NO SHAME

Just when we thought everything necessary had been said about Nepal’s corrosive corruption, it seems to be even worse.

The idea that ‘corruption’ is a Rs100 note slipped under a table is now just a quaint notion. Today, a network of politicians, bureaucrats, the legislature, judiciary and private sector cartels plunder and loot from the people, dividing the spoils. The beauty of it: no one is caught.

‘Corruption in Nepal is not a series of disjointed, individual acts. Instead, a range of stakeholders spanning public, private and criminal spheres operate as one to steal from the people and ensure impunity thrives’, says a new report by the Niti Foundation, Nepal’s Kleptocratic Network: Mapping Corruption and Impunity.

The network is one of shifting alliances spanning multiple agencies, with powerful businesses acting as brokers.

‘Money flows upwards through the hierarchy while impunity and benefits flow downward,’ adds the report. It uses Eworth to show and shame politicians, political parties, public institutions and the private businesses.

The private sector has gained primacy as the driver of corruption and impunity in Nepal... its main role is to distort the functions and policies of government regulatory agencies and to hijack key revenue streams to facilitate money laundering and reactive practices,’ the report concludes.

In cabots are political ‘patrons’ of the network and parties creating a ‘culture of collusion’, and public institutions, which also collude with private interests and politicians to steal directly from the state.

State institutions have been ‘weaponised’ and ‘hollowed out’. So, who remains to protect the interests of the Nepali people? If you were thinking ‘the judiciary’, think again.

The report states starkly: “Through pressure and threats, including sackings, impeachments, and forced retirements, political parties control and extract loyalty from justices.”

Making Nepal Accessible

Special coverage inside of efforts to make mobility inclusive

3 Toots for Tootie

Jeeza Williams’ journeys

1st accessible trek trail

Wheelchair friendly hotel

Uncover the cultural heritage of Lisbon

Situated on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean lies a vibrant, cosmopolitan city basking with old world charm. You can explore on foot and discover the ancient monuments and museums, or take the tram, funicular or Santa Justa lift and embrace the unparalleled views of the pastel colored terracotta rooftops from above. For every corner beauty, you can head to the nearby town of Sintra and revel at the spectacular fairytales castles. The beauty of Lisbon is endless.

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A KLEPTO REPUBLIC

A ll of us witness examples of Nepal’s corruption pandemic everyday in every sphere of life. From slipping a few to get a driving license to Semiconductor transactions. Roads that are dug up and not finished for a year and bridges that collapse as soon as they are built are our monuments to malfeasance. Clever civil servants now deploy ‘bribes’ outside of their offices to facilitate state services that should be free, so they do not have to directly get hand dirty.

But these are cases of petty theft by small fry. At higher levels of government, corruption is so huge and widespread, so accepted as SOTG, that the word ‘corruption’ does not do justice anymore to this contagion of loot and plunder.

One egregious example of the rot was the utterly scandalous example of the Parliamentary Account Committee’s (PAC) actions in support of Baburam Bhattarai. Parliament, which was supposed to oversee the government, instead protected it from scrutiny.

Another is the recent case of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and the Chinese Civil Construction Corporation (CCCC). These agencies were accused of irregularities in the construction of the Solukhumbu-Sagarmatha road.

The corruption that is present is not just at the top but is endemic across the government. The power is in the hands of a few people who use their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people they are supposed to serve.

There is no separation of powers anymore. What we are left with is a group of people who are in control of all three branches of government.

The result is a government that is incapable of functioning effectively. It cannot deliver basic services to its citizens and is unable to deal with the challenges facing the country.

In conclusion, Nepal is a klepto republic, where corruption is a way of life. The government is run by a few people who use their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people they are supposed to serve.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The Nepal Government (2002-2006) began its term on 10 April 2005 with a pledge to bring peace and democracy to the country. It was the first time in Nepal’s history that a democratically elected government took power.

The government faced a number of challenges, including a civil war that had been ongoing since 1996.

One major challenge was the Maoist insurgency, which had been fighting for an end to the monarchy and a federal system of governance.

The government’s efforts to negotiate a peace agreement with the Maoists were met with resistance from both sides.

In addition to the Maoist conflict, the government also had to deal with the ethnic conflict in the Terai region.

Despite these challenges, the government managed to achieve some important milestones, such as the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006.

The government’s success in bringing the war to an end paved the way for a more stable and peaceful future for Nepal.

What’s Trending

U Thant, Kenzo Tange and the Buddha’s birthplace

In 1964, the United Nations General Assembly voted to locate the UN in New York. This decision was made after a long process of deliberation and negotiation.

The site chosen was the old Palais des Nations in Geneva, which had been used for several years as the headquarters of the League of Nations.

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*taxes not included.
India’s new social media politics

There was no effort to curb ‘fake news’ during India’s election campaign because the ruling BJP was responsible for disseminating much of it.

Shashi Tharoor

NEW DELHI – What role has social media played in India’s election? Conventional wisdom had it that, in the Indian context, one should always be suspicious about the reach and political impact of social media. But with some 625 million Internet users in India, and upwards of 80% of Internet use on mobile phones, these have been 625 million pairs of eyes looking at social media during the 2019 election, nearly eight times more than in 2014.

Though I was a Twitter pioneer among Indian politicians, my own view is that no Indian election can be won or lost on social media alone. While perhaps above 40% of voters use social media, there are no reliable studies of how frequently they use it for political news and views. They could be in WhatsApp groups chatting Facebook status of their beach weekend, rather than debating the merits of the political parties. There’s still no substitute for mass rallies, street-corner addresses, door-to-door canvassing, handshakes at markets and busy junctions, and jeep-to-tours.

Twitter, the most ‘political’ of social media, has only 30 million active users in India. It is dwarfed by Facebook and WhatsApp, with over 240 million active users each. And, given parliamentary constituencies of some two million people, Twitter is of little help in political mobilization. Twitter would be useless for organizing a mass rally; it cannot be a substitute for conventional campaigning.

Nonetheless, political parties turned to social media during this election. Aside from its usefulness for issuing messages through members of Parliament and WhatsApp forwards, social media’s livelihood impact (as a source for “mainstream” media stories) makes it an indispensable communications tool for politicians. And that’s where the trouble starts.

WhatsApp is the favoured medium because 82% of India’s mobile phone users have downloaded the app, and because it is targeted to specific groups. A political party can create groups defined by their interests, caste or religious identity, or a specific issue or cause, and bombard them with messages to reinforce their bias and convince them to vote for them. The ruling BJP is the master of this technique, running an estimated half-million WhatsApp groups across the country. Its IT cell head, Amit Malviya, declared in March, “The upcoming elections will be fought on the mobile phone… In a way, you could say they would be a WhatsApp election.”

The use of social media is not always benign. Misinformation is rife on the BJP groups, including censored and white-washed accounts of what leading Congress politicians (mainly Rahul Gandhi) said and photoshopped images portraying traitorous behavior by opposition leaders. ‘Fake news’ exists because it has been manufactured to serve the political interests of its disseminators. The BJP’s attitude is that all is fair in love, war, and political democracy.

WhatsApp took steps to limit the damage, restricting forwards, for example, to just five recipients in order to impede lies from going viral. It blocked numbers identified by the Election Commission as members of ‘fake news’. Guilty parties quickly find alternative avenues and create more groups, however. The BJP benefits from vast armies of people, paid and volunteers, whose job is to feed the WhatsApp groups.

The fear of democrats are not unkindled: people have been killed on the basis of fake WhatsApp rumors. Social media offers a marvellously useful set of communication tools that democratizes public opinion. But in the hands of unscrupulous politicians who seek it as a means of manipulation, social media can undermine democracy itself. Once you have voted for the wrong people on the basis of false information, there’s nothing you can do about it until the next election. In that fact lies the danger posed by social media to India — and not only Indian democracy.

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Qatar unveils FIFA TVC

Qatar Airways has unveiled a new FIFA commercial in celebration of its sponsorship of the upcoming FIFA Women’s World Cup, taking place 7 June to 7 July in cities throughout France. The new film features a mother telling her daughter a bedtime story about a new land where women football reigns, where player rules and fans from many nations gather to cheer. Football superstar Neymar Jr. features.

MetLife Asia visits Nepal

MetLife’s Senior Vice President of Asia, Head of Strategic Growth Markets, uses.

Nissan offer

The group announced a ‘Pre-Budget Offer’ of cash benefits for the purchase of Nissan four-wheeler customers who buy a new car before the end of March. Customers who buy a new car will receive a benefit of up to Rs 3,000. Similar benefits are available with the purchase of Sunny, Nissan Kicks, Navara and Terra.

Bira 91 cracks a deal

Bira 91, one of the fastest growing craft beer brands, has signed a major five-year deal with the international cricket council (ICC). The partnership confirms Bira 91 as the official sponsor of ICC global tournaments including the ICC Cricket World Cup, ICC T20 World Cup, ICC Men’s T20 Championship, ICC U19 Cricket World Cup and the ICC Women’s World Cup. This month, Bira 91 is running the ‘Fly to World Cup’ promotion, where consumers can win a luxury paid trip to India to see a World Cup match firsthand. It will also launch the World Cup promotion featuring free Bira 91 merchandise and screenings of ICC World Cup matches at select locations.

BIZ BRIEFS

Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general and former minister for communication, chambers, and information in India National Congress MP, is the author of the book and the World of the 21st Century.
Devolving the judiciary

New and old structural challenges remain in federalism and access to justice

Iain Payne
and
George Varughese

The organisational infrastructure of the court system is of critical importance for the success of Nepal’s new constitutional order. It is in the lower courts that people come face to face with the judicial branch of government, and where the ordinary and routine forms of justice most directly affecting daily life are in practice. Subnational courts therefore should not be forgotten in considering the judiciary’s irreplaceable role in instilling a commitment to the rule of law and encouraging a new way of doing politics.

Nepal’s network of 77 district courts is the gateway for virtually all of the country’s litigation (85,000 cases in 2017-18, over which district courts oversee final resolution to 60%). Yet both in resource allocation and in public imagination, these courts are the most neglected. It is remarkable that a mere 241 judges discharge the enormous workload.

While the 2015 Constitution has changed the executive and legislative, the court structure has not undergone significant revision, except to add two district courts — for a total of 77 — and to refashion 16 appellate courts as seven high courts with their 11 benches extended across respective provinces.

The subordinate courts now have slightly enlarged purview. For the first time, provincial high courts will be able to hear public interest litigation, hopefully rescuing some of the Supreme Court’s caseload burden. District courts now supervise all justice institutions, formal and informal, below the district level. The conflict has increased authority to oversee criminal offences punishable by more than one year imprisonment, many of which were previously adjudicated by quasi-judicial bodies like the district administration office. They have new jurisdiction over some civil matters previously supervised by the district executive. Critical access-to-justice issues have been inherited from the previous governance set-up. For example, the geographical inaccessibility of the district courts, which remain the lower court in judicial hierarchy and sit at the new obsolete district headquarters, are one of the key reasons why only a fraction of disputes tend to be registered with the proper court and judicial authority. The judiciary’s absence in municipal government is glaring and hardy addressed by the presence of so-called judicial committees, which fall under the municipal executive.

Moreover, wholesale state restructuring must take into account roles and responsibilities of different justice sector institutions at the local level, and the judicial branch’s reflections on those would be timely in guiding other branches of government. This is especially the case with regard to judicial committees in 773 locations, about which inconsistent visions are projected in the Constitution and the Local Government Operations Act of 2017 — the federal framework legislation that presently guides local government operations. This is also the case with the option provided for in the Constitution allowing the creation of local courts if required. The judicial branch’s reluctance to provide guidance on constitutional provisions for accessing justice beyond district courts could result in costly adjustments.

These issues need to be addressed to guide the creation of a coherent and coordinated system for accessing justice locally, one that builds community and citizen trust in the entire justice sector and positions the judiciary in its rightful place in government. The lowest ranges of the judicial branch carry the greatest burden in making justice more accessible to more people. Much work, therefore, remains to be done to ensure that the promise of bringing all three branches of government closer to the people is fulfilled.

Renewed commitments to judicial independence headlined the recently concluded National Conference of Judges. However, aside from the box-button topic of judicial appointments that dominated discussion, only a few creative ideas emerged. Perhaps the most federally relevant of those related to empowering provincial courts to settle disputes between provinces and municipalities. Ideas such as this, while nascent, indicate that the judiciary may be willing to look for ways to be more responsive to the needs of the changed governance context.

With a recently appointed Chief Justice and remaining vacancies filled, Nepal’s Supreme Court is drafting its fourth strategic plan with more stable leadership and better prepared justices than ever before. This will drive the judiciary’s institutional vision, direction and contribution to democratic government in Nepal over the next five years.

Previous strategic plans have focused on court administration, caseload management, institutional and modernisation needs, and training programs. These remain necessary but will be insufficient to fulfil the difficult role of rethinking and reworking access to justice in a federal context. Oversight of the judicial functions of the state — wherever those may be located — is a key strategic metric of performance of the judicial branch.

More difficult will be the deep institutional introspection and principled action required to assert independence while exercising guardianship of the rule of law. It is vital that the judicial branch of the government sees itself as a trusted partner of both state and society, with its functionaries embracing their role as ‘judges of the people’ and who are held accountable.

Only then will a constitutional culture shaped by the rule of law translate into access to justice in federal Nepal.

This concludes a three part series by Iain Payne and George Varughese who are associated with NS Foundation.
in the face of natural forces. Storms have 
smashed many eucalyptus trees, and our 
‘big lads’ have to cut trees to dig up the land. 
Sacred summits are a familiar theme in 
the Himalayas, not only a spiritual 
 shrines but also a source of livelihood. 
The peak, which is considered sacred, 
maintains its snow and ice even in 
warmer months. The mountains are 
home to many ancient deities and 
ancestral burial sites.

SO FAR SO GOOD

Lisa Choegyal

The season of summits

In Nepal we live more easily with our holy mountains, balancing 
our reverence for them with the need for tourism income.

uable visitor segments.

Sacred spaces protect nature throughout the Himalaya, from lowland temple 
forests to monastery precincts, with ridge top 
ramparts of prayer flags, mani walls 
and chortens framing the soaring crystal 
peaks. Kangchenjunga is treasured by 
Sikkim, Tibetan Buddhists and Lepcha 
people, and Limbus believe the third highest 
peak to be home to omniscient goddess Yama 
Sumang. There are many other mountains 
that remain revered and sanctified: 
Khumbila, Kang Guru and Om Parvat, amongst others.

Expedition can play a role. The story 
that says Machingdunga’s unsanctioned top 
was closed to mountaineers out of hubris, 
not religion. Harka Gurung wrote early in 
2001: “That Machingdunga is sacred to 
the Gurungs is nothing more than a 
myth, and it is easy to speculate that it had 
nothing to do with Colonel JOM Roberts, 
a British Gurkha officer who led both 
the reconnaissance in 1956 and the 1957 
expedition to the mountain. The climbing 
team had to retreat just 45m short of the 
summit due to heavy snowfall... It would 
soon become clear that Jolly Roberts should 
realize that no one else should succeed on a 
mountain... which he had failed to conquer.”

Hiking and trekking worldwide throughout 
the country, I never underestimate the sheer hard work it takes to reach a 
Himalayan peak above 7,000m. The individual 
commitment, however much, is rewarding.

Whilst sometimes quietly wondering why 
they bother, I salute every summit, each one 
holding the key to its own way.

Lisa Choegyal

In Nepal we live more easily with our holy mountains, balancing 
our reverence for them with the need for tourism income.

back to its traditional owners.

Our team drew on Maori and Nepal 
experience to rise to the challenge.

That’s a really important sacred thing 
that you are climbing... you shouldn’t climb. 
It’s not the real thing about this place. 
This is the proper way no climbing,” Kumarram, 
an ethnic traditional owner explained. 
And his people’s plan to protect their ancestral 
heritage had fallen on deaf ears.

The Aussies were not easily deterred from 
their perceived privilege to tread the top of 
any rock they fancy. Stolid bus drivers in 
rubber shorts explained to their passengers 
that the locals were the only people to 
visit the mountain. But in the next 
breath announced that the links to the top 
leave early next morning.

Careless Quotas pilots flew over 
Ulua and the nearby outcrop of Kata Tjuca (the 
Ogilive), disgracing the worshiped walls 
considered too sacred to be seen by ordinary 
mortals. A glass of sparkling wine at sunset 
was the most market delivery of the Uluru 
experience at tourists piled out of their 
air-conditioned coaches to witness the spectacle 

The streaked and fissured rock changing 
colour, much enhanced by a plastic tumbler of 
Aussie bubbles. “The colours get better by the glass,” observed 
my friend Lee.

Anzaku elders realised their people 
needed a role in park tourism. Aboriginal 
architects could navigate this ancient 
land by sunglasses, rub sticks to create fire and 
survive on witchetty grubs and bush tucker, 
and visitors were keen to learn how – local 
guides and indigenous teams followed, 
also in a sympathetic mud brick cultural 
centre bringing art and handicrafts.

Requesting all tourists ‘please don’t climb’ 
was our pragmatic but effective solution 
to the debate, as clearly some were not 
interested, despite spiritual sentiments. But it has 
taken until 2019 for cultural respect to be restored 
and for the sanctuary to end.

In the Himalaya we live more easily with 
our gods, honoured by locals and visitors 
ali, and acknowledge the significant 
value of mountain tourism in beautifying 
the economy. Mountainous land steps, high 
employment and unrelenting focus make 
them one of Nepal’s most resilient and
In 1952, when a Swiss expedition camped out at Namche Bazar on its way to climb the world’s highest mountain, Kancha Sherpa was impressed with the climbers’ gear. They looked glamorous, and their Sherpa guides had sweaters. It made a deep impression on the 19-year-old, who ran away from home to Darjeeling to join Temzing Norgy, who was preparing for the 1953 John Hunt expedition.

As a teenager, Kancha Sherpa worked as a porter, crossing Nangpa La to Tibet with loads of paper and bringing back up to 60kg of salt to barter for maize or rice. When he was offered Rs8 per day to join the Everest expedition, with a bonus for going above Camp 2, it felt like a windfall.

Despite having no previous climbing experience, Kancha was trained to use ropes and crampons and set out for the steep with heavy loads of oxygen cylinders for the higher camps. Being better acclimatized than western climbers and used to carrying heavy loads, Kancha made a good impression on the “white”. Kancha made it to the South Col at 6,100m with his load, and remembers Temzing Norgy trying to lift the spirits of young Sherpas like him who were not used to the dangerous mountaineering on the steep ice of the South Face. Kancha portered for other expeditions in the Himalayas, but after his brother Jungba died on the slopes and following a 1955 tragedy in which 11 Sherpas were killed in an avalanche, he was convinced by his wife to give up climbing.

She was right: one-third of deaths on Mt Everest alone have been among Sherpa guides, who are much more exposed to avalanches on the Khumbu Icefall because they go back and forth many more times than their employers. Kancha Sherpa openly admits he worked as a high-altitude porter, and later as a trekking guide, for the money — he had no real desire to reach the top.

Kancha Sherpa set up the Nirvana Lodge in Namche and did well thanks to the trekking booms that started in the 1980s. He educated his two sons and two daughters, who are scattered in Kathmandu and Denmark. Grandson Tensing Chogyal Sherpa is a climate scientist and part of a National Geographic expedition this season to study the impact of global warming on Mt Everest.

Just as Edmund Hillary returned after his 1953 first ascent to help the Sherpas people with schools and hospitals, Kancha set up a foundation to support fellow Sherpas pursuing higher education. He has been featured in This Is Home. The story is included in Google Earth Outreach’s StoryMap, which has a new interface called Voyager featuring map-based stories from the Khumbu.

As the last living Sherpa of the first expedition to climb Mt Everest 66 years ago, Kancha Sherpa says he has no regrets, adding that the 1953 climb and changes to his homeland since then seem like a dream. He recalls: “It used to take two weeks to walk from Namche to Darjeeling, today I can take a helicopter to Kathmandu from a nearby helipad.”

Kancha Sherpa retains his respect and reverence for the mountains, and believes their sanctity should not be defiled. “They are gods, it is not good for anyone if they get angry. We should keep the mountains clean, and prevent the snows from melting.”

**The last of the first**

Kancha Sherpa is the final living climber of the 1953 British expedition that first summited Mt Everest.
Sheilin Teo
in Surkhet

Starting Nepal’s Green School Movement

Sheilin Teo
in Surkhet

With its new highway to the north, Surkhet has become the gateway to the Karnali and is morphing into a boomtown. But 10 minutes out of the dusty, bustling city nestled amidst a terraced landscape, the Kopila Valley School (KVS) is a functioning model for the rest of Nepal on how schools should be built and administered.

At a time when progress is marked by the rise of glass and concrete structures, the school employs rammed-earth technology with an eco-friendly philosophy that uses local materials for construction, harnesses the sun and stores energy, harvests rainwater and minimizes waste.

But even founder Maggie Doyne was at first needed convincing by architect Prabal Thapa to accept a mud design for the buildings. Her vision of an environment-friendly school was one made of bamboo, like the Green School she had seen in Bali.

“Look, we’re not in Bali,” Thapa told her. “We’re in Nepal, and Nepal is known for mountains. With rammed earth, you’re making mountains.”

Rammed earth provides excellent thermal mass to keep temperature stable indoors. It uses local material and labour, the structure is durable and easy to maintain. The walls are nearly 0.6m thick, and reinforced with steel and concrete bonding for seismic resistance.

“We wanted the school to feel Nepali through and through, to stay true to local architecture that is so stunningly beautiful,” explains Doyne, showing us around the campus.

The two-storey school blocks are simple and rectangular, with gabled roofs, brevity stairwells, and are connected by corridors on one side, much like traditional farmhouses in Nepal. The buildings are designed as modular blocks that can be arranged in various ways to suit the landscape and functions required by the school.

The simplicity and reusability of the modules were important considerations to allow ease of building by unskilled local labourers, many of them women trained on the job.

Standing within the grounds, it becomes clear why buildings were sited as they were: they form a protective cincture around a central sports court and create ancillary terraces where children play. The topography creates opportunities for passive surveillance from the administrative block that sits towards the top of the sloping site, and plenty of gathering and resting places along stone-lined steps that double as bleachers overlooking play areas and gardens. When children pour out of their classrooms, they tumble across the sports court and down the stairs, bobbing along ramps that snake across the school’s terraces walls lightly coloured in house colours of reds, blues, yellows and greens.

“Construction was so difficult, and the only thing that got us through the really hard moments was knowing that one day there would be kids in these classrooms,” Doyne says, explaining that complications in scheduling, budgets and differences of opinion about expectations and work values of intercultural and international teams proved to be challenges.

The project was not just a simple school. Strengthened with steel, stabilised with cement and concrete, fitted with high performance, durable windows, the school buildings called for experience and skills beyond those required by an administrative project. More advanced, outside-the-box technology gives the campus an edge of self-sufficiency, ease of maintenance and durability.

Green technology comes at a cost, with lengthy payback periods that are possibly out of reach of most other schools in Nepal, but are easily adaptable to the local context: Irrigation systems, biogas, rainwater harvesting by Smart Panis, and solar systems by Sun Farmer.

At Kopila, all these design elements are integrated in the school’s new buildings, their functions and terrain, giving the school its green skin.

“I feel that this campus has so much integrity. Every step of the way, we made decisions that were sometimes hard, or...
that had cost implications, or we had to forgo certain things in order to have others, but there’s nothing I would change,” says Doyne.

This approach is not limited to the physical design of the school. Its curriculum is also grounded in place-based learning that adapts Nepal’s national curriculum to the school’s philosophy. Principal Naim Chaudhari explains: “It is about trying to integrate what we find in the community, what we can learn from and what we can give back to it. After all, when the children graduate they go into the community and they will live there. That is where they will grow further.”

The school has a farm and a vocational focus, and the students learn at least one skill each year from among cooking, washing, cleaning, driving, farming, agro-forestry, animal husbandry, horticulture, welding, woodwork, machine work and electrical skills. “When our children graduate from here, they should either go for further studies or be able to find a job,” says Chaudhari.

The school includes Grades 1 to 10 and an Early Childhood Village that focuses on self-learning through play and exploration. The older ‘plus-two’ students are still in an old bamboo school by the highway, but there are plans to bring them into the new buildings.

The school’s design allows the new classrooms to blend into the greenery, preserving the productive fruiting trees on site. Just as village life still clings to the fringes of Surkhet, the school’s program extends to the students’ families, farms and the community.

“We are a full service community school,” Doyne explains. “It is not just for the kids who study here — we want to bring the community in. This buildings belong to them, and I hope it makes them think about what they ultimately build someday. Just like I did inspired Kopila, I hope that there will be other schools like this in Nepal, because this one existed.”
Cycle Rally
Get on your bike and ride to celebrate International Menstruation day. Break the silence about menstruations.
25 May, 9:30pm, Kathmandu Durbar Square (Start), Patan Durbar Square (Finish) (9844186407)

Open House
Get questions about SMCX�THA. 2019 (Girls Women Challenge)? Visit the open house to chat with the team and clear up your queries, discuss travel plans and get help with your applications.
24 May / June every Friday, 5:30pm, Outdoor Adventure Green, Thamel (9844167062)

Traces
This outdoor exhibition displays 28 different works by the batch of 2017, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Kathmandu University School of Arts, Department of Art and Design. 24-29 May, 11:30am, Park Gallery, Pullahra (9847235377)

Girl-a-thon
Run for a cause. Take part in this mass run to spread the message that women should have equal representation in decision-making positions. Register online.
25 May, 7:15am, Boudha, Jawalakhel (9844841008)

Gender and Family Violence
Lorenzo Wolfers is delivering a three-day training on "Addressing Gender and Family Violence through Restorative Justice". It will help you gain a deeper understanding of this violence and equip yourself with the necessary insights and skills. Call for details.
29-31 May, 10am, Boudha, Satdobato, Boudha (9841772292)

Flea Market
The weekly market offers sellers focused on artisans and craftspeople showcasing their work for local products on your shopping list.
25 May, 12pm, Genex City, Basantapur (9844006700)

GETAWAY

Dahiba Boutique Hotel
A luxury hotel in the heart of Phewa Lake. With a 180-degree mountain and city view, a great end to a memorable trek.
Lakeside, Pokhara (9844835355)

Hotel Moonlight
The hotel is graced by a bunch of Thamel. The garden is beautiful, and the rooftop terrace offers amazing views of Kathmandu. Their boutique rooms also offer a soothing change from the typical offerings.
Thamel, (9844383678 / 9844385678)

HerangyaLala
Immerse yourself in the rich cultural heritage of Patan by staying in the midst of Mahabodhuni and the Himra monastery. The hotel provides a complete tour package to get a genuine feel of the authentic Hawaiian heritage.
Gupchowkh, Patan (9847121796, 9845673766)

Grand Norling Hotel
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel featuring spacious bed rooms and adjoining bathrooms and a large balcony overlooking the golf course, monkeys and deep forest—not to forget the garden.
Gokarnesh, (9845751517)

The Last Resort
Take an exciting trip to the Shiv Koshi River for adventures like bungy jump, tandem swing, or underwater caving.
Dhulikhel, (9847148205)

Kathmandu, 17 - 23 May

The air quality in Kathmandu this week, especially for people with breathing issues below 5 microns, in diameters has been consistently in the unhealthy zone. Despite a brief shower and spotty showers, it seems like the air could be cleared enough because of the balsam of homes from smog. Adorned with the many charming houses that have been cleared up at a center in the western Terai Tribe. Still, the regional climate shows the last coming month of Nepal up as an air quality of LAM. The score seems to be stable, due to increased foggy days and low-rainy seasons, for nearly the entire week. At a gliss of www.nepaltimes.com.

Three toots for Tootle

The motorcycle ride-share serves as a reliable option for people with disabilities unable to use public transport

Sonia Awale

Kathmandu’s overcrowded public buses are a daily challenge for commuters, but they are virtually impossible for the visually impaired and people with disabilities. Fortunately there is now Tootle, the motorcycle ride-sharing app, for people like massage therapist Laxmi Shrestha, 31, who likes the door-to-door service. “I am a female and a blind one at that. Microbus are unsafe, taxis are expensive, but Tootle is affordable and convenient,” says Shrestha (pictured above who commutes every day to work at a Boudha branch of Seeing Hands, the blind massage therapy centre in Kathmandu).

Chiren Paudel, 35, is fed up with extortion from taxi drivers taking advantage of his inability to see. Paudel told his female colleagues to avoid micros and taxis, and call Tootle or the other ride-sharing app, Pathao, instead.

“I can’t count the number of times I’ve been cheated by taxi drivers,” says Paudel, who also works for Seeing Hands.

Kushal Pandey, 26, is partially blind, and says it is nearly impossible to get on crowded buses. “As soon as conductors see our walking stick or someone on a wheelchair they speed off, and if the driver does stop it is impossible to get the seat for the disabled.”

It is no coincidence that Tootle, which has been facing hurdles over taxation, has taken off among female commuters and people living with disabilities, who find public transport difficult and dangerous. Women make up half of Tootle’s users — and roughly 60% of the service’s drivers — and there are more than 150 visually impaired rides a day.

“People with disabilities and those living with disabilities, women who face harassment in crowded public transport and those without personal vehicles,” says CEO Srestha Bhatta, who adds that the firm’s software engineers have worked with the visually impaired and those with disabilities to make the app more user-friendly.

Roma Neupane lost her left leg in an accident when she was eight. She is now a famous one-legged dancer and actress in Nepali movies. Despite her popularity, she hasn’t been able to travel easily to shoots around Kathmandu.

“I have to perform all over the city and often times the shoot goes late into night. I now manage it all with Tootle,” says Neupane, who calls for rides up to four times a day and to get home at night. “The drivers now know me and treat me like their sister.”

In the two years since its launch, the ride-sharing startup has also amassed support among the general public, created 10,000 jobs, and now serves thousands of passengers a day. Much more challenging has been navigating Nepali’s long distance taxi taxes and the lack of draconian micro-payments.

Shimmya Sunowari (pictured driving the motorcycle above) a mother of two from Dharan, works as a Tootle driver from 8AM-7PM, when she is free from her duties as a mother and homemaker. She makes Rs30,000 a month, and Tootle does not take any fee from women drivers like her.

Says the 37-year-old: “The best thing is that the working hours are flexible and I can choose to ride when I want to. And the money is handy.”

Follow us on Tootle to see how the visually impaired and those with disabilities now have greater mobility and independence because of the service offered by the Nepali motorcycle ride-share startup.

nepaltimes.com
The contest runs from 27 May - 31 July 2019 and will be managed by Glocal Pvt Ltd in collaboration with Turkish Airlines. It will be featured on Glocal Teen Hero 2019, an online platform to recognize teenagers’ initiative, creativity and enthusiasm, and to empower young people.

Students’ entries for the competition can be drawings or paintings. Only one entry per person is permitted, and it must be submitted electronically in a good quality format (JPEG, PNG or PDF) to the school principal, who will then select the best five to send via email to flywithturkish@glocalthemehero.com with full name, address and contact number.

The artwork should include the title ‘Flying with Turkish Airlines – Your Dream Destination (Country Name).’ All works submitted must be original, no plagiarized art will be accepted, and the airline suggests that the artist should try to portray the theme along with a Turkish Airlines aircraft.

The selection of the winner will be done by a panel of the Turkish Airlines team based in Kathmandu, using criteria like relevance to the theme, visual effectiveness and aesthetics, originality and message.

Established in 1933 with a fleet of five aircraft, Star Alliance member Turkish Airlines today has a fleet of 335 (passenger and cargo) aircraft flying to 307 worldwide destinations (328 international and domestic), in 124 countries. Glocal works to educate, entrepreneurs, learning and skill through Global After School, and runs an online media named GlocalHub. It contributes to the growth and development of entrepreneurship and youth through various projects, like Glocal Teen Hero and Glocal International Teen Conference.

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**Labour Talks:** IO Regional Director Tomoki Kishioka, IO Nepal Director Roland Howard, Labour Minister Surekha Bista and Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Manish Prasad Dhau, meeting in Kathmandu on Monday.

**Backpacking:** Nepal’s envoy to the United Nations, Amit Raj, speaks with his Libyan counterpart, Eduard Salameh, on Wednesday about the safety of Nepali peacekeepers posted in Libya.

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**Nurturing Nature:** US Ambassador Randy Berry and WHO Country Representative Ghana Curing present the Conservation Award to Niru Lama for his conservation work in the Mustang region, on the 20th anniversary of WWF Nepal in Kathmandu on Sunday.
Naples-bound Somalis find themselves in Nepal

Gopal Gartoula

A year working in a garage for two years in Nigeria, Abd Alkader had saved only £7,000, too few to buy him a ticket to Europe.

He was looking for a way to earn more money when a Ugandan man offered to smuggle him to Naples via a Kenyan and to Lebanon in a truck for $12,000. Alkader did a Google image search of Naples, saw a prosperous city by the sea and was excited. He paid $2,000, and his kind employer lent him the rest, saying he was ensuring him on a Rambalu airport. “I knew how difficult your life is. Pay me if you can. It is not a help.”

This was the first time Alkader had been on a plane, and he was excited when he got to Dubai. After a short nap, he boarded the next flight, not bothering to check his boarding pass. Five hours later, on 17 April 2014, the plane landed on a small airport surrounded by mountains. There was no one nearby. He asked the person who came to pick him up where he was. “Kathmandu,” came the reply.

Four years later, Alkader is still in Nepal, not Naples. After arrival, he was taken to a hostel, where he had a job. When he woke up the next day, the hotel manager told him to pay up or leave.

Nowhere to go, he boarded a train and went on the streets of Thame. The human trafficker’s agent who had picked him up at the airport had abandoned him, taking his passport and ticket. After spending 24 hours hungry in Thame, he met an Austrian who gave him food and the address of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kathmandu. Two months later, he received a refugee ID. Then, he began his long struggle working as a construction labourer or a dishwasher to pay for food, clothes and rent.

Alkader lived for three nights in a Sambu village near the border with Ethopia, sharing spaces and being raped and beaten. Since his father was paralyzed, his mother and three siblings took care of the family. He left, and his family members are still alive, said Alkader.

In Kathmandu, he found a few new friends. All his family is here, he told his Linux friends. “I remember my childhood, the battle and the smell that my mother used to make. I remember the place where I used to play.”

In Kathmandu, he met a few other Somalis like him. Among them was Nasr Alabdi, who had spent his childhood and later murdered in the city, and also fled to Uganda. He paid his fees to get to Naples. Alkader and Alabdi are married, and now have a 4-year-old daughter.

“Many of us have seen our families killed or have had to leave our country,” says Alkader. “We try to stay in the hotel after the city goes to sleep.”

Alkader, 27, and his two small dogs used to live in Maghrib. When the fighting started, three armed men entered their home, killed Alkader’s father, stole his money, and then shot his brother, mother and sister in the yard. Alkader’s wife tried to escape, but was captured. She was taken to the capital Mogadishu with her 17-year-old brother and 12-year-old sister. He started washing dishes in a hotel, leaving early in the morning and returning late at night. He found out two years later that his sister was pregnant with the child of a man who had promised to marry her, but instead threatened to kill him in the street.

Fighting erupted in Mogadishu, and Alkader could not get away from his workplace. When he finally got to his room, his brother and sister were missing. He left, traveling through Kenya to Uganda. “I don’t think any of my 13 family members are alive now,” said Alkader, one of the 20 Somalis in Uganda who had received an UNHCR ID, and eventually married Nasr Alabdi, a fellow Somali who entered Nepal last year.

The Nepal government has decided to waive the delayed visa fees of Somali refugees, and banish them. But they do not want to go back to Somalia. When a call came to him, he told them: “I saw my parents and siblings murdered before my eyes. How can I see my old home?” asks Alkader. What one-year-old does needs a kidney transplant.

There are 27 Somali refugees in Nepal, and they do not know where to go next. Says Alkader: “The world has abandoned us.”
Making Nepal accessible

The country is making a start in inclusive adventure tourism with disabled-friendly trekking and other facilities

Monika Deupala

At Nepal rebuilds many heritage sites and trekking trails that were damaged in the 2015 earthquake, activists say this is an opportunity to make them barrier-free. Such improvements would render the facilities accessible not just for different kinds of tourists, but also for local people with disabilities, along with the elderly.

Accessible tourism simply means adapting facilities so they are easier to travel in, whether the visitors are people with disabilities or not. This gives tourists opportunities to visit areas they have been dreaming to see, but could not visit because of access difficulties. Inclusive tourism accepts everyone, no matter their physical state.

“Then is still a lot of work to be done to make Nepal an accessible destination, and we need a partnership between the state, tourism service providers and advocacy groups,” says Pankaj Pradhanang, a key player in creating accessible tourism experiences in Nepal.

A milestone in promoting accessible tourism in this country was the visit five years ago by the late American inclusive tourism advocate, Scott Rams, who worked with Nepal tourism entrepreneurs to develop an accessible tourism strategy.

Then, two months after the 2015 earthquake, 4ST organised a day trip to Godavari Botanical Garden for 50 people in wheelchairs who were living in a temporary shelter in Bungamati. Since then, the visually impaired and double amputees have climbed Mt Everest, completed difficult treks, and have been participating in relatively easier experiences, like taking mountain sightseeing flights out of Kathmandu.

In 2016, 4ST helped organise the “Wounded Heroes Trek in Nepal”, in which a group of amputee veterans trekked with prosthetics in the Annapurna Region (above). Last year, the organisation worked with Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the National Federation of Disabled Nepal to host the inaugural International Conference on Accessible Adventure (ICAA 2018) in Pokhara, during which Nepal’s first ever accessible trail, near Sannukhet, was inaugurated by late Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari.

Freedom of movement and the right to mobility and travel are considered basic parts of the trail are also stone-paved.

Tourists in wheelchairs can now ride a vehicle from Pokhara to Sannukhet for the panoramic view, drive on to Kaskikot, and then hit the trail in wheelchairs up to Naudanda, a distance that can be covered by lunchtime. Lodges and eateries along the way have built ramps and disabled-friendly bathrooms.

“We built this trail as a model, so more and more trekking paths in Nepal should be made like this,” says Rishu Hari Sharma, who heads a local committee that built the trail. “After all, those with disabilities also want to be in the outdoors to admire the scenery. Please spread the word.”

Pokhara’s first accessible trek trail

Nepal’s tourism city may not have wheelchair-friendly streets or sidewalk guiding blocks for the visually impaired, but it now has an accessible trail nearly designed for hikers with disabilities.

A 5km stretch of the trekking trail between Kaskikot and Naudanda has been made wheelchair-friendly for day hikers. There are no steps and guardrails have been built along the cliff sections as the trail winds its way through thick forests and ridge meadows with full frontal views of the Annapurnas. There are wheelchair-friendly toilets along the way, and

Yuvaraj Shrestha

in Pokhara

Human Garun of the advocacy group Srijambalam in Pokhara says: “It is short, but exciting. It is a great experience for those who are wheelchair bound, not only for us in Nepal, but for those like us from all over the world.”

The trail offers a stunning panorama of the Annapurna Range, Dhampus and Machhapuchchhre to the north, and Phewa Lake and Pokhara city to the south and east. Most hikers can return to Pokhara from Naudanda along the Baglung Highway. The easy gradient means that the trail can also be used by the elderly and those who have problems with steep climbs.

The trail was built as a model with a 6.6 million grant from the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), which is adding more guardrails and pavement. It was inaugurated by the late Tourism Minister Rabindra Adhikari in 2018 as a pilot project.

“This trail is also designed to spread awareness among the general public about the special needs of people with disabilities, and also to show the world that Nepal is accessible to all,” says NTB CEO Deepak Raj Joshi.
human rights is an international covenant signed by most of the world’s countries. However, accessible tourism is still not a reality in many places, including in developed destinations. In Nepal, the concept is new and since most travel products involve adventure, inclusive tourism is still a long way off.

However, a start has been made with recent initiatives that use tourism to raise awareness among local people about the need to offer wheelchair access and make infrastructure safe and easy to navigate for people with disabilities.

More than 4,000 Nepalis were left with physical disabilities as a result of the 2015 earthquake. They join an estimated 600,000 people in this country with physical handicaps. “It is actually more important to build accessible infrastructure for the benefit of the locals than for foreign tourists,” says Pradhananga.

Suman Timesman of the Washington-based International Development Institute, which organised the Annapurna trek for veterans on prosthetics added: “There are many advantages to promoting accessible tourism: it will open up Nepal as a new destination for people with disabilities, and senior citizens, and it will spread awareness among locals to care for people with special needs. Accessible tourism is not an easy thing to do but the right thing to do.”

**ADVENTURE ON WHEELS**

Watch video of tetraplegic Jeeza Williams, who does not let his paralysis deter him from engaging in adventure sports, and is spreading awareness globally about making tourism destinations more inclusive for people with disabilities.

Jeeza’s Journeys

To 2010, international river and mountain guide Jeeza Williams (right) fell off a waterfall while kayaking in Switzerland, his spinal injuries paralyzing him chest down and confining him to a wheelchair for life. But the 44-year-old New Zealander was always into sports and the tetraplegic has not let his injury stop him from seeking adventure around the world, while helping to adapt travel for those with disabilities.

Williams has been in Nepal for the past two weeks, having a whopping good time paragliding in Pokhara, rafting down the Trishul River and going on a solo trek in Chitwan. “Waiting for a glimpse of Annapurna at sunrise from Sarangkot was heavenly,” Williams told Nepal Times. “I am grateful to people who have been helping me from day one. This has been the most exciting and most adventurous trip so far.”

Williams is a licensed paragliding pilot, and flies in his special three-wheel all-design buggy harnessed between the wing. It was while recovering from his injury in a Swiss rehab centre that he made up his mind to continue his adventure tourism career, but Williams was soon shocked at how little infrastructure exists to make tourism friendly to people with disabilities.

So he set up the non-profit MaketourX to promote inclusive tourism, so that all kinds of people could enjoy adventure sports. Williams started attending talk programs and visited travel companies and adventure planners to spread the message.

Last year in Brussels, he met Pankaj Pradhananga from Nepal’s first Four Wheels Tours (see main story, left) at the Inclusive Tourism Summit and the two found they had shared vision.

“We had a synergy as we started talking about about destinations in New Zealand and Nepal and how Nepalis and Kiwis have adventure in our blood,” says Williams, “who said it is difficult to make a historic city like Kathmandu completely accessible, but it can be made inclusive.”

“We can make it friendly for all disabled people. Start with little things like widening doors in hotel rooms and provide well-trained adventure guides who can help with equipment that those with disabilities need,” he said at a gathering on Wednesday at Hotel Mamatu.

Monika Deupala

Nepal opens doors to a different world

If people with disabilities are seen as potential customers, all hotels would be wheelchair-friendly.

Prabhas Pokharel

Yani Magar (behind desk, right) rides busily and comfortably in her wheelchair inside Hotel Hotel, where she has worked for nearly four years. Most infrastructure in Kathmandu is inaccessible for wheelchair users like Magar, but in her workplace she feels completely independent as she does not need help from peers to use the bathroom or move about the workplace.

Hoteli Hotel is one of those new establishments in Kathmandu that have tried to address the mobility of people with disabilities, many of whom cannot find work because workplaces are not wheelchair-friendly. Even if employers want to hire people with disabilities, most cannot provide the needed environment.

“If more hotels, even five-star hotels, start building such infrastructure their hiring policy could be very inclusive for persons with disabilities like me,” says Magar.

Opened seven years ago, Hotel Hotel is still one of few, non-tourist hotels in Kathmandu with accessible rooms, bathrooms, hallways and wheelchair ramps. For manager Ramshu Pandey it was not an easy journey. At first the doorknobs on the ramps were too steep and wheelchair users had to be pushed up. (Video online.)

“When people hear accessibility they think it is costly, but you include those elements during the initial design and not as an afterthought, the cost of ramps is the same as for stairs wells. It does not cost a fortune,” Pandey was inspired to make a disabled-friendly hotel after watching a wheelchair user having to skip the Funkies because the only way to the food was via stairs. “It affected me deeply at a personal level, and I decided that my hotel had to have accessible infrastructure,” he recalls.

The move has been a plus for business. Many conferences and programs, not just ones for the differently-abled, now use Hotel as a venue. Ramps link the parking area to meeting halls and guest rooms with accessible bathrooms.

Says Sugar Prasai of the advocacy group Diverse Patrons: “As a person using a wheelchair, my major concern whenever I am invited to events is whether the bathroom is accessible to us.”

Pandey says it is a mindset problem: most hotel owners do not regard people with disabilities as potential customers or employees. “Making a facility wheelchair-friendly is only the first step,” he elaborates. “What is the point in just making a hotel wheelchair-friendly? Look at the state of our roads and sidewalks — how will people get to the hotel in the first place?”, he asks.

Also, while wheelchair ramps are the most visible symbols of accessibility, they are of no help to other differently-abled persons, such as those having visual or hearing impairments. Pandey now plans to create a mobile app so the visually impaired can navigate the premises.
Game of Clones

Many of you have taken me aside at diplomatic receptions this week and asked privately personal questions about what I think of the final episodes of Game of Thrones*, to which my diplomatic answer to all of you has been: “None of your business.” It is entirely a matter between me and David Benioff alone, no one else. But for those of you who got older as GoT factors aged or were killed off here is an unabashed recap. Please do not hesitate to raise your hands and interrupt me during this presentation if anything is unclear.

The Wall keeps off Reign’s sons called White Walkers from Westeros. Robert Baratheon (Cersei Lannister’s husband) meets the Maesters at the Night’s Watch, Ned Stark, and recites him to the new head of staff to replace someone whose fate is fateful. King’s Landing is so corrupt it is ripe for sally by the Highborn Faction when Ned Stark travels down with his daughters Sansa and Arya Stark. Bran is determined by Jaimes and his sister (Sharon). His plan was revealed by HBO for him to head south across and is where the plan bound for the mid-70s. Catelyn Stark suspects Tyrion Lannister of cutting Bran (even though that’s impossible because he is a dwarf) and a challenge to the dwarf, which he fights through his proxy, Bran. Cersei Lannister’s son Joffrey has Lord Peyt Littlefinger Bank that everything is not good because he wants Stannis Baratheon and not him (as Protector of the Realm). Arya escapes and Sansa is arrested. King Robb of Winterfell goes to battle against Lannisters. Meanwhile that ‘Death’Dragons marry (Daenerys Targaryen, who wants to capture Westeros and sit on the Iron Throne. Droga-dro STAT! Emery is due to bring three baby dragons capable of inhalingipur.

(You following me up to here? So far the story is pretty straightforward, but then plot thickens after this.)

Jaime Lannister is a POW in Robb’s camp, joining forces with Solar Gargery in the indo-Pacific Alliance, is double-crossed and Winterfell’s fall. Catelyn and Brienne of Tarth are sent to be perpetrators of Jon Snow’s murder. Meanwhile Jon Snow is lending his semi-regular Ass off at The Wall, gets bored with Night’s Watch and defects to Wildlings, Emerya governors his dragons, and says off for Qarth seeking an alliance against Westeros, and escapes to form a mercenary army. Joffrey is assassinated, Jass’s hand is chopped off, and Bran Stark becomes a wolf. Cersei is forced to be naked through the streets of King’s Landing (also arrested), Emerya becomes a Ser. Alepo and Sansa just before the Drosten forces, now allied with the Starks, close in.

Meanwhile, not all of the Northern Frics in Jon Snow’s is reunited for a second coming to wage the Battle of the Barons. Jon and Emerya go King’s Landing to convince Cersei to fight the Jonnies Walker’s together. Two dragons are subsequently shot down by Scorpion Heat seeking missiles, as the living and the dead fight unto death with small bombs.

[SKILL with that!]

Cersei is on the back of a baboon securing the feigned for mock and mute. Carael convinces that she is, the first big hunk with wild hair assets after a brief clasp. That was the mute. Good thing she didn’t mistake him for prey and eat a future history. Wearing gorgeous house. Targaryen inspired legging. Cersei chases a particularly yummy young man and slices his throat.

[Who’s fiddling with the remote? Why didn’t you tell me we had switched to Discovery Channel!]