Outward bound

More than 26% of Nepali households have someone working outside the country. This includes 44.4% of families in Far-Western Province, where most migrate to India. (Data in the chart above)

Gandaki Province is next with 38.3%, while the number is 18.3% in Province 3, which includes Kathmandu.

A nationwide survey by Shareast initiative shows that most of the 866,344 families that the 4 million Nepalis working abroad sent home is used for basic like food (69.6%), clothing (42.2%), medical treatment (36.4%) and children's education (35.9%). Only a small amount (10.9%) is invested in land, and just 6.5% is saved in a bank.

The proportion of households with at least one person working abroad is highest among Muslims (39.9%) and Hill Dalits (38.4%) families, while ‘High Caste’ Tarai and Tharu households have the lowest members abroad.

The survey found that most workers (44.4%) used bank transfers to send their savings home, while a third still use the informal hundi channel. Only 1% say they send money home with friends. Hundi transfers are lowest in Province 3 (24.3%), while bank transfers were lowest in Far-Western Province (34%).

Thanks in part to these foreign earnings, the survey reports a number of positive developments: 94% of respondents had electricity, 95% had latrines, 76% (which is still low) had a drinking water supply, 75% now live near some kind of road, and 70% of households use LPG for cooking.

Nepal’s poverty rate has fallen dramatically due to remittances, which could be why the survey shows that 47% of Nepalis feel the country is headed in the right direction.

But most respondents had a very low opinion of politicians. More than 54% said they did not believe what political leaders said, and half did not trust the parties.

More than a quarter did not trust the Federal Parliament, and 36% were not satisfied with local governments. Most respondents were apathetic. (Sudan Bista)

% of households with at least one member working abroad.

CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

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PHOTO PAGE 8-9

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CAN’T GET NO SATISFACTION

O

n the face of it, when 41% of Nepal’s population is headed in the right direction, it could be taken as a decent level of approval of the government’s performance. Indeed, the way the question is framed in the Nepali language gives broad leeway for interpretation. If we should be going north, any course bearing between 270 degrees to 90 degrees would mean we are more or less on the right track.

The question was part of a public opinion survey carried out by Kathmandu-based Shramshakti Institute in January among a statistically representative sample of 6,413 respondents in Nepal’s 72 districts. The survey takes the pulse of the nation, showing the general mood of Nepal two years after local governments took office, and a little over a year after the federal and provincial governments were formed. In all three tiers of government, it is mostly the Nepali Congress Party (NCP) that holds sway – only Province 2 and a handful of municipalities are run by other parties.

As with Himal media polls in previous years, the results show that the Nepali people are alert and aware of what is going on – they also seem to be less short-term pessimists and long-term optimists. Even if 41% of respondents felt the country was on the right course, a full 27% felt Nepal was headed in the wrong direction, and 22% were uncertain, leaving the chart.

One of the more positive outcomes of the survey was the response to a question on which facilities people have in their homes. The government’s initiatives over the past four decades on safe drinking water, sanitation, rural electrification, and infrastructure appear to be yielding results. Well over 90% of Nepal now has access to electricity and lattices.

Which direction is the country headed?

Right direction 41%
Wrong direction 27%
Same as before 23%
Don’t know 9%

Three-quarters live near a road, use gas cylinders for cooking. Although the 74% response to safe drinking water is quite good, and only 5% of mountain dwellers live near a back-cropped road, overall the country is making progress. Which may be why so many seem to think that Nepal is headed more or less in the right direction.

However, there is something dissonant with governance: only 4.2% were happy with the functioning of the federal government, 3.8% with district and nearly 84% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The greatest area of discontent is in Province 3 and Far-Western Province.

People do not seem to have faith in the federal Parliament, which is a quarter of respondents said they did not trust the legislature, only 5.9% said they did trust it, and 43% were ambivalent. Neither was there much approval of the performance of local governments: more than 30% were dissatisfied, and only 7% satisfied with the way provinces and municipalities were going about their business; 65% were apathetic.

The survey also proves just how important migration for work overseas has become for Nepal. More than a quarter of respondents said they had a family member working abroad, with the highest percentages among Muslims and Hill Dalits, and in Far-Western Province. Tamra ‘High Casta’ in Province 2 and Tharu households had the lowest numbers abroad. Most of the money sent home by overseas workers goes into subsistence (food, clothing, children’s education, medical treatment), and very little of it is invested in land, saved in banks or ploughed into productive sectors.

Opinion surveys are a way for a democratic country to gauge the public mood between elections. They should also be a wake-up call for civic society to act. They are a tool available to politicians, the bureaucracy and other agencies of the state to steer if their actions fail: the aspiration of citizens. Many of these checks and balances in a country are performed by democratic institutions and the mass media, but when the other sectors of the state (legislature, judiciary, executive, bureaucracy and the security agencies) are not functioning at an optimum, opinion surveys directly reflect the public’s frustration.

It is clear from some of the results of this survey to this edition (pages 14-15 and analysis) that citizens’ faith in government is faltering. It is evident that a large section of the public does not trust politicians and that they are unhappy with the slow pace of development. Yet, they have not given up hope and hold out the expectation that things will get better. It is still not too late for the NCP government to go beyond slogans, deliver more than rhetoric, and walk the talk. Can’t get no satisfaction

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

It was 15 years ago this week that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal had to resign over his failure to carry out his own election promise to women and girls who were pregnant at the time of the Constitution of 2008. If anything in governance is more tragic, it is the way the leaders who promised so much to women and girls have failed to deliver."

"When the government was elected in 1991, it had a clear mandate to serve the people. However, the government has failed to deliver on its promises."

"All the promises made by the government have been broken, and the people have been let down."

The author of the article, a leading feminist and human rights activist, argues that the government has failed to deliver on its promises, leaving the people feeling disillusioned and betrayed. The article highlights the need for the government to deliver on its promises and for women and girls to have equal rights and opportunities.
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Federalism, rule of law and the judiciary

The Constitution alone cannot reshape a culture that accepts impunity, backroom deals and horse-trading as normal.

George Varughese and Iain Payne

The 2015 Constitution and warlords, political leaders through nationwide elections in 2017 promised a more equal distribution of state resources for the judiciary today at its lowest levels of funding in years. The Finance Minister’s budget, down from 0.5% to 0.16%. Continued failure to invest in this co-equal branch of government — the one meant to constrain undue action — undermines the transformational project of the 2015 Constitution.

However, minimal attention has been given to the judiciary’s key role in compelling constitutional values in government — starting with the rule of law and access to justice and contributing to the success of the ongoing transformation.

This is neither mysterious nor cause for neglect of the judiciary, which is quite unusual in Nepal. The understanding of the judiciary over many years is part of a world story of collapse by political parties on the spectrum to weaken, co-opt and subordinate state institutions that deter impunity and constrain opportunities.

A quick measure of this neglect is the steady decline in the already-marginalised funding of the judiciary's budget, down from 0.5% to 0.1%. Continued failure to invest in this co-equal branch of government — the one meant to constrain undue action — undermines the transformational project of the 2015 Constitution.

In three years after the adoption of a new Constitution, it is the rule of law, and not the institutional branch of government, that is at the heart of this reality.

The rule of law is concerned with the principled exercise and accountability by the legislature.

Elected representatives and appointees of the executive also take their cue from the Constitution by those charged with protecting it. Nepal’s system is unique in that the judiciary is the executor of the Constitution. This process must be championed by the judiciary, as well as the expression of its own authority, one to which public actors and citizens must listen.

In the setting of the courtroom, the Constitution alone cannot justify the legitimate exercise of power and be able to defend their actions. The judicial process must contribute to a constitutional culture whereby the exercise of power is discouraged.

It is in this sense that the rule of law may be talked about as a value. It is a critical, missing feature of Nepal’s constitutional culture, one which the judicial branch of government must salvage, nurture and return to public service.
Semanta Dahal and Vikas Mahendra

The spate of investment treaty arbitrations that have inundated developing countries in recent times has now reached Nepal. At stake is a Rs918.6 billion tax imposed by the large Taxpayers Office (LTO) on Ncell, following a decision of the Supreme Court.

Ncell contested the LTO assessment, saying it is liable to pay only Rs41.5 billion. It also obtained an interlocutory interim stay from the Supreme Court on three grounds.

The initiation of investment treaty arbitration by Axista Investment UK Ltd (Axista UK) through an interlaken special purpose vehicle not directly investing in Nepal, while challenging the same action before the Supreme Court of Nepal and bypassing other statutory remedies, raises questions as to the use of investment treaty arbitration and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

Axista UK filed a request for arbitration at the ICSID regarding the capital gains tax levied by Nepal’s tax authorities on the indirect transfer to Axista UK of an 80% stake in Ncell through the subsidiary Reynolds Holdings Limited, by the previous foreign investor, Talahomes Norway Nepal Holdings AS, to Axista UK.

The arbitration was initiated on the basis of the 1993 bilateral investment treaty between the governments of Nepal and the UK (UK-Nepal BIT). Ncell also initiated proceedings before the Supreme Court of Nepal challenging the GCT assessment.

In doing so, Ncell and its indirect shareholder Axista UK have not availed statutory remedies otherwise available under Nepal’s law. This presents the government with credible arguments to resist the investment treaty claims. First, it is doubtful Axista UK’s indirect acquisition of Ncell’s shares qualifies as an ‘investment’ in the UK-Nepal BIT. Axista UK’s role in the transaction is limited to its provides that if a dispute arises, parties may refer arbitration if they are unable to resolve it within three months through pursuit of local remedies or otherwise.

By its decision on 6 February, the Supreme Court held that the capital gains tax could be levied on the transaction. Thereafter, the GCT was computed by the assessing authority, and this was also challenged by Ncell via a writ petition on 21 April. Subsequently, Axista UK submitted its request for arbitration on 26 April. The sequence of events shows that the decision to invoke arbitration made immediately pursuant to the calculation of GCT liability, instead of pursuing local remedies to challenge the assessment, appears to be motivated by a desire to avoid the requirement of depositing one-third of the disputed tax liability as a condition to challenge the assessment.

The government can now argue that the invocation of arbitration is against the letter and spirit of the UK-Nepal BIT and the ICSID Convention. Ncell’s present challenge before the Supreme Court is limited to the amount of tax, so it has admitted to a portion of the liability.

The Government of Nepal can now consider all options available, including raising preliminary objections on jurisdiction under ICSID Arbitration Rules and the ICSID Convention.

Semanta Dahal and Vikas Mahendra are lawyers and partners of Talahomes (Nepal) and Keynote Partners (India).

Istanbul Modern art
A special selection from the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art is now displayed in the Turkish Airlines lounge at the new Istanbul Airport. The art work includes examples that represent four main genres of Turkey’s modern art, ranging from early 20th-century landscapes to abstracts inspired by artists living and working in the 1950s.

Yeti ART72
Yeti Art72 added three ART72-300 aircraft to its fleet last week. Six other this will be joining the airlines in May, pushing the number of Yeti ART72 aircraft to five.

The airline acquired the planes from the Thai Airart Foundation just before Thai Airways reluctance to share. It is expected to be the 200th ART72 to join the airline’s fleet.

While keeping one ART72 to be used in domestic flights, the other four will be used for long-haul operations.

Hyundai Winners
The winners of the bumper grills in the Hyundai Festival Drive 2018 are Bhawana KE, who took home a Hyundai Xcent Active, and Basak Karmi Khadka, who received a Hyundai Creta. Other winners took home cash and gold in the annual offer announced five on television or at 5 May.

UNICEF Representative
UNICEF’s new representative for Nepal, succeeding Tomaso Basani, is a German national, who has been with UNICEF for over 23 years and opened the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia in Kathmandu in August last year until taking up his new post.

Qatar Airways
Qatar Airways offered first and business class passengers an upgraded premium experience The new service launched on 10 April at 10 May. Customers were provided with premium check-in desks, generous luggage allowances, lounges and Qatar Airways’ new Quality catering on board.

Coverage Premium
Qatar Airways also won the Travel and Business Class passengers an upgraded premium experience. The new service launched on 10 April at 10 May. Customers were provided with premium check-in desks, generous luggage allowances, lounges and Qatar Airways’ new Quality catering on board.

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नेपाल इनवेस्टमेंट बैंक लिमिटेड
The genesis of elephant polo in Chitwan

Pachyderm polo was Nepal’s star sporting event until it succumbed to the tide of public opinion in 2016

Afghanistani, clutching bloody mares between their chakkas and comparing blisters. Distracted by off-field petty squabbles, the point of elephant polo is to take it seriously or not, in careful measure, and to forward to those who understand the complexity of pachyderm skill and strategy.

The novel idea was first revived by Jim Edwards on the back of a hit meet in St Martin with Scottish landowner James Maclcriek, between Crete, Tohogan rams, inspired by a cartoon of the invincible Japanese polo team that still hangs in the Rambagh Palace hotel.

“I have the elephants,” cabled Jim in 1982, “you have to show how to play polo on them.” From the start my idea was organizing this furry idea, and making it a success. In time, we attracted scores of high-profile sponsors, flash photographers and media attention; extra tents accommodated the overflow, and Lodge staff came to dread the arduous work and long hours.

“My career on the polo?” was undistinguished (though I did make the Tigers’ team for a few years) but with their affability for both mounts and mahouts, my sons went on to take all the glory. Sanghyi (pictures) led three times world champion and twice became most valuable player. ‘Elephant polo’s answer to Lionel Messi’ I overheard one avocado describer describe him.

National Parks were the team’s host, and Chitwan government’s elephants used to supplement Tiger Tops’ stable, all subject to the same strict rules to safeguard the highest standards of treatment and care.

WPFA reports confirmed our habits as a model of best practice for elephant polo in Nepal and most responsible in South Asia and other. I employed three local keepers, mainly Tharu, Kamala and Botos. Considered to raise funds for elephant conservation and wildlife research, and to fill a quiet shoulder season, WEPA ran for 35 annual championships (challenging Max Neill at the country’s longest running event) before succumbing to the tide of public opinion.

Nepal’s last elephant polo championship was played in 2016.

In 1996, Col Raj Kahans was instrumental in reintroducing polo to his historic roots in Mongolia with Jim Edwards at Christopher and Zakhe Gorkaa’s riding camp high above the river of the Orkhon Valley. In the harsh cold light of Mongolia, the arid skies and grassland habitats stretched limitless as sturdy native ponies galloped towards the goal posts in a mere of waving sticks, excited shouting and flying dust, the executive Mongol robes.

The descendants of Genghis Khan are more at home in the stirrups than on their feet, and took to polo with puache as flying hooves kicked up the summer dust. Released during the harsh winter months to feed for themselves, the Mongol horses are rounded up and retrained yearly after the snowmelt. Raj and Sunny arrived every July to embed the spirit of fair play into the heartens of the high steps, and to mentor the Mongols on the finer points of polo. “No hooking above pony height” Mongolia now fields a team to international tournaments. The Greeks pitch is marked by a prehistoric stone pillar that casts a long afternoon shadow.

But no longer is the memory of Col RKs Kahans, the epitome of pachyderm polo, forgotten wherever polo is played throughout South Asia and beyond.

SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

“Get up, get up, get up!” Col Raj Kahans slipped his brown boots with a riding crop as he strode towards the winded boy struggling to his feet. “Pick up your polo stick, back onto the pony, grip with your knees and swing your arm.”

We saw the Kahans farm on the outskirts of Delhi. Myna birds fidget in the trees, the polo lessons progress, and I continue to chat with Sunny the family patriarch amidst her hunting flowers and tinkling teacups in the soporific Haryana afternoon. My boys learned their subtle stick and ball skills from Raj, and aspire to the dazzling expertise of Ralph’s clipped attire. And Uday, professional players who combined half the Indian national polo team. But Sanghyi and Rinchen were far from that league, more comfortable with elephants than horses.

Col Raj’s silver hair, salt moustaches and military bearing with the scar of Sunny at his side were a familiar sight at both pony and elephant polo matches around the region, especially in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. But there was none of the taint of privilege or elitism about the Kahans family’s muscular smile was all embracing and Raj shared his passion for the game with all comers, generous with his knowledge and patiently enduring the teasing invitations of his archtypical clipped army accent.

“Raj could always be counted on for some pitch-side advice whether you wanted it or not, and he was always right,” remembers master-hotelier Jason Friedman, one of many fans of the consummate coach. “On or off the pitch Raj was the supreme gentleman sportsman, trainer, friend, mentor and drinking buddy. He taught me the finer points of polo and made me a better person and player because of it.”

The pool season starts now.
A keyboard brought from Germany by classical music duo Gerwig & González was a big hit at schools they visited around Kathmandu. The musicians also carried a message: it’s time to invest in music education in Nepal.

AN EAR FOR THE CLASSICS

KATHMANDU

Tune in and turn up support for education, say visiting classical musicians

Marty Logan

The original dream of Gerwig & González was to bring a grand piano from Germany, and fly it around Nepal from one school performance to another using a military helicopter. That idea was not very practical, so they settled on an electronic keyboard to leave behind in Nepal after their visit.

For the classical musicians from Germany and their two children, the experience does not sound at all like a failure — they were already making new plans for inspiring the growth of music in Nepal before flying home after a fixed 15 days with the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC) last month.

Sitting on a couch during a rare break in their schedule, EfRAIN González describes visiting a school outside the Valley where one of the teachers sat at the keyboard and played the Nepali national anthem with one hand. “That sparked the idea to train at least one teacher in every school in Nepal to be able to perform the anthem daily on a simple keyboard.”

“Why not? Why shouldn’t we dream big?” González asks with the passion that obviously drove this latest musical mission to Nepal.

The pair, based in Germany, say they were impressed by the talent and potential of the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC), but disappointed that the school does not have more resources for instruments and teachers. There are only three grand pianos in Kathmandu, and a city this size should do could do with more.

“There are millions of dollars for playing football and for running elections, there are billionaires who have too much, and yet we have to work so hard to get just a little money for music education,” said González.

Christine Gerwig, from Germany, and EfRAIN González, from Mexico, (right) have been making music together for 10 years. The duo perform in concert halls and festivals throughout the world, and also regularly conduct workshops for children in schools in Germany and Mexico.

The family worked hard raising money for the trip to Nepal, which González had been dreaming about for years. Crowdfunding raised enough cash to cover costs for the parents and Alejandro, 11, a pianist, and daughter Valeria, 9, who plays both violin and piano. It also enabled them to donate the electronic piano. Donations came from friends and friends of friends worldwide, including a supporter in India who paid for two air tickets.

The concert that the family performed at KJC as part of the Katipaz International Festival this month was the first time the four shared the stage — including a piano duet for four hands by the parents — although both children are experienced performers, and have been playing since age 3.

“We were very humbled to host the Gerwig & González at our annual Katipaz Festival,” says KJC’s Abhisek Bhandari. “We are primarily a contemporary music school but we have actively started to promote western classical music education from this year. We hope to host more musicians and educators as they play a crucial role in realizing competent and holistic music education in Nepal.”

Besides visiting two schools, Gerwig & González also held a master class and teaching workshops at KJC. Gerwig remembers one young musician in particular: “He wasn’t a KJC student but he was very good. He said he had taken lessons only for one year and after that he kept learning on his own, because his parents disapproved of him becoming a musician.”

Her message: “If someone finds their passion in music, if it’s really in their heart, then that is what they should do, even if it is difficult to make a living.”

This two say they would love to return to Nepal to continue working with KJC if support can be found. Meanwhile, they hope to continue working with young musicians have via video-link from Germany.

A gift of music to Nepali children

The unprecedented blizzards this year in Dolpo and other Trans-Himalayan districts have affected spring-season trekking. Most high passes in Dolpo, and between Dolpo and Mustang, are still blanketed by heavy snow, with many trekkers turning back or taking longer alternative routes.

With better road and air access, Dolpo has seen a spike in trekkers, with Shey Phoksundo National Park registering 314 visitors this past year. And with motorized roads opened on popular trekking routes, visitors are venturing further afield.

“Most trails in Upper Dolpo are still closed because the high passes got heavy snow, and even local villagers have not returned to their villages in Saldang,” says trekking guide Nabin Lama, who adds that two Czech trekkers could not even cross Raiga La (3,170m) recently because of snow. “I am taking one group this month, but worried about which route to take since almost of the passes are closed.”

There is a risk of avalanches, and melting snow has made rivers rise to levels usually seen only in July-August. Sayashi Lama in Ringmo: “Right now all the passes are snowed in, but with the temperature going up, we expect to reach soon.” That will coincide with the yarsa picking season.

Trekking routes to Upper Dolpo all have to cross numerous passes above 5000m, like Shey La (5,010m), Kangsa La (5,260m), Raiga La (5,310m) Nuna La (5,310m) or Ghami Pass (5,310m) lose altitudinal Kangsa La is the most trekked route, but this season has been blanketed by heavy snow.

For those who do not want to cancel plans, there are alternative trails. Or it may also be worthwhile just trekking up to the stunningly beautiful Phoksundo Lake Inglad to explore the surrounding mountains.

For adventurers who still want to trek up to Saldang and Rejor, there is also the route via Ilio, Shikan, Tingo and, thanks to rising temperatures, Chhuk La and Sagar passes are now open.

The new road up to Tsum Valley to the south and the upgraded airstrip in Jhalu means there are now more Nepali and foreign visitors here. Ringmo has eight new guest houses, and there is a lot of anticipation ahead of the Dolpo Festival in the Ilio Tarap Valley, 16-14 September.

In three past months, the number of tourists was fewer than last year because of the weather, but the people have resumed and they are full both ways, say Dilip Karki of Tara Air in Nepalgunj, the closest point for trekkers to Dolpo.

Sonam Choekyi Lama in Dolpo

Nepal’s Grand Trek Route

A new roads crisscross the mountains and valleys of the Himalayas, Nepal’s most famous attraction – trekking – is unfortunately being suffered. When asked what facilities they want most from the government, villagers living in remote districts unanimously request a road. It is therefore given that the roads will be there, we just have to make sure that they are built with care so that they are safe and do not damage the fragile slopes.

A recent survey (page 14-15) has shown that three-quarters of Nepal’s population now has access to at least a dirt road, and a quarter live near a black-topped highway. What this means is that while established trekking trails like the Annapurna Circuit or the Mustang Trek may have the familiar roadside noise and dust, better access also makes it feasible to discover remote side valleys.

For example, after driving to Chame, more trekkers can now visit Nar, Phu and do the Seven Passes Trek from Manang to Mustang. When the Budi Gandagi road reaches Philim, it will make the Tsang Valley and Manang more accessible.

Roads will also make it easier for tourists looking for adventure in Nepal who do not have the four months necessary to do the Great Himalayan Trail at one go, to take it in instalments. You can now drive up to four days below Kangchenjunga base camp, trek for two weeks, and ride fly out of Tsum Valley; then return the next season to do the next segment.

Despite all the road-building, there are plenty of pristine valleys, high passes and remote villages in the Himalayas where we can still go to experience the Old Nepal - Nyinagma Gyanasum La between Mugu and Dolpo, or Kang La in Manang (left) when you feel like you can venture no further on this Earth, or Tsash Labtsa Pass, from where...
The perfect guidebook to a cross-Himalayan trek is out in its second updated edition. Robin Booth's The Great Himalayan Trail: A Pictorial Guide has more recent photographs, excellent new maps from Himalayan Map House (the GHT passing through Dolpa, above) and lots of tips and information for both the first-time Great Himalayaner, or a return trekker doing it in chapters.

Trekking in Nepal has never been just about the scenery. It is also about the people and travelling along the traditional caravan routes, the rural trading trails or lederas taking mountain goats to goats in the monsoon. It is along these trails that Nepalis and tourists visiting the country have formed a bond that goes back decades.

As Peter Hillary said at the launch of the second edition of Booth's book recently in Kathmandu: "I have a love affair with Nepal because there is nowhere else with this scenery. But much more than that, it is also the people — Nepalis are the most open-hearted people in the world.

And what better way to meet Nepalis face-to-face than on the up and down paths, through villages and forests, across yak pastures and passing smiling faces on trail bridges.

Although the mountains are beyond compare, it is the people you meet along the trail that linger in your memory... their indefatigable boldness and energy, their independence, strength and resilience when times are bad... it is impossible to make a comparison but surely the people of the high Himal are the best of mankind?" Booth writes in his introduction.

After leafing through this book, and admiring the foldout panorama of the

The Great Himalayan Trail
A Pictorial Guide
(Second Edition)
by Robin Booth
Himalayan Map House, 2015
176 pages, 70,000

You can peer down at the layers and layers of mountains and contemplate infinity.

Dolpo

Kathmandu

Nepal

Pokhara

Kopchhara

Mt. Dhaulagiri

Dolpo

Nepalgunj

Pokhara

Kathmandu

Kunda Dzait

Dolpo

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Dolpo

Nepalgunj

Pokhara

Kathmandu

Kunda Dzait
GETAWAY

Trishul
An exhibition of all paintings by Pragendra Shri Kama featuring the 'Trishul', an ancient rod known to Trishul as the finest weapon of power. Enjoy the evening, along with some wine.
15-30 May, 5pm, ArtHouse Art Space, Thomal (01) 4817707

Aama
Solo exhibition by Santhya Swara showcases artwork centering her mother for her patience, strength and energy.
7 May-31 June, 5pm, ArtHouse Art Space, Thomal (01) 4811808

Nude Carpet
A single object exhibition, 'Closet in Charms' Series - 2 features avant artist Kazi Munsid exhibiting his work done in an old carpet. The exhibition showcases an object, art and one big idea.
12-21 May, 10am, The Timesland Museum, Boudha (01) 6011003

Poetry Night
Join a poetry and storytelling night, where you will hear from the brave ones who dare to relive their stories.
10 May, 6pm, Toyia from Nepal, Thomal (01) 4260086

Lost in Transition

Bayleaf
Deeply by this garden restaurant for multi-cuisine food. Serving special Bureneau dishes like Bureneau Polo, Khow Se Thake (moodi salted) and Mogh (fish noodle soup) and other signature products.
Two Spirit, opposite Adda, Boudha (01) 4411940

The BUD
The newly renovated restaurant at Hotel Royal Singh serves healthy and flavourful gluten-free meals. Try Quinoa Tabouleh served with grilled skewers of gaman, mushroom, tomatoes, grapes and onion. Enjoy a meal with your family and friends.
(01) 4411950/441191

Hotel Heritage Bhaktapur
A new slate boutique hotel influenced by the past and embellished with the ancient city of Bhaktapur. The culture starts and ends at the gate of the hotel.
Suryabinodh (01) 6871128

Hotel Annapurna View
The new boutique hotel situated at 1,600m in the Annapurna area offers everything 'green', the Annapurna, a view of Phewa Lake, serenity and luxurious accommodation.
Pratap (01) 445996

Hotel Yuktang
This new hotel is a combination of Newari & library art, texture, built with Dutch brick from the Mula era, and including Bhaktapur wonders to add to the magic and traditional touch to your stay.
(01) 442058

Mega Walli Serai
Relax with fine dining and wildlife sacred in Chitwan at Taj Safari’s luxurious lodge, where rooms reflect local aesthetics.
Chitwan National Park, 857170928

AIR QUALITY INDEX

The daily range of the Air Quality Index in Kathmandu was present at a mid-level range of air quality at all times. This week, the AQI was mostly in the Very Unhealthy to Unhealthy range. As a result, the discussions in Kathmandu’s air quality monitoring stations show that the air quality has improved. The AQI was mostly in the Unhealthy range on the weekend, with some days reaching the Very Unhealthy range. The AQI was mostly in the Unhealthy category for much of the week. The AQI was mostly in the Unhealthy category for much of the week. The AQI was mostly in the Unhealthy category for much of the week.

https://airquality.kathmandu.gov.np
Good as old after two earthquakes

Patan’s historic temple is not just being rebuilt, but restored to its pre-1934 look

Kabita Maharjan

When an 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck Kathmandu Valley on 15 January 1934, killing more than 10,000 people, among the destroyed structures was the 17th-century Bhaishe temple in Patan. The three-storey pagoda temple was quickly rebuilt, but in the Moghal stucco doma style.

Eighty-one years later, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), with support from the Norwegian Embassy, had just started restoring Bhaishe in its original tri pyramid design when the 25 April 2015 earthquake hit. Four temples nearby went down.

Reconstruction of temples that were destroyed in both 1934 and 2015 are now simultaneously nearing completion in Patan, drawing attention to how damage from the two earthquakes often overlapped in Kathmandu Valley.

“Those were so much destruction here in 1934 that many of temples were quickly rebuilt in the Moghal style, but finally Bhaishe is being returned to its original glory,” says Rollii Ranjitkar of KVPT.

Architecture is much more than the sum of its structural elements, and nowhere is this more true than in Kathmandu Valley’s historic monuments. The structures go well beyond physical materials like wood, stone and bricks, and include intangibles that give them inter-generational continuity. After 1934, the residents continued to worship their gods amidst the ruins of destroyed temples.

Located at the western edge of Patan Square, the three-storey Bhaishe was supported by exquisitely carved wooden struts and capped by a golden pinnacle. After 1934, Nepal’s Rana rulers revamped it to its size using the cut-and-paste Moghal dome design like other damaged structures in the Valley.

Luckily, many carved eaves, columns and stone carvings at the bases were preserved, and have featured in Bhaishe restoration. Frequently, the woods and stone are hard at work at the site re-creating the missing pieces.

The temple is named after its creator, Bhagavat Bhaishe, a commoner who rose to prominence in Patan and built the structure in 1487, dedicating it to the Bishwakarma form of Lord Shiva. It is the only temple in Durbar Square not commissioned by a king.

“It was a travesty that such an important monument was not rebuilt in its original design after 1934,” says Ranjitkar.

Fortunately, there were some granary black-and-white photographs taken before 1934 as well as meticulous sketches by Henry Ambrose Oldfield, a surgeon at the British Residency in Kathmandu in the 1890s, which showed the original form of the temple.

“Without Oldfield’s drawings, we might not have known what the original looked like or that it had been altered,” explains Ranjitkar.

Based on these early records, restoration work began in January 2015 with a ritual Chhath Puja performed by tantrik priests. But within three months, the 7.8 magnitude quake struck, destroying many of the temples that had survived 1934. The priority shifted to rebuilding the other Patan temples and work on Bhaishe was delayed.

KVPT has thus had to salvage as much of the original material as possible for the reconstruction, but for new wooden columns and arches the right kind of timber was needed and artisans with carving skills had to be located.

Earthquakes have actually helped keep the ancient craftsmanship of Kathmandu alive because of the need to rebuild temples and monuments. However, Ranjitkar is worried that the traditional skills required are disappearing and it will be difficult to find experts in future.

Reconstruction of Bhaishe is expected to be completed by November 2020, with support from Lalitpur Municipality and Prithvi B Pande of Nepal Investment Bank. KVPT is also involved in rebuilding nearby Char Narayan, Hari Shankar and Krishna Mandir temples and other monuments like Mela Chowk and Bhaishe Chowk.

KVPT believes in transparency in its projects – quite literally. The artisans creating pieces for Bhaishe work behind a see-through plastic fence so passers-by can observe the skill and devotion needed to build these ancient temples. There are also other structures in Patan Durbar Square that were also rebuilt after 1934 with stucco domes and needed to be rebuilt in the original shikhara or pagoda styles. The Mango Police police station itself is where a large shikhara temple once stood.
Lost in Transition

Though the medium is oil on canvas, Mann Gurung employs only some hues in his paintings, evoking the era of old photographs. Indeed, his artwork harks back to an older, more innocent time in Nepal. The women still wear the sariya choli, and the men are in patakos and daka topi.

Gurung’s second solo exhibition, Lost in Transition, opened at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Baber Mahal, officially on Thursday, and will run till 8 June. Though most of the works are oil paintings, there are also graphite and ink drawings. They differ from his previous solo exhibition Power, Politics and War, which was predictably focused on politics. This time around, the emphasis is on a visual depiction of social change.

Gurung has captured women who collected milk in wooden jiko, and have now turned to plastic Coke bottles. Though they cling to traditional dresses, they cannot help wearing Crocs on their feet. He has captured the dhyungo hand drum, an important instrument in his community that seems torn and neglected, and an old record player that looks like it hasn’t been used in a while.

These portraits are from Khorda, a mountain village in Gurung’s home district of Gorkha. Collectively, the impression is of a theme that is collectively, the impression is of a theme that is caught in transition as traditional values are fast being replaced by modern ideas. Gurung’s paintings capture the reality of most of Nepal today. With the youth migrating out, the elderly and women are left to fend for themselves. It is an uphill battle to cling to their traditional lifestyles.

Gurung believes he has captured the last of a generation that carries our identity, as younger Nepalis are already filled with xeniums and pride themselves for embracing western culture.

“They have already made a transition from meals to box speakers, radio to mp3 players, hand woven bags to polythene ones, handmade garments to imported polyester, bamboo baskets to plastic bags, and from amuk to flattening TVs. We will soon lose the older generation, erasing hundreds of years of our identity, tradition and culture,” lamented Gurung.

His paintings force us to ponder identity, how it is correctly laid and whether it is even possible. The paintings are a testament to a past time, and present Gurung’s concern for his own heritage, which he seems powerless to conserve. But at least he has preserved and documented a part of his culture in his art.

Lost in Transition
Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal, finished 6 June.
FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Women of substance

RANJANA BISWOKARMA LAWYER
F rom the Kwakeeram (Biswokarma) trend in Mohanpur I have passed Grade 10, and read was my main subject, which makes me to be a lawyer in the Kathmandu High Court all the more excitingally. She was determined to support her family and completed her masters in law and a graduation degree in management.

“...I could accomplish all this because of my parents and my hard work,” says Ranjana, whose father and mother are now rightfully proud of her. Ranjana herself feels she is now in a position to legally do battle for justice and against discrimination based on gender and religion. “I want to serve society through my legal skills,” she says.

SABITRA BHANDARI FOOTBALLER
H aving scored 28 international goals for Nepal national team, Sabitra has not only established herself as a famous striker, but has also become an inspiration for other Nepali young women.

Now 25, Sabitra grew up working in the fields of her Dalit village in the state of four sisters, she not wear kurta or sari and was a boy with short hair and blonde highlights, which earned her the nickname “Sambari” after the banana flower. Sabitra were football fans for the first time for a women’s match in a neighboring village. But her career ended all when she was invited to play for the Nepal Club in Kathmandu.

As she prepared to leave for the city, she was told that girls should not take such a journey alone. But Sabitra ignored that advice and told comments from her neighbors. Today she is able to help her family to pay the tuition fees of her sisters and brothers at home, a football field is being built in her village in Lamosang, and the neighbors who discouraged her now welcome Sabitra with pride, saying, “Take young girls from the village to play football with you.”

SUPOCHA POUDEL ARMY MAJOR
W hen the Nepali Army opened its doors to women as officers 14 years ago, then college student Supoacha found at Thimi immediately joined. She was always fascinated by army parades at the nearby Sankhuwar barracks, and had wanted to become a soldier for as long as she remembers. Today, thanks to hard work and determination, Supoacha is now an army major.

She is the first woman to join the Nepali Army’s Command and Staff course, and a recruit has now opened up for her to become a brigadier general. If she is able to participate in the National Service Course, she could even become the first female chief of the Nepali Army.

“It grew up in a traditional environment. Some didn’t get the opportunity to study like me and some got better education than me. But Nepali society is changing for women and that is what is most important. We have still have a lot more to do, but we have also achieved a lot.”

MAYA GURUNG MOUNTAINEER
W hen Maya Gurung was a child in a Sherpa village, she used to ride on the Golden Trail in the state of four crimson. She had always dreamt of being a mountain climber and she made up her mind to climb the highest mountain in the world. She decided that she would climb the highest mountain in the world.

At age 14, her parents found her wandering in a person she had never met. One day before the ceremony, the smallest and least experienced trekking guide was chosen by her parents. Two days later, police found Maya and brought her home, but her father refused to let her enter the house because of the shame she had brought on the family.

In 2008, Maya became part of the first inclusive women’s Everest Expedition and reached the top of Mt. Everest, the first woman from the Gurung community to do so. Her village organized a program to honor her, and named her village after her. With tears in her eyes, Maya’s father admitted that he had not known that his daughter would become a mountain climber. He asked for forgiveness, and Maya hugged him... Today, Maya helps young girls from her district who have been rescued to become trekking guides. For that work the Nepali Government honored her with the Padma Shri Susho Shree Shree award.

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Public opinion poll shows the people’s trust in government is falling sharply

Analysis by
Rameshwar Bohara

There was great hope among Nepalis that the first local government elections in two decades, in 2007, would finally improve accountability and help raise living standards, but a recent public opinion poll shows that their optimism has faded.

Two years after the local governments were formed and a year after provincial and federal governments took office, most Nepali say they are disillusioned with their elected representatives in all three tiers of government.

There is a yawning chasm between slogans and performance. The Nepali Communist Party (NCP) government that promised ‘Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepalis’ and ‘Zero Tolerance of Corruption’ is seen to be not walking the talk. Public distrust for politicians and their parties has never been greater.

There appears to be a correlation between widespread media coverage of the executive, legislature and judiciary being under the control of vested interest groups and the public’s negative perception. For example, when asked if they trusted President Bidya Devi Bhandari’s office, only 7.8% said yes while 14.6% said they did not trust it at all. This is likely due to press coverage of proclamations of her office, and frequent traffic snarls caused by presidential motorcades.

The survey results, carried out by Sharecast Initiative Nepal among a sample size of 4,128 respondents in 42 districts, reveal that disillusionment is greatest in areas and among groups with greater access to the mainstream press and social media.

While most of the results indicate growing public dissatisfaction with the government, 41% agreed that the country was headed in the right direction, while 27% felt it was going in the wrong way. This is a slight decline compared to last year’s Sharecast survey, when 43% of respondents felt the country was on the right track.

This result corresponds with findings of A Survey of the Nepali People, carried out by Inter-Disciplinary Analysis and Kathmandu University among a much larger sample size (7,056) in 73 districts in 2018. That poll showed that overall 53.9% of the people felt the country was headed the right way.

Responses to the question broken down by province are identical to the Sharecast and KU-IDA surveys even though they were taken a year apart.

The highest percentage of those who think the country is headed in the wrong direction is in Province 3 (45%), while 56.4% of respondents in Far-Western Province say Nepal is on the right track.

It is not unusual that Province 3 is cynical, since it includes Kathmandu Valley, whose citizens are most exposed to media reporting of corruption and the lack of accountability. Residents of the Far-Western Province and Province 2, by contrast, still seem to hope that things will get better.

Indeed, overall the people of the Tarai seem more convinced than those living in the mountains that the country is moving in the right direction.

A cross-tabulation of the responses shows that the more educated Nepalis are, the more they seem to think the country has drifted off track. And among ethnic groups, the Newa population seems to be the most cynical about where the nation is headed.

The Sharecast survey also shows that the Nepali people were at best apathetic and at worst negative about the work of the federal government to the past year. Only 4.2% were satisfied, 35% were dissatisfied and nearly 61% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

The greatest discontent about the conduct of the federal

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Bishwakarma

NEPAL TIMES
government in Kathmandu is in Far-Western Province – indicating that despite devolution people living in the periphery still feel neglected. But even the centre is not impressed with the centre. Most respondents in Province 3 had a dim view of the federal government’s functioning.

Amid allegations that political power today is centralized among advisers in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), the level of distrust of the PMO (36.2%) was much higher than those who trusted it (10%), with 36% rating it ‘so-so’.

The national Parliament also suffers a trust deficit, with more than a quarter of respondents saying they lack faith in the federal legislature. Only 7% said they trusted Parliament, while 63% were ambivalent.

Views of the track records of local governments and municipalities are also not encouraging. More than a quarter of respondents were ‘completely dissatisfied’ with their work, and only 74% were pleased. Again, the highest level of discontent with local government is in Province 3, while people in Province 1 seem to be most content with the performance of local municipalities.

General dissatisfaction with all these tiers of government appears to be linked to confusion within infrastructure projects, corruption in sand mining and quarry contracts, obstruction of elected representatives with their own perks and privileges, and poor governance.

When asked how much they trusted political parties, nearly 45% said they did not trust them at all, while in Province 2 more than half said they had no faith in the parties. This figure has gone up in last year’s survey 38% said they did not trust the parties. Nationwide, leaders of parties do not fare much better. 54% of respondents did not trust them, and it was a whopping 63.4% in Province 3.

In a wake-up call for journalists, a full 47.2% said they did not have much faith in the media. Politically-oriented content and the over-commercialisation of the media appear to be behind this. Lawyers fared even worse, with 63% saying they did not trust them much. But the most untrustworthy profession seems to be contractors, with 57% saying they do not trust them. This figure is even higher for Kaniki Province, which is plagued by delays in infrastructure projects.

**Facilities at home**

- Drinking water: 73.6%
- Electricity + Solar: 95%
- Solar: 17.4%
- LPG: 95.0%
- Access to dirt road: 75.5%
- Access to black top road: 25.5%
- Gas: 69%
- Biogas: 6.3%

**Social indicators**

The Shrestha Initiative Survey conducted in January also included questions about socio-economic development and migration.

The most encouraging sign is that the government’s emphasis over the past decades on rural electrification, water and sanitation appears to have yielded results. Of the 4,129 individuals surveyed in 42 districts, 564 had electricity or solar, 59% had toilets and 74% (which is still low) had a drinking water supply. However, it is a sign of development that 7% now live near some kind of road, while 72% of Nepal’s seem to use LPG for cooking.

How have you spent the remittance you received last year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>36,085</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
<td>11,550</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s education</td>
<td>3,843</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing home</td>
<td>4,236</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy land</td>
<td>2,067</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank savings</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in new business</td>
<td>1,274</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With four million Nepalis working outside the country at any given time (half of them in India), responses to survey questions on migration and remittances show just how dramatically society is changing.

A quarter of respondents had a household member working abroad, highest in Muslim (34%) or hill Gorkha (30%) families. Tara Cama and Tharu households had the lowest members abroad. The proportion of families with at least one member working abroad was highest in Far Western Province.

Asked how overseas workers sent money home, most now use bank transfer (46%) while a third still use the informal hand-channel, while only 1% say they send money home with friends. Province 6 tops the rest in bank transfers – 81%.

Asked to name the top three items that they spend remittance money on, 60% say they use it to buy land, 42% for clothing, 36% for medical treatment and 35% for children’s education. Some 15% saved earnings to buy land, while only 6.5% saved it in a bank.
Unreal estates

Nepal is landlocked, and to make matters worse, the country is fast running out of land. Ever since we lost a third of our territorial integrity to British India in the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, we have had to make do with what was left. And what real estate we have is not enough for parking lots and malls. So, it’s all up for grabs, even the prime minister’s gazebos in Bahu Water.

No need to press the panic button, though, folks. What we need now is to carry out a baseline assessment, make an inventory of all the land in our grabberment’s possession, and expand its area by hook or by crook. Mostly by crook.

The first option that springs to mind, just off the top of my head, is to take back all the territory from the Tweeta to the Sutlej that the Gorkha Empire lost to the British Empire, and make Nepal Greater Again. The way we are doing this is by clandestinely infiltrating the British and Indian Armies through the Brigade of Gurkhas. This is a top military secret, so don’t go blabbing it out to anyone.

If, god forbid, we cannot pursue the military option to restore Nepal to its former glory, then we need a Plan B. And that is to capture the new islands along the Ganges Delta in the Bay of Bengal between India and Bangladesh since they are made up of Nepal’s soil anyway. We will no longer be landlocked, and as a newly littoral nation, can claim up to 200 nautical miles of territorial waters as our Exclusive Economic Zone.

And since we have run out of land on Earth, the Nepal Communist Party under the Great Helmsperson Commade Space Cadet is sending Nepalis where no Nepalis have gone before: across the Hemispherial Belt to Eericate the Red Planet from the forces of global imperialism and claim it for the glory of the revolution.

Kathmandu’s land mafia has already done the plotting for a housing colony on Mars, and to build a Martian Republican View Tower. Nepal will feel very much at home on the surface of Mars since it does not have any water either, and the roads have huge craters.

But before we conquer space, we must first determine how far above Nepal is still Nepal. Where does Nepal end and outer space begin? Fortunately, we already know exactly how far up Nepal’s air space stretches. The special ramp at Kathmandu airport where Air India passengers are frisked is 40 inches above the tarmac because that is the upper limit of Nepal’s aerial boundary. Our Air Force will guard this space tooth and nail. Last but not least, there is a very easy way to expand our territory. Nepal’s plinth area is 147,000 sq km. However, if we flatten Nepal out like a pancake the country’s actual surface area will be 24.7 million sq km. As a peace-loving nation, an expansionist Nepal should pursue this option to add territory since it does not involve any bloodshed.