IT’S A RICH MAN’S WORLD

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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. A report released last month shows that the country’s wealth gap is wider than ever.

The average income of the richest 10% of Nepal’s population 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 Tani 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 EAMI, SAAPRI 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 malnutrition, 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 Nepal in poverty. Experts say such a level of inequality 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.

Kamesh Kumar
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

This passage from the editorial in Nepal Times on 15 Jan 2000 is about how the toll in Nepal varies by a new report, and the dangers of the vaccine's death toll.

The editorial's recommendation: "This indicates that the vaccine's death toll is a significant concern, and the report also highlights the importance of continued research and monitoring to ensure the vaccine is safe and effective for all populations."
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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 was not on centre, nor was there too much in the way of a page layout. Without too much generalisation, it is safe to say that poverty has become a bigger problem in the area. Those who go to work every day and get paid a decent salary are unemployed and poor if they were successful.

We also start with a general agreement that there is a lot of poverty in human society. But we can create a safety net that no one should ever have to live below an agreed standard and quality of life. This is the role of the government. They have 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 measures such as inheritance, health, infrastructure, information technology are all great equalisers, but without action they are inefficient.

We know that in the United States and Nepal where there is more poverty, more of the poor have been known to go bankrupt when a major natural disaster strikes. Medical expenses not just drain savings, but also lead to people falling into a hospital bill.

The bad news 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 and there is a family to be seen and put up an antenna. The neighbors without tv are suddenly poor. This is 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 poor of the Kailash Ganj Valley are richer than others in that region because they traded in salt when the British were ruling India and had a virtual monopoly on this critical commodity. Had those create the inequality we see today in Central Nepal. It most certainly contributed to recent events.

Our ancestors were rich or poor depending on how much land they had. The credit for maximum and nearly a third of the wealth in the population remains unemployed or underemployed.

The world and Nepal consist of those who have a lot, those who have little, 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 50% of India’s GDP is owned by 1% of its population. Does it mean anything? Building fancy modern hospitals to 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 SARDWORTH.
NEW NISSAN KICKS
The Intelligent SUV

*FEATURES MAY VARY FROM MODEL TO MODEL. ACCESSORIES ShOWN ARE NOT PART OF STANDARD EQUIPMENT.
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 these adventure sports, only a few dozen people participated. Adding camping as an attraction in the second 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 events of the year in Kathmandu.

The three-day Himalayan Outdoor Festival [HOF] is an opportunity to welcome back aching for fun amidst nature. This year, the games will be held on Hatibhan Ridge from 22-24 February and will have 450 competitors and more than 1,000 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 Dipsak Ghale 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 grow sporting talent.

“Mira’s success and effort has helped popularise trail running, which had been lagging behind rock climbing and mountain biking,” says Ghale. “But there are other challenges that hold back all three industries to grow and develop.”

It costs around Rs 2.5 million to organise a HOF event, and raising money is the main hurdle. Ghale 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, broad-nosing, dyno and natural in rock climbing, with 5km, 10K, 20K, and night run.

There are other activities like slackline, mini airplanes, 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 Himalayan Resort.

Celebrating the Himalayan outdoors
Sunmaya Budha

Like a lot of kids in Nepal, Sunmaya Budha has been running up and down mountains all her life. Now, at 21, it rains to support from Mira Rai, she is also running in international competitions.

"My dream is to be a professional athlete, so when I came back after winning international mountain races, I want the media to come to encourage me at the airport," says the 21 year-old, her eyes glistening.

Budha is now following the footsteps of Mira Rai and participating in cross-country and trail in Hong Kong, China and France and set good records. She became the Asian Skyracing Champion in Hong Kong in 2017 and came 10th in the Golden Trail Series, Maratón 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 seen benefits of many international athletes and even been in a town of Spain’s running magazine in France.

Sunmaya Budha comes from a family of farmers in rural Jumla with six sisters and a brother. Her parents were keen on outdoor activities when they decided to have children. Her father Budha Pratap started coaching her. But they are now her biggest fans.

Mira Rai

Mira Rai is the prime mover behind the Himalayan Outdoor Festival that launched her career.

She helps organize the Khumbhda Trail Run, encouraging beginners. Every year, she holds a trail race in her home district of Bhotepa to give local runners a chance to run in the Garhwal Himalayan Race in Hong Kong, which Rai held its fourth edition last week.

She aims to organize a Nepal Trail Race Series in Shigra, Jhark, Rutkum, Southrupet, from which top 10 runners will be selected to run in one of the most famous Himalayan runs, the Annapurna Marathon in the autumn.

In 2018 Rai set up the Mira Rai Initiate to support gifted young female athletes. Sunmaya Budha from Jumla, Prabhu Tamang from Shining, Uthi Shrestha Rai from Shining, Chhiring Sherpa from Shining, and Tum Buda Magar from Praja.

Rai is taking a break as she recovers from surgery she had in December in France.

Pancha Maya Tamang

Pancha Maya Tamang, 19, was always interested in sports. Being the youngest child, Tamang was free to follow her passion. At 13, her brother introduced Tamang to rock climbing, and since then there has been no looking back.

She has participated in over 30 rock climbing competitions, eight international ones. She has won four national and all international competitions and is training hard to perform better in global events.

She came eighth out of 25 in a tournament in China, and won a bronze in the National Asian team in Indonesia South-east Asian Climbing Championships in Singapore in 2019.

When she is not climbing, she can be found on the indoor climbing wall in Thame. She says, "I want to get the best international standards to bring the team to compete in more competitions around the world and promote the sport in Nepal."

Swastik Chaudhary

Swastik Chaudhary has been a long-time climber who grew up with her parents, who were gear-making factory workers. As a teenager, she participated in a wall climbing competition in Kathmandu.

She did not excel at his sport, but his passion for climbing led to a lifetime of climbing in sports.

"I want to do the best international standard in sports and bring the team to compete in more competitions around the world and promote the sport in Nepal."

The oness to watch

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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 Tulshy Laxmi Suwal, who is doing a doctorate on the mammal.

Titled Pangolin Monitoring Guidelines 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.

 suma Chhatri The scales have and has marked zero poaching of rhinos for the last few years. But while those charismatic mammals grab headlines, elusive and lesser-known species like the pangolins 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 auspicious, 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, Nepali Police have arrested 34 smugglers and confiscated 125kg of scales, four live anteaters, and one cactus 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 fetuses, 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,” said 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 Nepal Times.

In recent years pangolin scales are finding their way from China to Europe and the US. A 2017 UNEF 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 mainly from poachers supplying the mammals to China. Pangolins eat termites and ants, keeping a check on the populations 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.”
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.
**EVENTS**

**Nepal International Film Festival**
For a part of the biggest film and media event in Nepal, the film festival will screen films from 31 countries along with discussions, master classes and workshops on films and film making.
25 February – 2, 3, Beni Road, Kathmandu. [Details](#)

**Junction Maa Chya**
An outdoor discussion program to engage individuals for a critical, analytic and safe discussion on issues influencing women, girls and gender and sexual minority. The topic this week is ‘Looking at Cases’ with a different perspective. Consent? Register online.
25 February, 2-4 pm, Around the Corner, Boudhanath. [Details](#)

**Living memories of war**
An exhibition of photos stories of civilians living with conflicts related disabilities. Photo circle produced the exhibition after traveling different districts across Nepal to capture stories.
23-24 February, 10 am-6 pm, Staff College, Jawalakhel. [Details](#)

**Cargo Cafe Grand Opening**
This is guaranteed to be an exciting Join in event featuring acoustic performances, stalls by Nepali startups, drawn from ‘Sweater Things’ and sample tasting of Cargo cafe’s menu items.
22 February, 5-8 pm, Nepal Community Mall, Patan. [Details](#)

**Mahindra Udaya Festival**
Mahindra will launch its six new future ready products, proves in interactive museum, and also enjoy music and food for a fun day with family and friends.
22 February; 6 am to 9 pm, Mahindra Udaya Festival. [Details](#)

**Movie Monday**
The 6th 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 pm, Beni Hotel Outdoor (Sagarmatha Annapurna Jhalamandala). [Details](#)

**9th Grand dog show**
Dogs of all types will show their talent with existing breeds and races.
23 February, 9 am, BDU street near, Jawalakhel Football Ground. [Details](#)

**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 details. 9:30, March 3, 4am, BDBF, Budhanilkantha. [Details](#)

**Adrian Pradhan**
The seasoned singer will perform his music in a live show to enjoy good music and spend time with family and friends.
22 February, 7 pm, King’s Lounge, Durbur Marg, (01)4223110

**Swing Tuesdays**
It’s time to dance to the beats of Swing music straight from the 30s and 40s. 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.
25 February, 6-10 pm, Blue Monkey Art Cafe and Restaurant, Pullahari, 301147136

**Diwas Gurung**
Dias Gurung’s last gig before he leaves Nepal. All artists, members and other musicians will join Gurung to create a vibrant musical night.
22 February, 6-10 pm, Pokhara. [Details](#)

**Jazz at Temple House**
A jazz concert presented by an ensemble of renowned Nepali artists. Call for the invitation of Jazz Updates, NC, Yamaha Music, or Kamptso, Temple House.
22 February, 7-9 pm, Temple House, Thamel. (01)5017313 [Details](#)

**Yoga and Hike**
Yoga hike and the perfect combination to refresh your mind and soul. This Saturday, hike in Tale kha at Budhanilkantha’s Shivapuri National Park, and do yoga amidst the green pine trees.
22 February, 10 am, KTM. [Details](#)

**Weeping Banyan**
American visual artist Musten Drick explores the Banyan tree as a poignant metaphor of how development has represented natural forces in its exquisitely green.
22-24 February, 10 am to 5 pm, Judgement Hideaways, Yatre Regency, Bhaktapur. [Details](#)

**April Rush**
Amourous evening featuring performers by NuL, and Yalnies from April Rush, along with happy hour cocktails and beer.
22 February, 7 pm. Yatrakari Bar and Grill, Lalitpur. [Details](#)

**OUR PICK**

**Fire and Ice**
One of the first pharmacies in Kathmandu, fire and ice offers genuine Nepali pizzas and dozens of vegetarian and non-vegetarian varieties to choose from.
Thamel. (01) 4252070

**New Orleans**
Offering a variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. Rosemary chicken and hamburgers will make you return for more.
Kathmandu. (01) 5257998

**Gokarna Forest Resort**
Located away from the cloumb of Java/whitewhite/madhy, Nepal features heaven side dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental and rustic.
[Details](#)

**Baan Thai**
Baan Thai serves generous portions of comfort and healthy Thai dishes.
Durbur Marg. (01) 4273191

**Barahi Jungle Lodge**
The first eco-lodge in Chitwan directly overlooks Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest rooms, individual and two- or five private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Meghnal, Chitwan. (01) 440826

**Mystic Mountain**
Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern design and world-class comfort.
Annapurna. (01) 4236406

**Patalabandh Vineyard Resort**
An eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and spa to rejuvenate from your travel routine.
Chhoprani, Kathmandu. (01) 4756377, 84417573

**Royal Singi Hotel**
The distinctive and symbolic art elements of Tibetan culture, made by local artisans and to the serenity and charm of the Tibeta vibe at Royal Singi hotel.
Jal Durbur, Kathmandu. (01) 4424190/4424191

**Step in front of shoes**

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 15 - 21 February

**NEW**

**OFFICIAL TRAILER**
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 buildings 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-desperation 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 a fast-track highway to the Tansen.

The collapse of the 19th century Bhasmeshvar tower killed 56 people on that fateful Saturday just before noon on 25 April 2015. Many heritage conservationists thought the Mechchh style tower was an eyesore and had negligible archeological value, but the National Council of Archaeology has taken it upon itself to restore the relic at the cost of $30 million while leaving mere 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 Shrestha 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 restored. 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 Deurali while protesting the unlawful construction of a cemented walkway in the protected Shobhmati Forest within the holy Pashupati premises, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Department of Archaeology 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 Katmandhapuram 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 Shrestha decided to rebuild it using the City’s funds – effectively sabotaging the community’s involvement.

While Kathmandu bristles monument reconstruction, in Lalitpur the pace and quality of rebuilding by a non-profit conservation group is far superior. Shahapur is the other role model with the largest number of reconstruction projects undertaken by local communities with financial and logistical support from the Municipality. When the ‘development’ of the heritage got to participate in rebuilding, their bond with it is that much stronger.

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. Three loves 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, fuelled by anger 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.
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Rap music entered the subcontinent’s musical mainstream 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 Yo-Yo 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 fickle 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 ‘wise’, 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 Shrantika (Shraddha Chaudhury) who resays the role of Murad’s mentor with the confidence of a seasoned performer, and not the newcomer that he is.

Saltana 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 so she acts another girl who is flowing with her boyfriend. Murald and Saltana’s childhood sweethearts may seem too romanticized 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 friends people who steal cars and deal with drugs. Director Zoya Akhtar’s last movie, the gritty Zindagi Gulati Shekhawat (That lacked an engaging story, had fallen flat both commercially and critically, and she had almost been edited 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 rapping is about ranting whatever comes to the mind “This is not cyberpunk, this is not meaningful cool,” another clever name gives a lecture about the centrality of poetry and rhythm in rap. Sheer’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 rapting 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 eyes 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.

Sona Bhattarai

Silver Jubilee: Prime Minister KP Oli inaugurates the opening session of Kathmandu Convention to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Kathmandu Metropolitan City on Sunday.

Dare to Dance: Demonstrators were out in force on Sunday afternoon at Kathmandu Maidan to demand the YouTube music video Juthka Sate Jane (After singer Pasang Shampa was forced to take it down following threats by ruling MCP cadre.

Smash Car: Pioneer Moto Corp authorised Distributor of Nissan Motors, launched its new inside, the ‘intelligent SUV’ at a glittering ceremony in the capital on Sunday.

Don’t ignore Tooth sensitivity*
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 ponders 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 Cafe that employs the quirky 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 kill 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 just edit the plot in the direction I wanted to.”

So, Wagle put his characters into Kibernetes 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 Cafe during his first stint at Kantipur in the 90s, and he has reversed to its meandering conversations 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 behind the lines. That takes him to explore different facets of life through other writings. But since journalism is a hectic job in itself, 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 Pulpashe Cafe, which is set during the war. His second novel Megur Times was not as well received, stranding him in a mild career crisis for almost a decade.

Pulpa Cafe 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 gusty 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.

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Nepal’s great 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 Nepal has widened considerably.

While milestones from Nepali workers abroad have helped reduce overall poverty, 10% of rich Nepal now own property worth an astounding 28 times more than the 40% of the poorest. The income gap has also become wider: earnings of the top 10% of richest Nepal 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 brought to government multiple times, Nepal is more unequal than ever.

Nepal’s Gini index (see graph, overhead) was 0.63 in 1996 and increased steadily to 0.68 by 2011. Economic professor Kamal Raj Dhungel warns:

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 Meena Kushalnagar in an interview with this paper had described Kathmandu as ‘an island of prosperity in a sea of poverty’. The only change since then is the gap between rich and poor has got wider. The last livelihood survey in Nepal conducted in 2011 shows that the benefits of economic growth have flowed to a few already-privileged sections of society.

According to the report, only 5% of Nepal’s saw their income increase in the period between 2003-2011. Urban dwellers enjoyed
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 8 hectares. There are 80,000 landless families, and nearly half of Delta in the Tarai have no land at all.

Although the reduction in poverty has brought down malnutrition 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 fanned inequality as the already rich have cashed in big time through property speculation and investment in prime real estate. The classic 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 24,000 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 164 among 180 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index.

Sociologist Piambar 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.”

Nepal’s Gini Coefficient and Palma Index

T he 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 most unequal with a score of 0.4. Nepal’s Gini Coefficient has been going 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 Nepal’s earned 1%, the richest 10% earned 46.32.

How inequality is measured

Internet and Digital TV

SUBISU INTERNET

www.sabisu.net.np

clear tv

www.cleartv.com.np
Slightly fake news

In most countries, including yours truly, the constitution allows journalists 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 estate. After all, politicians and journalists have a symbiotic relationship. They scratch our back and we scratch ours. 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

Mr. Gyan Prakash Bhandari, chief minister of the Province of Surkhet, said the government plans to build the first wet port in Nepal. The port will be located in the District of Shekhuwa and will be built with funds from the World Bank.

However, local residents have complained that the construction of the port will lead to increased pollution and environmental degradation in the area. The government has assured the residents that steps will be taken to mitigate these impacts.

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