P. 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, Zilt 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 term 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, 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 constraining 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 stabilize society and take Nepal forward.
- There is an organized 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 unchartered 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 723 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.

nepalitimes.com
For full text of interview in Nepali go online.
THAT TIME OF MONTH

The practice of chhaupadi in which women in western Nepal are forced to live in secluded sheds during their periods has been the subject of media attention within Nepal and internationally, eliciting much more widespread and extraneous menstrual restrictive practices in the rest of Nepal. As cruel and inhumane as chhaupadi is, journalistic coverage as usual tends to be event-based, baselining only deaths due to suffocation, snakebites or exposure. There is an argument to explain that the practice is now more less widespread as literacy improves, and after it was outlawed. As public health specialist Anusuya Roy reports from Achham in this issue (page 14-15), young women and mothers across western Nepal are now defying this superstition, but that is not ‘newsworthy’ for the international media.

To be sure, it is a travesty that young women are subjected to such treatment because they are forced to find specific sheds or places living in the filthy huts, where scorpions prey to the cold, infections, wild animals, or rats. Chhaupadi is cruel and an egregious violation of the human rights of women, perpetuated by conservative societal norms.

Courageous and progressive women exist in every place 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, on 13 February 2008, Nepal times was titled “Get book back, it was a gift on the occasion Warrant government honouring the Chakari: Kept. K. Deuba

- Go back to sleep, and write paper when thing is getting really exciting now. And then and now, nothing neither than fluidities are all up to two per garden, all one to one and up to the sky.
- The Chakari police that the eastern hill has been taken out by a few, but there are still. Their bodies and brothers will die if they “gress” them during their periods. Festivals like Chakari Pandita reinforce these beliefs, where women apologise for all the ‘sins’ they may 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 school 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 Pandit in her best book released this fall, Apaninara (Impure Blood), argues that all menstrual restrictions are human rights violations, not just chhaupadi (GR-15). She says the banishment of chhaupadi has been the panacea for some, but that this is only partially true for many.

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

Positive stories also need to come because not everything about menstruation is regressive in Nepal. Over the years, fewer and fewer numbers of women have started questioning this tradition, and have proactively and collectively broken the taboo. Education has been most effective in changing the social norms and guiding 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 who have countered the pressure of their village and family to conserve their rights. Ultimately, disengaged menstruation comes 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.”

HISTORY LESSONS

Great Article (“The end of history,” Ajit Chitrakar, 3/04) The attractiveness of any course is directly linked to economical visibility. Unfortunately Nepal doesn’t have an environment that encourages and fosters the liberal arts.

Sudesh Suwal

Lack of enrollment in history could be due to youth: three days looking to study subjects that could lead them into postgraduate study or work in a foreign country. It would be sad for Nepal if the coming generations did not carry this rich and diverse history into the years ahead.

Sue Chamberlain

How sad that there are no enrollments in history. As the article suggests, could it be because history is seen as something where you simply memorize dates rather than analysing events.

Kaipa Pera

History in Nepal overlaps too deeply with myth… wonder if academic rigour would be appreciated, some would have to be related and might be unappraisable especially the Shah kings.

Aba Pan

CLIMATE CLIMAX

The impact does not bear thinking about, so far reaching a Himalayan melting, Kunda Diit, 3/06).

- And people will continue to live like they are in a dreamland until floods occur, or their tap runs dry and reservoirs can’t no longer carry enough for electricity generation, and agriculture. Call it the pessimist or a realist. Dibyeshwar Rai Babu

- Impact already felt, not only in high Himalayas but in mountains and its communities. Nepal, already in economic trouble, must adapt to this new challenge.

David Seddon

WHATS TRENDING

Tellingly assessment of Himalayan melting

For decades, the Himalayas have been melting away due to global warming, but they are warming faster than the global average, and at an alarming pace. In the last century, the Himalayas have lost over 12% of its ice mass. The latest report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in March this year, projects that the warming trend will continue, and the rate of melting will speed up. The report also highlights the potential consequences for millions of people living in the region, and for the biodiversity of the region.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook
- Most popular on Twitter
- Most visited online page

THE END OF HISTORY

We have not yet begun to scrape the surface of what we are facing in history so far. The next 10 years could be a big challenge.

Most watched story ever and much more about the future of Nepal’s history. We go back to the challenging discussions.

Most commented

QUOTE & TWEETS

Nepali Times (@nepalitim) Nepalimad-2016 promises to be warmer 33°C-37°C than its global presence. Al Borde (nepali) dons the warmest of our firsts. To be held on 2102. An earlier report from Bhutan revealed it to be one of the few to be known for its comforts. ClimateChange (Global Report review) @ Jodhpur Times @ Chitwan Times @ 18 billion people in the mountains and dense forests, we can. We need to get the nearest Namaste and Khesi Times.

nepalimad (@nepalimad) Bhutanians also know as Bhutanese for the people of Bhutan (also South Paki and North Paki) is a melting at accelerated rates. This will affect the future of Nepal. It is the development of the Himalaya mountain.

nepalimad (@nepalimad) No plastic water is the theme of the event. This is a concern for the future. More people live. The development of the Namaste and Khesi Times.

Sajal Das (@sajal_nepal) This is something that needs to be taken under the eyes. Nepal Times.

Sajal Das (@sajal_nepal) This is something that needs to be taken under the eyes. Nepal Times.

Weekly Current Tall #49

- This has no 2055 timetable helped to trade skill based crafts in Kathmandu.

Weekly Current Tall #50

- Total votes: 163

Weekly Current Tall #51

- Yes: 127
- No: 85
- Vote now: 323

- To date: @nepalmemc.com

Q By this time, which historical traditions have been replaced with one?

- No more chhaupadi?
Creeping control over the press in Nepal

Recent attempts to curb 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 decentralized, with provincial governments drafting laws that would jail journalists for perceived infractions. A new criminal code last year already announced positive measures against reporting contrived 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 by the constitution to politicians, businessmen and power brokers who seem united by second media exposure. This intolerance is reflected in threats of legal action against mainstream journalists, digital platforms, and social media content providers.

In 2018, there were numerous police crackdowns on journalists covering public demonstrations, the Minister of Communications canceled 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 deja vu of Stalinist 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 vandalize newspaper offices, burn distribution vans and use militant unions to shut down media.

The following piece is a 10 years ago in my blog, Humanature Journal, as a current today as it was then. Circumstances have changed, but the cast of characters and the script is the same.

Ajay Pradhan is based in Vanautau and works as senior policy advisor on Indigenous Crown relations and border negotiations.

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

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2008
By Ajay Pradhan

There are strange times. But these are not unusual times. History repeats itself.

In Nepal, under the impact 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 extending their iniquitous habit of behavior by unleashing intimidation tactics 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 famed Maoist affiliated YCL, carried out a brazen physical attack on the journalists, management and staff of Himal Media, a Kathmandu-based media enterprise that publishes the AgAli Times and the Himal Khabar and vandalized their head office. Many Himal Media staffers were injured in the assault by a large gaggle of masked Maoist YCL.

The attack drew immediate national and international condemnation. The embattled Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda put a political spin on the matter and blamed the attack on “reactionaries” who had infiltrated his party.

The very next day, however, the defiant Maoist trade union chief, Saptakar Amatya, who is also a Maoist member of the Constituent Assembly, ironically denied Prachanda’s spin deriding the assault as a setup.

The previous week, on 25 October 2008 Maoist propagandists associates with state, the Himal Media CEO and his staff. On 14 November, Maoist burned 5,000 copies of Khabar at a distribution depot, making death threats against staff.

Earlier, the Maoists vandalized the office of Kantipur’s daily which publishes the Kathmandu Post and Kantipur for criticizing the Maoist party.

The attack on Himal Media is a sinister and insidious 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 inanity of about YCL activists will neither help its candidacy, much less win the heart and mind of the people.

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Nepal's new National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission

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

YANKI URYAB and GEORGE VARUJHANE

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 appointed 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) for formulating 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 NNNRC is strategically positioned to adopt and deliver a risk-tested, contextual, and adaptable template of data and evidence-based policymaking that other Nepal government entities can benefit from in delivering public goods and services.

Uniform policies will not suit Nepal’s diversity which is why the NNNRC will have to drive a nuanced and context-specific model of allocation decisions. Evidence-driven analytics will enable NNNRC to contextualise and adopt existing fiscal federalism into an implementable intergovernmental 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 federalization 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 authorize 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 characterized by accepted reform by the political and bureaucratic order, an authority who champions the reform, and technical ability to absorb the reform. The NNNRC is uniquely positioned to serve as such a reform space if its broad acceptance as a mission-critical commission and the reputation of its candidates for chairperson are built upon to drive the technical ability for data and evidence-based analytics.

The magnitude of data requirement for NNNRC 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 NNNRC 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 NNNRC 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 NNNRC’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 NNNRC has a constitutionally-grounded basis for championing intergovernmental 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 inconsistent 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 NNNRC, 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 NNNRC chairperson will soon be over. More importantly, this appointment should drive the NNNRC’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 NNNRC 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 Uryab and George Varughese are associated with Nhus Gins.
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

“T”he shaken and rattled to the bone,” exclaims uphill, the vehicles skidding on exposed stones and sliding off the deeply gouged cuts. The driver wresles with the wheel of the sturdy Indian truck, surging our way up the torted mountain road. I hold on to the back of Ambica’s seat as we pitch and roll like a boat in heavy seas.

Climbing higher out of the murky air, the dusty roadides foliage, bamboo stands and delicate ferns give way to thickening conifers, blue skies and views of logged soaring scenery. Between the trees, layers of dusty hillsides 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 Bhasma Highway slicing its way to the Kuring-Ranwah border through a vast hillaside dotted with habitation, a silver thread of river far below.

Our head of bouncing and bruisedRotattin 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 characterized by new one-story concrete houses pocked with metal ebar syer sitting for the next floor. “Women call them ‘fingers of hope’,” says Isabella, the minister’s wife.

It is nearly four years since the earthquake rocked our existence in Nepal, and we all have our own personal stories seared into our memories. Mine involve running barefoot onto my house wires, hanging onto a garden chair for stability as terrace tiles rain off the roof, my little red car buffeting back and forth in the driveway, and in the distance an unfaustial pail of dust rising eerily to obscure the Valley floor. Most of us were lucky, but an unexpected rubble still stutters, evolving 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 (FBWP) led by the indefatigable Ambica Shrestha and her team, with donations from our Rotary Mid-Town, have been investing 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 Nepali, a red wooden scarf wrapped around her dark head, explains that 90% of the Khalale village houses were damaged. These industrious people have cleared and shoveled 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 Vistara police post, inaugurated only the day before the worst tremor. “I tried to shelter these, thinking it would be the safest place,” smiles Lila Devi Purwai. “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,” she softly 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 50 parcels to distribute.”

Putting their heads together as how best to help, Maya Devi came up with the concept of high value, organic, mountain Ambica 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 Chetsa Bahadur Tamang, who had never seen a coffee tree or tasted a fresh brew 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 litter, unpalatable conception 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 grails, our small delegation trudged through the enthusiastic coffee village, observe the ‘cherry’ sorting, pulpising and composting, inspect ‘parchment’ drying on rooftops, and admired nurseries of thriving seedlings in homestead greenhouses. We are briefed on market linkages for the uncreated beans, and savour organic fruit and vegetable produce grown by the same innovative women’s groups.

Driving home through Nuwakot’s capital, Bistah 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 capriciously mined for gravel and sand. Our vehicle is heavy with gifts in appreciation of Ambica’s work: fragrant cardamoms, onions, yams and huge cabbages. The soil still clinging to their stalks. As we crest the Kathmandu Valley rim we catch a glimpse of the valley, a mesmerizing sight of glittering lights. The city roads are rough and paved with no sign of their rate elegance, but perhaps one day our capital’s cappuccinos will be made with healthy mountain coffee from Nuwakot.
Teeing off on a trek? Why not?

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 Patthar 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 Larka La (5,600m) on the Manaslu Circuit two years ago, but the wind was gusting at 70km/hr 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 polled in the following and Ramechhap yet – but they tow 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 underutilizing is killing an industry that employs at least 500,000 Nepalis.

Trekking in Nepal has blossomed 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 economy should be a high-end destination that commands top values,” he says. “Trekking in Nepal is already adventurous, but it needs a gimmick or two to make it even more exciting.” Like golf.
Nepal’s Rare Beauty: A view from above

A skier lines up the Nepal Flag from atop Myma Peak (4,300m) overlooking Lake 22 after last week’s heavy snowfall.

After a light snow, the sun rose from behind theDolpa mountains, which glowed gold at sunrise.

“The views from the peak are breathtaking, with snow-covered ridges of the Mugu, Kanchenjunga, and Annapurna Ranges, providing a panoramic view of the surrounding mountains.”

A woman and her baby wait for the first flight to leave the airport after the airport was closed for nearly a week due to heavy snowfall.

Visit us at a ski resort for a breathtaking view with snow-covered Myma Peak in the background.
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 65 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 Talchu 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 sunsets 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.
Weeping Banyan

Arifn can visit Bhutan and see the banyan tree as a poignant metaphore of how development has resulted in large forests. His visit led to the establishment of a project to create a park that affects the forest. Weeping Banyan will be provided. Register through the event details page.

Let's talk

16 February 4pm-6pm, De Pauw, Goldstein School, 15919001

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 5pm, The Yellow House, Sonoma, 01-0532989

Blues from Shillong

The band Soul in the air performs in the Shillong area. The band consists of the best of the best players in the field of blues. Soul in the air, their first album, is the band's most recent release. The band plans to release their new album soon.

Muller Time

International artists (Usin Salim, Spain), and Freidik Muller release new music. Freidik Muller has been a part of the music industry for a long time, and this latest release is a testament to his talent. Freidik Muller will perform at the new venue.

Once in a lifetime

Rajesh Nepali on vocals and Pratima Lama on keys to come together for a special show. The band will perform a mix of Nepali and American rock. 16 February 6pm, The Serenade, Sonoma, 01-0579095, 0991793948

Embarrs

Embarrs is the only place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites. The traditional menu offers the best in vegetables, rice and lentils. Embarrs, Alipath, Patan, 01-535186

Lahakpa’s Chulo

Nepali food, the best in town, is served up at Lahakpa’s Chulo. The menu includes Dal Bhat, Rice and Rapey, and a variety of other dishes. Lahakpa’s Chulo is a great place to enjoy a meal with friends. Lahakpa’s Chulo, Pvt. Ltd., 01-4437490

Gully Boy

"From the peace in the home to peace in the world make education sage for all"
Maya Thakuri: Writing between the lines

Aama, please leave.

Aama is my eighty-six-year-old mother, a strong pillar in my life. My mother, my darling, my daughter, and my wife. Many times, she scolded me and told me to take care of her. Aama, please leave.

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

MT: I think she left him in real life. In Shilig, as we played out the conversation, if you were knitting or working, you would talk to each other. Sometimes, you would show your work, and they would criticize it. They would also do things like that. It was all the colourful frongs hanging in the air. And when she died, I think my hands along with the pleats, Mowa would look at me and say, “Next time?” That’s how it came. When my father passed away, Mowa got some money, it was probably the first time she got any money from him. She bought me a silk suit. I still have it. When I wear it, I feel my Mowa, 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, when she was sick, he would come to our house in the early hours of the morning and fall asleep on our couch. We would let him get up and shower and while he was shaving, my mother would insist he wash his feet and drink the water off of them. I hated that she treated him like that. He would not fully wake up, she would sit on him as if he was a child. He would sit outside on a wooden stool and she would wash him and use a towel. I would scream at her. But I never saw my father ever get any love from a woman. She didn’t show it as if she was a mother, like a man for loving touch. Balancing my father was the closest she came to being a good mother, and she clearly 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 and I have spoken to 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 them, women had no value, they were things to have and throw. I am not perfect either. My mother may have been unknowingly or unknowingly hurt many people, made many mistakes. If my father had not been abusive, my mother may have not abandoned us and sent me to that school. I am not sure about 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. These are memories. I do think of him, but he is a part of my life. I have moved on from it.

Lightroom Conversation is a monthly page in Nepali Times, an interesting forum in the Nepali literary scene. Last month’s guest was Sonali Tiwari.

SEVENFOLD OFFERING

Maya Thakuri never attended school and now she is interested in an interview, so she has written a selection of the conversations where Thakuri talks to me about her life, her writing, her children, her husband, father, writing, and different emotions. Also featured are exclusive photos and videos.
Maureen Drdak’s Weeping Banyan

The banyan is often mistaken for the holy peepal. The banyan is ‘jut’ in Nepal and is often found in convents with the popular misconception that it is the tree of the name of religion passion the air, soil and water. Drdak was inspired to render the painting series white of a walk through Kathmandu, when she passed an ancient banyan on a shouder, while the slow current of grid-bound traffic swirled around. Santorini have small crop courts that spread even a wide area and drop down from the upper storeys and embed themselves in the soil so the parent tree can soak up water and nutrients.

However, Drdak remembers that this year’s crop court has been augmented as to enclose the branches in the traffic roundabout. For Drdak, the year’s auspicious attempt to reach Mother Earth’s metaphor for nature’s long battle with human development, has had an exhilaration and the multiplying of economic growth. Some of the works are process lipa sculpt and palisade, which symbolise water and it flows through the paintings like the measure that travels up the sap llanes of the trees. The other three paintings use Drdak’s trademark copper-reduced metalwork which is combined with her canvas. Drdak learned these techniques from Nicholas Shukla of Pash, and has gifted it to her modern work.

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 UK.

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

IN A WHILE: British Ambassador to Nepal Richard Morris releases a giant 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, Kushti 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 2003 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 faintec,” she said. “I asked myself what drove them to take up the gun. I found the answer: the class, caste and gender discrimination.” Paudel recalls.

She Khelungema Manala (The Attack on Khalinga) 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 An развития (magnified 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 cowshed during their periods

Aruna Uperty

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 SK, 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 fire, and beg

Defying tradition (clockwise from top left) This cow shed in Kailali used for menstrual banishment has now been turned into a store room for dart guns.

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

Apurva Kunwar, 15, is among those who have now said the shed

Village women in Achham meet to discuss why the superstition is against the law, and a violation of human rights.
CODE RED: ‘Nure turned white’ Radha Paudel: Radha Paudel describes a period menarche at the age of 16, and says, "This week, I felt Radha felt with women, including myself, in fear of being recently declared the illegible

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 temple 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 written in her own words. The book is a story of how menstruation is treated in rural Nepal, and how it affects the daily lives of girls and women.

As a nurse, Paudel conducted research on menstrual practices and found that many rural women in Nepal did not even know about panty pads. She then decided to write this book to describe the monthly reality for many Nepali women.

When Paudel got her first job, she promptly bought herself proper panty pads and new, clean cloth to use during menstruation. But, she said, the situation had not changed for many of her female

and they are still living in poverty.

Today, Nepal is not just spreading awareness but manufacturing biodegradable sanitary pads at a factory in Chitwan. The factory was built by a group of women who are now making sanitary pads and selling them in local markets.

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

"Menstrual isolation is a human right violation. It isolates women by barring them from kitchen, 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 across Nepal. Limiting the crime of isolating women to chhaupadi unfairly points the finger at only western Nepal.

Across the world, women use code red sanitary pads, and Paudel wants to make them available in Chitwan, much like, for example, all the描述 the isolation and stigma women face.

Radha Paudel now wants to go beyond physical aspects of menstrual exclusion to psychological and religious beliefs that make many women themselves firm believers in the taboo.

For the reason she wrote the book is to demystify menstruation so that students, families, men and women can talk more about it openly.

CODE RED

Radha Paudel describes exactly why the menstrual restrictions are barbaric, and gives a tour of the factory in Chitwan which produces biodegradable sanitary pads. Go to neta times.com

Superstition

People to cook red 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 Rajgur, one woman said her husband pressured her mother-in-

law to be allowed to stay inside 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.

Ramamati: Girl stays at home during menstruation for safety reasons, but has gone one step further to break the taboo about talking about menstruation. “I don’t tell it, the cows will not give milk, and besides, none of the cows have died,” Gir says.

A teen-aged 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 her younger siblings had gone hungry all day because their

mother was in the shed. She flew into a rage against her mother: “Do you really think the children will go hungry?” After that outburst, the mother now stays home and cooks even during her periods.

There are superstitions that the sign will appear if a menstruating woman bathes in the river. So, 35-year-old Gaya Devi Rista from Dang decided to test that. Yellowing an illness, Rista 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 banned herself to a shed every month. “The elders, dharmis and family members have all eaten the food I cooked even during my periods, none of them felt sick,” she says.

A Dali 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 making awareness alone is not enough. Chhaupadi has already been criminalized by law, and needs to be strictly enforced.

Vending machine for pads

Students at the Gyandeva 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

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

The students in Grades 6 to 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 Gyandeva 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 girls to do much better in class now that they don’t have to worry about their periods so much.

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

Principal Neelkaji Malla, who also teaches science at the school, says the curriculum places priority on studying reproductive health, as well as menstrual 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 Nepal Times
Shruti Tamang in SEEUqali, 14 February
Have we gone soft?

Are we losing the Eye to our ballads? 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 bandas, chakkis jams and trods on the asphalt 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. Are we keeping close count here at the newsroom, and have found there was an entire rush hour period on Tuesday evening when no Mandales in Mandal intercross intercrossed tyas on the asphalt.

There has even been a sharp drop in sit-ins, sleep-outs, stand-ups, pen-downs, and go-out 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 2076–78 BS, but that seems to have been because there are no royal statues left to knock down. The Mahendra 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-earned 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 unto 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 losans? And why are tanker drivers still idle by and not goring the prime minister’s residence after the NCP said it would book anyone found spitting off diets? 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 resurfacing itself. Comrade Big Flap has stepped up his extortion racket with the slogan: “Make Nepal Greater Again.” The Minister of Doublepeak 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 crore, whichever comes first.