Two to tangle

Why is it that every time Nepal’s prime minister goes to India, all hell breaks loose back home? In 2016, when Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was being feted in a high-profile visit to New Delhi, the anti-corruption Czar Lokman Singh9 Karki held a hurriedly summoned press conference to say that he was investigating Dahal’s alleged misappropriation of billions of rupees meant for ex-Maoist guerrillas in UN supervised camps. As soon as he returned, Dahal got other political leaders to start impeachment proceedings against Karki.

Prime Minister Oli was in New Delhi for Narendra Modi’s inauguration last week, and it was Dahal’s turn to leak an agreement on the UML-Maoist unification that included a clause that said Oli and Dahal would ‘take turns as necessary and on the basis of equality’ to be prime minister. Many analysts say Dahal had initially shown flexibility on the timing because he thought Oli was in failing health and would have to step down sooner or later.

However, with Oli showing signs of being in the pink of health, Dahal is getting impatient. Riding with him are his own colleagues, as well as disgruntled ex-UML stalwarts like Ram Dev Gautam and Madhav Kumar Nepal, who have not been given plum cabinet posts. On Oli’s side are powerful Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel, trusted aide Bishnu Paudel, as well as Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, who has distanced himself from his former Maoist bosses.

Gautam has been harping on about the need to have ‘one past, one responsibility’ and wants Oli to at least relinquish his party co-chairmanship. That is not going to happen, Pokhrel has publicly declared. Both Pokhrel and Paudel dismiss the leadership debate as an “artificial diversion”, and privately blame it on Dahal’s eagerness to be prime minister for the third time.

Dahal and Oli have met to try to iron out the issue, but both seem to be getting their trusted aides to rattle sabres while denying that there is anything but the-scores power struggle going on. The dispute is casting doubts about whether the Maoists and the UML are really united after all, and delaying the formation of a polibureaucratic and a joint political structure.

Kuma Dhir
Prabhakar Rana, 84

The passing of Prabhakar Rana on 31 May in New York after a year-long, post-operative convalescence marks the end of an era in Nepal’s political, business and social service spheres.

At some point corruption was standard operating procedure among politicians, bureaucrats and private businesses, Rana stood out as a beacon of diligence, decency and dignity in public life.

Figured out from all sections of the political spectrum, members of the international community and businesses in the business world, all had confidence in him. His demeanor and mannerisms made even antagonists trust him, giving him a unique mediating role.

He used his vast network of contacts in Nepal, India and overseas in the national interest. And for Rana, the national interest meant first and foremost ensuring stability in Nepal so that investors would come, business would flourish, jobs would be created and all boats would rise together with the tide.

Rana was the son of Nepal’s first Inspector General of Police, Nara Bamdev Rana, and was born inside Singha Durbar in 1934, when it still served as the palace of Rana prime ministers. His two older brothers were married to two of King Mahendra’s brothers. Besides being an A-Class Rana, therefore, Prabhakar had proximity to the Shahs through the marriage of his siblings.

This stood him in good stead after the rise of the Shahs, and especially after Mahendra and Gyanendra’s coup d’état of December 1960, right through the absolute monarchy years and the reign of King Birendra.

The launch pad for Prabhakar Rana’s visionary career led growth in Nepal was the establishment of the Sealsite Hotel in 1965, which he pushed through despite heavy resistance prevailing. Nepal would not have a five-star hotel for three decades. Nepal was brought to its knees. A decade later, Prabhakar’s hotel chain was menstrual.

Prabhakar Rana went on to head the Nepal club and the Pacific Asia Travel Association, the Hotel Association of Nepal, the American Himalayan Foundation and the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry. After 1990, Rana’s companies were involved in the first foreign investment in a hydro-power project in Nepal, and he was on the advisory boards of many social service organizations.

When Rana spoke with a silver spoon in his mouth, Prabhakar, did not really have to work for a living. Yet, not only did he put his formidable capital to base to productive use, but he did it with honesty, transparency and for the larger cause of laying a strong foundation for the Nepali economy. Rana’s belief in a fair a level playing field, he treated everyone, no matter class, caste or creed, with equal respect. Not showmanship (name the mighty, and never sorrowful of the down and trodden, Prabhakar Rana led a life of example.

After the promise of the 1990 People’s Movement went sour and the conflict in the ruling Rana became the main channel through which various domestic and international interlocutors tried to find a solution, a desperate and desperate conflict of conditions, and international interlocutors took to the streets. When Biren Kumar was being cursed by his hardline relations in the palace in the 1990s to sicken Constituent Assembly and take over the reins of power, it was Rana who was sent as an envoy to round out New Delhi, London, Washington DC. He got a conditional tender for a flight-time-bounded contract for the Constitutions on condition that negotiations would be held with the Maoists.

Some of those tensions and intrigue probably contributed to the royal massacre of 1 June 2001. When Gyanendra was enthroned, Prabhakar found an even cooler role in stock exchange because the king was now not just his business partner, but a close childhood friend as well.

Gyanendra exiled Prabhakar by his nickname, “Pro”, and used him as a sounding board in setting up his royal cabinet. However, while Prabhakar believed in democracy, Gyanendra had nothing but disdain for political parties. “Oh, Pro, even after this you want to hand power to the partner?”, he asked Prabhakar just before 1 February 2005, when Gyanendra reinstalled his father’s coup d’état, against all advice.

After the ceasefire, Nepal plunged into more instability, and there was plenty to be cynical about. But Prabhakar believed that, what his country’s destiny was to be a stable and prosperous nation. When talking about the franchise in present-day Nepal, he would allow himself was one of his characteristic smacks.

Nepal will miss Prabhakar Rana when it needs him the most. He set the bar high for us to follow.

Times.com
WHATS TRENDS

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ten years ago, in the #G4A edition of 1-5 June 2003 of Nepal Times, (XL) had this criitical talk on the Constituent Assembly and its lingering post-registration of the Maoist government.

The problem with Nepal’s “moderate Maoist” leadership appears to be that they don’t know whether they want to be moderate politically or forcibly. Why, they don’t know that they don’t know. Hence, the shrewd flip-flopping and political pr铄.

The Maoists are waiting first time and energy by boycotting the constituent assembly hearings – (a) what, if a counter opinion? Isn’t the old socio-political order as is if it’s no longer there? Are the Maoists waiting for their victory? The Maoist leadership appears to be playing for an even more powerful restored in the state of Kailash.

Prabhakar Rana, 84

Online Packages

Test Flights

Join us on a trip to Kathmandu alone or with friends for the first time to collect spectrum parties and deliver minutes to help people in the remote mountains of central Nepal. With direct flights. See page 7.

Trend Flights

Lost Paradise

Deep in the weeds and jungles of western Nepal, the people of Bardia, a remote district, live in abject poverty. Story page 8.

Bel Air

This is a such a bad phase – no one is realizing it and taking it seriously. (Air pollution is more dangerous than smoking), Sonia Awe, (W3). My uncle has just been diagnosed with cancer... so much damage this pollution is doing and we keep quiet.

Manisha Khatra

Everest Traffic Jam

Interesting article about the reality of Mt Everest. When international media like NY Times and ICN don’t understand the reality, try to get cheap sponsorship and bash a small country like Nepal.

Sanjay Golchha

Nepali

Read this, and then you won’t need to ask me that question. I’ve already asked. Why do you support Nepali war? (Sita Thung Thangam: More than a machete), Mona Gurung, (W3). Steve L. Roberts

Feedback continued on page 13

Daily times

40

10 years of Mt Everest traffic jam by sonia awe. (w3). the reality of mt everest, try to get cheap sponsorship and bash a small country like nepal.

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feedback continued on page 13

Weekly Times

6

Do you think the government issues too many directives to everyone?

Total views: 225

Yes: 78.1%

No: 21.9%

Can’t tell: 0%
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“It is now or never to devolve power to local governments”

Swiss Ambassador Elisabeth von Capeller Oswald is on her second diplomatic stint in Nepal after also serving as assistant director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Bern. She spoke to Nepali Times last week about Switzerland’s changing focus in Nepal’s development over the decades. Except:

Nepali Times: This is your second tenure in Nepal. How has Nepal changed?
Ambassador von Capeller Oswald: I am very happy to come back here, and I have seen many positive changes. Nepal was a rural society but now through mobility, it is more of a rural-urban society. The places that you had to walk for days to reach are now reachable in a few hours. In the past, the young wanted to be government officers, now they want to have their own enterprise. It’s much more diversified, self-exploratory and self-determined. That is a huge change.

Then, of course, the political system has changed a lot. Not everybody agrees with it but that is a part of federalism. People are closer to service delivery and elected representatives are closer to the people. The politics is more dynamic and engaging. What is still there is discrimination. Probably it’s not as strong in some regions as it was, but maybe it’s more subtle and not as visible.

You mention how mobility has changed Nepal. Your government has worked a lot on building trail bridges. Has that priority changed?
I think Switzerland was among the first countries to understand that roads are needed for economic and social development. The Jot road benefited the people there. The Swiss Embassy has provided technical expertise in this area, later collaborating with the government for knowledge transfer. We want to stop building roads now because the competence lies with local governments.

Nepal’s migration economy has had a huge impact. What has been your embassy’s involvement?
I remember 10 years ago the government refused to accept migration as a fact. Now it is fairly understood that it is a reality and it needs to be addressed. A lot depends on migrants who contribute to the development of this country. Our aim is to support positive migration but also to help the government mitigate the negative aspects.

The Migration Information Centre we have set up are the best initiative in our 30 years of development cooperation. They have helped people learn of the risks of migration, and their rights, and helped them to contact the right people in case of emergencies. We also give skills training to help them earn better, and to inform them about the cultural context of where they are going. We also have financial-literacy trainings. And what I appreciate is psycho-social counseling for victims and family members. Some of the women migrants really suffer because their family think they are not ‘honourable’ any more.
The Swiss embassy has been working a lot on gender and social inclusion. What can Nepal do to achieve better inclusivity?

Let me start by telling you that I am the first woman to head this office in 60 years. Even in Switzerland we are not where we want to be. It is a long process, it entails powerful people letting go, and for others to take over. Swiss laws are not as complex as Nepal’s, but we do have different languages, culture and religions. It is about diversity.

I would say this country has very progressive election laws. The President and Vice President need to be of different genders, and so do the mayors and deputy mayors. I think that is fantastic, exceptional and will have an impact on gender and inclusion. Compulsory Dalit representation at the local level will have a powerful effect too.

We have always said the root causes of the conflict were exclusion and poverty. It is important that those excluded due to gender or caste gain from development, including in the workforce. It is now our duty to support elected women and representatives of marginalised groups.

Nepal has recently become a federation while Switzerland has been one for a long time. What would you say are the ingredients that make devolution work?

We have different contexts and histories, but the principle is the same: services are delivered where the people are, by elected persons. Last week I was in Karnali and I met many committed mayors, deputy mayors and also ward level members. They really want to understand the people and deliver the services. For me, this is what makes federalism work; that is its secret.

It is new or never. All citizens, and we as development partners, have to contribute if this is going to be a success story. Development partners will be decisive in power sharing at the local level. Do we still implement through the central agency with provincial representatives, or do we now implement and collaborate at the local level? I do not yet see a full change in approach by the donors. We have clearly adapted all our programs to the local level.

The Swiss embassy is also very involved in transitional justice. How do you gauge progress in that arena?

I was first here in 2006, and a lot has happened since then: the peace accord, the Maoist integration, an earthquake, the Constitution and the election at three levels. It’s a lot for a country to go through in a short time, and shows the country is able to deal with difficult situations.

Having said that, we also believe it’s the right time to finalise the peace process. We support a Nepali-led process which is victim-centric. It is not just about justice but also about people who have the right to know what happened to their loved ones, about compensation and memorials. It is also about rule of law, because if impunity prevails it will have an impact on the economic environment. The economy can only be strong in an environment with a strong rule of law.

Go online to watch our video interview with Swiss Ambassador Elisabeth von Capeller Oswald.
Piecing together Afghanistan’s Bamiyan’s Buddhas

Waiting for the end of war to restore giant figure of the Prince of Peace

The baked biscuit cliffs of Bamiyan shimmered in the dawn glow, the massive blank Buddha niches gaping like painfully missing molar teeth.

We had arrived by road late the night before and, stumbling out of the guesthouse with dew dampening my bare feet, I was not prepared for the vista across the valley. Tidy green fields studded with fortified farms, mud houses hidden under the peckmated precipice, and mud bare hills rising behind, falsely doted with snow and dark shadows.

Generations of Silk Road travellers and pilgrims must have gazed with equal wonder as they plundered the trade routes through this northern valley of Afghanistan, a prosperous enclaves strategically positioned between several great empires, and with Buddhist links to Ladakh and Mustang.

The two gigantic 6th century Buddha standing solid a quarter of a mile apart and towering 55m and 36m tall, would have appeared very differently to these early visitors: their plaster veneer reassembling with lime, blue and gold decorations haled in yellow and white.

The main bodies had been hewn from rock, but the details and dress were enhanced with a mixture of mud, plaster, straw and horsehair coated with stucco. Neither has any artistic value, saddled travel writer Robert Tyrone 100 years ago, but their gaudy monumental mass, plaster gable and Gandhara-style draped robes could not have failed to impress.

Thousands of monks inhabited temple caves that surrounded the two huge figures, their acraves now eerily empty, hollowed out of the soft stone over the whole height of the rock face and decorated with frescos in bright hues. One statue tells of a mother who took 12 years to recover her lost son, so extensive was the labyrinth of grotto dwellings carved into the compressed clay and gravel cliffs.

Only a few fragments of colour remain when I first visited Bamiyan an AD8 tourism mission in 2005, and again in 2006, but we could still make out the paths used to pinion circumambulate the Buddhas. Ruined tracts and crumbling stairways precariously connected the intricate network of chambers, but I was not brave enough to climb with the others to dizzying head level.

At their feet, heaps of rubble, rock and plaster were laboriously sorted and conserved by teams from UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites. Their scrunching tin-tickled stalk start, dust metes circled in aurad rays. We were shown metal shards embedded in some of the pieces, remains of the dynamite, bullets and bombs used in their brutal destruction.

The colossal Buddhas were blown to bits by the Taliban in March 2001, declared as “false idols’ and cheered by hordes, including Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden, who flew in to witness the spectacle.

Several weeks and many attempts were needed to demolish them, anti-aircraft fire and rockets had little effect, and eventually timed explosives were placed within the dome nesta and bored into the statues, planted under dunes at rifle point by unwilling prisoners dangled on ropes from above.

Ancient texts tell of a third giant Nirvana Buddha reclining in the vicinity but he is yet to be located by archaeologists, perhaps kept secret for safekeeping. The crumbling ochre citadel of Shahr-e-Choghiljan, meaning city of scarabaeus, eggs or lamination, was destroyed by Ghenghis Khan in a 1221 massacre.

Departing with my colleagues for the astounding turquoise lakes of Band-e-Amir, where we had been asked to reconnoitre tourism and build a visitor centre, we avoided forgotten mines by carefully keeping to the dusty tyre tracks.

West of Bamiyan we walked the ruins of a dragon supposedly slain by Hazrat Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet, a bucking volcanic barge of rock in the shape of a petrified dragon from which emanates mineral tears and mountll, unsoundly broken by underground springs, said to be moans of frustration at his mountain imprisonment.

I returned to Bamiyan in 2008 to work on the Aga Khan Foundation’s ecotourism project, trying to boost livelihoods for the locals, New Zealand forces were still peacekeeping behind a high-wire force, but security had deteriorated and it was no longer safe to drive the highway from Kabul. My UN aircraft was filled with shadowy characters in checked headscarf and bulging armlets, who vanished in haste once we landed amidst the golden fields. Arriving on a windy flight out of Bamiyan was a rare group of intrepid Brits, one of the very last to visit, and led by a veteran journalist.

Looking back it seems naïve, even distasteful, to have been working on tourism in Afghanistan, preparing a national ecotourism strategy, designing national park authorities for the lakes of Band-e-Amir, viewing fortified farmhouses in Bamiyan, and reconnoitring trek routes amongst the burnout tank and artillery skeletons of the Panjshir Valley.

In 2009 and 2011 we brought two ecotourism study tours to learn from Nepal and interact with our industry, including the heroic lady governor of Bamiyan, Fazliha Sarabi. But in 2005 suicide bombers had murdered more people in London than Afghanistan, and there was still hope that tourism could bring some relief and alternatives for the beleaguered local people. We were unaware of how much worse it would get.

Debate has raged about what is best for the Bamiyan Buddha, how to safeguard, rebuild, repair, restore or revise with 10 laser light projections into the recesses. In Kabul Museum a multinational team is painstakingly piecing back together 7,000 shattered fragments of Bamiyan, brought in crates, sluggishness as page engorgers.

“Three artefacts don’t just belong to us, they belong to the entire world,” said a stressed-looking conservator in the television interview.

Healing the wounds of the Afghans, putting together the pieces, reminiscing the past, is happening just as peace with the Taliban is making some tentative progress.
GROW vegetables faster, cleaner and with less water than conventional farming — it all sounds very fishy. And it is. Aquaponics combines raising fish in tanks with hydroponics, which grows plants in water only.

Aquaponics works like this: fish poop and leftover bits of food in a fish tank are pumped into the plant-growing area, where bacteria convert them into nitrates, then into nitrites. The nitrites are absorbed by the plants as food and the water is recycled to the fish tank.

“Aquaponics is the best way to save water and the environment because the same water is continuously circulated throughout the system,” says Bill Ashwell, CEO of Hope Nepal Bioponic Food and Aquaponic System. “Open farming consumes 10 more times water, yet aquaponics is more productive.”

Ashwell came to Nepal for the first time in 1999 to talk, and fell in love with the mountains and people. Since then he has returned many times to help with water projects. He sold his business in South Africa in 2005 and moved to Nepal with his wife Janet in 2009 to pursue his interest in aquaponics.

“I felt that setting up a business would be the most sustainable way to stay long-term and help Nepal by demonstrating new technologies and creating employment,”

Hope Nepal Bioponic Food also serves as a training centre and demonstrator farm showcasing the technology as it grows tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, strawberries and more.

“In open farming you would probably need about six weeks for a lettuce plant to mature but with aquaponics it’s half of that. It grows faster because it is raised in a protected environment in a greenhouse, where you can control climate conditions, and also because the plants get all its nutrition requirements from the fish,” says Ashwell.

Adopting aquaponics would help Nepal to improve agricultural productivity and reverse its growing reliance on food imports, and it could provide food security during natural disasters like floods. But the system has particular challenges: the farmer has to know something about fish farming, plumbing and chemistry, as well as agriculture. Also, the start-up phase is challenging.

“People do have a strong desire to do this but they don’t know how to start and from where to start, and they don’t have time to learn all these skills,” says Ashwell, who believes nevertheless that the potential gains outweigh the losses. Because fish would suffer if pesticides or other chemicals were used in growing, aquaponics use neither, making it one of the healthiest ways to produce food.

A system can be built in a heated greenhouse, at home on a rooftop, in a backyard or even indoors if proper lighting is available. “Nepal has a lot of opportunities and in order to embrace those one needs to have vision, good management and good practices,” says Ashwell.

Karma Gurung apprenticed at Hope Nepal for three years. His vision is to install an aquaponic system on every rooftop of every house in the capital. “Kathmandu needs this system — there is a lack of water and people are compelled to eat vegetables grown with pesticides and chemicals,” he says.

“Aquaponics would also be ideal in more remote parts of Nepal where water is even scarcer.”

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**Something fishy in new Nepali farm**

Aquaponics is organic, requires no land and is powered by fish poop.
The secrets of a flourishing 1,000-year-old empire are just being revealed in Surkhet Valley

Why is the site in ruins?

The details of Kakrebihar have inspired many. While the ruins are at odds with historical facts, they show how the eruptions have captured local imagery.

According to oral tradition, the temple was built by the Potrait prince, thousand of the Hindu-raj Mahato. They were supposed to open the site in the city, but discovered the ruins and died, destroying the palaces.

A local historian says that two of the patterns were inspired by the ruins of temples over time. While the site called Laxmi Mandir managed a Chhatra above the adjacent Laxmi Mall, the other side (Godin of the Palace) found its name still attributed after the site broke. As a result, they destroyed whatever they had built and left.

A LOST PARADISE

KATHMANDU

DANG

SURKHET

Kakrebihar

Buddhist relics in western Nepal

The secrets of a flourishing 1,000-year-old empire are just being revealed in Surkhet Valley

Sewa Bhattarai in Surkhet

Just a 10-minute auto ride from the bustling city of Biratnagar in Surkhet, a road that meanders through a lush green forest, a hillock marks an mystery — a medieval-looking, six-storey tall, shikhar style temple surrounded by ruins.

Since its discovery about 50 years ago, the site Kakrebihar has piqued the interest of archaeologists and Buddhist scholars. They agree it dates back to the 12th-13th centuries, but questions if it is really a Buddhist site or a Hindu temple that adopted Buddhist features.

Is it one of many places along a route that passed through the Surkhet-Dang area in prehistoric times, bypassing the inhospitable Gangetic plains to the south? Who built it — followers of the Vajrayana Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley or of the Tibetan Buddhism of the mountains? And was it even constructed as a temple, or could it have been a palace, monastery or something else?

The discovery half a century ago of what seemed a lost Buddhist paradise in western Nepal, populated by Jains and Hindus, was mitigating. Buddhist had been virtually unknown outside of the Kathmandu Valley and Nepal’s mountains, and had even disappeared in Buddha’s birthplace Lumbini, which is today surrounded by Muslim settlements.

The Department of Archaeology (DoA) excavated the site in 2000, and has been working at it slowly over the past three years. Stone craftsmen work hard all day chipping exact copies of broken pieces. The task is expected to be done this year, but the DoA’s decision to use concrete to join the stone pieces is controversial.

“The stone pieces were hard to put together, and concrete was the only viable option. We consulted with experts before we arrived at this decision, which is the best way to preserve the site,” says DoA Spokesperson Ram Prasad Kunwar.

Because the structure was made of stone, much of it has survived, though in fragments. Scattered at the site are stone walls, facades, statues, pillars, wells, and more, but there are few clues as to what these pieces originally looked like as a whole. However, they suggest an architectural style similar to that of temples in Kathmandu, which was once part of the Khast kingdom.

After excavation and a detailed study of the structure’s foundation, the DoA decided to piece the ruins together to make a shikhar style temple, which was also the dominant Khastani style of that era. The 12th to the 13th centuries marked the reign of the Khast kings, rulers of a powerful kingdom that stretched from Tisuli to the east to Khasa in the west, Tibet in the north and Bhuddhas in the south. Using the last names Challa and Malla, they ruled from their capital in Sinja, Jumla.

Evidence points to the Buddhist nature of this site, the fact that Sinja was a confluence of Buddhism from Tibet, Kathmandu and Khasa, and that Buddhist kings of the Pal dynasty from Bengal had settled in Tisuli. Buddhist scriptures, gilt by Khast kings to shrines in Kathmandu still exist, and King Pujya Malla’s signature on the Ashok pillar in Lumbini can still be seen.

After this thought, all at Kakrebihar is guesswork. There are no records to indicate who created the site. According to a signboard it was done by Ashok Challa around 1205 AD, but experts say it could have been built earlier by another king, Aruna Challa.

Status of Buddha found at the site indicate it was a Buddhist site, but the presence of Hindu deities like Ganesh, Saraswati and Shiva throws that theory into question. Some see it as a Hindu-Buddhist shrine.

The signboard at Kakrebihar proclaims that the site is built followed Mahayana Buddhism, but the statues, as well as the Khast kingdom’s interactions with Vajrayana from Kathmandu, Bengal and Tibet, indicate Vajrayana.

Conflicting theories also exist about the building’s destruction. Some suggest it was paved over by an earthquake in 1833, but Buddhist scholar Bhasma Mahuran thinks it was destroyed by invading Muslim soldiers in the 14th century, before they were eventually defeated in Dilkot. At most, the ruins of Kakrebihar offer tantalizing clues to a mysterious part, which is being pieced together by craftsmen from Bhaktapur, who are well known for their temple.

The Kamala province chief minister Mahendra Baburam Shrestha recently announced plans to turn the area into an open zoo, while experts think it should be conserved and investigated. Many say the DoA should be actively searching for other structures that surely exist at the site. “The site is randomly called Kakrebihar, but no other (monastery) has been found there yet. More excavation of this area is needed, which will lead to better understanding of Buddhism in Western Nepal,” says Mahuran.

Follow our report to Surkhet, deep in the Hindu and Jaina heartland of western Nepal, the government is reconstructing a Buddhist temple from ruins. Though much of it is unknown, experts aren’t ready to predict tantalizing details that are a lost paradise of Kakrebihar.
Paleontologists agree that humans moved out of Africa about 70,000 years ago, and spread out across the world. Several theories exist about their migration routes, and recent genetic studies of the Y-chromosomes with samples taken from all over the world have helped figure out their historical movements. A popular theory suggests they first crossed over to Central Asia and onwards to India, and then Southeast Asia, with one branch walking on to Australia and another through the Iraan-istan-strait to the Americas.

A study by German paleontologist Gustaf Curcuru in 1994 published definitive evidence of prehistoric settlements in Nepal’s mid-mountain region. The research has yielded an unexpected number of Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic sites and filled the lacuna of knowledge about prehistoric settlements in Nepal, writes Curcuru in a paper published in the journal Ancient Nepal in July 1995, which mentioned sites in Dang and Dolakha with remains of hand-axe flake, blades, adzes, core-scrapers and points.

For the first time, this proved that the entire belt of valleys at the foothills of the Chure, perhaps including Sukhet, was inhabited by prehistoric peoples. There is no question that during the prehistoric times Nepal, too, was occupied by people who fashioned stone age tools and who were able to penetrate through the thick forests of Terai, writes Curcuru, adding that prehistoric people may have stopped by in western Nepal on their way to Europe via the Caucasus and eastwards. The relics in many parts of Nepal are similar to ones in Vietnam and Thailand, indicating that the Nepal Chure route was used by humans to travel to Southeast Asia, bypassing what at that time must have been dangerous jungles of the Gangetic plains.

Curcuru concludes that prehistoric people settled along the hospitable foothills of the Chure at 12,000-30,000 years ago. But today, with soil erosion and changes in geography, it is increasingly difficult to find evidence of the prehistoric objects that are first exposed and then washed away.
**Rentezvous with Yaks**
The semi-annual event by Snow Yak presents sheepherders including Jhumka (Sherucho, Juju) Amir Multian and KP Khang, who work to make the world a better place and have made an impact on society.

6 June, 5pm onwards, DSL, Napel (Children’s organization Ball Mandi), Nainu. 9894275852

**Functional but Disconnected**
Listen to Mike Ilid Wildrose, doctoral researcher from the University of Sussex, and independent researcher Bikash Kumar talking on the topic. **“Functional But Disconnected: Can Janakpur’s Security System Cope with Urban Guaradi?”** in the research seminar series at Martin Chauvel.

9 June, 3.30 pm, Martin Chauvel Seminar Room (Patnapok). (01) 4382643103/34/17412434

**Live Art Competition**
As one of the pre-events of the 13th National ASA meets for folk artists, participate in a live art competition where you can paint/ draw/ sketch on the theme “Wake up for better nature” and “Abandoned heritage.” The winner will get Rs. 10,000 (advance in lieu) and Rs. 5,000 (final level).

If June, 17-30. Rs 200 (advance), Rs 100 (final), Pachik Cholpa, Patnapok. 9894275689

**The Mongolian Heart**
The popular folk-pop band The Mongolian Hearts celebrates its 15th jubilee on the occasion of World Tourism Day. The event will also feature Jawan Biju.

6 June, 6:15 pm, In кор, Lamjor. (01) 4383010

**Open Air Cinema**
Watch the 2016 movie ‘Pledge,’ as part of the open air cinema at a Laser Garden restaurant. Cafe & Bar.

8 June, 6.30 pm onwards, Laser Garden. 9894276173

**Reminiscences**
Siladhara Art Gallery presents an exhibition of paintings & drawings entitled “Reminiscences,” by Subash Parey. UNESCO Representative Christian Mainhart will inaugurate the exhibition.

10 June, 3-5 pm, Siladhara Art Gallery, Rider Mohan Residency. (01) 43819080

**Swing Socials**
Experience the thrill of dancing, fun and socialising with friends while enjoying the best swing music. Open to everyone, so don’t be shy! If you don’t know how to dance, 17 June, 6.30 pm onwards. Siladhara Art Cafe & Bar, Pachik Cholpa. 9894147276

**#FratstagChallenge**
Join the challenge to clean up Bhaktapur.

The challenging challenge is a good way to show how信息发布 nature can be seen when it’s free of trash.

7 June, 10pm. (event.org). AMS Bhaktapur. (01) 4381287

**Dusha Connection**
Indulge in the spell-binding performance of this band’s three instrumentalists. Open-minded, they seamlessly combine the most bizarre musical styles. A live drawing from the broad brush of art history 19 June, 6-7 pm, KBC, House of Music, Thamel. 9894257159

**Neha Kakkar**
A treat for bhakhs burning buffs this weekend, beautiful singer Neha Kakkar is in town and will be performing here. Call to book your tickets.

8 June, 7 pm onwards, Food of the World (10th Floor), (01) 4384418, 989413329

**Anatolia (Halal)**
If you are looking for quality Halal food, this is the place for you. The restaurant has been serving quality Halal on and off for various Turkish, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese cuisines since 2004.

10 June, 10am, Jyoti Mall. (01) 4387157

**Hotel Nag Pukhu**
Experience authentic Nepalese cuisine at Hotel Nag Pukhu, in the ancient city of Bhaktapur, only a walking distance from the dharma square. Its interior and exterior decor reflect rich Nepalese culture.

Whistlepump. (01) 4381738

**The Old Inn**
This B&B consists of two beautiful, timbered and brick Newa town houses in traditional design, overviewing a serene, traffic free piazza. The view of the central Himalaya range across the piazza is simply stunning.

Bhaktapur. (01) 4381111

**Grand Norling Hotel**
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at this hotel surrounded by world heritage sites. The spacious bedrooms include an adjoining bathroom, with a separate dining room in pitch black.

Bhaktapur. (01) 4381193

**Borderlands Eco Resort**
Enveloped in the natural Himalayan splendour, this resort is located a mere three hours’ drive north of Kathmandu. A quick getaway to wildlife and nature, weekend and eco-adventures. Borderlands Eco Adventure Resort. Shikharpur. (01) 4381425, 9894275111

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**Air Quality Index**
Daily Air Quality Index values range from 1 April 2019 to May 2019 showing values on a scale from very bad to bad at worst.

This week we are not presenting daily averages but the annual graph of daily data from the US Embassy in Kathmandu, monitoring air quality in Pashupatinath Temple. The graph shows the seasonal variation in the Air Quality Index, with the maximum during the most polluted period and winter months having a significantly higher value.

Regular updates of the AQI in Kathmandu are given every week as well as the daily pollution level on an

https://gpi.unep.ch/embassy-air-quality-monitoring
Nepal tests and treats TB with a flying pharmacy

A pilot project in Piuthan is using drones to collect sputum samples and deliver antibiotics to patients

Ramu Sapkota

Problem: Some 70% of Nepal's cases of tuberculosis, the second biggest killer of people in the world, are due to new infections, which has led to the country being placed on a red list by the World Health Organization. Nepal has been identified as one of the countries with the highest rates of drug-resistant TB in the world.

Solution: By drones.

Nepal has been acclimatised to drones to deliver TB treatment and sputum samples to patients in remote areas. The drones are being used to deliver treatment to patients who are unable to travel to health facilities due to geographical barriers.

The drones are equipped with a camera that allows health workers to monitor the delivery of the anti-TB drugs.

The drones are also being used to collect sputum samples from patients in remote areas, which are then sent to the laboratory for analysis.

MDR (multi-drug resistant) TB is also spreading, as patients develop resistance to commonly used drugs for treatment. The last survey in Nepal showed that among previously treated cases, anti-microbial resistance was found in 33.8% of cases, against the world average of 18%.

Nepal also has the added challenge of an border with India and migrant workers continue to bring infections home, while many patients from India come to this country for treatment.

Sona Awale

We will take care of your dear ones care when you are away from home.

Health at home is an organisation which facilitates home health care services. Health at home service promotes health care i.e., out of hospital setting to the clients. Being the first of its kind in the whole South Asia, Health at home is here to cater to the need of health care facilities to be home based at their doorstep.

TEST FLIGHTS

Drone: Delivered 10 kg of medical supplies in 10 minutes.

Nepal Times 12.08.2023

nepaltimes.com
Swaying to Ghatu dance in Lamjung

Devotees lined up inside the Tandi Chowk of Gumba in Nilma village, Lamjung, recently on Buddha Jayanti to prepare the Ghatu. Interestingly, although the day began with offerings for the Buddha, the dance starts by invoking Hindu gods.

Ghatu seems to bring many cultures and languages together across central Nepal. In Nilma village, a two-hour ride from the district headquarters of Besisahar, four young girls are dressing up in traditional Gargun costumes. The rituals actually begin in January, on the festival of Shree Panchami, when the dancers are selected. They are then trained until the performance starts on Buddha Jayanti, and goes on for up to a week.

On full moon day, the dancers line up in a community building at the centre of the village, and begin, swaying slowly to the music as village elders sing in the beat of the music. Gharu tells the tragic story of King Pashramu and Queen Yambawati. Pashramu goes on a hunt, meets and marries Yambawati and they have a child. Pashramu is killed in action, Yambawati itself on her husband’s pyre.

The first dance was with Yambawati’s grief as she gives up her kingdom, says goodbye to her little son and embraces death. The dancers go into a trembling trance.

Gharu is performed all over central Nepal by Gurung, Magar, Daisi, Bolelai and Kuma communities, but no one is sure how it originated. “Our ancestors did not tell us where they learnt it or how it began,” says Jung Bahadur Gurung, a dance teacher in Nilma. “People believe it’s based on a local story, and that Pashramu and Yamawati were a local Gargun king and queen.”

Gurung does not know what language the songs are in, but it sounds like Bhojpuri or Bhojpuris. Since Pashramu meets Yamawati when he is out hunting, some people speculate that Yamawati was a woman from the Tanu, who brought the songs with her.

The Gurungs also did not practise bells, which is depicted in the dance. Considering this and other factors, folk music expert Keshor Gurung concludes that Gharu was actually brought to Nepal by Lahures who went to India. “Nepali soldiers who joined the British Indian armies must have brought it back with them 150-200 years ago.”

There is agreement, however, on what makes participants go into a trance as they dance with their eyes closed. “The dancers sometimes don’t even know the story, but go with the flow and whatever the music takes them,” says folk music researcher Jhuma Limbu, who is making a documentary about Gharu. “It is a matter of great pride that music which explores the depths of human psychology is still alive in Nepal. We must do our best to preserve it.”

Grown women who were former dancers sometimes fall into a trance when they hear the music. Hence villagers here forbids recording the music, and the performances only happen at designated times.

With the march of time, interest is waning in such lengthy dances when other means of entertainment are easily available, says musician Raju Gurung. “It is very sad that people are losing interest in the ritual past the dance and it is becoming more and more commercialised. We love our dance very much and would like to preserve it, but it is a losing battle.”

Sewa Bhattacharya is a reporter.
BAD AIR

Thank you Nepal Times for putting this important issue to the fore.

Satyajit Pradhan

The government ought to bring in experts from outside to talk not only as advisors but to follow through with the recommendations, no matter how unpopular it might be in certain quarters. The government carries a responsibility to provide the answer to the pollution problem that is shortening the lives, by years, of the people in Kathmandu.

Alan Roadright

Instead of “measuring in roads, why not invest in a good public transport like a tram or a regular (big) bus service, or get rid of all micro buses and use electric tuk-tuks? Kathmandu is one of the few capital(s) without a proper public transportation system.

Rik Reels

Wow, what an amazing article. Wish this could be translated and sent to all the GSA members so that they get enlightened and maybe they’ll also bang the table in the House of Representatives. (How to carve out Kathmandu’s air?) Anil Chitrakar, (PSS2).

Not only that, but send it also to all the schools, colleges and universities so the people know what we want and how it can be done.

Mani Lama

This is so appalling (#BlackApo). This is a wake-up call for all the citizens of Nepal by far the most conservative for when it comes to following the rules for the greater good.

Wagpal Chaubal

Nothing will happen as long as politicians have no sense of (old) duty, no personal pride, remain kept and corrupt. Billions are paid in car tax, billions in road tax.

David Durkan

Can we join forces to sue the government over poor air quality in the capital and for their lack of interest to do anything about it?

Vairachen Sherpa

Visit Nepal 2020 to witness one of the most incompetent governments in the history of ‘humanity’.

Bhumi Giri

Nothing will happen as long as politicians have no sense of (old) duty, no personal pride, remain kept and corrupt. Billions are paid in car tax, billions in road tax.

Karen Porter

I am not sure the Nepal government is the issue ("Oxyd-rium, lung from Mt Everest", Ivan G Simant, (PSS2)). What we see on Everest are symptoms of mass tourism. The same is happening in the Alps.

I have said Mount Blanc is actually the most dangerous mountain in the world. Over 20,000 people try to summit each year with around 10 fatalities. Chamonix has been a ski village for 100 years — before it was as poor as most of Nepal is right now.

Jürgen Stüdtner

EVEREST TRAFFIC JAM

Trekking permits must be increased to decrease this traffic.

Prasanna Malla

EVEREST TRAFFIC JAM

Trekking permits must be increased to decrease this traffic.

Anup Sajracharya

Karma Tensing puts it into perspective ("Most days, it’s not so crowded on Mt Everest, (PSS2)"). He was actually there, unlike these news reporters.

Mark Parelia

There were 381 permits sold through which is a record and this number doesn’t include guides. Also, apparently, relatively inexperienced climbers are up there. That’s easy (and dangerous) for everyone!

Rhem Lakal

I agree with much of what you say (Because we are there, Damien François, (PSS2)). Mountaineering is a chance and with it comes responsibility for oneself and partners. However, when we use terms like Nepalese or Sherpas guides it implies exclusivity, responsibility and a duty of care on their part. The NMA and government share this responsibility — although not in the same way — with the Sherpa guides, leaders or mountain communities. Accepting clients with little mountaineering experience increases the risk to everyone but also increases the duty of care on our guides, leaders and government. It seems to me, after 35 climbing and trekking adventures in Nepal, poor management of mountain tourism is changing the game and degrading the experience, without improving the lot of mountain communities. On the other hand, a few eggs having a crowded day on Everest falls in the face of Nepal’s greater social and economic needs.

Bill O’Connor

EVEREST CLEANUP

So good to have this article to share with my American friends who love mountain climbing and have been horrified by recent news articles even in our favourite news source, NYT, about the degradation of the Everest environment (‘Tiger on the ascent’ 17 tons of Mt Everest trash”, Bhutan, (PSS2)).

Wilda Campbell

Well done to all concerned. I think it is time for the Nepali government to get serious. Close the mountain for one or two seasons, clean up the trash and then re-open to climbers at increased fees with only a limited number of permits per season. Let the Sherpas themselves run the whole management of the mountain and empower them to enforce the law.

Andrew Duncan

Thank you, for this much needed and laborious task. It is a shame that there are reproductions this year willing to add to the problem. Perhaps the Nepali government should deny climbing permits for the next climbing season to any company that failed to provide for compliance of these regulations.

Kathryn Schwenger

I’m not a climber but if they can take it up why can’t they bring it down?

Christine Henry
SISTERHOOD OF STUDENTS

A new approach allows older female students to support younger ones to complete schooling.

Priyanka Budathoki
in Parsa

Nepal has made significant progress in raising primary school enrolment, with more than 90% of boys and girls now attending school from Grades 1 through 6. More than half of adolescent girls in rural areas are now in secondary schools; 15 years ago it was less than 30%.

Despite this achievement, poverty, family pressure and gender-unfriendly schools mean that the dropout rate for girl students is still high. As a result, adolescent girls from rural areas get caught in a trans-generational cycle of poverty inherited from their mothers, and are more likely to pass it on to their own children.

In response, NGO Nepal, in partnership with Amos Nepal, the British Council, Global Action and Mercy Corps, is helping girls in districts like Parsa — where female literacy is low — through a program called Sisters for Sisters’ Education. Older girls are recruited to mentor younger ones, increase their enrolment and prevent dropouts.

The older girls are volunteers from the community, who act as Big Sisters to get Little Sisters into school and guide them through adolescence. Big Sisters provide not only academic support but also encouragement and taboo-busting information on sexual and reproductive health to the younger ones.

More than one-third (33%) of Nepali women over 15 have had no education. This rate increases with age — more than 53% of women ages 65-64 cannot read or write.

Girls are at much higher risk of dropping out due to cultural bias, lack of educational opportunities and resources, and

Do not fail students in WASH

Nepal must ensure progress in water, sanitation and health continues, so children stay in school.

Attended elsewhere

By the numbers, Nepal’s progress in water, sanitation and health (WASH) is encouraging. More than 90% of people now have access to toilets and 74% enjoy safe drinking water, a recent survey found.

But as usual, facts and figures alone don’t tell the full story. According to Unicef, just 29% of water supply systems in the country work properly, 36% require minor repairs and 39% need either major repairs, rehabilitation or reconstruction.

Schools are also reporting progress — 82% now have toilets and close to 80% can

boost an improved water source — but in only 47% of schools was water supply available during a recent survey.

Nationally, two-thirds of schools have separate toilets for girls. That’s supported by research done in 12 schools in Achham, Bajura and Parsa in 2016. It found that all schools had toilets, but 10 had separate ones for girls. Yet only 3 toilets in all 12 schools had a water tap that children could reach and just 1 toilet in all the schools was disabled-friendly. Nineteen toilets had a door that locked while 33 lacked a door; no toilets had soap and water nearby for hand-washing.

Girls students especially are sensitive to the availability of toilets, and if they have to share facilities with boys, or if they are no locking doors or if no water is available, some girls will choose to stay home instead.

Given that enrolment of girls in schools is
"I am proud of my sisters"

Apsana Khatun, 19, from Province 2, is a Big Sister community volunteer who mentors four girls (Life Skills) in a community school. When her relatives wanted her married, Apsana’s mother resisted Apsana’s story.

"I am a Muslim. The girls in my community cannot go out on their own, and have to wear veils. My relatives wanted me married off, but my mother allowed me to go to school. Many other girls are not so lucky. After completing Grade 10, I became a Big Sister community volunteer in Sisters for Sisters’ Education in my village. I am responsible for four little sisters, whom I mentor with academic guidance and emotional support. All four of their parents were not happy with me. But I persisted, and got two of them who had dropped out in school. Now, the parents treat me like family. I feel so proud when the girls in my school say they want to be teachers, doctors and nurses. My mother never went to school, I want every mother in Nepal to be educated."

"Never look back"

Suniti Deel is 34 and her daughter is 12, the age she was when she married. At 16 with two babies in her arms and a small bag, Suniti was brought to keep her husband’s home. She does not want her daughter, or other daughters in Nepal, to go through what she did and now mentors female students in her community. Suniti says:

I was in Grade 7 when my parents forced me to get married to someone in a nearby village. I became a mother at 13, but my father wanted me to give birth to a daughter. A year later I gave birth to a baby boy, and tried to be accepted back to my husband’s house. I returned only after he had married someone else.

I completed Grade 10 and began teaching in a primary school, earning a sum to raise my children as a single mother. I started working in Sisters for Sisters’ Education and have been back. I am living in the same community where my husband lives with his second wife, but that does not affect me anymore. I am determined not to let my students be forced into marriage or at an early age. As an Apple Champion I teach the girls in my skills, mentor them and increase their confidence."
Nepal's undecided decision-makers

Don’t believe what the press is writing about ministers being incompetent. As usual, the media is exaggerating. Actually, our ministers are hard at work behind the scenes trying not to take any major decisions. This is an ingenious strategic move by the government so that they do not make any mistakes.

If no decisions are taken, there is no chance of the decisions being wrong. For anything to go wrong, a decision has to be taken that is not right. It is audacious for the government to be so decisively indecisive, since decisions that are eventually taken may turn out to be the wrong decisions.

Policy-makers may think they are decision-makers. Out of sheer boredom, they take impulsive decisions, and immediately get to regret their decisiveness. Since this is a two-thirds majority grumblement, the Cabinet has the mandate to not decide on anything of a substantive nature.

So, the matter of the members of the Cabinet (Motto: “Who Told You the Buck Stops Here?” being incompetent doesn’t apply. It’s an idiot-proof system of governance because our movers and shakers don’t move at all and very rarely shake. To make the system move, the ministers have collectively decided to henceforth scrap Cabinet meetings at Singha Durbar altogether since it has been decided that everything is not decided at Baluwatar anyway.

Even so, the groveling spokesperson is required to hold a press conference every Thursday to brief the press about the decisions that were not taken by the Cabinet. In the pseudo-nationalist Internet, we have decided to publish hereunder all pending indecisions:

1. The Cabinet has decided not to make any decision on reviving the Bhairabphi project, and instead allow the private sector to bid for a small plot near the Linglung National Park. But no decision has been taken (press time).

2. The Ministry of Information and Cultural Tourism has finally decided to pull off any decision on the proposed new bill because it would show that the government had falsified its decision to be decided.

3. The God of Rain has not yet decided when the monsoon will start, and farmers have therefore put off their decision to transplanted paddy.

4. Ratna Pathak on the 3km section of road between Chandpur and South is a full complex because the Department of Roads and Highways is half-decided about completing it before the rains.

5. The government hasn’t decided what the decision should be on the Nagarkot Airport chairlift project. The decision hasn’t been taken on who should decide which competing company should bag the deal. “Define the government spokesperson without a hint of indecisiveness in his voice.”

6. A new court order has ruled that the court’s condition that the Ministry hasn’t made up its mind about what to do with Nagarkot has. “God is weighing the options since things are tied up because he is not expert enough to answer our question,” said a delirious spokesperson.

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