Only half-prepared

Federalism was supposed to decentralise disaster relief, but it hasn’t

The memory of the catastrophic flood of 2017 is still fresh in the minds of the people of Rautahat. But even though they are better prepared, there have been no moves to address the cause: floodplains of rivers blocked by embankments. Rautahat is now in Province 2, and which is responsible for disaster management under Nepal’s new federal structure. Even with the arrival of the monsoon, Kathmandu and Janakpur are still wrangling over power devolution. Ironically, the Bagmati that burst its banks here two years ago, originates upstream in Kathmandu Valley. The 2017 Disaster Risk and Management Act formed out responsibility of preparedness, rescue and relief to central, provincial, and local governments. Province 2 has passed its own Disaster Management law, but it exists only in paper. By the time it is ready, the central Tanai could drown in another flood. New roads, embankments, levees and settlements along floodplains on both sides of the India-Nepal border will make future floods much worse.

“We have a total of Rs150 million in the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund and in the ministry’s own disaster fund,” says Arun Bha at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Province 2. “But we have not been able to procure rafts, tents, and food stockpiles in time. When the flood comes, we will find a way to deal with it.”

The lack of civil servants has paralysed the Province 2 government in Janakpur from functioning at full capacity, and so it depends on Kathmandu for everything. First responders like the Nepal Army and Police, for instance, are deployed by the central government. As the tornado disaster in Buta in April showed, the role of the Province 2 government is limited to coordination.

It will take a few more years before all three levels of government work smoothly to prevent and cope with disasters. Till then, Lalita Kumari Ram (pictured above), who survived the 2017 flood by fleeing to a road embankment with her family, will be on her own. Sewa Bhattarai, Editor
FLOOD OF RECRIMINATION

It is that time of year again when we start getting inundated with news about floods. With the advent of the monsoon, floods, landslides and other water-induced ‘natural disasters’ will once more wreak havoc throughout the land. But while floods are natural, disasters are not.

Nepal has seen dry months, and three months in which we have too much water. In the rainy season, rivers used to spread along the floodplains, dissipating the force of the water. Nepalis used to live in those areas lower than to locate settlements on river banks. In the agrarian Tamiar, farmers had to learn to live with floods, and welcomed the annual replenishment of farms with vital, water-born nutrients.

There were years when natural disasters would be overwhelmed and Rivers burst their banks, eroding valuable farmland as they changed course. But we have turned a predictable annual occurrence into a regular calamity because of bad planning.

More than half of Nepal’s population now lives in the Tarai, and human settlements have encroached on what used to be floodplains. Deforestation of the fragile Chure hills has increased sediment loads on seasonal rivers, causing them to flow through villages and farms. A river will find its own way to the sea no matter what we do to block its path.

It is true that floods are getting more destructive, but not just because there is more rain. Our attempts to control floods are making them worse.

Levies built to ‘train’ rivers end up constraining their flows, embankments often cut the dam blocking the natural course and submerging huge tracts of farmlands. Roads have been built on levies intended to prevent them from being submerged, but they just make the floods worse.

Many roads on the other side of the border in India have inadequate drainages and create vast reservoirs on the Nepal side every year. Meanwhile, the raas news bulletins in Bihari and Uttar Pradesh blame Nepal for releasing water from its dams — not bothering to explain that Nepal has only one reservoir and the sluice gates of the three border barrages are under Indian management.

After every disaster like Sunsari (2008), Bardia and Sarkhet (2014), Septapi and Rasathai (2011) and Bhaktapur (2009), that year, there is a flood of recrimination, blaming nature and bemoaning our lack of preparedness. Reconstruction agencies are usually at the scene quickly, but are overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the damage. Relief and rehabilitation is mired in bureaucracy and corruption, with villagers still waiting for help three years later. Power to infilexors are impoverished even more, and floods force them to migrate.

Once the monsoon tapers off in September, we will forget about floods for another year. Instead of taking proper measures to improve drainage and poorly designed infrastructure that block the natural flow of rivers, it will be back to floods in time.

Most of the flood damage in the Tarai is not caused by Nepal’s four big rivers, but by Chuets streams that are dry most of the year and become raging muddy torrents during the monsoon. The paradox is that boulder and sand mining in the Chuets has fed the infrastructure boom in the Tarai and Indus and actually makes these floods more destructive in the Tarai and downstream.

As we learn from a field report from Bhusmati that the week before, 1, 159 most flood victims are poor, and neglecting them comes naturally to the state. Because not enough is being done to prevent destructive floods, relief agencies are turning attention to early warning systems and the management of disasters after they happen.

Making all these problems more difficult is the climate crisis, which is leading to more extreme weather events. Monsoon cloudbreaks are said to be more frequent and intense, causing localized rains in the Tarai and Indus. And then there are disasters like the Sunnari flood, which have nothing to do with heavy rainfall or global warming, but are caused by contractors stealing boulders from the Kosi’s eastern levee, thus weakening the embankment.

Sunsari was just a rehearsal for a future Kernan flood that will be far bigger and will hit millions in Nepal and India. It is a given that floods elsewhere will also get more destructive in the years to come.

Preventing them requires an understanding of nature’s ways, and raising rivers to be free again.

In federalism, flood prevention, management and emergency relief is no longer just the responsibility of the Kathmandu apparatus. In fact, federal responders by definition have to be local governments, and the state needs to further its flood prevention and management capacity.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ten years ago this week, in issue no 433 of 10-5 June 2009, senior journalist BHAUSING patriarchy as the basis of the status quo. It is avalidated record.

Women’s entry gets stopped for commercial reasons and the lack of equality in the classroom. But a new frontier is being opened.

On 22 May, two mountains from Austria and Hungary set a new record on the Everest, an ascent of 34,770. A. L. was the oldest person to reach its summit.

On 30 May, 475,000 migrants from Syria have been repatriated to the country, an average of 4,500 a day. A. L. was the first to reach the summit of Mount Everest, and the second to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

Several dozen women of the Shar Pei, who really are a bit of a curiosity, have been adopted by several families. Their names range from Agnes, Annabelle, Jennifer, and other names. This is a story of how women are greatly neglected and a good read for women, who will find that it is predictable. It is the right thing to do.

REPORTS

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT'S TRENDING

Himalayan meltdown from space

by Bhusmati

In a recent Tats video, author P.K. Hima红山, a former scientist for the high-altitude project at the national Astrodome in Delhi, said the Himalayan glaciers were melting at a rate unprecedented among the world’s glaciers. Ms. Hima红山 noted that the trend was the most important trend in recent years on Facebook.

Most watched and shared on Facebook

Motorcycle grandma by Bhusmati

The story of a 92-year-old grandmother who has learned to ride a motorcycle to stay close to her grandchildren and to accept the reality of aging and her own community. It’s a heart and soul-moving story from the 90s. Page 31

Most popular on Twitter

Own worst enemy

The Nepali Communist Party does not need enemies. It is facing its own problems. The party is split and is being dragged into internal disagreements.

Most commented

Most visited online page

QUOTE & TWEETS

Bhutanese refugees

Nice piece “Who stands with Bhutanese refugees in Nepal?”, Bhutanese people and T M Prashita, which I am puzzled at how the international community continues to share the burden of refugee resettlement without putting any due pressure on the countries responsible for the refugee crisis in the first place. By turning a blind eye, the West and especially the US is doing injustice and encouraging bad behaviour.

Bishak Bhattachary

Bhutanese refugees share the love of their culture with us, while working hard to assimilate and assume the responsibilities of living here. They give back to both their ethnic community and the greater community at large. It saddens me greatly to think of the 7,000 left behind in Nepal.

Jo Ann Reddoch

I lived in Sikkim for five years and had seen this humanitarian crisis of progressively deteriorating situation (“Sikkim remains in Western Nepal”, Prabhat, September 1994). There is so much history in this Nepalese community that... if only there were a concerted effort to find, catalogue and protect them.

Irin G. Samant
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Fixing what ain’t broke

Let us hope the government learnt the lesson not to tamper with what has preserved Nepal’s unique cultural heritage for centuries.
How to restore the lure of Everest

Legendary British mountaineer offers solutions to overcrowding on the summit this spring

Doug Scott

I have been adding to Nepal many times, as much by the Himalayan landscape as to be with the mountain people. It is the people, more than the mountains, who bring visitors back to Nepal.

I realised this during two visits in 1972 and again during our first ascent of the southwest face of Mt Everest in 1975 (above). That was also when Nepal's first tourism master plan was drafted.

With increased global mobility, everyone today can sign up to the experience of the Himalaya. Mass tourism means that you should not go to the popular areas of the Himalaya these days to find solitude. Not even to the top of Mt Everest.

Trekking trails are no longer places of peace and spiritual renewal, due to the constant distraction of fellow trekkers. Most trails offer selfie spots and wifi or phone signals so hikers can upload instantly on Instagram. This social media publicity in turn brings more tourists. At the height of the tourist season it is now hard to take a photo without capturing another trekker in the shot, or to make your hike a walking meditation.

How to reverse this situation and return to the most beautiful and dramatic mountain landscape on the planet, to a place where the mountain people are not overwhelmed by the sheer number of visitors, and those who come are not disappointed?

What is the carrying capacity of the Everest Trail and other popular destinations? Experts on environmental impact, tourism and local culture can advise on how to enforce restrictions without causing offence to visitors or reducing local incomes.

There have been reports of insurance fraud involving climbers being rescued by helicopter. This is already hurting tourism, and will ultimately affect local incomes. The sector needs to be effectively cleaned up.

Pre-1986, there was one expedition per season per route, which was wonderful. Now, people are impatient and want to rush to achieve their goals and move on. Why should Everest be treated any differently than Mont Blanc or the Matterhorn? Because it is a holy mountain for local, it is the highest in the world and of universal value. We have to protect not just the mountain’s sanctity, but also what is sacred to mountaineering by respecting the style of the first ascent.

After this year’s fracas, it seems inevitable that the number of permits will be limited to reflect the carrying capacity of the mountain, as is done on Mt Denali. The challenge is to protect the mountain from the tyranny of numbers and accommodate those who have come to rely on Mt Everest and other popular mountains for their income.

The commercialisation of Everest and other Himalayan peaks is largely unplanned and uncontrolled. This could change if the Nepal government issued permits only to climbers who have summited at least one other 7,000m peak elsewhere in Nepal. Teams could be allocated certain climbing days, although this may not go down well with those on the mountain during bad weather periods. Agents who have previously acted incompetently or have transgressed on Everest could be blacklisted. And finally, permit fees can be increased.

Once we have restored serenity to mountains, we can work to use climbing royalties to improve the working conditions of Nepali guides by ensuring full insurance cover, and a welfare/compensation board to cover accident and death. A well-remunerated mountain rescue group made up of elite mountain guides can be set up, and employed to fix and remove ropes for each climbing season. High-altitude porters and guides could be paid for collecting, sorting and recycling rubbish and waste from the mountain.

If Everest hopefuls climb elsewhere in Nepal, it will spread the benefits of mountaineering to other parts of the country. Encouraging tourism to less visited areas at less busy times of the year could reduce congestion on Everest. As new motorised roads replace trekking routes, this is starting to happen anyway.

Climbers used to visit Nepal seeking new peaks and routes, drawn by venturing where no one had been before. There are still more unclimbed peaks over 6,000m than those that have been summited, yet everyone wants to be on Everest, which has been climbed out.

Doug Scott is an English mountaineer who made the first ascent of the southwest face of Mt Everest in September 1975.
Exposing bellies under saris and other parts of the body politic

Shelvin Teo

B
uying a bouquet for a friend’s wedding the other day, I got really involved in the process of choosing the flowers, arranging the blooms and packing them up. So much so, I was bent over and staring at the little flower shop to find the right coloured ribbons, paper and paragraphia.

That’s when my husband noticed my clothes.

Light coloured, because I dressed to cope with the stifling summer heat of the valley. Traces of my undies showed through when I leaned down to scrutinise some ribbons. He noticed. And according to him, others noticed too.

Should I feel ashamed that they did? Should I wear the burden of having males stare at my bottom when I happen to bend over, or stare at me when I walk? It’s not often I’m scouring about a small shop exposing my bum to the world. When I walk, the pants don’t pull tight enough to look ‘indecent’ or ‘vulgar’.

In a country where exposed bellies under the drapes of saris are normative, or flash-up busies and sexy, diaphanous tailoring are to be seen at any given wedding or celebratory event across the city, why am I made to feel like I’m a girl, wearing a girdle, bearing my kind of fuss free, breezy fashion that happens to be in a light colour and fabric?

Why should my girlfriends feel intimidated by people staring at them when they wear skirts or shorts cut above the knees?

It is no wonder to me that the abuse of women and girls in Nepal, and to the rest of the subcontinent, is prevalent.

If women are yoked with the responsibility of presenting ourselves in ways that do not offend the male or conservative gaze, where would the blame lie should such offences be taken, I would ask. Also, should we start examining the dynamics of treating women and girls in ways that are harmful to their well-being, in the name of tradition and religion and among class and caste status?

Generally speaking, like other South Asians, many Nepalis are quick to judge and bred to not question the status quo, in a situation like mine, with a Nepali husband who by so many measures is modern in his mindset, I am constantly surprised at the sudden yawning of traditional mores at my ankles.

It’s not like me to be too affected by it. I’ll shake it off, like I’m doing now, but I’m irritated. I’ll voice my disheartening opinions, and I’ll keep wording what I want to, and differing what I need to, as long as I’m not hurting anyone to the best of my discretion. I’m a woman who knows herself and knows her self-worth as a human being.

However, there are many women brought up in this country who don’t have the mindset that I do, perhaps fortunately for them, so that the harmony of life as they know it is maintained. I understand that unquestioning acceptance is often exercised in this culture I’ve chosen to be immersed in. But I do think it’s healthy to question culture when it is disproportionately patriarchal, as it is still in this part of the world.

I question that in order to live harmoniously a woman has to give up her rights to be comfortable in her own skin, in how she chooses to look. She gives up her humanity, her security, her sexuality, her sensitivity, her intelligence, her curiosity, just to please men and matchmakers, just to fit into a culture that validates only certain aspects of her entire nature.

Abuse of women in this culture will remain prevalent until the men and women of power step up and act out against it, and until the downtrodden powerless learn to voice their displeasure beyond the strains of sad folk songs. I am not of your culture, but I am affected by it. This is my voice.

हिमाल
बारिष्क चाहियोली !

र. ५०००/- व्यक्तिको व्यतिरिक्त सुधारको पिशवीट मार्केट

Think Ahead

Go further.

(Registration fee for CII (June 2019)

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Sure, Nair & Associates

Society Annual Report 2018-19
With its strong oral tradition, Nepal is a country of storytellers and listeners. Holding a steaming cup of chhaya, a storyteller recites past adventures or tales about the best and worst days of her life, at roadside tea stalls, or under a chaalpat. Curious bystanders huddle together to listen. The crowd grows larger as more passersby join in. But stories have never been yelled on stage — until August 2016, when The StoryYellers launched a platform for those who wanted to tell their stories.

"I tell stories and help others tell theirs," says Prabanta Manandhar Mahavel, who explains that The StoryYellers started out as a joke, after a friend asked him why only "important" people got a platform. By then, Manandhar and partners were already running The StoryYellers, another stage for successful "local heroes".

"Today, the bi-monthly The StoryYellers is held at 25 Hours in Tundal, and features people from all walks of life describing the one incident that has created the biggest impact on their lives. Speakers either volunteer using an online form or are hand-picked by the team, which selects speakers from various professions. There is a rigorous process of story framing and rehearsal before the live show, and the team makes sure that the tale is told like a traditional story, with a plot, characters, conflict and resolution."

Manandhar rejects comparisons with TED Talks, explaining that The StoryYellers is more about personal stories well told, while the global platform is more about ideas. The fact that The StoryYellers took off from its very first performance is proof that there was indeed a demand for just such a platform. Tickets have sold well, and the stories are getting popular on social media, with viewers in 150 countries. However, Manandhar does not want to transform the show into an online-only event:

"Personal interaction is very important to us. It makes the show much more intimate, and we do the show even if there is only one audience member."

The event goes beyond telling a good story, challenging speakers to dig into the most important part of themselves, and then share that publicly.

"I speak about my relationship with my parents after my experience with Solo Women Travel," recalls Monika Gurung, who took the stage in March. "I had never spoken about this to anyone and talking about it on the stage made me very nervous even though public speaking is my thing. I think I was scared because this time, I was speaking about me."

Gurung says she felt relieved after sharing her story, regardless of whether it inspired people in the audience.

The StoryYellers team also runs other platforms, such as Comedy Specials (stand-up comedy), College Edition (stand-up storytelling) and Story Craft (inter-school storytelling competitions). It plans to take StoryYellers to a national and then global stage, and conducted a session in Pakistan on March 2019.

About 136 speakers have made it to The StoryYellers stage to date, including well-known names like Ayushman Joshi, Neeshita Jung Kunwar, Swoopna Suman, Netra Shah, Nave Manandhar and Jyotika Yogi. Asked why he does it, Manandhar has a simple answer: "It inspires change through stories and help the world learn about Nepal."  

Reeti KC
Clothed in can

The weed may be illegal, but hemp fabric is catching on

Pema Sherpa

Hippies flocked to Nepal in the 1960s and 70s, driven by the freedom to buy and smoke pot. But today, tourists are attracted by t-shirts, shawls and jackets made from the marijuana plant.

While there are still weed pushers on the streets of Kathmandu trying to sell you a smoke, the tourist hub is now better known for designer apparel made from a blend of cannabis fibres and cotton.

“In my business cannabis isn’t illegal. If cannabis was illegal then we wouldn’t have these products on sale,” says Yubraj Timilsina, who started out as a vegetable vendor and now owns Hemp Headquarters, which manufactures and runs a wholesale shop for cannabis-based attire.

Timilsina and others who deal in cannabis fabric source their products from western Nepal, where marijuana cultivation is permitted for hemp production under strict supervision of the local police. Western Nepal suffered greatly from the US-induced ban on cannabis in the 1970s, when already impoverished farmers were pushed into deeper poverty because of the loss of their cash crop.

On 26 June, International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, instead of encouraging farmers to
Social fabric

A blend of fabrics from the Himalayas with creative patterns and effective marketing have made Nepal's hemp-based products trendy in designer stores in Europe, North America, and Japan.

For the past 30 years, Karuna Natural Weave has been exporting high-quality clothes blending hemp with other natural fibers like nettle, silk, and bamboo designed for durability and comfort. "The hemp textiles are popular among our customers because and abroad is that they are comfortable, suitable for people with sensitive skin, they are naturally resistant to UV rays, the design looks bold and striking," explains designer Nabin Mahakar. Indeed, the hemp clothing on display at Karuna's store in Durbar Marg and Lazimpat, and Juju in Thamel is in their subdued earthy colors and tastefully rendered minimalist traditional patterns, are soft to the touch. There are halwa, pants, skirts and a whole range of bags and other hemp-based products. Although the hemp fabric is mainly sourced from western Nepal, the quality and supply was not reliable enough and Karuna now imports some raw material from China and India.

Most in demand at Karuna and Juju stores are apparel from blended fabric, and although they are slightly more expensive, the hemp-cotton fabric is the most popular.

Sanam Chokshi Lama

POT VOCAB

MARIHUANA: a psychoactive drug made from the dried flowers and leaves of the Cannabis plant, containing tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). It is also known as weed, pot, grass, Mary Jane.

Hemp: A variety of cannabis plant that grows up to 3m tall and contains less than 0.3% THC. It is used to make clothes and bags (cann-lapel bags).

Sanja: Marijuana in Nepal. Hindi and Sandali, used to denote the drug and the Cannabis plant.

Shang: Six fold hemp made by croaking green leaves and buds of the Cannabis plant. Smoked and eaten at festival time in Nepal.

Hashish: Also known as hash in the Subcontinent, is the resin made from rubbing Cannabis flowers and leaves.

CANNABIS WEAR

Toddlers have become target customers for hemp-based products. Listen to shopkeepers talk about their own brand of label with more support from the government.

Nepaltimes.com

Green Gold

In 1979, after American youth started flocking to Nepal by the thousands attracted by cheap hemp and pot, Nepal was forced by the US government to ban the use and sale of marijuana. This caused thousands of farmers out of work, and made impoverished western Nepal even poorer. Today, while marijuana is legal for medical purposes in most countries, it is still illegal in the US.

Mr. Pradhan is a Nepali dweller who has been following the Cambodian government on legalizing marijuana. He says it is absurd that the US government still classifies marijuana as a narcotic drug when experts agree on its medicinal properties and therapeutic effects. "For Nepali farmers it can be a green gift," Pradhan told a recent conference in Kathmandu on legalizing marijuana.

Nepal's Narcotics Drugs Control Act allows the use of the wildy grown cannabis plant, but it is vague and confusing, and it is enforcement in every other statute. Activists are now pushing for regulation of hemp cultivation so that plants can be used to make fabric, and that batik bowls - they say want to shift their focus to legalising ganja for medical use and even recreational consumption.

Cannabis grower David, who was interviewed for this article, says he is "worth the journey." He says, "It is totally legal to produce the hemp all as the hemp seeds are legal and the oil doesn't get you high. We need to cross the board legalisation of hemp."
Rice Planting Festival

Celebrate the onset of summer by getting wet and playing with mud, while interacting with local mudrains and, of course, planting rice! Nawasa is at the forefront.

Nepali Travellers Hang Out
If you like travelling, don’t miss this hangout, where you can listen to travel stories and chat about the events of the Sabru Warrior Challenge. Have fun while drinking and enjoying other adventurous spots too.

28 June, 4-6 PM, Sabru Adventure Centre Nepal, Thame (01) 4443515

Nextalk
Join the conversation with visual artist Priyanka Banjordham and Pranav Lamichhane, two of Nepal’s most famous artists. The second season of the Art Talk series focuses on artists’ creative processes, material health issues, and the current art market.

28 June, 6-9 PM, Nehru Cultural Centre, Kathmandu (01) 5322055

Mandala Workshop
Learn about lines, shapes, and colours, how to draw a variety of sandalgram patterns, and create your own mandalas. Following the basic principles of a symbolic language encourages a better understanding of our connection to this beautiful universe.

28 June, 11 AM, The Bench Thamel, Bhasmapur, 564485567

Word Warriors Live
Word Warriors are back with ‘Urea Jut’. The featured poet is Sambu Shankar, who will perform his famous poem ‘Pitru ko Chet’. The event will include a panel discussion on poetry writing and other performances.

28 June, 2:30 PM, ART, Live like the Base, Kathmandu (01) 5237570

Neetesh Jung Kunwar
This Saturday come together to meet Neetesh Jung Kunwar and perform his beautiful songs. Opening for him will be the duo Luma and Sangh.

7 June, 5-7:45 PM, Thame, Laxapana (01) 4445300

Wood Carving Exhibition
Enjoy this wood carving exhibition, The Art of the Nepalese by Birsha Prasad Shrestha from Nepal, along with drawings of wood carvings by Birsha Prasad Shrestha.

1 July, 4-8 PM, Tengboche Monastery, Bhaflia (01) 4440755

Siri series II
A solo exhibition by Nirmal Lall Shrestha, the series will run until 5 July.

1-5 July, 6-8 PM, Roundabout, Delhi Bazaar Hotel, Thamel (01) 4450406

Reminiscences
Sudhara Art Gallery presents an exhibition of paintings and drawings, entitled Reminiscences by Dr Punya Prasad. The exhibition will run until 11 June.

12-17 June, 11 AM-7 PM, Sudhara Art Gallery, Bodhi Motel (01) 4216094

Indian Classical Dance
If you are into Indian classical dance, this workshop is for you. Participants will be introduced to classical arts, with the primary focus on Bharat Natyam and Kathak.

29-30 June, 5:30-6:30 PM, Arts Chokhopati (01) 2305254, Sarina Workshops & Yoga Centre, Lalitpur (01) 4832744

Musical Muna Madan
Witness a musical presentation of Muna Madan by Surendra Prasad performed by Kamal, Bimala, and Muna Madan.

30 June, 6:30 PM, Kathmandu (01) 4216094

Royal Sing Hotel
Distinctive and symbolically crafted artefacts at elements of foton architecture, are the centerpiece of the sanctum and charm of the Palace suite at Royal Sing Hotel, Lal Durbar, Rambagh (01) 4447000, 4447031

Godavari Village Resort
Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views, traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking river-fed fields.

Gokarn (01) 5558675

Soaltee Westend Premier
The new hotel stands as a testament to the elegance and architectural style. Designed as the first hotel in Nepal certified Silver Category for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, the badge was awarded by the US Green Building Council for following strict energy-saving and eco-friendly criteria.

Perpetual (01) 533170

Hotel Yukhang
A new hotel built with concrete piers from the Melamchi area and Bhasmapur’s wooden slabs, for a royal and modestly touch to your stay.

(01) 444581

Hotel Country Villa
From the top of the Nagarkot hill, the hotel provides spectacular views of greenery, sunrise and sunset, and showcases the mountain range in all its glory, accompanied by relaxing music on Fridays or a Pop-up market on Saturdays.

(01) 4448047

Our Pick

AIR QUALITY INDEX
KATHMANDU, 21-27 June

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For the first time in Nepal, we are bringing to you the air quality index in the form that shows the pollution. The effect of traffic congestion on a car running at 30 km/hour can be observed at the site of Gajapati Chok at Sanepa, which shows the real-time condition of the air. The data will continue to be updated hourly until the air improves.
Shanti Chaudhary: Poet-at-large

Shanti Chaudhary was born in 1965 in Kathmandu. She is a renowned poet, novelist, and short story writer. She has been a prolific writer and has received numerous awards and recognition for her literary work. Her poetry often explores themes of love, nature, and the human condition, and her works have been widely praised for their depth and nuance.

I met Shanti Chaudhary in the quiet north wing of the Palace of the Department of Art and Culture. The weather was cold, and the wind was blowing. I asked her if she could give me a few minutes of her time. She readily agreed, and we sat down in the park, surrounded by the late afternoon sun. Shanti Chaudhary is a thoughtful and articulate writer, and her poetry is a testament to her unique perspective.

“Why did you choose to become a poet?” I asked her.

Shanti Chaudhary: “I was always a writer. I grew up in a family of writers, and I was surrounded by books and literature from a young age. I started writing poetry when I was very young, and I continued to write throughout my life. My poetry is a way of expressing my emotions and ideas, and it provides me with a vehicle for exploring the human condition.”

I asked her about her latest book, which she had just released. She told me it was a collection of short stories, and it was called “The Wind of Change.” She said it was a collection of stories that explored the complexities of human relationships and the challenges of living in a rapidly changing world.

“I was inspired to write this book by the stories of my family and friends,” she said. “I wanted to capture the essence of their experiences and the struggles they faced. I hope my readers will find something in these stories that resonates with them.”

I asked her about her future plans. She told me she was working on a new novel, which she hoped to complete within the next year. She also mentioned that she was planning to go on a book tour to promote her latest book. She said she was excited about the opportunity to connect with her readers and share her work with them.

I asked her about her inspirations. She said her inspirations were the people she knew and the places she had traveled. She also mentioned that she was inspired by the beauty of nature and the power of love.

“I believe that the world is full of beauty and wonder,” she said. “I try to capture that beauty in my writing and to share it with my readers.”

I asked her about her writing process. She told me she wrote every day, regardless of her schedule or her circumstances. She said she was a very disciplined writer, and she worked hard to maintain her commitment to her craft.

“Writing is a way of life for me,” she said. “I cannot imagine not writing. It is a source of comfort and joy for me.”

I asked her about her favorite place to write. She told me she loved to write in her garden, where she could be surrounded by the beauty of nature and the sounds of the birds. She also mentioned that she sometimes wrote in her car, while stopped at a red light, or while walking in the park.

I asked her about her advice for young writers. She told me that the most important thing was to write every day and to never give up. She said that writing was a journey, and that it required dedication and hard work. She also mentioned that it was important to read widely, and to expose oneself to a variety of voices and perspectives.

“I would tell young writers to read as much as possible,” she said. “Read everything, from classic literature to contemporary works. Read in different languages, and read in different genres. Read widely, and you will find your own voice.”

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I asked her about her proudest moment as a writer. She told me it was when she received the award for best fiction at the prestigious literary festival.

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Turbulent times

Ishan Puryar did not intend for his exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery to coincide with the raping protests down the street against the Gachi Hill, but it so happened that it did. Puryar’s series, started in 2015, seems prescient today: a cause moves in to dismantle heritage buildings, whose lion-like guardians rise up to form a protective guard of honour around the structures.

Titled Reminiscences, the paintings are a voice raised for the protection of our culture and heritage, although the artist says he is not an activist.

Most of his work depicts boats at sea. “Water is a symbol of time, and the boats are a symbol of life,” says the artist. “I have used boats because they take you from one place to another. Here, the boats take us on the journey of life through time.”

Many of the boats contain statues of deities: a golden Avalokitesvara and a large, red-hued Bhairav, among others. Puryar says the deities symbolise our faith and the traditions they embody. As the boats ply vast bodies of water, sometimes gently floating and sometimes rocked by the waves, some deities floating as the boats capture. The viewer gets the sense that the gods are delicate, fragile figures. They need protection, like our heritage. For Puryar, it is all part of looking back at history. He sees the deities as the end product of a long process of evolution, and believes that the faith they embody leads to spiritual growth.

Religious monuments are witness to different times and eras, and the moments we are breathing are the remembrances for the future,” says Puryar. “The eternal and invincible force of the divine is imprinted in our psyche, thus giving us inspiration to preserve these ancient monuments and beliefs.”

Every inch of Puryar’s paintings is covered by unique textures. The artist is from Pokhara, hence the images of boats, but unlike the colourful ones floating on Phewa Lake, his vessels are covered in wood carvings of Kathmandu’s monuments, in earthy browns and dark greens. Lion-like and parvati-like figures are often protecting temples, the golden sculptures contrasting starkly with the watery background.

The seas and clouds are rendered in misty, oval droplets, even when the colour ranges from a peaceful blue to intense tinges and stormy green. Puryar says the texture is of a bitter gourd, because life is bitter, and there is no option but to deal with it. However, the visual impact is not bitter—the droplets look pleasantly serene.

Sewa Bhattacharya

Reminiscences, by Ishan Puryar
Siddhartha Art Gallery
15th Jul 9

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SURPRISE: Child artists perform a traditional dance during a program organized by the Chha Cultural Centre Nepal in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

POWER YOGA: Participants hold a yoga demonstration at Pashupatinath Temple complex to mark International Yoga Day.

PADDY NATION: Farmers in Bhaktapur prepare for paddy planting on Thursday as the rains finally arrived. The monsoon has been delayed by 10 days this year.
Taking away forests from communities

Abdulah Miya

Even though the Forestry Act 2073 has granted community forest user groups independence to decide on the price and sale of forest products, a draft amendment to the act would revoke that right.

Clause 31 of the new law would require the user groups to submit an application to the Divisional Forest Office to approve any sale of timber, charcoal, cork, grass, fodder, wild honey, herbal products, sa, louruks, roots, sand and other products found in a forest.

Bijay Paras Pathak, FECOFUN Chair, said, "The country is now a federation, but central forest administration is being handed back to the DFOs, undermining our user groups’ right to sell, approve, and manage the revenue they earn from sale of forest products. This law is being passed away from us."

And now, the Community Forest Bill

Parliament’s Agriculture Committee has started debating the government’s draft bill to amend and articulate the Forestry Law. Just as there was opposition to changes in the Guild Bill and bills on women’s rights, and a draft amendment to the forest law without consultations with stakeholders.

The main criticism is the Federation of Community Forest User Groups Nepal (FECOFUN), whose Chair, Bijay Paras Pathak, says community forests would cease to exist if the proposed changes are passed.

Clause 31, sub-clause 5 in the draft amendment says, “members of user groups shall be legally considered to be government employees.” This means that the 22,434 community forest user groups and their 100,000 members will no longer be volunteers if the law is adopted.

Pathak says with a note of irony, “If they consider government employees, then why don’t they also give us the same pay and facilities as civil servants and allow us to get into Sigha Durbar?”

FECOFUN says the new law would take away its independent decision-making power on the sale of forest products and hand it over to the Divisional Forest Office. The federation also opposes a clause that would make the DFO a member of the community forestry group.

FECOFUN also wants restrictions on farming included in a clause that would ban settlements inside community forests, and another clause inserted stating that community forest management should be the main priority. The group argues that the community forestry campaign should be added to the list of national pride projects, because of its contribution to ecosystem services, biodiversity protection, job creation, and the role it plays in contributing to the carbon sink in Nepal.

Stakeholders are worried that proposed changes to the law would allow the government’s DFO to arbitrarily dismiss a community forest, or seize its land if the user group is deemed not to have fulfilled its commitments.

“The act says that a guilty individual should be punished, but to abolish an institution because of the mistake of one person is not right,” Pathak said. “It’s like you do away with the entire system because of one of its civil servants is corrupt.”

FECOFUN is also opposed to paying taxes to all three levels of government, especially because user groups receive 39% of profits from the sale of forest products for the under-served and women. Additionally, it does not want community forests inside nationally protected forests to be affected if they are transferred to conservation areas.
Nepal Tarai learns from

Small steps prepare the plains for future floods as rampant construction sets the stage for more tragedies

Sewa Bhattarai
in Rautahat

A small school in Bhabhisya village in the central Tarai last week, children in Class 5 sweat in the humid heat, waiting attentively for a signal. A sharp clap from Disaster Focal Person Mukesh Jha, and they are down on the floor, covering their heads with their hands. Then they walk out single file from class, form a circle in the playground and start counting aloud their pre-assigned numbers.

The students are practicing a drill on disaster response in those flood-prone plains bordering India. Two years after a devastating flood that displaced more than 400,000 people, destroyed 65,000 homes and killed 143 people, parts of the Tarai are beginning to incorporate disaster management activities.

Eighteen lives were lost and 35 schools were submerged here in Rautahat alone (pictured, right), including Sasanwadi School. It was repaired under the Flood Response Project funded by the European Union and implemented by the British agency, VSO (Volunteer Service Organisation) and local partner MuniVi.

Yet while disaster management is starting to attract the attention it deserves, rampant construction in the district, and across the country, is increasing vulnerability to disasters, say experts. Much of the new infrastructure actually blocks the natural drainage of rivers, resulting in flooding, especially along Nepal’s southern border.

“Disruption by roads, low capacity bridges, urban expansion and embankments along the border in India constrain water flow,” says climate expert Aliny Dikk. Inundation in the Tarai has got worse as roads were built on the Indian side, which act like dams. The damage is more severe because river basins in Nepal are already encroached by roads and human settlements whose tree use to be only fields or sandy riverbanks. As a result, floods that could have passed by in a few hours with minimal damage now submerge farms and towns.

In 2017, heavy rainfall in the Ganga catchment of the Tarai caused damage worth more than Rs80 billion, according to estimates. But such cost is set to increase, especially as rainfall patterns have become more unpredictable with the climate crisis. Higher intensity storms that drop more rain in shorter periods are becoming more common, raising the risk of sudden inundation.

Among the 49 disasters monitored by the Disaster Risk Reduction Portal under the Home Ministry, flooding is among the mostly minutely monitored. Water levels in major rivers are watched in real time, and if they cross the danger mark, the government sends out text messages to all at-risk residents or Inform local disaster management committees. This early warning system was instrumental in evacuating residents and minimizing the loss of lives in 2017.

The Disaster Risk and Management Act 2017 prioritizes the role of local governments in disaster management. “After these policies came into effect, we have prepared for floods by stockpiling boats, tents and other emergency materials,” says Arun Kumar Yadav, chair of Durga Bhagawati rural municipality in Rautahat. Security forces at local levels have been trained for rescue and relief and are alerted when disaster is imminent.

Though Nepal has improved its performance in rescue and relief, many parts of the Act are yet to be implemented. The government is still working on a comprehensive Disaster Information Management System, which is supposed to include information about areas at risk of hazards and the resources available nearby.

“We have asked local level governments to start sending us this information, but they must conduct a hazard mapping in their areas first to create a national-wide risk atlas,” says Bed Nidhi Khadka, the under-secretary at the Home Ministry who oversees the Disaster Risk Reduction Portal. The law also requires the government to conduct drills for disasters, but until now it has only held sporadic simulations along five river basins, and has no national plans for systematic, nation-wide drills. Many other aspects of disaster management are missing from the law, especially prevention activities.

“With increasing human
past floods

In the driver's seat

In many communities in the Tarai, women are still semi-veiled in public and hesitate to speak to strangers. But Geeta Devi (above) is quite a sight, driving her rickshaw around towns with a big smile on her face, waving at passerby.

The 32-year-old mother of four was trained to drive an rickshaw by Mandvi, an NGO that works on flood management in Rautahat. Geeta Devi lost her farm and livestock in the 2017 flood, so she has joined her husband behind the wheel. Her teenage son and daughter are studying in Kathmandu, and their mother is determined to earn enough to give them the education she never had. Mandvi, which is supported by British volunteer agency VSO, trained six other women and helped them get loans to buy rickshaws.

Geeta Devi earns an average of Rs500 per day ferrying people around Gaur for up to three hours after her husband comes home. She does not take fares outside the municipality because the roads are bad.

“When they see a woman driving, some are surprised,” she says, “and some laugh out loud. But that is their problem. They can laugh all they want. I like what I do.”

deluge

Almost all of Nepal’s southern plains were already vulnerable to floods from snow-fed rivers and streams from the Churia hills swelling during the monsoon. Relief is surrounded by fires on three sides. Flash in the west and lagardagh in the north and east. The district capital of Gaur is often inundated. In 2017, floods washed by boundary walls and embankments rise 1.5m in a matter of minutes and entire settlements of much houses were washed away, leaving residents with nothing.

The Flood Response Project has built a safe house in Budhbaraha village as an immediate relief structure. The ground floor is an open space, which can be used as a local market during normal times, and the first floor has separate rooms for men and women.

Three schools in the district have been repaired, a new mesmerize, and raised hand pumps have been built at every location for drinking water during floods.

Says principal Tripuran Yadav, “Drinking water is a big problem during floods because the hand pumps are submerged too.”

At Budhbaraha, villagers gathered around a giant pond under a sweltering sun for a drill (page 16). Residents staged a simulated rescue of a drowning man, and trained locals to make temporary life jackets from plastic bottles. Drills are compulsory under Nepal’s Disaster Risk and Management Act passed in 2017, but until now the focus has been on early warning, rescue and relief.

“The Tarai does not just have flood risk, there are multiple hazards. Wild animals and snakes pose a great threat, and so do earthquakes. We certify these and plan for them,” says Anjaji Jhul al Mandvi.

After the risk assessment, residents who participated in 2017 and talk to road embankments, say they feel better prepared to face future floods. Loka Kumar Rami (photographed, page 5) says the drills are measuring. “Now these exercises have made us better prepared for future floods that are sure to come.”

RHYTHMS OF UNITY & DIVERSITY

TONIGHT

EK TAAL
Subtle Sounds of Percussions
Show Time: 7:00pm to 9:00pm
Venue: Kantipur Temple House, Thamel
Ticket: Rs. 1000/-

Featuring the subtle, delicate and harmonious colors of drums at the beautiful and intimate setting of the Kantipur Temple House with visiting drummers and some of Nepal’s top traditional percussionalists.

TOMORROW

DRUM JATRA FINALE
Show Time: 7:00pm to 9:00pm
Venue: Hotel Summit, Sonepur Height
Ticket: Rs. 800/-

The Finale will showcase some of the top festival performers with high energy drumming traditions spanning from modern percussion ensemble, African drumming style, Brazilian rhythms to traditional Nepali drums such as Modal tuning and Women’s Tomam Salo ensemble.

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT JAZZ UPSTAIRS, LAZIMPAT I KIC, JHAMSIKHEL I MY MARE, THANDEL FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CALL 9821031292 OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.DRUMJATRA.COM
Everybody loves a good hartal

The season of shutdowns is upon us again, and it fills us with nostalgia for the good old days in the Roaring Nineties when Nepal used to grind to a halt at least 10 days a month.

Sometimes, band days would clash, and we had to have a make-up day sitting home to do nothing. This unique form of protest started in Bangladesh and was perfected in Nepal, but we had it because we need our freedom for granted. This is why we still need our freedom for granted, because it was our commitment to democracy waved.

Thank goodness, the Nepali Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist-People’s Marxist-Leninist) – not to be confused with the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Stalinist-Titoist-Nepalese Communist Party) – has decided to revive this glorious tradition and keep the spirit of democracy alive and kicking.

The success of a hartal hinges on people voluntarily keeping off the streets, exercising their freedom to do what the good laws want. The enforcers of our democracy must therefore gently persuade people not to drive on the streets by setting fire to a couple of taxis and leaving pressure cookers at strategic intersections early in the morning.

In the past, bicycles, rickshaws and places have been allowed to meritilicious when all other forms of transport were grounded. We are glad to see that the concerned revolutionaries have now brought two- and three-wheelers, as well as twin-engine turboprops, under the ambit of a band.

There are cynics who argue that shutdowns hurt the economy to the tune of Rs 2.5 billion a day. Workaholics complain about not being able to get to office. They should learn to see the bright side. In fact, the NCP (MLSPM) are the only communists with a commitment to cleaning up Kathmandu’s air pollution, and have allowed Nepal to reduce its carbon footprint by adhering to the emission reduction timetable in the Paris Rubbuck agreed to in Frazzle.

The result can already be seen in the measurements at the air pollution monitoring stations: a national shutdown brings air quality in Kathmandu to the ‘Good Enough To Breathe Without Dying’ level. And while most countries are hawking and hawing about meeting their Paris targets, with four shutdowns in the past three months, Nepal is well on its way to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels.

But we must not be complacent. We must enforce shutdowns every day to make Nepal carbon negative by bringing the country to a grinding halt. If nothing moves, we will not have to import any more petroleum either, and this will also solve our growing balance of trade deficit and bring the national economy back on track.

Let us turn petrol pumps into dairy outlets, spark plugs into cigarette lighters, motorcycles into hair dryers, micro buses into microwaves, and build a Communist Gun-tatra.