Class struggle

Every time any government in Nepal sets up a "High-level Commission" it is either a cover-up, or proof of another populist measure to silence critics. The latter may be true for the commission which recommended this month that Nepal's private schools be phased out. Commission members, some of whose children were educated in private schools in Nepal or abroad, argued that the new constitution stipulates all education be free and compulsory at the basic level, and free up to the secondary level.

Inevitably, the High-level Education Commission's report was hailed in controversy over the provision that all private schools should be turned into non-profit community schools within the next ten years.

In an ideal state, free and compulsory education would be appropriate and, indeed, necessary. Nepal's education is over-commercialised: private medical education has become a scam, there is blatant corruption in the university affiliation process, and 10+2 school system is an assembly-line industry.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states that free education is a fundamental right, but its Article 26 adds that parents have a prior right to choose the type of education they want for their children.

Educationalists say that if the government’s schools were of superior quality, there would no need for private schools, which have reversed the trend of Nepal going abroad for education.

"Private schools will automatically shut down if the standard of government schools are as good as private ones," says Nagendra Aryal of Kathmandu Model School.

Today, 80% of students in the country are enrolled in 27,000 government schools, and even if the remaining 8,000 private schools became non-profit, they could not accommodate children now going to community schools. The line is further blurred with the Commission's provision that children from high-income families and foreigners will still have to pay fees.

Nepal's private schools have introduced progressive and innovative curricula absent in most government schools. We have also seen that in areas where government schools have maintained standards, parents prefer them to private schools (see page 14-15).

D.K. Dhungana of the Private and Boarding Schools' Organisation of Nepal (PABSON) says flippantly: "The government made schools register as companies, it cannot force them now to be converted into trusts without proper compensation."

Banskanta Aryal of the Ministry of Education told Nepal Times that the Commission's report will be presented to the government in the next few days. Prakriti Kandel

The Kamali

Go online for 5-part multimedia series on an epic 1,100km journey from "Tibet to India, down Nepal's longest river"
I f you still need proof about the poor quality of government schools in Nepal, just visit one of them. Not at a remote village in a remote district, but right here in the heart of the capital. Dark and dingy classrooms, cold as a refrigerator in winter, decrepit furniture, absent teachers, putrid waterless latrines. Classrooms are nearly empty, and most of the students are girls. Parents have such a low opinion of government schools that they send children to more expensive private schools — lumped together popularly means government schools are deemed just fine for the girls.

Still, some 90% of students in the 35,000 schools in Nepal go to government and community-run schools, while about 10% go to private ones. Yet, only 30% of children enrolled in government schools make it to Grade 16, while 77% of children in private schools do. Only 25% of students in government schools pass the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), while 81% of private school students graduate.

The state education system is the result of chronic, criminal failure of successive governments to run its schools properly. So a 25-member High-Level National Education Commission headed by none other than Education Minister Giriraj Paudel has taken the populist route to recommend that make it schools be shut out in ten years. In that period, the fee structure of private schools and their taxation will be determined by local governments.

Of all the instances of the Nepali government making decisions to suit itself in the foot, this one is the most appalling, and one with serious consequences to the future of the country. It is like the pilot of a plane who finds one of his two engines has malfunctioned, and shuts down the one that is still running.

To be sure, there is over-commercialisation in the private school system, with over-charging and lack of quality control. But the government’s job is to improve the quality of the schools it runs, not close down the ones that are trying to fill the void left by the state school system.

The High-Level Commission says it is institutionalising constitutional provisions for free and compulsory education for all Nepali children. But this does not factor in the crucial issue of quality. Private schools are thriving purely because of high demand from parents for better education. They work hard in Nepal and abroad to be able to afford the fees. Nepali parents deserve the choice to send their children to private schools if government schools are not meeting minimum standards.

The only way to remedy the crisis in education is to improve the quality of instruction in community schools. In fact, we have reported in this paper about many instances where private schools have lost students to government schools with motivated teachers whose students excel in SEE.

Private schools are profit-driven, and that is their incentive to maintain a quality threshold. Teachers are compelled to be more accountable because there is direct supervision and an absence of utilisation that prevails in government schools. Parents work hard to be able to afford these schools.

Turning private schools into non-profit trusts would remove the incentive investors have to open schools to meet demand. Enforcing that rule would kill private education, and reduce Nepal’s education to the lowest common denominator.

The private school system is definitely not fair to poorer parents. But a crucial reason why so many children are sitting in poverty is because they themselves did not get relevant, proper education. No matter how commercialised, private schools at least provide better level of instruction. And citizens have made it clear they prefer more expensive, quality education over poorly funded, free education.

Taking away the option of a private school education would compel many Nepali parents to send their children abroad for high school studies, further exacerbating Nepal’s balance of trade deficit.

The High-Level Commission and Misket Paudel who leads it would do well to pay attention to the 80% of students who still go to government schools, and understand what the get the level of education that will guarantee better earnings and skills when they grow up.

Globalised world has changed the former human resources that can compete with other countries. The emphasis should be on upgrading the quality of community schools to ensure our children’s — and our nation’s — future.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The editorial in Nepali Times Issue 4949 of 16 January 2008 was an article on the visit of Prime Minister Umapati Khadka to a ceremony to celebrate. Special excerpt:

“The Ministry of Education is aware that some of the schools are not providing quality education... The Ministry is taking all necessary steps to ensure that the quality of education in these schools is improved...”

It is interesting to think of the Ministry of Education being a government that is underperforming and adds value to the educational system.

“Ministry of Education, through the Ministry of Education’s Council for Education Improvement, is working to improve the quality of education in these schools...”

The Nepal Times is committed to providing quality education to our readers and the Ministry of Education is also committed to improving the quality of education in these schools.

What is the significance of the Ministry of Education in improving the quality of education in Nepal? The Ministry of Education plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education in Nepal. It is responsible for formulating and implementing policies that promote access to quality education for all students. The Ministry of Education in Nepal is committed to providing quality education to the students and is working towards improving the quality of education in these schools. The Ministry of Education is working with various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, to improve the quality of education in these schools. This includes providing training and resources to teachers, developing curriculum that is relevant and engaging, and ensuring that students have access to the necessary resources to succeed in their education. The Ministry of Education is also working to increase access to education for marginalized and underprivileged students, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to receive a quality education. Overall, the Ministry of Education is committed to improving the quality of education in Nepal and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. What is your opinion on the Ministry of Education’s efforts to improve the quality of education in Nepal? I believe that the Ministry of Education’s efforts to improve the quality of education in Nepal are important and necessary. Providing quality education to all students is crucial in order to prepare them for the future and ensure a bright future for Nepal. The Ministry of Education needs to continue to work towards improving the quality of education in Nepal, by providing resources and training to teachers, and by developing relevant and engaging curriculum. Additionally, it is important to ensure that all students have access to the necessary resources to succeed in their education, including access to technology and other tools that can help them learn. Overall, I believe that the Ministry of Education’s efforts to improve the quality of education in Nepal are important and necessary, and that continued efforts are needed to ensure that all students have access to a quality education. I believe that the Ministry of Education needs to continue to work towards improving the quality of education in Nepal, by providing resources and training to teachers, and by developing relevant and engaging curriculum. Additionally, it is important to ensure that all students have access to the necessary resources to succeed in their education, including access to technology and other tools that can help them learn. Overall, I believe that the Ministry of Education’s efforts to improve the quality of education in Nepal are important and necessary, and that continued efforts are needed to ensure that all students have access to a quality education.
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Reading up on Communism at Nati Bajra’s

Kathmandu readers used to flock to a tiny bookshop to buy books by Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung

Last week, linguist, writer and song composer Nati Bajra passed away. He was not well known in the mainstream media, but if you were interested in reading five decades ago in inner-city Kathmandu, Nati Bajra was the man to go to.

People went to him for books, magazines and newspapers of all kinds. His little book store at Bhotahiti in a small alley that led into Dagu Baha was where people sat on a narrow wooden bench with a straw mat. In the age before Internet and television, and when Radio Nepal was too boring, they browsed, bought publications, and lingered to chat with him. Nati Bajra was a one-man public sphere.

Among the books and magazines he sold in those days were the beautiful printed, glossy magazines called China and ‘Chhenn’ in Nepali. There were some really elegant hard cover books by Kim Il Sung. Today many visitors ask why or how Nepal has a Communist Party in power with a majority popular vote. Nati Bajra made a big contribution.

These magazines and books painted a utopian picture of communism, and portrayed the United States as the world’s enemy. Adults read the English and Nepali editions with great care and discussed the contents at their local tea shops and rest houses. There was no Nepali translation of Animal Farm to counter the propaganda literature.

When the adults were done reading, we children made these glossy publications into text book covers, greatly increasing their shelf life. Whoever designed, published and shipped those publications to Nati Bajra at Bhotahiti, achieved their mission. The publicity value of the books were immense, and 50 years later we have a Nepal Communist Party government.

Beyond books, there were also film screenings of how the North Korean and the Chinese armies defeated the Americans in the Korean War.

King Mahendra was right when he said to have told Prime Minister Nehru that communists would not travel to Nepal in a taxi over the newly-inaugurated Arniko Highway. But it did travel through books, magazines and films, and brought up an entire generation of Nepalis to get a glossy and glorified version of a Communion.

There are now Nepalis travelling to China and to the USA all the time, and this generation will vote very differently. Given the fact that our last local elections were held in 1997 and then again in 2017, we do not have a pattern to go by yet. The reason why many local leaders, representing Communist parties, got re-elected could be because they continued to serve and organise the local population despite the fact that they were not in government. Today, the world is different, but not much has changed in using the media, this time social media, to manipulate public opinion.

The world of tomorrow will be the result of the electronic media and the fact that many have had a chance to visit places and talk to people with different points of view. It will be the result of the experiences we have had.

During a trip to Beijing, I met a group of young ‘investors’ from Raishan, who had taken a ride on the board a new subway in New Delhi and were not at all impressed with the system in Beijing. Young Chinese who went to the United States and took on English first names are now moving back to China with Chinese first names.

Nepali worldviews is also changing rapidly as the epicentre of the global economy moves towards the Eastern Hemisphere. Hence do not be surprised if we hear about more and more Nepalis coming back home to raise yaks and buffaloes, install geothermal plants and go fishing in the Gulf countries.

Anil Chitrakar is President of SiddhiNath.

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**Gypsy Girl Mosaic**

Turkish Artist’s Chicago-inspired figurative mosaic is the missing piece of the Gypsy Girl Mosaic back to Turkey. The piece had been smuggled abroad and have a

**BIZ FRENCH**

New Tata CUV Tata Motors along with Sipahi Trading announced the launch of its newest Tata CUV, the Aria Crossover, positioned as Nepal’s Youngest Compact SUV or SUV (750cc) powered by the 1.2-litre Revotorq petrol engine, and will be available with a 5-speed manual transmission, 5-speed in three other options. The Tata Aria is available at an introductory price of Rs.2,50,000.

**Teach for Nepal**

Sanjukta Bank has operated Teach For Nepal (TFN) with Rs55,000 to cover the cost of recruitment, pre-service training, on-going support, leadership workshops and stipends. The bank supports TFN’s movement to improve the quality of education of underprivileged children by recruiting university graduates and young professionals for teaching workshops.

**France-Nepal 70 years**

The Secretary General of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Maurice Gauzes-Mortage was an official visit in Kathmandu from 9-10 January and discussed bilateral, regional and multilateral issues with Nepal’s foreign secretary Shanker Das Bhattar. During the visit, Gautam Mortage and Bhattar signed commemorative events to mark the 70th anniversary of Nepal-France diplomatic relations.
Amrita Acharia comes home

Sewa Bhattarai

Amrita Acharia arrived at the children’s shelter in Godawari on Friday morning wearing a pastel shawl with intricate woven patterns. When complimented, she replied with a smile: “This is Paipali Dhika, we went all the way to Timnair to get it.”

Daughter of a Nepali father and Ukrainian mother, the Game of Thrones actress is in Nepal after 16 years on a journey to reconnect with her roots, and a long-awaited visit to the Chora Chori children’s charity she is involved with.

Chora Chori rescues trafficked Nepali children from circuses as well as victims of rape and abuse in India, giving them skills-training, rehabilitation, and reuniting them with families when possible. Acharia helps the UK-based charity with fundraising dinners and other promotional activities.

After leaving Nepal at the age of seven, Acharia grew up in different parts of Europe and turned to acting. The HBO series Game of Thrones made her a household name seven years ago, she acted in the role of Eris, maid to the herculean Daenerys, in the show reputed to be the world’s most watched.

“People get killed so easily in that show, I was lucky to have survived for two seasons,” she laughs. “That was so long ago, but it was a good start for me. It opened the door for me to work in other shows.”

After that, Acharia appeared in many British and Norwegian productions, and is currently busy as a doctor in Good Karma Hospital. She doesn’t know whether her father, a real-life doctor, finds her take on the medical profession convincing. “He enjoys it as a show, but he is also aware of the artistic liberties we take,” she says.

Good Karma Hospital’s set in Kerala, but filmed in Sri Lanka. It was while on location there that she was reminded of a visit to Nepal was long overdue both to see the land she grew up in, and also to visit Chora Chori.

“I like how Chora Chori hosts children in a safe environment, provides them with education and skills, and makes them independent, and that is what drew me to help them,” she says. “A lot of people know me, and I want to use that fame to shed some light on the issues of Nepal’s children and the efforts by charities like Chora Chori to address them.”

On this trip, Acharia also trekked to Gandaki, visited Butwal, Bharatpur, and Angkhunaud to meet her father’s side of the family. She does not remember the Nepali of her childhood much, and her impression of this trip is that Nepal is a little busier, but otherwise the same.

Does it feel like home? “I have lived in so many places that I adapt easily,” she answers. “So I am always partly at home, and partly an outsider everywhere. In Nepal, I found there are still people who think of me as family. And that feels good.”

Raised in Britain and Norway, Acharia calls herself multilingual and multicultural, but has not been typecast as someone from a minority community in films. She says: “I don’t look like a typical Asian. I could be cast as anything, from Caucasian to Latvian to Asian. So being of mixed race is actually an advantage for me.”

Acharia’s parents spoke to each other in Ukrainian and Russian, so she lost touch with Nepal. But she says she enjoyed being immersed in Nepal: even on this trip, in Godawari, Acharia asked in halting, accented Nepali what the girls learnt in tailoring class.

She has never watched a Nepali movie, but says she is open to acting in one if she likes the project. “But I do not like my voice to be dubbed, so I must first learn Nepal,” she adds in English. “Maybe next time I can answer your questions in Nepal.”

YSW/VA
The vanishing land

Kathmandu Valley’s urban sprawl is gobbling up Thimi’s last remaining vegetable patches

Taylor Mason

Rutru Rani Newar grew up helping her grandparents dig up vegetables in the fertile farms around Thimi. Today, she is doing the same work passed down through generations.

Kathmandu Valley’s agricultural families, do not want to work in farms. But they do visit their mother every Saturday, and help sell her cauliflower and spinach in the local market.

This type of farming is one of the last of its kind in Kathmandu Valley: traditional, organic and hand grown with no help from machines. In a couple of years, farmers carrying fresh vegetables in woven baskets down the streets of Bhaktapur, calling out to customers will be a rare sight.

Agricultural engineer Man Singh Barret, who used to be a scientist at the Nepal Agricultural Research Council, says Kathmandu’s farmers had developed a very successful cycle using crop rotation to replenish the nutrients in the soil, and to keep the land fertile.

“People from all over the world noticed our techniques and productivity,” he says, “but farming is becoming obsolete.”

Nepali farmers used a special technique to grow vegetables in tiny parcels of land to sustain their families. It fertilised the soil with organic black soil and cow manure, giving the Valley’s vegetables an amazing taste full of nutrients.

But Barret says, “Land for farming is decreasing as the population increases, so new techniques are needed to meet food needs. Chemical fertilisers and green houses are being used, but the quality of these vegetables is not the same — quality is not ever considered important.”

Barret says the trend of building on prime agricultural land that started in Kathmandu is now spreading to other urban areas of Nepal, and younger educated people from farming families would rather seek a salaried job.

Saba Krishna is another Thimi farmer, whose children live in Australia. He says: “Farming has been in my family for generations, I have farmed all my life, but now the fields are replaced by houses. I think my generation is the last in my family that will farm.”

GOING GOING GONE: The last remaining fields in Thimi have been taken over by real estate developers (below, left), farmers using the traditional technique of replenishing the nutrients in the soil for the next crop (below, right).
Two years ago Mong Tamang sold 1.5 hectares of his farm. When the new owner built a road along the land to turn it into a new housing colony, local farmers were up in arms and prevented it. Shah Thapaliya sold half a hectare of his land in Kathmandu-based businessmen three years ago. But villagers again prevented houses being constructed, and Thapaliya had to return the advance he was paid.

Today, 2,000 out of 3,000 households in Piple raise cattle and grow vegetables, and much of the credit goes to Nahrai Ona, who returned from Korea after 25 years and put into practice what he learnt there working in a farm. He brought back seeds, and distributed it free among his fellow-villagers.

“He has a vital role in encouraging us to take up farming and protect our land,” says Ramsherwar Oli of the dairy cooperative in Piple. The cooperative has a farmers’ savings and loans scheme, providing low-interest loans to farmers to buy seeds and buffaloes. All loans are paid in time, and the cooperative also has a livestock insurance scheme.

 Farmers of Piple village in Chitwan say their farms are much more valuable for raising vegetables and livestock than as real estate, and have united to preserve cultivable land from being bought by developers for housing and factories.

Unlike anywhere else in Nepal, they have enforced zoning criteria to classify farmlands and residential areas, and have prohibited buildings anywhere other than in areas along the road.

“Legally we cannot intervene in decisions about private property, but there is an understanding among us to not sell cultivable land,” explains Danda Rai Pandey, one of the farmers who started the movement.

It has been ten years since Piple people have turned to vegetable farming and animal husbandry, and transformed their village into a modern agricultural settlement.

Pandey himself used to buy oranges wholesale in Dhading and Gorkha to sell at Kalmati market in Kathmandu. Today he sells vegetables and 15 litres of milk every day from his own village, and does not have to travel away from home for livelihood. He now makes Rs60,000 a year, and with his savings, has expanded his farm so he can grow more.

Moti Kiju was a daily wage worker until he started farming in a small plot of his ancestral property. The farmer made more than Rs100,000 by selling just cabbages, and he decided to expand into commercial farming. He has now leased more land from neighbours to grow other vegetable cash crops.

Rama Dallallok (pictured below) sprays vitamins on vegetables recently) also grows beans in her small plot, and in the last season she made Rs400,000 just from selling it in the market. Piple has now overtaken Glanagar as the dairy capital of Chitwan, and local farmers sold Rs12 million worth of milk and supplied Rs10 million in vegetables to Kathmandu last year.
Over the last 30 years, most major rivers in Nepal have been researched for their hydropower potential on a basis of economic cost and revenue from electricity. The Marsyangdi, Kali Gandaki, Chilime, Bhote Kosi, and Bagmati have all been dammed, and construction is nearing completion on the Modi Khola, Tams Kosi, Upper Trisuli, Khimti. More projects are planned in Upper Marsyangdi, Bhote Kosi (Basuwa) and West Seti.

All rivers in Nepal have some form of hydroelectric development planned for the next 20 years. But we have to stop and ask: does prosperity only mean damming rivers for electricity, or are there other more nature-friendly ways to raise living standards?

The benefits of renewable fuel sources come at a price—the destruction of the river landscapes and fragile eco-systems around them. Fish species can be lost due to dams, and the riverine ecosystem is fractured by rampant development.

In the United States and Japan, overdevelopment has led to dams being dismantled so rivers can flow free again. Bhutan has declared free-flowing rivers, and even Australia has set aside the Franklin River. Norway generates 80% of its energy need with hydro, yet the river ecology is left intact for recreation and tourism.

Why cannot Nepal learn from the mistakes of other countries? We have 8,000 rivers and rivulets with a potential to generate 40,000MW. But some of them have been declared free-flowing, or protected as river heritage. Set aside at least one river on each basin to be free-flowing, and there will still be enough energy to go around. We have national parks to protect mountains, lakes, but none to protect rivers.

I first did a white water rafting descent on the Karnali in 1991 and it was the most pristine river I had ever been on. Since then, we have been working to protect Nepal’s longest river from over-development that has destroyed other rivers in the country. The trouble has been that the Karnali flows through Nepal’s remotest and most underdeveloped areas, and the pressure for economic extraction is high.

Karnali River Conservation and the Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT) have been working to protect the Karnali, a river that connects Mt Kailash with Bardia National Park and the Ganga in India. There is tremendous potential for eco-adventure tourism: a glacial river, canyon, and confluence with the Ganga are just some of the reasons why this river has been set aside for conservation.

Scientists from all over the world would come to study the incredible diversity of the Karnali flats. Just making noise was not achieving results, so we decided to put together this expedition to explore the source of the...
Ramesh Bhushal

Unlike other rivers in Nepal, the Karnali is not regarded as auspicious because of the mistaken belief that it originates in Lake Rakshast in Tibet. Unlike the holy Lake Manasarovar nearby, Rakshast translates as the ‘lake of the demon’ because of its association with Vanav.

There are two places considered the real sources of this great 1,100km river. A spring in Magepa Chhupa in Palan County is taken as the religious origin, while the geographical lower point is actually in the Garu Valley below the imposing Mt Gurja Mandala.

This region around Lake Manasarovar off Nepal’s northwestern tip in Tibet has religious as well as geological significance. From the four sides of the holy Mt Kailash originate four of Asia’s great rivers: the Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Karnali.

The lake, mountain, and river are revered by the Hindu, Buddhist, Bon and Jain faiths. Hindus try to make a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mt Kailash, but inaccessibility makes it hard.

One morning in late September, as an orange glowing sun rose from behind the mountains, a group of pilgrims chanted prayers to Shiva on the shores of Lake Manasarovar. We had arrived here from Kathmandu via Kerung, riding west on the Tibetan plateau along the Brahmaputra, admiring the rare view of the Nepali Himalaya from the north. Guzark, Manalsu, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri.

Our mission was to explore Nepal’s longest river from its source in Tibet, through Humla to Kalikot in Nepal, across the salt plains of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in India where the river joins the Ganges.

The spring in Magepa Chhupa gushes out of a mountainside footworn with prayer flags. 50km northwest of Lake Manasarovar and south of Mt Kailash.

Further downstream, the river is harnessed for electricity that serves the traditional trading outpost of Takkot. The roads here are veritable tracts of concrete embankments, there are transmission lines.

Across the Karnali on the Nepal side, however, it flows in darkness. Pema Angmar runs a lodge here for pilgrims and tourists, and speaks frankly about Nepali government’s neglect of this historically vital area. “For us to go to Kathmandu, it takes weeks to walk and much money to fly, we are so far away no one listens to us,” she says bitterly.

Hills may be unexplored, but the sound of helicopters carrying Indian pilgrims from Simikot is constant. Living standards have improved, but Angmar is worried about floods if the dam the Chinese have built on the Karnali upstream bursts. From here, the Karnali flows through Nepal’s underdeveloped districts of Humla, Bajura, Kalikot, Darchula, Achham and Surkhet. There is a lot of despair along the river. “We are too poor to make the pilgrimage to Kashi, and it will be the same river that will take our lives down,” says Ilka Sunar in Dzadha Village of Humla.

But change is underway. Dynamite blasts reverberate in the valley as the Army builds a new road to connect China. Geo-demographer Karen Bennett on our team was aghast at the unnecessary destruction.

“Necessities are needed, but this construction is dangerous, making the settlements along the river vulnerable,” she says.

Despite the stunning unspoilt scenery, Karmali has been too remote for tourism. Except for Indian pilgrims flying overseas, or the occasional mule cart, there are no outsiders here.

The wild and scenic Karnali sweeps through the mountains like a giant serpent, with narrow bends and deep canyons. But what is stunning scenery as us visitors is a curse for locals. They say the beauty is of little use to them.

The Karnali has potential for world-class rafting. But even that prospect is jeopardised because of the Upper Karnali barrage project and the proposed Chisapani High Dam.

“From a back vision to make use of this river,” says Megh Ale of the Karnali River Conservation Trust, who was with us. “For decades we talked about big hydro projects, but did nothing to boost rafting and trekking on the Karnali. We only see it used for hydro and irrigation.”

Dal Bahadur Shahi lives in Talimana at the inlet site of the 200MW Upper Karnali project in Darchula district, Nepal’s biggest and the first on the river. He has been hearing about the project for the last 20 years, but it is stalled because India’s GMR has failed to secure investors.

The Karnali could easily feed its people if the water of the river is used to irrigate its fertile valleys, but the region is so poor and food-deficit because of the lack of investment in development. The effects of climate change is adding to the woes.

Devi Paudel from Sinuag village in Humla was in a rush to harvest golden tonnes of rice and then make the north side rapids along the banks of the Karnali.

“Though the weather is unpredictable every year, we have to bring in the paddy while the sun is shining. It’s difficult for us,” she says. The region has seen deficient winter rains for several years in a row, and there was a severe drought in 2016.

We flew into Mahauda Bahadur Shahi, the chief minister of Karnali Province and ask him about his plans for tourism. “I have no plans,” he says.

We have held bilateral talks with the Chinese about a railway line from Humla to southern Nepal,” he confides. Railway is a pipe dream. Then, the railway from Humla to Simikot has not been completed in 25 years. But Shahi does not have time to talk about small problems like that.

After the mighty Karnali, the next river cuts through the Chhupri Hills and then courses under the majestic Chisapani Bridge. Here the Karmali’s channels are a utilisation for the Baruda National Park in Nepal and Kalinchetung Wildlife Sanctuary in India.

After the Karmali flows into India, its name changes to Gaghara. The Indians have built embankments to tame the river in Bihar and Gomati districts. The first barrage in Gajipur diverts the river for irrigation, leaving the riverbed downstream dry.

Rajay Katra from International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development heads a unique country-partnership to protect what is called the Kailash Sacred Landscape in Nepal, China and India. Tis is too easy, given the sensitive geopolitics of the Himalaya, but Katra says he has started a dialogue: “There is a greater realisation that coming together benefits all.”

The Karnali cuts across the Himalayas with little regard for national borders. But these three countries it traverses have not even started talking about working together to preserve this other mighty Himalayan river.


Nepal’s longest and only free flowing river should be left as it is.

Karnali and travel down with the river to its confluence with the Ganges in India. With us was geomorphologist Karen Bennett to gather science-based evidence on why it should be a free flowing river. We will use the findings to convince politicians.

A MCA report states that licenses have been issued to generate nearly 8,000MW on the tributaries of the Karnali like Humla Karmali, Magu Karmali, Thas, West Seti etc. The GMR Licences for Upper Karnali has expired, so that would be the opportunity to cancel and concentrate on projects that do not touch the main stem of the Karmali.

A pilgrimage along the Karnali River from Chisapani to Kalikot can draw Indian devotees to trek to Manasarovar, and bring Chinese Buddhists to Lumbini. Eco-tourism trails and homestays can provide local income.

The Karnali is a natural gift to Nepal and among the five best in the world for whitewater rafting and kayaking. It is promoted well it can lift this entire region of Western Nepal out of poverty.

The government of the province that is home to the Karmali must realise that their river is as important as Mt Everest. This can be a perfect world class Himalayan river heritage also connecting the cultures and economies of India and China through Nepal.

Look out for the 3rd National River Summit 28-31 March at the heart of the Karnali. There will be exhibitions and presentations by scientists that highlight the unique features and potentials for this great river.

Megh Ale is President of the Karnali River Conservation Trust.
**EVENTS**

**Dancing Latin**
Get your dancing shoes ready to sway away on the biggest dinner floor of the town. Come and groove to some awesome Latin beats.
1 January, 7:30-11 pm, Club Polonez, Thamel, 9804062327

**Coffee brewing course**
The most affordable coffee brewing foundation and intermediate course can be one of the highly skilled and reputed Specialty Coffee Association certified instructors. Miss Rea.
12-14 February, 9:30 am-5 pm, RO Coffee Lab and Training School, 9802621368

**Himalayan Hydro Expo**
Arranging shareholders in hydropower, irrigation and drinking in South Asian region, the expo focuses on investment, research, production, engineering, entrepreneurship and import/export in water resource.
13-15 January, 10 am onwards, Bhaktapur Exhibition and Convention Hall, Bhaktapur, 9801588462

**In pursuit of Dragons**
A fascinating talk about the discovery, history and science of dragonflies with photos by a renowned entomologist Karen Constent.
15 January, 3 pm, Hotel Shankar, Camps, 8320, kapilcatherine@gmail.com

**Patan on foot**
Walk through narrow streets and wide courtyards in the old town of Patan and experience its intricate heritage to understand the relevance of traditions in everyday life today. Examine the scope of new urbanism and evolution of Patan as an urban hub.
Every Monday and Thursday, 9.30 am. $5 per person, 9841062079, deepashuch@gmail.com

**Pin Drop Violins**
Chapin, William and Matthew C.Morris-Quinn album, Groove went on an astonished by Ryan Pridham. Come on in for a thrilling, soulful vocals and great times.
12 January, 7.30 pm, Nexus Centre, St. Mather, 9802634480

**TPF**
15% off from Hong Kong is supported by Nical, Birhan and Brian this Friday to make your first night memorable one.
17 January, 9 pm onwards, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tashichho, 9803398400

**THE BENT FORK**
This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Average evening with family and friends. Try their vegan dish, creamy pasta with vegetable ragu.
Hotel: Khotos, 9804048961

**Stary Night BBQ**
Enjoy a scrumptious spread of BBQ along with live performances by Tatiana Band. Febra, Jan 1, 2020, Jom pension hotel, Hotel: Shangri La (c. 1 km), 9804199696, Fax 17.18

**Chandragiri Hills**
Enjoy the snowfall at Chandragiri Hills, a quick trip with the cable car and there you are with the snow Wolfs.
Chandragiri, 9809123027

**Tiger Palace Resort**
Spend a night or two at the resort which is reminiscent of beach resorts in Bali and Thailand. One of the finest resorts in Nepal plans.
Tiger Palace Resort, Bhokwang, 9801562000

**Baitadi Village Resort**
A small, cozy retreat with a bird’s eye view of green terrace fields dotted with scented flowers.
Baitadi, Khote, 9801387777

**Godavari Village Resort**
Spread over 14 lush green areas, the resort offers numerous views and traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking the field.
Godavari, 9809106036

**Himalayan Golf Course**
One of the most unique courses in the world, Himalayan currently has 18 holes. Par 3-7 over 18 holes (up to play the first and second twice) it was opened in 1954. The course is vertical, and built in a valley of the Bagmati Kolailm directly below the desert.
Majesty Palace, Parakhet, 9807521862

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**GETAWAY**

**Kids yoga**
Consider doing the breathing and mindfulness practice with your children and see how it transforms them. Speakers: they are likely to cultivate coordination and awareness of others, while developing techniques to relax the mind and body.
Every Sunday, 3:30-5:30 pm, Sonara Hilltops and Ryan Centre, Lisalpur, 9802001932

**Labour of death**
A play by Caro de Heijer, Mirjam Kauffman is the success of an intense theatre workshop, based on the method of Heinrich von Veldekeberg, conducted by the playwright himself and is a theatre maker from the Netherlands.
13 January, 7 pm onwards, Kunjo Theatre, Thapathali, 9801541728

**Hip Hop Coppelia**
Directed by Arie Sullani, the play tells the story of Paul, a city youth who becomes infatuated with a life-size doll, and Sophie, who dresses up in the doll, through steps of Hip-Hop.
17-20 January, 7:30 pm and 9:30 pm, Russian Center for Science and Culture, Kanyakuphal, Ranautha, 1, Chayo, 9800156879

**Heritage and honest people**
A solo collection exhibit by young energetic artist Rupak Chal, who has painted the heritage and honest people around Nepal with an oil color.
17-21 January, Olsson Gallery, Chobhem, Patan, 9802060534, 9841034353

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**MUSIC**

**The Bent Fork**
This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Average evening with family and friends. Try their vegan dish, creamy pasta with vegetable ragu.
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**DINING**

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**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 4 - 10 January

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**Ventures Cafe**
Stop by for the best fusion menu and local favourites, beers, and enjoy the breezy outdoor seating.
Balkot, 9802616174

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**Ours Pick**

" органический мир и вегетарианство: чистая жизнедеятельность "
"Orange the World: Meet me to"
Factory of Questions: Sarita Tiwari

Lightroom is a monthly page in Nepali Times on interesting figures in the Nepali literary scene.

Born in 1989 in Pokhara, Sarita Tiwari has been writing diligently for over two decades and published three books: Buddha ne Laharu (Buddha and Levi, 2001), Aasthrai Gho Bahasaapati (Expression of Existence) and recently, Prayabharak Karkhari (Factory of Questions, 2018).

She is a fierce single mother who did not believe in educating her daughter, Sarita started writing poetry in Grade 7. When teachers noticed her work, they took her to writing competitions, many of which she won. In 1997, she went to college in Pokhara and got closer to the literary scene led by Sara Bhatta.

Me: If I were the best school I could ask for, I was amongst great poets and learned how to use words effectively, bend them, shape them.” Sarita says.

When I read her most recent book, Prayabharak Karkhari (Factory of Questions), I was blown away by the first section, Aarestra (Verses) with simple prose and some22 classic lines in Nepali and Tharu about labour, land, gender, power, democracy, ownership, identity, Partition, politics and the price of living. How had someone used two languages and written simple words to address and deliver with elegance such large questions?

Sarita: Her afterward, she writes how many call her a terrorist, a militant feminist, or worse, a woman who has now attained manhood, due to how openly and bravely she writes about society and politics.

I thought Sarita’s as a young woman with short hair, a brick wall, no husband and definitely no children. It was a different Sarita I finally met over Facebook Messenger. She is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law, in her funny, laugh easily and openly shares stories you don’t feel you’ve quite yet earned. Here is our conversation:

Sarita: I was called kuncha and bahu at home. I was treated like a son. It wasn’t until I was in 4th or 5th grade that I fully realized I was a girl.

Muna: How?

S: People told me I was one. They said things like “you’re a daughter, you’re something else, you’re something else.”

M: People are the worst.

S: But at home, Aama never let me feel that difference. She, herself, was taken out of school because her family believed that if you educated your daughter, she’d stop with a male at home. My father who was never home, and blew all his money and property. So, she realized that daughters and sons should have equal access to education and opportunities. Aama sold all her jewelry to send all four of us to school. Of course, she wasn’t perfect, many things she believed were cultural.

M: You met your current husband through your mother.

S: Yes. Aama didn’t believe in love. To her, marriage brought shame. Our society is so extroverted in love. Aama was worried for us, especially for my eldest sister, who was the oldest among us. So, she’d keep us around our house just to catch a glimpse of her.

M: It’s funny how we can be so progressive about certain things and so conservative about others. So, you rebelled.

S: I was unhappy at first, I was just completing my bachelor and wanted to study further. But Aama cried, and I’d never seen Aama cry. She is a strong woman. She said, “I am getting weaker, and even I won’t be able to care for you. You will suffer if you live your life alone.” And when I met my father as he talked very openly about how they didn’t want a husband who would just clean the house, but someone motivated to do everything with her.”

S: He had read my first book then, and felt like they knew me. Anyway, marriages are a compromise, ours isn’t any different.

M: When I talk to poets, a lot of them speak of light and how poetry is a pathway towards light. What is this light and where is it?

S: If there had been no songs in Aama’s life, she would’ve been depressed. She raised four children alone after suffering under her husband all her married life, and we were not well-off. Still, she was full of life. I, too, have a lot of childhood trauma and dark moments in my life, and the only way to bring light onto those moments is through creative means. When I think about why I’m content in life, or emotionally strong, I know it’s because I am close to poetry.

M: In your poems, you write about conversing with the ghost of Parjati.

S: The spirits of Joan of Arc, Parjati and Virginia Woolf come to me in my dreams and sleep me across my face. Marx and Conry are also my constant companion, my guide.

M: So is the anthaan that you speak in your poetry.

S: Exactly – you’re sleeping and there is something heavy sitting on your chest. And I used to feel this anthaan especially in those times when my readers and close friends would call me Takhan, or SSS and paint this picture of me carrying a belt of bullets around my shoulders, AK47 in my hand, and in one poem referring to Dart, I wrote about how all of society’s “blame has drowned in your vagina,” or how in another, I mention ‘alavtra and sam’, or a poem where a girl’s own father repeatedly rapes her. There are such disgusting things happening in society every day, and I have written about less than 3% of that – not even written, just alluded to them but people can’t tolerate it.

M: What about your family?

S: My husband just leaves me alone when it comes to work. I guess I take that positively. My life is tied to the kitchen, so I can never call myself a full revolutionary.

M: You’re better, you’re a revolutionary, you need people?

S: I don’t know. My children want me to be that mother who makes pancakes for them every Saturday. Or husband wants to sit with me in the sun and eat peanuts, but I’m not at home. We don’t live with my laws anymore and that makes it a little easier. For instance, kids on days I can’t. He would do that if we were living with his parents.

M: You call your husband sir?

S: Everyone calls him sir around here. He teaches chemistry and is a principal.

M: Does he call you ma’am?

S: He calls me Sarita. (Laughter).

M: I’ve always been fascinated by how we address people and what they say or doesn’t say about our relationship with them.

S: I’ve started writing an essay What Name Shall I Give You? and it’s exactly about this. When I heard my friends call their husbands by their name, I tried doing the same, but I think my husband felt off. And in our Khush Bahun-Chhitr community, the man can call his wife maa, but the wife always calls him tapai or jagat. In Janajati communities, I think the language is more equalizing, no?

M: Ar in Gurung means you, and that’s how we address everyone from a two-year-old to an 80-year-old.

S: That’s incredible. We don’t have that. Even our language is oppressive. And let’s not even get started on how men can rewar, but if women do the same it is seen as nasty. Life is a big zigzag, Muna ji.

M: I see books behind you. Are you in a room of your own?

S: This room used to be the guest room, and I moved some books down here. Then I set up a small table, and bought a laptop for myself. My daughter, who used to keep herself, now wants to sit at my desk and do her homework. While she doesn’t, I’ve set up a single bed here where I read. Although this is my room, I am only able to come here to write at night after everyone is asleep. I stay up till 2am writing. The only way I can write is by trading in sleep for words.

M: I want to shift the conversation a little what you have written in the section Aarestra of your most recent collection. What made you write from their perspectives?

S: I have a lot of Tharu friends and I grew up around Tharu villages both in Nawalparasi when my mother moved us there and also when I came to Colombo after I got married. Most of the characters in my poems are my friends and I had long conversations with them. I know what oppression they have gone through from the Kanso and most of my stories are from Gour and Gritti who descended from the hills and took over their lands; ten years whose land was taken by whom and how. It’s horrible.

M: Do you get accused of telling these stories through your poems even though you are not a Tharu yourself?

S: I understand what you’re saying and part of being a responsible writer is knowing that I can never write as well or as accurately as my Tharu friends. I don’t have the authority of experience that Tharu has. The poem, Dilima Madha actually came out of Devnayans Dasato kaaka’s kitchen in Nawalparasi. I was living and working with them for over a week while I was researching and when we sat to eat, I saw a stew being cooked in a saucepan and I asked Devnayans kaka, what is that? He told me it was a dal, a bucket to catch fish, but how there are no fish in the rivers anymore. So, they put garic, onions, other vegetables in it. Whatever he told me, I made into a poem and perhaps only the last four lines are from him. I heard Devnayans kaka passed away last year. He hadn’t seen his children for years, they all went abroad to work. But like the fish in his dal, he never returned.

M: That poem is one of my favourites. You know, we have such a rich reserve of folklores and folk literature. If we held all of that, I guarantee you it is as rich or richer than those from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa... I want to continue to collect those Tharu stories too. I keep telling myself that once my children are older I will go somewhere and write furiously.

Muna Gurung is a writer, educator and translator based in Kathmandu. For more of her work, visit mungurung.com

Fish in the dilli by Sarita Tiwari

Now – how can there be any fish in the dilli?

There’s just two or four cloves of garlic some onion and chilli

Fish?

There were many in this Mugwari river.

In Mughl. during Jirya and Amosha.

I’ve seen women of how many I’ve killed!

Fish as plump as my youth.

Like all I’ve had them swept away
don’t even,
eyou must cut this stalks of pampas.
I wear a dal!

It amazes me all that fish,
what stream did they enter?
what river did they merge into?

Humans and fish are alike.

Once they are washed away from the source, they never return

Someone, please return the lost army of golden fish to this river or, shall I continue to sit by the bank and watch my own age turn
Eastern melodies in Kathmandu

A long time ago in the beginning
There was no violin.
And there was no beautiful earth.
And there were no human beings.
And the earth cried.

It is rare to hear folk songs in the Limbu language in Kathmandu, but this was the moment. Four Limbus, including Iriya Shurbu and Deepa Shrestha, performed a traditional song from their community at Avenue Theatre this week. The event was organized by Kathmandi Music to promote true folk melodies that people live by, and which are endangered by assimilation.

This article is written in English.
Govinda KC, who has been on a fast-unto-death protest to demand reforms in the medical sector, began his 10th protest in Ilam on Wednesday after Parliament’s Education and Health Committee passed the Medical Education Bill in violation of the agreement made with him.

He has begun a new phase of protests with six demands, asking for the Medical Education Bill to be amended before it is passed by the full Parliament. KC reached Ilam on Tuesday, and organized a press meet on Wednesday evening to announce his protest at a private home near the Tundikhel.

“By violating the agreement, the Parliamentary Committee has prepared a bill that is not oriented towards the people but the mafia,” he said. Hundreds of people attended to express solidarity with his protest.

Some of KC’s previous demands have been fulfilled by this bill. For example, the bill restricts opening new medical colleges in Kathmandu for the next ten years, requires that medical colleges be non-profit, and has provisions for scholarships to make medical education accessible to all.

However, many previous demands remain unfulfilled, and KC has asked that the bill be amended to reflect word for word the agreement made with him on Aug 26 of this year. Besides that, he has also made the following demands:

- Tribhuvan University officials found guilty by the Gauri Bahadur Karki investigation committee should be sacked immediately. The Institute of Medicine should be restored with the rights taken over by TU. Planned affiliations through Agriculture and Forestry Ministry that deny the cabinet decision should be cancelled and the culprits punished.
- Medical Colleges should be opened in all seven provinces.
- The culprit of Nimla Panta’s rape and murder case should be apprehended and punished, and those colluding in hiding the evidence should also be punished.
- Wasteful crimes should be processed and the guilty punished according to international laws. Victims should be heard and transitional justice process should be concluded.
- Kathmandu University should roll back the high fees it is charging in defiance of the government’s decision, and those responsible be punished.

KC began his protest by drinking a glass of water, and said he will only drink water during his protest. He added: “I am fighting for 50 million Nepalis, so I don’t care whether I live or die.”
Good Fellows

Students become teachers to inject a new sense of commitment in government schools

A Korean volunteer returns to a remote government school to see much has changed for the better

Seven years in
Teach for Nepal

Teach for Nepal is patterned after Teach for America, and strives to make education more equitable by raising the standard of instruction in neglected government schools through a fellowship program that recruits Nepali university graduates to work as teachers for two years.

Fellows receive a 45-day training that prepares them not just with teaching techniques like preparing lesson plans and classroom management, but also about community immersion and social justice.

Teach for Nepal’s CEO Shubhit Khanal says he was initially inspired by the Sri Lankan movement Shramadhan which invests skills and human assets to empower local communities. Khanal discovered that access to quality education was a prevalent problem across many remote communities in Nepal, which led him to start Teach for Nepal.

Fellows also engage with families of students through community visits because Khanal says the quality of education will only improve if local families own it. "There are gaps between school and the community in rural Nepal. Our fellows could be one way of filling this gap."

Tityang

Tityang

the school needs more help. Yogesh Khadka wants to build on his father’s foundation by adding a subject like agricultural science in the curriculum.

"Most people here are farmers, so it would be useful to have practical classes about agriculture," he says.

The sun was setting behind mountains to the west as I hurried to catch my jeep back to Baglung. The passage of time cast a lengthening shadow across a school that once taught me so much about Nepal, and about life.

BACK IN BAGLUNG
Ha-Ha® Instant Noodles

There is a nasty rumour going around that foreign direct investment in Nepal has fallen drastically because of corruption. That rumor doesn’t even deserve a rebuttal. The real reason no one is investing is because we have run out of brand names for new products.

Even though the government is in denial, this is a crisis of nationalistic proportions. If we can’t come up with new brand names ASAP then I’m afraid this country is doomed. Which investor in his or her right mind would want to come to a country where there is such a dearth of trade marks?

Take Mt Everest, for instance. It’s over-saturated, everyone and their grandmother has named their product after the mountain. Mt Everest Steel Rods, Mt Everest Cement, Mt Everest Gin (Motto: ‘Get High With Us!’), Mt Everest Ghee Udyog, Mt Everest Prawn Crackers, Mt Everest Helicopter & Hospital (Slogan: ‘Regular non-stop flights from Base Camp to Rooftop Helipad even if you are lal and hearty’).

So, if you are thinking of getting into the instant noodle business, naming it Mt Everest Noodles is out of the question. Besides, the Ministry of Taxation has just mandated that all instant noodle brands in this country must compulsorily have names consisting of one monosyllabic word repeated twice, like Wa-Wa or Ra-Ra. But potential investors need not feel restricted. There are odds of noodles names still available and they come with ready-to-use motives: Mane-Mane (‘Even your cat will love it!’), Ha-Ha (‘Probably the world’s funniest noodle’), or Ba-Ba (‘The favourite noodles of the black sheep in every family’).

Another highly popular brand name is Sherpa, not just in Nepal but also abroad. In Nepal we already have Sherpa pick-up trucks, Sherpa health soaps, Sherpa brand musk, and internationally there are Sherpa 100 Volt Portable Power Banks, Sherpa Venture Capital, and even Sherpa Supreme Court continues in the US.

My friend Tashi Tshering says no one asked them if they could borrow his surname, and he intends to sue them through the solicitor’s firm, Sherpa, Sherpa & Sherpa. Since Nepal is a multi-ethnic country, this opens up a whole new avenue of nomenclature for the manufacturing and service industries: Chhetri brand ketchup, Rai Rams 86’s proof, Tharu brand photocopy paper, Bahun Pure Mustard Oil, Lama Vegetarian Memo and Pan fodder Franchise, KC’s AC-DC Adapters, and Gachchhar Flip-flops.

For new domestic airline operators, the field is wide open because if we can have Buddha Air, we have the whole pantheon. Hanuman Air Lines (Starting Direct Flights to Lanka Soon), or Pushpesh Bhanu which offers In-flight Bow-Wow noodles (‘What’s good for your dog is good for you.’)