DREAM TRAIN

Tashi Sherpa runs the only teashop in Rasuwa Gadi on the Nepal side of the border, 176km north of Kathmandu. Nearby, dozens of trucks carrying imported Chinese goods cross the Bheri Kosi into Nepal (pictured, above). Sherpa has heard that a railroad to Kathmandu is also being planned, but she will only believe that when she sees it. “Dream train,” she calls it.

But what Tashi Sherpa does not know is that a feasibility study conducted last year has proposed a rail route under the mountains instead of along the river, thus bypassing Rasuwa Gadi altogether. People along the highway may not even see the train because most of the track will be in the tunnels drilled beneath Langtang, Gesiantunda and Shivapuri to Tokha near Kathmandu.

Truck driver Balram Rimal sips tea at Sherpa’s shop as he waits to cross into China. He says: “All the talk of trains is nonsense. First they should fix this scary road to Niwakot.”

The railway forms part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative and will be an extension of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway from Xigazê to Kerung and on to Kathmandu. However, crossing the Himalayas through a series of long tunnels will not just be an engineering challenge, but will cost at least $5.5 billion.

The Chinese have put up a 9-story building at the border that looks like a shopping mall, and houses well-equipped customs and immigration offices. The Nepal side is a tin shed flying a tattered Nepal flag. The 2015 earthquake destroyed the Nepal border post, and its reconstruction has been delayed due to a dispute with the contractor.

Pinga Lachan runs Potola Guest House near the border, and sums it all up: “How can a country that can’t even put up a building, drill a train tunnel through the mountains? My head spins when people talk about railways.”

Tunnel to Tibet

The proposed route of the Kerung-Kathmandu train would drill under the mountains, and not follow the river.

TRIANGULAR TRAINS

EDITORS PAGE

2

Read more PAGE 14-15
TRILATERAL TRAINS

The trans-Himalayan rail network has been in the news lately. And, like everything else in Nepal, it is difficult to separate hot air from a cool breeze. The Chinese cannot hide their irritation anymore about Nepal’s politicians daydreaming. Ambassador Hou Yanqiu was as blunt as a diplomat can be at a recent interaction in which she said (we paraphrase) “Not now.”

The extension of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to Nepal was one of the promises-kept in the recently concluded agreement with Kathmandu, Lumbini and the Indian border constitutes a part of Beijing’s Medium and Long-term Railway Plan. But laying train tracks on the rugged terrain of the Tibetan Plateau has been a daunting challenge even for the Chinese.

After the Lhasa-Erice was connected to Xigaze and buyback, it was expected to reach Kerung on the Nepal border by the next year, but now it looks like it will be pushed back five more years. Yet Nepal’s hyperbolic politicians talk about it as if the locomotives will be changing in next Dasiin. The railway to Nepal was listed as one of the 64 Belt Road Initiative (BRI) projects at the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April. The ambitious BRI aims to improve China’s overland connectivity to countries across its western border in Central Asia and beyond to Europe. The Nepal link is not directly on the main line, but part of a sub-Silk Road that could, in the future, offer an alternative to two-way trade between China and India, which today follows a maritime route through the Strait of Malacca.

China is India’s largest source of imports, and it is in Beijing’s geostrategic interest to find land alternative to choke points on its sea route to the Indian Ocean. Two-way trade between India and China is now nearly $100 billion a year and a stable land corridor would be in both the countries’ interest. Besides that, China wants to integrate its southwestern regions of Tibet and Xizang with central and southern Asia. But what does Nepal get out of the proposed rail link? First of all, theoretically, we can have a cheap and reliable alternative access to sea ports. That Nepal needs this trade bypass is a no-brainer considering the five-month Indian blockade of our southern border in 2015. Despite its initial cost, train travel is cheaper and environmentally much cleaner. A railway track through the mountains could interlink trade and tourist travel between the two countries, and be a catalyst for other trade links within the region.

Nepal’s politicians, including Prime Minister K.P. Oli, came to power under the nationalist banner after the blockade, and promised better access to the north. But one just has to see the slow progress of the road on the side of the Basanta border today to realize that it was all talk. Whatever progress has been taking up in upgrading the highways in Rana and Kavrepalanchok, the dry port in Lacha, are still being built by China in our territory.

The greatest uncertainty is about the trans-Himalayan railway is who is going to pay for it, and why it is going to pay for itself. The $17 billion stretch of Kerung to Kathmandu will be built by China’s state-owned railways and cost at least $5 billion. It is unlikely the Chinese will just gift the railroad, and a loan would be a debt in China’s export to China’s rise dramatically. This railway will not make much economic sense. (See story page 14-15)

Nepal’s trade deficit with China is expected to grow to $9 billion by 2023, up from $2.5 billion in 2010. A closer relationship with China could potentially help reduce this deficit. China has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure projects in Nepal, including roads, bridges, and railroads. These investments have helped improve trade between the two countries.

Greater connectivity between India and China could open a new trans-Himalayan trade corridor. It would provide a direct land route for goods to travel from China to India, bypassing the sea routes and reducing transit time. This could be beneficial for both countries, as it would reduce transportation costs and improve trade flows. However, the implementation of such a trade corridor would require coordination and cooperation between the two nations, as well as addressing various logistical challenges.

Nepal’s women are seeking to achieve their dreams, and the government is supporting their efforts. For example, the government has established the Women’s Development Fund, which provides financial assistance to women’s cooperatives and small businesses. Additionally, the government has implemented various policies and programs to promote women’s rights and empowerment.

The Nepali government is also working with international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide support and resources for women’s empowerment. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been working with the government to promote gender equality and women’s rights.

The Nepali government has also taken steps to address gender-based violence. In 2011, the government adopted the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, which criminalizes trafficking and provides protection for victims. Additionally, the government has established the National Child Helpline, which provides support and resources for children who have been trafficked or are at risk of trafficking.

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Where is the monsoon this year?

Chennai's current water crisis is an early warning for Kathmandu

In January 1985, Cape Town faced the possibility of executing its last water day, in which the city's residents would have to queue daily for reduced municipal water supply. The reservoirs that served the city were almost empty. Unfortunately, rainfall and lowered water use helped avert the crisis. A year later, Chennai, India's sixth largest city, came near to Day Zero, too. Last minute rains averted the emergency.

In 2015, Chennai faced devastating floods. How could a region that was submerged four years earlier suffer such a serious water crisis? Despite floods and droughts becoming a regular feature of South Asia's climate, none of our governments have learnt lessons to conserve, harvest, and store water. Misuse and inefficiency are high, and precious water is blatantly abused.

Urbanisation, encroachment of floodplains, and open spaces that served as flood buffers have been made inundation wards on one hand, while depleting natural storage systems at a time when water runs out like never before. As Chennai expanded with new industries and IT-led growth, the wetlands were converted into housing. In January 1995, 40 hydrologists, social scientists, water activists, economists, political scientists and agriculturists had gathered in Chennai to discuss the political economy of water in South Asia. The conference, convened by the US Social Science Research Council, had concluded that relatively wealthy middle class urbanites were still having top priority over water, industries get next priority, irrigation users are next and rural domestic water users and the urban poor are at the bottom of the rung.

Twenty-five years later, nothing seems to have changed. In fact, this hierarchy of access to water is now even more entrenched, and continues to promote the transfer of water from rural to urban areas. Extraction rates exceed recharge and groundwater storage is gradually depleted.

Water problems in India, Nepal and the rest of the subcontinent are a result of a complex interaction among urbanisation, agriculture, industries, changing water use, and impact of the climate crisis on precipitation, rainfall timing and humidity. By 2030, 45% of South Asia's population will be living in cities. Urban settlements require more water supply in concentrated areas. Rapid urbanisation and the increased demand bring new challenges as higher income families use more water to meet sanitary functions producing more waste water.

The water challenges in Nepal is no different. Himalayan glaciers and snow packs are melting faster, the springs in the high-altitude areas are going dry at an alarming rate while groundwater levels are receding in Nepal's Tarai and across the border in India. Collectively these changes will lower base flows with profound implications for water security across the Indo-Gangetic basin. The current crisis is an outcome of the relentless pursuit of a water development and management model that evolved in an era before the climate emergency. It assumed the unlimited availability of water and focused on supply side solutions; without heed to demand management and improving water governance. This model has dealt with rainfall, population growth, urbanisation, water security, neglecting the water cycle and its intrinsic function in nature. This fragmented approach continues.

This water management model is not appropriate to deal with the water emergency. We need to change our approach to adapt to monsoon rains becoming more erratic, as they have this year. Innovative rainwater harvesting practices, promoting a judicious mix of surface and groundwater sources, and managing increasing water demands is the way to go. The Chennai crisis this year will be replicated in Delhi, Patna and Kathmandu.

And it is not the quantity of water that is the problem, the poor quality of available water is an equally serious challenge that needs to be solved with low-cost filtration systems for hundreds of millions of underserved families in the region. Disposal of human waste using treated clean water, in particular, needs to be systematically replaced. Untreated sewage pollutes freshwater sources and reduces available supplies. Already dysfunctional water treatment plants significantly push up treatment costs.

Solutions must be based on greater societal commitment achieved through regular consultation between individuals, households, the community, the market and the state about water science, supply options, reduced uses, and wastewater, and fundamentally re-creating the institutions that govern and allocate water. Only this can potentially usher in a people-centred water stewardship and management that will include preservation of open spaces, wetlands, rivers and aquatic beings.

Ajaya Dixit is executive director of Kathmandu Guardians (KGK), a monthly news letter during the April-May monsoon season with the vision of global warming in Nepal and the region.

Nissan Monsoon Offer

Nissan Motor India has announced the launch of the Nissan Monsoon Offer where Nissan vehicles will be held at a 12% discount across the country. The offer includes offers like attractive insurance packages up to Rs. 60,000, exchange bonus of up to Rs. 90,000, boletto on zero down payment of up to Rs. 25,000, and interest rates starting at 9.1%.

Jeevan Surendran

Nissan is offering special discounts on its vehicle models across the country. The offer includes attractive insurance packages, exchange bonuses, boletto on zero down payment, and interest rates starting at 9.1%.

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Ever gone wildlife trekking in Nepal?

Adding a new purpose to hiking in the Himalaya

A few walking to Jomson in 1974, my next foray was to Nepal. I was more prepared this time, remembering to bring a hat and wear socks inside my humble canvas shoes.

The path was precipitous, and packed by centuries of human and animal footsteps. It wound through the towering forests of Nepal’s mid-mountain, taking detours into the billiard for sturdy stream crossings and traversing upwards into the thinning air with tantalising glimpses of rocky escarpment and soaring white peaks.

In late spring, the woods were heavy with red rhododendrons, white dahlias and yellow bamboo. The pervasive calls of Himalayan revere and crows, bug, haunted the landscape. Tangled creepers and buttressed tree roots reminiscent of Tolkien’s Hobbit seat my mind to skidding off into a trekker’s trance, a flight of fancy involving mythical monsters and wailing moons.

But mostly I was just concentrating on putting one foot in front of another, and gasping for air.

“Things people must be stupid,” observed Pertemba, as we paused more men bent under the weight of bulky loads secured by a woven canvas strap across their foreheads, driving their shaggy ponies abreast of them down the trail. “Why don’t they use the horses to carry these sacks of grain?”

He shook his head, smiling a wide Sherpa smile, dark eyes shining beneath a red baseball cap. Stones dislodged by the horses’ hooves spun noisily and invisibly into the void below, the sound reverberating across the valley walls.

The pungent steam of pony droppings mingled with the scent of warm pine needles and the sound of my laboured breath.

It was late that afternoon that I encountered the red panda. It was definitely an encounter, not just any old sighting. Pertemba had gone ahead to the Langtang Valley to find us a spot for the night, so I was wandering alone on a friendly stretch of billiard, the last of the fading sunlight filtering through the trees. Stumbled by a rustle beside the trail, I first noticed a rich orange coat and furry banded tail amidst the dead leaves of the forest floor, followed by a white snout, black nose, striped face and a pair of curious beady eyes. A current of communication passed between us, a last pause, and he flashed away into the undergrowth.

Pertemba and the locals had no idea. It took me some time to identify the creature as a red panda, as they are rare, highly threatened and seldom seen in the wild.

Even today, wildlife viewing and bird watching in Nepal’s mountain circles remain a best opportunity for tourism. There is little overlap between the knowledgeable naturalists of the Tatra national parks and the shepherds (with a small “a”) who guide our 200,000 or so trekkers with such enviable capability.

Trek guides are adept at getting their clients safely through the day, avoiding altitude sickness, cheerfully carrying up the inevitable steep climbs, and delivering them in one piece to a lodge or teahouse for the night. On more un-serviced trails, they are super-skilled at setting up camp, wrestling with tents, packing sleeping bags and producing elaborate meals in the middle of nowhere.

But few of Nepal’s 18,000 licensed trekking guides know the names of the birds, animals, plants and trees along the route, striking past a whole dimension of potential enlightenment for their clients.

The opportunity to advocate for conservation, and explain changing lifestyles forged by modern life and climate change, is lost too.

Circling eagles and vultures, flashes of woodland birds, and dosses of species of fascinating forms, mosses and trees are passed unnoticed and unremarked. Trek itineraries disregard adjustments to maximise sightings of the hidden natural world. During my years of addiction to Himalayan trekking, fleeting brief and few, east and west, that red panda was the first of some of my most intense and unexpected moments.

Enduring an icy January, my brother Nick and I were having a winter trek high in the Sagarmatha region. Incredibly pleasant and wheeling foxes of doves flared in the naked fields, and long-tailed magpies scolded us for our intrusion. We spotted shaggy tahr and skittish moose driven to lower altitudes by snow and cold.

Late one bright night, the entire call of wolves drowned us from our warm sleeping bags, startled by the shouts of villagers protecting their stone-encrusted yaks. In the full moonlight, I can still see that black outline of two Himalayan wolves racing across a white snowfield high above the grey stone houses of Phortse.

Snow leopards lend their ethereal beauty and spiritual mystery to the high Himalaya, a shadowy powerful presence lurking in undisturbed valleys, though sightings are a precious few. Ghana Sanyam Gurung is the WFFT network’s global champion for this elusive endangered cat, working with the government on research efforts that ensure Nepal’s snow leopard populations are flourishing, working for individuals in Kanchenjunga to better understand their habits.

The closest I came was a glimpse of a pair of snow leopards on a distant rock-strewn ridge during a 2016 trek in the area we so the excited local hunchen used sure.

Snow leopards are never going to be a sure thing for mountain visitors, but viewing red pandas and even wolves could become an exciting facet of Himalayan tourism as their numbers recover, boosting the income of mountain village guides and adding new iconic wildlife attractions to our

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SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal
B<br>oxta-based Nepali artist Sneha Shrestha once laid out an installation on the floor so that people could walk all over it. She did not want her art to be unapproachable.

Now, she has taken on the most democratic art form of them all: graffiti, for which the whole city is a gallery, free for everyone.

What makes Shrestha’s graffiti stand out is that she creates Devnagari calligraphy using the walls and sides of 10-story buildings as her canvas.

Shrestha has taken to the streets of Kathmandu this week, admitting that she never intended to become an artist, but she grew up loving art. Her mother, an educator, used to convert English children’s books into Nepali, and also illustrate them. Shrestha used to watch her mother enjoy that process of creation, and actively started sketching herself.

When she went to study in Gettysburg College, she studied humanities but also took art classes. By the time she graduated, she had taken enough art classes to be a double major. She then joined the non-profit Artists for Humanity, and did photography. Her principal subject was the work of her colleague and graffiti artist Bob Gibson.

Shrestha saw Gibson’s work, and started experimenting with Devnagari calligraphy. “I liked what you have to pay to see graffiti,” she says. “It’s a public form of art which is available to anyone on the floor so that people could observe the architecture. I realised that calligraphy in Nepali could be beautiful, and I started painting a Devnagari style which is completely my own.”

Shrestha’s works now adorn walls and buildings in Boston, as well as being exhibited at Museum of Fine Arts there, and has done work for Harvard and Red Sox. She writes down letters, words, and poems in Nepal and Sanskrit, and her favourite one is a mural at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) building where she quotes Laxmi Prasad Devkota: “Manju Thumka, jatola bandana (a person’s greatness is defined by his heart, not by his castle).”

“There are so many ways I could relate to that line, and it was relevant at that particular space,” explains Shrestha. “MIT is one of the most select institutions in the whole world, who define what success means in that context? In a meritorious world that values high earning, what is the success rating of someone like me, an artist? I think you define your own success, and it is defined by where you come from.”

Shrestha imbues her art with Nepali aesthetics using a lot of orange and blue. “The orange comes from marigold which are so intrinsic to Nepal. It reminds me of my favourite festival, which is Shrawan, who needs a lot of equipment to realise her artistic vision—painting materials that she

nepalitimes.com
What happens when you let a talented Nepali calligrapher/graffiti artist loose on the streets of Boston?

Watch Sneha Shrestha at work and start conversations by painting Nepali poems and quotes in Devanagari script on some of the most exclusive buildings in the world.

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What happens when you let a talented Nepali calligrapher/graffiti artist loose on the streets of Boston?

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Sonia Awale

Law enforcement and education, the only way to stop trafficking to China of

Flora and faunal conservation is a contentious issue in Nepal at present. Conservationists are divided over the importance of wildlife protection and the need for human development. Nearly 300 wapinals would have had to be killed for the consignment worth $38.7 million.

Kamal Maden

Once widespread in Kathmandu Valley and across Nepal, barn owls are now endangered due to habitat loss, urbanization, and threats from humans.

Mukesh Pokhrel

Wolf-like animals are thought to have a significant impact on the population of grey wolves, which Gaur die out the likely cause. The report's authors are calling for more research into the impact of wolf-like animals on the grey wolf population.

Coy cat

Camera trap takes first photos

Is wildlife conservation a success in Nepal?
Yadav Ghimirey

The small and shy spotted linsang was recently photographed for the first time in more than 175 years in Nepal. This was the first authentic evidence of this tree-dwelling mammal occurring in the country. Although there were reports of its presence in Chitwan National Park in the 1980s, reliable evidence was scarce. The species was documented for the first time by a British resident and naturalist Brian Hodgson in 1827, who illustrated the mammal using a line drawing. The animal is elusive, showing up very rarely in camera traps. During our survey in Terai Arc Conservation Area in 2017, only two pieces of the species were captured at 1,350 trap days. A trap day equals one camera trap set for one day.

The animal is rarely visible for the following reasons: forest patchwork at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines it as a priority area for habitat protection, but it is often preyed upon by local people and farmers. Hiding in dense forests makes it difficult to sight. The spotted linsang is classified as a data deficient species, which means it has very little information available on its status. Despite this, the species is under threat because of human activities. It is not known if the species has recovered since its discovery.

The spotted linsang is a conservation priority at IUCN Red List. It has been working with wild cats species in Nepal since 2006. Yadav Ghimirey have also conducted a study on its distribution and ecology. The study also calls for urgent action to assess the status of the species and to conserve its habitat.

Captured (on film)

4,200 bush cats in eastern Nepal

ON KANIDODA: A rare photo of a spotted linsang in eastern Nepal, and its location is in a community forest in a place where the camera trap was placed.

Carpenters are revolutionising how researchers detect and count cryptic species, said Adrian Paterson, associate professor in Zoology at Lincoln University in Christchurch, a co-author of the research paper. “Detecting the spotted linsang in eastern Nepal is a great example of the benefits of using cameras and will add significantly to conservation in Nepal.”

The marked cat is categorised as ‘Near Threatened’ in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, listed in CITES Appendix I and as a species of healthy status in Nepal. The cat has been observed in forests throughout South and Southeast Asia, from the Himalayan foothills of India and Bhutan to China and Southwards through Malaysia and Indonesia. The species has also been observed in Nepal, where the cat has been detected in the natural habitat of a forest after a fire destroyed the area. It is thought to be present in Asia and parts of Europe.

The study calls for urgent action on threats to the species, including habitat loss and hunting.

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common with the spread of community forests, and cut migration has allowed vegetation to cover cleared land. With nearly three-quarters of its population having left for the cities to work or to study, the soil is at high risk of wildlife attacks. In April, a 14-year-old Pashupati Adhikari of Bhandara village was killed in a leopard attack. Last year, 300-year-old Amrit Gurung and 4-year-old Manjita Lamsal were killed and killed in a neighboring village. And just last year, four children were killed by leopards in Tanahun alone.

The NPWC Department says Tanahun, Lamjung, Kaski, Syangkhol, Archanchbus and Kavre, with their thick community forests have the most human fatality due to wildlife encounters. But because the Regional Forest Directorate, which used to collate data on wildlife attacks, has been abolished under the new federal set up, and no new agency has taken over the job, integrated figures for wildlife encounters are not available. However, just in the last five years, 34 people have lost their lives in three districts: Archanchbus, Tanahun and Baitadi. Elsewhere in the country, 49 have been killed in the past three years in national parks and buffer zones alone – 14 of them children, and mostly by leopards. There are no records of livestock killed, or of crops destroyed by wild animals.

Since there is no fencing on national parks and community forests, we cannot control the wildlife wandering into villages or travelling along their migratory routes and this has led to human-animal conflict," admits Man Bahadur Khadka, head of the NPWC Department in Kathmandu. District and park officials say they do not have the required manpower to deal with wildlife encounters outside protected areas, whether for fencing, darting or rescue of animals that have strayed into human settlements. The limited human resources available is concentrated in national parks, whereas most incidents happen outside of them. For example, the Nepal Army has over 8,000 soldiers deployed to guard the country’s 12 national parks and hunting reserves.

With the new federal structure, local government is under public pressure to respond to increased wildlife attacks. The temptation is to restrict the movement of wildlife even more, making them even more aggressive.

“My constituents come to me every day complaining that chitens and other wildlife have destroyed their crops, we band out some compensation, but it is never enough," says Mayer Dhami GC of Triveni Municipality in Nawalparisa, who has put up a Rs 7,00,000 fence. Now, the government is also considering a policy to allow local communities to set up their own wildlife management committees. The municipality has also built a 17km wall at a cost of Rs 15 million to keep wildlife out.
EVENTS

LAVEE Market
With a greater emphasis on consumer consciousness, there is a need to support environment-friendly businesses. At LAVEE Market, you can buy a range of sustainable products from organic produce to handicrafts. Don’t forget to bring your own cloth bag.
Every Sunday, 9am-5pm, Lavee Residence, Misrodong Mog, Boeun, 0808961775

Kathmandu Haat
Enjoy pottery making, on-the-place drinks and snacks, and products from Nepali Vendors at Kathmandu Haat.
6-7 July, 11am-6pm, Enkure Haat, Shukhuphaudha Chowk, Jomson, 7825094867

Sarangi Bhela Season 6
Project Sarangi presents Sarangi Bhela Season 6, a quarterly event that showcases new folk artists and Sarangi performances. Folk music enthusiasts can enjoy watching them in the Sarangi season. Enkure Haat will also feature Sarangi performances during the week.
6 July, 7pm onwards, Ice Camp, Jomson, 7825094527

Game Festival
Game Colosseum is the largest eSports games, FIFA, and Counterstrike: Global Offensive arging tournament in Jomson. Check their Facebook page to see when each game is available during the week.
8-13 July, 3pm-6pm, Alliance Franchise at Kathmandu, Bhok Decho, Patan, 7890082232

MUSIC

Friday Night Instrumentals
Monthly presenting famous musicians, DJs, and producers around Nepal to perform.
New Zealand. I listen to the unique melody of the umbrella, the rain and the guitar.
5 July, 7-10pm, Malish, Jomson, 7872652682

Bipul Chettri Live
Listen to Bipul Chettri and the Travelling Band live together every first Saturday, 5pm, Jomson, Hotel, Kota, Tower, Chowk, 7809061111

Overeasy
Who said breakfast foods are just for breakfast? Overeasy brings you all-day breakfast with fluffy pancakes, refreshing smoothie bowls and healthy Buddha bowls in the minimalistic setting of its all-day breakfast place.
7am-5pm, Moksha, Jomson, 7872652682

Cold Stone Ice Cream
Escape the sweltering heat with delicious ice cream flavors like the Black Chocolate Mousse and Mango Blueberry from Cold Stone Ice Cream.
For the very first time in Nepal.
1pm-9pm till 30th September, 2019, Hotel Shangri-La, Luangpri, 7814443399

OVER Easy
Who says breakfast foods are just for breakfast? Bipul Chettri's restaurant, Overeasy, brings you all-day breakfast with fluffy pancakes, refreshing smoothie bowls and healthy Buddha bowls in the minimalist setting of its all-day breakfast place.
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DINING

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8-13 July, 3pm-6pm, Alliance Franchise at Kathmandu, Bhok Decho, Patan, 7890082232

Monssoon Anima
Start your monsoon season with fun activities, games, music, stalls, food and dancing in the rain. Be sure to bring your own wear or waterproof clothes.
6-7 July, 10am & 14th July, 12pm, Dadit Park, Ngagkhren Mog, 0140475384

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Mountain Glory Forest Resort
This luxurious new resort is the ideal location for those looking for breathtaking mountain views and time away from busy schedules. Shibla, Panchthar, 0564166232

The Harbor
With its distinct natural stone architecture, airy rooms, Mediterranean cuisine and proximity to Haew Lake, The Harbor is one of Pakhawa’s newest luxury boutique hotels. Lakeside, Kavre, Pakhawa, 0145459272

GETAWAY

Kasaras Resort
Immerse yourself into the lush greenery in the heart of Dhokar, Mustang Park.
With activities for everyone, from hiking to wildlife-watching, Kasara Resort is a haven for adventure seekers.
Ghar, Chhewon, Mustang Park, Chhewon, 0145455237

Hotel at the End of the Universe
In this quaint sanctuary, located on terraced hedges, guests are free to explore, enjoy sculptures, and take in the views of the distant mountains.
Mohakar, Mustang, Angkor, Mustang, 0145500099

Hotel Shambala
Located in the bustling city of Kathmandu, Hotel Shambala is a fusion of natural heritage and modern luxury. Enjoy traditional-themed rooms, a relaxing dip in the infinity pool overlooking the city and relaxing spa amenities.
Dhulikhel, Bandipur, Kathmandu, 0145505847

Bungalow Bar and Kitchen
At Bungalow Bar and Kitchen, you can have authentic Thai dishes like Som Tam Issan, Pad Kra Pao and Red Curry, or a fusion dish like the Pan Bamboo Shoot, Butternut Grass and Fish Collar, all with a side of refreshing cocktails.
11:30am-11pm, Food, Bhaktapur, 9801273206/ 9801056899

Casa Mexicana
Enjoy a taste of Mexico with a assortment of tacos, quesadillas and rib-let tacos. From vegetarian to meat options, everyone can try the authentic Mexican dishes.
2pm-7pm (Saturday), Gahunbahar and Patan, 9801435882

Melrose Restaurant and Bar
Within the vibrant streets of Thamel, step into the gunny sack of casual dining place. You can enjoy the music every Friday after 9pm.
7am-10:30pm, Thamel, 0145556867

AERIAL VIEW INDEX

KATHMANDU
28 - 6 June

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU
28 - 6 June

The display of the monitors is not a public health warning system, it also means that the supplementary precautionary action is taken. The purpose of the display is to inform the public what the health risk is, it is not a recommendation. The purpose of the display is to inform the public what the health risk is.
Dance-drama takes trafficking head-on

Stories of pain, struggle and survival of Nepali women performed through ballet

Sewa Bhattarai

Human trafficking makes for dramatic stories of suffering, struggle and survival, which is why it is frequently the theme on stage and screen performances. But few, perhaps, with the grace and poignancy of Zhou Tingjue, presented by Srij Performing Arts and One World Theatre at the Russian Cultural Centre 6-7 July.

This immersive musical dance-drama directed by Allah Biannic portrays not just the victimisation of young women and their emotional journeys, but tells their story through contemporary European-style dance steps.

The sheer physicality of the play makes the strongest impression, whether it is the women with the trembling knees, the exhibition of half-dressed, overcoming women in front of caressing men who, measuring each woman with their eyes and hands, menacingly circle them and haul them over their shoulders like sacks of potatoes.

With minimal dialogue, every emotion—terror, anger, guilt, hope—is communicated through body movements, which is fitting because the subject matter revolves around physical relationships. Every action sequence has been framed carefully for visual appeal even when the emotions depicted are negative.

“I wanted every scene to look like a painting, because visual impact is very important in such a performance,” explained director Biannic, who trained the actors, most of whom Nepali non-dancers, in ballet-inspired moves so that they look almost as graceful as her.

The play does not just take us through the physical journeys of the characters, but also their emotional, spiritual and psychological ones. It starts with a young man whose family is involved in the ‘Bachch trade’, and his wonders if he should join in. His journey begins with confusion, then acceptance, then guilt and finally abandonment of this trafficking activity.

“I want to depict the phenomenon from many aspects, including the story of how young men are unwittingly trapped in this vicious circle. Violence breeds violence, and you cannot expect love out of someone who has never seen it. This creates a chain of negativity where young men reproduce the behaviour they have seen,” says Biannic who met with several trafficking victims before writing and directing this play.

She wants to draw attention to continued trafficking of Nepali women to brothels in Nepal and abroad. “The journey of the women is actually tackled through symbols and visual metaphors. An eagle, a bird associated with power and spirituality, brings hope to the women. The women build, suggesting a spiritual clustering even when their bodies have been defiled. The women look for an escape from their hell, their bodies withering and corrupting with age. When they together overcome their pain, the choreography turns fluid and light. Biannic has blended classical Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky to create an intense background score that plunges and soars with the storyline. This and the performance packs an emotional punch that is distinctly Nepali.”

The Right

Directed by Allah Biannic

Russian Cultural Centre

4 & 5 July, 7.30 PM & 8.15 PM

Biannic brings new edge to the Nepali stage

When her flying butterfly moves and gracefully unfolds, Aktel Biannic is mesmerizing on stage. The ballet-trained artist appears to dance in European, but her controlled conversation and elegant movements gives one a certain strike at her being French. She has been living here for the past six years, creating and acting in a group that has added a cosmopolitan touch to Nepali theatre.

Biannic started learning dance when she was 13 in Germany and Spain before working at the Royal Ballet in London. She developed her own style which merged acting and dancing because she thinks the combination works better. In 2011, she came to Nepal to take a year off, and has stayed here ever since.

She met a doctor in a workshop in Kathmandu, organiser who is acting in her current production. The flight attendant who I wanted to work with people who are clear and open minded because it made the role that night was missing something,” continues Biannic. “I want my life to have meaning, which I found in Nepal.”

Biannic takes the same approach to her work, at the time she likes to inhabit every frame with meaning. Her actors do not just stand in the background, their body positions and movements are strongly parallel, conveying specific emotions relevant to the scenes. Each person or object has a well-defined role to play in every scene, and every frame looks like a painting.

Biannic recently opened Srij Performing Arts, a school with Bhaskar Gore, acting and music. And when she is not teaching, she is acting or directing, and has also produced six plays and acted in other, including Dhyani’s screenplay.

“I want to make the best of available resources to create quality drama right here in Nepal,” says Biannic, while adjusting the props, lighting, music, and costumes during a dress rehearsal on Wednesday. “Dress attention to technical details really enhances the quality of production, and that should not be neglected.”

Don’t ignore Tooth sensitivity*

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- Dr. Subir Banerji, dentist practising in the UK.
Echoes of Drum Jatra

“O,” the gong reverberated with a gentle touch of the mallet. Another swirl of the stick to the gong and it had a divine resonance. Slowly, the hands that made the sound moved towards singing bowls of all shapes and sizes. One by one, the singing bowls were struck with the mallet and its rotation on the rim produced a sweet vibration. This was followed by a medley of percussion that left the audience at Kantipur Temple House last week bathed in sonorous sound from Mangal Man Maharjan’s performance ‘Sound Bath’.

This was the highlight of the Surya Nepal Drum Jatra 2019, with the pin-drop silence of the night punctuated with music from the best traditional percussionists and visiting drummers in Nepal. Everyone in the audience felt every beat of the drums deep inside them.

Kathmandu’s Bash Poona performed with Nayaksha (Nayak Drum) which is rarely seen. The musical pieces are rarely performed because of the caste stigma, but here the sounds were clear and strong.

The act put together by Rohit Lal Shrestha entertained the audience with tabla talent, while the opening act was by the Nepali digeridoo virtuoso Sujal Sutil who also blew on the marchang. Rohit also opened the Drum Jatra finale on Saturday, 28 June, invoking the ambience with the deep, booming sounds from down under. There also was a spontaneous performance by Shankri Shrestha on tabla and Andreas Wilhagen on snare drum.

Drum Jatra conceptualizer Nabin Chhetri led a team of drummers in a piece called Brushing Life, playing four snare drums with brush sticks. They did not beat the drums but playfully brushed against them instead, producing sounds like sand becoming solid. Though composed for a string quartet, it worked quite well on a snare quartet as well. With a jazzy flavour and novel techniques, this was a unique composition.

More innovation followed, with Naresh Prasad playing more than a dozen maddals at once, and entertaining the audience with traditional folk tunes. In a foliage Tamang Sejo piece performed by Tamba group, four women played the damdoba drums, accompanied by a man on the string tumba. The damdoba used by the Tamang community in rituals and festive occasions was traditionally played only by men. Their use and performance by women was an example of innovations in Nepal’s folk music arena as well. The Tamba rendered a piece traditionally performed at the beginning of all rituals: invoking supernatural powers and offering greetings and blessings to everyone present.

The Drum Jatra Ensemble then got on stage with plastic bottles and proceeded to drink out of them. They then rocked the half-full bottles in sync, and also beat them with sticks to create unique music.

The event honoured Dev Rana, a senior drummer with a career spanning more than 50 years, with the Drum Jatra Lifetime Achievement Award. Rana and his band Prins are credited with starting the rock music movement in Nepal and establishing the foreign genre. “I am a very average drummer with a passion for music, and now I am so happy to see so many talented young drummers here,” said Rana, accepting the award.

The event ended with rousing Indian and African beats, featuring conga and djembe. Cadence performed another fiery piece Momo Funk. Finally with an uproar from Ghana called Pasha and a chaasy one from Nigeria called Lady, the drums rolled to a final stop, with a promise for another Drum Jatra next year.

Reeti KC and Sewa Bhatarai
Business of politics undermines Nepal’s democracy

Ramesh Kumar

When Prime Minister KP Oli called the unexpected ‘confidence vote’ in the House of Representatives (HoR), he did so in the hope that he would be able to form a new cabinet that could address the political crisis gripping the country. However, the new cabinet that was formed on Monday failed to address the country’s economic crisis, which has been worsening due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The new cabinet, led by Prime Minister Oli, includes ministers from the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and the Nepali Congress. The cabinet has been criticized for its lack of a clear plan to address the country’s economic challenges, and for not addressing the concerns of the country’s political parties, which have been protesting against the government’s policies. The new cabinet has been accused of being more concerned with its own interests than with the country’s needs.

Nepal may have gone from monarchy to republic and seen many changes in its governments, but this has not stopped the country from facing economic challenges. The country has been struggling with a severe shortage of foreign exchange, and the government has been unable to implement effective policies to address the crisis. The country’s economy has been hit hard by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the government has been unable to implement effective policies to address the crisis. The country’s economy has been hit hard by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the government has been unable to implement effective policies to address the crisis. The country’s economy has been hit hard by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the government has been unable to implement effective policies to address the crisis. The country’s economy has been hit hard by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the government has been unable to implement effective policies to address the crisis.
Which way will the Tibet

Feasibility report suggests drilling a train tunnel under the Himalaya, not along the river

Even though only 30% of the length from Membu to Kathmandu is in Nepal, it will account for almost half the cost of the project because of the required tunneling.

Despite these challenges, Nepal's railway dream moved closer to reality after the project was listed as one of the 64 to be considered under China's BRI during the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April.

Nepal is seeking a grant from China to construct the railway, but Beijing is reticent, hence recent comments by Chinese Ambassador Hao Yang urging Nepal not to jump the gun.

The Nepali government has not allocated any money for the Tibet railway in this year’s budget. But officials say just a detailed engineering study for the Korung-Kathmandu section of the railway will cost an estimated five times Nepal’s total railway budget for next year.

Even so, Finance Minister Yubhu Khatiwada seems upbeat. He even announced when construction will start: “We will complete the detailed project report and start construction on the Korung Kathmandu railway in the next two years.”

Till not too long ago, a trans-Himalayan railway sounded like science fiction. Now, with the proposed 100km long tunnel under Langtang National Park, it sounds even more futuristic.

The rapid strides China has taken in extending its national railway network makes extending it under the world’s highest mountains seem no longer technically impossible, but is it economically viable?

A 2018 pre-feasibility study of a railway into Nepal from Tibet by a Chinese team suggests it would be an engineering feat, but not an impossible task.

“Technically, this will be one of the world’s toughest railways to construct,” says Parbesh Parajuli, the only train engineer at Nepal’s Department of Railways, who was educated in China and is a consultant for the government.

Despite Nepali politicians making wild promises about the imminent arrival of a Tibet train and existing public anticipation, because of the technical and cost factors, the Chinese have sought to dampen some of the enthusiasm.

The feasibility study has not yet been made public, but is said to list ‘six extenuating factors’ that will be challenging: topography, weather, hydrology, technical, and rock.

And despite speculation that the railway alignment will follow the Bhote Kosi River across the Himalayas to Newakot, the study actually lists a much more adventurous route under Langtang National Park, below Gosainkunda and Shivapuri National Park, to enter Kathmandu Valley at Takkali. Stations will be located at bridge points where the tunnels emerge at Langtang Khola and Puti Bhujang.

The gradient required to descend from 4,000m on the Tibetan Plateau to 1,400m above Kathmandu is so steep engineers have proposed drilling through the mountains with 98% of the tracks on the Nepal side inside tunnels.

Says Parajuli: “If the railway follows the proposed tunnel route under the mountains, the towns along the highway to Rasuwa will not even see trains.”

Although drilling under the mountains will minimise environmental impact in two national parks, the tunnels will traverse the Main Central Thrust fault of the Himalayas. Mitigating earthquake risk will make the project even more expensive.

Preliminary estimates put the cost of just the 176km Korung to Kathmandu section of the railway at 38 billion yuan ($5.5 billion).
Nepal railway go?

The Chinese do not seem to be in such a rush. The Qinghai-Tibet railway reached Xigazê in Tibet in 2014. At the pace of construction, it was scheduled to arrive on the border in Kerung by 2020, but the Chinese have reportedly pushed that back to 2025. Both the Chinese and Nepali governments have denied that loan financing for the project will trap Nepal into a debt trap, as the Americans have been warning.

“The main thing is how projects are selected, whether that is done on the possible rate of return, and the pay back plan,” says Foreign Minister Pruddip Gyawali.

While the minister could not answer questions about what Nepal would export to China by train, Prime Minister KP Oli once speculated that it could be bottled water, for which he was widely ridiculed. Mineral water is already a multi-billion dollar industry in Tibet, it would be like selling coal to Newcastle.

Economic analysts say the railway makes no sense unless China can fill the wagons with its goods for the return trip. While imports from China increased by about 40% in 2018, exports from Nepal to China fell by 46%, with the country’s trade deficit reaching about US$12 billion last year – equal to half of Nepal’s GDP. Ambassador Hou has tried to allay fears. “The BR is not a ‘debt trap’ that some countries may fall into, but an ‘economic pie’ that benefits the local population,” she wrote in a recent opinion piece in The Republica newspaper.

The real question is not just who will pay for the railway, but also whether it will pay for itself. The tunnel alignment will push up costs, and because it bypasses all towns along the way, it is unlikely to benefit local populations.

Narayan Das Bholung, 76, lives in Takea village on the northern rim of Kathmandu Valley near the proposed terminal of the Kerung-Kathmandu railway. He has heard rumours about a train coming. There is still confusion about the exact route the tracks will take, but land prices here have already soared six-fold to Rs3 million for a 32 sqm patch in anticipation.

“He always says he will insist the train should go through his town, adding: ‘I have heard that the railway will cross our town, but we have not been consulted or informed about it at all.’

One worry is that regular cargo trains between China and Nepal will increase wildlife trafficking not just of endangered species from Nepal, but also India. Nepal would be an even greater transit for contraband like tiger skin, rhino horns, pangolins and sandalwood.

On the Nepal side, there is zero preparation for the Tibet railroad. The proposed east-west Tular railway does not seem to be going anywhere, either. In the decade since it was set up, Nepal’s Department of Railways has yet to hire a full-time railway engineer. A 16km railway from Bihat to Nepal is to start operations next month with a hired train and driver from India. Still, Nepal is dreaming big: the government plans to construct 4,000km of railways in the next two decades.}

MONSOON EXCHANGE WEEK

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SECOND BARREL
SHERRY OAK
The IMPORTED 8 YEARS SCOTCH MALT is blended with ENGLISH GRAIN SPIRIT and SPRINGING WATER from THE HIMALAYAS and matured for few months in EUROPEAN OAK Oloroso Sherry Barrels, which imparts fruity and honeyed depths to this exceptional whisky.

1 Picture = 1,000 Words

Over the past year, helpful readers have emailed unsolicited photographs of contemporary nature to The Asa. We have stored them in a high security vault, waiting for the opportune moment for public dissemination. To prevent overuse, one photo a day after mail. Send more pics to asa@nepaltimes.com

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