The right path

It is easy to be disappointed by Lumbini. Scanty, dusty and unimpressive but this time of year, it looks from the outside like a desolate construction site. More than 1.5 million pilgrims from all over the world will visit Buddha’s native site this year, honouring his teachings of compassion and impermanence. This figure is likely to grow as the new Guam Buddha International Airport nearby brings direct flights from Asian cities from next year.

Buddha Jayanti, on Saturday 18 May, is an annual reminder of the decades of political neglect and corruption that have prevented Nepal from taking full advantage of its most important pilgrimage site. There are few signs showing the way, visitors have to hike long, hot walks, there are few facilities, and lots of ugly construction along the new highway.

But commercialisation, greed and abandonment of nature are all reminders of why Buddhist philosophy is still relevant today, and why it is necessary to practice and strive for.

Despite everything, the plan of the 23-hectare park designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in 1972 is more or less being followed, the open spaces have shrubs and small forests, the wetlands in between seem with birdlife. The World Heritage Site has a strong spiritual presence and provides corners of solitude, along with dozens of temples in the monastic zone built by Asian Buddhist countries.

Lumbini has been a place of pilgrimage for more than 2,000 years, ever since Emperor Ashoka visited and erected his famous elephant pillar. With Vist Nepal Year 2020 and the airport, Lumbini is poised to be an international destination like never before.

To prepare for it, roads are being upgraded and new hotels are coming up outside the sacred garden area. The Lumbini Museum is being re-imagined, transforming Tange’s vaulted brick cylinders into a world-class example of heritage preservation and display.

As in life, in Lumbini you see what you look for. A flower only sees flowers and a thorn sees thorns, as the song goes. There are plenty of signs of neglect and ugliness, but looking deeper we remember what the Buddha himself said: “You only lose what you cling to.”
A CREEPING COUP

W hether Nepal was ruled by a monarchy—military dictatorship, an elected coalition or a Communist regime, its leaders have often tried and ultimately failed to suppress free press. After the royal military coup of 1 February 2006, the Royal Nepal Army invaded newsrooms. At Nepal Times, two soldiers in military fatigues peeked at the monitors, forcing the designer to jump columns and cartoons. Kathmandu-based papers, including this one, went to press with white holes—so readers got the message that the edition had been censored. We wrote metaphorical editorials comparing democracy to trees, and played cat-and-mouse with the authorities.

Radio stations were told to broadcast only music, no news or current affairs. Some news readers got so fed up they started singing the news, broadcasting bulletins in cloaks. In districts, radio stations were closed down, journalists jailed, some tortured and forced into solitary confinement for a year.

After the casacde and the 2006 elections, in which the Monarch party won a landslide, many breathed a sigh of relief. The war was over, and it looked like our freedoms had been restored. We were mistaken. The ruling Communists retaliated against critical content in the media in 2008–9 by burning newspaper distribution vans, instigating militant unions or vandalising and assaulting journalists in fresh newsmakers.

Ever since the united Nepal Communist Party came to power, it has been taking incremental steps to gag the media. Not with a sudden, swell crackdown but slowly, in instalments. Like frogs in a pot of water above a fire, we are not supposed to notice that the water is starting to boil until it is too late. Just a short recap:

In August 2018, Nepal’s new Press Code criminalised expression (Section 286), slapped on heavy fines and jail terms for recording conversations (Section 286) and accused sentry punishment for sending, receiving or using online data (Section 288). It banned ridiculing of government officials by Photoshop-ing their images.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepal Communist Party #47 of 15-25 May 2009 (All editorial/ Abb) V/Not alone we may/it could have been written about current Nepali polit. (Cont.)/

Counties in hybrid politics threaten to be governed differently than federal democracies. "It is major policies must be on the list of the next prime minister," says foreign analyst. (More on the "new" CPM is to be released this week)

Unfortunately, consensus has been the first casualty of the conflict of interest between the "new" CPM. More than half the members have been elected to the "new" CPM. This is sure to lead to confusion and ultimately a vacuum of power. (The "new" CPM is to be released this week)

...Unf

What’s Trending

Good as old after two earthquakes

The three iron pagoda temple batch was destroyed in the 1934 earthquake. Lot's in the Magh Mayadevi temple. Now, Bhaktapur: Nepal's historic temple, isn't it just as remarkable as it is to see a 1934 look. Buy their daily online and take a look at the rest of the online site...

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Survey is wake-up call for Nepali government

There were great hopes among Nepalese that the first local election in four decades, in 2017, would finally improve governance and help solve long-standing, but recently more pressing, questions. From their aspirations today, this Nepal Times, a few years ago.

Most popular on Twitter

Women of substance

There was a time when we would enter the profession of chat. Today, they’re more young women. Meet Rashmi Subramurthy, Rashmi Subramurthy, Rashmi Subramurthy and Mira Jhingan, who are helping reorient gender roles in Nepal.

Most commented

Nepal’s Grand Trek Road by Sonal Dehlvi

There is one very funny and still want to eat their egg and keep a toate all part of the Great Indian trek tour. After brushing through this workbook, you’re going to like it just as much. Read more on our website.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

"It is so good to see that the way is now open for women with ambition with Alan Robinson.

"The main export from many villages is labour. We visited villages where there were few working-age men. Some are mostly women, the old and young children. The main man had gone off to work in India to work and send money back home. Often, not all, these men are cheated and treated unfairly.

"Are you worried about your online activities being restricted under the government’s increasing surveillance? Not an easy Yes/No question. On the one hand, I worry about being fired and/or put in jail for speaking truth to power and the consequences I would have on my family. On the other hand, I would resist any day in the court and the international stigmatisation that could be mobilised.

Sadagata Magar

You are a strong, kind and beautiful young lady (Sadagata Magar) from survivor to champion, Amritesh Shrestha.

Sue Everall

READER REVIEWS

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Sue Everall

Quotes from readers.

Online Packages

Buddha's Luminous

Lumini was not yet negotiated until 1999. The Secretary General of "We must always be vigilant in their spirit to live in" an international centre for peace. India, at 16 years later, the grand vision is finally being realised. The Lumbini Museum will be an 'invaluable asset in the cultural experience of the Buddhist culture. Watch our video.

Under Buddha's Gaze

It has always been referred to Buddha's legs, whether the knees of the valley, Tarai Buddhists from the forests of Kirtipur in the Chitwan National Park to have access to the Buddha's sacred shrines, and how the large size image contains a holy connection sentiment with the original sanctity and reality.

Women Power

Big dream, follow your dreams, work hard and you will achieve the "Women of substance", #505

Sue Chamberlain

Labour Cost

Exploiting the government to supply jobs is a dangerous step toward Socialism. Sigmund Stengel

Press Freedom

Are you worried about your online activities being restricted under the government’s increasing surveillance? Not an easy Yes/No question. On the one hand, I worry about being fired and/or put in jail for speaking truth to power and the consequences I would have on my family. On the other hand, I would resist any day in the court and the international stigmatisation that could be mobilised. Sidda Not is my likely answer as the judiciary system here is so corrupt that a day in court most likely would not happen.

Badam D Vrhunga

Sangita Magar

You are a strong, kind and beautiful young lady (Sangita Magar) from survivor to champion, Amritesh Shrestha.

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Dozers and Nepal’s development

Building infrastructure must be seen as an investment, not expenditure

On 13 May, Himalayan TV, Jharkhand, Delhi and Vijayakant gave out excellence awards to projects that met newer, higher standards. One surprise award went to the restoration of the historic Pokhara Ganga Chharka of Kathmandu. The second surprise was that no one was awarded in the large-project category, sending a message that there was plenty of room for improvement. Such due diligence to select winners will in future ensure that the quality of construction will improve. As the saying goes, when everyone stays average, the average goes down; this is what has long plagued the infrastructure sector in Nepal.

Dozers are literally changing the face of Nepal. Mountains are no longer the barriers they were, which may be the necessary first step toward prosperity through connectivity. However, this process must ultimately determine the level of prosperity that can come with easier access to the world by improved roads and services. The cost of transport must go down over time.

To attain such results, maintenance, management, and upgrading of infrastructure must be a continuous process. Roads cannot only pay for themselves, they can generate huge revenue in the longer term. Building infrastructure is not expenditure, as is currently perceived, but an investment.

Many construction projects today are undertaken through a flawed public procurement regulation that awards the contract to the lowest bidder. This has resulted in many destructive projects and a waste of taxpayers’ money. In future, many projects will be designed, resource and implemented by the private sector. Competition will help improve things in general.

The government can collaborate with the private sector, as we are seeing, in hydropower, hotels, schools and hospitals. There could even come a time when development partners may rely on back well constructed social infrastructure to be the definitive sector as their contribution to Nepal’s development.

A day or so ago, a recent trip up the Trisuli River, it was heat-warming to see dozers expanding the road beyond the traditional. It just depends on who is driving them.

Anil Chitrakar, President of Godavari Bank

Turkish Airlines Golf Cup

Baku, where Turkish Airlines Turkey Open was held, is among the most beautiful cities of Azerbaijan. The course, which is known for its challenging nature, provided an excellent backdrop for the Turkish Airlines Golf Cup. A total of 108 participants took part in the event, which was organized by the Azerbaijan Golf Federation and the Turkish Golf Federation. The tournament was held at the Baku Resort Golf Club, which is one of the best venues in the region.

Qatar feeds the needy

Qatar Airways, in partnership with Qatar Charity, has launched the holy month of Ramadan by providing food for the needy.

British PGA Professional and Director of Golf based in Istanbul, Andrew Nickolls, who was at Gokarna this week told NewsTimes: “Gokarna is a world-class course, challenging because of its long and narrow fairways but spectacular because of the forest and wildlife.”

The Golf Cup event in Gokarna was selected as the best participating from membership clubs across Nepal, including the Nepal Army Golf Club, Pokhara and Dharam.

We wanted to treat this like a Nepali qualifier, and to try and include as many people as possible, said Deepak Acharya of Gokarna Forest Resort and one of the organizers. Pema N. Sherpa finished second runner-up on the course with 41 points, Raju Rana and G. B. Giri were also scored 41 points. Pemja and Raju had 39 each on the course last but Gen Thapa scored 37. On the last six holes scored, Pema scored 14 against 13 for Raju to secure third place.

Mithun Ris (men) and Rekha Ghimire (women) won the competition, which was won by Mithun Ris (men) and Rekha Ghimire (women). Tashi Tsering won the lowest gross score with 2, along with a special trophy in the memory of the late Ang Tshering Sherpa. With 18 points, Tashi also won the gross score award.

We warmly thank all of our guests who made the Turkish Airlines Golf Cup possible, said Abdullah Tuncer Kocel, General Manager for Turkish Airlines Nepal. We hope that everyone enjoyed the event and that we see you next year.

All Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup events will fly to Turkey in the luxury of Turkish Airlines’ business class. Events such as the Turkish Airlines Open and TAWGC have made Turkish Airlines an important part of our story.

Turkish Airlines is proud to continue its partnership with Qatar Airways, which provides exclusive intercontinental services to foreigners arriving in Nepal. The carrier will offer a range of services, including immigration and vaccination services, for visitors.

Qatar Airways has been a sponsor of the tournament since its inception in 2015. The airline’s ongoing support is essential to the success of the event, which attracts players from around the world.

Red Russian

Red Russian, a classic dozen with no alcohol, is now available in Nepal. The brand is made from the finest grains and pure sugar, giving it a smooth and rich taste. It is perfect for sipping, as well as a foundation for cocktails.

Travellers’ SIM

Ncell has introduced the Travellers’ SIM, which provides exclusive intercommunication services to foreigners arriving in Nepal. The carrier will offer a range of services, including immigration and vaccination services, for visitors.

Let’s move beyond

Café Bar is a marketing campaign to enhance the service by introducing new seats, Wi-Fi access in two high floors of the restaurant.

White Walker Whiskey

Jameson Walker has launched the ‘White Walker’ whiskey in collaboration with HBO and Games of Thrones (GoT). The limited edition Scotch whiskey is inspired by Game of Thrones, the ‘White Walkers’. The brand is known for its smooth and balanced flavor, which is perfect for sipping alone or as a base in cocktails.

Enhanced food and beverage offerings in all classes, and upgraded digital platforms, will ensure that the flights will meet the expectations of the NRI electorate in the next few months,推开作为一天的开始。
Constitutional guardianship in Nepal
Rule of law and the irreplaceable role of the judiciary in the federal project

George Varughese and Iain Payne

The judiciary has an irreplaceable role in ensuring a commitment to the rule of law and encouraging a new way of doing politics in the new federal system. But can this role be more public beyond the confines of courtrooms in Kathmandu and the provinces?

In addition to requiring a stronger and substantive account from all branches of government, the judiciary must be influential in shaping norms and values in the New Nepal in a constitutional guardianship role.

The judiciary’s relationship to other branches of government shapes its ability to play a role in protecting the Constitution. While historically Nepal’s judiciary has had a few notable exceptions, been cautious to combat or prescribe executive actions, more recent developments suggest additional issues in stature as well as independence.

Successful governments of all political stripes have collaborated in shielding the judiciary and engaging in substantial stress, judicial setbacks, impeachments, forced retirements, and political appointments are some of the methods used. There is also a consistent pattern of governments and politicians imprisoning and delaying court orders.

Leaders and fundraisers of the judicial branch have also invited apprehensions on several occasions, leading to public criticism sometimes resembling that levied on executive and legislative branches.

The judiciary has its existential dilemma: how to regain public trust not only as an institution of restraint on government but also as a trusted guardian of justice.

While the Constitution seeks to bring government closer to citizens through a federated structure, serious concern can be raised of obfuscation and procrastination on the part of the federal government to meaningfully devolve power.

The future of intergovernmental relations will be shaped by the ability of the federal’s 767 governments to converge as equal players. Legitimate and credible dispute resolution will be critical for constitutionally mandated cooperation and coordination among and between governments.

The Constitution creates several institutions to support and supervise intergovernmental relations. At the national level these include the Inter-Parliamentary Council, which brings governments of different levels to the same table to discuss disputes and grievances. The National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission, the constitutionally mandated forum to promote a fair allocation of the country’s resources derived from revenues and royalties, and the Constitution bench of the Supreme Court.

The Constitutional Bench is tasked with interpreting the Constitution, particularly for settling intergovernmental disputes and promoting clarity and obedience to federalized governance. However, internal politics have prevented the bench from functioning properly.

More than three years after the adoption of the Constitution, the Court has yet to embrace one of its most important roles: framing and shaping the course of constitutional federalism, particularly regarding intergovernmental relations.

This has contributed to ongoing legal and jurisprudential paralysis, which hinders effective functioning of provincial and local governments.

The Constitution’s schedules, which delineate the division of constitutional power among the governments, are ambiguous. Disputes management, for example, is listed as both an exclusive responsibility of local government and as a concurrent power of the federation, provinces, and local governments.

Whereas effects of disaster are managed locally, the incoherence in disaster management begins with ambiguous delineation of responsibility in the law.

The ongoing dispute between Province 2 and Kathmandu over the establishment and governance of police forces is another example. This is likely to frustrate and draw conflict across provinces in the absence of clear legal clarity on who does what in a federal system. Such legal uncertainty has stymied lawmaking at the sub-national level.

Aggravating the issue, their legislative being nullified by the courts or contradicted at the federal level, most local assemblies have restricted themselves to passing only procedural laws. One elected local representative recently stated: “Initially, we were very excited to make laws. Later we realized that our laws could be annulled by the court even by the federal or provincial governments. Now we are confused, as we have to be very careful.”

The Constitutional Bench can provide definitive guidelines on Nepal’s federality by, for example, supplying a constitutionally robust mechanism for sub-national governments to debate and contest laws that harm their constituents’ interests. The formal resolution of disputes by the Bench will require governments, particularly the federal government, to publicize the decision in which they are steering the federation.

For federalism to work, Nepal’s judiciary and the judges who lead it must embrace a culture of alliteration.

This is perhaps most important for the Constitutional Bench, as its task is to help navigate the complex jurisprudential issues that will arise in the newly federalized system of governance. We must be ready.

We must join the fight for a better judiciary and a better federal Nepal.
Not just another book on Everest

Fresh light on the transformation of the land and people of Solu Khumbu

It is perfect that Everest: Reflections on the Solu Khumbu should come out this year, the centenary of Edmund Hillary’s birth. The book is a tribute to the contribution made by one of the first two people to climb Mt Everest to the Sherpa people who live in the sacred valleys below the world’s highest mountain.

The large-format photo book has stunning images of the Solu Khumbu, by photographer and travel writer Sujoy Das, and chapters by Lisa Chonggay, who has lived and worked in Nepal since 1974, is New Zealand’s honorary consul to Nepal, and writes a fortnightly column in this paper. Both have a deep connection to the Sherpa people, and an admiration bordering on reverence of the mountains that they live amongst. Das has been visiting the Khumbu since 1978, trekking, writing and photographing. The book shows why he keeps coming back: the photography reflects his marvel at the camera and a Tapovan ability to capture the beauty of nature in words and pictures.

The portraits of mountains and people are simultaneously stark and sublime, their rugged beauty etched by the light of the Khumbu sky. Das peers beyond the usual touristy postcard images of the Khumbu to reveal faces and forests, rivers and ridges in strikingly memorable imagery.

Afrad of being grounded in Lukla by weather last year, he decided to walk down to Phaplu as the monsoon broke over the Himalayas. The photographs of the less-travelled trail with male trains, school children and porters carrying enormous loads of corrugated sheets along shiny rain-wrecked stone paths take us back to a pre-tourism Solu Khumbu.

Das’ photography is as lyrical as his writing. Waving of mist funnelled up the valley, abruptly blanketing out the entire trail. The rain was as fine as spay can be, so soft and delicate it was barely there. The trees were ghost like apparitions, and round a bend an unexpected yale caravan materialised out of dense fog, revealed only by tinkling bells.

Lisa Chonggay retraces the life and times of the unsung Edmund Hillary after Everest made him a celebrity — how he transformed a potato field in Lukla into an airstrip in 1964, ‘short-circuiting’ trekking and transforming the region. The people of Solu Khumbu are cited as the best example of remote communities who have not only prospered from tourism, but have grown wealthy from it. Without sacrificing their Buddhist ethos, they have been able to harness the benefits of tourism whilst modifying the worst of its influences and defending their traditional values, she writes, crediting Hillary’s selective and sensible approach to ensure quality health, education and infrastructure to his beloved land.

The Sherpas are no strangers to change, tragedy and disasters, but a strong sense of community has provided a robust coping mechanism. They adapted an agrarian, pastoral lifestyle seamlessly into tourism. When trading routes to Tibet closed in the 1950s, they made the mountain-guide profession synonymous with their surname. And when India and China went to war in the 1960s, Sherpas switched from mountaineering to trekking. Namche today has a per capita income five times Nepal’s national average.

Even bigger changes are coming. Nepal’s road network has reached Phaplu and it is possible to drive to Kathmandu in 12 hours. Global warming is melting the mountains, increasing the danger of glacial lake outburst floods. The Sherpas, and indeed the people of the rest of the Himalayas, will need their legendary resilience to deal with these changes.

British climber Chris Bonington hints at this in his Foreword to the book. “This is not just one more book about Everest, but a special celebration of the haunting beauty of Solu Khumbu and its people. Civilization depends on the health of our high places, and I wish all Sherpa friends all the best with successfully navigating their future course.”

Kunda Dixit

Internet and Digital TV
By the time participants of the Trans-Himalayan Adventure 2019 rally arrived in Kathmandu, they had nearly had enough.

Driving on the Tibetan plateau was, aside from the altitude, fairly straightforward. Chinese highways are world-class, the terrain relatively flat and the facilities were good.

But crossing the Himalayas, descending 1,000m in one hour through serpentine roads, negotiating a tin-shed immigration post on the Nepal side, and then bopping along the dusty track from Rasuwa to Kathmandu tested the stamina of the drivers and their 65 plus cars. The drivers said the contrast between China and Nepal could not have been more stark.

"It was the worst road I have ever driven in, actually there was no road, but it was an adventure of a lifetime," said Steve Duckworth, who drove a classic 1979 Range Rover 2-door named Camel. Via Iliong Pass on the Korang side, across the border and on to Kathmandu was only 182km, but it took the 15 cars 9 hours along the earthquake-damaged road. Two of the cars lost their headlights and had to negotiate the dark and dusty tracks with handheld torches as the exhausted drivers and cars wheeled into the Y&T and Yacht Hotel at midnight on 9 May.

Trans-Himalayan Adventure 2019 was organized by Rally Round, which sets up challenging vintage and classic car events, including the trans-continental Peking to Paris Rally. But even by the gruelling standards across the most challenging terrains on Earth, the non-competitive China-Nepal-India rally was one of the most difficult so far for drivers and cars alike.

Crews were driving a 1925 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, and a 1939/1937 Coupe named Buttercup. A 1929 Bentley Super Sports and a 1927 Nash Roadster were some of the other elderly cars. Senior vehicles included the MG J4, Bentley Super Sports, a 1952 Studebaker Champion, a 1965 Porsche 911 Coupe and a classic 1970 Mercedes 280SL Roadster.

The mud-raked and dust-covered cars all seemed to have taken the arduous journey from the Tibetan Plateau to Kathmandu surprisingly well.

This week six of the cars crossed into India and on to Varanasi, before driving through Pokhara.

Many participants were familiar with the challenges having taken part in the Peking to Paris rally. On Day 3 out of Chengdu, from Beihang to Zhouqong, the classic 1970 Mercedes 280SL Roadster of ex-Gurkha officer Richard Cunningham suffered from fuel evaporation 12 times before being fixed by the sweeps. At the end of the day, an unshod Cunningham wrote in his blog: "That was a hell of a drive. What a great day. Adventure driving at its best!"

Said Cunningham: "The amazing thing about driving through Nepal was that although the roads are rough, the people are great, the kids offer helping hand, you drive through some stunning scenery few people get to see."

Many villages took selfies in front of the exotic cars, and a couple of enthusiastic villagers in China even cleaned the naked mudguard of a vintage Bentley Super Sports. "They would have given the whole car a wash if time had allowed," wrote a driver in the rally blog.

Lisa Wennman, founder and director of Rally Round, said the Trans-Himalayan Adventure took two years to plan and map. "It is not about competition, it is about the journey, about companionship and shared passion," she expressed. "Many of the participants are above 50 years of age, they keep in perfect health, and enjoyed every moment of it."
Reimagining and renovating The

Kunda Dixit

W

en the Burmese Buddhist Secretary-

of the United Nations, U Thant, visited Nepal in 1967 he flew to Lumbini for a pilgrimage and said: “This is the most important day of my life.” Then, he wept.

Many years later, he said he was touched by the visit to the sacred site, and even his grandson Thant Myint-U tells us in an interview (rightly that his grandfather was “incredibly moved” in Lumbini. U Thant might have been spiritually stirred to be at the birthplace of the Buddha, but he was also distressed by the condition of the devotees and festivities spot near the Nepal-India border. Back in Kathmandu, he met King Mahendra and discussed restoring Lumbini’s sanctity. And on return to New York, U Thant set up a UN committee to turn the devotees into an international centre for peace.

Both UNDP and UNESCO got involved and the Japanese architectural firm was designing the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Kenzo Tange, was hired to draw up a master plan. Tange visited Lumbini, and his firm submitted the design in 1978.

The project to preserve Lumbini and landscape the sacred garden and surrounding park was to have been finished by 1985, but Tange died in 2005 without seeing the completion of his master plan.

The choice of Kenzo Tange for the design was influenced by the stature of post-war Japan. While he was part of the “Metabolist” movement of Japanese architects, his work did not incorporate any obviously traditional Japanese, or even Asian, elements. Neither was he a devout Buddhist. Metabolists sought to experiment with structures that were inspired by biological processes of growth and aggregation.

In fact, Tange joined architecture school after seeing the work of the Swiss-French architect and urban planner Le Corbusier, and he admired the functionality of Soviet architecture of the 1930s. This penchant for raw, concrete mega-structures that shunned decorative elements earned Kenzo Tange a place in the “brutalist” school of mid-20th century architectural modernism.

Tange’s monumental master plan for Lumbini governed by its north-south axis (above of a canal that bisects the site, and is straddled by a series of amphitheatre and vast spire for public meetings. The museum anchors the north, while the concentric circles of the sanctum sanctorum: the sacred garden surrounding the Mayadevi Temple is situated at the south end. The plan includes a monastic zone, a library and Lumbini Village for visitors.

The eastern monastic zone was set aside for Theravada Buddhism, while the western zone is for Mahayana Buddhism. The master plan is still being broadly followed, but the monastic structures are falling short due to poor maintenance, and not all the temples in the monastic zone conform to the overall harmony and scale the architect had in mind.

Lumbini did not develop into a major Buddhist pilgrimage destination like Bodh Gaya, Saranath or Kushinagar, mainly because it was discovered to be the Buddha’s birthplace relatively late — in the early 20th century. It suffered neglect due to its remoteness and because Nepal was closed to foreigners till the 1950s.

Even after U Thant’s visit, the Buddha’s birthplace was never accorded the priority it deserved in Kathmandu who wanted to have it both ways: push Nepal’s identity as the world’s only Hindu kingdom while simultaneously using Lumbini as a symbol of nationalism. The fact that Lumbini is today surrounded by Muslim villages has also diminished local interest.

After U Thant’s death in 1974, the UN’s focus and fund-raising for the project also waned. Although Nepal’s royal family attended numerous meetings of the International Committee for the Development of Lumbini, and gave patronage to the Lumbini Development Trust, the master plan languished. After 1990, corruption, poor governance and conflict took their toll.

The government’s weak commitment to Lumbini and lack of transparency meant that over the years, vested interest groups tried to cash in on Lumbini’s fame. Those with resources and geopolitical clout got away with unregulated construction in the monastic zone.

One mucky affair was an initiative in 2011 by the Asia-Pacific Exchange Cooperation Foundation (APECF) which claimed it would invest $1 billion in Lumbini. The foundation got the backing of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, but soon became embittered in controversy because it planned to scrap Tange’s master plan.

APECF’s scheme is now on hold.

On Saturday, 18 May President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Prime Minister KP Dli, other government ministers and ambassadors of Buddhist countries in the region will be in Lumbini to give new impetus to developing the Buddhist circuit in Nepal as an international pilgrimage and tourism destination.

The time is ripe, as the new international airport nearby (called Gautam Buddha International Airport) will be in operation by next year, allowing direct flights from Asian cities, the road linking Lumbini to the Indian border and the East-West Highway is being upgraded, new hotels are coming up and Kenzo

and beyond to re-imagine, renovate and expand the centre as a true cultural and spiritual oasis within Lumbini.

The museum has a rich history rooted in the vision of the Buddha’s native site as a universal centre for peace, and the new phase of development will further the original vision of the master plan and the museum. Beside the spirituality of the Buddha’s birthplace, the modernist heritage of Tange’s refurbished structures will be an additional attraction for international visitors.

“When we travel to Lumbini we hope to find peace, solace and serenity as part of the Buddha’s teachings, so the re-imagination of the Lumbini Museum is going to be a very special milestone,” says Vice Chair, Vesc Mettevrae Sakyaputta of the Lumbini Development Trust [LDT].

In addition to being the birthplace of the Buddha, the Greater Lumbini Area has more than 200 historical sites including Kapilvastu (the ancient capital of the Sakya Kingdom where Prince Siddhartha lived until age

29), Devdaha (his maternal hometown) and Ramagaha (the only site still containing corporal relics of the Buddha).

Lumbini is a very special place where you see all the vehicles come together.

Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana — in a big Buddhist spiritual function.

and at long last! A dedicated Buddhist Museum is happening,” says Director Harshacharya Kunjapala of Thirti.

The structure is currently being restored and refurbished by Asia’s leading architect, Kris Yeung, and the redesigned museum will re-open in late 2020. Conservation and

MOUL RELICS: (left) during back to the in the Greater Lumbini Museum (Ca)

The present museum will be entirely renovated

and beyond to re-
BUDDHA'S LUMBINI

Lumbini was relatively neglected until UN Secretary General U Thant visited in 1967 and was moved to tears. A Japanese architect designed the master plan to turn the sacred site into an international centre for peace. Today, 41 years later the grand vision is finally being realised.

Lumbini Museum

evaluation of display possibilities for priceless archaeological artefacts from the Great Lumbini Area dating back 2,500 years are underway, with Thai interpretive planner Albert Panvil Wongchaisak leading the design, planning and fabrication of a world-class gallery space. Says monk and writer Matthieu Ricard, “In our troubled world facing human and environmental challenges, the wisdom of Buddha Shakyamuni’s compassionate heritage is more relevant than ever. The Lumbini Museum will offer a unique and inspiring insight on the Buddha’s teachings, a most precious legacy that Nepal can be proud of.”

Contemporary fine art, audio-visual shows, dialogues and interactive exhibits will enhance storytelling for a truly modern and powerful experience of the Buddha’s life and message.

The Lumbini Museum team is busy fundraising, curating art and mobilising national and international donors, partners, experts and visionaries.

Says Lumbini Museum Director Sunamita Udai: “It is not often that one is given an opportunity to participate in such a momentous undertaking that can have a transformative impact on the identity of Nepal and its people. The Lumbini Museum is not a project, this is our common mission.”

www.lumbinimuseum.org

MOVING AND SHAKING: (Left to right) U Thant with King Mahendra in Kathmandu in 1967; King Birendra (centre with Guru Kripalu Rimal from the government) on an elephant back inspection of Lumbini in 1972; U Thant with his newly-born grandson Thant Myint-U in New York in 1966.

NT: What is your earliest memories of your grandfather?

Thant Myint-U: I was eight years old when he died in 1974. We lived together in New York, and I remember him well: coming home from work in his black Cadillac in a dark overcoat and fedora, puffing on Burmese cigars in his study, he’d play with books and papers, a photo of Mohandas Gandhi at his spinning wheel behind him, swimming with me in our pool at home, racing in a Burmese song, enjoying my grandmother’s stories or reading the latest news in the New York Times.

NT: What was the reason behind his determination to get the UN involved in preserving Lumbini?

In those days, the biggest conflict was of course the Cold War and the ideological conflict between communation and capitalism and democracy. My grandfather believed that religion could be an ally in the cause of peace. In 1965, Pope Paul came to New York at his invitation, the first Pope ever to set foot in the new world, and spoke to a special meeting of the UN General Assembly, calling for an end to war.

It was not long after that he came to Nepal and visited Lumbini. He was incredibly moved, saying it was one of “the most important days in my life”. I think it was only then that he had this particular vision, as a Buddhist but also as the UN Secretary General, not only to preserve Lumbini but to connect the development of Lumbini as a global centre, representing values of tolerance and non-violence, with the broader cause of world peace.

NT: You yourself have spent some time in Nepal. What would be some suggestions about how to preserve the sanctity of Lumbini?

Yes, I have very fond memories of my year in Kathmandu in 2008. I was not however able to travel to Lumbini, and so have no particular insights on what should be done. I would however say that, as is the case for any of the world’s great places, any development should weigh carefully the interests of local people, to ensure they benefit too.

NT: Many people from Burma travel to Buddhist sites in India on pilgrimage. What should be done to attract more of them to the Buddhist circuit in Nepal?

I think the most important thing at this point is simply transport. There are no direct flights from Yangon to Kathmandu, which is really a shame. Our two countries, with so much in the way of shared culture, history and even political experience, can benefit immensely from greater contact. I am sure Lumbini could become a magnet, but I hope the Burmese would then take the opportunity to explore Nepal more generally.
GETAWAY

Hotel Shanker
A resident for the runners of Nepal from 1854-1964, this heritage hotel offers an historic and serene atmosphere, featuring along with a comfortable interior, a lounge, and a rooftop cabana.
Campus (01) 4841257

Babar Mahal Villas
As is in the heart of the city, this boutique hotel is set in the existing architectural haven of Babar Mahal Revisted. It features 3 distinct styles of Nepal's architectural heritage, where you can relax in luxury and savour exquisite cuisine.
Jodhpur Palace Road, Sadak (01) 4573565/6/7

Dwarika’s Resort
A distinctive resort, Dwarika’s draws on an ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for heart and body, as well as the resort’s unique setting in a magnificent natural landscape and cultural historian.
(06) 6960127

Waterfront Resort Hotel
Located on the northern shore of Phewa Lake, the hotel is a perfect place for your travelling needs. It is near the airport, the tourist hub and has a free shuttle service to lakeside.
(06) 4029004

Patalabhan Vineyard Resort
A venue for those who enjoy peace, simplicity and quiet. An ensuite that echoes the elements with great views, jungle walks and panaries to take a break and rejuvenate after your tedious route.
Chasopani (06) 4316617, 9465759564

Air Quality Index

KATHMANDU | 10 - 16 May

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*Note: AQI values vary based on various factors such as emissions.

**Refer to the AQI Index website for the latest updates.**

https://aqi.ne.gov.np/
Between existence and extinction in Nepal

Sonia Awale

Nepal is situated at the crossroads of four eco-biological domains to the north, south, east and west. The country’s great altitudinal range endows it with biodiversity that is the richest in the world in such a small area.

Nepal also is the most densely inhabited mountain country in the world, and is squeezed between two of the planet’s most populous nations. Now, climate change has been added to the threats to the endangered life forms that inhabit Nepal’s fragile ecosystems.

The United Nations released an apocalyptic report in Paris last week warning that one million animal and plant species across the planet are on the verge of extinction. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment concluded that besides charismatic mammals, insects, fish and microorganisms, 73% of crops will vanish.

Here in Nepal, despite successes in nature conservation, species are threatened by new infrastructure projects like the proposed Nilgiri Airport and the East-West Railway, which are expected to wipe out 200,000ha of forests. Human encroachment of natural habitats, rampant pesticide use, poisoning of rivers and wildlife trafficking were bad enough, but climate change now adds a whole new dimension to the threat.

“In Nepal, we have usually focused on big mammals. Those are important but the attention should shift to other species that are vital to maintain the ecological balance,” explains naturalist Yathra Bahadur Shrestha. Indeed, the country may be losing insects and reptile species that have not even been discovered yet.

For example, there has been little study of the impact of wetland destruction and the pollution of water bodies on insects and amphibians. A new dragonfly species discovered above Pokhara’s Phewa Lake last year has not been spotted again. Bee populations have been declining at an alarming rate due to the spread of pesticides, leading to a loss of farm productivity. The disappearance of insects and aquatic fauna has had a cascade effect on indigenous and migratory birds wintering in Nepal.

“There is a crucial need of public awareness about less well-known species — they may have important roles for the ecosystems that we don’t even know about yet,” says Dugar Dalal of the Small Mammal Conservation and Research Foundation.

Extreme weather caused by global warming has also led to a serious water shortage across Nepal, which in turn is profoundly affecting wildlife, medicinal plants, rare orchids and the insects that depend on them.

The last major mass extinction on Earth 65 million years ago wiped out not only dinosaurs, but 75% of all species. It took the planet 10 million years to recover. But unlike previous extinctions that were caused by natural catastrophes, this time human activity is the cause.

The loss of biodiversity and destruction of nature and its impact cited in the IPBES report are felt more acutely in Nepal due to the vulnerability of the Himalayas to climate change, deforestation, pollution and poaching.

“Global environmental degradation will affect countries like Nepal more because of our sensitive topography,” writes IPBES researcher from Nepal, Utsan Babu Shrestha in a Kathmandu op-ed this week. “Proposed large infrastructure projects will have lasting negative impacts on the environment.”

Nepal has been successful in curbing domestic poaching, but it is a major transit point for wildlife trafficked en route to China. The presence of smugglers means the country needs to be vigilant about a revival in poaching. It is a conduit for tiger and rhino parts, rhino horns and other endangered species. Earlier this year, 200kg of pangolin scales bound for China were found at Kathmandu airport.

“Nepal may be landlocked in every other aspect but it is land-locked when it comes to smuggling,” Tirbah Bahadur Shrestha told Nepali Times.

The good news is that Nepal’s conservationists, planners and the government know what the problems are, as well as the solutions. The country also has vast experience in balancing nature conservation with meeting human needs. It just needs a long-term strategy and all stakeholders to work towards protecting the abundant biodiversity.

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**THE 6TH EXTINCTION**: The arid with medicinal properties, *Datura antipoda* (Parvati), is an endangered species.

Of the two species of pangolins in Nepal, one is on the brink of extinction. The new species of *Minganophorus phayrei*, discovered in Phakta last year, has not been spotted again.

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Norway—Nepal, a love story

When Krishna Shumsher Rana, then stationed at the Royal Nepalese Embassy in London, decided to visit Norway in 1938, war clouds were gathering over Europe. The embassy sent a letter to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry in Oslo saying this was a private visit, but reminded the Norwegians that the diplomat was also the son of Nepal’s prime minister, Chandra Shamsher.

Always accommodating, the Norwegians offered to set up an audience with King Haakon. The embassy replied that Krishna Shumsher and his wife were visiting Norway as tourists and ‘did not want any fuss’. However, the letter went on to hint that the couple could be invited to dinner with the king, reminding the Norwegians that the diplomat and his wife would only eat food prepared by their own chef.

Cited in the book Access Borders: A Story of Norway-Nepal Relationships, by Merit Baake, the reader doesn’t learn if the dinner eventually happened, or even if the visit took place, but the condition could have been prompted by the Rana couple trying to ensure that no beef would be served at the royal table.

Baake’s book is being released to mark 40 years since establishment of diplomatic relations between Norway and Nepal, and contains many such interesting anecdotes. The first recorded trip by a Norwegian to Nepal was by Robert Bergsaker, who travelled to Yasu in 1849 to set up the hospital there with Robert Fleming, the missionary and famous border.

Other noted Norwegians who travelled to Nepal include the climber and environmentalist Sigmund Kvaleh Stenseng, who did work in Rolwaling, the philosopher of ‘deep ecology’ Arne Naess, peace activist Johan Galtung and mountain-turnt-concertorant Jan Gangdal.

Among those who stayed longest was Odd Hoftingh and his wife Tuille, who helped set up the Rutwal Power Company to scale up hydropower capacity in Nepal through bigger and bigger projects, starting with Timsu, Ambikhet with its first underground powerhouse, then Kharikh and Kharikh. If the Nepal government had not bungled its energy planning so completely, Norway’s Stauerkraft and later SN Power would have built on Hoftingh’s experience and completed the 600MW Tamakoshi I project by now.

Hoftingh’s lifelong engagement with Nepal was also accompanied by tragedy when his son Martin Hoftingh died in the Thai Airforce crash in 1922. Odd Hoftingh donated the compensation from the airline to his son’s co-workers in Nepal to continue his work on democracy and debate through Martin’s Charitable.

The subject of Baake’s book is that unlike Nepal’s other big donors, there has been no geopolitical interest behind Norway’s development assistance to this country over the years. It started out with Christian missionary work, but even that was a benign and altruistic involvement. As in their own country, the Norwegians saw hydroelectricity as a driver of development and progress in Nepal, although later its aid branch out in other sectors like health, education and peace-building.

Norwegian photographer Ann Halsland, who worked with UNFRI in Nepal in the 1970s, asks in the book: ‘What is it about the Nepali people that make them so lovable, and make us connect with them for life?’ Halsland leaves the question open-ended, permitting us in Nepal and Norway to ponder the answer.

Randa Dietl

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**PROVINCIAL WELCOME**

Chief Minister of Province 2, Lalitpur, will welcome President Bidya Devi Bhandari in a Jalapal on Monday. Bhandari was visiting to perform special rituals at the Janak Temple.

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**COMRADESHIP**

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli will have a meeting at the Independent Monument in Ramnesh Peth on Monday. An agreement on trade and investment was signed between the two countries during the visit.

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**BRAVISSIMO**

Italian Honorary Consul Patrizia Pande Naoroji was welcomed at the Ravi & Vini Hotel on Wednesday as part of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and Nepal.
The minister and the anchor

The 12 May episode of Avenues TV Talk show Sakas Rajniti, in which host Susheel Pandey got into a fiery debate with Deputy Prime Minister and Health Minister Upendra Yadav, generated an equally heated debate on social media.

Rita Thapa @ritahira
Who trained this journalist? I am shocked and saddened by this arrogance, and lack of manners and self-control. Tough questions, if asked in a civil and polite manner, would have been more effective and earned Avenues TV respect. Hope this raises awareness.

However, there were others who urged viewers to look at the entire video and not just the part where the minister walks out. They said it was clearly Minister Yadav who had stonewalled on the tough questions from the host, and tried to evade them, after which the tension escalated.

Kritika Tharu नेपाली मार्ग @NepaliMaan
Where will the ego of ministers like these take Nepal? Why such a fuss over a simple question?

Raju Thapa @Rajuakkh
So I guess leaders are free to be ungracious. It looks like the captain alone after Yadav warned the host not to talk nonsense. Good manners apply to everyone.

Bhushan Yadav
The journalist is the one. The minister can walk out, and not talk nonsense. And then to increase TRP, the channel announces that the minister walked out because he couldn’t answer a question. Journalists need to mind their manners and learn etiquette.

Rajendra Dahal @DahalRJ
The Communication Ministry should invest in training and educating journalists like these and give them exposure, not minimization and reprimand.

Ram Rawal @RawalaRam
There is no sense in attacking the journalist alone for his “honesty” and “gaffes.” This incident clearly shows the junior lack of concern on human resources. Let us investigate why professional people either do not enter, or stay, in the media field.

Measuring and reducing carbon emissions

The Nepali government is committed to reducing its carbon footprint. The country aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This goal is in line with the global efforts to mitigate climate change and combat the impacts of climate change.

YETI AIRLINES' JOURNEY TO CARBON NEUTRALITY

MEASURE

Using GHG inventory tool, the calculated carbon emission was 19,665 tonnes of CO2e. Our aircraft operations were responsible for nearly 19,648 tonnes of CO2e emissions, with our vehicle and facility operations producing only 17 tonnes of CO2e.

REDUCE

From 2017, we reduced our emissions through fleet upgrades and reduced fuel use. In future, we will initiate to reduce emissions from two major sources of emissions: i.e. aircraft operations and build private-public partnerships to make greater impact together as per the Government of Nepal in the 2013 Action Plan on CO2 Emission Reduction

OFFSET

We have embarked journey of carbon neutrality by purchasing certified emission reduction equivalent to 2018 emission through UNFCCC Carbon Neutral New platform. As an airline industry highly depend on fossil fuels, we seek to offset any unavoidable emissions through feasible technological replacements and carefully selected projects from credible and certified sources.

REPORT

Based on the baseline set by GHG inventory, we ensure transparent and detailed reporting, inform strategic and technical decision-making, and raise ambition since 2018 and in the years to come to contribute further to achieve broader development goals.
Child marriage in Nepal: eloped at

Sewa Bhattarai in Surkhet

Sewa Bhattarai is now 45; she has been married 30 years. Pakitra Bhattarai married as a teen and is now 26. Anita Magar was married at 13, became a mother at 17 and is now 23 years old.

All these women are from Surkhet, one of the districts in Nepal where despite a sharp rise in female literacy, the average age of child marriage is still low. The women say it was a mistake to get married so young, and they are determined to convince their wives to wait till they are older.

“I endured such hardship because I got married young, but back then I didn’t know any better,” says Pakitra, who married at 15 and had four children by the time she was 20. “I tell my children they should not make the mistake I did.”

Pakitra’s husband eloped with another woman and abandoned her with the children when she was only 20. “There were days when I had nothing to feed my children. Fathers may ignore their children, but mothers cannot,” says the woman, who broke stones by the river to earn money to buy food for her four children.

Pakitra has got over years of physical and sexual abuse and the heavy burden of motherhood at a young age. Two of her sons got married after age 20, and her 17-year-old daughter is preparing for her Grade 12 exams with no intention of getting married yet.

Despite improved literacy, Nepal still has the third highest rate of child marriage in South Asia, and is among the world’s top 10 countries for the practice (see map, overleaf). The country has committed to end child marriage by 2030 and raised the minimum age of marriage to 15 in 2018,

NEPAL TIMES

It has been difficult to raise the average age of marriage.

“Since we get complaints about an impending child marriage, we stop them by separating the children and taking legal action against the parents,” says Chaudhary. “But if a couple is already married, then there is nothing we can do, since it is socially unacceptable for the girl to go back to her single life.”

A child marriage is legally void,

Percentage of women married before the age of 19, in 2011

but adolescents often elope because of lack of education. Sharmila BK, a counsellor in Surkhet, says that easy access to Facebook today has increased interaction among boys and girls, leading to teen marriages. “Though both young men and women are involved in

имал падэ, чандрагир чадэ

ималко гаак калнободес и
кевалкарако дхунфаки тифуздхулас
Child marriage and female literacy rates in South Asia

- **Afghanistan**: 35%
- **Nepal**: 37%
- **Bhutan**: 26%
- **Bangladesh**: 59%
- **Sri Lanka**: 12%

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13, mother by 17

Child marriage, many women have to deal with family matters and leading healthy lives. They are also more vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse, and sometimes are also the main victims of violence. The law protects them from child marriage, which is punishable by law, but there are no strict rules to prevent child marriage.

While the police in Surkholt receives barely five child marriage complaints every year, there are dozens against polygamy and hundreds against domestic abuse. All are linked, say social workers.

"Surkholt is a melting pot where people from the mountain districts settle temporarily before moving on. Men often migrate to India for work, and after such separation, it is normal for both men and women to find other partners, leading to conflict and domestic abuse," says Rosina, a local social worker.

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The curse of being new mothers

Prakash Singh in Baghura

D amsar Bushra of Chaur village in Baghura district gave birth to a baby three weeks ago in a hospital. She will sleep in the dark, windows covered with the cloth for another week. Her neighbour Sunilda Kalita was taken to a health post when she went into labour, but after she gave birth, the baby was burnt and thrown into the toilet.

"There are 300 families living in this village. Women give birth in this house, and all are living in caves with their cattle," says village headman Jindaila Bihari without much explanation. But she finds this is a safe place for mothers and newborns.

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Kolkatt and Diboga, districts of northern Kailash and Diboga, are same. I estimate that 80% of the women here deliver their babies in cowshed, which is why the infant and maternal mortality rates here have not come down like the rest of the country," says Firuza, who has worked with the Kailash Dalpa.

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Kissing Ass

(There is a rumour going around that we journalists aren’t free to be scathing and hypocritical lies anymore. It is true that there is complete freedom of expression in Nepal, it’s just that we don’t have freedom of press. The government is not stopping anyone from singing hymns at the top of their voices at any given time. Just surf the TV news channels: our aforementioned freedoms are perfectly intact and our backs have never been freer to kick or kiss ass, and be kicked in the Ass. Yet, we must not be complacent and rest on our laurels. We must not forget to kowtown when asked only to bow. We must always be prepared to print headlines in exchange for handouts. But unlike some other professions, we are not the type to take the envelope and run. Our journalistic code of ethics does not allow that — we take the cash out, return the envelopes, and only after that, run.

There are no curbs on max movements in Nepal, we are free to report any and all official pronouncements without let or hindrance, except when it pertains to the Dalai Lama’s health bulletin. Thanks to the Ministry of Information and Newspeak, the media today is more self-restrain, self-important, self-righteous, and self-omnious than ever before. If we have hurt anyone’s feelings, forgive us our press passes. Tough luck.)