



BIKRAM RAI

Oli's 1st year

KP Oli is Nepal's strongest prime minister since the Ranas, yet as he marks his first year in office on Friday why does he appear so embattled?

Oli has everything going for him: a strong majority in Parliament, a demoralised opposition, some youngish can-do ministers. But instead of communicating his accomplishments, he spent an entire interview this week attacking critics. (*See below*). Social media ridicule of his wild promises, skepticism of his schemes for social security or unemployment allowance make him defensive.

Instead of the opposition, Oli is battling ex-Maoist hardliners within his own party. The row over parallel statements on Venezuela, rift over celebrating the start of the Maoist revolution on Wednesday have put Oli on a collision course with co-Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Even worse, Oli's own former UML comrades mutter privately that he is going it alone and listening to poor advice.

We asked Oli this week to fill out his own report card on the first year of his second time as prime minister. Sound bites:

■ They were jealous of my popularity two years ago, they accused me of being a nationalist. They were afraid Nepal would really develop under my leadership. The same thing is happening this time. No one talks about my achievements on federalism, the social security scheme, our progress in infrastructure. All the negative publicity is from people who cannot bear to see me being successful.

■ There is an ideological prejudice. They are spreading disinformation about Indians

needing work permits, disturbing Nepal's foreign relations, they say I am constricting press freedom and democracy. Who are these people who never fought for democracy, now saying it is threatened? A few are spreading fake news, it does not represent public opinion.

■ They ridicule me about railways and shipping, the really ridiculous thing is that with its great potential Nepal is still poor, there is greed and conspiracy, Nepalis still go hungry.

■ Freedom of expression does not mean you can defame people, use foul language, be uncivil, indulge in character assassination. There is a trend to undermine the very people who are trying to stabilise society and take Nepal forward.

■ There is an organised effort to spread lies that Nepal is a dictatorship, it is not investment-friendly. Political parties pass resolutions warning foreigners not to invest here. Have you heard these critics ever talk about the extortion and loot by Biplav's faction?

■ Federalism is work in progress. We are in uncharted territory to implement power devolution, make new laws, restructure the civil service, we have to convince those who do not accept the constitution. There used to be one government, now there are 753 local, 7 provincial and national governments. It is not easy to make them all pull together.

■ This was our base year, we have given a glimpse of the future, built the foundation, gave Nepal direction. Now we will move on governance, development, and performance.

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For full text of interview in Nepali go online.




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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

THAT TIME OF MONTH

The practice of *chhaupadi* in which women in western Nepal are banished to cow sheds during their periods grabs a lot of media attention within Nepal and internationally, eclipsing the much more widespread and entrenched menstrual restrictions in the rest of Nepal.

As cruel and inhumane as *chhaupadi* is, journalistic coverage as usual tends to be event-focused, headlining only deaths due to suffocation, snakebites or exposure. There is little context to explain that the practice is now much less widespread as literacy improves, and after it was outlawed.

As public health specialist Aruna Uprety reports from Accham in this issue (*page 14-15*), young women and mothers across western Nepal are now defying this superstition. But that is not ‘newsy’ enough for the international media.

To be sure, it is a travesty that young women are still dying because they are forced to fend for themselves in the flimsy huts, where some fall prey to the cold, infections, wild animals, or rapists. *Chhaupadi* is cruel and an egregious violation of the human rights of women, perpetuated by conservative societal norms.

But while women in western Nepal are cast out to spend four days every month in sheds, in other parts of Nepal they are confined to isolation in separate rooms. They are not allowed to cook or eat in the kitchen, cannot touch taps, and are supposed to keep off places of worship. These are not poor and illiterate women in rural Nepal, but college graduates, upper and middle class urban women in Kathmandu, and even the Nepali diaspora.

Many women believe the superstition about menstrual ostracisation and willingly follow the practice, thinking crops will wither, livestock will die, cows will not give milk, or that their fathers and brothers will die if they ‘pollute’ them during their periods. Festivals like Rishi Panchami reinforce these beliefs, where women apologise for all the ‘sins’ they many have committed, even unintentionally, during menstruation.

Women are also excluded from festivals and auspicious occasions, forced to find distant water sources for washing, and left out of schools and work. More damaging is the emotional toll: women feel humiliated

and dehumanised as they grow up feeling powerless from a young age.

Writer and menstruation activist Radha Paudel in her new book released this week, *Apavitra Ragat* (Impure Blood), argues that all menstrual restrictions are human rights violations, not just *chhaupadi* (*page 14-15*). She says the demolition of *chhaupadi* huts and the distribution of sanitary pads, while being important interventions, do not address the continuing isolation of women during their periods, and their feelings of inferiority that it perpetuates.

Paudel suggests that the focus should be shifted to a more holistic advocacy where all members of society accept that menstruation is not impure. For that, communication and education are key, and the campaigns must include men, as well as school teachers, health workers, faith healers and community leaders.

Positive stories also need more coverage because not everything about menstruation is regressive in Nepal. Over the years, increasing numbers of women have started questioning this tradition, and have proactively and collectively broken the taboo. Education has brought about dramatic change, spreading knowledge among students and their parents about the biological reasons for menstrual blood.

The accounts of women who suffer in cow sheds are tragic, but much more compelling are the brave stories of those that have countered the practice in Nepal’s most conservative communities. They prove that reform is possible, and can be brought about by the combined strength of many ordinary women fighting for justice and rights for themselves and their children. They show that courageous progressive women exist in the same places where the taboo is strongest, and where those extreme cases of deaths and despair are reported.

Ultimately, dignified menstruation for women all over Nepal should focus not just on hygiene and safety through sanitary pads and alternatives to *chhaupadi* huts, but on making sure that women are not shamed by menstruation and are free to participate in any activity, whether or not it is ‘that time of month’.



Courageous and progressive women exist in the same places in western Nepal where taboos about menstruation are strongest, and where extreme cases of deaths and despair are reported.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ten years ago this week, the Ass’ Backside Column in edition #438 of *Nepali Times* of 13-19 February 2008 was titled “Go back to sleep”. It was a spoof on the elected Maoist government honouring the PLA anniversary. Excerpt:

Go back to sleep, we'll wake you up when things start getting really exciting around here. As things stand now, nothing is really happening. Politicians are all up to their ears in party affairs, and no one has any time for the country.

The southern plains and the eastern hills have been locked down now for weeks, but PM PKD has all the time in the world to helicopter over to Panchthar to attend his army's anniversary. Defence Minister Cloudy was off in western Nepal attending a Tharu council. This whole week, the Boddie brass has been busy getting organised for the three-day gala war anniversary in Nawalparasi. All the UML members of the cabinet, including the Hydro Minister, will be out of action for another week because of the party convention in Butwal. And next week Nepal's Other Army will be celebrating its own Army Day on Shivaratri.



ONLINE PACKAGES



Menstruation activist Radha Paudel has been advocating for safe and dignified menstruation, and this week launched a new book *Apavitra Ragat*. Watch video in which she talks about opposing not only Chhaupadi, but also social practices that limit a woman’s activities during her periods, prevalent even in urban areas. Visit Paudel’s pad factory. Read review of the book and her profile: *page 14-15*.



Maya Thakuri is a member of Nepal Academy and has published eight anthologies of short stories, many of which have been translated into English, and are taught in universities in India and Nepal. She never went to school and taught herself how to read and write. Watch her talk about her childhood, broken family, an abusive father, writing, grandchildren and different emotions. Story: *page 17*. Go online for the unabridged version of the conversation and other exclusive photos and video.

HISTORY LESSONS

Great article (‘The end of history’, Anil Chitrakar, #946)! The attractiveness of any course is directly linked to economical viability. Unfortunately Nepal doesn’t have an environment that encourages and fosters the liberal arts.

Swadesh Subedi

■ Lack of enrolment in history could be due to youth these days looking to study subjects that could lead them into post-graduate study or work in a foreign country. It would be sad for Nepal if the coming generations did not carry the rich and diverse history into the years ahead.

Sue Chamberlain

■ How sad that there are no enrolments of students in history! As the article suggests, could it be because history is seen as something where you simply memorise dates rather than analysing events?

Kalps Para

■ History in Nepal overlaps too deeply with myth ... wonder if academic rigour would be appreciated, some stories would have to be retold and might be unpalatable, especially about the Shah kings.

Abs Pan

CLIMATE CLIMAX

The impact does not bear thinking about, so far reaching (‘Terrifying assessment of a Himalayan melting’, Kunda Dixit, #946)!

Alan Roadnight

■ And people will continue to live like they are in a dreamland until floods arrive, or their taps run dry and reservoirs can’t recharge enough for electricity or irrigation for agriculture. Call me a pessimist or a realist.

Dibyashwor Raj Baidya

■ Impact already being felt, not only in high Himalayas but in mountains and hills communities. Nepal, already in economic trouble, must adapt to this new challenge rapidly.

David Seddon

WHAT'S TRENDING



Terrifying assessment of Himalayan melting

by Kunda Dixit
Not only are the Himalayan mountains warming, but they are warming faster than the global average, and nearly all Himalayan ice will be gone by 2100. The new Himalayan assessment released by ICIMOD last week generated waves worldwide, and this review of the report was read by tens of thousands and shared widely. Visit *nepalitimes.com* for the full story and video interview with David Molden of ICIMOD for key findings and recommendations.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

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Most visited online page

The end of history

by Anil Chitrakar
We have not even begun to scratch the surface of what we can turn our history into. The news that no student enrolled for graduate studies at the History Department of TU was as disturbing to the readers as for the writer. Most were aghast and were vocal about the reasons for the lack of interest. Go online to join the on-going discussion.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Himalayan peaks are warming between 0.3-0.7 C faster than global average. At this rate 2/3 of Himalayan glaciers will melt by 2100. An earlier report said #Everest region would lose 90% ice by end of century #ClimateChange @icimod Report review @kundadixit <http://bit.ly/terrifying-assessment-of-a-Himalayan-melting-nt> ...

icn InsideClimate News @insideclimate
If current emission trends continue, two-thirds of Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2100, a new report suggests. That would affect 1.6 billion people living in the mountains and downstream. via @nepalitimes

आरत्ती ARATI @aratikh
#Himalayas also known as #thethirdpole for the amount of snow it has (after South Pole and North Pole) is melting at unprecedented rate. This will affect perennial rivers and people living in the downstream river basins of #SouthAsia and #China . #ClimateCrisis

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
No student enrolled for graduate studies at the #History Department of TU this year. Will we forget and loose all the colourful characters, events, places, plots, wars, treaties, because no one wants to study history anymore? Anil Chitrakar writes.

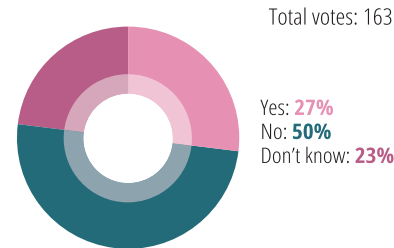
Sajan @sajanunited
This will affect our society years to come. Govt should think about it before its too late. Our culture and history is a great asset for future. Thanks to the author for his great insight.

Bhumi Ghimiré @BhumiGhimir
Disheartening even on a personal level. My grandfather's book (*Nepal ko aithihasik roop rekha* - Bal Chandra Sharma) which is still used as the main course book might become something of an obsolete item then?



Weekly Internet Poll #947

Q. Has the 2015 earthquake helped revive traditional crafts in Kathmandu?



Weekly Internet Poll #948
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think menstrual restrictions have reduced with time?



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Creeping control over the press in Nepal

Recent attempts to curb on press freedom are reminiscent of Maoist attacks on the journalism 10 years ago



GUEST COLUMN
Ajay Pradhan

The ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) government is taking incremental steps to curb press freedom, hoping no one will notice. But added up, they represent a serious threat to the constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression of citizens

and journalists.

With federalism, controls on the press also seem to be decentralised, with provincial governments drafting laws that would jail journalists for perceived infractions. A new criminal code last year already announced punitive measures against reporting construed to infringe on privacy, or ridicule political figures. This week, the government proposed new laws to punish objectionable content on social media with a Rs1.5 million

fine, or 5 years in prison.

There is a disturbing trend to roll back on freedoms guaranteed in the constitution by politicians, businessmen and power brokers who seem rattled by recent media exposes. This intolerance is reflected in threats of legal action against mainstream journalists, digital portals, and social media content providers.

In 2018, there were numerous police crackdowns on journalists covering public demonstrations,

the Minister of Communications cancelled a TV show for asking uncomfortable questions, politicians threatened social media users with imprisonment for lampooning the prime minister.

There is a clear feeling of déjà vu of Stalinistic tactics used by the newly-elected Maoist government headed by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to attack the media in 2008. The party deployed its notorious Young Communist League (YCL) to

vandalise newspaper offices, burn distribution vans and use militant unions to shut down media.

The following piece I wrote 10 years ago in my blog, Humanature Journal, is as current today as it was then. Circumstances have changed, but the cast of characters and the goal is still to muzzle the media.

Ajay Pradhan is based in Vancouver and works as senior policy adviser on Indigenous-Crown relations and treaty negotiations.

Maoist's Attack On the Media Continues: Are YCLs the New Mandales?

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2008
By **Ajay Pradhan**

These are strange times. But these are not unique times. History repeats itself.

In Nepal, under the implicit protection and complicity of Maoist leaders in the party that leads the coalition, its unions have got a free pass from the leadership to unleash a reign of terror on the free press.

Despite leading the governing coalition, Maoists are continuing their insurgency-time behaviour of using violence to intimidate journalists that dare to report news that they do not like. Such attacks on the free press are unacceptable and should not go unpunished.

On Sunday, 50 Maoist-affiliated trade union members, most of whom were the feared Maoist-affiliated YCL, carried out a vicious physical attack on the journalists, management and staff of

Himalmedia, a Kathmandu-based media enterprise that publishes the *Nepali Times* and the *Himal Khabarpatrika* and vandalised their head office. Many Himalmedia staffers were injured in the assault by a large gang of masked Maoist YCL.

The attack drew immediate national and international condemnation. The embarrassed Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda put a political spin on the matter and blamed the attack on "ex-monarchists" who had infiltrated his party to defame it.

The very next day, however, the defiant Maoist trade union chief, Salikram Jammakattel, who is also a Maoist member of the Constituent Assembly, ironically rendered Prachanda's spin doctoring worthless when



he threatened further, more vicious attacks on Himalmedia if it did not yield in to the demands of a Maoist union. Two Maoist trade union leaders who led the attack were

safely ensconced in a YCL camp.

Physical assault by a group that is affiliated with the party in power can only be construed as the government's attempt to muzzle the free press. Maoists maintain that this is a labour dispute, but the facts prove otherwise. Sunday's assault was triggered by criticism of Jammakattel the previous day by the publication. This is deeply troubling: the Maoists must realise that their days of guerrilla insurgency are over.

The previous week, on 25 October 2008 Maoist perpetrators attacked with stones the Himalmedia CEO and his driver. On 16

November Maoists burned 5,000 copies of *Himal Khabarpatrika* at a distribution depot, making death threats against staffers.

Earlier, the Maoists vandalised the offices of Kantipur Publications that publishes *The Kathmandu Post* and *Kantipur* for criticising the Maoist party. Even after winning the CA election, Prachanda is on record warning *Kantipur* not to criticise his party, making unspecified threats if it did not comply.

This is not how a government builds a nation, earns trust and inspires confidence. Intimidation and violence cannot muzzle the media. Prachanda would do well to keep this basic tenet of free speech in his mind. Otherwise, the infamy of vicious YCL activities will engulf his credibility, much like what the infamous Mandales did to expedite the demise of the seemingly invincible partyless Panchayat system that ruled Nepal for 30 years.





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Turkish teams with LEGO

Turkish Airlines released its second safety video featuring characters from the LEGO movie. The movie's colourful characters give detailed instructions about safety in a fun ambience, and the video journeys across 5 continents to some of Turkish Airlines' most prominent destinations. In August 2018, the airline released its first ever LEGO passenger safety video which gained widespread popularity with 20 million views in one month. The second movie will play in airplanes starting from March 1 2019.



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School Handover

TATA trust in partnership with Siproddan Sahayata Sanstha handed over the new building of Sindhupalchok's Shree Sharada Higher Secondary School that had suffered damage in the 2015 earthquake. The new building is earthquake resistant, has 12 classrooms, gender and disabled friendly toilets, computer lab, and was reconstructed as part of the 'Nepal Earthquake Rehabilitation Initiative'.



New cooler

Smart Appliances (P) Limited, the sole authorised distributor of Airtek air cooler in Nepal, has introduced a new model Airtek ATE800. It has an engineered polymer body with a carbon dust filter, earthing safety, honey comb and ice chamber and a 7 litres detachable water tank.



Mountain Ice

With increased consumer preference for strong brews, Raj Brewery has launched a premium strong beer named Mountain Ice which is brewed to international standards with imported malts and select hops. It has a 6.5% alcohol content and costs Rs230 for a 650ml bottle.



 **prabhu BANK**

Nepal’s new National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission

This pivotal constitutional body for federalism’s survival and success will get an all-important head this week

YANKI UKYAB and
GEORGE VARUGHESE

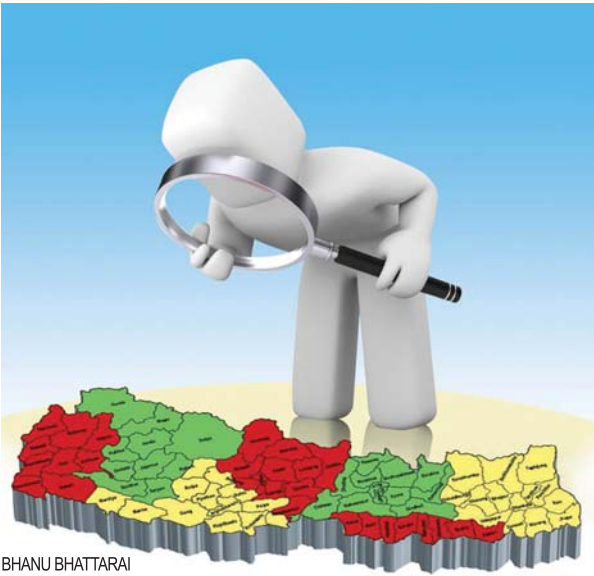
Nepal’s Constitutional Council recently recommended candidates to chair a number of constitutional bodies. This week, Parliamentary hearings will commence for the confirmation of each of these candidates, and they will subsequently be appointment by the President.

Perhaps the most pivotal of these constitutional bodies for federalism’s survival and success is the National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission (NNRFC) as it will serve as the constitutionally-mandated authority (under Section 26) forsetting guidelines for federal fiscal transfer to subnational governments, and developing formulas for distributing natural resource royalties, among others.

NNRFC’s ability to deliver on its constitutional mandate will critically depend on the quality of data and evidence-based decision making. Globally, governments are increasingly employing evidence-based policymaking, data science, and analytics to solve policy challenges. Data analytics can help understand, simplify, and predict trends to improve public policy.

The NNRFC is strategically positioned to adopt and deliver a risk-tested, contextual, and adaptable template of data and evidence-based policymaking that other Nepali government entities can benefit from in delivering public goods and services.

Uniform policies will not suit Nepal’s diversity which is why the NNFRFC will have to deliver a nuanced and context-specific model of allocation decisions. Evidence-



BHANU BHATTARAI

driven analytics will enable NNRFC to contextualise and adopt existing fiscal federalism into an implementable inter-governmental architecture.

NNRFC’s role naturally transcends the remedying of fiscal and horizontal imbalances across the three types of government, and extends to analysing related issues of fiscal federalisation such as potential intergovernmental spillovers, fiscal mobility, and fiscal discipline.

These tasks will need a new domain of data and accompanying analytical capability which will authorise a detailed examination of existing reality to ensure that the recommendations are not just implementable but will in fact produce the desired results for each of Nepal’s 761 governments.

Researchers have argued that public sector

reform will germinate and sustain only in a space characterised by acceptance of reform by the political and bureaucratic order, an authority who champions the reform, and technical ability to absorb the reform. The NNRFC is uniquely positioned to serve as such a reform space if its broad acceptance as a mission-critical commission and the reputation of its candidate for chairperson are built upon to drive the technical ability for data and evidence-based analytics.

The magnitude of data requirement for NNRFC is unprecedented and the deficiency of such data compels the Commission to be not just a user, but also a producer of data. As a strategically-positioned adopter and champion of evidence-based policymaking in federal Nepal, the NNRFC will most likely face challenges as well as risks associated with testing new practices/technology.

The lack of reliable data coupled with generally low levels of research and analytical literacy in government entities are major constraints in effective data-driven policy making. For example, accessing revenue and expenditure data at all levels of the government is a tremendous challenge. The secretariat of the NNRFC currently gets development data from line ministries for financial data and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), but they are hard pressed to provide the data. Thus, in light of NNRFC’s constitutional mandate to determine the distribution of revenues between the federal, state and local governments, a new domain of data is needed.

Another data challenge in Nepal is the presence of diverse data related initiatives,

which are not inter-linked, triangulated and tested for internal and external validity. Government entities that own and use data remain isolated, for the most part, with weak inter-governmental data linkages.


The NNRFC has a constitutionally-grounded basis for championing inter-governmental data consolidation and facilitating data linkages among ministries and departments across federal, provincial, and local governments. A consolidation initiative of this sort is overdue, since many subnational governments are exploring and even embarking on data-related initiatives that are unrelated and potentially incoherent for whole of government.

Finally, the challenge of data requisitioning in government can be addressed to a great extent by a constitutional body such as the NNRFC, if the appropriate rules and regulations are enacted and practiced. India’s Finance Commission functions as a quasi-judicial body and has the powers of civil court for summoning and enforcing attendance as well as requisitioning any public record from any court or office.

The long wait for the appointment of the NNRFC chairperson will soon be over. More importantly, this appointment should drive the NNRFC’s delivery of a constitutionally-grounded framework for fiscal transfers and royalty distribution that uses evidence generated by data science and analytics.

The moment is here to support the NNRFC as a reform space that is strategically positioned to champion a risk-tested, contextual, and implementable model of data and evidence-based policymaking in Nepal. 🇳🇵

Yanki Ukyab and George Varughese are associated with Niti Foundation.




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Four years later, Nepal's farmers rise from the rubble

One day Kathmandu's cappuccinos will be made with beans grown by Nuwakot's earthquake-hit farmers

"I'm shaken and rattled to the bone," exclaims Ambica as we lurch uphill, the vehicles skidding on exposed stones and sliding off the deeply gouged ruts. The driver wrestles with the wheel of the sturdy Indian SUV, zigzagging our way up the tortuous mountain road. I hold on to the back of Ambica's seat as we pitch and roll like a boat in heavy seas.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Climbing higher out of the murky air, the dusty roadside foliage, bamboo stands and delicate ferns give way to thinning conifers, blue skies and views of jagged soaring scenery. Between the trees, layers of hazy hilltops recede to rocky ridges newly dusted with snow, and the occasional glimpse of a distant white peak. Across the Trisuli Valley we can follow the scar of the Pasang Lhamu Highway snaking its way to the Kerung-Rasuwa border through a vast hillside dotted with habitation, a silver thread of river far below.

Our band of bouncing and bruised Rotarians is visiting three thriving women's cooperatives in remote Nuwakot villages, way off the beaten track even though within sight of the Chinese border and Langtang tourist trails across the valley. Although we are in one of the worst earthquake affected areas, we see little sign of damage. The hillside villages are characterised by new one-story concrete houses pieced with metal rebar spikes waiting for the next floor. "Mexicans call them 'fingers of hope'," says Isabella, the minister's wife.

It is nearly four years since the earthquakes rocked our existence in Nepal, and we all have our own personal stories seared into our memories. Mine involve running barefoot onto my house lawn, hanging onto a garden chair for



LISA CHOEGYAL

stability as terracotta tiles rain off the roof, my little red car buffeting back and forth in the driveway, and in the distance an unnatural pall of dust rising eerily to obscure the Valley floor. Most of us were lucky, but an unexpected rumble still startles, evoking the roar of that terrible great shake.

The countryside narrative is different. No amount of sterile statistics or dry data reporting the extent of devastation in Nepal's central middle hills can prepare us for the reality of suffering on the ground. This is why we are here. With most men gone to labour overseas, the Federation of Business and Professional Women of Nepal (BPWN) led by the indomitable Ambica Shrestha and her team, with donations from our Rotary Mid-Town, have been assisting these courageous lady farmers to diversify and rebuild their lives. Organic vegetables and the introduction of mountain coffee, a new commodity for Nepal's hill regions, are

supplementing the traditional crops of subsistence agriculture and helping recovery after the disaster.

We sit on plastic chairs as the deputy mayor Maya Devi Neupane, a red woollen scarf wrapped around her dark head, explains that 90% of the Kahule village houses were damaged. These industrious people have cleared and shovelled and toiled and saved, managing to reconstruct and restore their shattered homes. Other than a few cracked walls, only a tangled heap of concrete slabs and rubble catch our attention as being obvious earthquake destruction remaining unattended – we are told it was the new Fikure police post, inaugurated only the day before the worst tremor. "I tried to shelter there, thinking it would be the safest place," smiles Lila Devi Fungal. "But I got out in time."

Maya Devi's rare qualities first

came to Ambica's notice when she refused a gift of 80 emergency relief packages in May 2015. "I can't accept these," the soft-spoken but steely leader told a puzzled Ambica. "I have 100 families in my village and it is too difficult and not fair if I return with only 80 parcels to distribute."

Putting their heads together as how best to help, Maya Devi came up with the concept of high value, organic, mountain Arabica coffee, just a few trees per family. She requested Ambica for training on how to cultivate and process the coffee fruit, a tree that requires little water, offers annual yields without replanting, and grows on unused edges of terraces and fields. Only by combined effort and some outside assistance would it make economic sense for these semi-literate ladies to take such a risky step towards a brighter future.

An enterprising neighbour had planted the idea years ago, a shy

farmer Chetra Bahadur Tamang, who had never seen a coffee tree or tasted a fresh brewed cup but was convinced by an informative Radio Nepal broadcast that this was the cash crop for his community. He walked to Kathmandu to purchase a hundred seedlings, but was disappointed by the bitter, unpalatable concoction that the bushes eventually yielded. "Not understanding how to harvest or



process, I was so disillusioned that I even chopped down some of the coffee trees," he confesses, crossing his slender ankles.

Swathed in thick jackets, sensible shoes, and welcome garlands, our small delegation trudge through the enthusiastic coffee villages, observe the 'cherry' sorting, pulping and composting, inspect 'parchment' drying on rooftops, and admire nurseries of thriving saplings in homemade greenhouses. We are briefed on market linkages for the unroasted beans, and savour organic fruit and vegetable produce grown by the same innovative women's groups.

Driving home through Nuwakot's capital, Bidur, last week at the end of a long day, diggers, trucks and bulldozers were plying the border highway, shaping culverts, gabion cages and road surfaces. The Trisuli riverbed is rapaciously mined for gravel and sand. Our vehicle is heavy with gifts in appreciation of Ambica's work: fragrant cauliflowers, onions, yams and huge cabbages, the soil still clinging to their stalks. As we crest the Kathmandu Valley rim we are greeted with an ocean of glittering lights. The city roads are rough and pitted with no sign of that rural diligence, but perhaps one day our capital's cappuccinos will be made with organic mountain coffee from Nuwakot.

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NEPAL
WHEREVER
YOU ARE.



We were keeping an eye on a new westerly front advancing menacingly after dumping snow over the Af-Pak mountains, but it seems to have dissipated somewhat. This means the early warning for more blizzards in the Nepal Himalaya can be scaled down a bit. There will still be snowstorms and rain, mainly west of the Kali Gandaki, but Kathmandu Valley should get some cloud cover and a drizzle or two over Friday and the weekend. Maximum temperature will remain below 18 Celsius in the capital.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 17° 8°	 16° 6°	 16° 6°



QATAR

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When asked why on earth he would want to hit a golf ball at various high passes above 5,000m in the Himalaya, trekking entrepreneur Raj Tamang has a Mallory-esque answer: “Because I can.”

So far, the prolific hiker has teed off from Thorung La and five passes above 5,000m in Upper Dolpo, six ridges on Cho La, above Gokyo, as well as Kala Patar below Everest. Tamang is not a golfer, although he has occasionally played 18- or 9-hole golf in Kathmandu and in courses abroad.

“I just wanted to do something no one else has done,” replies Tamang, who with his lanky frame and white hair tied in a pony tail is seldom mistaken for a Nepali on the trails. And when yak herders come across him teeing off at Mojo La, they think he is not just a foreigner but a weird foreigner.

Because of the thin air, he says the golf ball travels faster and farther at high altitude.

He uses only biodegradable balls specially imported from Spain, and surprisingly has retrieved every one of the golf balls he has hit so far. He says: “Even if we don’t find the ball afterwards, it is ok because they biodegrade pretty fast even up there in the cold.”

Tamang wanted to tee off from Larke La (5,400m) on the Manaslu Circuit two years ago, but the wind was gusting at 70km/h and he decided against it. One thing is for sure, Raj Tamang is not going to run out of high passes, since he has not even golfed in the Rolwaling and Kanchenjunga yet -- but they are in his sights. He just needs to make sure that Responsible Adventures has a steady stream of clients interested in booking Himalayan treks. Indeed, the avid trekker who leads most of his clients’ groups himself on treks across Nepal has always wanted to be ahead of the pack, and do things differently from the rest of the herd. So, unlike other trek guides, Tamang never forgets to pack his golf club and balls along with his walking stick.

He started Responsible Adventures to provide clients high-value trekking and make Nepal an adventure destination with most creature comforts.

He thinks Nepal has sold itself too cheap, and the undercutting is killing an industry that employs at least 500,000 Nepalis. Trekking in Nepal has flourished despite the authorities making it as difficult as possible with fees, permits and bureaucracy. Tamang believes Nepal can easily command better prices if clients are assured of high quality service, safety and proper facilities.

“Nepal’s premium scenery should be a high-end destination that commands top value,” he says. “Trekking in Nepal is already adventurous, but it needs a gimmick or two to make it even more exciting.” Like golf. 🏌️

HOLE IN ONE




Join Raj Tamang as he tees off from various high altitude passes in the Nepal Himalaya with famous mountains as a backdrop.

nepalitimes.com

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NEPAL'S YOUNGEST CUV

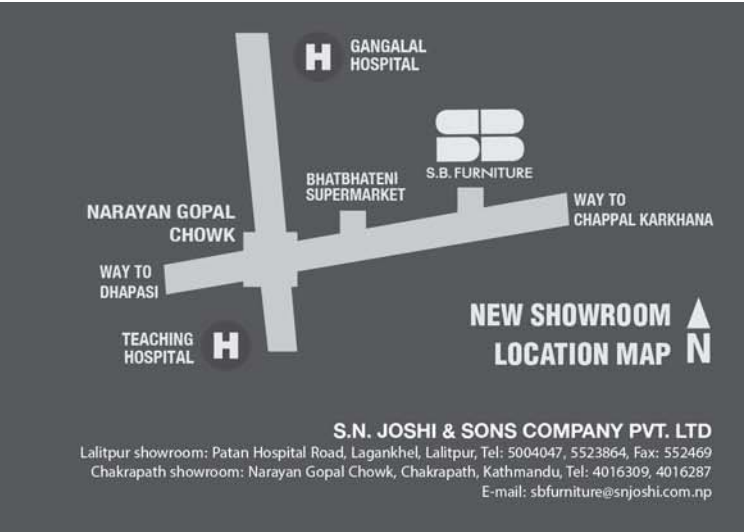
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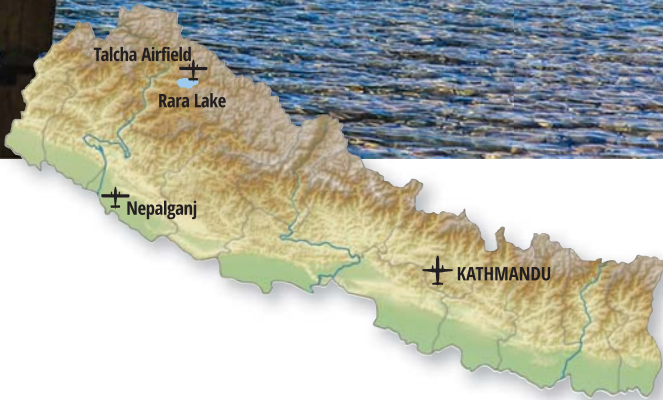
NEW SHOWROOM LOCATION MAP

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Chakrapath showroom: Narayan Gopal Chowk, Chakrapath, Kathmandu, Tel: 4016309, 4016287
E-mail: sbfurniture@snjoshi.com.np



RARA'S RARE BEAUTY: *(Clockwise, from main picture above)*

A visitor flies the Nepal flag from atop Murma Peak (4,000m) overlooking, Rara Lake after last week's heavy snowfall.
After a frigid night, the sun rises from behind the Dolpo mountains, which glow gold at sunset.
Talcha Airfield from Rara Lake's perimeter ridge, with snow-covered terrain above the Mugu Karnali River.
A woman and her baby wait for the first flight to Nepalganj after Talcha airfield was closed for nearly a week due to heavy snowfall.
Visitor at a pier for sightseeing rafts with snow-covered Murma Peak in the distance.





Photographs by
Bharat Bandhu Thapa

Rara Lake is the biggest lake in Nepal, and its remoteness protects its pristine beauty. Although almost as hard to get to as Phoksundo Lake in neighbouring Dolpo, Rara had remained blissfully untouched. Lack of proper lodgings kept foreign tourists away, and only 95 visited the Rara National Park in the past year. However, the Karnali Highway has now arrived nearly at the perimeter of the Park, and the airfield in Talcha that also serves Mugu district, has been upgraded. Nepalis now make up most of the visitors to Rara National Park, and they thronged to the lake after the heavy snowfall of the past weeks turned the mountains surrounding the lake into a winter wonderland. Located at an altitude of 2,990m, the lake is surrounded by peaks up to 4,000m with a low forested ridge to the north keeping the water in. The thick pine, oak and rhododendron forests are home to rich biodiversity, with the lake itself harbouring an indigenous species of trout found nowhere else in the world and home to thousands of migrating water fowl. Rara is not a stopover, but a destination, a place to linger and contemplate nature. The lake changes its colour every hour of the day, from pastel sunrise to fiery sunsets, the metallic silver of a rising moon and by ghostly starlight. There is no better place on Earth to let its healing power cleanse the soul. 🇳🇵



EVENTS



Journaling 101

A workshop hosted by Batul dai with Shuvechchhya Pradhan to help you channelise your journaling ideas. Bring your pens, papers, stationeries and anything that can be pasted and embark on an imaginative journey to create a piece that reflects you. Coffee and Snacks will be provided. Register through the event facebook page. 16 February, 11am to 2pm, Rs500, Karma Coffee @ Gyan Mandala, Jhamsikhel, 9843767232

Poems of Love

Word Warriors bring you love poems and Open MIC performances to celebrate the month of love, where all poems are original submissions. You can also buy interesting merchandises like poetry chapbooks, poetry paau, stickers and others. 16 February, 12-2pm, Mokshya Lounge, Baneshwor, 9851130754, mokshyarestro@gmail.com

Movie Monday

Screening of some of the most romantic movies for the month of love. This week, enjoy the critically acclaimed 2013 romantic drama, Her. 18 February, 7-9pm, Base Cap: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5536051



Revolutionary Songs

Anna Stirr, a musician and professor at University of Hawaii, will talk on 'What makes songs revolutionary? Leftist Performance Aesthetics in Theory and in Practice'. 17 February, 3pm, Martin Chautari Seminar Hall, Thapathali, (01) 4102027

Weeping Banyan

American visual artist Maureen Dradk explores the Banyan tree as a poignant metaphor of how development has repressed natural forces. Her inspiration led to ten exquisite pieces made with unique style like lapis lazuli and palladium in graphite drawings, and synthesis of copper repoussé metalwork with paintings, among others. 15 February 4pm-6pm and 16-24 February, 10am to 5pm, Taragaon Museum, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, (01)6201035

Let's talk

An event to discuss the realities of today's society where participants can share their opinions through interactive sessions and engage with experts. The talk show will begin with a discussion on "What is development in the 21st Century?" 16 February, 1pm-3pm, Da Pow, Gairidhara Sadak, 9841444381

The Art Market

The fourth edition of the market is back with an opportunity for artists to show their creativity. Join in to celebrate all forms of art. 16 February, 1-5pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, 01-5553869



A fantastic State of Ruin

Geographer and photographer David Zurick explores the connections between visual culture, landscape change, and the loss of cultural memory in small-town India in this illustrated lecture. Learn about the evolution and architectural uniqueness of the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan. 17 February, 4pm to 6pm, NexUs Culture Nepal, Maitri Marg, Patan, 01-5522393

Nepal International Film Festival

The biggest film and media event in Nepal will screen films from 31 countries along with discourses, master classes and workshops on films and film making. 21 February, 3pm and 22-25 February, 10am-7pm, Rastriya Sabhagriha, Exhibition Road, (01) 4225639

MUSIC



Blues from Shillong

The band Soulmate is back in Nepal after 10 years with its soulful blues tunes. Soulmate is inspired by the root sounds of the Blues, Blues-Rock, Soul, Rock 'n' Roll, Funk and R&B, and the band also wants to raise awareness of this important genre through their music. 16 February, 7-10pm, Rs 1499 (pre-sale), Rs 1799 (door), Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01)5528362

Muller Time

International artists Daahoud Salim (Spain), SunMi Hong (South Korea), and Hendrik Muller come to Nepal with their funky music. Eight talented artists in Kathmandu: Anisha Maharjan, Sanjok Sharma, Sneha Lama, Siddhant Basnet, Prithivi Nakarmi, Prajolan Thapa, Albo Gurung, and Sahil Bhattarai will play their original songs and music. 15 February, 7-9:30pm, Rs300 (Students), Rs500 (standard), Rs 1000 (Table and drinks), Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01)5543554

Once in a Lifetime

Rajesh Nepali on vocals & Prajwal Lama on Keys come together for a special tribute to American rock icon Axl Rose. 16 February, 3-6pm, The Yard, Sanepa, (01)5532965, 9851095046



Albatross

The band will perform their powerful rock tunes for an evening that will definitely be a musical delight. 16 February, 6pm, Trisara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200

DINING



Mezze by Roadhouse

Smart interiors and a chic terrace with a view of the palace provide a great atmosphere to enjoy dinner with friends. Recommending the chef's special - smoked mo:mo and grilled chicken with linguine vegetable. Mercantile Plaza, Darbarmarg, (01) 4223087

Kaiser Cafe

A very quaint restaurant with a nice menu and attentive service, hidden in the corner of Garden of Dreams. Enjoy fine dining after a relaxing walk around the serene garden. Kaiser Café, Thamel, (01) 4413217



Embers

A large, cosy place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites. Try the traditional marinated boneless chicken kebab served with vegetable, rice and chutney. Krishna Galli, Pulchok, (01) 5555306

Lhakpa's Chulo

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry: Lakpa's Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. Garlic chilli prawn at this cosy restaurant is to die for. Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

Bayleaf

Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes such as Burmese Tofu Thoke, Khao Swe Thoke (Noodle Salad), Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes. Tangel, opposite Attic Bar, (01) 4437490

GETAWAY



The Pavilions

Luxury boutique eco resort with boutique villas, swimming pool, organic farm, restaurant lounge and bar. For refreshing morning walks, therapeutic and relaxing day-ins, authentic gastronomical experience and quiet nights. Chisapani, Pokhara, (061) 694379

Hotel Yukhang

The hotel is built with Dachhi appa bricks from Malla era, and Bhaktapur's wood crafts. Add a royal and medieval touch to your stay. Thamel, (01) 4267358

Peacock Guest House

Housed in a World Heritage Site, this 3-storied Newar-style building provides splendid views of the Dattatreya Square and the Bhimsenthana temple. Bhaktapur, (01) 6611829



Tiger Palace Resort

Near the birth place of Lord Buddha, the resort is a great escape with a huge swimming pool, attentive service, and a grand casino. Enjoy happy hour everyday at Cabana Avenue, live music on Fridays and Saturdays, and special vegetarian and non-vegetarian BBQ at your table. Bhairahawa, (071) 512000

Borderlands Eco Resort

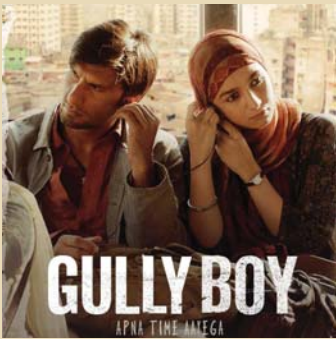
Enveloped in the natural Himalayan splendor, the resort is located a mere three hours north of Kathmandu. A quick getaway to wild nature—celebrate the weekend for eco-adventures. Borderlands Eco Adventure Resort, Sindhapalchok, (01) 4381425, 9801025111

“घर शान्ति नै विश्व शान्तिको आधार: दिगो विकासका लागि लैङ्गिक हिंसारहित समाज”
"From the peace in the home to peace in the world make education sage for all"



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
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OUR PICK

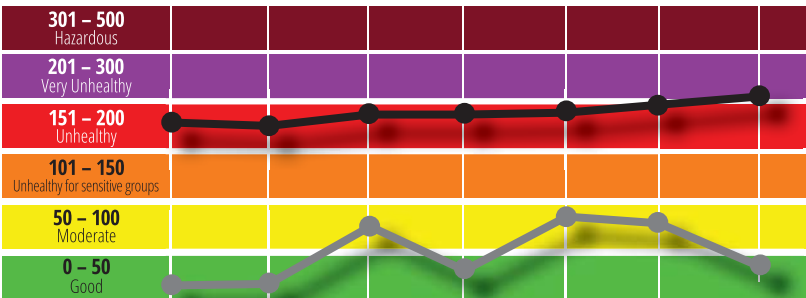


Opens in Kathmandu on 14 February

For the first time, a Bollywood movie portrays India's vibrant rap scene. The movie is set in the slums of Mumbai which house millions of people. It depicts the need for artistic expression in every person, no matter where they live. Directed by Zoya Akhtar, the movie stars Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt as the unlikely artists - one the son of a chauffeur who is expected to follow in his father's footsteps, and another an aspiring doctor from a conservative Muslim family.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 8 - 14 February



PM2.5
Ozone
FRIDAY Feb 8
SATURDAY Feb 9
SUNDAY Feb 10
MONDAY Feb 11
TUESDAY Feb 12
WEDNESDAY Feb 13
THURSDAY Feb 14

The air quality this week has eased a bit thanks to the winter showers over last weekend. Ironically, it is 'good news' that Kathmandu's AQI daily average this week was only 'Unhealthy'. Overcast skies and cloud cover over the weekend, however, will mean accumulation of pollution particles in the inversion layer which may make the air hazardous again. The harmful levels of ozone also came down a bit this week. For hourly live AQI measurements from the US Embassy's monitoring station in Phora Darbar, go online to [www.nepaltimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/).
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Maya Thakuri: Writing between the lines

Born on July 2, 1946 in Lucknow, Maya Thakuri's first poems were hate letters to people who mistreated her. "They used to call me all sorts of names," she says referring to the real-life characters who shaped her childhood.

Her philandering father left her mother who raised her and her two siblings in what she calls the "slums of Shillong". In 1974 she moved permanently to Kathmandu and settled with her husband, Damodar Sharma.



LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION
Muna Gurung

Maya taught herself how to read and write, and is today a member of Nepal Academy and has published eight anthologies of short stories such as *Priyambada* (*Sweet Spoken*, 2013) and *Aama! Jaanuhosh* (*Mother! Please Leave*, 2008). Her stories have been translated into English, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil and Japanese, and are taught in universities in India and Nepal.

Her life is a story of brokenness and triumphs, and is filled with characters from her fiction. One cannot help but fall in love with the main protagonist, Maya, who is completely flawed, wholly woman, and wild. We sat to talk in a hallway of the Nepal Academy in Kathmandu long before office hours. Our meandering conversation is about anger, fear, mischief, hunger, women holding women, and of finding, creating and occupying spaces that were always built to exclude us.

Maya Thakuri: They say I am 70, some say I am 75, maybe I am 80. Who knows? When they write about me, they say all sorts of things. I never object, I let them believe what they believe.

Muna Gurung: What else do they say about you?

MT: That I am a sophisticated literary woman who is now at the prestigious Nepal Academy. It is not untrue, but that's just a small part of me. Inside me, there is a hurricane.

MG: And where is the eye of this hurricane?

MT: I had a lot of anger and disgust towards my father. He was a tall, handsome Rana man who worked as a conductor in the Indian Army Medical Corps. He knew a thing or two about medicine and people used to call him *Doctor* but most called him *Bausaab*. He came home to Palpa from India with a rifle and a dancing woman. In the evenings, the woman would wash her face, put makeup on, and they would eat, drink, dance all night. When someone suggested he get married, he asked for a *line of maiyas* for him to pick from. My Muwa, just 9-years-old, was lined up with five other young Thakuri women from Rukumkot. She was tiny like a sparrow, and was not the prettiest. He could hardly see her face because she had her head covered, but he pointed the muzzle of his rifle at her. He was 35.

MG: He picked a child.

MT: Exactly. Muwa used to tell me that she spent the first years of her marriage with my father in complete fear of him, and in a bloodbath. I didn't understand why she mentioned the blood until much later — she had had so many miscarriages before me. If you think about it in today's terms, he was raping her.

So they walked back to



SIKUMARAI

Lucknow where my father was posted and Muwa was carried in a palanquin all the way to Nepalganj. The dancing woman walked beside her the *entire* way only to be told at the end that Bausaab did not want her anymore. Muwa said that the woman cried and hugged her. They had bonded over the trip, she was like a mother to her. The woman told Muwa that she was leaving, but that she was also taking Bausaab's memento with her.

MG: A child?

MT: The thing is, I am sure I have run into so many of my father's children without knowing that they were actually my half brothers and sisters. Eventually when he was posted in Shillong where I spent most of my childhood, he left Muwa. She raised me, my younger sister and brother.

MG: When did you realise that you held deep disgust for your father?

MT: The fact that I am here today is an accident. I was born seven months premature in a hospital in Lucknow. They stuck me in an incubator. When my father was told it was a daughter, he said he did not want to see my face. Muwa says he did not even look my way for the first year of my life, let alone touch or love me.

When we were in Shillong and living in squalour and he would sometimes show up and eat all our food, I would get very angry. I would ask him to get out and if he screamed at me, I would scream back. I was never afraid of him. Or of anyone, for that matter.

Fatherless and poor and I was often called a *bigreko keti*, a rotten girl, and people could do anything to me. Push me around, spit at me, call me names, touch me wherever they wanted. But I also had a dirty mouth. If they called me a bad word, I would repeat it back to them. (Laughs). I have done a lot of naughty things, I stole clothes from his rich *memsahib's* house for my sister. Of course there were nice people who gave me clothes and food, too. You know, I also never went to school.

MG: Never?

MT: I don't know what it feels like to change into a school uniform, carry books in a bag and be in a classroom

with friends and teachers. My friends would tell me about how the teacher would hit them with a ruler if they misbehaved or how they would pat them on their backs in praise — I longed to feel both. When I told Muwa I wanted to go to school, she hugged me tight and said she could not afford to send me. I would wait all day for my friends to come back from school and play with me, but when they came back, they would change from

their school uniform, eat a snack and do this thing called *homework*.

MG: Homework still baffles me. So, how did you learn to read and write?

MT: My poor Muwa, who had learned to read and write when she was in Lucknow through the army's social welfare program, had given me a slate to practice my alphabet. It was when my friends started going to school that I realised I needed to learn to read and write, too. So once my friends were done with their notebooks, I would take them and write in the space between the lines. If they had written the word, 'P-E-N', I would also write 'P-E-N', below. With the help of Muwa, and these notebooks, I taught myself to read.

MG: You literally learned to read and write in between the lines.

MT: Absolutely. I always feel that spaces open up for us, we just need to see them and take them, and fully occupy them. I was not given much, but I think I took all that I could take. When I was 14 or 15, and had begun to read Nepali and Hindi magazines, Satish Sir approached me. He knew that I was interested in reading and writing but had never gone to school. He told me to come to his house for tuitions just like the other girls in 10th grade did. He told me not to worry about money. When I got to his house the next morning, he was still in bed with his wife. He saw me and said, Ah, you are here. *Do yesterday's dishes, sweep the floor, make some tea*. I would do household chores for them and in return he would teach me all the subjects I had to take to pass what they called 'Matric'.

MG: You passed?

MT: Yes, 32 out of 100. In third division. I was so happy. But I think the writer in me was seeded by Muwa and my grandmother, the stories they told me appear in my fiction. For all my work, I take from life what I have seen, experienced, heard. I never have to make any of it up. My story 'The Night Is Mine Too' is based on a real-life event of a woman who was beaten for not wanting to have sex with her husband when she had just given birth six days earlier. In the story, I have her take sweet revenge.

MG: I love that story, and the ending made me feel like I had somehow won.

MT: I think she left him in real life.

In Shillong, as we played out in the common yard, the women who were knitting or working would tell each other about their husbands, their pasts, their troubles, I listened to so many stories. They were all around me. During Dasain, I always wore clothes that other people gave me. But we would go shopping for my little sister and I would look at all the colourful frocks hanging in the shops and I would run my hands along the pleats, Muwa would look at me and say, *Next time, ok?* This next time never came. But when my father passed away, Muwa got some money, it was probably the first time she got any money from him. She bought me a silk sari. I still have it. When I wear it, I feel my Muwa, like she is holding me. That woman suffered so much, you know. And I used to be so angry at her for loving my father. Once in a blue moon, he would come to our house in the early hours of the morning and fall asleep on the bed. Muwa would get up and shower and while he was still asleep, she would wash his feet and drink the water off of them. I hated that she treated him like a god. Then, when he would finally wake up, she would boil water for him to bathe. He would sit outside on a low wooden stool and she would wash him and use a luffa to gently scrub his back. *Why do you even touch a monster like him?* I would scream at her. But I never understood that my mother never got any love from a man. She died never knowing what it feels like for a man to lovingly touch her. Bathing my father was the closest she got to satiating any womanly desire she might have had.

MG: I can see that image so clearly and it breaks my heart. Do you think you have forgiven your father?

MT: I have spoken about him in so many interviews, written about him and no one has asked me this question before. At this stage of my life, I realise that my father was of another time. For him, women had no value, they were things to have and throw. I am not perfect either, I must also have knowingly or unknowingly hurt many people, made many mistakes. If my father had not mistreated my mother, had not abandoned us and sent me to school, would I have been this version of Maya Thakuri that I am today? My hatred towards him, my mother's pain, my broken childhood were the things that fueled me to stand up, to write. They made me strong. Funny thing is, it's almost like he's the hero and the villain of my life story. (Smiles). So yes, I have forgiven him.

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

Last month's guest was Sarita Tiwari.

SEVENFOLD OFFERING



Maya Thakuri never went to school, and now her books are taught in universities. Go online for an unabridged version of the conversation where Thakuri talks about her childhood, broken family, abusive father, writing, grandchildren and different emotions. Also featured are exclusive photos and video.



and palladium, which symbolise water, and it flows through the paintings like the moisture that travels up the capillaries of the trees. The other three paintings use Drdak's trademark copper repoussé metalwork which is combined with her canvas. Drdak learned these techniques from Rabindra Shakya of Patan, and has grafted it into her modern work.

Maureen Drdak has always been fascinated by the cross-cultural capabilities of art, and has been especially inspired by the Patan tradition of repoussé, and translated the timeless Nepali metalcraft into a contemporary 'repoussé-painting' art form during her Fulbright stint in Kathmandu.

Her work forms a connection between contemporary western and traditional Nepali art, and she says: "My work is an exploration of philosophical and cultural synthesis in which Eastern and Western iconographies are meaningfully integrated". <http://www.maurendrdak.com>

Weeping Banyan
by Maureen Drdak
Taragon Museum and Siddhartha Art Gallery
15-24 February, Taragon Museum,
Hyatt Regency Hotel

Maureen Drdak's Weeping Banyan

The banyan is often mistaken for the holy *pipal*. The banyan is '*ba*' in Nepali and is often found in consort with the pipal on *chautari*, where the duo give shade to travellers. Both are of the genus *Ficus*, and both are regarded as holy by Hindus and Buddhists alike. It does not matter that American artist Maureen Drdak has confused the two trees in naming her latest art exhibition at the Taragon

Museum. The displays are in blue and white, and evoke trees grasping for light and gasping for air as the humans that worship the trees in the name of religion poison the air, soil and water. Drdak was inspired to render the painting series while on a walk through Kathmandu, when she passed an ageless banyan on a *chautari* while the diesel exhaust of gridlocked traffic swirled about. Banyans have aerial prop roots that spread over a wide area and drop down from the branches and embed themselves in the soil so the parent tree can suck up water and nutrients. However, Drdak remembers that this tree's prop roots had been amputated so as to enclose the branches in the traffic roundabout. For Drdak, the tree's tragically doomed attempt to reach Mother Earth is a metaphor for nature's losing battle with human development, of haphazard urbanisation and the malignancy of economic growth. Seven of the works use precious lapis lazuli



JET SAIL GO: Prime Minister Oli inaugurating Nepal's first maritime shipping office in Lalitpur on Thursday. Minister of Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali, Minister of Tourism Rabindra Adhikari and Infrastructure Minister Raghurib Mahaseth attended.



DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE: Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali briefed the diplomatic community in Kathmandu last week about the Government's plans and foreign policy priorities. also seen are Nepal's new ambassadors to India and the UN.



OLD IS GOLD: Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari, culture expert Satya Mohan Joshi and officials of Archaeology Department visit Chhauni Museum on Wednesday to mark 80 years of its establishment.



IN A WHILE: British Ambassador to Nepal Richard Morris releases a gharial crocodile into the water in Chitwan National Park on Saturday.



THIS ABILITY: Nepal Women's Blind Cricket team won the First International Women's Blind Cricket Series in Islamabad, Pakistan last week.

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Communicating to remove

Sewa Bhattarai

Growing up in Chitwan, Radha Paudel’s father used to tell her stories of faraway Jumla: the long walk in, the snowy winters, the Tila River on the banks of which were the world’s highest paddy fields. She was fascinated.

Paudel became a nurse and, as luck would have it, was posted to Jumla with a safe motherhood program. The maternal mortality rate in the Karnali was at sub-Saharan levels. Strict patriarchy meant reproductive health issues among women were neglected.

Nepal’s armed conflict with the Maoists was at its peak, and Jumla suffered several rebel raids. Paudel witnessed the fiercest battle in Jumla in 2002 in which hundreds were killed. She survived by hiding under a bed all night as gunfire and bombs were going off outside.

“It was terrifying, I fainted. I asked myself what drove them to take up the gun. I found the answer: the class, caste and gender discrimination,” Paudel recalls.

She *Khalangama Hamala* (The Attack on Khalanga) that described not just the night of the battle but the harsh condition of life for the people of Jumla. The book was awarded the Madan Puraskar in 2013, bringing the Karnali’s plight to national attention.

After a career as nurse and writer, Paudel is now a full-time activist trying to address practices like menstruation restriction on women, which symbolise entrenched gender inequality not just in Jumla, but all over Nepal.

Paudel is back with a second book *Apavitra Ragat* (Impure Blood), and like her first one this book also deals with blood-letting — only this time it is about the discrimination



Nepal’s superwomen beat

Women in the Far West Nepal are refusing to be banished to the cow shed during their periods

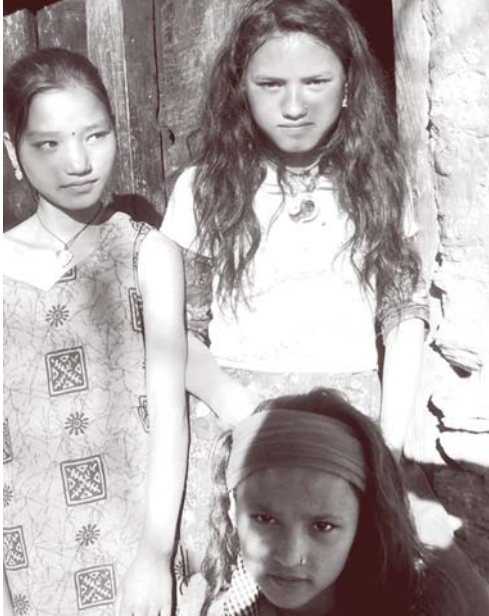
Aruna Uprety
in Achham

Media reports of the practice of *chhaupadi* are full of harrowing tales of suffering, and women dying of cold or suffocation during their monthly exile to the cowshed.

A recent trip across eight districts in Nepal’s Far West revealed a critical mass of women who are defying the practice and overcoming the superstitions that perpetuate it. Each of the women have a different reason for shunning the shed, but together they are breaking an entrenched taboo that has come to epitomise gender discrimination in Nepal.

In Achham, a 23-year old girl bravely decided to stay at home, even though her mother goes to the shed. On occasions when they menstruate together, the daughter cooks food inside and takes it out for her mother. She says indignantly, “The municipality says there must be a toilet at home, but no one ever discusses that women must not be forced to live in cowsheds.”

Nirmala BK, 30, is also from Achham and is an example of how a mother’s courage can help eliminate practices like *chhaupadi*. Since she was not allowed to cook during her periods, Nirmala’s children would walk through town carrying flour, and beg



DEFYING TRADITION (clockwise from top left): This cow shed in Kailali used for menstrual banishment ihas now been turned into a store room for rice husk.

These young women from the Far West bravely defied local tradition, and happily refused to be banished to cow sheds during their periods.

Apsara Kunwar, 15, is among those who now shun the shed.

Village women in Achham meet to discuss why the superstition is against the law, and a violation of human rights.

menstrual taboo

After her book on bloodshed during Nepal's war, Radha Paudel writes about menstrual bloodletting



BIKRAM RAI

CODE RED: Nurse turned writer turned activist Radha Paudel discusses dignified menstruation at her work place in Kathmandu this week. (*left*). Paudel with women, including faith healers in Lopra of Jumla recently declaring the village *chhaupadi*-free (*right*).



RADHA PAUDEL FOUNDATION

and taboos women have to face during their periods.

The story began in Paudel's own childhood, and she writes about how her mother and sisters were made to stay away from the kitchen and temples during menstruation. She had seen girls isolated for three weeks after their first periods, so when it was her turn Radha ran away from home to her sister's place.

The book is searing in its honesty, and the practical difficulties Nepali women face during adolescence: not finding enough rags to soak up the blood, always worrying if the blood is leaking through clothes, asking classmates in school if her skirt is stained, not drinking water so that she did not have to go to toilet and risk losing her rag...

As a nurse, Paudel conducted research on menstrual practices and found that many rural women in Nepal did not even know about panties and pads, they bled freely all day, and in many households women took turns to use the same rags. The book is graphic, and not for the faint-hearted reader, as it describes the monthly reality for many Nepali women.

When Paudel got her first job, she proudly bought herself proper panties and new, clean cloth to use during menstruation. But, she realised the situation had not changed for many of her fellow-women in Jumla.

Today, Paudel is not just spreading awareness but manufacturing biodegradable sanitary pads at a factory in Chitwan, and training young women to make reusable cloth pads as well.

Paudel explains why it is important to de-glamourise modern sanitary napkins: they are made of synthetic materials and take up to 1,000 years to degrade. Much of the plastic waste dumped by the trails in Nepal are made of discarded sanitary pads.

Besides making an environmental statement, Paudel also wants to promote dignified menstruation and remove the taboos, the practice of *chhaupadi* in which women in western Nepal are banished to the cow shed once a month.

"Menstrual isolation is a human right violation, it isolates women by barring them from kitchens, water sources, temples, schools, and homes," says Paudel. "This means women are treated like second class citizens, or not even human."

Paudel is determined to also change the image of Karnali as being a backward, illiterate and primitive region. For instance, Nepal's 2018 Criminal Code prohibits the practice of banishing women to *chhaupadi* huts during menstruation or childbirth, but does not address more general menstrual restrictions practiced all over Nepal. Limiting the crime

of isolating women to *chhaupadi* unfairly points the finger at only western Nepal.

Women dying of suffocation or snake bites in menstrual sheds make headlines, but not the everyday humiliation women everywhere are subjected to. Paudel says the ceremonial demolition of *chhaupadi* huts is misdirected. "Even if you replace the huts with a 5-star hotel, that is still discrimination," she says.

Menstrual shaming exists all over the world, not just in Nepal. Just this month, Unicode approved a droplet of blood as an emoji to symbolise menstruation. Plan International lobbied for the emoji because its poll found that nearly half the girls and women in the UK between 14-21 were embarrassed about their periods.

Across the world, women use code words when they refer to their periods, and Nepal is no different. Paudel lists some of them: *chhui*, *chhau*, *nachhune*, *para sarne*, all describing the isolation and stigma women face.

Radha Paudel now wants to go beyond physical aspects of menstrual ostracisation to psycho-social and religious beliefs that make many women themselves firm believers in the taboos. Part of the reason she wrote the book is to demystify menstruation so that students, families, men and women can finally talk about it openly.



Radha Paudel describes exactly why she thinks menstruation restrictions are dehumanising, and gives a tour of the factory in Chitwan which produces biodegradable sanitary pads. Go online to watch video.

nepalitimes.com

superstition



people to cook *roti* for them. After seeing how miserable they were, the mother resolved to stay home and cook during menstruation.

Some women have supportive husbands who empowered them

to break the taboo. In Bajhang one woman said her husband pressured her mother-in-law to be allowed to stay indoor during her periods. "My mother-in-law still tries to find out whether I am menstruating or not, but I just tell her a white lie that I took a medicine to stop the bleeding," she added.

Ramaroshni Giri stays at home during menstruation for safety reasons, but has gone one step further to break the taboo about milking livestock during her periods. "If I don't do it, the cows will not give milk, and besides, none of the cows have died," Giri says.

A teenage girl in Achham kept her monthly cycle a secret because her mother threatened to kick her out of the house if she stayed indoors.

One day, coming home from school the girl was shocked to see that her younger siblings had gone hungry all day because their

mother was in the shed. She flew into a rage against her mother: "Does our religion say the children have to go hungry?" After that outburst, the mother now stays home and cooks even during her periods.

There is superstition that the shaman will shiver if a menstruating woman touches him. So, 35-year-old Gangadevi Bista from Doti decided to test that. Feigning an illness, Bista showed her hand to a *dhami* during her periods, but not a shiver from him. She made sure the whole village found out about it.

A restaurant owner in Achham has abandoned *chhaupadi*, saying her business would collapse if she banished herself to a shed every month. "The elders, *dhami* and *jhankri* have all eaten the food I cooked even during my periods, none of them fell sick," she says.

A Dalit woman almost lost her baby son while she was in the shed in winter. She fell asleep with her eight-month-old in the shed and they were both nearly killed by a fire. She has not gone back to the shed after that.

Many equate *chhaupadi* with poverty, but it is a product of a deep-seated patriarchy. In spite of positive changes, the practice continues and the pain of many women proves that raising awareness alone is not enough. *Chhaupadi* has already been criminalised by law, and needs to be strictly enforced.

Vending machine for pads

Students at the Gyanodaya High School in Kathmandu do not have to worry about getting their periods while in class, forgetting to bring sanitary pads, or even skipping school for a few days every month. The school has installed a vending machine for its 1,300



NARAYAN MAHARJAN / SETOPATI

female students and 75 female staff which will provide a napkin after dropping a Rs 1 coin, but the users have to pay Rs 5 to the school for the added cost.

The students in Grade 6 or 7 who get their periods for the first time, often while in school, are the ones who are going to benefit the most from the vending machine, the first sanitary pad vending machine in Nepal, and Gyanodaya has

established itself as a menstruation-friendly school.

The school, whose students achieve one of the highest pass rates in SEE exams in the country, expects the girl students to do much better in class now that they don't have to worry about their periods so much.

"We used to face hassles when we would forget to bring pads, and it was troublesome to borrow from classmates, we used to have to leave school and go home," now we don't have to worry about it anymore," says Ganga Sapkota, a student.

Principal Natikaji Maharjan, who also teaches science at the school, says the curriculum places a priority on studying reproductive health so as to remove the taboos and superstition surrounding menstruation.

He says this is a pilot project, and the school hopes to set aside a budget for free distribution of the pads from next year. "It will help in spreading awareness about menstruation as being a natural biological process," he says.

*From the Nepali Press
Shanti Tamang in Setopati.com, 14 February*

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Have we gone soft?

Are we losing the fire in our bellies? Are we slacking off and allowing lethargy and ennui to erase the gains of our revolution? The answer to both questions is: “Umm, that’s a thought.”

How else does one explain the sharp drop in the number of bunds, chukka jams and toddfods in the past fiscal year? Ever since the Left Honourable Prime Minister assumed office there has been only one arson attack on a government car. We are keeping close count here at the newsroom, and have found there was an entire rush hour period on Tuesday evening when no Mandales in Mandala intersection incinerated tyres on the asphalt.

There has even been a sharp drop in sit-ins, sleep-outs, stand-ups, pen-downs, and goof-offs in government departments. The civil service strike was a lacklustre and half-hearted affair, with not a single effigy of the prime minister set on fire. How can this country be effectively governed if there is so little interest in creating mayhem and anarchy?

Not a single royal statue was vandalised throughout this erstwhile kingdom in 2075-76 BS, but that seems to have been because there are no royal statues left to knock down. The Mahindra & Mahindra Highway was actually not blocked for six hours on Sunday after a minor traffic altercation in Lahan. No one stoned any newspaper office on Thursday. This is a scandal.

Are we going to let go of the gains of our revolutionary past so easily? Will we allow the euphoria of liberation to evaporate into thin air? Have human beings outlived their usefulness? What is the best cure for hair loss? Will someone stop me before I ask another rhetorical question? Thank you.

As we all know, there are entire sections of society that are still not using their hard-won freedoms to reignite a class war, to take up arms against feudalism, and struggle against crony Communist rulers to bring the nation’s capital to a grinding halt for the right to fast onto death over and over again.

How come no one set off a firecracker beneath the table of the Minister of Lethargy and Ennui when the government decided to cancel national holidays on all five Losars? And why are tanker drivers sitting idly by and not gheraoing the prime minister’s residence after the NOC said it would book anyone found siphoning off diesel? Have we as a nation gone soft? Have we stopped honouring the sacrifices of martyrs who defended this country against imperialism?

Fortunately, we see signs of the revolutionary spirit reasserting itself. Comrade Big Plop has stepped up his extortion racket with the slogan: ‘Make Nepal Greater Again’. The Minister of Doublespeak is pushing a draft law to punish anyone who ridicules the government on social media to be sentenced to jail for five years or pay a bribe of Rs 1 corrode, whichever comes first.



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