature conservation. ACA was proof that Nepal did not have to deploy the Army, like it did in national parks, to successfully conserve nature—the job could be done by locals.

Now, it looks like the Annapurna Conservation Area is the victim of its own success. Nepal’s national, provincial and federal governments are competing to take control over it. There are already signs that this will be a three-way tug-o-war.

Yubaski Kunwar, head of Annapurna Rural Municipality said the constitution grants jurisdiction over natural resource and environment management to local governments. “This means it is our responsibility to collect fees from tourists and invest it in local conservation and development,” he said.

However, in Pokhara, Gandaki Province Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung said that since the conservation area spans many rural municipalities, ACPA management should go to the provincial government.

“The responsibility for management of the Annapurna Conservation Area should be the purview of the provincial government,” Gurung told us.

Head of ACA Rajkumar Gurung says it is not important who controls the project as long as its model of community-managed conservation is preserved.

Municipalities want to manage Annapurna

There is a 3-way tug-o-war between local, provincial and federal governments to control Nepal’s showcase conservation project.

Yuvaraj Shrestha

in Pokhara
Eve since trekking first started in Nepal 66 years ago, social entrepreneurs have tried various ways to maximise the benefits of tourism to local communities. The latest is a Korean initiative that promotes culture with agriculture as visitors get a unique experience of rural life in the Himalayas.

The project called ‘Nepal Hike Village’ hopes to give tourists more than just mountain views, and augment it with Nepal’s other famous attraction—its hospitality. Visitors stay with local farmers, learn about organic agriculture and tea cultivation, and take part in traditional festivals in the mountain village near Pokhara. ‘The biggest benefit of homestay is to blend with the real life of rural Nepal which I would not have appreciated if I had gone to the usual tourist attractions,’ says Jinho Lee, a Korean teacher. ‘I plan to come back to Nepal with my students and share this rich social experience.’

One recent morning a group of Korean tourists climbed up from the road to the village of Lwang Ghale. They are scheduled to stay one night in House Number 13, take a pleasant ride walk the next day through forests with a panoramic view of the Annapurnas range, eat local food and learn about growing tea.

There are now 12 households in Lwang who are running homestays and the families have received basic training in hospitality. In the evening there is music and dancing that Kaski is famous for. Ajjun Adhikari, the local guide, whispers to visitors whether they would like a taste of the powerful local rakhi liquor.

The tea garden is on a slope alongside rice terraces and Jinson Im is excited about this part of the visit because he is a professional tea grower himself back in Korea. The garden pays attention to making tea as chemical-free and is sensitive to worker’s rights.

‘Today’s experience makes me understand more about the tea cultivation in Nepal and the pickers,’ says Jinson. ‘I am a person involved in tea, but I have learnt a lot from the Nepalis about fair trade and the art of tea cultivation.’

Nepal Hike Village was the brainchild of Yuzumi Seo, a Pokhara-based volunteer with the Korean aid agency, KIDCA promoting community-based tourism. After the 2015 earthquake, the investigated existing tourism products around Pokhara, researched the trails in person, and tried to find out visitors’ expectations and experiences, met local people to find out about their needs. She found that many visitors did not have time for a long trek, and were looking for a meaningful immersion into rural life in Nepal, away from the commercialism of mass tourism. Nepal Hike Village is promoting eight short hikes, including the ‘Accessible Trek, the first in Nepal for people with disabilities and the elderly, which is now even popular among families with children as well. Yuzumi Seo is promoting the hikes through a website, brochures and by introducing the products to tour agencies in Pokhara. Already the Nepal Hike Village is augmenting the income of villagers, mainly women, who now run households because the menfolk are working overseas. It is the women who greet visitors as they arrive, organise the food and cultural events.

Sustainability is an important part of this work. There is a limit to what short-term projects can achieve, so we are building strong local leadership willing to improve the current situation,” says Yuzumi Seo, whose stint with KIDCA ends in May.

Thim Bahadur Ghantayel is the manager with Lwang Ghale homestay, and says host families are as delighted with the visitors who have come, and the extra income is always helpful.

He adds: “Our best advertisement is our guests telling others how much they enjoyed staying with us. But it will help if you write about us and spread the word.”

To make matters worse, the recently drafted Forest Bill curtails the rights of Community Forest User Groups, the very elected local committees that were responsible for protecting the forests under the 1993 Forest Act. For example, the new bill purposes that local user groups cannot sell extra forest products without permission of the government, unlike in the past when they could independently fix prices, sell timber and other products from their protected forests.

“Greater accountability at the local level helped to save the forests, but the new bill attempts to undermine that very foundation of our success,” says Bharat Pathak, chair of the Federation of Community Forest User Groups (FICOFUG). She warns that the bill will result in widespread deforestation, with negative impact on the environment, biodiversity, tourism and local livelihoods. Community forests have been threatened ever since local and provincial elections last year. Many contractors, loggers and quarry owners got themselves elected to local councils, and cases of poaching, illegal logging and encroachment into community forests have shot up.

Back in Singh Darbar, joint secretary Krishna Acharya says forests will actually thrive under federalism because elected governments will be closer to community forests, and thus have better oversight over their protection. In theory, that makes sense. But activists argue that stricter laws have never translated into conservation. Federalism has decentralised corruption, and the forests do not stand a chance.

The reason Nepal’s community forestry program worked was because of local user committees. Transferring ownership and management to municipal or provincial councils, or interference from Kathmandu, will invite corruption and destruction of forests.

Activists say such confusion over jurisdiction could wreck Nepal’s achievements in community-based forest conservation, and add that some ought to be left alone.

“Whoever ends up managing the forests, the functional modality of the community forestry program that transcended political and administrative boundaries should not be dismantled,” states the former Director General of the Department of Forests, Bijaya Pandey: “If we do, all our efforts and investment will come to naught, and the very thing we take pride in, our green forests, will be lost once again.”

Pradit recommends that the government include local communities for consultation in decision making, because without user groups there will be no preservation, let alone sustainable management for economic benefits.

The advice of the WWF’s Rinchen Gyalje says: “Give credit to local people for the protection of forests for the last four decades, and build on that with better management and ensure communities are accountable.”

Awale
GETAWAY

Lasannaa Artalk
Asmala Syed, a Canadian artist and researcher based in Berlin, will present her recent projects that are a combination of biology and psychology, and activism.
J.9, Aljuneider, National Cultural Centre, Malhi, M.Town, Patna. (07433) 737999

Arun Chandhuyals talks
A curious about how CG holds, one of the biggest businesses in Nepal, manages its diversified businesses and investments? Join in for a talk with Arun Chandhuyals, Chairman & Managing Director of CG Holdings.
J.2, 14-4 pm, Nepal Tourism Board Head Office, Pradeepnagar, Mahendranagar, (07433) 737999

Bijest 2019
Google doodle Group Kathmandua Bijest is an annual exhibition to learn new strategies that help to grow businesses with tools and Google technology. A day of engaging sessions, workshops, and quality exhibitions for startups.
J.3, 10 am, Jatra Public School, Gyaneshwor, (01) 4417982

Paji in KTM
Playful in motion and producers, based in Berlin, who combines contemporary music with classical instruments. Come on to watch him perform live with Einhard and Rigon.
J.4, 5-10 pm, Sambhav, Kathmandu. (01) 4288725

Blues parade
It’s the 65th birthday of the world’s greatest blues man, and Private Performance by T.R. Miller from Keltland. 3 pm, 5 pm, 7 pm, and 9 pm.
J.5, 11 am, 1 pm, 3 pm, 5 pm, Inom Darbar, Kathmandu. (01) 4409072

Kathmandu: My Fascination
A novel exhibition of pop-art screenprints illustrated with a sound installation by Prakash Sherchan. The materials display the lifestyle of modern Kathmandu, often juxtaposing the old and the new.
J.6, 9 am, 11 am, 3 pm, Bibhutibhushan Cenner, (01) 4708024

Khapak music
A celebration of the music, community, and the society. Performances by Jhumka, Manu Namjung, Sanam Namjung, and others.
J.7, 3 pm, 5 pm, 7 pm, Inom Darbar, Kathmandu. (01) 4409072

Image of Life
An art exhibition by Sanjana Rajpuria, who does the changing phases of a human life through the diverse mages of time, in which she wants to narrate a story.
J.8, 9 am, 11 am, 3 pm, Pashupatinath, Shankar, Park, Kathmandu. (01) 3054951, 9851668908

Cycle city by design
Shimmi Rai, an urban designer and architect, will be presenting her research at the Research Seminar Series by Martin Charalow.
J.9, 9 am onwards, Martin Charalow Seminar Hall, NAC

Reminiscing Arun Thapa
On the eve of Arun Thapa’s 40th birthday, there are local artists, who are also his fans, remembering the legendary Nepali artist. Go back in time with him.

The Coffee Shop
Showroom in the living room of locally sadness, Hetauda. J.11, 3 pm, Hotel Annapurna, Durbar Square, (01) 4277171

Muse Restobar
A unique place in town and a bar with sophisticated wester interior, providing a complete family environment. Urlmah, Kathmandu. (01) 4465712

Harmony Spa & Health Club
Among trees on the edge of a pristine overlooking Gokarna Forest and the grassy valley below, Harmony Spa combines therapeutic care within a natural environment impossible to recreate elsewhere.
J.12, 3 pm, 5 pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Kirtipur. (01) 44312

Rox Restaurant
Souled food to increase your metabolism and improve blood circulation for more energy every day.
J.13, 9 am, 11 am, 5 pm, Hotel Sphinx, Kathmandu. (01) 3054951

The Famous Farm
The new adventure destination in the subsurface Middle Hills, west of Kathmandu, is a naturalist’s best kept secret, and a place with the historical place of the distant. This little restaurant has a lot of rich cultural heritage to share.
J.14, Kathmandu, (01) 4755856

The Fulbari Resort & Spa
The ultimate getaway in Fulbari, Patan is far from everything but at the centre of all that matters.
Patan, (07433) 4288725

Tiger Mountain
The resort with a Gold award from Travel+Leisure for sustainability, offers a perfect for the kind of tourism Nepal should be promoting: homegrown high-value eco-tourism that showcases the best of Nepal’s scenery, nature, culture. Kondani Danda, Patan, (07433) 4288725

Heranya Vula
Get a genuine feel of authentic Newari heritage by living right in the middle of Mahal Baudhika and the Heranya monastery. The hotel provides a complete tour package to immerse in the rich cultural heritage of Patan.
Pashupatinath, Patan, (07433) 4288725

The article does not provide a clear example of a music event or a dining event. It does provide information about various artists, exhibitions, and restaurants, indicating a diverse range of cultural and leisure activities. However, there is no clear event highlighted as the “Our Pick.”
Nepal’s silent emergency: springs going dry

Nepal’s emission of greenhouse gases maybe small, but its annual growth rate is already the highest in South Asia

On a recent domestic flight to western Nepal, our AT8-23 broke through the thin smog at about 3,000m after takeoff from Kathmandu. The ocean of grey-brown pollution blanketed the Teraí, and stretched right across to the southern horizon. Out of the right hand window, the Annapurnas rose above the carpet of smog, with Mt Machapuchre appearing like a black pyramid devoid of snow.

Even though it is nearly 7,000m high, and in the height of winter, Mt Machapuchre’s snow has melted away. The Himalayas have seen unprecedented melting due to rising average global temperatures, and soot particles from pollution that reduces the reflective power of the snow.

Climate change has also brought changes in weather patterns. On this trip to Jhapa, I was told winter rain and snow have been deficient for ten years in a row. Snow, when it does fall in the higher mountain settlements, is only ankle deep, and is already leading to seasonal water shortages. Rainfall comes in bursts, is erratic, and the steady, relentless rains of the past is a fading memory. Natural ecosystems and biodiversity, water resources, and agriculture have been heavily impacted.

Ongoing land-use changes brought by demographic shifts as well as haphazard excavations of the mountains for roads and other infrastructure have taken their toll. Across Nepal spring sources are depleting. Of the 1,115 springs investigated inTanahun district, 63% had reduced flow by an average of 21% between 2004-2014. A preliminary analysis of 663 springs over ten districts of the Far West showed 187 had their average discharge decline by 69% between 2013-2016. Linking spring depletion to changing rainfall patterns and climate change is difficult because of inadequate rainfall measuring stations in Nepal and the lack of focused scientific studies. Nepal needs at least 1,000 rain gauges all over the country to provide accurate rainfall data, we have little over 500. But lack of data does not mean there is no impact – water scarcity is forcing hill families to abandon their homes.

As this crisis unfolds in the Himalayas, 6,000km away in Katowice of Poland last month leaders and scientists from 196 countries agreed on guidelines, known as the Paris Rulebook, to begin operationalising the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

The Rulebook lays out methods for how countries can develop and communicate their plans to reduce carbon emissions, how they adapt, track finance they provide and receive for climate action, and how they can review progress and set targets.

Climate politics is hard, driven primarily by the current US administration’s decision to exit from the Paris Agreement. The final declaration in Katowice did not welcome the IPCC’s Special Report on 1.5°C which had concluded that warming beyond 1.5°C is the next 10 years could bring catastrophic and irreversible change to life on the planet.

The Rulebook also specifies goals to measure, which methodology to use and the kind of information required in a country’s report to be submitted to the UN–climate body every two years. It did not, unfortunately, raise collective ambitions, and as emission reduction pledges currently stand, average global temperatures will probably rise by 2°C by 2050. For its part, Nepal lacks the foundation to translate the Paris Rulebook to action. Creating these mechanisms could demonstrate the country’s collective climate ambition, but judging from our past, we see likely to provide only lip service. Nepal’s elected leadership shows little interest in creating a scientific base for improved understanding of local climatic and natural dynamics, which is key to adapting to the changing climate.

Our current preoccupation is to excavate hill slopes with non-engineered roads as the building of progress. Roads do improve connectivity and mobility, but without a well thought through strategy supported by robust safeguards in our geologically fragile landscapes, upkeep as well as social and environmental costs will simply keep rising.

In 2016, Nepal imported 8,328 excavators, bulldozers, cranes and trucks. The number jumped to 12,712 in 2017. During this same period, diesel imports increased 3.4 times. Nepal’s emissions of greenhouse gases maybe small, but its annual growth rate is already the highest in South Asia.

The link between the Paris Rulebook and the snowless Machapuchre massif is closer than we think. But just as devastating is the silent emergency of our springs going dry. Given the entrenched interests dominating global climate politics, it is hard to envision dramatic systemic shifts needed to keep the destruction of global climate in check.

Yet, the Rulebook is the first step on a new global journey to implement the Paris Agreement and even the catastrophic of more than 2 degrees warming by 2050. We must increase our collective ambitions, and turn back the curve of global carbon emissions by 2030.

Ajaya Dixit is Executive Director of Kathmandu Based SFD Nepal. His monthly column Climate for Change in Nepal Times deals with the impact of global warming in Nepal.

CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Ajaya Dixit

DRYING UP: Tani Roger’s famous panorama of Pokhara taken in 1935 (top), and last week from near the same spot at Pokhara airport (above). Snow cover on Machapuchre and the Annapurnas are dramatically depleted.

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NATION
11
Kathmandu through silk screen

Innocent children smile from the back of a rickshaw. Crumbling buildings are supported by long timber beams. Pueblo Shrestha's photographs of the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake now exhibiting at Bikalpa Art Cafe in Pulchok are different in form and substance: instead of bromide or digital prints, he uses silk screen to transfer the images to paper manually.

Silk screen is an ancient art technique, but is used around the world mostly for paintings and rarely for photographs. A mesh on a wooden frame is used to transfer colors to canvas. Each new colour requires a new frame, so few colours are used.

“I wanted to experiment by using the technique on photographs,” explains Shrestha who processed his photographs digitally until the last step, when he manually transferred them to blank paper. The result are vibrant paintings dominated by single colours: sunshine yellow here, and azure blue there. The stark black line art combines with eye catching colours to give a pastel view of Kathmandu city after the earthquake, when it was regaining its lively and constantly changing urban ambience.

Shrestha grew up in Kathmandu, and says the paintings represent his nostalgia for the bygone era of his childhood and also convey his feelings about its transformation. “I have always seen Kathmandu as a place of great mysticism, but also know that it is rapidly modernising,” says Shrestha, who lost his art gallery to the earthquake.

Without a gallery and not much else to do, he wandered around the Valley taking pictures and scribbling verse. These notes about his feelings of being lost and finding himself in Kathmandu accompany the illustrations at the exhibition, providing snapshots of not just the visual state of Kathmandu, but also of Shrestha’s mental state.

Pueblo Shrestha sees a Kathmandu rebuilding itself, as the pictures are almost journalistic. But the images convey a very personal sense of what is important to the artist in Kathmandu. We see the Valley through an artist’s sensibilities: an ancient city with precious heritage adapting to modern values and rising from the dust of a catastrophe.

Whether it is in the smiles of children and passersby, or Kathmandu’s ancient temples wrapped up by wooden beams – this is a story of survival. One of Shrestha’s paintings:

Now in its urban chaos
Searching my own presence
I chose my childhood memories
To find that life is beautiful in its dissimance

Sewa Bhattachar
Kathmandu: My Inspiration
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NEPAL-LANKA: Sri Lankan Ambassador to Nepal Thilake Peiris addresses a program to promote economic relations between Sri Lanka and Nepal at Inter Austin on Friday.

RESHAM FARI: The Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra jamming with young Nepal musicians to mark 60 years of Nepal-Germany relations at a concert organized by the German Embassy at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Kathmandu on Saturday.

CONNECT US: Residents of Sadang, Shy Phoksundo rural municipality of Dolpa district construct a building for a mobile tower so they get a cell phone connection.
No need to migrate for work

Phurpa Tamang in Himal Khacharpatni, 30 December – 1 January

Phurpa Din Dups Tamang, 50, of Thulo Bharkot of Rasuwa district is a yak herder by profession. His grandfather Sing Jakaski had a big sheep farm, and his father Dawar Jakaski raised yaks. His other grandfather Tenzim Tamang was known as Tenzin Bhusu and was wealthy because of his large herd of yaks.

Phurpa Din Dups also grew up raising yaks, but when he felt it did not pay him enough, he went to Kuwait in 2003 to work for eight years as a security guard. He returned to Nepal and decided to get back into his ancestral profession in his home village, and use the exposure he had gotten abroad.

"Other places are not like your own village and country," he says, "it may not be easy to earn money in Nepal, but it is an easier life." The government dairy buys yak milk for Rs 60 per litre, and Dups says he can make a comfortable enough living with that.

Raising yaks may be difficult for others, but he finds it easy since he learnt it as a child. He does acknowledge that it may be really risky for those who don’t know anything about it. Yaks have to be moved according to the seasons. If they are not moved to highland pastures in summer, they die from the heat.

Yak herders need to know which forests have enough water and grass in which months, and which rivers and wetlands are infested with leechs. They need to stay away from poisonous plants, and treacherous cliffs and landslides. Yak herders also need to know how to save their animals from snow leopards and wolves, and what medicinal herbs to give them when they fall sick.

In olden days, people who raised yaks and sheep were called ‘Baras’ (rich) because they earned income from selling milk, butter, cheese, charu, wool, and calves. These days there are fewer yak farms in villages, but the products still fetch good prices.

"Mountain communities like ours sell butter for rituals like birth, death, weddings, so the value of milk has increased because there are fewer yak farms," Dups adds.

Dups, now 32, never got the opportunity to study, and says one reason he started his family yak farm is that he does not have the skills or the capital to start any other business. He received Rs 500,000 from the Agriculture Ministry to raise yaks, and now earns Rs 700,000 a year.

He is educating his children from his earnings, his eldest daughter passed Grade 10 and got married, his second daughter is in Grade 12, and eldest son passed Grade 10. His wife bought gold earrings last year from those earnings.

Says Dups: "It is good to be back, I can be with my family, and travel to the mountains, in winter I go down to Kerung. In summer I go up to Lamjihati Pass. Life could not be better."
Nepal Airlines is once more making headlines for all the wrong reasons. This time it is over the state-owned carrier’s purchase of two Airbus A330-243s last year.

A sub-committee of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament said Wednesday that it found irregularities in the deal involving the wide-body jets, that it violated the Public Procurement Act, did not meet specifications, and that Rs 6.36 billion in kickbacks was involved.

A parliamentary sub-committee on Tuesday recommended that the airline’s Managing Director Sugat Katu Rana Kansakar be sacked, and action be taken against Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Rashtrikanta Dhakal and two of his predecessors, the present and two past secretaries in the ministry, and dozen of other officials.

Sounders are not new in the history of Nepal’s flag carrier, especially after 1999 when political interference in the airline initiated Nepal’s once-reputed flag-carrier. Allegations of corruption on appointments of general sales agents in Europe, kickbacks on the lease of jets and high-level corruption dug the airline throughout the 1990s.

The Rs 610 million Airbus deal is the biggest ever in the country’s aviation history, and so is the sound and fury surrounding allegations of payoffs. Once again, the airline is caught in a web of political and financial intrigue.

The sub-committee report says the airline influenced the cost of the plane to Rs 204.8 million, whereas the 2016 price tag was Rs 68.09 million. It also says the plane’s weight is only 230 tons, which should be 242 tons. But airline sources say the Rs 68.09 was the price of the plane in 2009, and the escalation corresponds to inflation. They add that the jet’s maximum takeoff weight was configured for full payload long-haul takeoffs from Kathmandu airport’s high and short runway.

Nepal’s flag carrier faces multi-pronged attacks just as it prepares to spread its wings

Rikki Walters
in Lukla

S

can the feedback section of travel sites: they are full of comments from frustrated trekkers stuck at Lukla’s Tenzing-Hillary Airport waiting days on end for flights out.

After having descended from Mera Peak Base Camp after weeks on the trail, trekkers sprawl on their sleeping bags on the indoor floor of the check-in area waiting for flights that are delayed either by congestion in Kathmandu, or due to weather, wind or visibility in Lukla. Flying in the Nepal Himalaya has always been touch and go, and Lukla airport with its inclined runway has gained a reputation for being the most challenging in the world. But airline managers and aviation experts say not all: the delays can be blamed partly on worse air traffic management at Kathmandu.

One recent morning, the frustration of passengers borne in Lukla was evident. The sky was cloudless and there was no wind, but there was no sign indicating that the flight they had taken off from Kathmandu. The reason was poor visibility in Kathmandu leading to congestion.

Kathmandu handles more than 400 flights a day on its single runway, but on many a morning like this week, tiny Twin Otters are forced to circle alongside big international flights waiting to land. A 35 minute Kathmandu flight can take up to 1.5 hours, reducing the number of Lukla flights before the mid-morning tail wind closes them.

Capt. Viying Lama now flies Nepal Airlines’ twin turboprops, but has three decades of experience landing in airfields like Lukla. He says: “A lack of Kathmandu congestion in winter can be eased if the early morning STOL and Mountain Flight traffic can be diversified to other airports.”

Rikki Walters
NATION

The sound of low-flying helicopters reverberates all day along the narrow Dush Khosi gorge in the Sagarmatha National Park. There are as many as 50 helicopter flights a day from Lukla to Everest Base Camp for sightseeing, mountaineering rescue, or expedition cargo. Congestion has got so bad that it is affecting safety. Rotor downwash from a helicopter taking off in November caused the still rotating main blades of a Mountain Air AS350 to hit its tail boom, causing serious damage, but luckily no injuries. Since then, Lukla airport has added five new landing pads in its new heliport (left) to accommodate the growing number of passengers who fly to Lukla on fixed wings and transfer to helicopters.

There are now private helicopters where charter companies have to pay landing charges. As a charter operator, people assemble in position. The exchange happens in minutes, cargo comes off, people board, and the pilot takes off within seconds back to Lukla. But even locals are now complaining about the noise pollution from helicopters, fearing that it may affect trekking.

Airworthy

that the vultures are circling. Instead of a group non-political, independent probe, vested interest groups have converged to wreck Nepal’s national airline over the Airbus330 deal.

Initially, this came at a time when the airline is poised to spread its wings with its two long-haul Airbus 330s, two medium-range Airbus 320s, and a new fleet of 125mm Twin Otters to the domestic fleet, as well as two more 320s once Lumbini and Pokhara airports become operational.

The airline did overstretch itself with the 330 purchases, but the losses accumulated because the two planes sat in the hangar for more than two months awaiting CAAN clearance.

Now, they are not airborne long enough to start making money. Airlines insiders say full utilisation of the fleet would easily increase the carrier’s annual turnover by Rs1 billion a year.

But such market expansion would directly affect the revenue of carriers competing with Nepal Airlines on the Gulf and Malaysia routes. Cartelling on the profitable Delhi route kept fares artificially high at up to Rs40,000, but after Nepal Airlines resumed regular twin-engine services on this route fares have dropped to Rs25,000.

Fares to Bhagsu have also halved to Rs5,000 after Nepal Airlines broke the domestic monopoly on the trunk route.

Private carriers operating Jomsom and Lukla also stood to lose business if Nepal Airlines modernises its STOL fleet.

“Carriers overcharging passengers would like nothing better than if our planes sat on the ground,” said Nepal Airlines Managing Director Suga Rama Kamakar, who denied wrong doing and said he has sent Airbus330 files to the Parliament committee.

Political interference in the airline is nothing. The government forced it to induce Chinese MA-60 and Y 12s, which have been a big liability. Last year, the PMO foisted Madan Kharel as executive chair without removing Kamakar.

Strangely, one of Kharel’s first acts in office was to bring out a report that concluded the airline was bankrupt. Most airlines go through a liquidity crunch during the expansion phase, yet the crisis was magnified through selective leaks in the media.

Confidential insiders told Nepal Times to separate interviews that management appears to be working to deliberately undermine the company’s image so as to benefit those eying its future privatisation.

Nepal Airlines now competes directly with Himalaya Airlines, a joint venture between China’s Tibet Airlines and Yeti Airlines.

EVEREST’S HELICOPTER HIGHWAY

Aviation experts add that separation time for international flights at Kathmandu could be cut by half if the parallel taxiway is simply extended till the threshold at both ends of the runway. “They have been talking about it for 20 years but have not done it even though you could reduce half the congestion by extending the taxiways,” said an aviation insider.

If you thought all this was bad, wait till next month when Kathmandu airport’s one and only runway will be reallocated for the first time after it was built 35 years ago. To be done in 80m sections, it means the airport will be closed from 10am till 6pm every day from April till June. The window for Lukla flights will now be even narrower, that too at the height of the peak season.

The three main airlines that operate Lukla flights, Tara Air, Summit Air, and Sixe Airlines, will have no option but to use alternative airfields with road connections. Fed up with cancellations in November due to congestion in Kathmandu, Sixe Airlines ferried out about 200 Lukla passengers via Ramechap, a four-hour drive from Kathmandu. Other few passengers from Lukla by helicopter to Phaplu.

“If the runway repairs are going to cause delays, we will have to revise this option,” says Rajendra Bahadur Singh of Sixe Airlines.

Aviation experts say ATC could also increase the efficiency of the current layout without compromising safety by adjusting visibility thresholds for different types of aircraft like international heavies and STOLs.

Domestic airlines servicing mountain airports with seasonal peak traffic cannot wait for Kathmandu airport to get its act together. The delays are costing them money, and they fear that runway repairs will make an already overcrowded Kathmandu airport even more chaotic.

Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Rabindra Adhikari says a new STOL airfield in Keveri’s Nagphunga is still an option, and adds: “We are working on it.”

A minister has repeatedly said that the airport for Visit Nepal Year 2020.”
The defence of Nepal

For centuries nature helped defend Nepal’s southern border from foreign invasions. We deployed malaria-carrying female mosquitoes, and this Monzie Army ensured that Nepal never had to suffer under the colonial yolk.

But the ingenious Brits used Odens as a strategic deterrent, and sent Gen Kitchin to lay siege to Sankthali Ghati in 1767. So, the defending The Famous Gorkha Battalion rolled horne’s nests down on the infidels who fled all the way back to Darjeeling with their tails between their legs. The rest, as they say, is history.

If aggressors did somehow survive our onslaught of mosquitoes and/or Horntes, they were sure to be eaten up by regiments of man-eating Tiger Commandos that patrolled our frontiers. And if an invader somehow managed to penetrate this phalanx, he, she or it would soon be disembowelled by one of our heavily-armoured columns of One-tonne Rhinozoom Divisions lying in ambush at the border.

However, since the eradication of malaria in the Tarai we have no forward line of defence and Nepal’s glorious military needs new ways to secure our territory from hegemons with imperialistic designs. This is why the Govt of Nepal (GON) has cunningly kept all roads, culverts, bridges, petroleum pipelines, inland navigation channels, and fast tracks in advanced stages of disrepair along the southern border to make the terrain impassable for enemy tanks and battalion armadas.

But this will not suffice, which is why the Royal Nepal Army’s clandestine Rio Warrior Division is weaponising diarrhoea.

Culturing genetically-modified versions of the Vibrio cholerae and Giardia lamblia bacteria, we now have the capability of blowing up the gastro-intestinal tracts of sworn enemies with explosive force.

The two Bactra have gone viral, and have already been subjected to gruelling military tests to be covertly infiltrated into the endoplastic reticulum of visiting tourists.

As expected, the germs wreaked havoc on the digestive tract of these foreign guinea pigs, making them think twice about entering Nepal’s Toilet-Free Buffer Zone.

Prime Minister K P Oli has also taken keen personal interest in erecting a missile launch pad in Daman cleverly camouflaged to resemble a view tower. Together with the Republican Tower under construction in Kathmandu, these two esclite dysfunctions should repel all enemies on sight by their sheer ugliness. From spy satellites, the two structures will bear a striking resemblance to ICBMs on launch pads, and convince those who mean us harm that we already have the delivery vehicles for our biological warheads.

Besides that, I can disclose here in strictest confidence that Nepal is also developing a top-secret drone program. (Make sure you burn this paper after you read it. We don’t want it to get into the wrong hands.)

The idea is to mass produce salaried civil servants who do nothing all day. These drones may seem to be asleep at their desks, but they are on duty. Actually, they are trained to wake up and deliver grain kits to any foreign army that dares to invade Singha Durbar.