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IT'S A RICH MAN'S WORLD

MIND THE GAP

EDITORIAL

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SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

REMOVING POVERTY WITH JOBS

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NEPAL'S GREAT INCOME DIVIDE

PAGE 14-15



DIMAKAR CHETTRI

Nepal's Maoists fought a decade-long war for equality and inclusion. They have been in power off and on for the past 13 years after the conflict ended. But a report released last month shows that the country's wealth gap is wider than ever.

The average income of the richest 10% of Nepalis is more than three times that of the poorest 40%. Even more startlingly, the richest 10% own 26 times the wealth of the poorest 10%. The wealthiest 7% of households own 31% of the agricultural land.

Even among the poor, it is

women who are more deprived. Women own only 5% of the land in Nepal, nearly half the Tarai Dalits do not own their own farms, and 80% of the country's indigenous families own less than 0.4 hectares of land.

Poor women from minorities

suffer triple discrimination: a poor Dalit woman is likely to receive less attention in government hospitals. Because of unpaid household work, women have lower socio-economic status, especially if they are from poorer marginalised communities. Of the poorest women, half cannot read or write. A rich Nepali man is 50 times more likely to be literate than a poor woman.

'Gender inequality compounds the impact of economic inequality,' states the *Fighting Inequality in Nepal: the Road To Prosperity* report released by HAMI, SAAPE and Oxfam recently. Remote, rural areas with ethnic minorities tend to be much poorer.

The root of persistent inequality in Nepal is the unequal distribution of land. And although remittances from overseas workers reduced poverty and malnourishment, a third of children are still stunted and one in every ten child shows signs of wasting due to lack of food.

Corruption, impunity and lack of accountability among the ruling elite perpetuates the vicious cycle keeping Nepalis poor. Experts say such a level of inequity is unsustainable in any country. If the wealth gap is not narrowed, not only will prosperity remain a mirage, but Nepal could once again be mired in instability and conflict.

Ramesh Kumar



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER



MIND THE GAP

Whatever the political ambitions of the Maoist leaders, their justification for taking up arms was the inequality historically embedded in Nepali society. The rebels lit the spark on terrain tinder that was dry with disparities. Nepal would have gone up in flames sooner or later, the Maoists just had their timing right.

The tragedy, of course, is that in an allegory of *Animal Farm* 13 years after the war, the Maoist leaders people elected to government forgot what they fought for, and Nepal's income and wealth gap have grown even wider. As our review of a recent report (*page 14-15*) shows, Nepal's poor are trapped in poverty while the few rich have prospered.

The report by HAMI, South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication and Oxfam paints an alarming picture of deprivation and disparity in Nepal: the average income of the richest 10% of Nepalis is more than three times that of the poorest 40%. Worse, the richest 10% own 26 times the wealth of the poorest 10%.

Economic inequality is most evident in agriculture in which 66% of Nepalis still depend. The wealthiest 7% of households own 31% of the agricultural land, and many landless are tenant farmers at the mercy of landowners.

Social discrimination multiplies the misery: 81% women are landless, as are 44% of Dalits in the Tarai.

Nepal's wealthiest man has a net worth of \$1.6 billion and is the 1,561 richest in the *Forbes* list. His wealth grew by \$200 million last year. A history of feudalism, a rent-seeking state and neoliberal economic policies have concentrated Nepal's wealth in the hands of a dominant elite which has made policies and laws to perpetuate its hold on it. Rulers and hangers-on have deliberately kept the poor out of reach of new opportunities, depriving them of a chance of a better life.

Such disparity also gives the movers and shakers an unfair advantage in a democracy because they can bend the system to keep getting elected, which then deprive the underserved even more. Politicians, bureaucrats and businesses can carry on with business-as-usual with no accountability, full impunity and no fear of retribution from a rigged system.

The government's failure to deliver on basic services like health and education have driven the private sector to fill the gap. But consequent over-commercialisation and lack of regulation have put quality schooling and medical care out of reach of the poor. The government's reaction has been to back a populist call for nationalisation to cover up its own delivery failure.

Inequality is taking its toll on the physical and mental development of children. Malnutrition begins at a very young age: 36% of Nepali children under five are stunted, 27% are underweight, and 10% suffer from wasting due to lack of adequate food. There is no greater proof of chronic governance dysfunction than this: the apathy and failure of the state to protect its most vulnerable.

No society or nation can have totally equal income or wealth distribution. But there must

Nepal's rulers over the past century deliberately kept the poor out of reach of new opportunities, depriving them of a chance of a better life.

be a certain equilibrium so that all citizens can attain a basic quality of life and earn a standard, minimum income.

But inequality is so bad that the 8 million Nepalis who live in poverty have shorter lifespans. A poor Nepali child is three times more likely to die before age 5 than a rich child. The poor and excluded receive unequal care at government hospitals.

What is most tragic is that there is minimal recognition or commitment from successive governments to redress this injustice. Nepal ranks 138, which is nearly at the bottom of a list of 157 countries, for its Commitment to Reducing Inequality. Rampant poverty and extreme inequality build frustration among suffering citizens, increasing the chances of social instability, and possibly renewed conflict. After a revolution to liberate the poor from poverty ended up killing 17,000 of Nepal's poorest people, the gap between the rich and poor has actually widened.

The way countries try to compensate for the inequality inherent in free market capitalism is through progressive land reform and taxation, by spending on a social safety net, and through government investment in affordable, quality health care and education. There must be minimum wages for even those working in the informal sector, because that is where majority of Nepalis are engaged. All this would lay the foundation for a more equitable society, where the poor may not be immediately guaranteed greater income but all citizens would have a level playing field.

We have seen the current government make tentative moves to address some of these issues, but they are too little and too half-hearted. The chasm between the rich and poor is so wide that it will take more than the hollow populism of the government's 'Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepalis' slogan for prosperity and happiness in our lifetime.



DIMAKAR CHETTRI

ONLINE PACKAGES



IN SEARCH OF CHARACTERS

Narayan Wagle is a journalist by day. But at night after deadlines, he devotes his time to more creative writing. He has just launched his third book, a nonfiction after two novels. Watch video where he reads out an excerpt, and explains how he wants the characters of his book to behave themselves. *Story: page 13.*



DRIVING US UP THE WALL

Watch Swastika Chaudhary and Pancha Lama Tamang practice wall climbing ahead of the Himalayan Outdoor Festival this weekend. The Festival with the motto 'ride, run, rock' will feature Nepali athletes trail running, mountain biking and rock climbing at Hattiban. *Story: page 6-7.*

PRIMETIME MINISTER

As a Nepal girl my humble request to you ('Oli's first year', #947) Sir Prime Minister, is to provide security to every girl child and woman of the country, and punish those who abuse it.

Sary Shahi Sen

■ Progress is not a word I hear often. Would love to see infrastructure development. Corruption is preventing all that.

Gyurme Dondup

CLIMATE CRISIS

On my trek around Manaslu I was fascinated by a redundant bridge built some decades ago over a small stream at the end of a glacier ('Terrifying assessment of a Himalayan melting', Kunda Dixit, #946). It had always been a small stream until the glacier melted, making the stream unpassable. Now that the most of the glacier has melted it is a small stream again.

Robert Vermont

■ We need to work to conserve our landscape and increase watershed recharge to maintain ground water and river flows. ('Turning on the heat', Ajaya Dixit, #946). Prevention is better.

Dinanath Bhandari

NOT FORGETTING HISTORY

That's so sad, please don't forget Gurkha history it is so important ('The end of history', Anil Chitrakar, #946).

Sue Everall

■ Change the way history is taught in schools and universities and create opportunities for students.

Gyanendra Banks

FREEDOM OF THE ASS

In a democracy, people should be encouraged to speak their mind, constructively ('Have we gone soft', Backside, #947). That will often mean that they will speak out against the government. No judge should punish anyone ridiculing the government.

Alan Roadnight

WHAT'S TRENDING

Nepal's superwomen beat superstition

by Aruna Uprety

Women in the Far West Nepal are refusing to be banished to the cow shed during their periods and by doing so are overcoming the superstitions that perpetuate the custom. This field report provided a fresh perspective on the overwhelmingly negative image of western Nepal. Go online to meet the brave women, and join the online discussion.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

Four years later, Nepal's farmers rise from rubble

by Lisa Choegyal

Introduction of mountain coffee in Nepal's hill regions has helped farmers recover after the 2015 earthquake and presented the possibility that Kathmandu's cappuccinos will one day will be made with beans grown in Nuwakot. The story was widely shared in social media. Visit the Nepali Times homepage to read the column.

Most popular on Twitter

Oli's first year

KP Oli has everything going for him: a strong majority in Parliament, a demoralised opposition, young can-do ministers. Yet as he marks his first year in office why does he appear so embattled? Hear from the prime minister himself on this page 1 story that elicited the most comments from readers.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

- Times

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
A girl in Achham was shocked to see her siblings hungry because their mother went to chhaupadi shed. She flew into a rage. "Does our religion say we have to go hungry?" Aruna Uprety chronicles brave women in Far West Nepal who are breaking menstrual taboos
- Mingmar G Sherpa @DrMingmaSherpa**
In other parts of Nepal, husband has to cook because menstruating women are not allowed in the kitchen. Not much different from Achham though.

- Times

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
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? We asked @kpsharmaoli this week to fill out his own report card.
- Subodh Rana @ranasubodh**
With 2/3 rd majority in house his only claim to fame is that he remained one full year in power. Wow!
- Binod Sijapati @binsija**
Seems there is a no dearth of trustworthy sycophants

- Times

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
No student enrolled for graduate studies at the #History Department of TU this year. Will we forget and lose all the colourful characters, events, places, plots, wars, treaties, because no one wants to study history anymore? Anil Chitrakar writes.
- @M_Drishti_**
It's not because no one wants to study history anymore, but it's because of the quality of education that TU delivers. A year ago, I met a guy who really wanted to study history but had dropped out of the course in TU because it wasn't upto the mark.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

This passage from the Editorial in *Nepali Times* #439 of 19-26 Feburary, 2009 about how the still-royal Nepal Army was trying to reassert itself, and warns of the danger to a civilian chain of command. Excerpt:

The Nepal Army's 'recommendations' to the CA Committee on Protection of the National Interest has raised hackles. While it is the fundamental right of every citizen to respond to the CA's call for suggestions, an instrument of state is expected to abide by operational norms of proper procedure. The NA brass has clearly overstepped its limits by bypassing the executive to present its case directly before the legislature. Under normal circumstances, an organ of state has to access parliament through the concerned ministry.

But even more alarming is the tone of the content. A civilian chain of command means the army shouldn't have a political position of its own other than that of the government of the day.



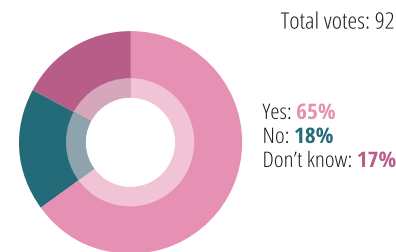
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Weekly Internet Poll #948

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



Weekly Internet Poll #949
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Does growing economic inequality threaten Nepal's stability?



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

Some are more equal than others

Trickle up is more likely than trickle down, concentrating wealth in the hands of fewer people

This issue of *Nepali Times* focuses on growing inequality in Nepal. The income and wealth gap has been widening around the world, and Nepal is no exception.

A few people on top of the wealth pyramid have a lot more than the numerous at the bottom. Governments and INGOs use the data to get aid which helps, in a



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

strange way, to create a new category of people called the 'Lords of Poverty'. Without too much generalisation, it is safe to say that poverty has become an industry in itself. Those who go to work every day to end poverty would be unemployed and poor if they were successful.

We need to start with a general agreement that there is, was, and will always be inequality in human society. But we can create a safety net so that no one should ever have to live below an agreed standard and quality of life. This is the role of the government.

There are proven ways to do this, but in Nepal there is a lack of political will to make it happen. Hence we struggle. Trickle up works better than trickle down, and concentrates wealth in the hands of fewer people. Redistribution has to be by design. Tax money spent on education, health, infrastructure, information technology are all great equalisers, but not sufficient by themselves.

We know that in the United States and Nepal where there is poor state health care, families have been known to go bankrupt when a member contracts a serious illness. Medical expenses not just drain their savings, but some sell land or take children out of school to pay hospital bills.

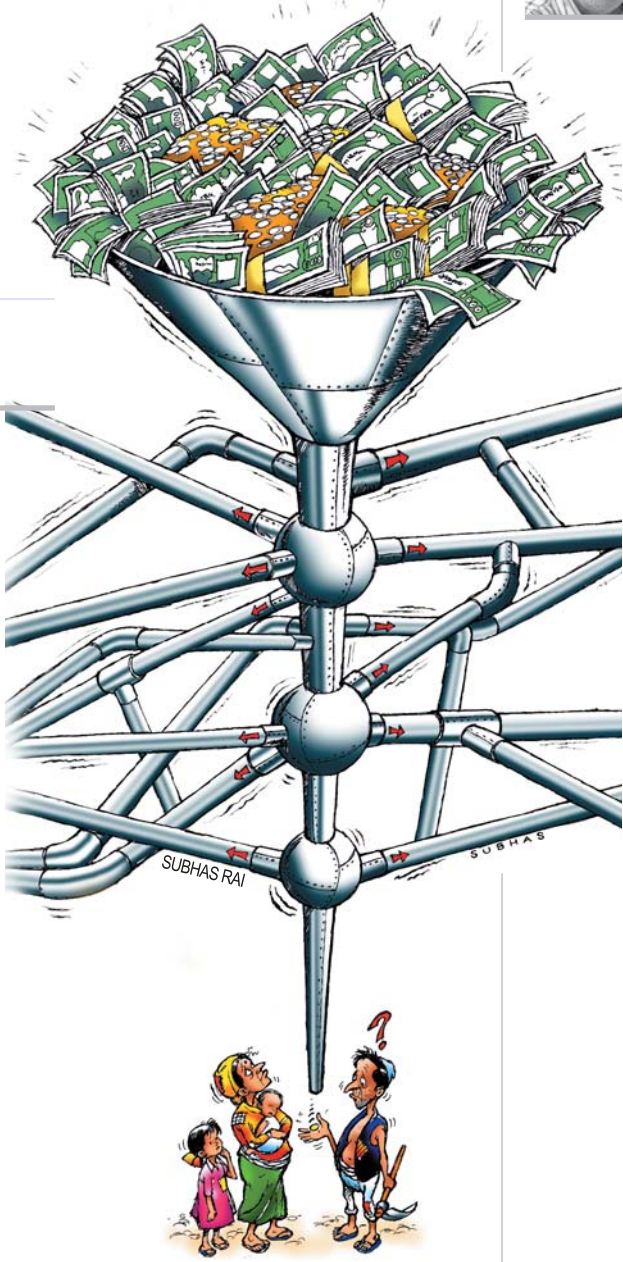
What can we do about poverty caused by alcoholism, crime, disability, accidents, fraud, drugs and other addictions and mental conditions? When parents separate, terrorists attack, industrial accidents occur, people are pushed below the poverty line.

Take the example of a village where everyone is equal till one family buys a tv set and puts up an antenna. The neighbours without tv are suddenly poor.

The Sherpas are not rich because Mt Everest is up the trail from their village, but because the world made climbing mountains a business for the adventure minded.

The people of Karnali became poor because of the militarisation of the India-China-Nepal border after the 1962 war leading to the loss of trade and livestock movement with Tibet. The people of Kathmandu became rich because the land they owned became very expensive mainly due to failed rural development over the past five decades, and the insurgency that drove people into the valley to buy small parcels of land.

The Thakalis of the Kali Gandaki Valley are richer than other ethnicities in that region



because they traded in salt when the British were ruling in India and had a virtual monopoly on this critical commodity. Did these create the inequality we see today in Central Nepal? It most certainly contributed.

Our ancestors were rich or poor depending on how much land they owned. Today with a new idea and entrepreneurial qualities, a person can become very rich very fast. Many still do not understand the difference between property and intellectual property.

The author of the Harry Potter books or the founder Facebook do not count their wealth in *ropanis* of land. How do we then define wealth? Few people will tell you how much money they actually have. The same people who plead poverty in front of the potential donors will prove to the US immigration officer that they can pay for a four year college degree, to obtain a visa.

The world and Nepal consist of those who have a lot, those who have little, but the biggest group of people are those in debt, and have not yet paid for what they have. The US may appear rich, but it is \$22 trillion in debt. Next door, more than 57% of India's GDP is owned by 1% of its population. Does it mean anything? Building fancy modern hospitals in Kathmandu may contribute to GDP, but it is also an indicator that people are sick from polluted air, water and food poisoned with pesticides.

Anil Chitrakar is the President of Siddharthinc.

Jobs reduce poverty

Domestic employment and income generation are the steps to prosperity

Prime Minister Oli said last week that his government laid the foundation for prosperity in Nepal during its first year in power. This claim has very little foundation. The economy has not



THE GADFLY
David Seddon

performed well in the last year, and even he is said to be frustrated by the lack of progress.

There has been limited movement in hydropower, transmission lines, roads, irrigation. The trade deficit has grown alarmingly as imports soar while exports stagnate. The balance of payments is covered year after year largely by remittances sent back from abroad by Nepali men and women who should be contributing to investment, entrepreneurial activity, income generation and production back home.

Every year, more than 300,000 young Nepalis enter the labour market, but the supply of jobs is much smaller than the demand, so many seek opportunities abroad. Others are forced to take low paid jobs with limited security, and nearly a third of the work-age population remains unemployed or underemployed.

Banks are reluctant to lend, even to established enterprises and much less so to entrepreneurs hoping to invest in start-ups. Those with substantial resources of their own prefer to invest in sectors providing more reliable returns, such as real estate, hotels and restaurants in urban areas, commerce and trade.

Where larger investments are made for the longer-term, for example in infrastructure or aviation, it is usually only when lucrative government contracts are involved, providing direct or indirect benefits of various kinds (including illegitimate arrangements).

Nepal remains a largely rentier capitalist economy, rather than one in which capital investment in production generates real and sustainable growth, promoting and encouraging enterprise and creating jobs.

The government and the state could assist by better regulation and also by cutting red tape, effective control of rampant corruption (even inside an anti-corruption watchdog like the CIAA) and by the promotion of investment in medium and long-term productive activity.

One way this can be done is through effective public works programs. These have been successful in many countries and have also proved their worth in Nepal. They could be adopted on a much larger scale by both federal and provincial governments seeking rapid development and job creation.

The construction of 'green roads' using labour rather than capital-intensive machinery by the Rural Access Programme (RAP) among others, has shown to effectively contribute to infrastructure development while creating employment.

Recently, Prime Minister Oli launched a new Employment Program ensuring a minimum of 100 days of wage-employment a year to those registered in the scheme. Registered persons will be entitled to 100 days in paid employment, and if this cannot be delivered they can get a subsistence allowance worth half of the amount to be paid to those employed under the scheme.

An Employment Service Centre (ESC) will be established in each of the 753 local authorities and employment coordinators will be deployed at all centres, to record, through an Employment Management Information System, all those who are unemployed and seeking a job. These will act as 'job centres' at the level of the urban or rural municipality and will indicate employment opportunities within the locality as well as providing 100 days employment or subsistence.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security has identified 13 categories, but there is no reason why the jobs available should be limited to those areas. The proposed scheme appears to be confined to 'government projects', but the ESC should be able to gather information on all employment opportunities in the private and public sectors and provide this information in real time to job-seekers and prospective employees.

In this way it could contribute not only to employment but also to social security for the unemployed and their families, and to local development. It is a scheme to be

welcomed as a bold initiative, long overdue.

Of course, this remains a scheme in theory, yet to be put into practice. And if it is like so many other paper schemes proposed by successive governments over the years, it will be yet another deception perpetrated on the Nepali people.

One problem is deploying and supporting the human and technical resources required for the scheme. Will local authorities be able to fund the ESC and the personnel needed to staff it and operate it effectively? Will the IT required to establish and maintain a data base on both job opportunities and job seekers be made available and will it be properly serviced?

Identifying and verifying candidates for the scheme also cannot be another gravy train for local party cadres and their families or for local elites, otherwise it will not help the jobless and the poor. A significant proportion of Nepal's population remains below the poverty line, and they should benefit from this scheme.

We should welcome this proposal for a pioneering scheme, which has the potential to benefit not only the unemployed, but also the wider local population, and if it takes off, the economy of Nepal at local, provincial and national levels.

David Seddon is Director of Critical Faculty, author and co-author of many publications on Nepal, and currently writing a three-part book on 'Nepal and the Great War'.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish award

Turkish Airlines received an award for 'Lease Deal of the Year' by Airline Economics, and 'Aircraft Tax Lease of



the Year' by Global Transport Finance. The awards were given to Turkish for the financing of its brand new B777-Freighter aircraft with a total of €110 million. Through the years, Turkish has received over 20 awards for various, innovative financing models for its fleet of 300+ aircraft.

Qatar Show 2019



Qatar Airways flew the internationally renowned Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan to Doha for the opening of Qatar Show

2019. The extravaganza features exquisite gem stones, jewellery collections and watches from all over the world, and will also have Qatar Airlines' luxurious Business class seat Qsuite for display.

Hyundai's new Santro

Laxmi InterContinental Pvt Ltd, the authorised distributor of Hyundai Motor, has launched the all the new Santro in



Nepal with a revised, stylish look, a comfortable and premium cabin, new age technology, customer centric safety and all-round performance. One of the premium features includes a 17.64 cm audio-video system with smart phone connectivity and voice recognition software.

Zoo improvement

Nepal Investment Bank Limited (NIBL) collaborated with National Trust for



Nature Conservation (NTNC) to support an educational audio-visual centre at the Central Zoo. The bank provided Rs5,000,000 for the facility that will improve existing tools with interactive media, audio-visual system, bio-facts and preservation of specimen.

Banca Assurance

IME General Insurance and Muktinath Development Bank Limited have agreed on a Banca assurance program. Through this, all services of IME General Insurance will be available to Muktinath Bank's customers across Nepal.



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Spring is trying to make a return, but is being held back by a massive sub-continental circulation around a low pressure hovering over northern India. This has brought cold, clean air from the northwest into Nepal which has kept the temperature lower than usual this time of year. It has also blown away the north Indian smog, so we are not complaining. But another westerly front is over the horizon and will arrive in western Nepal by early next week, bringing more rain and snow.

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The annual Himalayan Outdoor Festival this weekend will once more be ride, run and rock

Sikuma Rai

When a group of passionate rock climbers, trail runners, mountain bikers, and event managers came together to organise the Himalayan Outdoor Festival eight years ago to combine all three adventure sports, only a few dozen people participated. Adding camping as an attraction the next year did not help. But as with long-distance running, perseverance paid off. The Festival has now become a firm fixture on the Himalayan adventure calendar, and one of the most anticipated sports event of the year in Kathmandu. The three-day Himalayan Outdoor Festival (HOF) is an opportunity to welcome back spring for fun amidst nature. This year, the games will be held on



Celebrating the Himalayan outdoors

SHISHIR MAHARJAN

Hattiban Ridge from 22-24 February and will have 450 competitors and more than 1,800 visitors. “I remember in the early years, it was difficult to convince people to participate. But things have changed and more people are now embracing outdoor sports,” says Dipesh Ghaley of HOF. One milestone that increased the drawing power of the Festival was trail runner Mira Rai’s win in 2014, which propelled her to international popularity, and she was eventually named National Geographic Adventurer of the Year and conferred the Asia Society’s

Asia Game Changer Award (*see profile, opposite*). Nepal is an ideal destination for outdoor adventure sports. The terrain and the people’s lifestyle is perfect to groom sporting talent. “Mira’s success and effort has helped popularise trail running, which had been lagging behind rock climbing and mountain biking,” says Ghaley. “But there are other challenges that hold back all three industries to grow and develop.” It costs around Rs2.5 million to organise a HOF event, and raising money is the main hurdle. Ghaley

says: “Till now, the government has not helped out, nor have we expected anything from them.” HOF categories this weekend are downhill, cross country, eliminator and night uphill in riding, bouldering, dyno and natural in rock climbing, with 5km, 10+K, 20+ K, and night run. There are other activities like slackline, mini ziplines, horizontal bungee and adventure movie screening. The event is a celebration of Himalayan lifestyles, and attendees can either camp on the hill, or stay at Hattiban Resort. 🇳🇵

DRIVING US UP THE WALL



Watch Swastika Chaudhary and Pancha Lama Tamang practice wall climbing ahead of the Himalayan Outdoor Festival this weekend. The Festival with the motto ‘ride, run, rock’ will feature Nepali athletes trail running, mountain biking and rock climbing at Hattiban.

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Sunmaya Budha

Like a lot of rural girls in Nepal, Sunmaya Budha has been running up and down mountains all her life. Now, at 21, thanks to support from Mira Rai Initiatives, she is also running in international competitions. “My dream is to be a celebrated athlete so when I come back after winning international marathons I want the media to come to congratulate me at the airport,” says the 21-year-old, her eyes gleaming. Budha is now following the footsteps of Mira Rai and participating in ultra-marathons and races in Hong Kong, China and France and set good records. She became the Asian Skyrunning Champion in

Hong Kong in 2017 and came 10th. in the Golden Trail Series, Marathon Du Mont-Blanc in France last year. She is now training hard for this year’s Golden Trail Series in Spain. Besides winning races, Sunmaya has won hearts of many international athletes and even been in a cover of *Esprit Trail* magazine in France. Sunmaya Budha comes from a family of farmers in remote Jumla with six sisters and a brother. Her parents were once skeptical even when Nepal’s marathoner Hari Bahadur Rokaya started coaching her. But they are now her biggest fans.



LLOYD BELCHER

Mira Rai

Mira Rai is the prime mover behind the Himalayan Outdoor Festival that launched her career. She helps organise the Kathmandu Trail Race, encouraging beginners. Every year, she holds a trail race in her home district of Bhojpur to give a platform for local runners to run in the Gurkha Trailblazer Race in Hong Kong which held its fourth edition last week. Her ambition is to organise a Nepal Trail Race Series in Bhojpur, Jumla, Rukum, Sindhupalchok, from which top 10 runners will

be selected to run in one of the most rigorous Himalayan runs, the Annapurna Marathon in the autumn. In 2018 Rai set up the Mira Rai Initiative to support five gifted young female athletes, Sunmaya Budha from Jumla (*left*), Rasila Tamang from Dhading, Chhechi Sherpa Rai from Solukhumbu, Chhoki Sherpa from Okhaldhunga, and Humi Buda Magar from Pyuthan. Rai is taking a break as she recovers from ligament surgery she had in December in France.

The
ones to
watch



Pancha Maya Tamang

Pancha Maya Tamang, 19, was always interested in sports. Being the youngest sibling, Tamang and was free to follow her passion. At 13, her brother introduced Tamang to rock climbing, and since then there has been no looking down. She has participated in over 30 rock climbing competitions, eight international. She tops in local and national levels, and is training hard to perform better in global

arenas. She came eighth out of 25 at a tournament in China, and won a bronze in the Female Junior Lead in Asian Youth Sport Climbing Championship in Singapore in 2017. When she is not in college she can be found on the Astrek Climbing Wall in Thamel. She says: “I want to get the best international training in sport climbing, compete in more competitions around the world and promote the sport in Nepal.”

Swastika Chaudhary

Swastika Chaudhary has come a long way since growing up with her parents, who were garment factory workers. As a scout at 16, she participated in a wall climbing competition in Kathmandu. She did not win, but the sport fascinated her. “I cannot think of anything else to do in life but sports climbing,” says the 19-year-old who has given up law school. Chaudhary has so far taken part in 20 climbing competitions, three at the international level. She supports her climbing expenses from cash prizes, works as a climbing instructor at Ladies Mountain League, and is also sponsored by Rajesh Lama at Lama Works. Shy and of a small built, Chaudhary is grateful to her parents and neighbours in Nawalparasi for believing in her and supporting her passion.

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Protecting pangolins from being eaten to extinction

Nepal acts to save endangered scaly anteaters from the voracious appetite of its northern neighbour

Sonia Awale

They may not be as cute, and do not make headlines like tigers, elephants or rhinos, but Nepal’s pangolins are critically endangered and need as much protection as those better known mammals.

A report released in Kathmandu by Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation on World Pangolin Day on 16 February warns that two indigenous species of scaly anteaters may soon become extinct if they are not protected from poachers smuggling them to feed a growing demand for pangolins across the northern border in China.

“It is very difficult to spot a pangolin in the wild or its burrows when I go out in the field for research nowadays. You really need to be lucky. This was not the case 10 years ago,” said Tulshi Laxmi Suwal, who is doing a doctorate on the mammal.

Titled *Pangolin Monitoring Guideline for Nepal* the report released on Saturday is a world first – providing instructions on how to monitor the animal’s activity in the wild so action can be taken to protect them.

“The geopolitical situation is such that Nepal not only acts as the source site but as a transit point for pangolin trade,” states the report, which its authors hope will help develop a national-level conservation, protection and monitoring strategy.

Pangolins with their armour-like scales are known as ‘living fossils’ because the hardy species have been around for 80 million years. It is also the most trafficked mammal in the world, accounting for 20% of all illegal wildlife trade.

Every year, 100,000 pangolins are smuggled live into China from Southeast Asia and Africa. One million of the animals have been killed worldwide in the last decade alone.

Many Chinese believe the scales have



and has marked zero poaching of rhinos for the last few years. But while these charismatic mammals grab headlines, elusive and lesser-known species like the pangolin are being hunted nearly to extinction.

Nepal is home to two species of pangolins: Chinese pangolins have a darker body small head and lack external ears, while Indian pangolins possess brownish yellow scales. Farmers believe the animals to be inauspicious, and they are usually killed if seen.

Chinese pangolins are among the most endangered of all anteater species. Both pangolins

are in Nepal’s protected list and killing, poaching, transporting, selling or buying the scaly anteater is punishable with a Rs 1 million fine and/or up to 15 years in jail.

Last year, the Nepal government prepared a comprehensive Pangolin Conservation Action Plan.

But more worrying is that Nepal is becoming a conduit for smuggled pangolins from India and Africa to China where the scales are worth \$3,000 per kg. A live adult anteater can sell for anything up to \$8,000 in China.



In the last five years, Nepal Police have arrested 34 smugglers and confiscated 125kg of scales, four live anteaters, and one carcass and four sets of pangolin skin. In 2016, Suwal identified one of the seized pangolins to be an African species.

The pangolin trade is flourishing despite the global ban, and smuggling is so rife that of the eight species found in Africa and Asia, four are listed as vulnerable, two as critically endangered and two as endangered.

Pangolin fetus, scales and blood have been

ingredients in traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years, but growing affluence in China means demand has increased. Stuffed pangolins are sold as souvenirs, and body parts are also used in ornaments and even to make bulletproof vests.

“It is essential to also address the ever-increasing demand for pangolin products when talking about its protection,” added Suwal, who is currently pursuing a PhD on the anteater in Taiwan, the only country in the world where pangolin population is increasing.

“Taiwan is proof that China can also reduce its demand for pangolins through education, stricter laws, transboundary collaboration and enforcement,” she told *Nepali Times*.

In recent years pangolin scales are finding their way from China to Europe and the US. A 2017 UNEP report shows that pangolins and their parts have been seized in 67 countries, highlighting the growing global nature of the pangolin trade. (*See map*)

The report found smugglers were using 27 new global trade routes. Europe, especially Germany and Belgium, was identified as a major transit hub and the Netherlands was found to be a destination for pangolin body parts and scales from China and Uganda. Hong Kong is a major wildlife trade hub because of its proximity to Mainland China.

Sagar Dahal of Nepal’s Small Mammal Conservation and Research Foundation says some Nepali ethnic groups eat pangolin meat, but the animal is under threat now mainly from poachers supplying the mammals to China. Pangolins eat termites and ants, keeping a check on the population of these insects, which harm crops and vegetation.

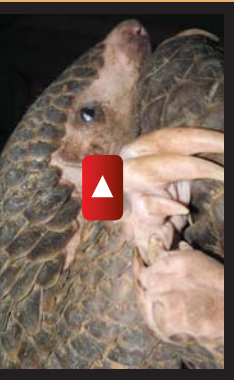
Says Dahal: “For a long time, we have focused exclusively on saving tigers and rhinos, it is urgent that we also look at protecting pangolins which are now critically endangered.” 🇳🇵

International trafficking routes for pangolins 2010-2015



therapeutic value, and pangolin meat is considered a delicacy. Some ethnic groups in Nepal also eat pangolins for their supposed health benefits, but most are now killed or trapped to be smuggled to China.

Nepal is set to become the first country to double its tiger population by 2022,



Did you know that pangolins are the most trafficked mammals in the world, and that Nepal is not only a source but also a major transit point for pangolin smuggling into China? Watch video explaining the importance of protecting these endangered mammals.

nepalitimes.com



ALL PHOTOS: TULSHI LAXMI SUWAL

EVENTS



Nepal International Film Festival

Be a part of the biggest film and media event in Nepal. The film festival will screen films from 31 countries along with discourses, master classes and workshops on films and film making.

22-25 February, 10am-7pm, Rastriya Sabhagriha, Exhibition Road, (01) 4225639

Junction Maa Chiya

An outdoor discussion program to engage individuals for a critical, analytical and safe discourse on issues influencing women, girls and gender and sexual minority. The topic this week is “Looking at Love with a different perspective: Consent”. Register online.

25 February, 2-4pm, Around the Corner, Bansbari, (01) 4433631 (hosts), 9861631197 (venue)

Living memories of war

An exhibition of photo stories of civilians living with conflict-related disabilities. Photo.circle produced this exhibition after touring different districts across Nepal to capture stories.

22-23 February, 10am-6pm, Staff College, Jawalakhel, 01-5522002

Cargo Cafe Grand Opening

This is guaranteed to be an exciting ,fun filled event featuring acoustic performances, stalls by Nepali startups, desserts from Sweet Things and sample tasting of Cargo cafe's menu items.

22 February, 5-8pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchok, (01)5530229



Mahindra Udaya Festival

Mahindra will launch its six new future ready products. Partake in innovative interactions, and also enjoy food and music for a fun day with family and friends.

22 February, 2-6pm, and 23-24 February, 10am to 6pm, Bhrikutimandap, (01)4442666

Movie Monday

The last edition of romantic movies will conclude with the 1987 classic Dirty Dancing. Jennifer Grey stars as a young woman who falls in love with a dance instructor played by Patrick Swayze.

25 February, 7-9pm, Base Cap: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, 01-5536051

9th Grand dog show

Dogs of all types will share their talent with exciting tricks and stunts.

23 February, 9am, Rs125 (door entry), Jawalakhel Football Ground, 9851161463

KathaFest

An international photo and film festival with movie screenings and photo exhibitions to unleash the power of storytelling. An ideal platform for young photographers and filmmakers to share stories, and open to all for attendance. Go online for tickets.

1-2 March, 12pm, Rs200, Baber Mahal Revisited, 9813776692



Yoga and Hike

Yoga and hike: the perfect combination to refresh your mind and soul. This Saturday, hike in Tare Bhir at Budanilkantha's Shivapuri National Park and do yoga amidst the green pine trees.

23 February, 7am-5pm, Rs 1200, Soorya Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lazimpat, 01 4001714/ 19, 9818481972

Weeping Banyan

American visual artist Maureen Dradk explores the Banyan tree as a poignant metaphor of how development has repressed natural forces in ten exquisite pieces.

22-24 February, 10am to 5pm, Taragaon Museum, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, (01)6201035




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MUSIC



Adrian Pradhan

The talented singer will perform his musical hits. A great place to enjoy good music and spend time with family and friends.

23 February, 7-11pm, King's Lounge, Durbar Marg, (01)4223110

Swing Tuesdays

It's time to dance to the beats of Swing music straight from the 30's and 40's. Even if you are new to Swing, just come along, make new friends and you will be dancing before you know it. There will also be special dinner menu and drinks for the night.

26 February, 6-8pm, Bikalpa Art Cafe and Bar, Pulchok, 9851147776

Diwas Gurung

Diwas Gurung's last gig before he leaves Nepal. Albatross members and other musicians will join Gurung to create a vibrant musical night.

27 February, 7pm, Rs500(pre-sale), Rs700(door), Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 01-5528362

Jazz at Temple House

A vivacious Jazz concert from an ensemble of talented Nepali artists. Collect your free invitation at Jazz Upstairs, KJC, Yamaha Music, or Kantipur Temple House.

22 February, 7:30 to 9pm, Kantipur Temple House, Thamel, 9803001592, (01)4250131



April Rush

A musical evening featuring performances by Rajat and Yankey from April Rush, along with happy hour cocktails and beer.

22 February, 7-10pm, Oskar Bar and Grill, Lazimpat, (01) 4418648



OUR PICK

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OFFICIAL TRAILER

IN CINEMAS 3RD FEBRUARY 15 FEBRUARY

Opens in Kathmandu on 15 February

Once in a while a Nepali movie tries to break away from the Masala formulas and pick up a story from real life, and Bulbuli is one of them. This is the story of a young woman (Swastima Khadka) who drives a tempo for a living, and her struggle to survive in an indifferent city. She is pursued by a traffic cop (Mukun Bhusal), and persecuted by her landlords. The movie is directed by Binod Paudel.

DINING



Fire and Ice

One of the first pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napolitana pizza and dozens of vegetarian and non-vegetarian variants to choose from.

Thamel, (01) 4250210

New Orleans

Offering a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. Rosemary chicken and hamburgers will make you return back for more.

Jhamel, 5522708



Flavours of Italy

Each region of Italy has distinct recipes and unique dishes, and Rox restaurant will bring the diverse flavours from Tuscany, Lombardy and Campania to Kathmandu. Enjoy delectable dishes with an expansive range to choose from: soups, salads, pastas, pizzas, risottos, chicken, trout, fish, and desserts.

22 February - 22 March, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt regency, Boudhha, (01)5171234

Utopia

Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel's noisy streets, Utopia features Newari dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines.

Ekantakuna, 9849592412



Baan Thai

Baan Thai serves generous portions of perfected and healthy Thai dishes.

Durbar Marg, (01) 4231931

GETAWAY



Mystic Mountain

Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern design and world-class comfort.

Nagarkot, (01) 6200646

Pataleban Vineyard Resort

An eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picnics to rejuvenate from your tedious routine.

Chisapani, Kathmandu, (01) 4316377, 9841679364



Gokarna Forest Resort

The resort is a numinous paradise, thick with century old trees rustling out natural tunes and great restaurants for fine dining. Golf anyone?

Gokarna, (01) 4450002

Royal Singi Hotel

The distinctive and symbolic art elements of Tibetan culture, made by local artisans add to the serenity and charm of the Potala suite at Royal Singi hotel.

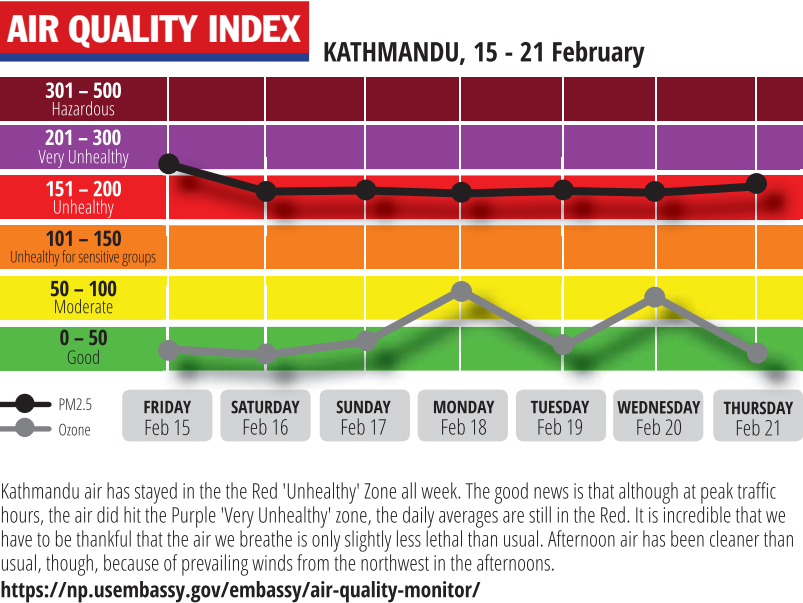
Lal Durbar, Kamaladi, (01) 4424190/ 4424191



Barahi Jungle Lodge

The first eco-jungle lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.

Megauli, Chitwan, (01) 4429820





ALOK TULADHAR

Deconstructing reconstruction

Alok Tuladhar

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake in 2015 caused a tragic loss of life, and damage to homes. But it had some positive side-effects that have gone largely unnoticed. The government's haphazard handling of the restoration of over 750 historic monuments in Kathmandu Valley sensitised residents about the need to preserve cultural heritage. In the past four years, more damage has been done to Kathmandu's traditional architecture by the government's apathy, greed and near-despotism than by the earthquake itself.

Strong-arm tactics have bulldozed monument zones in the name of 'development'. A new expressway threatens to wipe out the very essence of the historic towns of Khokana and Bungamati at the southern edge of the valley, beautiful towns with many archeological sites. Local people who are putting up a resistance are taking on a powerful enemy: the Nepal Army, which is building the fast-track highway to the Tarai.

The collapse of the 19th century Dharara tower killed 56 people on that fateful Saturday just before noon on 25 April 2015. Many heritage conservationists thought the Moghul style tower was an eyesore and had negligible archeological value, but the National Reconstruction Authority has taken it upon itself to restore the relic at the unjustifiable cost of \$30 million while leaving more representative monuments remain in ruins.

Nearby, the neoclassical Bag Darbar is the home of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Citing safety reasons, Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya is bent on demolishing the historic palace complex and replacing it with a concrete highrise, ignoring inspectors who confirmed that earthquake damage is minimal and the building can be retrofitted. Activists have finally obtained a stay order from the Supreme Court to stop the demolition.

The same activists have also been pushing for sensitive restoration of other earthquake-damaged heritage sites. Six of them were detained by police in December while protesting the unlawful construction of a cemented walkway in the protected Shleshmantak Forest within the holy Pashupati premises, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Department of Archeology is responsible for most of these violations of heritage conservation norms. The public and activists had to directly intervene to stop

the inappropriate rebuilding of Rani Pokhari under the supervision of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, while the Department of Archeology watched in silent complicity.

Using tarpaulin sheets to hide the reconstruction from public view, the City started building cement retaining walls around the 17th century pond that holds great religious, cultural and architectural significance. Not only was the use of concrete illegal as per the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, the City planned to turn the site into a commercial park.

The 7th century Kasthamandap monument was destroyed in the earthquake killing ten people. Since its reconstruction was constantly undermined by the government, the local community campaigned to rebuild it with voluntary public participation. But Mayor Shakya decided to rebuild it using the City's funds – effectively sabotaging the community's involvement.

While Kathmandu bungles monument reconstruction, in Lalitpur the pace and quality of rebuilding by a non-profit conservation group is far superior.

Bhaktapur is the other role model with the largest number of reconstruction projects undertaken by local communities with financial and logistics support from the Municipality. When the 'consumers' of the heritage get to participate in rebuilding, their bond with it is that much stronger.

This is a good time to contemplate why things are in such a sorry state in Kathmandu. Since neither parents nor schools taught residents about the importance of heritage preservation, it created a knowledge gap bridged only after the 2015 earthquake.

Activists and communities across Kathmandu Valley suddenly realised that their traditions were important, and they came together spontaneously as heritage watchdog groups, sacrificing personal lives and careers. Most have no affiliations and no funding. These loose but dynamic young campaigners are motivated by the urgent need to prevent further destruction. Nepal's cultural values will be inevitably lost if the present practice of unlawful, unethical and non-transparent reconstruction of monuments continues.

Youthful energy, fueled by regret at past detachment from their cultural inheritance is working wonders. There is also a danger that this spirit will dissipate with time. Before that happens, the groups need to realise the challenges ahead and come up with a solid plan to sustain and scale their activities.

Alok Tuladhar is a conservation activist. aloktuladhar@gmail.com



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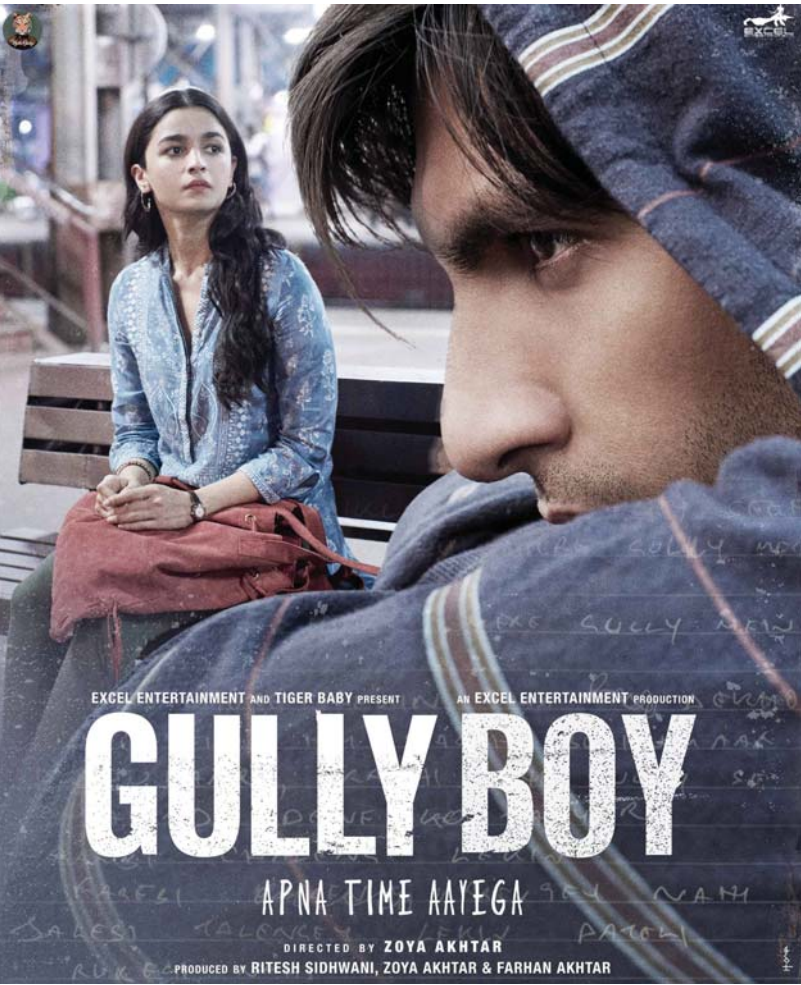
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Rap music entered the subcontinent’s musical firmament decades ago, but its essence has never been as well encapsulated as in the new Bollywood film, *Gully Boy*, that is in cinemas in Kathmandu this week.

Right at the outset, protagonist Murad (Ranveer Singh) points out what contemporary Indian rap sounds like: “What kind of song is this? Look, this is my car! Look, this is my girl! Look at all this gold I have!” Yes, those are the rap songs we usually see from the likes of singers like Yoyo Honey Singh in most Bollywood songs.

Gully Boy, however, takes us to the origins of rap, born from a need to express and to seek release from pain and suffering, from the need to stay honest and sane in a fake world, a need to seek your own centre in the constant glut of sensations that the world throws at you.

It starts with the eponymous Gully Boy Murad (meaning ‘wish’,

cleverly named) who lives in a slum with his extended family, just as his father brings home a second wife who is closer in age to him than his father. Murad goes to college so that he does not have to become a chauffeur like his father. But disturbed by everything he sees around him, he writes poetry at night, and is touched one day when he sees a rapper perform the kind of songs he writes.


The rest of the movie is more or less predictable, but still a heartwarming tale of his eventual success as a rapper. What makes this movie watchable are the typically Indian characters, and very relatable across South Asia. The one who stands out is Shrikant aka Sher (Siddhant Chaturvedi) who essays the role of Murad’s mentor with the confidence of a seasoned performer, and not the newcomer that he is.

Safeena played by Alia Bhatt is another instantly memorable character. Bhatt turns the role of a supportive girlfriend, a role that

may have passed in the blink of an eye, into a fiery portrait of a millennial woman. She is studious, but also adventurous. She loves her parents, but does not hesitate to lie to them when she is going out with her boyfriend. She is smart, and keeps her own communication apps well hidden as she outs another girl who is flirting with her boyfriend. Murad and Safeena’s childhood sweethearts may seem too romanticised and unrealistic in other parts of the world. But not here in South Asia, where everyone is familiar with the game of cat and mouse with family, and sneaky ways to hang out.

Meanwhile, the movie also manages to portray what life in Mumbai’s slums actually look like. Murad lives in a cramped loft of a two-room shed, and counts among his friend people who steal cars and deal with drugs. Director Zoya Akhtar’s last movie, the glitzy *Dil Dhadakne Do* that lacked an engaging story, had fallen flat both commercially and critically, and she had almost been slotted into a rich-world storyteller. With *Gully Boy*, she proves her versatility and her ability to mine all kinds of social strata.

Ultimately, the movie succeeds in showing what rap means in India. For those who are alien to the genre and think rap is about ranting whatever comes to the mind (‘JPT’ in Nepali cyberlingo) Sher (meaning ‘couplet’, another clever name) gives a lecture about the centrality of poetry and rhythm in rap. Sher’s constant mentoring, and Murad’s incessant practicing, also break the myth that stars are born. Instead, it shows how much hard work it takes to be good at what you want to do. One of the most memorable scenes is when Murad is arguing with his father about his dreams, and breaks into rhythm naturally, as if he had internalised it with constant practice.

Such poetry fills every moment of our lives, and we only need to open our eye and ears to see and hear them. *Gully Boys* reminds us how each of us have stories to tell, and if we do not tell them, we may just explode. Ultimately, it is a celebration of the human need to spell out our feelings in the form of art, so that we can connect with each other.  **Sewa Bhattarai**



SILVER JUBILEE: Prime Minister KP Oli inaugurates the opening session of Kantipur Conclave to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Kantipur Media Group on Sunday.



DARE TO DANCE: Demonstrators were out in force on Sunday afternoon at Kathmandu Mandala to dance to the YouTube music video *Lutna Sake Loot* after singer Pashupati Sharma was forced to take it down following threats by ruling NCP cadre.



SMART CAR: Pioneer Moto Corp authorised Distributor of Nissan Motors, launched its new model, the ‘Intelligent SUV’ at a glittering ceremony in the capital on Sunday.



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Novelist returns to non-fiction

If anyone has seen Narayan Wagle’s characters wandering about, send them back to the author

Sewa Bhattarai

His hair graying and receding, his gaunt and weathered face creased with laughter wrinkles, Narayan Wagle looks out over the city from his 8th floor newsroom and pours out his exasperation of trying to juggle journalism with fiction.

After two novels in 20 years, the editor of *Kantipur* has returned to non-fiction with his new book, *Koreana Coffee Guff* that employs the chatty style he developed in his newspaper columns, but written from his experiences in Korea. After trying to use fiction to get closer to the truth, and hit by writer’s block on his third novel, the journalist seems to have come a full circle.

“The characters in my new novel were not behaving the way I wanted them to,” Wagle says, breaking into easy mirth. “If they are saying things I do not want them to say, then I could not take the plot in the direction I wanted to.”

So, Wagle put his characters into hibernation and turned to non-fiction. The journalist in writer was inspired by his sixth trip to Korea to make that country the backdrop for his narrative. Even though there are over 70,000 Nepali workers in Korea, he did not interact with too many of them, and they do not figure in his book.

Wagle used to have a popular column called *Coffee Guff* during his first stint at *Kantipur* in the 1990s, and he has reverted to its meandering conversations



MONIKA DEUPALA

interspersed with monologues and philosophical observations in *Koreana*. Even though it is an account of his travels in Korea, Wagle says it is not a travelogue but ‘creative non-fiction’.

“Every day I deal with the ins and outs of news, which has a limited writing style, but there is a creative writer in me that seeks release, and that is why I combine them in creative non-fiction,” Wagle explains.

Wagle does find ways to be

creative in journalism as well, but says that is only the surface. Actually, he is always curious about what is hidden between the lines. That takes him to explore different facets of life through other writings. But since journalism is a hectic job in itself that sometimes takes more than the normal 8-hour workday, he is left with little time to write. But there is always time to read.

“To be a good writer, you must read as much as possible, which is what I try to do when I have time

left over after deadline,” says Wagle showing the translated books that he carries around in his bag. “It is important to read world literature, I am intrigued by how people express their thoughts in creative ways in different languages.”

In his novelist avatar, Narayan Wagle shot to fame in 2005 after winning the Madan Puraskar for his first novel *Palpasa Café*, which is set during the war. His second novel *Mayur Times* was not as well received, stranding him in a mid-

career crisis for almost a decade.

Palpasa Café has been translated into four languages, but most Nepali literature is not known outside Nepal because of the lack of translations. Wagle, however, thinks Nepali literature must first try to be world class to be taken seriously by the world.

“Rather than thinking of where we are on the world stage, I think it is important to develop our own voice first. Once we focus on developing a strong reading and writing culture, and on creating literature that represents the diversity of Nepal, only then can we think of taking it outside,” he says.

Wagle can often be seen commuting to work on foot, taking gangly steps along the dusty sidewalks of Patan. It almost seems as if he is searching for the lost characters of his next novel so he can get them to behave themselves again. 🇳🇵



Narayan Wagle is a journalist by day, and a creative writer by night. He has just launched his third book, a non-fiction after two novels. Watch video where he explains his writer’s block, explaining how his characters don’t listen to him anymore, and read an excerpt from *Koreana*.

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Nepal's great

Ramesh Kumar

Nepal's growing income disparity is pushing the country towards instability and conflict

It may seem like a contradiction: Nepal's poverty rate has dropped from 42% to 21% in two decades, but the gap between the richest and poorest Nepalis has widened considerably.

While remittances from Nepali workers abroad has helped reduce overall poverty, 10% of rich Nepalis now own property worth an astounding 26 times more than the 40% of the poorest. The income gap has also become wider: earnings of the top 10% of richest Nepalis has grown three times more than the poorest 40%.

These and other statistics are part of *Fighting Inequality in Nepal: The Road to Prosperity* report released last month by Oxfam Nepal, Humanitarian Accountability Monitoring Initiative and South Asia Poverty Alleviation Forum.

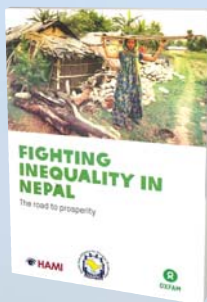
"The findings are very worrying, it is dangerous for the rich to keep getting richer and poor to remain

poor," says economist Dilli Raj Khanal.

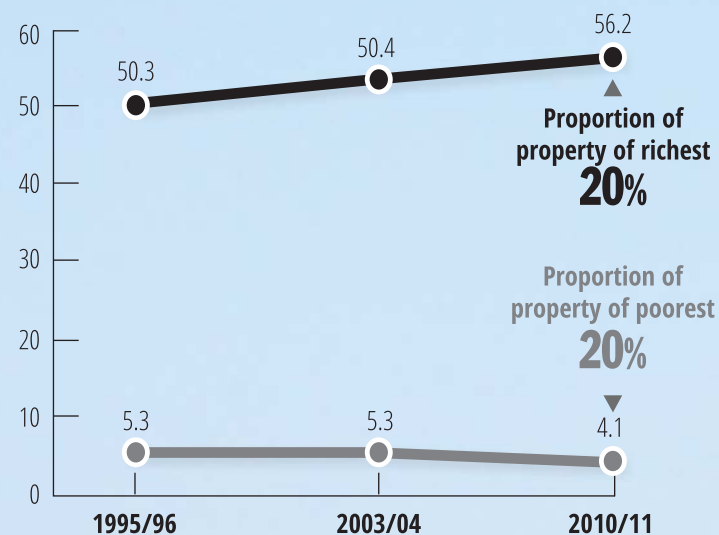
To be sure, it is impossible to make everyone rich, and there will always be inequality in society because of individual capacity and ability. But an unnatural imbalance in wealth and income can lead to resentment, and be a precursor to social conflict.

Nepal's Maoists waged an armed struggle from 1996-2006 arguing that the 'objective conditions' for revolution were ripe due to inequality, social injustice and discrimination. However, 13 years after the war ended, and with the former guerrillas having been elected to government multiple times, Nepal is more unequal than ever.

Nepal's Gini index (see graph, overleaf) was 0.43 in 1996 and increased steadily to 0.48 by 2011. Economic professor Kamal Raj Dhungel warns:



Nepal's wealth disparity



"If Gini exceeds 0.5 it means a society is in an explosive state. We are nearing that tipping point."

Indeed, as far back as 2001 the then South Asia head of the World Bank Meiko Nishimizu in an interview with this paper had described Kathmandu as 'an island of prosperity in area of poverty'. The only change since then is that

gap between rich and poor has got wider. The last livelihood survey in Nepal conducted in 2011 shows that the benefits of economic growth has flowed to a few already-privileged sections of society.

According to the report, only 5% of Nepalis saw their income increase in the period between 2003-2011. Urban dwellers enjoyed



“घर शान्ति नै विश्व शान्तिको आधार: दिगो विकासका लागि लैङ्गिक हिंसारहित समाज”
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income divide

double the income of the rural population. The top 20% of Nepalis own 56% of the wealth, and the bottom 20% own only 4%. In fact, the gap in ownership of land and property is even starker than income disparity between rich and poor.

There are many reasons why Nepali society is becoming more and more unequal. Some of it is historical: since the feudal Rana period royal families and their courtiers divided up the spoils among themselves, leaving little for the others. This inequality is still reflected in the gap in ownership of land. Oxfam also blames the neoliberal economic policy of governments since the 1990s that weakened regulatory interventions to keep inequality in check.

Even though two-thirds of the population is still dependent on agriculture, nearly half of Nepal's farmer families own less than 0.5 hectares of land. Only 3% own land more than 3 hectares. There are 300,000 landless families, and nearly half of Dalits in the Tarai have no land at all.

Although the reduction in poverty has brought down malnourishment among children

by half in the past 15 years, a third of children are still stunted and one in every ten children shows signs of wasting due to lack of food.

Land rights activist Jagat Deuja says at the root of Nepal's inequality is unequal distribution of land. "Those who owned lots of property had most of the opportunities to study and earn income, while the descendants of those who had no land became poorer and poorer," Deuja says.

Rising real estate value and the land price bubble in urban areas have fuelled inequality as

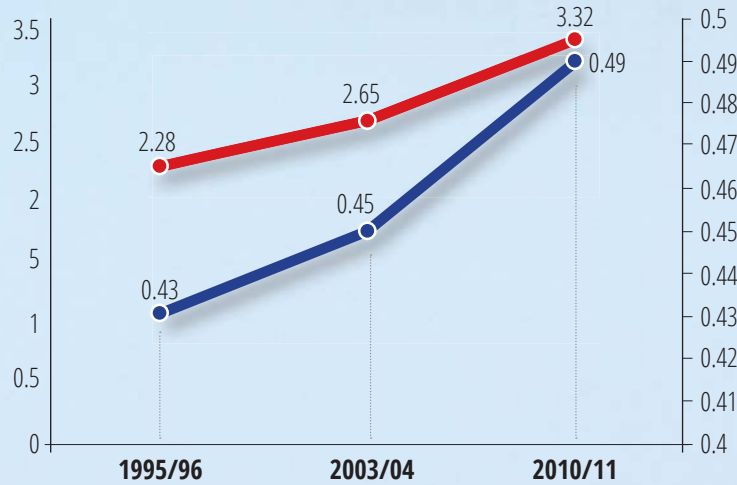
the already rich have cashed in big time through property speculation and investment in prime real estate. The chaotic growth of Kathmandu Valley, Pokhara, and other urban areas is an indication of this trend. Nepal used to import 4,000 private cars a year till a decade ago, today that figure has soared to 14,000 vehicles.

Corruption, impunity, political instability have added fuel to the fire. Collusion between business, the bureaucracy and politicians have created a hydra-headed monster that means any attempt to distribute wealth and opportunity is fiercely resisted. Corruption in the agency created to curb corruption is a vivid indication of this nexus. Nepal dropped two points this year to rank 124 among 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.

Sociologist Pitambar Sharma says the state's emphasis on economic growth must go hand-in-hand with distribution. "Prosperity does not mean a few people get rich, it means lifting those who are left behind. Social development and stability are at risk if we continue to ignore economic inequality while talking about prosperity." 🇳🇵

How inequality is measured

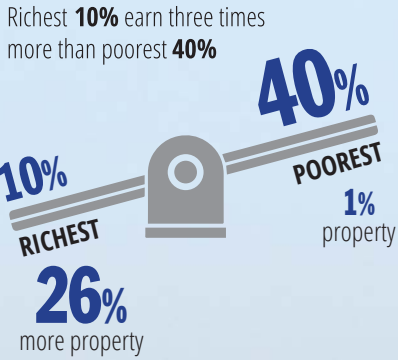
Nepal's **Gini Coefficient** and **Palma Index**



The chief index used to measure economic inequality is the **Gini Coefficient**, named after an Italian economist, that compares the income or wealth distribution within society. A score of 0 would mean a society that is totally equal, while 1 represents complete inequality. Nordic countries, for instance, are below 0.3 and are some of the most egalitarian in the world. The country with the biggest gap between rich and poor is South Africa with an index of 0.63. The United States is the wealthiest country in the world, but also among the more unequal with a score of 0.45. Nepal's Gini Coefficient has been getting steadily worse, and is now at 0.49.

The other indicator is the **Palma Index**, which is the ratio of the richest 10% of the population's share of gross national income (GNI) divided by the poorest 40%'s share. When the poorest 40% of Nepalis earned Rs1, the richest 10% earned Rs3.32.

Inequitable Nepal



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Slightly fake news

In most countries, including yours truly, the constitution allows journo to get away with the most outrageous things. That is because our founding grandfathers in their wisdom figured there was a slim chance that we may get something right, and perhaps even tell the truth. Still, there are many pitfalls and potholes on the road to a free and responsible press – and here in Nepal we have fallen into every one of them. Luckily, we can hold our heads high as the custodians of the fourth real estate. After all, politicians and journalists have a symbiotic relationship. They scratch our back and we scratch theirs. Heads we win, tails they lose. And now that we have those niceties out of the way, we can get right down to this week’s main news in detail:

Nepal To Have 1st Wet Port

By Our Maritime Correspondent

Triveni -- After the completion of the dry port in Tatopani, the Oli Grovelment is planning Nepal's first and foremost wet port even though we are slightly landlocked. "This is an unforeseen hitch," admitted the spokesman of the Ministry of Merchants & Marines. "But we are working to overcome our landlockedness by requesting the Gobarment of India to permanently submerge our border areas." In a related development, the Prime Minister this week inaugurated Nepal's first navigable inland waterway between Jorpati and Gokarna. The muddy stretch of road was turned permanently into a canal, and is now open for barges and gondolas.

Mayor Shakya told the media before setting sail on a maiden voyage: "We will turn Kathmandu into the Venice of the East."

Biggest Garland Competition

BY OUR FLORICULTURE COLUMNIST

A week after Comrade Awesome was radio-collared during his tour of the Farwest Tarai by a garland with the girth of a python, not to be outdone his co-chair Comrade Oily was set upon by a record-breaking marigold necklace weighing 85kg. Opposition leader Brave Lion, however, had to make do with a puny 55kg warhead (pictured below).



CHUMAN BASNET / NAGARIK

However, geologists warn that the sheer weight of these garlands is titling the country on a north-south axis. "At this rate of subsidence, the Tarai will be below sea level," said a heavily-garlanded Secretary of the Department of Floral Tributes.

Husband a la King
Sarlahi -- Unable to resist the delectable charms of her husband, a homemaker has set off a new culinary trend by eating him up, reports RSS. Police got suspicious when they could not trace the aforementioned husband. (Up to here, this news item is 100% true. -Ed.) Police are now looking for other women who want to dine on their husbands, instead of with them.



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