LONG SHADOWS

The year since the Nepal Communist Party government came to power has seen a creeping squeeze on the media space, both online and in the mainstream press. The Civil and Criminal Codes first criminalised photos and cartoons that ridiculed politicians and then put official documents out of bounds for media.

Journalists have been arrested and ordinary citizens, including a singer, have been trolled and threatened for social media posts. Reporters without Borders ranked Nepal at 106 among 180 countries in its Press Freedom Index 2019, a six-point drop from last year.

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) says there were 38 violations of media freedom by the state last year. They included attacks, threats, abuse and even the disappearance of one journalist. FNJ this week submitted a letter to the co-chair of the ruling NCP, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, as well as to opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, drawing their attention to the crackdowns. The nature and number of incidents have come down from the previous year, but legal challenges have increased, says FNJ general secretary Ramesh Riha.

"Journalists are being arrested through laws not designed for the media, but the Electronic Transactions Act, which usually applies to hacking," says Riha. "The government is preparing a draft for online content and an umbrella law for all media that includes provisions which could affect journalists in their work. We see very concerned about the negative impact this will have on the constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of expression in Nepal."

Historically, Nepal has been a safe country for journalists since the end of the absolute monarchy, although there was a period in 2016 when reporters and editors were silenced. On paper, Nepal has some of the most progressive laws on press freedom, and is one of the few countries where the right to information is also applicable to politicians. However, these laws have been superseded by potentially draconian provisions which could allow the state to deny these rights.

"The Criminal Code of 2017 has criminalised the violation of privacy and prohibits investigating records and documents, which directly hampers the work of journalists. Individual privacy should be protected, but the law should not be applicable to public figures," says Namrata Sharma, Chair of the Centre for Investigative Journalism. Nepal.

"The Constitution prohibits acts or speech against national interest and sovereignty, and that can be used against journalists, which is a matter of great concern."

SUP-PRESS: Journalists taking part in a rally on Tuesday ahead of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May were stopped by barricades and riot police outside Parliament in Kathmandu.

Activists at a rally a few days before World Press Freedom Day on 3 May said the ruling NCP’s attitude towards the media has been antagonistic. Minister of Communication and Information Technology Geku Basanta has publicly censored media criticism of the government. A person who posted an unfavouring, photo-shopped image of the prime minister online was arrested, singer Pushpali Sharma was forced to delete a music video on YouTube that ridiculed corruption, and Pokhara reporter Arjun Giri was arrested over a defamation complaint under the cybersecurity law.

Sewa Bhattachar

experience a journey like never before

Fly with us and find yourself in a world where you have only ever imagined. Take advantage of our incredible offers and experience premium travel like never before.

20% on premium fares* 25% on companion offer in premium Double Olympic upgrade from £

For terms and conditions apply, please review the time of booking.

Qatar Airways

www.qatarairways.com

Qatar Airways

www.qcfaq.com

Qatar Airways

www.qcfaq.com

Qatar Airways

www.qcfaq.com

Qatar Airways

www.qcfaq.com

Qatar Airways
While the Government of Nepal is taking pains to polish its human rights image internationally, its actions at home belies the perception of a global rights champion. Nepal became a member of the revamped UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2018 for the first time, furnishing it with its position until 2020. On 27 February 2019, Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali addressed the UNHRC, telling it Nepal had embarked on the final leg of the peace process by extending the terms of two commissions: one on truth and reconciliation, the other on human rights. The process would be guided by the Comprehensive Peace Accords of 2006, Supreme Court directives, international human rights commitments, victims’ concerns and ground realities, Gyawali assured the UNHRC.

Subsequently, the government put on a ebullient and insistent act to amend the Act, even asking representatives of the international community in Kathmandu for their suggestions. It was a move. As a result, on 12 April five HRC officials wrote to the government pointing out shortcomings in the truth and reconciliation process, including the ‘reported lack of impartiality, independence and transparency’ in the selection of new heads of the two commissions. While the government takes pains to show the world that it is working for those who suffered rights violations during the 1996-2006 conflict, and their families, at home a proposed law threatens to weaken the national institution tasked with ensuring the human rights of all Nepalis — the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

A proposed amendment to the NHRC Act 2012 would require the rights body to have its recommendations for action against perpetrators of alleged violations veted by the attorney general. This is a drastic step that the NHRC is a constitutional body, a status given in the interim Constitution in 2007 precisely so that the NHRC can investigate alleged violations independent of government interference. In fact, the 2012 NHRC Act contained the same provision, section 17 (10), until it was deleted null and void by the Supreme Court on 6 March 2013. Following a challenge by lawyer Om Prakash Aryal. The court ruled that as a constitutional body, the NHRC was capable and empowered to decide if a case should be pursued and that the attorney general could not overturn such decisions.

The revised Act, discussed by the parliamentary committees on law, justice and human rights this week, would reintroduce 17 (10) in a slightly different wording, then go a step further by giving the AG the power to ask the NHRC to conduct criminal investigations.

Ironically, when Nepal was campaigning for governments to support its bid for an NHRC seat in Geneva, it noted a human rights activist: ‘The National Human Rights Commission, established as an independent institution only in 2006, has now been elevated to a powerful constitutional body with a commensurate mandate and resources. It embodies the rights of all people to determine their own political destiny.’ And in his speech in February, Gyawali called the UNHRC ‘a pioneer for mainstreaming the global rights agenda into its national policies and plans. Yet since the NHRC came into being in 2006, just 12.5 percent of its 810 recommendations have been fully implemented, 48.3 percent were implemented partially and 39.2 percent are under consideration. These statistics are misleading as the only two recommendations focused upon concern compensation — those calling for action against perpetrators have been ignored. Notably, all political parties that have held power in the past two decades have failed the NHRC, including the opposition groups now railing against the proposed amendments.

The NHRC reportedly recommended 17 changes to the revised NHRC Act 2012, all of which were ignored in the version sent to Parliament. The root of the ingrained culture of impunity and lack of accountability in Nepal today is the many perpetrators who literally got away with mass murder in the past. While truth-telling and compensation are important, without justice being seen to be done, the peace process will never really be over, we have seen with a Maoist faction still on the war path.

Now that victims are united and the way forward has been clearly laid out by the Supreme Court and international law, what’s also needed is finally advance transitional justice is a fresh state of commissioners in both the enforced disappearances and truth and reconciliation bodies. In February, Gyawali announced Nepal’s candidacy for a second term to the UNHRC 2021 to 2023. That election will be decided primarily on geopolitical considerations, but the Nepali government could help its own cause by finally addressing the demand for truth and justice so conflict victims and their families have closure, and by ceasing the independence of the NHRC.
WATCH THE EXCITEMENT TAKE OFF

Amateur Golfers from around the globe come together for the Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup Amateur Series.

The 2019 series include 103 qualifying events taking place in 71 different countries.

Be part of it.

turkishairlines.com/golf twitter.com/T_A_GOLF facebook.com/TurkishAirlinesGolf
People now visit from all over Nepal, and from around the world, to ‘see and do’ something at this sacred site. This is because many visitors walk away muttering that there is really ‘nothing to see and nothing to do in Lumbini’. In a strange way this is what the Buddha would have wanted in terms of educating people about the path to a life without suffering. The birthplace of the Buddha should be quiet, serene and natural, with plenty of opportunities for self-reflection, meditation, de-stressing, but no闪光.(The Slogon of the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign is very appropriate for Lumbini — a “Life-Time Experience”. People who know only the Lumbini of the Buddha was born in Nepal, but very little else about his life and teachings, are vapidly disappointed when they take a long bus ride on a currently very dusty wide road, get off at a dirty bus stand, walk or take a noisy bear ride on the Central Gain, buy a ticket, take off their shoes and walk to the building that houses the monk and austerity stumps, then out to the pond, the Sarnath Pillar and back again.

There is no one to explain anything. Who was the Buddha, who was Maya Devi, what was his childhood like, what did he teach, why do we remember him 2,500 years later?

Organized groups have guides — the majority of Nepali visitors do not. Outside the sacred garden, a young entrepreneur is designing and building a Buddharama, where visitors will be able to experience an eight-part sound and light show that captures the life of the Buddha with robot characters. Lumbini is a World Heritage Site and a place of faith for millions from around the world, it should be managed as a sacred space, but also create jobs and economic opportunities for the local communities who need an incentive to preserve it, as did the people here two and a half millennia ago.

The greater Lumbini area offers visitors a chance to understand the childhood, youth and family life of Siddhartha, his return to meet family after enlightenment and much more. Without a guide and proper storytelling tools, the sites are a pile of bricks and little sites. We need to bring these important relics to life.

A new museum should be a life-changing experience influenced by the life and teachings of the Buddha. The planned world class Lumbini Museum in buildings designed by Kenzo Tange should be a big contribution. However, a very disturbing aspect of Lumbini today is the multiple construction sites, including inside the zone set aside by ‘Tangye’ in his Lumbini Master Plan. We have to prevent Lumbini turning into a Buddhist Disneyland. The many motorbike rides on the canal (and the gaudy monuments are the results of this theme park in progress).

We need a full moratorium on any more construction inside the sacred garden. We need to assure that people expect here is being interrupted by constant noise of construction. This may require one final push for fund raising, but we need to close Lumbini.

We need to focus new resources and investment on upgrading facilities, developing the site and surrounding areas, and creating a new tourism model. Even before the international airport is completed, there is an economic boom of new hotels and infrastructure in the Makwanpur-Lumbini-Butwal triangle. Meanwhile, Lumbini itself needs better signage, transportation to get from one part of the garden to the other, and more toilets (with showers and lockers). There have to be many more guides with passion, knowledge, and as well as opportunities for inclusion for those who cannot or need not meditate.

All the monasteries, monastry and staff have to be oriented on what is expected when you see it. They are residing here. And what about day and week passes for unlimited rides on electric buses to the greater Lumbini areas? With Visit Nepal Year and Visit Lumbini Year around the corner, a lot more work remains to be done in convincing this phase and future generations closer to the Buddha’s teachings.

And Chitrakar, President of Siddhachakra

---

Lumbini is not a Buddhist Disneyland

There must be a moratorium on new construction

Carbon-neutral Yeti

Yeti Airlines says it has become the first carbon-neutral airline in Nepal by reducing and offsetting its greenhouse gas emissions, after undertaking an independent carbon audit facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The audit revealed that the airline produced 19,005 tons of CO2 equivalent in 2018, including 10,005 tons from flights, ground vehicles and other facilities. In the previous year the airline reduced carbon emission by 20% per passenger and by a further 14% with more fuel-efficient aircraft. The airline reduced its fourth苑392 in 2017, and expects another next year.

Yeti also offsets its greenhouse gas emissions by purchasing certified reductions carbon credits through its green forest project. “UNDP would like to congratulate Yeti for its efforts in becoming the first carbon-neutral airline in Nepal after having successfully met the international LCC program on carbon neutrality,” said UNDP Nepal Representative Aplonio Metelgonda Loa.

Heritage Walk

NBA Bank Organizes the 8th NBA Bank Heritage Walk (2019) as a part of World Heritage Day. Representatives from the Bank’s Board of Directors and Surk RC CEO, Chief Executive Officer, inaugurated the event. Over the years, NBA Bank has been working to create awareness on preservation of heritage sites. This initiative, 8th in its 16th anniversary, has been organizing the Heritage Walk for the past seven years. A car-organized trip was embolden with following the walk.

Call Aayo Paisa Payo

Bajaj Auto has launched a custom-built party campaign, Call Aayo Paisa Payo. Customers will receive a Rs 2,000 cashback for every minute of international call they receive, from any country, that goes beyond 2 minutes up to 10 minutes maximum. The offer, which started 29 April, will run for three months. A Samsung Galaxy A20 will be rewarded weekly to a customer who meets the campaign’s criteria.

Mega Offer

As part of its Mother’s Week Celebration, Mega has introduced a unique offer and pay scheme through Mega Smart Banking. This includes 50% cash back or Rs 4,000 at Malls, Restaurants and Gas Stations using the PaySure QR code. The offer is valid from 28 April to 4 May.

---

Rox rocks again

“We make almost 85% of ingredients in the restaurant, it helps to maintain consistency,” explains Dhari Khadka, Sous Chef at the hotel.

Rox has surpassed its regular pasta fare by adding homemade spinach and ricotta ravioli and truffles mushroom sauce. The ravioli is crunchy, the spinach soft and the cheese melts in the mouth.

Another new dish on the pasta menu is the seafood linguine, which despite Nepal’s landlocked status is surprisingly fresh and indulged with rich organic tomato flavoured. One bite of this dish transports or straight to a sea front restaurant in Rimini.

On to the main course. Two dishes that seem popular are oven baked, Tuscan-style, whole Himalayan rainbow trout and duck breast with pumpkin puree and fava bean nagoon. I will not attempt to describe the taste — suffice to say that it hits the spot. The whole trout is first grilled with herbs, while the large chunks of duck meat and vegetables make for a unique combination of fish, duck and plant. The pumpkin puree, while a little sweet, complements the combo.

Trattoria and cassata are two new desserts already popular with Rox regulars. The trattoria is a homemade torte, while the layers of pistachio-caramel-strawberry ice-cream patterned after the green red white Italian flag to the cassata mahogany you want to stand up, sing the Il Canto degli Italiani and salute. The nuts and marzipan comes out, the dish a welcome addition.

Vegetarians and the health-conscious will be pleased with the Rox’s crunchy and fresh organic vegetables — you can actually taste the goodness. Dinner is served from 6PM to 10PM.

With a show kitchen, wood oven and authentic Italian cuisine, the Rox is no longer just a stopover while wandering the traffic — it’s a destination on its own.

Reed KC
Turkish global golf in Gokarna

This year’s tournament will be in memory of Ali Ergin, Sheba Airline’s chairman, who also manages the Gokarna Forest Resort. Pakistan’s champion Madhav Asrani attended the grand finale at Asrani last year.

Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup was initiated in 2013 as part of its groundbreaking golf programs, which include the Turkish Airlines Open European Tour Tournament and the Turkish Airlines Challenge Tour event. Besides golf, the airline is also involved in organizing tournaments for other sports like soccer, rugby and basketball.

“There is a huge unexploited potential to promote Nepal as a golfing destination for the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign,” said Deepak Ray, chairperson of Nepal Tourism Board. Indeed, the Gurkha source is featured prominently on Turkish Airlines’ promotional material and its website’s home page, which notes: “Inspired by the myth, magic and mystery of the ancient far Eastern valley, David Kilgore of Kilgore Golf Developments, fitted his skills against those of nature, creating a golf masterpiece spread over 140 acres of 4,500 feet above sea level, the 600-yard par 72 course boasts the only bermuda greens on an 18 hole course in South and South Asia.”

Gokarna Forest Resort is a former royal hunting reserve and the last remaining primary forest on the Kathmandu Valley floor, and the course’s dramatic fairway through jungle teeming with deer and monkeys, with the summit of Mt. Dharhara (3,480m) peering over the fairway.

Golfing proponent Deepak Ray of Gokarna Forest Resort appreciated the effort Turkish Airlines is making to develop Nepal as more than just a trekking and mountaineering attraction, including promoting it as a scenic golfing destination. Bhairao Pandey of Gokarna Golf Club noted efforts made by the airline, especially focusing on promoting Nepal tourism and its diverse attractions. Both were addressing a press conference on Wednesday to announce the Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup.

Turkish Airlines’ Blue Starline fliegs to 33 destinations in 134 countries, and flies over 75 million passengers yearly. Its newly opened Bishkek Airport hub is set for completion in 2023, when it will join up to 200 million passengers annually.
Downhill all the way
Nepal has the ideal extreme terrain for mountain bicycle racing

Reeti KC

Being one of the world’s most vertical countries, with six directions (east, west, north south, up and down) it was only a question of time before racing downhill on mountain bike became a popular sport here.

Now it has. Pedal-powered, two wheel downhill races are gaining adherents looking for adrenaline and adventure. With the world’s most rugged terrain to practice in, Nepal is even winning international championships. (See overleaf)

Adventure seekers hurl themselves down steep slopes on their dirt bikes, conquering through narrow trails, dodging cattle, goats, people, trees and rocks, all the while striving to maintain balance and prevent themselves from losing control and veering off the path to the valley below.

Possibly the first daredevil mountain bikers here were Craig Moffit and Brad Grunewald, who rode all the way to Everest Base Camp and back in 1983. Since then, as roads have opened up Nepal, adventure bikers have been venturing further afield into wilder parts of the country.

“Because trekking routes have been turned into motorable roads, many young people are taking up cycling,” explains Dhawal Pradhan of the group Pangmo Mustang is gaining popularity for cross-country riders, but there are challenging ridge trails right here on the Kathmandu Valley rim, in Chobar, Daksinkali, Pharping and Godavari.

And as they gain experience, many young Nepalis want to take part in competitive downhill races. “More than 20% of the participants in our last race were youth,” says Sayam Limbu of Grand Himalayan Enduro, adding that the sport is not just fun, but also a healthy, environment-friendly activity.

Grand Himalayan Enduro is now famous
As one of the world’s most vertical countries, and having six directions (east, west, north, south, up and down), it was only a question of time before racing downhill on mountain bikes became a popular sport in Nepal.

Karma’s Karma

Fed up with 12-year-old Karma Shepha playing video games all day long, his aunt took him for a biking trip to Chobit four years ago.

That is all it took to get the young lad hooked to mountain biking. Now 16, Sherpa and his bicycle are inseparable, and besides winning many national races, in December he came second in the under-18 international Chiang Mai Enduro (photographed above).

“I believe I was a pretty notorious kid,” he admits with a shy smile. “I didn’t like doing homework, so I was out and about in the mountains around Kathmandu in my bike every chance I got.”

The Chiang Mai race was a morale booster for the Nepali teenager, who realised he could compete with the best in the world, and was also inspired by meeting the big names in downhill biking.

“The competition was five days after my final exams in Kathmandu, so I couldn’t practice much but the race went well,” Sherpa said, hinting that he could have even come first if he had enough training time.

The boy’s first race was the Kathmandu Mountain Bike Festival, where he was 13. Despite being nervous he finished seventh, then built on the experience winning three of his next six races.

Sherpa credits his trainer and mentor, Niyam Limbu of Gombi Himalayan Road, “He is my biggest inspiration,” says the racer, explaining how Limbu is a holistic trainer, monitoring his technical, mental maturity, concentration and nutrition.

“His dad also tells me to be less shy and talk to people more. It is good advice and has allowed me to make many international friends,” adds Sherpa, who also looks up to Nepali bikers Rajesh Magar and Suman Lamang.

Sherpa’s foster parents are very supportive, and took him to Switzerland for bike training. He has been told his performance is much improved after that, thanks also in better gear.

Downhill racing is dangerous, and even at 13 Karma was already battle-scared. He broke his collar bone while training in Switzerland and proudly shows us an x-ray of his shoulder on the cracked screen of his smart phone.

“I have broken my collar bone in the exact same place twice. I also broke this mobile screen in one practice,” he adds smiling.

The teen biker’s ultimate goal is to participate in and win the Red Bull Hardline, one of the toughest downhill mountain bike races in the world. He says: “One victory is not enough, I need to win more.”

Ritek K.C.
HOP OVER THE GENDER GAP

There is a debate in behavioural science about which plays a more significant part in determining gender roles: nature or nurture. Most children are raised with gender stereotypes, but are they born with some gender traits? What role does society play in defining what masculinity and femininity mean?

Despite being tied down by patriarchal traditions, education and exposure to the wider world are changing gender perceptions and roles in Nepal. Slowly, rule breakers are becoming the rule.

Art is for everyone irrespective of gender. It is about aesthetics.

Ram Kumar Rai, Dancer

Ram Kumar Rai is now a male Kathak teacher. He teaches the classical Indian dance form to young boys and girls in schools across Kathmandu, one of them being Rhythm Dance Academy. Rai commutes in heavy traffic every morning before a week in Basantapur. He loves teaching dance that enjoys dancing even more. “When I first performed, I believed I attained mokshaya.”

Born in a village in Bhojpur district in eastern Nepal, where the life of most boys is to join the British or Indian Army. Rai was drawn to art as a child, sitting on his father’s lap while he read the holy books. His father also used to play the tabla/ drum and his children all danced to its rhythm. Rai discovered that he enjoyed dancing, setting his body away to the beat.

He came to Kathmandu to study and enrolled at Sitiana College of Fine Arts. Rai did not have a male role model while growing up, and despite facing ridicule every step of the way, he pursued his dream to dance.

Non-toxic, heal
Aagya Khanal, 22, is a stunt rider, a rarity among her male peers. But she is only doing what came naturally to her — she has enjoyed riding motorcycles since childhood.

Still, Khanal never thought she would become a professional until three years ago, when she went to a motorbike race and saw women riders doing stunts. She immediately joined the team.

“I was scared when I started. But I used to look at other lady stunt riders and in that way overcome my fear,” she says.

An even bigger hurdle was her parents. “I was in a dilemma whether to tell my parents or not. When I confessed to my brother and sister, even they were concerned about the risks and did not support my choice,” Khanal recalls.

Her parents soon found out what she was up to after seeing photos of their daughter performing stunts. They asked her to stop, but she continued. Eventually, they came around after finding out that people appreciated her skill.

“RULE BREAKERS”

As female riders, no one discriminates against us. If a man can do it, a woman can too.”

Aagya Khanal, Stunt Rider

“I have never seen teaching as a gendered profession.”

Divakar Chhetri, Teacher

thy masculinity

Interviews by

Amit

PETER

USA

“IT’S OK for me to be a man who feels and expresses my emotions. I think toxic masculinity is rooted in men’s insecurities. I want to give advice to my younger self about what it means to be a good man. I think the main thing would be this: care less about what others think, judge others less, and learn more.”

VARUN

NEPAL

“IT’S OK for me to be afraid. The notion of fear is always held in relation to failure for boys. I’ve realized that being afraid opens opportunities for learning, in today’s day and age. I’ve noticed men reacting theatrically because they are afraid to show people that they do not know something.”

FABIO

BRAZIL

“It’s OK for me to be a man who isn’t afraid to show my emotional side. My emotions are a part of who I am, having the strength to be open about this is not wrong but a pure freedom.”

MAX

NEPAL

“It’s OK for me to be feminine. I have been told multiple times that my hand gestures are really girly. This is something I can’t really control. People have also told me that I do not look very gay and I could easily pass as a girl. Now, what can I do about looking like me? So, guys, it’s okay for me to have a ‘beautiful face’ (damn it did).”

NILS

FRANCE

“It’s OK for me to wear pink. I don’t think it’s dangerous to be a gay person who feels and express of course, the expression of desire is important.”

Ram Kumar Bani is a member of the Nepali team. Aagya Khanal is a stunt rider in Kathmandu, Nepal. Divakar Chhetri is the first female teacher of the grade nine class at school. These individuals do not act out elaborately in any gender stereotypes but follow their passions and thrive in being themselves.
Ancient Panauti’s French Connection

Exhibition celebrates the bucolic town’s past and present

The 13th-century town of Panauti has the ambience of a place that has been bypassed by history. The fertile valley along the Kosi Khola was given by the king of Bhaktapur as dowry to his newly married sister. However, archaeological finds prove that Panauti was settled much earlier, in the early Kirti period 1,500 years ago.

The town escaped the Gorkha invasion of the Valley, 30km to the west, and was annexed into the unified Kingdom of Nepal by default. Situated astride the India-Tibet trade route, Panauti was set back far enough from it not to be tainted by commerce. In 1964, the Kodari Highway linking Nepal with China once more circumvented Panauti. Today, a new alternative road from Lalitpur to the B F Highway in Kirtipur passes through the town, but it is still not a major highway.

All this has meant that despite the march of modernity and the non-traditional reconstruction after many of its monuments were brought down by the 2015 earthquake, Panauti still retains much of its quaint and bucolic charm. The town has a sacred location at the confluence of the Kosi Khola and the Panauti Khola, as well as a third mythological river, Lillawati. Panauti is also the seat of the famous Indrawati Temple - one of Nepal’s oldest standing pagoda shrines, built in 1294 to honour Lord Shiva. The temple grounds now house a museum as well.

Panauti also has intangible heritage: it is still a largely cohesive town, which has preserved its Nawa culture that has similarities — but also differences — to Kathmandu Valley traditions. Piles of newly harvested paddy are still spread out to dry in golden circles along the brick-paved square of the old palace. Next month, on full moon day, the town will mark the three-day chariot festival and the exciting mass-consecrating of the Panauti khola by devotees.

This year will also see the Makar Mela, which happens every 12 years in Panauti, when tens of thousands of people from surrounding districts — including Kathmandu Valley — will converge on the town to take a dip in the holy confluence of the rivers. The month-long festival will be held in January. It was at the last Makar Mela in 2010 that Panauti native and photographer Parasmesh Shrestha met Gérard Toffin, the French anthropologist who has researched Nepal’s Newari civilization. Toffin is now emeritus professor at the Centre national de recherche scientifique (CNRS) and was involved in detailed research of Panauti’s culture and architecture with Vincent Barre, Patrick Berger and Laurence Freville. This led to French Government involvement in the restoration of Panauti and its urban renewal from 1979-1990, just as the Germans were involved in restoring Bhaktapur.

To find out more about Panauti’s past, present and perhaps even the future, Shrestha and Toffin have collaborated on an exhibition of old and new photographs at the Alliance Française in Bagmati, on display till 6 May. The exhibition is among events to mark the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and Nepal.

Toffin’s photographs of Panauti from the 1970s are juxtaposed with Shrestha’s recent images from the same places. The before-and-after photography depicts the changes that have taken place in the town in the past four decades, but it is also heartening to see how much of the core area of Panauti is preserved. In fact, a temple that is in ruins after the 1934 earthquake in Toffin’s photograph has been meticulously restored in Shrestha’s image of the same shrine.

Says Shrestha: “We have managed to restore and salvage much of Panauti’s history and culture, and now we need to get the younger generation to value our heritage. That is why this exhibition is important to prove that our past is precious.”

Changes in Panauti
Photo Exhibition
31 May
Alliance Française Kathmandu
01 5130012
Free Entry
Private is political

The Vagina Monologues is being performed in Nepal for the fourth time, and this rendition at the Kausai Theatre does not adhere to Eve Ensler’s classic text. This localized version is based on stories of Nepali women and is therefore much more relatable and impactful to the local audience.

The meta-performance starts with theatre artists who are actually acting out a rehearsal of a production of The Vagina Monologues 4.0: Nepali stories have been adapted to fit the original frame — a tearful Nilima Pant speaks graphically of the moment she was violated, while a conflict-era sexual abuse victim explains how prolonged her pain has been. These stories are presented in a sensitive and not sensationalised way, which makes viewers share the trauma. The women begin by talking about how the play relates to their own lives.

“If this guy is hugging you so much, why do you still work with him?” one character asks, while the other replies: “Then who do I work with? There isn’t anyone else.”

The actresses urge one among them to share her story in the media, but soon realise the survivor is the one who will be blamed.

“The stories bring alive a world of women: how they often end up being silent because there are no options. The play has a desperate intensity as it relates the sexual harassment case rocking Nepal’s theatre world. Actresses have accused three noted theatre directors of sexual harassment in a popular weekly tabloid, leading to the theatre community temporarily banning some actors — a significant achievement here. The stage thus becomes the vehicle through which the accusations are documented and spread to more people.

The play engages with the current discourse about rape and sexual abuse and its manifestation of power imbalance. The fallback argument is often ‘not all men’, but the play gives a fitting comeback to that as well: “If I am being followed by a potentially dangerous person and I am afraid, I won’t help me to say ‘not all men are like that,’”

Directed by Akamsha Katki, the play deliberately does not create any strong characters because the cases represent the experiences of all kinds of women. Nevertheless, together these stories produce an emotionally intense experience. Loomitha Tuladhar deserves special mention for her perfect timing, both in serious and comic scenes with their dark humour.

The play presents the viewpoint of many people who think that gender inequality and abuse don’t exist, because today women can go out to work, wear the clothes they want, own property, vote, and even share domestic duties (humiliating menstruating women outside of their houses) has been abolished by the government.

“The play is based on true events, but you may not believe any of it.” says one character sarcastically at the end of the play. “After all, it was made by a woman.”

Sewa Bhattachary

Vagina Monologues 4.0: Private is Political
Kausai Theatre, Feb 19, 5-9 PM

---

WELCOME BACK: President Bidhya Devi Bhandari returns home to Kathmandu on Wednesday, a day earlier than planned due to a suspected case of altitude sickness in Ushua.

FRENEMIES: Prime Minister KP Oli and vice-chair of Nepal Communist Party, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, at a meeting to mark King Day in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

VOILA: French Ambassador to Nepal François-Xavier Leger and a team from German Development Agency (GIZ) visit Baneshwor Binda, a proposed site for a new Kathmandu Valley landfill, on Monday.

INKMEN: "Tattoos is a form of expression. I will keep speaking out, and I will keep dying," Captain Vijay Lama said. Nepal Times after getting a new tattoo on Sunday. Lama was suspended and then reinstated by the civil aviation authorities this week.

NOWZAD: Nepal bowler Biswajit Kumar Pant celebrates during the finals of the ACC under-19 Eastern Region Tournament in Chiang Mai, Thailand on Sunday. Nepal defended the title by beating Malaysia.

---
**Moving to the mainstream**

Nepal’s polity provides the Muslim community adequate space for social, economic and political uplifting.

Chandra Kishore
in Birganj

Muslims have historically struggled to be included in the socio-economic and political mainstream of the country. Despite forming a relatively small proportion of the national population, the Muslim vote bank constitutes an important enough swing vote to be wooed by the national parties.

Province 2 Chief Minister Mohammad Lalbabu Raut, of the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal, is the only Muslim chief minister under the federal system. Earlier, he was a member of the Constituent Assembly and as one of the senior-most Muslim politicians, the symbolism of his position goes beyond Province 2.

During the Madhes Movement, many Nepalese Muslims tried not to be identified as Muslims, but their involvement in the 2015 agitation established the clout of this community in the Tarai. Now, Nepal’s Muslims are intent on carving out a distinct identity that is not solely based on religion or the perception of them across the border in India.

Although the poverty rate among Muslims in Nepal is not as high as that in Dar ul Islam, for example, their literacy rate of 40% is much lower than the national average of 64%. Literacy among Muslim women is even lower. There is debate within the Muslim community about the madrasa-based education system and whether it prevents youth from competing for jobs and integrating into mainstream Nepalese society.

Muslim women, especially, are seen to be unable to participate on an equal footing with their peers.

The exclusionary nature of some madrasas has made them an object of suspicion, and greater transparency in their conduct would help both the Muslim community and the nation at large.

Nepal’s constitution gives the Muslim community the opportunity to rise and address its shortcomings. Islamic holy days are now recognised as national holidays and the mainstream press provides adequate coverage to Muslim issues. Nepal’s Muslim community must take advantage of the equal rights of inclusion accorded to Nepal’s faiths and ethnicities.

Nepal’s Muslims should not be swayed by the strong slogans and agendas from across the border, or dismayed by what is happening across the Subcontinent. Nepal’s politics provides them adequate space for social, economic and political uplifting.

Prakriti Kandel
in Nepalgunj

Ever since he established Baskatiya School in Nepalgunj in 1993 on leased property, principal Musleh Ziauddin Mostafa Noorani has worked relentlessly to improve the quality of instruction in his madrasa.

More than 100 students attend the school from primary to Grade 10, studying all the subjects in Nepal’s education curriculum, like science, English, mathematics and social studies. But they also study Urdu and Arabic, mandatory according to Muslim culture.

“I transferred from a private school to Baskatiya because I wanted to understand my religion,” says Sahil Khatoon, who passed her SEE and is now teaching English at the same school. “The school also prepared me to be well-rounded in all other subjects and gave me a future.”

Apart from students following the regular curriculum, Baskatiya has 80 children studying religion, who will graduate to become clerics in their communities.

The majority of madrasas in Nepal used to be religious institutions, but in 2004 the government started registering them as government schools and had them adopt the Nepali curriculum, while allowing them to continue religious learning.

However, although they are registered, madrasas do not receive the same treatment as other government schools. Baskatiya itself is short-staffed and underfunded, with only three teachers provided by the government for classes up to Grade 10.

“In spite of being mainstreamed, community leaders and schools feel discriminated against because they do not get the facilities other government schools have,” explains Sanimiya Anvari of the National Muslim Commission. Despite being a school that the community considers a model, Baskatiya receives minimal funding, and the budget set aside for scholarships for needy students
Despite being registered as government schools, madrasas do not receive the same treatment as other public schools. Visit Barkatiya School in Nepalganj. This madrasa is located near the old Muslim quarter of Nepalganj. Bazaar has a total of 75 students, 30 of them are girls. The school has a total of 11 teachers, 9 Muslim and 2 Hindu. The school has a total of 5 classrooms and 2 toilets. The school has a total of 3 dining halls and 2 canteens. The school has a total of 10 sports facilities, including 3 indoor courts and 7 outdoor courts.

Describing the situation, the headmaster of the school says, "The school is facing many challenges, including lack of funds, lack of infrastructure, and lack of resources. However, the students are doing well and are making good progress."

Viability of madrasas

Despite the challenges, madrasas continue to thrive in Nepal. They provide a unique opportunity for children to learn about their religion and culture. However, the viability of madrasas is under threat due to lack of government support and funding.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal has its own history of terrorist attacks. The country has been affected by the Maoist insurgency for more than a decade. The conflict ended in 2006, but the memory of violence and suffering continues to affect the society. Nepal can learn from the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, where the government has taken strong measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. Nepal needs to strengthen its security apparatus and take preventive measures to avoid any future terror attacks.

Upgrading madrasa schools

Samim Miya Ansari, the newly-appointed chair of the National Muslim Commission, spoke to Nepal Times this week.

Nepal Times: What is the current situation of madrasas in Nepal?

Samim Miya Ansari: Madrasas are educational institutions related to our culture, and they are not just any other school. But they are not properly managed. Government grants are inadequate.

What will be your commission’s role?

The commission is a constitutional body working to improve the status of the Muslim community. In the past, we have worked on issues related to madrasas. We have advocated for better facilities and resources for madrasas. We have also been working on legal and political issues to improve the status of Muslims in Nepal.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal has its own history of terror. The country has been affected by the Maoist insurgency for more than a decade. The conflict ended in 2006, but the memory of violence and suffering continues to affect the society. Nepal can learn from the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, where the government has taken strong measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. Nepal needs to strengthen its security apparatus and take preventive measures to avoid any future terror attacks.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal Times: What is the current situation of madrasas in Nepal?

Samim Miya Ansari: Madrasas are educational institutions related to our culture, and they are not just any other school. But they are not properly managed. Government grants are inadequate.

What will be your commission’s role?

The commission is a constitutional body working to improve the status of the Muslim community. In the past, we have worked on issues related to madrasas. We have advocated for better facilities and resources for madrasas. We have also been working on legal and political issues to improve the status of Muslims in Nepal.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal has its own history of terror. The country has been affected by the Maoist insurgency for more than a decade. The conflict ended in 2006, but the memory of violence and suffering continues to affect the society. Nepal can learn from the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, where the government has taken strong measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. Nepal needs to strengthen its security apparatus and take preventive measures to avoid any future terror attacks.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal Times: What is the current situation of madrasas in Nepal?

Samim Miya Ansari: Madrasas are educational institutions related to our culture, and they are not just any other school. But they are not properly managed. Government grants are inadequate.

What will be your commission’s role?

The commission is a constitutional body working to improve the status of the Muslim community. In the past, we have worked on issues related to madrasas. We have advocated for better facilities and resources for madrasas. We have also been working on legal and political issues to improve the status of Muslims in Nepal.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal has its own history of terror. The country has been affected by the Maoist insurgency for more than a decade. The conflict ended in 2006, but the memory of violence and suffering continues to affect the society. Nepal can learn from the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, where the government has taken strong measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. Nepal needs to strengthen its security apparatus and take preventive measures to avoid any future terror attacks.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal Times: What is the current situation of madrasas in Nepal?

Samim Miya Ansari: Madrasas are educational institutions related to our culture, and they are not just any other school. But they are not properly managed. Government grants are inadequate.

What will be your commission’s role?

The commission is a constitutional body working to improve the status of the Muslim community. In the past, we have worked on issues related to madrasas. We have advocated for better facilities and resources for madrasas. We have also been working on legal and political issues to improve the status of Muslims in Nepal.

What lessons can Nepal learn from the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka?

Nepal has its own history of terror. The country has been affected by the Maoist insurgency for more than a decade. The conflict ended in 2006, but the memory of violence and suffering continues to affect the society. Nepal can learn from the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, where the government has taken strong measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. Nepal needs to strengthen its security apparatus and take preventive measures to avoid any future terror attacks.
Yeti was born in Nepal

Two items of news this week proved beyond reasonable doubt what we knew all along: early Homo povoided the Pleistocene, and the Yeti is still up there somewhere.

On Wednesday, Lanzhou University scientists announced that the 160,000-year-old jaw bone found in a cave in Tibet belongs to a Homo erectus that passed on its genes to Nepal’s present-day Neanderthals.

On Monday, the government announced findings of Homo erectus remains in the Upper Paleolithic. Together, these findings are irrefutable proof that the Yeti does indeed exist. It could not have been better timed ahead of Visit Nepal 2023.

This also finally puts to rest the so-called ‘evidence’ of Yeti dinks who tested tissue samples of Abominable Snowmen from Nepal and said they belonged to bears and a Tibetan marmot.

How could the Yeti not exist, when we have honed our it by naming an airline, a yoghurt, a casino, a luxury hotel that is code-sharing with a Yuk, a Skoda SUV, and a vacuum-insulated tumbler after it?

Nepal Tourism Board should immediately hold a press conference confirming the existence of the Yeti at (where else?) the Juck & Yeti Hotel, to counter a conspiracy hatched by countries trying to brand their own mythical animals like the Loch Ness Monster of Scotland, Sasquatch in Canada, and Wun Wong Bar Wun of Hardhome. These countries have a vested interest in denying the existence of Yetis to promote their own mythical mascots.

Nepal cannot take this lying down. We should be standing upright on our hind legs. GONE should take the matter to the London Court of International Arbitration, and if that does not work it must call a national strike and shut down the country.

Here are other measures we can take:

- Get all of Nepal’s Ambassadors and Plenipotentiaries to don Yeti outfits and send out press releases to claim that the Yeti was born in Nepal.
- Hold an International Conference on the Yeti and get Reinhold Messner to deliver the keynote (“Ich bin ein Yeti!”).
- Set the record straight about George Mallory. He was not asked, “Why do you climb Mt Everest?” The question actually was, “Why do you look for the Yeti?” To which his now-famous answer, “Because it is there.”
- Nepal should permit more Yeti Expeditions and charge them an arm and a leg. But they should sign contracts to only find footprints, never a Yeti in person. We want to keep looking for the Yeti, but not find it yet.
- Unilaterally declare April First a National Holiday to mark the International Day of the Existential Yeti, and issue a postal stamp.
- Re-deploy the Indian Army to fulltime Yeti Exploration in Siachen.

http://www.facebook.com/olddurbar

THE ORIGINAL XXX RUM

KHKUKRI

SINCE 1959

EXCELLENT SMOOTH.
FULLY MATUERED IN WOODEN VATS.