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ZIP UP

Freedom of expression is enshrined in Nepal's 2015 constitution, and the K P Oli government has repeatedly assured 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 steps.

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The Electronic Transactions Act is being superseded by the Information Technology Act, the draft of which has provisions that would directly impact Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube content.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 Gaunle, 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 anvil that lays out vague parameters about what is acceptable in paid notices in the media, with 5 years imprisonment and/or Rs500,000 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 Baburam Aryal: "There is a clear intention to regulate the Internet platformwise, and thereby control content deemed critical."

Rameshwar Bohara



Modern Arniko

Nepal's sculptors follow the footsteps of the great artisan to Japan

PAGE 6



BHANU BHATTARAI



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PATRIARCHY IN AN OLIGARCHY

Nepal's 2016 Constitution may be seen as the preeminent in the world by its framers, but there are still some design defects in it that need to be fixed.

Among the most glaring are provisions about citizenship that directly contradict the preamble proclaiming all Nepalis to be equal whatever their gender, creed, caste or class. Chapter 2 of the Constitution makes the sweeping promise: 'No citizen of Nepal may be deprived of the right to obtain citizenship.'

However, clauses on the requirements for citizenship have been deliberately left vague. This was probably done to fast-track the Constitution at a volatile time, but the provisions on citizenship in the name of the mother have been left to interpretation.

In a society steeped in patriarchy and a male-dominated bureaucracy, this means single mothers are bullied, ridiculed, humiliated, and given the run around when trying to obtain citizenship papers for their offspring. Many children therefore remain stateless, depriving them of education, jobs and other state facilities.

The debate has surfaced again this month because the Citizenship Amendment Bill tabled last year is now being discussed in the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee of Parliament. While some lawmakers have tried to fix flaws that discriminate against women, others (and a surprising number of them are female MPs) have argued against making the Bill fairer and less discriminatory towards women.

The Constitution says a person whose father or mother is a Nepali citizen will get citizenship by descent, but this is not applicable if the mother is married to a foreigner. Mothers with children whose fathers are absent, divorced, unknown cannot automatically get citizenship for their children.

If a Nepali man marries a foreign woman, he can get Nepali citizenship for her and their children automatically. However, if a Nepali woman marries a foreigner, the husband does not immediately get citizenship and their children cannot be Nepali by descent.

Even while the debate rages in the Parliament Committee, there are women facing obstacles at CDO offices across the country while trying to get citizenship papers for their children. Many are referred to the Home Ministry which has the final say. Some with husbands who have left them are asked to prove Nepali citizenship of parents who are long dead.

Women who marry foreigners are also made to produce proof that they have not already obtained the citizenship of their husband's

country, which Nepali men who marry foreigners are not asked to do.

There is a surprising number of women across party lines who support this discriminatory provision, and their argument is that if it were allowed, Nepal would be flooded with Indian men marrying our women. Falling back on nationalism is a lazy way to justify gender discrimination, but what is surprising is how pervasive this xenophobia is. As if Bihari men are lining up across the border to marry Nepalis. One MP even justified the discriminatory law for single mothers: "Making it is easy for children of rape to get citizenship will encourage rape."

The Bill is a manifestation of the paranoid nationalism that has plagued Nepal's politics. Nepal's sovereignty will be stronger if we strengthen our women, it will be weaker if

we disenfranchise the children of Nepali mothers, and by extension, half the population.

At the root of this deep-seated insecurity about nationhood is an entrenched vulnerability of some Nepali men. They feel that empowered women will erode societal privileges they have enjoyed within families, in the community and from the state. A patriarchal state refuses to accept women as socially, politically, economically equal.

Even if the regressive clauses in the Bill are corrected after the debate in the Parliament committee, it will take time for the administration to treat women as equals. But changing the law is a start for changing attitudes and behaviour.

The real proof that Nepali women and men are equal will be when a mother can obtain citizenship certificates for her children without having to prove her husband's citizenship. Her own citizenship should suffice. It is none of the government's business who the father is.

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.



10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

If you thought the state of drift in the country today is bad, then just read this excerpt from the front page analysis by J B Pun in the #443 issue of *Nepali Times* from 20-26 March 2009:

Six months after coming to power, many political analysts agree that the state of drift in the country looks too systematic to be happening by chance.

It is as if the Maoists in the ruling coalition are allowing things to fall apart, or at least not doing anything to stop it. There are only eight hours of power a day, the inflation rate is irrationally high, there is anarchy on the highways and businesses are on the verge of mass-closure.

Baburam Bhattarai said in Butwal last week: "We have 40 per cent (in the CA) so not one word in the constitution can be written without us. Either it will be the kind of constitution we want, or there will be no constitution."



ONLINE PACKAGES



Sankhu was one of the worst hit in Kathmandu Valley in the 2015 earthquake, killing 98 and injuring 200. More than 6,000 monuments and homes went down, but elected local officials achieved remarkable progress in rebuilding. Watch this video of Sankhu four years later. *Story: page 14-15.*



Lumbini is preparing for a new surge of pilgrims and visitors as a new international airport in Bhairawa nears completion. Follow our reporter to Lumbini and see for yourself how it is developing and expanding to boost pilgrimage and tourism. *Story: page 8-9.*



Poet Toya Gurung's verse is not only read widely in Nepal's universities, but have also appeared in literary magazines abroad. Watch her talk about pain and joys of writing, and recite her favourite poems. *Story: page 11.*



Karen Yaptomi first came to Nepal in 2015 from Nagaland for earthquake relief, but after seeing that no one served ethnic cuisine from India's northeast, started her own restaurant in Kathmandu. Let us take you to Dzoukou Tribal Kitchen in Thamel, and try the famous pork dish spiced with Naga Viper. *Story: page 7*

SANDUK RUIT

Tribute to Dr Ruit ('The visionary Sanduk Ruit', Sonia Awale, 951)! I first went to his eye clinic as a visitor, a tour organised by the then Australian ambassador, and later as a patient, my eye being suddenly blurred by the first symptoms of cataract. A well cared clinic with a friendly atmosphere. My thanks and testimony of deep recognition of the work he is doing to help his people.

Yves Carmona

TRUE DEVOLUTION

I have not come across such support for C K Raut in Province 2 ('Only genuine devolution will douse separatism', David Seddon, #951). I doubt devolution of power will address separatism. How do you deal with Biplav? Who is supporting him? There are many societal changes that need to take place in the Madhes first, starting with female literacy, violence against women.

Abs Pan

WHAT'S TRENDING



Nepal's far-sighted eye care

by Sonia Awale
Nepal is an international leader in eye care, and driving this progress is Sanduk Ruit who has devoted his life to restoring the gift of sight to the world's poor. The review of his new biography, *The Barefoot Surgeon*, was the most popular story from last week. If you missed the package visit nepalitimes.com and also listen to a podcast conversation with Dr Ruit.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

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Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Mingma Norbu Sherpa was one of the top Nepali conservationists who passed away in Ghunsa #crash in 2006. This week @lisachoeagal recounts how the Mingma Norbu Sherpa Memorial Scholarship was born and has since flourished. #Nepal @WWFNepal #conservation

NZ in India @NZinIndia
Honorary Consul to Nepal Lisa Choeagal writes in @nepalitimes about how the Mingma Norbu Sherpa Memorial Scholarship was born out of the ashes of the 2006 Ghunsa crash and how Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari's work must continue even after he is gone.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
A 2008 study found that one in five school-going children in Kathmandu were short sighted. In remote rural areas, many do not even know they need spectacles or cannot afford them. What are we doing to combat this emerging challenge? @SoniaAwale reports.

Mingmar G Sherpa @DrMingmaSherpa
Government of Nepal neither listens to others nor does it come with innovative ideas itself but just continues with the same unproductive programs and continues to be the same, and even worsens.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
EDITORIAL Government ban on Biplav faction of the Maoists could mean one of two things: the ruling NCP wants to keep the door open for negotiations, or ex-Maoists in the ruling party who used to be buddies of Biplav just want to pretend to go after him.

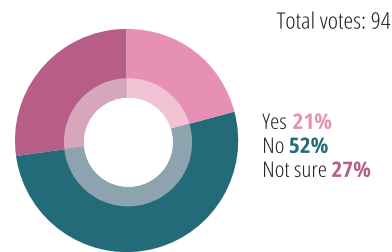
Joe Niemczura, RN @ccnepal2013
Maybe the government wants to go after him because his group is committing crimes against innocent Nepalis. Maybe the government realises that if Nepal is to end the culture of impunity they need to begin with punishing the criminals and establishing the rule of law.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal's Far-Sighted Eye Doctor: New book about Dr Sanduk Ruit who overcame all odds to give the gift of sight to the poor in Nepal and across the world. Profile and review of *The Barefoot Surgeon* by @SoniaAwale in @nepalitimes:

bharat koirala @lampuchhre
Will make sure to read the book and the review. I have a lot of admiration and respect for Dr. Ruit.

Weekly Internet Poll #952

Q. Will the government's agreement with CK Raut bring about decentralisation?



Weekly Internet Poll #953
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should children get citizenship in their mother's name?



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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 westerly disturbances. This year there were 12 frontal systems dumping snow and rain across the country.

Kathmandu Valley and surrounding mountains had snowfall twice within a month and received 90mm of rain on the night of 26 February alone -- the heaviest ever recorded, 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 Kathmandu were in 1946 and 2007.

Was this precipitation 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 Shrestha is Nepal's leading climate scientist and says the trend is worrying: "The westerly 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 disturbing. 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 1.8°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 be limited to within 1.5°C by 2030, to avoid a disastrous climate future. But this looks unlikely and the above scenario may become a reality earlier 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 1,000MW and in 2018 the plants supplied 4,475GWh of hydroelectricity into the Integrated Nepal Power System. New plants under construction will add 3,370MW, and new planned projects will generate an additional 4,562W. These do not include smaller community plants, export projects like Arun II, or storage projects like Budi Gandaki and West Seti.

When these are completed, Nepal will have 300 power plants with an installed capacity of 8,932MW. If we assume that each 1MW needs \$200,000 worth of investment, these projects will be valued at \$18 billion, and could produce about 40,000 GWh of electricity provided the hydrology of rivers, particularly their base flow, does not change.

Already, hydropower plants in fragile basins like the Bhothe Kosi face floods, landslides like the one in Jure in 2014, the earthquakes four years ago, and glacial lake outbursts. 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 86% of Nepalis have 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 show no signs of slowing.

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 climate change 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 they are designed for.

Data sets generated by existing plants 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 import of petroleum products by using indigenous hydro 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 inaction. I underplayed the dangers."

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

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

If we all stopped saying 'no problem' to everything and started actually implementing real solutions to Nepal's real problems, we as a country would be much farther ahead than where we are today.



Attracting and retaining the flow of foreign direct investment is a no brainer for a country with such potential as Nepal. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is not just cash coming in, it is knowledge, international exposure and experience, technical knowhow, and a decent rate of return

on investment that can be repatriated.

Currently, houses are being built, taxis are bought, and many restaurants are operating in Thamel or Pokhara with some kind of FDI or other. We just need to invest in improving the investment climate in Nepal, and scale these outlays up to include larger infrastructure projects.

The government has put out a list of 63 projects at the Nepal Investment Summit 29-30 March in Kathmandu which will be worth over \$30 billion dollars. There is also a negative list where FDI will not be allowed to protect local investors and producers, mainly in agro-based industries.

However, building trust will not be easy in a country

prabhu BANK

BIZ BRIEFS

The Great Move

Turkish Airlines is preparing to move to the new Istanbul International Airport on 5 April from its current home at Atatürk Airport. Over 10,000 pieces of equipment



weighing approximately 47,300 tons will be transferred in a move expected to last for 45 hours. Over 1,800 personnel will be involved in this operation.

Golden Vodka

Jawalakhel Group of Industries (JGI) launched Nepal's first premium Vodka with edible gold flakes called Ruslan Gold Reserve Vodka which is infused with real 23 carat gold flakes imported from Germany and certified by the European Food Grade. Every batch of Ruslan Gold Reserve Vodka is also tested at an ISO/IEC certified lab.

Fun at Tiger Palace

Tiger Palace Resort in Lumbini organised a full day of fun games, activities and lunch



for children from Nepal Anath Ashram orphanage as part of its corporate social responsibility initiative.

Buddha's New ATR

Budhha Air added a new ATR 72-500 to its fleet this week. The plane registered 9N-AMY landed this week in Kathmandu



after a flight from Tolouse in France. Buddha Air now has a fleet of 12 aircraft operating over 50 flights per day.

Cathay partnership



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NCell Super Seller

NCell launched a new Super Seller campaign targeting its retailers across Nepal. After purchasing recharge cards, SIM cards, and VFTs from Ncell S&D App, retailers will be eligible to participate in the campaign whose bumper prizes include a car, Europe tour package and iPhone X. The campaign started from 15 March and will be valid for 10 months.



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ALTON BYERS

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 'ke garne' attitude pervades politics and the bureaucracy. Internationals 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 project sites, 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 Shesh Ghale 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 rent-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 is the opposite of Nepal's *jagir* mentality where a job means a life time 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 '*mero manchhe*' by a local partner should be first signs of problems ahead. 

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc



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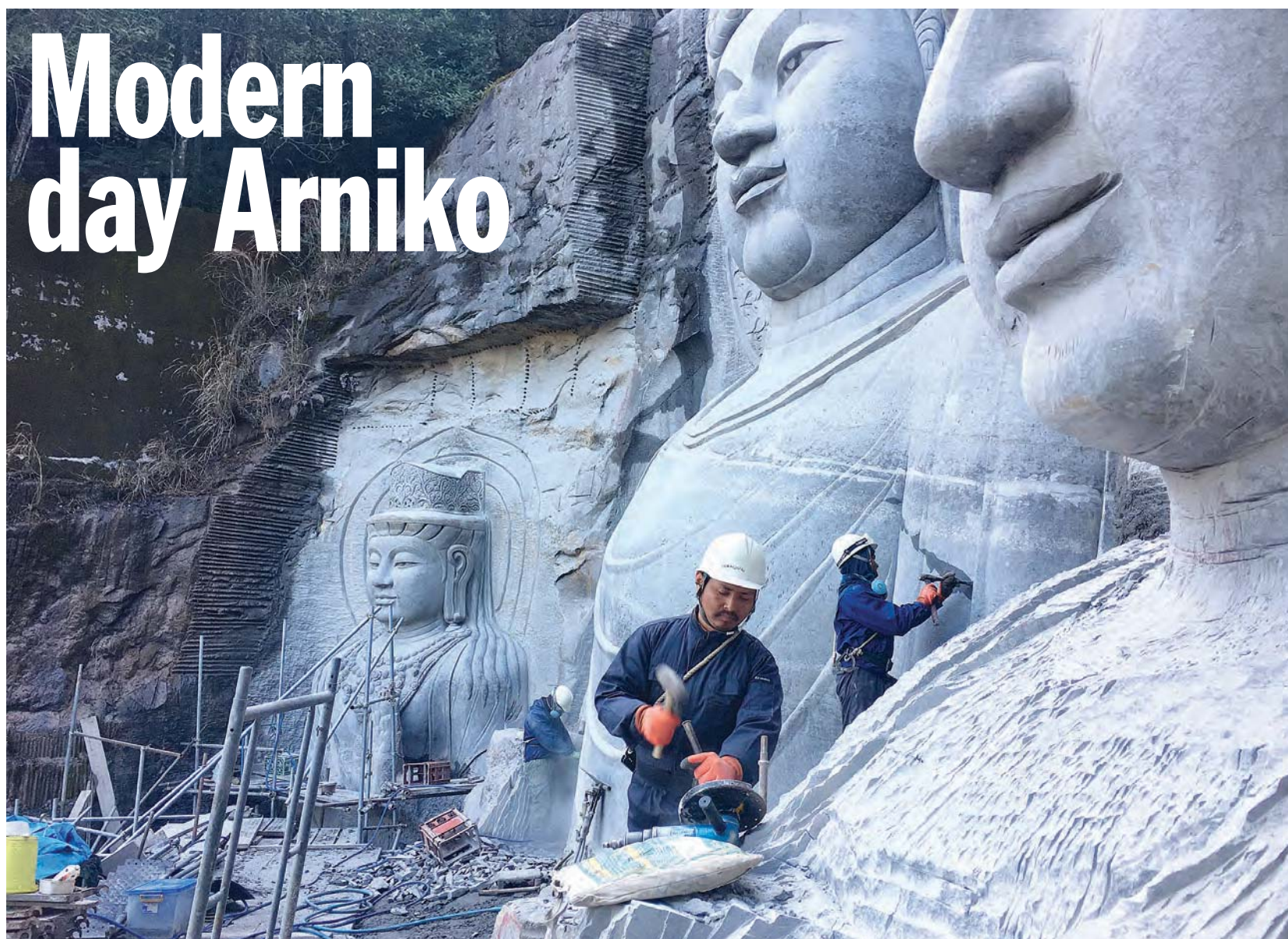
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Modern day Arniko



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

Gopal Gartaula

When he was younger, Manjul Baraili would be chiseling away into stone to create sculptures while 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 Baraili says. "But even though it was easy to dream, I needed tremendous help

from others to realise my dream."

Baraili'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, Baraili organised a press conference in Umlabari 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 Bindhyabasini is in Naikap, the stone figure of Kirat spiritual leader Falgunanda is in Sankranti Bazar of Tehrathum, and Bhanubhakta



Acharya's figure today stands in Damak in Jhapa.

After carving over 2,000 stone sculptures in the past 20 years, and being awarded the Rastriya Pratibha Puraskar for his creativity, Baraili started getting international commissions to build Buddha statues. He is currently in Kyushu with his team, hewing a 25m tall figure of the Buddha out of a rock face in Kumamoto (*left*). Three other Nepali artisans, Sanubhai Bika from Kavre, Ramchandra Pandit from Udaypur, and Ganesh Rai from Morang (*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 Baraili many things, including their graciousness 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 Baraili, 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, Baraili was in Nepal and talked to the authorities to suggest ways to promote Lumbini globally.

Baraili likes to orient his work around nature and peace. In a sculpture workshop organised by the Fine Arts Academy in Itahari last year, he created a statue called *The Earth Near Apocalypse* which depicted a missile buried in the planet. Another sculpture *The Invention of Peace* represents how to find good qualities in seemingly demonic people. Baraili explains: "The idea is to communicate abstract ideas about peace, nature, compassion through art so that you reach people at an emotional level."

But for Baraili the greatest thrill 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.

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A confluence of weak westerly fronts with localised convection systems along the mountains have lead to the early onset of spring storms this season. The thunderstorms this week are occurring earlier than usual. But warm moist air rising along the Himalaya, have been triggered by transpiration from unusually heavy winter precipitation. The weekend will be clear in Kathmandu, with some afternoon buildup. Stormy evenings in the high mountains.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
24° 11°	25° 11°	25° 12°

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MONIKA DAUPALA

Sewa Bhattarai

Nepalis are used to chillies. Our volcanic *akbare* 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 jalapeño, and were even listed in the Guinness Book in 2011 as the world’s hottest chillie. 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 jest, our one piece of unsolicited 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 Asan and was struck by the familiarity of it all. Bamboo shoots, dry fish, *timur* (Sichuan pepper) and *niguro* (fern) reminded her of Nagaland.

While the similarities excited her, she was even more intrigued by what could not be found in the local restaurant scene: 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. Nagas eat pork, rice and vegetables with pickles twice a day, and that staple is what she serves at the restaurant, along with other items from Manipur and Mizoram.

The food has distinct, pungent and exotic flavours which are a result of the cooking style and spicy ingredients. We are invited to the kitchen, where we watch as Yaptomi transforms a piece of pork with *timur*, a basil variant called *napa*, fern and fermented soya to make a succulent accompaniment to rice. There is hardly any fat or oil, so it is a healthy and heady mix – with the taste and flavour coming through loud and clear.

Yaptomi has difficulty finding the right kinds of dry fish, so 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. Once, 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.

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MANTRA
Spa & Wellness

The Buddha born in L

As a new international airport is built near Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, the city prepares for the influx of pilgrims and tourists.

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 marker stone at the exact spot where the Buddha was born 2,642 years ago, and it already receives 1.6 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 Metteyya Sakyaputta

(Awadesh 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 Metteyya.

Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari 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 Metteyya says most of the remaining work in infrastructure, drainage, waste water treatment facility, walkways, a centralised 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.



Buddha was born in Lumbini

Airport nears completion, for a rush of visitors

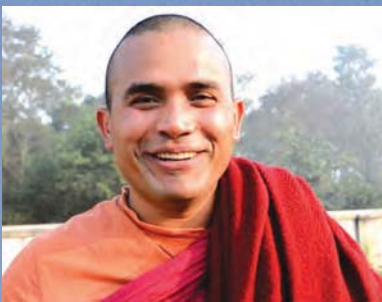
The temples are grandiose, and get a lot of visitors but there is not enough signage and information for visitors to learn from the significance that Buddhism has in sects within countries. Tourists and pilgrims can be seen clicking selfies without meaningful immersion and learning. The app, and the upgraded museum are expected to ease this problem.

Ven Metteyya (*pictured, 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 neighbouring 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 29 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. Ramagrama Stupa in Nawalparasi has some of the Buddha’s corporeal remains.



OMASTHARAI

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 enriches 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 increase in pilgrims and tourists, new hotels have started coming up in the Lumbini-Bhairawa-Butwal 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 to 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. 🇳🇵

BUDDHA'S LUMBINI



Lumbini is preparing for a new surge of pilgrims and visitors as a new international airport in Bhairawa nears completion. Follow our reporter to Lumbini and see for yourself how it is developing and expanding to boost pilgrimage and tourism.

nepalitimes.com



EVENTS



Love revisited

An exhibition of mixed media artworks by Ragini Upadhyaya Grell, an eminent Nepali artist who was previously the chancellor of Nepal Academy of Fine Arts. *Until 13 April, 12 to 7:30pm (On Saturdays: 9am to 4pm), Kathmandu Art, LeSherpa, 9851177901*

Fuzzscape

This multimedia exhibition showcases documentaries from Bhojpur, Janakpur and Manang as musicians travel to these places and collaborate with local artists to create original tunes infused with traditional touch. *Until March 31 (except Saturdays and Sundays), 10am-5pm, British Council Atrium, Lainchaur, (01)4237700*

Talk with Satya Mohan Joshi

Legendary Nepali writer, researcher and historian Satya Mohan Joshi will share his ideas. *25 March, 10-11:30am, National College, Dhumbarahi, (01)4420871*

Let's Talk

This month, the discussion topic is violence against women and the #MeToo movement. *23 March, 1-3pm, Bent Fork, Baluwatar, 9841444381*



Women Trade Expo

The fourth edition of this expo will bring women-crafted products such as clothing, handicrafts and even agricultural produces. 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, Sanepa, 4239942 (hosts)*

Movie

The special theme of Women In Movies through March will conclude with the critically acclaimed 2018 drama *Can You Ever Forgive Me*. *25 March, 7-9pm, Base Camp Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397*



The Great Giant Leap

An audio visual performance with a compelling wildlife theme dedicated to the desert and The Great Indian Bustard. This species of bird found in Rajasthan is in the brink of extinction. *23 March, 6:30-9pm, Rs500, Rs300 (students), free for children below 12, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, waspconcerts@gmail.com (organisers)*



Yoga for Beginners

Those who have never tried Yoga before can sign up for this workshop to learn some basic stretches and poses to experience the health benefits of yoga. There will be 6 consecutive classes for 75 minutes each. *24-29 March, 4:30 to 5:45pm, Rs4000, Soorya Wellness Centre, Laazimpat, (01)4001714 / 19, 9818481972*

Happiness Program

Be a part of a 3-day course by The Art of Living to rejuvenate your mind and reduce stress by learning the Sudarshan Kriya. Preregistration required. *28-30 March, Gyan Mandala, Jhamsikhel, 9843527048, 9851177642*

MUSIC



The Elements

The Elements is a three-member band and their live shows combine story-telling and music-making. *22 March, 8pm, Helena's restaurant, (01)4266979*

The Gentleman

Dev Rana and Jyoti Ghimire lead the formation to perform three hours of their original music, covers of the western and Nepali rock and roll, blues and other musical genres. *22 March, 7-10pm, Social Cafe, Gairidhara, (01)4427370*



Karma Band

The popular Nepali folk rock band perform some of their hit songs along with Hari Maharjan. *23 March, 5:30pm, Countdown 4 Restaurant & Bar, Gairidhara, Lumbini, (078)501441*

Saili Night

Popular Nepali Singer Hemanta Rana and musician Kali Prasad Banskota will perform with the Innercore Band. *23 March, 8pm, Lord of the Drinks, Thamel, 9843948991*

Pahenlo Batti Muni

The band Pahenlo Batti Muni will be performing this Friday night as part of the Base Camp Music Festival. *22 March, 6:30-9:30pm, Rs300, Base Camp Outdoor Lifestyle, Jhamsikhel*

DINING



Utopia

Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel's noisy streets, Utopia features Newari dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines. *Ekantakuna, 9849592412*

Beer and kebabs

Shangri-La 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 combinations. *Until 8 April, Shangri-La Hotel, Lazimpat, (01)4412999 and Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara (061)462222*

Weekend Brunch

A fulfilling brunch buffet featuring barbecue, kebab stations, antipasti, live station and delicious desserts. The price also includes swimming and some complimentary drinks. *Every Saturday and Sunday, 12:30 to 4pm, Rs2699++per person, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency, Bouddha (01)5171234 / 4217123*



Momo Monday

Enjoy a 50% discount on all types of steamed momos. *Every Monday, Classic Momo, Naxal, (01)4428648*

Chimes Restaurant

The restaurant brings an edition of 'Barbeque, Dumplings, Burgers and Beers' for a hearty and enjoyable Saturday afternoon. You can enjoy over 25 variations of beer as well as diverse dishes from over the world. *Chimes restaurant, 12-6pm, Sanepa, (01)5549673*

GETAWAY



Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur

A Newari-style boutique hotel that incorporates the rich art and architecture of the ancient city of Bhaktapur. The culture starts and ends at the gate of the hotel. *Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur, (01) 6611628*

Nirvana Country Club Health & Golf Resorts

Forty-five minutes from Biratnagar Airport, this 9-hole course in Dharan was built at a former recruitment and pension base for the British Brigade of Gurkhas in 1962. The course is par-70 over 18 holes. *Ghopa Camp, Dharan, (025) 525555*



Dwarika's Resort

A holistic retreat, drawing on ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and for oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings. *Dhulikhel, (011) 490612*

Meghauli Serai

Relax with fine dining and wildlife safaris in Chitwan at Taj Safari's luxurious lodge. *Chitwan National Park, 9851218500*



Yoga retreat

Yoga Room is hosting a 2-day workshop that can help you de-stress and discover yourself. The workshop is at the newly constructed Vishuddhi Alaya, a beautiful retreat place for personal development located 42 km east of Kathmandu at Phulbari, Namobuddha. Contact Yoga Room for registration and details. *30-31 March, Yoga Room, yogaroomktm@gmail.com, 9818154225, 9823110018*

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NEW Arrivals

Show Room: SRD Building New Plaza, Putalisadak, Tel:4425402

OUR PICK

Opened in Kathmandu on 21 March

Kesari is based on the Battle of Saragarhi, considered one of the greatest last-stands in the military history. In 1897, 21 soldiers of the Sikh Regiment of the British Army fought to death against thousands of Afghan tribesmen. Written and directed by Anurag Singh, the film stars Akshay Kumar as a farmer- turned-warrior Isher Singh who leads the Sikh battalion and Parineeti Chopra as his deceased wife.

AIR QUALITY INDEX KATHMANDU, 15 - 21 March

Index Range	Category	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
301 - 500	Hazardous							
201 - 300	Very Unhealthy							
151 - 200	Unhealthy							
101 - 150	Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 - 100	Moderate							
0 - 50	Good							

Legend: PM2.5 (black line), Ozone (grey line)

This week's AQI numbers look as colorful as Holi pictures in the Red and Yellow Zone but remain 'Unhealthy' despite regular rain breaks. The hourly AQI measurements show that pollution levels have even dropped to the Green Normal Band, but stay there only for a few hours and rise again to Unhealthy once traffic picks up. Surprisingly, ozone has consistently remained 'Unhealthy' during the whole week, possibly due to heavy motorcycle traffic. Even the Holi holiday on Wednesday did not make a dent in the pollution levels in Kathmandu city centre.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Toya Gurung: Nepali literature's Thulnani

When I first saw Toya Gurung's name in an anthology of poems, I thought she had to be Japanese. I had known of no Gurung women writers. "Toyé means water, and toyā means lotus," she tells me in the living room of her home in Baneswor that sits on a street named after her.



LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION
Muna Gurung

Her house is surrounded by junipers, the inspiration behind her book-length poem *Dhoop* (The Juniper), and later when we walk into her wild garden full of roses and angelias, Toya will look like a dandelion puff, floating in the green, wearing a crown of soft white hair.

Born in 1947, Toya Gurung was the oldest of seven siblings and lovingly called *Thulnani* (eldest girl child) by her family and dear ones. Since her father was in the Nepal Army and posted at various places, Toya spent much of her childhood travelling around Nepal and India. She has published two poetry collections (*Suryadaha*, *Dewal Ghumepachi*), two long poems (*Dhoopi*, *Punarawati*), a collection of stories (*Kusum*), and as of last year, a period-memoir (*Asprishya*) written in an unconventional form of diary entries, poems and memories. But these books were published quietly: no launches, no fanfare. "I don't want to make noise," she says. Toya was the country's first female at the Nepal Academy where she headed the poetry department from 2000-2005.

Toya's poems are not only read widely in Nepali universities, but they also have an international audience. Translated by Ann Hunkins, some of her poems have appeared in Norton's *Language for a New Century* and in *Dānta*, a literary magazine from the University of Notre Dame. Writer Manjushree Thapa best describes Toya's writing as 'taut and hallucinatory ... that suggests rather than tells, evokes rather than explains' and the tone as 'often wry, playful, and ironic'.

On a lazy mid-week afternoon, Toya and I talk about being called to poetry through divine interventions, the joy and pain of writing, the craft, and loneliness.

Toya Gurung: In 1971, Kedar Man Vyathit, who was the chancellor of Nepal Academy, asked me to recite a poem. I had just graduated from Morang College in Biratnagar and was lucky to be part of a literary gathering there. Vyathit told me that he would publish a collection of my poems from Nepal Academy if I could bring him 50 of my poems.

Muna Gurung: A book deal after a recitation?

T: Yes, but it was like that back then, being published was not as complicated as it appears to be today. I was overjoyed. I was only 24 and a famous writer from Kathmandu was going to publish me. In 1972, our convocation was happening in Kathmandu, so I arrived with my poems. Later, when I asked the Academy if they had published the poems, they said they had lost the manuscript.

M: No.

T: I was so sad, I cried for days. You cannot re-write poems you had written at that age -- those poems were gone from me.

M: That is such a sad story.

T: I cried to Muwa, who was wise and never spoke much but always knew what to say to me. She said, *Thulnani, where will your*



MONIKA DEUPALA

talent go? Nowhere. It is in you. Do not cry. You were born to do this, so keep writing.

M: Your mother was a poet.

T: By far a bigger poet than I could ever be. She never went to school but she grew up around a lot of Hindu scriptures written and recited in verse. Her knowledge was vast and her wisdom unmarked. I keep everything Muwa said to 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 world, this earth, the trees, the skies belong to everyone. Why do you make your heart so small? You do not need to own things, Thulnani, everywhere is your home.*

A day before I was born, she said that a *jogi* 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 desired and invited by nature.

T: Yes, maybe nature wanted me to exist. And you, too. Because how did *you* come to literature? We are Gurungs, it is not something we do. (Laughs). There are so 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.

T: 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 headmaster, Kamal Sharma, was Nepali. He asked me to recite a poem in front of the school. Why me? Why a poem? Then later in Bhojpur, where I went to school with Manjul, every Friday students got to perform. One Friday, Manjul's piece of paper said he had to sing a song. Then it was my turn, my piece of paper read, *Recite a poem*. Again, why a poem? So I recited *Mero Itihaas Bannecha*.

OM: That is your first poem. You mean you just recited it off the top of your head?

T: 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 to the poem came out of my mouth.

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

T: (Smiles). These days though, I feel like all the accolades, recognition, they are nothing. I am all by myself. When Doris Lessing 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 use is it?* she had asked. There are very few people who truly understand the pain of a poet, a writer, a thinker. Maybe that is why I feel lonely these days. I used to share my sorrows with Muwa but she died five years ago. My husband, who loved me immeasurably, who never raised his voice at me or uttered a single hurtful word, also passed away three years ago. I have sisters, but they have their own lives. Sometimes I feel like I have become a book. Who will write about me now? No one.

M: I want to echo your mother: but this world, this earth, the trees ... it is yours. What you have written will never go away.

T: That is true. I loved reading Wordsworth and his two poems *Lucy Gray* and *The Solitary Reaper* in 8th grade. I don't think he imagined a Nepali girl in Bhojpur would be reading them! Both the poems were about hill women and I saw myself in them. I, too, wanted to write about my country, 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 I lift it even a little higher, it will be spoiled. But I am sure many will pick up my poems and see how 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, Christina Olivares, says that a poet's job is to observe the world with accuracy and honesty. In the first chapter of Asprishya, you observe a crow eating a baby magpie for at least a page.

T: Observation is everything. For my first book of poems, *Suryadaha*, 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 ocean. I had never seen anything like that body of water: vast, unforgiving and kind at the same time. And the ocean met 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 alone 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 poem. But they come from very deep within me, I thoroughly feel them grow and then they rise up.

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

T: I could not write full-time, because literature is not a shop, it is not something that has immediate return. And maybe that is not something we should wish out of it either. So, I had to work 10AM-4:30PM. But in between bank vouchers and punching 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 Bhugol Park building. There was a *bakaina* tree outside my window that gave me shade and invited sweet breeze. I wrote many poems at that window. But you know, later they cut down that tree. I was so sad, I wrote *Rukh Mitho* (Tree Sweet), which Ann later translated for an American literary magazine.

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

T: Once 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 wrestle with

it a little, but I do not stop until I finish the poem. The other ladies at the bank knew not to disturb me if I was scribbling away. Once I am finished with a poem, I hardly go back to mess with it again. I write a poem every 2 or 3 days. Being alone is hard but it is also the best for writing. I don't have to talk to anyone. I just think, read, and write. I make two small meals for myself. I pretend to sweep and clean. When I do housework, I get dizzy. When I am reading or writing, I feel relaxed. But my hands and finger joints hurt so I can't write for too long. My legs hurt so I cannot sit or stand for too long. Some days, I have to wear a neck brace. All this pain makes me want to cry, but I don't. There is no one to console me. Instead, I just listen to the radio.

Annex

(Short story from *Kusum*)

I have bowed down to my friend Brenda Jayasundera many times. Whenever I arrived at her house from Nepal, she would try to press her neck against mine in an attempt to hug me. At the beginning, I didn't know how to join necks. Many times, when she tried to bring her neck towards mine, I fumbled. Sometimes my nose would hit her forehead, and sometimes my head would meet her shoulder. She used to simply smile and say, "How innocent you are."

We don't have a culture of hugging. Besides those closely related to us, touching another's body disgusts us. I wasn't disgusted by Brenda. She and I had a spiritual connection. When she was by herself, we would eat with her. It was because of her that we didn't move elsewhere throughout our time in Colombo.

The civil war started. For a long period of time, we couldn't eat what we wanted to eat, or go where we wanted to go.

I used to wear a *tika* on my forehead. She said,

"Don't wear a *tika*. Those who wear *tika* are seen as separatists." I listened to her.

There was a door between the kitchen in the annex where we lived and her living room. That day, the door was unlatched. I pushed it open and saw that in her living room, she had beautiful large wood-carved cupboards full of western books. One by one I got a chance to read many of them.

I fell in love with *East Wind West Wind* by Pearl S Buck. I wanted to ask her for it, but I didn't. She probably would have given it to me, but I read the book and put it back in the shelf. Many times, I wanted to sit with her and talk to her about her books.

Then another day, I found myself at the door again. I pushed it open. Her dog was there. His name was Timi. Next to Timi, a coiled up green snake. I was scared to walk to where the books were. Timi was sound asleep. What is the relationship between the dog and the snake? I stood by the door and looked at them for a long while.

November 25, 1996



Watch Toya Gurung talk about pain and joys of writing, and recite her favourite poems.

nepalitimes.com

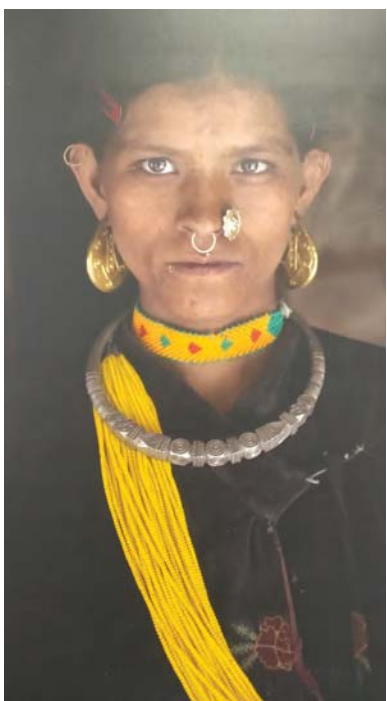
Art and photography



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 Baral and Ramesh Bhushal, the result of a 44-day journey from the origins of Karnali to its confluence with the Ganga which was featured in this newspaper in February. The photos reflected the diversity of life in this far-flung region from the mountain communities in the north to the Tharu villages 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 Sonaha 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: from the barren browns of northern desert to bright greens of the rivers, and the multi-hued clothes and ornaments of women. The elegant pyramid of Mt Kailash 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 tightly 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. 

The Karnali: Photos from the Sacred River Corridor

*In Memory of Uttam Kharel
Nepal Art Council, Babermahal*



EU

HOUSE WARMING: Ambassadors of EU member states pose at the inauguration of the group's new office premises in Lazimpat on Monday in the presence of Vice-president Nanda Kishore Pun.



US EMBASSY

DIGITAL FIRST: US Ambassador to Nepal Randy Berry with Nepal's Mayor Dhawal Rana and Deputy Mayor Uma Thapa Magar unveiled a digital information board last week.



ANFARSS

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



SEWA BHATTARAI

HOLI DAY: Shopkeepers and vendors alike rejoice in the colours of Holi in Birganj on Thursday as the Tarai observed the festival.

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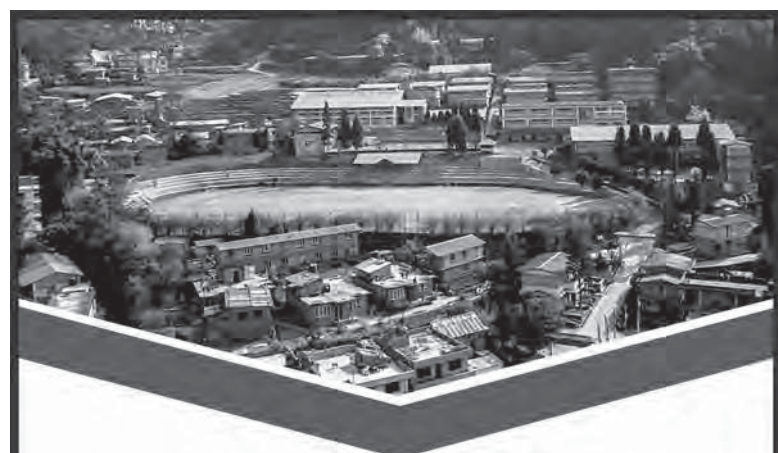


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For Nepal, a game-changer in TB control

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 2000-2015, 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 medieval 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 2017.

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 28 million lives in the next 10 years.

These shocking figures may seem like numbing statistics, 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 in any random patient: Is this TB? This is in sharp contrast to the western world where TB is essentially a biblical 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



ANTONIO BELTRÁN RODRÍGUEZ

TB OR NOT TB: Birat Nepal Medical Trust team in Hetauda on Wednesday used the Holi festival to raise awareness about tuberculosis in Nepal.

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 diagnosis 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 1.6 million to 2.9 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 1950-60s this epidemiologist worked with the largely Inuit population in the town of Bethel 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 Bethel. 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 resounding impact in the control of TB. Indeed, this 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) emphasised 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 95% 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** is with the Britain Nepal Medical Trust in Kathmandu.







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4 years after quake, Sankhu rises



SONAM CHOEKYI LAMA

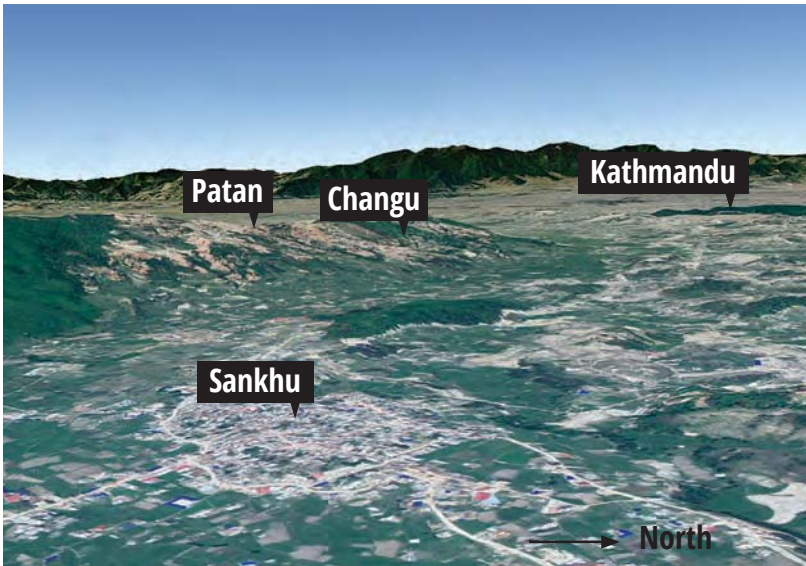


ROJITA ADHIKARI

LIFE GOES ON: Nanmaiju Prajapati picks up the pieces of her life from the ruins of her home in Sankhu that collapsed during the earthquake four years ago killing her husband, daughter, son-in-law and two grand-children (*left*).

This week, Prajapati stood outside her partially rebuilt neighbourhood with her surviving grandson (*above*).

Sankhu Mayor Subarna Shrestha (*below*).



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 northeast of Kathmandu. More than 6,000 of Sankhu’s monuments and homes made of brick and mud were destroyed.

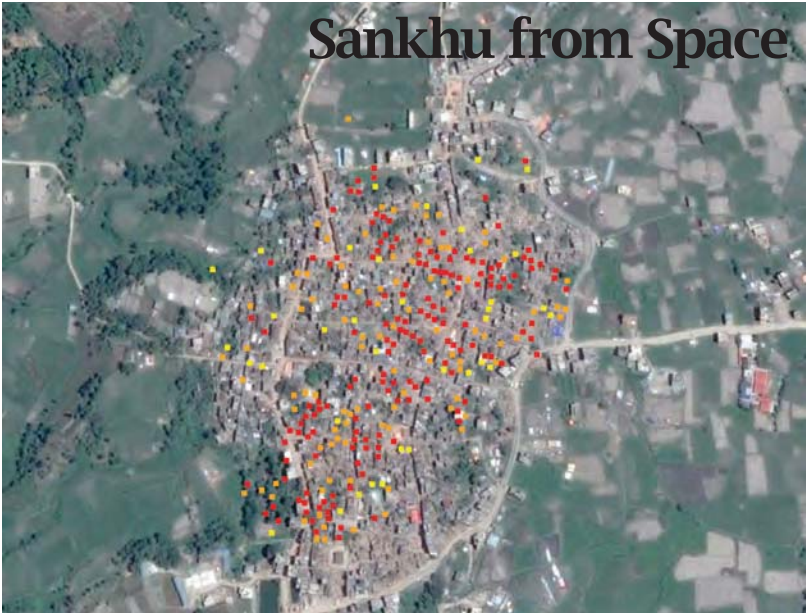
Before the 2017 elections, only

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

Mayor Subarna Shrestha says the progress is mainly due to decentralisation 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.”

Suresh 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).

from the dust

bureaucratic hurdles, and it is also working with local communities and heritage experts to help us gear up,” says Pradhan, but adds that a lot more needs to be done more rapidly.



The township gets its name from its conch-like shape and earliest records of settlements here go back more than 1,000 years to the Lichhavi Era. Located below the ancient temple at Changu Narayan, Sankhu has important Hindu-Buddhist shrines like its Mahadev Temple and nearby Bajrayogini.

The town had escaped the uncontrolled urbanisation of the nearby Kathmandu suburbs of Gokarna and Jorpati, but the new Melamchi highway and a spurt in post-earthquake reconstruction has unleashed a building spree along the fertile floodplains of the Manohara River.

Says Suresh Pradhan: “Yes, a lot of the buildings have been rebuilt in the past year, 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 Subarna 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 as in other parts of the Valley 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 given Rs100,000 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 unreconisable 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 Daya 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 Rs300,000 in three tranches is slow in coming and is not enough. Indira Maya Shrestha, 60, lives a house that has now been divided into three portions by inheritance. She only got Rs15,000 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 Subarna 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.

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Reshuffle, anyone?

If 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 Balu Water this week. The rumour of an impending cabinet reshuffle was swiftly and vigorously denied by the Minister of Alterantive 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 Primeval Minister would like to give Drinking Water Minister Bina the sack but Daddy-in-Law warned Oli before leaving for the States that if he did that Underfinanced Minister Khatiwada would have to go, too.

Oli would also like to kick out Infrastructure Minister Mahaset, but the man’s bro-in-law happens to be a major mover, shaker and party funder (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 Shock and Tourism.

There is also a possibility that CK Raut’s Referendum Party will join the grabberment 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 boat 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 gossip from the Directorate of Military Intelligentsia.

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-duper Ministry.

The Ministry of Foreigner Affairs will be merged with the Home Ministry and will decide if hubbies are Biharis 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 Damn Building as well as the Ministry of Ministers without Portfolios.

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



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