ZIP UP

Freedom of expression is enshrined in Nepal’s 2015 constitution, and the K.P. Oli government has repeatedly asserted the public that this liberty will not be taken away. But because a sudden clampdown would ignite protests and international condemnation, the tactic seems to be to muzzle the media in gradual stages.

Since the Nepal Communist Party assumed office last year with a two-thirds majority in Parliament, it has incrementally pushed draft laws designed to dampen citizens’ right to know. And with the spread of the Internet in Nepal, this also includes curtailing the freedom to express themselves on social media platforms.

The Electronic Transactions Act is being superseded by the Information Technology Act, the draft of which has provisions that would directly impact Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube content. In a recent example, a ruling party youth wing forced a singer to remove a satirical song critical of corruption in high places. If the new law was in place then, the singer could have been jailed and/or fined.

“The draft Act is a direct threat to the people’s right to free expression and to press freedom,” says Shiva Gaule, former head of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, adding that the definition of what is objectionable is deliberately left vague to control content.

There is also an Advertising Act in the ambit that lays out vague parameters about what is acceptable in paid notices in the media, with 5 years imprisonment and/or Rs.500,000 fine for infringement. Critics say this is another way to pressure the media by threatening advertisers. Indeed, although the target of the new draft seems to be Internet content, the impact will be felt by the legacy media with digital editions as well.

The new rules come on top of a new Criminal Code that was drafted by a previous government but passed by this one that treats what can be vaguely construed to be objectionable reports and posts in the media as a criminal offence. Previously, violations would be liable for prosecution under other benign laws.

A new draft Privacy Act that would have allowed officials to refuse to divulge information to the media was watered down earlier this year after public outrage. Says media law expert Subram Aryal, “There is a clear intention to regulate the Internet platform-wise, and thereby control content deemed critical.”

Rameshwar Bohara

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PATRICIARCHY IN AN OLIGARCHY

Nepal’s 2010 Constitution may be seen as the preeminent in the world by its framers, but there are still some design defects in that it need be fixed. Among the most glaring are provisions about citizenship that distantly contradict the principles enshrined in the Nepal Constitution to be equal throughout.eloaded clause, which states that any alien born in the country is a Nepali. Nepal citizenship is a birthright for all children born in Nepal. This is not only in line with the Constitution, but also with the principle of equality.

The real proof that Nepali women and men are equal will come when a mother can obtain a citizenship certificate for her children without having to prove her husband is a Nepali.

Nepal is a nation of women and men who are equal. This means that the nation is a birthright for all children born in Nepal. This is not only in line with the Constitution, but also with the principle of equality.

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Climate risk to hydropower investment

New safeguards are needed to protect existing and future projects on Himalayan rivers

In a normal winter, northern India and Nepal get 3-4 weestern disturbances. This year there were 12 frontal systems dumping snow and rain across the country. Kavrepani and surrounding mountains had snowfall twice within a month and received 96mm of rain on the night of 26 February alone – the heaviest ever recored, and almost five times higher than the monthly average.

Rains in other parts of the country were three times higher than the winter average. Earlier lighter snowfalls in Kavrepani were in 1946 and 2007. When this precipitation generated a natural anomaly, or was it spawned by changes in the global climate? Attributing one unusual, weather event to climate change is challenging in countries like Nepal which still have significant data gaps and lack climate modeling expertise.

However, if this is a new trend, it is a cause for serious concern. Warming caused by a greater concentration of atmospheric carbon is already changing the jet stream and weather patterns that influence climate in different ways, creating a new weather normal.

Madan Lal Bhatta is Nepal’s leading climate scientist and says the trend is worrying: “The weestern systems seem to be shifting southward and bringing these anomalies.”

The scenario for new snow dynamics projected by Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in its 2019 assessment and the inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) SR 1.5 are equally stunning. The ICIMOD study suggests that even if global warming is limited to 1.5°C by the end of the century, the Himalayan region will warm by around 4°C. Under a 1.5°C scenario, the study says glacier volumes in the Himalaya will decline by 36% by 2100 and under business as usual emissions, by a whopping 64%. The IPCC SR 1.5 suggests temperature rise will be limited to 1.5°C by 2030, to avoid a disastrous climate future. But this looks unlikely and the above scenario may become a reality sooner than projected. These change dynamics could already be

depleting base flow of many of our snow and rain-fed rivers. Existing and planned hydropower plants in both river types face higher risks.

Nepal has a total installed hydropower capacity of about 2,560 MW and in 2018 the plants supplied 4,475 GWh of electricity to the integrated Nepal Power System. New plants under construction will add 3,370 MW, and new planned projects will generate an additional 4,862 MW. These do not include smaller community plants, export projects like Arun II, or storage projects like Budi Gandagi and West Seti.

When these are completed, Nepal will have 400 plants with an aggregate capacity of 8,823 MW. If we assume that each MW needs $200,000 worth of investment, this development will be worth $100 billion, and could produce about 40,000 GWh of electricity provided the hydropower of rivers, particularly those that flow, does not change.

Already, hydropower plants in fragile basins like the Kosi flood from floods, landslides like the one in June 2014, the earthquakes four years ago, and glacial lake outburst floods. As the snow and glaciers melt, energy stored in expanding glacial lakes like this one on the Barun Glacier, above could theoretically be harnessed in the future, but these will be technologically complex, the upfront cost prohibitive, and impose high risks to fragile mountain ecosystems.

Today, while 46% of Nepal has access to electricity, its use in productive sectors of the economy and in creating new jobs is limited. The bulk of the country’s cooking energy still comes from biomass, and the cost of petroleum imports still no sign of declining.

In addition, regulatory oversight is inadequate, and so is compliance to environmental and social safeguards in the development and operation of hydropower plants. Hydropower design use historical rainfall and river flow data, but changes over time makes them unreliable to calculate energy performance of power plants. Agencies in Nepal involved in hydropower development must assess climate change risks, identify mitigation measures and ensure that projects deliver energy flow are designed for.

Data generated in Nepal’s snow-fed and rain-fed rivers can alert us to changes in flow, and in assessing related risks to their energy performance. Generation mix for a cleaner energy future can offset potential risks of total reliance on water-based energy system vulnerable to climate change. Such a strategy must minimise impact of petroleum products by using bioenergy fuel and other clean sources, address persistent energy poverty, elevate use of electricity in the economy.

In 2006, Economist Nicholas Stern’s Report on the Economics of Climate Change had warned that the cost of inaction would be far greater for future generations than the costs of action taken today. A decade later he said, “I should have been much stronger in what I said in the report about the costs of inertia. I underestimated the dangers.”

Crossing the 1.5°C threshold would take us to the danger zone. To remain within this limit, we need to improve governance and institutional accountability with a built-in systemwide incentive to ensure that new climate risks are accounted for and minimised.

Ajaya Dixit is Executive Director of Kathmandu-based SEO-Nepal. His monthly column Climate for Change in Nepal Times deals with the impact of global warming in Nepal.

Towo all stepped saying "no" to alcohol from current time to liquor permit. Over 1,800 permit will be involved in this operation.

CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Ajaya Dixit

Climate change will be a major challenge for our country. We need to work together to mitigate its effects. The government has taken steps to reduce carbon emissions, and local communities are actively engaging in conservation efforts. Let us all do our part to ensure a sustainable future.

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How Nepal can invest in improving its investment climate

The Nepal Investment Summit is another chance for Nepal to walk the talk on FDI

where we are used to promise much with no thought to fulfilling them. This lackadaisical ‘ki game’ attitude pervades politics and the bureaucracy. Internationally we do not trust us, they take our assurances with a dollop of salt.

We should take the summit as an opportunity to remind ourselves that what matters more than what we say is what we do. Blowing up cell phone towers is not the way to collect taxes, renegotiating business deals every time a minister changes does not inspire confidence, extorting international contractors is not how you finish long-delayed water or airport projects.

Investors in high-risk zones know that things can change, but even unpredictability has a limit. Nepal has just promised that FDI approvals will be processed in just seven days. Really? Don’t promise what you cannot deliver.

There are 330,000 foreign firms with investments in China, and the country plans to institute changes in the next three months, including the protection of intellectual property. At present, Nepal and China are both ruled by communist parties, yet the way we interact with foreign investors could not be more different.

Uncertainty is what keeps investors away, or in wait-and-see mode. Investors have a wide variety of choices of where they can take their money, and Nepal must be competitive.

If we could invest in new roads and ensure that their alignment complements future hydropower projects, it would make those investments more cost-effective. Attracting FDI would be easier if we augment the grid so that evacuation of the power produced to potential consumption centres. Land acquisition is so expensive and complex that it is usually several times higher than the cost of any project.

Some countries actually attract FDI because the children of the executives get to attend good schools. Kathmandu’s air quality is actually linked to Nepal’s investment climate. Investors do not want to be sick. Land, water, and power supply needs to be regular, but with so many young people sucked away by foreign labour markets, human capital could be a constraint in the short term.

Despite everything, Nepal can still be attractive to foreign investors. There is a reason why Sherik Chade and others are building new hotels here. Tourism, energy, agriculture, education and health are low hanging fruits. A country of 30 million with 2.5 billion people living next door is not a small market.

We need to make an honest effort to enable investment, open markets for products and services, allow investors to make a tidy profit which they can take away without having to bribe everyone, and file for bankruptcy if the venture does not work out. The last part has not been easy in the past.

Corruption and hidden costs of doing business in Nepal’s restless-seeking state can turn honest people away, and only the crooks will invest. The competition between the seven provinces and local governments could give investment a boost if procedures are streamlined.

Foreign investors gravitate to places that have an entrepreneurial and competitive culture. This it the opposite of Nepal’s agrarian mentality where a job means a lifetime guarantee. Cartels enforced by violence, lack of the rule of law, militant unionism, extortion and corruption need to go. Investors should also be careful not to partner with people who claim to be well connected. Any mention of ‘more mafchi’ by a local partner should be first signs of problems ahead.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddhartha Group.

31% सम्बन्ध फाइड

39% सम्बन्ध फाइड

24% सम्बन्ध फाइड

6% सम्बन्ध फाइड

39% सम्बन्ध फाइड

8 अद्वैत सविधा
Modern day Arniko

Following the footsteps of the famous Nepali artisan, sculptors take their skills to Japan

Gopal Gartaula

When he was younger, Manjul Barali would be chiselling away into stone to create sculptures whilst his friends played marbles nearby. He dreamed one day of becoming like Arniko, the famous Nepali artisan who took Kathmandu Valley’s architecture to Kublai Khan’s court in Beijing in the 15th century. “I imagined myself in Arniko’s place,” 37-year-old Barali says. “But even though it was easy to dream, I needed tremendous help from others to realise my dream.”

Barali’s parents were supportive of his interest, and he used to bring home stone sculptures to work on weekends. His father was a carpenter so he learned the carving craft quickly, encouraged by teachers who praised his work.

Ten years ago, Barali organised a press conference in Utkalik to announce that he would gift 1,000 statues of famous Nepali figures to be placed all over Nepal. His stone sculpture of the Goddess Binduvelahini is in Nakap, the stone figure of Kirti spiritual leader Palkonanda is in Sankranti Bazaar of Thaktum, and Bhanubhakta Asharya’s figure today stands in Damak in Bajra.

After carving over 2,000 stone sculptures in the past 20 years, and being awarded the Rastriya Pratibha Puraskar for his creativity, Barali started getting international commissions to build Buddha statues. He is currently in Kyushu with his team, housing a 23m tall figure of the Buddha out of a rock face in Kumamoto (left). Three other Nepali artisans, Sanabah Bika from Kerka, Ramchandra Pandit from Udayapur, and Gannesh Rai from Mornag (below) are also in Japan working on the prestigious project for the past three years, and will be there for two more.

The years in Japan have taught Barali many things, including their gracelessness and compassion as a people, and the thought they give to their communities. He feels the Japanese practice the Buddha’s real values and beliefs.

“It is not enough to say that the Buddha was born in Nepal, we need to practice his teachings, observe his philosophy,” says Barali, who advises Nepal’s tourism authorities to promote Lumbini using Japanese language publicity material, instead of English, and encourage them to come to Nepal.

While taking a winter break from his sculpture work in Kyushu recently, Barali was in Nepal and talked to the authorities to suggest ways to promote Lumbini globally. Barali likes to orient his work around nature and peace. In a sculpture workshop organised by the Fine Arts Academy in Kathmandu last year, he created a statue called The Earth Near Apocalypse which depicts a missile buried in the planet. Another sculpture The Invention of Peace represents how to find good qualities in seemingly demonic people, Barali explains. “The idea is to communicate abstract ideas about peace, culture, compassion through art so that you reach people at an emotional level,”

But for Barali the greatest Ankil of all is to be a modern day Arniko, and to experience the same feelings the young builder from Patan had 700 years ago when he travelled to China to build Beijing’s White Dagoba.
Northeast Indian cuisine is a hot new sensation in Nepal

Sewa Bhattarai

Nepalis are used to chillies. Our volcanic akhara are legendary for setting mouths on fire. But even macho locals with a high tolerance for the hot stuff will raise the white flag and surrender to the Naga Viper. With a high 9 on the Scoville Scale, the bright red peppers are supposed to be 500 times more potent than habanero, and were even listed in the Guinness Book in 2013 as the world’s hottest chillies. Vipers are vital ingredients at the Dzoukou Tribal Kitchen’s brand new franchise in Thamel.

Owner Karen Yaptomi is from Nagaland and now has a string of restaurants in Delhi and Kathmandu. In just, our one piece of unobstructed advice to her was to install fire extinguishers at her restaurant because the Vipers are so inflammable.

It was a disaster that Yaptomi landed up in Nepal, but not in the way you might think. She had come to Kathmandu in 2015 with friends from northeast India, after she helped raise funds for earthquake victims through a series of concerts in her Delhi restaurant with her friend, Nepali singer Abhaya Subba. “I was in Delhi, Nepal was so near and I had never been here. So I decided to make a trip up,” recalls Yaptomi, who explored the local market in Annapurna and was struck by the familiarity of it all. Bamboo shoots, dry fish, fish (of various peppers) and ziguio (herb) reminded her of Nagaland.

While the similarities excited her, she was even more intrigued by what could not be found in the local restaurants: no restaurants serving ethnic cuisine from India’s northeast. Through her music network, Yaptomi was offered a terrace space in Thamel, and that is how Dzoukou Tribal Kitchen came into being.

“I did not come here with the intention of opening a restaurant, but one thing led to another and I thought I would take that chance,” she says. Even though she lived most of her life in Delhi, Yaptomi made frequent visits to Nagaland where her mother taught her the traditional food of her people. Naga eat pork, rich fish curry and vegetables with rice, andYaptomi has difficulty finding the right kinds of dry fish, as she sources many of the ingredients from Nagaland. Even the décor is from her home state with bamboo ceiling, walls, wooden tables and straw mats. Kettles and other utensils are also from Nagaland.

With no formal education in hotel management, Dzoukou Tribal Kitchen is purely a labour of love. And it was by sheer chance that she even got into the restaurant business. One day, she invited 30 friends home and spent the whole day cooking. The guests all raved about the food, and suggested she open a restaurant. Which she did. The rest is her story.

Follow our reporters to Dzoukou Tribal Kitchen in Thamel, take in the tribal vibes, and watch Karen Yaptomi cook a famous dish from her people in Nagaland. Northeast India.
Prakriti Kandel
in Lumbini

As the birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini is among the four holy sites that pilgrims from the world over travel to during their lifetime. But the nativity site in Nepal is in a sad state, and needs to spruce up its facilities for a rush of visitors once its new international airport named after Gautam Buddha is completed later this year.

The inner sanctum of the Maya Devi Temple here has the marble stone at the exact spot where the Buddha was born 2,542 years ago, and it already receives 1.8 million visitors annually. Many international pilgrims at present come just for a day to Lumbini while on the Buddhist circuit in India.

But with the new Gautam Buddha International Airport nearing completion only 16km away, this number is expected to surge as direct flights can start operating from predominantly Buddhist countries in the region like Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, China and Korea and Japan.

There are also tourists who come to Lumbini because it is a centre for learning about Buddhism with a library, museum as well as monasteries built by various countries within the World Heritage Site designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange 40 years ago.

Tange’s master-plan divides Lumbini into three zones of 1 sq mile each: the sacred garden consisting of the Maya Devi Temple, the monastic zone that has monasteries from around the world, and the new Lumbini village with modern facilities for visitors. The master plan which had been languishing for decades is now being expedited under the leadership of Meityura Sakyaputta (Awadhesh Tripathi), a Buddhist monk himself.

“For the past 40 years, we never set a deadline or had an urgency to complete the master plan. Now, we have opted for international bidding and selected the best from around the world. This will ensure that the work is completed as soon as possible,” says Ven. Meityura.

Tourism Minister Rabindra Acharya had put the completion of the masterplan as his priority. And his death last month in a helicopter crash has been a big blow to Lumbini’s preparations for the future.

Ven. Meityura says most of the remaining work on infrastructure, drainage, waste water treatment facility, walkways, a centralized drinking water system, and pond construction is being expedited.

Work for solar powered charging stations in Lumbini is also expected to be complete in the next month. Electrification and a free WiFi network is being established for the entire masterplan area through which visitors can download an app that will help them navigate through the sprawling site.

This is an important project to resolve the information deficit Lumbini currently suffers from, especially in the international monastic zone which is divided into two parts by the central canal. The eastern part has Theravada tradition temples and the western portion has shrines belonging to the Mahayana sect.

As a new international airport is being established for the entire masterplan area through which visitors can download an app that will help them navigate through the sprawling site, this is an important project to resolve the information deficit Lumbini currently suffers from, especially in the international monastic zone which is divided into two parts by the central canal. The eastern part has Theravada tradition temples and the western portion has shrines belonging to the Mahayana sect.
The temples are grandiose, and get a lot of visitors but there is not enough signage and information for visitors to learn from the significance that Buddhism has in sects within countries. Tourists and pilgrims can be seen clicking selfies without meaningful immersion and learning. The app, and the upgraded museum are expected to ease this problem.

Von Metteys (picted, right) says that the trust is also working to revive spiritual Buddhist practices. “The experience in Bodhgaya is very powerful because monks are chanting and people are meditating. But Lumbini feels very museum-like. We will now revive Buddhism’s living spiritual heritage in Lumbini,” he says.

Even though the Maya Devi temple receives the largest number of visitors, most spend less than 45 minutes there. There are not many activities to do in the larger Lumbini gardens either. The Lumbini Trust is seeking to expand its activities in the neighboring districts of Kapilvastu and Nawalparasi which have over 235 sites of archaeological importance to Buddhism.

Kapilvastu is the home town of Gautam Buddha, and where he lived for 28 years as Prince Siddhartha before renouncing everything in search of enlightenment. In Tilaurakot, visitors can see ancient excavations of the Buddha’s father’s palace. Ramagama Stupa in Nawalparasi has some of the Buddha’s corporeal remains.

Among eight places where Buddha’s remains were spread following his death, Ramagrama is the only one that remains untouched and in its original state. Places like Kapilvastu and Ramagrama are valuable for pilgrims, but also for non-Buddhist tourists who want to learn about the Buddha’s life and history.

The Trust hopes to promote these centres in a circuit that entices the experience for visitors, and take them beyond just Lumbini. The expansion of the Buddhist circuit to these other sites would also spread out the benefits of tourism to larger areas.

“Promoting places like Kapilvastu and Ramagrama will definitely help the economy of local hotel businesses as pilgrims and tourists stay longer to explore the greater Lumbini circuit,” says Tul Bahadur Thapa, manager of Hotel Aloka Inn in Lumbini.

To accommodate the expected increases in pilgrims and tourists, new hotels have started coming up in the Lumbini-Bhairawa-Surkhet triangle which already had the look of a boom town with new factories and highways. Proximity to India also means new five star hotels like Tiger Palace are targeting Indian guests for weddings and for its casinos.

Travel trade experts say that Nepal Airlines should take the lead to begin marketing package tours and flights from Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma directly to Lumbini, and not wait for the airport to be finished.™
Fuzzoscope
The multimedia exhibition showcases documentaries by Ingrii and Laxapaha Cirella, an eminent Nepali artist who was previously the chairman of Nepali Academy of Fine Arts. Until 31 April, 17 to 7.30 pm (Sat-Sunday), from 10 April, Kathmandu Art Centre, Sankleshra, 9811727087

Talk with Satya Mohan Joshi
Legends Nepali writer, researcher and historian Satya Mohan Joshi will share his ideas.
25 March, 10.30 am, National College, Dillikhel, 9814889731

Let’s Talk
The March, the discussion topic is violence against women and the ‘khatu top’ movement.
23 March, 7 pm, Bent Fork, Bhaktapur, 9814408881

Women Trade Expo
The fourth edition of this fair will bring women-owned products such as clothing, handicrafts and even agricultural produce. Explore from an assortment and enjoy the day with your friends and family. There will also be handicraft workshop from local women experts.
28 March - 1 April, Heritage Garden, Sanoepa, 6269894 (Note)

Movie
The special theme of Women in Music through March will coincide with the critically acclaimed 2018 drama ‘Can I Say Ever Forget Me’, 25 March, 7.30 pm, Base Camp Outdoor Lifestyle, 9814327697

The Elements
The Elements is a four-member band and their live shows combine story-telling and music-making.
22 March, 8 pm, Inferno’s Restaurant, 9814502379

The Great Giant Leap
An audio visual performance with a compelling wild-life theme dedicated to the desert and The Great Indian Buffalo. This species of bird found in Rajasthan is the trekking March 17, 6.30 am, 6:30, 630 students, free for children below 12, Bali Miyage Kendra, Patan (Oasis), waqeenrao@gmail.com (organisers)

The Gentleman
Dev Rana and Jyoti Chitrakar lead the formation to perform three hours of their original music, dancers of the western and Nepali rock and roll, blues and other musical genres.
25 March, 7.30 pm, Social Cafe, Gokarneshwor, 9814540093

Beer and kebabs
Sharing a brings some delicious kebabs paired with beer as springtime arrives. You can choose from a spread of vegetarian and non-vegetarian items, and also enjoy with friends and family with different pricing combos.
26 March, 5 am, Shangri-La Hotel, Lalitpur, 9814199899 and Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara (06) 422222

Weekend Brunch
A fulfilling brunch buffet featuring barbeque, kebab stations, appetisers, live stations and delicious desserts. Special price includes swimming and some complimentary drinks.
Every Saturday and Sunday, 12.30-4 pm, Rs2680 per person, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency, Boudha (01) 5171234 / 471212

Karma Band
The popular Nepali folk rock band perform some of their hit songs along with Hari Mahajan.
25 March, 5.30 pm, Courtyard 4 Restaurant & Bar, Chandragiri, Lalitpur, (01) 5814481

Saili Night
Popular Nepali singer Hemanta Rana and music band ‘Prukshi’ will perform with the Incheon Band.
23 March, 8 pm, Lord of the Smiles, Chakap, 9842699891

Pahenoi Battli Muni
The band Pahenoi Battli Muni will be performing this Friday night as part of the Base Camp Music Festival.
25 March, 6.30 am, Base Camp Outdoor Lifestyle, Patan

Happiness Program
Be a part of a 3-day course by The Art of Living to rejuvenate your mind and relieve stress by learning the Sudarshan Kriya. Prerequisites required.
20-22 March, 9 am, Bjorn Monchol, Patan, 9814580984, 9811706942

Utopia
Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel’s noisy streets, Utopia features Nepali dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines.
9810603412

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
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Dining

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OUR PICK

Stephanie’s
Life Style

KAMTHAMANDU - 15 - 21 March

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KAMTHAMANDU - 15 - 21 March

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https://np.airquality.gov.np/air-quality-kathmandu
Toya Gurung: Nepali literature’s Thulnuni

When I first saw Toya Gurung’s name in an anthology of poems, I decided to seek her out because of her use of vocabulary. I had known of her Gurung writer women. “Toya means water, and Toya means life,” she told me. “It’s a long story. Her father was a professor in the Nepal Army and passed at an early age. Toya spent much of her childhood travelling around Nepal and India. She has published two poetry collections (SuryaPradhan ChhurnaGhumna), two long poems (Upancha, Vana), and a collection of writing (A list of poems) in the Fresh Academy where she headed the poetry department from 2000-2005.

Toya’s poems are not read widely in Nepal, but they have an international audience. Translated by Ann Finniss, some of her poems have appeared in the English language in Nepali Academy, Nepal, in the New Century and in Sita, a literary magazine from the University of Notre Dame. Wilma Martin, founder of the Fresh Academy, called Toya’s writing “artistic and hallucinatory,” which suggests “it’s too rich, too much to explain” and the tone is often, “no poem.

A day, a week, a month, a year, and to this day, and the phrases are still there.

Toya Gurung: In 1971, Kozu Man Vyasel, who was the chancellor of Nepal Academy, asked me to write a book on my experiences in Mount College in Kathmandu. I wrote three books on the college, and there was a lot of interest in my writings there. Vyasel told me he would publish a collection of my writings. I was known to the Nepal Academy and if I could bring it with 50 of my poems.

Muna Gurung: A book deal after a recitation?

I: Yes, it was like that. It was such a deal when I was published, being published was not something that happened. It was only when I was published. I was only 24 and a famous writer from Kathmandu was going to publish me. In 1972, our conversation was happening in Kathmandu, so I asked her what she wanted. In 1972, I asked the Academy if they had published the poems, they said they had lost the manuscript.

M: No.

I: I was so sad, I cried for days. Why did they lose the poems you had written at that age? Those poems were gone from me.

M: That is such a sad story.

I: I tried to find Toya, who was wise and understanding, and spoke much that always knew what to say to me. She said, Thulnuni, where will your talent go? Nowhere. It is in you. Do you read books? You are born to do this, so keep writing.

M: Your mother was a poet.

I: By far a bigger poet than I could ever be. She never went to school but grew up around a lot of Hindu scriptures written and recited in verse. Her knowledge was vast and her wisdom unbound. I keep everything Moyu told me, it is my possession, my wealth. One time, I was sad and told her that I had nothing in this world, not even a handful of soil to my name. She said, this earth, the trees, the soil, belong to everyone. Why do you make your heart so small? You do not need to own things, Thulnuni, everywhere is your home.

A day before I was born, she said that a jagat had come to her and blessed her with a daughter. I don’t know what you call this, manifestation of the divine! But here I am.

M: It seems like you were destined and invited by nature.

I: Yes, maybe nature wanted me to write. Do you like to come to literature? We are Gurungs, it is not something we do. (Laughs). There are many Muna Gurungs out there, but here you are focused on words, language, and literature. It is not an accident. Sometimes we choose things, but many times we are chosen.

M: But you, you feel like a soft fire. Like you have always known you would be a poet.

I: There were so many signs that I was bound to be a poet. When I was nine, my Buwa told me that I should go to Calcutta and widen my world. At the school where I studied for three years, the librarian, Kamal Sharma, was Nepali. He asked me to recite a poem in front of the school. Why? I wonder? Then later in Bhujpur, where I went to school with Mannu, every Friday students got to perform. One Friday, Manju’s piece of paper said he had to sing a song. Then it was my turn, my piece of paper said to recite a poem. Again, why a poem? So I recited Mohit Bhanjali, OM: That is your first poem. You mean you just recited it off the top of your head?

Absolutely, I stood up, I looked at the mountains around me. I closed my eyes, listened to the waterfall in the hills and when the wind blew, the words of the poem came out of my mouth.

M: It is surreal. And the poem is elusive.

I: Thulnuni. Those days, if I think all the accolades, recollection, they are nothing. I am all by myself. When Dorja Leking was given the Nobel Prize, she was old and seated on her front porch with a grocery bag. Why give this prize to me now? What is it that she had asked. There are very few people who truly understand the pain of a poet, a writer, a thinker. I believe that is why I feel lonely these days. I used to share my sorrows with Moyu but she died five years ago. My husband, who loved me immensely, who never raised his voice at me or intended a single hurtful word, also passed away three years hence. I have sisters, but they have their own lives. Sometimes I feel like I have become a book. Who will write about me now?

M: I want to echo your mother’s words. this world, this earth, the three. I am Thulnuni, my written will never go away.

I: That is true. I read Wordworth’s and his two poems Lany Osexy and The Solitary Boating in my grade, I don’t think I imagined a Nepali girl in Bhujpur would be reading them! Both the poems were about hill women and I saw myself in them, too, between the words, the story, the soil, the way we laugh. When I write, I think about how my poems will land in this world. My writing should be as close to the ground as possible. If it lift even a little higher, it will be spoiled. I am sure many will pick up my poems and how we simple they are and ask, Why do we even call this poetry? But if they look closer, they will find my life in them.

M: My friend and poet, Christine Oliveiras, says that a poet’s job is to observe the world with accuracy and honesty. In the first chapter of Aspirations, you observe a crown craft a baby magazine for at least a page.

I: Observation is everything. For my first book of poems, Sukradha, it was the Sri Lankan sun that I observed every day. My husband worked for RNAC then and was stationed in Colombo. Our house was three blocks away from the railway tracks and after that, the stones. I had never seen anything like that body of water vast, unending and kind at the same time. And when the moon and me at eye level, it wasn’t like a mountain and neither was it below me. I watched every sunrise and every sunset, that is why the title. It felt like the sun came with its own water.

But sometimes seeing is not enough. Or some peoples’ visions are blocked, or inadequate. My friends ask me, Why do you write such simple poems? And I ask them, in return, What did you get by writing convoluted ones? I use simple words. No one has to use a dictionary to read my poems. But they come from very deep within me, I hope there will be and they will rise up.

M: You worked full-time for 23 years at Bank. When did you find the time to write?

I: I could not write full-time, because literature is not a shop. It is not something that has immediate results. But that is not something we should wish for out of either. So, I had to work full-time. But in between bank vouchers and printing numbers, I would slip away and write. In my later years at the bank in Kathmandu, I was promoted to look after an entire department so my office was on the top floor of the New Road Bhagpur Park. There was a banana tree outside my window that gave me shade and scented sweet dreams. I wrote many poems at that window. But you know, later they cut down that tree. I was so sad, I wrote Rukh Mitto (True Swam), which Aun later translated for an American literary magazine.

M: You would write poems at work and recite at home?

I: Every day I write a poem, I do not touch it too much, I think about it a lot beforehand. I play with the words, move them around in my head, and the poem stays with me for a while before it comes out onto paper. I write

Nepali Times
Art and photography

Two delightful exhibitions at Nepal Art Council this week gave art lovers much to rejoice, with great variety in theme and style.

On the ground floor were photos from the Karnali corridor by Nabin Baslal and Ramesh Bishwakarma, the result of a 60-day journey from the origins of the Karnali to its confluence with the Ganga, which was featured in this newspaper in February. The photos reflected the diversity of life in the far-west region from the mountain communities in the north to the Tharu village in the plains.

The exhibition reminded us that the Karnali provides sustenance to a diversity of people from salt traders and farmers in the north to Setake people who mine it for gold in the south. The portraits of people from different ethnicities are a testament to Nepal’s ethnic variety. The exhibition was also a reminder of how remote and dangerous the Karnali still is with people crossing raging rivers hanging on ropes and travelling on precarious roads.

The colours were also varied: the barren brown of northern desert to bright greens of the rivers, and the multi-hued clothes of ornaments of women. The elegant pyramid of Ms. Kalliash reminded us of why it is deemed to be sacred.

One floor above, switching gears completely this week, was the artwork of the late Uttam Kharel, a senior artist and one of the founders of Srijana College of Fine Arts. The exhibition was a retrospective of the works of Kharel who passed away in 2018. Kharel’s works presented a heightened environmental consciousness where human beings interact with the world of animals. Kharel’s lines are smooth and lightly packed, invoking the intimacy between human beings and nature. Deep, saturated maroons, navy blues and bottle greens fill the frames giving the paintings a solid presence. These paintings extract notice from the viewer, there is no ignoring them.

Though Kharel became known for this style, there are also many other formats on display, like black and white sketches, abstract pieces, and little sculptures. Together they represented a distinctive voice in contemporary art in Nepal, from a pioneer artist and art educator.

Karnali: Photos from the Karnali River
Corridor in Memory of Uttam Kharel
Nepal Art Council, Siddhartha

DIGITAL FIRST: US Ambassador to Nepal Randy Berry with Nepaimagin Mayor Dhurav Rana and Deputy Mayor Uma Thapu Majar unveiled a digital information board last week.

FINAL WHISTLE: Nepal defeats Sri Lanka 4-0 during the semifinals of the on-going 5th Women’s SVF Championship in Biratnagar on Wednesday. Nepal will now face India in the finals on Friday.

HOLIDAY: Shopkeepers and vendors alike rejoice in the colours of Holi in Biratnagar on Thursday as the Tara observed the festival.

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For Nepal, a game-changer in TB control

The Comstock Method and Gene Xpert can help reduce tuberculosis in South Asia

Buddha Basnyat
and Maxine Caws

Tuberculosis killed 33 million people worldwide between 2000 and 2015, more than the entire population of Nepal. The infection still kills three people every minute all over the world, and 11 Nepalis a day. This perfectly curable medical disease is the biggest infectious killer in the world today, more than HIV or malaria. In sharp contrast, Ebola, which receives far more media coverage, killed only four people in 2014.

World Tuberculosis Day on 24 March is an opportunity for governments to renew efforts to control this devastating disease. More than 40% of the world’s TB cases occur in South Asia. While much research and funding focuses on HIV-associated TB and multi-drug-resistant (MDR) TB in sub-Saharan Africa, HIV infected individuals make up only 9% of global TB cases and less than 1% had MDR TB in 2017. Despite a huge sample size, there is a lack of research on TB in South Asia, particularly India, and on cases not associated with HIV. If nothing is done, TB will cost another 38 million lives in the next 10 years.

These shocking figures may seem incomprehensible, but at an emotional level in Nepal, we all know people, including many family members, who have suffered and died of TB. Many readers also may have suffered from TB, and fortunately have been cured. Tuberculosis is so rampant in South Asia that every working day, clinicians struggle with the question: ‘Any new patient? Is this TB?’ This is in sharp contrast to the western world where TB is essentially a historical disease.

While Nepal is a role model in the community-based DOTS (directly observed treatment short course) treatment, which ensures index patients are taking their medicines, this alone will not suffice in the battle against TB, since a patient would often have already infected others in the household and workplace. Which is why active case finding and early treatment is the key. But tragically there is massive under-reporting – Nepal gets over 40,000 new cases of TB a year with over 4,000 deaths, but many do not get diagnosed and treatment due to lack of resources for TB control.

The first ever prevalence survey for TB in Nepal is currently underway, and preliminary findings show a substantial increase in the estimate of total TB cases in the country. This would be consistent with the results of other prevalence surveys in the region, which have all demonstrated that the burden of TB has been substantially underestimated in South Asia. For example, evaluation of data from multiple sources in India showed an increase of more than 80% in the estimated incident TB cases from 1.8 million to 2.5 million in 2014. Although better than DOTS, just active case finding and treatment will not be enough to bring TB under control.

This is where George Comstock’s work becomes relevant in Nepal and South Asia. In the 1940s this epidemiologist worked with the largely isolated population in the town of Buttel in Alaska. He determined that, although patients and their household contacts were being treated properly, the rates of TB in the community was not declining as predicted. He felt that unless latent TB infection was treated, the TB organism ‘pool’ would continue to perpetuate the disease. Many people who are exposed to the tuberculosis organism will just have an infection, that is latent TB, without any symptoms.

Comstock started treating latent TB infections with one drug (isoniazid) which, sure enough, brought down TB cases in Buttel. Since then, multiple studies all over the world have shown that treating latent TB infection this way helps substantially decrease the TB pool in the community and make a meaningful impact in the control of TB. Indeed, it is how TB has been nearly removed from many poor communities in the West. For many reasons, including financial and perceived concerns of isoniazid’s liver toxicity, Comstock’s game plan has never been taken seriously in South Asia. It is time we change this and replicated the strategy.

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized treatment of latent TB in high-incidence countries. This will be a game-changer in Nepal, besides the highly-efficient Gene Xpert machine used for active case finding. By decreasing the pool of tuberculosis patients, we have a chance to meet the lofty WHO END TB strategy of reducing global incidence by 90% and deaths from TB by 65% by 2035. But even these targets only represent a reduction in TB to the levels seen in developed western nations today, not elimination.

These targets are not achievable unless there is a dramatic escalation in TB control efforts and a significant paradigm shift in our approach. To attain the target, the annual decline in global TB incidence rates must accelerate from 2% per year in 2015 to approximately 17% per year by 2025. This requires the deployment of George Comstock’s strategy to act now, and to observe this year’s ‘TB Day slogan ‘It is time for action’.

Buddha Basnyat is a physician at Patan Hospital and Max Caws with the British Nepal Medical Trust in Kathmandu.
4 years after quake, Sankhu rises

Reconstruction picks up pace after local elections force Nepal’s mayors to build back faster

Sonam Choekyi Lama

Of all the parts of Kathmandu Valley, worst hit in the April 2015 earthquake was the historic town of Sankhu. But this is also where elected local officials have achieved the most remarkable progress in rebuilding.

At a time when the central government in Kathmandu has been blamed for unnecessary delays and excessive bureaucracy in helping survivors rebuild homes, Sankhu is a model of how devolution of decision-making to municipal governments can speed things up.

The earthquake that struck just before noon on 25 April four years ago killed 98 people and injured nearly 200 in this densely-packed town, 20km northwest of Kathmandu. More than 6,000 of Sankhu’s monuments and homes made of brick and mud were destroyed.

Before the 2017 elections, only 10% of the homes had been rebuilt, but since the new Shankharpur Municipal council took charge just over one year ago, more than half the buildings have been rebuilt.

Mayor Sabarna Shrestha says the progress is mainly due to decentralization of decision-making after local elections: “Not only is reconstruction now the responsibility of local governments, but even we in the municipality have allowed local wards to decide on disbursement and approval. This has reduced red tape, and improved accountability in the distribution of reconstruction grants.”

Surekha Pradhan of the Sankhu Reconstruction Committee agrees that the central government did not do much for relief reconstruction, but things started picking up after the elected municipal council assumed office last year.

“I think the municipality has been trying to make up for lost time by expediting the compensation of the third tranche and clearing the

Satellite image of Sankhu taken three days after the 2015 earthquake overlaid with ReliefWeb assessment of structures that were completely destroyed (red), severely damaged (orange) and partially damaged (yellow).
The town has escaped the uncontrolled urbanisation of the nearby Kathmandu suburbs of Gokarni and Jorpati, but the new Melamchi highway and a spur in post-earthquake reconstruction has unleashed a building spree along the fertile floodplains of the Manahan River.

Says Surendra Pradhan: “Yes, a lot of the buildings have been rebuilt in the past two years, but many are concrete buildings within the core heritage area of Sankhu. Now it is difficult to claim that the town is a heritage site.”

Mayor Susharna Shrestha is aware of the need to protect the town’s precious Newa architectural heritage, and is determined to work with the local community not just to build back stronger homes, but also to preserve the overall traditional look of the town. But he says this is an uphill battle.

Since most of the buildings that went down were made with timber, brick and mud using traditional construction methods, and most of the cement buildings survived, there is now a tendency in Sankhu to rebuild using concrete and glass. The municipality is giving incentives to residents to rebuild in the original style by waiving property and house taxes, and giving Rs 100,000 grants to families which use traditional raw materials and rebuild in the original style. Twenty-five houses have been rebuilt in this way.

Mayor Shrestha admits that a lot of destroyed buildings were replaced with concrete structures in the three years after the earthquake, but says that a new code is being enforced so new buildings follow traditional styles.

Four schools were completely destroyed and 20 were damaged, but nearly all of them have been partially or fully rebuilt. Most of the 24 temples and monuments that were destroyed are being rebuilt. Seventy-two of the 98 people killed were women, and the town says it prioritises those widowed and orphaned for assistance.

“Our street was unrecognisable because all the houses had collapsed and there was rubble everywhere, but now Sankhu is looking much better thanks to the gods,” says 70-year-old Durga Laxmi Sharma, whose family survived even though the family home was destroyed. The reconstruction is partially complete, and the family has had to sell part of the property to be able to afford to rebuild.

Some survivors are waiting to rebuild because the government’s compensation of Rs 100,000 in three tranches is slow to come and is not enough. Indira Maya Shrestha, 46, lives a house that has now been divided into three portions by inheritance. She only get Rs 15,000 from the government, which was her share, and it has all been spent.

“Sankhu looks more prosperous, but I don’t know how safe these tall new buildings will be in the next earthquake,” she says.

In his office Mayor Shrestha looks like someone who is used to hearing complaints. He says: “Obviously the 300,000 was never going to be enough to rebuild a home, but we managed to convince people that it was just a small help for them to initiate reconstruction.”

Visit Sankhu with our reporter and meet Mayor Susharna Shrestha as well as survivors to learn about how the historic town is rising from the dust four years after the earthquake, and the challenges they face.
Reshuffle, anyone?

The Ass was the Prime Minister he would also be bored with seeing the same old people around the table every week, and would order an immediate Cabinet reshuffle. Even though, as far as we know that he is not, The Ass, the PM is hoping to do the Shuffle soon.

"In order to face changes, I have to change faces," he was overheard telling top aides at Bahu Water this week. The rumour of an impending cabinet reshuffle was swiftly and vigorously denied by the Minister of Alternative Facts, which means that they are probably accurate.

The question is which heads are going to roll, whose heads are going to be buried in the sand, and where some heads are going to be transplanted. Bargaining is intense. The Prime Minister would like to give Drinking Water Minister Bina the sack but Daddy-in-Law warned Oll before leaving for the States that if he did that Underfinanced Minister Khatiwada would have to go, too.

Oll would also like to kick out Infrastructure Minister Mahaseet, but the man’s bro-in-law happens to be a major mover, shaker and party fundie (in that order). The Right Hon’ble PM thinks the Minister of Informatics has done a great job with the Digital Insecurity Act and wants to reward him with the vacant portfolio in the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism. There is also a possibility that CK Saud’s Reform Party will join the gathering to counter the opposition’s calls for referenda.

Kamal Thapa of the Royal Revival Party (RRP) and Shashank ("Redemption") Koirala are clamouring for a referendum on Hinduism.

The Oligarchy plans to tame both rockers by making them ministers. But since there are not enough portfolios to go around, the Ministry for Industry, Commercialism and Over-Supply will have to be spun off into three different ministries.

The Minister for Justification, Miscommunication and Disinformation will now have a strategic partnership with the Defensive Ministry and gather useful goons from the Directorate of Military Intelligenciaa.

The Ministry of Irritation, Population, Family Planning and Adultery will be combined with the Ministry of Infrastructure, Physical Therapy and No Works to form a Super-duce Ministry.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be merged with the Home Ministry and will decide if babbies are Sikhs or marrying Nepali women to become citizens of this proud nation of ours.

For the time being, the Prime Minister will keep ministries like Water Resources and Dunn Building as well as the Ministry of Ministers without Portfolios.

The Ministry of Housing Around has formed a 108-member Steering Committee to organise this year’s Ghyare Jatra which, in the interest of the government’s general policy of austerity and belt-tightening, will be combined with Gai Jatra.