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“Nepal is now seen and heard.”

When Nepal's politicians were asked to list their assets, many disclosed property, bank balances and jewelry. Among his possessions, Nepal's well-read Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali declared that he owned 2,500 books. The soft-spoken Gyawali now has the responsibility of steering the country's foreign policy at a time of heightened geopolitical polarisation in the region. Sound bites from an interview this week:

- Nepal used to be a back-bencher in international fora. Now we are being seen and heard. The Prime Minister's participation at Davos and hosting the BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu has raised Nepal's international profile.
- It could be that some cannot digest Nepal's higher international engagement and

are uneasy about it. But there is no question of Nepal ever joining any strategic alliance.

- We look at our own national interest, and we also try to make sure that our decisions and involvement do not hurt the interests of our neighbours, development partners or other friendly countries.
- Our long-term foreign policy goals have not changed, but we are trying to adapt to new geopolitical realities by analysing them and formulating new policies of engagement.
- We want to benefit from the economic growth and development of our two neighbours.
- We are conveying to China and India that a prosperous and stable Nepal is also in their interest.
- We are telling our development partners that Nepal is a safe

country for foreign investment, from where it is easy to export to other countries.

- We are very sensitive to the fact that 4 million of our young men and women are working abroad and through diplomacy we want to ensure their security, rights and respect.
- In the 1990s and 2000s many Latin American countries went nearly bankrupt and had to be bailed out. It was not called a 'debt trap', none of them had loans from China.
- If it is in the national interest, we can take not

just aid, but also loans. But if it is against our interest, we will not even take assistance.

- The suspicions about the Indo-Pacific is a storm in a tea cup. Our Chinese friends are not really worried, they are sure that Nepal will not allow anti-Chinese activities.
- We do not lean more or less on any one side. We don't try to compare the relationship we have with our two neighbours.

FULL INTERVIEW

PAGE 13



buzz

To make up for monsoon slack, Nepal opts for spiritual tourism

PAGE 8-9



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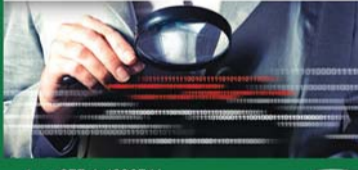


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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

TOXIC PSEUDO-NATIONALISM

It is hard to say which is most worrisome: that pesticide-laced Indian vegetables were coming into Nepal, that the government caved in to pressure from the Indian Embassy to allow the poisoned plants in, that Prime Minister Oli was unaware of a intimidating letter from the Indian Embassy to lift the border quarantine, or that Industries Minister Matrika Yadav said he was deceived by bureaucrats.

It is an indication of the PMO’s poor public relations handling that an action which should theoretically have earned Oli brownie points for standing up to India, have instead made him the prime target.

The pseudo-nationalism of Nepal is a peculiar trait. We are proud to be a nation that was never colonised, but allow our nationals to fight and die for other countries whose enemies are our friends. We boast that the Buddha was born in Nepal, but let Lumbini rot. We gloat about Mt Everest, forgetting that three of the mountain’s four faces are actually in China, and we trash our side of it.

To be sure, there is a pan-Nepali identity that translates into patriotism derived from shared history, culture and language that transcends national boundaries to the Nepali-speaking world. Wherever they are in the world, Nepal carry an inner pride that is a bedrock, however much an exclusionary state and anti-Mahendraist rhetoric try to erode it.

Unfortunately, the pesticide episode has brought out the kind of hollow and toxic pseudo-nationalism that we have now become famous for. The citizen commentariat, and media opinion-makers heaped scorn all week on Prime Minister Oli for kowtowing to India, whereas the real issues were Nepal’s inability to be self-sufficient in vegetable production as well as the pesticide residue in vegetables grown in Nepal for domestic consumption.

Instead of working ourselves into a fit about pesticide-laced Indian vegetables, we should be more worried about the 2,200 tons of pesticides Nepal imported from India last year. And that was just through official channels: there is a whole lot more that is smuggled across the border, including agro-chemicals banned in Nepal.

Nepal’s pesticide consumption of 400g/ha is one of the lowest in the world, and most subsistence farmers in rural Nepal do not use chemicals. In fact, most vegetables and crops in Nepal are organic. However, commercial farmers supplying produce to city markets often overdose their crops with pesticide. A Rapid Pesticide Residue Analysis Lab set up

at Kalimati wholesale market five years ago, showed that 15% of produce analysed were too toxic for human consumption. A recent survey showed that the most-used pesticides in Nepal are among the ‘Dirty Dozen’ pesticides banned in the country.

The Pesticide Registration and Management Division is supposed to regulate the use of these chemicals, but it is unable to monitor most banned pesticides, confiscate chemicals past their expiry or pesticides with diluted active ingredients. Government agencies are also plagued by inadequate lab equipment and test ingredients.

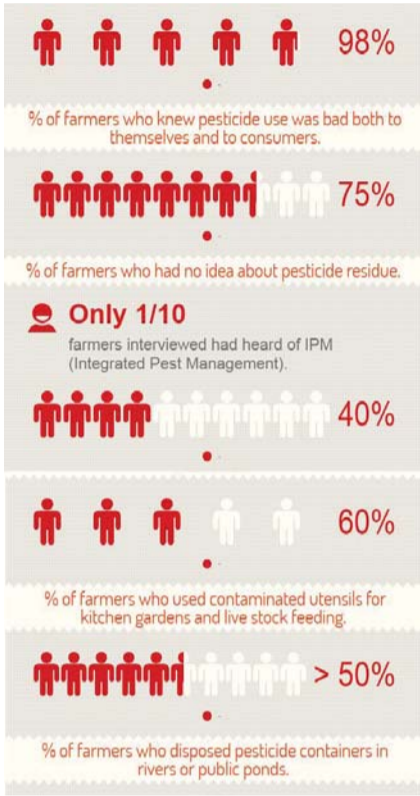
A survey by this newspaper of vegetable farmers in Tikathali on the outskirts of Kathmandu in 2015 showed that 90% of them sprayed chemical pesticides, but only half used protective gear. Worryingly, the most commonly used pesticides were banned chemicals like metacid and malathion. These are organophosphates, the easily-available chemical most widely used to commit suicide in the subcontinent. Only one in ten Tikathali farmers had ever heard of IPM (Integrated Pest Management) for chemical-free pest control. Contaminated utensils were commonly used around the households, and more than half the farmers interviewed disposed of pesticide containers in rivers or ponds.

Ironically, one of the best things that happened during the Indian Blockade was that Nepal’s pesticide imports, which were rising steeply till then, declined in 2015-16. It is up again, due to increasing demand from Nepali vegetable

farmers who use 1.5kg/ha, as well as some tea gardens which spray up to 2.1kg/ha. The seven pesticide residue test laboratories in Kalimati, Birtamod, Sarlahi, Pokhara, Butwal and Nepalganj are not enough, nor are they sufficiently equipped to determine if crops grown in Nepal are safe. We are not even talking about veggies imported from India.

If the government is serious about the health of its citizens (for which evidence so far suggests it is not) it should immediately work to:

- Train Nepal’s commercial farmers on IPM and organic farming
- Spread public awareness about pesticides
- Regulate and control imports, especially of banned pesticides
- Test imported edibles for pesticide residue



Instead of working ourselves into a fit about pesticide-laced Indian vegetables, we should be more worried about the 2,200 tons of pesticides Nepal imported last year.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

An editorial in *Nepali Times* from ten years ago this week (#459, 10-16 July 2009) looked at how Nepal had not been able to reap the peace dividend for the economy. A decade later, it still has not. These lines have a familiar ring:

'Nepal is reeling under double-digit inflation because of highway disruptions, cartelling and weak enforcement in Nepal. Since Nepal imports almost all consumer goods from India, pumping money into the market has little effect in boosting employment here.'

The new government is so ridden with existential angst that it doesn't realise the gravity of our crisis. The macro-economy may be fine, but Nepalis can't eat the macro-economy. This year's food crisis is an emergency. Nothing has been done since the 18-hour power cuts last winter, so next winter is bound to be worse.

What is holding the country back is an absence of political will to lift ourselves up from this morass. We have heard enough speeches, this government must show it is determined to govern.'



Times.com

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT'S TRENDING



Follow our reporters to Anandaban Hospital and watch how a simple, cost effective technology is allowing leprosy patients to heal faster, how Nepal is now a leader in trying out LPRF treatment, and why it is not being picked up by government and private hospitals. Story: *page 14-15*.



Indra Shilpakar is following his ancestral profession of a traditional woodcarver. His works adorn temples, and he is now being recognised as an artist as well. Join us on a visit to his workshop in Bhaktapur where he works with his father, and balances the tension between tradition and modernity. Story: *page 7*.

TIBET-NEPAL RAILWAY

It has taken them more than five years to fix the 9km road from Kalanki to Thankot and it is still not blacktopped. ('Trilateral Trains', Editorial, #967) Nothing gets done without bribing the government. It has taken 40 years to build Pokhara International Airport, and the only reason why anything has happened is because the Chinese are building it! Nepal is their own worst enemies.

Phil Oakland

■ China and India have a different track gauge so a major railhead or junction with warehousing employing many Nepal is would need to be built in Nepal. I am sure that this is probably on the table right now. Trains that run on electricity, would ultimately keep costs down. Nepal would need strong negotiators in order to obtain the maximum benefits. Politics would need to be put aside once the country decides to go down this route, which I believe, will one day happen.

Alan Roadnight

POLITICS-BUSINESS NEXUS

Business is politics and politics is business in Nepal ('The business of politics undermines Nepal's democracy', Ramesh Kumar, #967). Business is about wealth accumulation; politics is about power. Wealth attracts power and power attracts wealth. Wealth and power is like two opposite ends of magnets: keep it close, they attract each other. The author is analysing present day situations when in fact, this has been the case since the early days of Ranas and Shahs.

Narayan Manandhar

WATER PROBLEMS

If more people had less children, the demand would ease as this is a population issue as well as globally changing weather pattern ('Where is the monsoon this year?', Ajaya Dixit, #967).

John J Mallan

HEMP FABRIC

Nepal could make a fortune in hemp products and medical marijuana production ('Clothed in cannabis', Pema Sherpa, #966). After all, it grows like weed in Nepal.

Denise Tomecko



Nepali calligrapher at large

by *Sewa Bhattarai*

A Nepali calligrapher/graffiti artist is starting conversations by painting Nepali poems and quotes in Devanagari script on some of the most exclusive buildings in the world. The profile piece was the most popular story last week. Go to nepalitimes.com to watch videos of her in action.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page

Lesser known endangered species

They may not be as charismatic as tigers and rhinos, but they are just as endangered. In this wildlife special, read up about the first time sightings of marbled cats and spotted linsangs, and about the protection of barn owls and trafficking routes for pangolins.

Most popular on Twitter

Which way will the Tibet-Nepal Railway go?

by *Ramesh Bhusal*

Feasibility report by a Chinese team suggests drilling a train tunnel under the Himalaya, not along the river. It would be an engineering feat, but is it economically viable? Visit our website for the complete multimedia package and join the discussion online.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
EDITORIAL Greater connectivity between India & China through Nepal could open a new trans-Himalayan trade corridor. Nepal's strategy should be to serve as a land bridge between its neighbours & get these two giant locomotives to pull in the same direction.

gehendra dhakal @360_paralle
Perhaps negotiating a deal to build ancillaries along the route might infuse Nepal with motivation to attain elusive 'development' ..another reason to strengthen PPP among other things.

Dimitris T @dimitrish81
I think that Kathmandu's only connection in the line will bring freight and passenger traffic that will boost the economy. Up until now the only reliable way to travel in Delhi or Lhasa is plane. Train will certainly change that and boost tourism

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Meet Nepali author Shanti Chaudhary, who at 63 has written 65 books, but is now homeless and lives in a library. @munagr's Lightroom Conversations Column this month in @NepaliTimes with moving video by @sikumarhiannon

Nirnanjan Kunwar @MetroNir
Another delightful interview, this one is truly inspiring and humbling. Do read.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
This week Nepali Times brings a wildlife package of less known species: first time sightings of the marbled cat and spotted linsang, and protecting the common barn owl and the most trafficked mammal pangolin.

Nirmal Ghosh @karmanomad
Good to see coverage given to lesser known endangered #wildlife species by @NepaliTimes

Times Weekly Internet Poll #967

Q. Will the Tibet-Nepal train happen?

Total votes: 257

Yes: **32%**

No: **50%**

Can't say: **18%**

Weekly Internet Poll #968
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How has the government handled the issue of pesticide-laced vegetables with India?



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Nepal’s fatalistic *ke garne* culture

Citizens should not accept *Asare Bikas* because we are the only ones who do not benefit from it

A bulldozer ploughs through a rice terrace being readied for paddy planting for a new Ring Road in Bajhang. An excavator tears through an ancient pipal tree to make way for a motorable road. A perfectly good road repaved during a monsoon downpour, when a pot-holed street nearby is left as it is.



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

These are examples from this week’s media depicting what Nepali have come to label *Asare Bikas*. The phrase describes hurried slapdash construction that happens in the last Nepali month of every fiscal year. The connotation is that there are kickbacks, payoffs involved in such rushed low-quality work. It is no wonder the Nepali words for *bikas* (development) and *binas* (destruction) rhyme.

An experienced man recently explained to me why the government ends up spending so much of its development budget right at the end of every fiscal year. His slightly convoluted elucidation of the process: “The goal of starting a poultry farm is set and approved. The benefits are real and there is no doubt that the poor will benefit. Eggs in the diet are also a good side benefit, and the waste can actually generate energy before it is used as fertiliser. The only problem is that in the first quarter of the fiscal year, one gets only enough money to buy one fourth of a chicken. In



DAMAN RAI / REPUBLICA



BASANTA PRATAP SINGH / KANTIPUR

the fourth quarter you have the full amount to buy a whole live chicken. This is why the government is spending Rs4 billion per day in the last two weeks of Asar.”

It is our taxes that prop up the government. On top of all the tax revenue, Nepal receives a good amount of foreign aid and has been benefitting for over seven decades now. We have also received plenty of advice and technical assistance over this period, all meant to put Nepal’s development on the right track.

Why then does Nepal still spend all this money in the last two weeks of the Nepali month of Asar? Some of it has to do with corruption, but the high last-minute disbursement is to ensure that there are no cuts in allocation for the upcoming year

because of an unspent budget. Last week, while trying to get back from Nagarkot most roads were closed because they were all being suddenly black topped. We saw workers in yellow helmets weeding the side of roads under the PM Employment Scheme. When we got into Kathmandu, the street dividers at Baber Mahal were all getting a new coat of paint. The metal railings in Kupondole also had wet paint and new street lights were going up at Tankeswor crossing. The capital seemed to be undergoing an eruption of development. The late rains this year meant that even more *Asare* development could be squeezed into the last month. The bright side of it was that the hurriedly black-topped road may actually last longer because of

the dry spell. This is also a time of the year when many able-bodied young Nepalis who have not left the country are hired as seasonal labor to plant rice. This year, they got the chance to be hired twice: once for *Asare* development and then for paddy plantation delayed by rains. The office of the Auditor General identifies and compiles all the non-compliant procurements and spending in its annual report to the President. For all its effort, it does nothing to change the state of the Nepali state. The CIAA files cases against corrupt government officials, but they not only seem to get a clear chit from the courts, but end up getting a party ticket to fight elections and become political bosses.

Asar is also the month for training and ‘study tours’ within Nepal, and for officials to go on foreign junkets to finish their budgets. It is an easy budget head to spend the remaining budget quickly. Many of these training programs are never really conducted, but the bills get made and submitted. The people who own venues, resource persons, and participants all get their cuts. Under the new constitutional arrangement, all money is spent from just over 760 government accounts across Nepal. This is not a lot to keep an eye on given the size of the media and journalists, auditors, opposition parties, civil society organisations working for good governance, and international development partners. All these agencies cannot be in collusion. Yet, the practice prevails, lubricated by corruption and a fatalistic *ke garne* culture of acceptance that this is just the way things are in Nepal. Citizens should not accept *Asare Bikas* because they are the only ones who do not benefit from it.

Anil Chitrakar is the President of *Siddharthi*

Jimmy Carter’s Nepal vest auctioned for \$10,000



11. NEPAL ELECTION MEMORABILIA
An blue fishing-style observer vest worn by President Carter during the Nepal elections in 2013 is offered in this lot. Front displays the Carter Center logo. “Nepal CA elections November 2013” is on the back. With the vest is a lanyard holding President Carter’s identification card and an 8-inch by 10-inch color photograph that shows him smiling with a young Nepalese child. Carter has signed the matte of the framed image.
Donor(s): The Carter Center
Value: \$1,000.00

A blue election observer flak jacket worn by former US President Jimmy Carter in Nepal’s 2013 Constituent Assembly poll (*left*) has fetched \$10,000 at a charity auction in Leesburg, Virigina on 29 June. Although valued at \$1,000 for the auction, the vest, name tag and an autographed photo of Carter greeting a Nepali voter carrying a child, was auctioned for ten times that amount. Carter personally visited Nepal twice for election monitoring missions supported by his Centre. The weekend auctions raise money for The Carter Centre’s human rights, shelter and health projects around the world. Among the other items auctioned on Saturday include a handcrafted wooden chest built by Carter himself, signed photographs of five US presidents, and guitars signed by Bon Jovi, the Rolling Stones and Carter himself. Besides the Nepal election memorabilia, there are also vests from the 1980 Carter-Mondale presidential election campaign. The auctions have been held regularly since 1992, and have raised over \$31million.

**BIZ BRIEFS**

Turkish and Kuwait

Turkish Airlines and Kuwait Airways are starting a bilateral codeshare agreement from 1 August that will see Kuwait national carrier’s code added to Turkish Airlines flights and vice versa on flights operated between Kuwait and Istanbul/Sabiha Gokcen Airports. Kuwait Airways operates daily flights to Istanbul and Sabiha Gokcen, while Turkish Airlines operates 28 flights from Istanbul, and 14 flights from Sabiha Gokcen to Kuwait City.



Miss Asia Pacific Int’l

Kingfisher is holding Miss Asia Pacific International Nepal 2019, part of Asia’s oldest beauty pageant. The event is taking place in September, and the winner will represent Nepal in Manila later in the year.

New Samsung Plaza

Samsung has opened a new Samsung Digital Plaza in Pulchok to address growing demand of Samsung products.



Qatar Privilege

Qatar Airways is making an exclusive offer to its Privilege Club members of savings of up to 30% when using Qmiles on select products at Qatar Duty Free (QDF) at Hamad International Airport (HIA) and at Oryx Galleria in Doha. Privilege Club is a loyalty program allowing passengers the opportunity to earn Qmiles when travelling on Qatar Airways, Oneworld carriers and as another convenient means of payment at the Qatar Duty Free outlets.

Monsoon Camp

The three day Mahindra Monsoon Camp held 3-5 July allowed car owners from all over the country free 30 point check-ups. Car owners also got 10% discounts on lubricants, spare parts, and labour charge. Special discounts were also offered on vehicles such as the Quanto, Xylo, and Logan.



Punished in Malaysia, ignored in Nepal

Even as Malaysia prosecutes minister involved in labour scam, no one is investigated in Nepal

Ramu Sapkota
in Kuala Lumpur

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission began prosecution this week against Malaysia's former Deputy Prime Minister and Internal Affairs Minister, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, for charges against corruption related to migrant labour.

Hamidi was arrested on 24 June and released on bail after being charged with 33 crimes, including one that claims he took more than 42 million Malaysian Ringgit (more than \$10 million), as a bribe for letting the Malaysian company, Ultra Kirana, become a One Stop Center (OSC) for visa processing and labour migration. If these allegations are proven, Hamidi could face a jail sentence of up to 20 years.

Hamidi was named in a joint investigation conducted by *Nepali Times* and *Malaysiakini* last year in a Rs1.9 billion scam that cheated tens of thousands of poor Nepalis between 2013-17 who were migrating to work in Malaysia.

Ultra Kirana, the company accused of bribing Hamidi, represents Malaysia's VLN company in Nepal, that processes the visa applications of Nepali migrant workers going to Malaysia. VLN Nepal used to collect illegal fees from labourers and send the money to Ultra Kirana through informal channels.

Since the investigation was published, the government in Malaysia changed after elections, and both countries banned the Nepali workers going to Malaysia pending an inquiry. Nepal Labour Minister Gokarna Bista promised to clean up the racket and make it fee-free for Nepalis wanting to work in Malaysia. The ban has still not been lifted.

In Malaysia, investigations on Prime Minister Najib Razak's government began after a new government was formed under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad following the general elections in 2018. Hamidi, who was the Internal Affairs Minister in Razak's administration, was arrested for the first time in October 2018 by Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission.

He was charged with acquiring at least 114 million Ringgit (\$2.6 million) through illegal means, and 45 cases were filed at the High Court, including 27 cases of money laundering, 10 of breach of trust, and 8 for accepting bribes.

Among the charges of bribery was one that alleged that he accepted more than \$3 million from three companies including Profound Radiance, which used to collect the passports of Nepali workers and take them to the Malaysian Embassy in Kathmandu. The



MALAYSIAKINI

charge sheet mentions that Hamidi accepted a total of three bank cheques worth 2 million Ringgit (\$300,000) from Ajlan Shah Jafril, the Director of Profound Radiance.

Malaysia's Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi met Nepal's then Labour Minister Tek Bahadur Gurung in 2015 and outsourced the work to Ultra Kirana Sdn Bhd which required Nepali migrant workers to apply for work visas through the Kathmandu-based affiliate, Malaysia

VLN Nepal. The agency charged Rs3,200 from every Malaysia-bound Nepali worker, and collected Rs1.95 billion from more than 600,000 workers between September 2013 and April 2018.

Then in July 2015, Malaysia made it mandatory for all Nepali migrants to undergo a biometric test for which the Malaysian government hired Bestinet Sdn Bhd, a tech firm run by Hamidi's brother-in-law Amin Bin Abdul Nor. Hamidi's brother

FLASHBACK: Nepal's Labour Minister Tek Bahadur Gurung met with Malaysian Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (*left*) in Kuala Lumpur in 2015, agreeing on letting private Malaysian and Nepali companies to process visas for Nepali workers.

Hamidi after a recent court appearance (*below*).

Abdul Hakim Hamidi and ex-Malaysian Environment Minister Ajmi Khalid also reportedly owned shares in Bestinet.

Bestinet partnered with Nepal Health Professional Federation (NHPF) to carry out biometric screening through 39 medical centres which charged Rs4,500 from each migrant worker for biometrics. Bestinet denied the allegations, and in a statement published in July 2018, they hinted that it could take legal action against *Nepali Times* and the reporters.

Previously, migrant workers could apply for visas independently or through a manpower agency. They could get a work visa for just Rs700, and could have medical tests done at any of 200 government-approved health facilities.

In Nepal, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security started prosecuting the company that charged migrant labourers extra fees. Since then,

Nepali workers were stopped from going to Malaysia even though the two governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on October 2018 to resume sending workers.

The Minister for Labour, Gokarna Bista, says the selection of an institution for health checkups of aspiring labour migrants is in the last stages now, adding that the Joint Technical Committee, tasked with implementing the MoU, is preparing for its second meeting.

"No one has the right to swindle workers. The ministry's stance on the companies that created a syndicate in visa processing remains the same," Bista told *Nepali Times*.

However, even as the case against Hamidi moves forward in the Malaysian courts, in Nepal, the counterparts of the companies involved have gone scot free.

None of the companies involved, or the senior officials who allowed Hamidi to get away with swindling labour migrants, have been investigated. 🇳🇵

Additional reporting by Abdul Rashid in Kuala Lumpur



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Nepali women take to media to expose abuse

Upset by impunity, more women share testimonies of harassment from their own pasts

Reeti KC

After a flurry of accusations by Nepali women of sexual harassment by co-workers, bosses, teachers, family members or strangers in buses, the #Metoo movement has largely dropped out of the headlines. Very few of the accused have faced trial, detention, or even lost their jobs.

And it is perhaps because of this impunity and sense of entitlement in conservative Nepal that women are now stepping up with deeply personal testimonies of their own abuse. They are using social media platforms, and the weekend section of newspapers to keep the issue alive. These narratives are inspiring more women to come out and tell stories they have never told anyone.

“I was harassed since the time I did not know the difference between good touch and bad touch, but I could not do anything about it even though I am not shy. I just could not bring myself to slap a harasser in a public vehicle. Then I thought, even if I am not be able to hit back, I can write about it,” said Durga Karki, who wrote a courageous account in *Annapurna Post* titled *#Notme*.

Even though only a few brave women came out during the #Metoo campaign to tell their stories, Karki says nearly all Nepali women have been harassed at some point.

Shivani Singh Tharu, a well-known media personality, recently shared a write-up in *Kantipur* titled *34 inch 'D'* which recounted incidents of harassment she has



MONIKA DEUPALA

faced from a male teacher, men in her workplace, and others.

“I got many messages from women saying they had faced such situations as well, they said they too needed to speak out publicly,” says Tharu. “Among those reacting were men, some of whom have daughters and were emotionally touched. They started imagining what if it was their own daughter?”

These recent writings by women in the Nepali press have also spread awareness among men who may have intentionally or unintentionally made women feel uncomfortable with their behaviour.

It is not just women who have been writing confessional pieces. Author Ramesh Sayan recently published an article *Keta Haru Ko Kuntha* (Frustration of Boys) which talked about how boys are brought up by their families and the kind of values they learn from society. Sayan wrote about how topics related to sex are neither taught by parents nor teachers, but by equally under-informed peers.

“The main issue is how men were schooled. As a man, I experience the same psychology and my company since childhood has only been male. I wrote the



COMING OUT: Durga Karki (*left*) whose testimonial about harrassment was published by Bimal Acharya in *Annapurna Post* recently. More and more women are writing about their experiences in the Nepali language press.

article to show how the social structure is for them”, says Sayan.

One of the most talked about recent write-ups is by Kunta Sharma because it was about her former husband, Megh Raj Sharma who is better known as the singer ‘Manjul’. The two are literary personalities, but Kunta Sharma writes about how despite being educated and supposedly independent, she suffered physical and mental exploitation from her husband.

“I was educated, yet I was like a doll inside a toy house and served as a sex slave,” Sharma, now 74, confided.

Sharma and her son filed a defamation case in the Lalitpur District Court against Manjul, but Sharma was not happy with the

court’s decision. When a DNA test proved that Manjul was indeed the father of their youngest son, the court fined him a mere Rs500.

“Our society is infected with patriarchy. Women have to muster the courage to go public, and must have the endurance to fight till the end, whether or not we get justice,” Sharma says.

One reason the women say they are writing about their past now is because very few of the accused men faced any action. “The #Metoo movement fizzled out in Nepal because the men got away, that was because women did not want to name names,” says Durga Karki.

Tribhuvan University recently filed a sexual harassment FIR against economic teacher Jagadish Murti Koirala, but he is absconding.

Bimal Acharya, who edits the weekend section of *Annapurna Post* and published both Kunta Sharma and Durga Karki’s accounts, says: “I consciously publish more stories by women, and encourage new women writers and provide them a forum.”

Women are now coming out not just on mainstream press, but also on social media to share stories and encouraging others to do the same. @CatcallsofKTM on Instagram gives space for women to share testimonies, and was opened by a 16-year-old who says she was frequently harassed. She prefers anonymity for now, but felt Nepali women needed the platform.

“It is a good followup to the #Metoo that women are coming out to share their stories, one writer encourages others to write,” says Narayan Wagle, the editor of *Kantipur*. 🇳🇵



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Out with the old, in with the new

Bhaktapur’s traditional woodcarver experiments with traditional forms to create a modern aesthetic

Sewa Bhattarai

Woodcraft embellishes Kathmandu Valley’s traditional architecture, adorning columns, eaves, windows and door frames with meticulously carved figures of gods and goddesses. Historically, these anonymous works of devotional art were carved by generations of the Shilpakar clan, whose surname was derived from their ancestral profession.

Indra Prasad Shilpakar (pictured, right) is from a long line of woodcarvers from Bhaktapur who decided to give new life to the craft by using traditional motifs, while adding artistic license with new elements. He has separated these pieces from architecture and created them as freestanding structures of art, modifying some background designs and poses of the gods.

“Woodcarving on temples are strictly defined by rules that follow the storyline of the scriptures,” Shilpakar explained during a walk around his solo exhibition at the Taragaon Museum this week. “But outside of the architectural frame, I try to experiment.”

Shilpakar has a degree in fine art from Tribhuvan University, and he says that his background in contemporary art helps him try out new aesthetics so traditional woodcarvings can also be viewed as individual pieces of art.

In his day job, Shilpakar works in the restoration of Patan’s Bhai Dega temple which was destroyed in the 1934 earthquake. There, he tries to replicate missing pieces of the temple based on old photographs and damaged pieces. After work, he is back at his

basement workshop in Bhaktapur where he works with his father Indra Kaji Shilpakar (pictured, left) on traditional carvings.

Indra Kaji is not too enthusiastic about his son trying out new styles and selling them in galleries. He says: “Work in exhibitions ultimately end up in private collections, and only a few people will see them. On the other hand, when your carving adorns a temple, everyone sees them and it spans generations.”

Nonetheless, the younger Shilpakar says it is difficult to make a living just by creating traditional wood carvings for temples, whereas experimenting with modern forms of traditional art and exhibiting them in galleries can earn the artist extra money.

Shilpakar’s Taragaon exhibition, that ended on Tuesday, depicted the best of



woodcarvings found in temples: windows with intricate patterns of flowers, deities like the Buddha, Ganesh, and Matrika, animals like crocodiles and Garuda, a pair of singing Gandharva and dancing Kinnara.

Even more modern renditions of traditional wood carvings are strewn around Shilpakar’s workshop in Bhaktapur. Senior Shilpakar and his son share a passion for traditional woodcraft, and have designed their home keeping true to their Newa heritage. Carved wooden pillars line the ground floor, a traditional wooden staircase leads to the second floor which has intricately-carved wooden windows.

The attic kitchen has a high, triangular roof supported by wooden balustrades, and the balcony outside is lined with woodwork. The walls have a museum feel to it with displays of mallets, chisels, gouges and skewers in various sizes that were used by their ancestors. “We wanted our house to reflect and preserve our traditions as well,” says the younger Shilpakar.

Indra Prasad Shilpakar feels his family’s ancestral work is still seen as a lowly occupation, and he wants to be recognised as a creative artist as well. He says: “It is sad that we don’t know the names of the masters who created the exquisite carvings on our temples. They were never known as artists. But here in this gallery, I am known as an artist in my own right.”



MONIKA DEUPALA



Indra Shilpakar is following his ancestral profession of a traditional woodcarver. His works adorn temples, and he is now being recognised as an artist as well. Join us on a visit to his workshop in Bhaktapur where he works with his father, and balances the tension between tradition and modernity.

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To make up for monsoon slack, Nepal opts for spiritual tourism

Sonam Cheokyi Lama

Whenever tourism in Nepal suffers a slump, it is young westerners seeking enlightenment that compensate for fewer visitor numbers.

After every political upheaval, like the 2001 royal massacre or the decade-long conflict, or disasters like the 2015 earthquake, meditation students kept Nepal's tourism economy afloat.

Tourists seeking spiritual upliftment and detox from the stress of modern life and materialism, have flocked to Nepal ever since the hippie days. But lately, there are monasteries and temples that cater specifically to customers who come to Nepal to learn meditation techniques like vipassana, take intensive yoga classes, or to seek solitude and communion with nature.

Indeed, the word *gompa* is derived from the Tibetan word for meditation, and it is where devotees go to pray, train their mind to concentrate on a positive mental attitude, and attain a blissful state. Meditation allows people to gain mindfulness, consciousness, and detoxify their desires and negative thoughts like jealousy, anger and greed.

As global headlines about the coming



climate apocalypse, wars and political unraveling bombard people every minute of every day through the social web and the mass media, people need to take time off to be with their inner selves.

"This is the path to regain mental equilibrium and restore one's healthy mental state as meditation pushes out feelings of jealousy, anger and greed," explains Geshe Lobsang Sherap at Kopan Monastery near Kathmandu, one of the pioneers of meditation tourism in Nepal. (*See box.*)

There are now customised meditation

tours and packages, spiritual and spa trekking that combine yoga for the purification of both the body and mind. After all, the Himalaya is where Hindu and Buddhist sages have gone for millennia to meditate, cleanse their souls and even attain nirvana.

Himalayan Hermitage is one agency working with local partners to facilitate meditation tours and pilgrims inside Kathmandu and around various sacred places in the Himalaya.

Alex d'Artois and Sisse Budolfson (*pictured above*) started Himalayan Hermitage



after spending many years in Nepal studying Buddhism, philosophy and meditation, and found many blessings during their stay here.

"Meditation is all about mind practice, cultivating sanity, becoming better human beings, attaining innate compassion and wisdom," explains d'Artois. "It is not about trying to be something or someone. It is cleaning up our mess, and connecting with reality. Nepal is the perfect place for meditation because life here is less hurried and people are simple, relaxed and at peace." Himalayan Hermitage works with local

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कानून बमोजिम लिनुपर्ने इजाजत नलिई वा इजाजत पत्र नवीकरण नगराई वा इजाजत प्राप्त व्यक्तिको मृत्यु पश्चात हकवालाको नाममा नामसारी नगराई वा अन्य जुनसुकै तरिकाले नेपाल राज्यभित्र कोही कसैले अवैध हतियार र खरखजाना राखेको भए यो सूचना प्रकाशित भएको मितिले ३५ (पैंतीस) दिनभित्र नजिकको प्रहरी चौकी, जिल्ला प्रहरी कार्यालय वा नेपाली सेनाको ब्यारेकमा अनिवार्य रूपमा बुझाउनु हुन नेपाल सरकार (मन्त्रिपरिषद्) को मिति २०७५/११/१८ को निर्णय अनुसार यो सूचना प्रकाशित गरिएको छ ।

यसरी हातहतियार र खरखजाना बुझाउन ल्याएमा यसअघि ती अवैध हातहतियार र खरखजाना राखेको कारणले मात्र त्यस्ता व्यक्तिलाई कुनै कानूनी कारवाही नचलाइने हुँदा तोकिएको समयभित्र अवैध हातहतियार तथा खरखजाना अनिवार्य रूपमा बुझाउनुहुन सम्बन्धित सबैमा जानकारी गराइन्छ । यदि इजाजत प्राप्त नगरी आफूसँग रहेका हातहतियार तथा खरखजाना तोकिएको अवधिभित्र स्वेच्छाले नबुझाएमा त्यस्ता व्यक्ति उपर प्रचलित कानून बमोजिम कारवाही हुने व्यहोरा समेत सूचित गरिन्छ ।



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग



PHOTOS: HIMALAYAN HERMITAGE

partners to facilitate meditation pilgrimages in Nepal, India, Bhutan with spiritual journeys into sacred valleys like Tsum, Solu Khumbu, Dolpo, Mustang and Manang where they practice mediation amidst sublime scenery.

“These sacred valleys of the beyul have a sanctity that is hard to explain, they have healing properties,” adds d’Artois, a Canadian who has studied Buddhist philosophy.

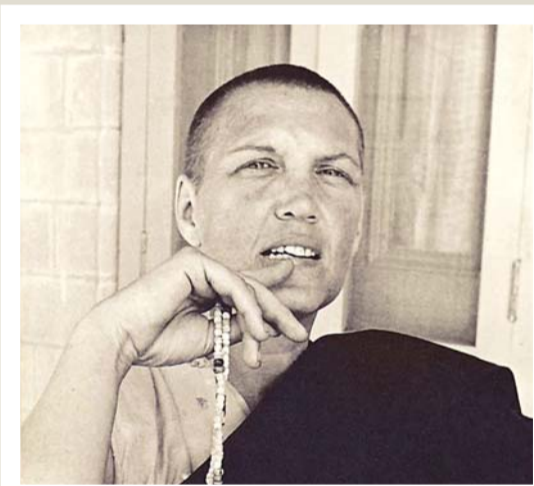
Himalayan Hermitage combines western and eastern perspectives, and prefers to call its Nepal package ‘pilgrimage’ and the tourists ‘pilgrims’, explaining that the idea of a pilgrimage is non-religious and an inclination of self-introspection that allows pilgrims from around the world to immerse into the culture of Himalaya.

“If I do not meditate, I feel like something is missing, I do not feel fully cleansed and taken care of. A feeling that I didn’t take time for myself,” explains Sisse Budolfson, who is from Denmark and has been travelling to Nepal and Tibet ever since she first came to Kopan at the age of 20.

According to airport arrival figures, 17% of tourists visiting Nepal last year (some 65,850) said they were here for meditation and spiritual tourism.

“We have specifically prioritised meditation tourism since this is a new concept and a trend,” shares Kabitra Bhatt at Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). 🇳🇵

Kopan’s Russian-Hollywood connection



One of the first centres to popularise meditation tourism in Kathmandu Valley is Kopan Monastery which now gets more than 1,500 students every year for its 10-15 day classes.

The history of Kopan is closely tied to the legendary daughter of Russian émigré Zina Rachevsky, whose family fled Russia during the communist revolution, became a Hollywood actress, and arrived in Nepal with the hippies in the 1960s to

seek enlightenment.

In 1968, the Russian-French- American socialite became Anila Thubten Chub Palmo (*above, left*) and was ordained in Dharmashala by Trijang Rinpoche. She bought the land on which Kopan Monastery now stands in Kathmandu Valley for the Nepal Mahayana Gompa Retreat that she set up with Lama Yeshe, (*above, right*) whom Rachevsky met in Darjeeling.

“Kopan became a refuge for those fleeing

materialism and artificial modern lifestyles,” explains Geshe Lobsang Sherap. “Among them was Zina. She met our gurus, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche and became their first disciple in 1968.”

The first of 15 American tourists came to Kopan in 1968 to attend a medication course taught by Jamyang Wangmo. Zina Rachevsky died of cholera while on a meditation retreat in Thame in Khumbu in 1973 at the age of 42.

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EVENTS



Kora Cycling Challenge

Join the 9th edition of Kathmandu Kora, a yearly cycling challenge that invites cyclists from all over Nepal to bike 50km, 75km or 100km around Kathmandu Valley to raise money for charitable causes. Pledge to raise Rs100 for every kilometre completed. 20 July, 7am onwards, Patan Darbar Square, 9801123401

Doodle Workshop

For kids aged 9-15, spend a Saturday doodling away. This workshop is perfect for kids who like to doodle and who want to create a refined piece of art from their doodles. 13 July, 9am-12pm, Karkhana Innovators' Club, Gyaneshwor, (01)4429963

P.C Showcase 68

Hosted by Photo Circle, join the 5 Nepali photographers that participated in exhibitions around the world as they showcase their work from the International Storytelling Workshop and the International Photography Program. 12 July, 6pm onwards, Basecamp Outdoor Lifestyles, Jhamsikhel, 9808380219



Evening Photo-Walk

Hosted by Udaya Visuals, stroll the cobbled streets and navigate the historic monuments of Basantapur Darbar Square. Bring your camera, get familiar with night photography and meet other photographers. 20 July, 6-7:30, Basantapur Darbar Square, 9840710813

Workshop on Yoga and Meditation

Attend this informative workshop to learn more about the mental, physical and spiritual benefits of yoga and meditation. 19 July (4pm-8pm) & 20 July (8am-12pm), Sooriya Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lazimpat, (01)4001714

Flow Yoga and Brunch

What better way to get ready for the week than with Eggs Benedict and Surya Namaskar at this Brunch and Yoga event? 14 July, 8:30am-10am, Le Sherpa, Lazimpat, (01)4428604



Horns and Bones

Ever been curious to know what happens to unused animal parts? At Shailee Crafts you can explore how neglected buffalo bones from around Kathmandu are upcycled to create buttons and pendants. 14 July, 1pm onwards, Shailee Crafts, Godawari, 9818975527

Philosophy Discussion

Organized by Nepal Darshan Adhyayan Kendra, join a philosophy discussion led by Dr. Niraj Poudyal 12 July, 3pm Martin Chautari, Thapathali, (01)4102027

France-Nepal Art Exhibition

Celebrate 70 years of French-Nepal diplomatic relations with a collaborative painting exhibition by Nepali and French contemporary artists during the opening on the 16th at 4:30pm and throughout July. 17-31 July, 9am-5pm, Alliance Française de Katmandou, Jhamsikhel, (01)5009221

MUSIC



Deepak Bajracharya & Rhythm Band

Listen to the dynamic Deepak Bajracharya and Rhythm Band play their greatest hits. 13 July, 8pm onwards, Lord of the Drinks, Thamel, 9843948991

Acoustic Friday Night

Unwind from the busy work week with chill music by Hotel Nana's house band in their breezy terrace bar. 19 July, 6pm onwards, The Nana Hotels, Thamel, (01)4443701

Places Jazz Night

Start off the weekend with some jazzy tunes with fellow jazz-lovers at one of Kathmandu's favorite musical hubs. 12 July, 7pm onwards, Places Restaurant and Bar, Thamel, (01)4700413



Ku.Ku & Fiddlers Band

Listen to an upbeat medley of Nepali songs while munching on traditional Newari dishes. 13 July, 3pm-6pm, Sasaa the Newari Restaurant, Kirtipur, 9849109808

Nomads Transition

In the newly renovated Bikalpa Art Cafe, join Nomads Tradition, a local Indie duo, for a night of fusion jazz music. 12 July, 6:30pm onwards, Bikalpa Art Cafe and Bar, 9851147776

DINING

Zen Bistro & Cafe Restaurant

Zen Bistro offers some of the best Red Curries and Pork BBQ for anyone who wants to venture into the palatable world of Thai food. Try the refreshing Papaya Salads on a hot summer day and warm bowls of Tom Yam on a cool monsoon night. 10am-10pm, Bansbari, (01)4017654



Tasneem King's Kitchen

Tasneem's mouthwatering authentic Bohra Muslim cuisine is a must for anyone who loves flavorful, spicy and savoury dishes. From slow-cooked Dum Biryani to traditional 10-course Bohra Thaals, Tasneem is a place that brings food-lovers together. 12pm-10pm (Except Sundays), Jhamsikhel, 9801121212

Dechenling Garden Restaurant

Dechenling is a quaint place to eat within the chaos of Thamel. It serves one of the best Tibetan and Nepali foods in Kathmandu. From Naan to Ting-mo and Fokso to Kewa Dhatsi, Dechenling is the place to be. Opt for set dishes if you can't decide what to order! 10:30am-9:30pm, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, (01)4412158



Hankook Sarang

Enjoy a variety of Korean dishes like Tteok-bokki, Gimhap and Bibimbap. You can also try various Banchan (Korean side-dishes) with Korean BBQ. You can cook the meat yourself and enjoy the tempting sizzling of pork and chicken while you wait. 10am-10pm, Tangal, Naxal, (01)4421711

Mamagoto Nepal

Mamagoto is a fun Pan-Asian restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Enjoy Maki Rolls, Satays, Dumplings, Ramen and more all with a side of cocktails in this new quirky eatery. 11am-11pm, Panipokhari, Lazimpat, (01)4446299

GETAWAY



Tiger Palace Resort

Regarded as one of the most dynamic, exciting and luxurious resorts in Nepal, Tiger Palace Resort offers a wide variety of entertainment, eateries and activities. From an international Casino to six different places to eat within the resort, this getaway is a must visit for travellers venturing south of Kathmandu Valley. Rupandehi, Bhairawa, (71)512000

Aloft

Located near the heart of Thamel in Chhaya Devi Complex, Aloft, a global chain of hotels offers some of the best modern luxuries and architecture in Kathmandu. From beauty salons and spas to restaurants and shops, Aloft is a place for visitors to indulge. Thamel, (01)5252111



Evergreen Eco-Lodge

A relatively new lodging concept in Nepal, Tree House Resort is a local-owned rustic stay in Chitwan. Unwind in one of their wooden tree-house cabins with thatched straw roofs and enjoy the tranquility of the dense surrounding forestry. Chitwan National Park, Sauraha, 9845693879

Hotel Mountain Top

With one of the best views in Pokhara, Hotel Mountain Top offers views of Fewa Lake and snow-capped mountain ranges. Sip drinks and enjoy Nepali cuisines atop The Altitude Bar and stay in rooms that are reminiscent of the clean white and light blues of Santorini. Lakeside Road, Pokhara, (61)461779

Shangri-La Village Resort

Grab the Monsoon Madness Package at Shangri-La Village Resort in Pokhara with exciting offers of 2 Nights and 3 Days stay on twin sharing basis with cash back coupons worth Rs3000 per person. Rs7499 per person, Pokhara, (61)462222



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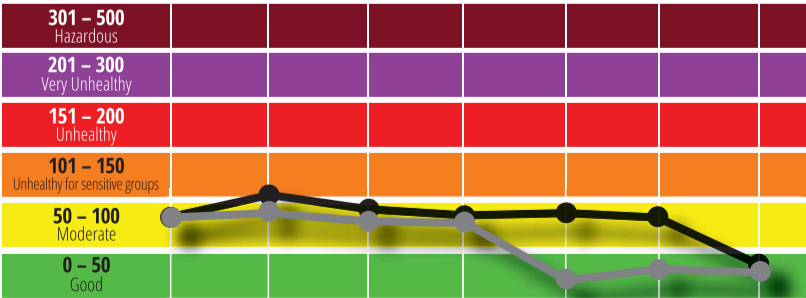


Opened in Kathmandu on 12 July

Super 30 is based on the true story of a mathematician Anand Kumar in Bihar who coaches 30 underprivileged students for free every year to appear in India's highly competitive IIT examinations. Kumar is portrayed by Hrithik Roshan, adding star power to an inspiring story. Directed by Vikas Bahl, the film also exposes India's poverty, competitive education system, and the issues it has with reservations.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 5 - 11 July



Daily average for concentration of harmful particles below 2.5 microns in diameter in Kathmandu air has finally dipped into the Green 'Good' band (*see graph*). The reason, of course, is that the air is being flushed down by the monsoon rains and the easterly winds associated with it. However, the hourly readings of monitoring stations at the US Embassy premises in Phora Darbar shows daily morning and evening peaks for PM2.5 that correspond with rush hour traffic. Ozone gas is also scrubbed by the rain, and is within healthy levels. Saturday's spike appears to be an outlier. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



PHOTOS: GARGEE PRADHAN SHRESTHA

The last and least in Rautahat

Nepal's least literate district has seen little improvement in its schools since local governments were elected

Sewa Bhattarai
in Rautahat

From afar, a little bamboo and mud hut looks like the many cowsheds that dot this district in the central Tarai.

But it is actually a classroom for some of the 124 students enrolled in Uma Primary School and their two teachers. A nearby cement building that houses a single, tiny furniture-less classroom also looks less than inspiring. On the best days, the hut struggles to shelter the children, but with monsoon rains, the children are always wet.

"Where do I even begin with the list of problems our school faces," says Principal Munni Kumari Pandey, "a proper school building with desks and chairs, classrooms in which students actually fit, a compound wall so children are safe from the road, and we want more teachers."

Uma Primary School is a fitting snapshot of the state of education in Rautahat, which

ranks as the worst district in Nepal for school performance. Scoring low in other Human Development Indicies like health, life expectancy, and gender equity, Rautahat trails even remote mountain districts like Humla, Bajhang and Bajura.

Its literacy rate (42%) is lowest in the country, only half of the men and a third of the women in Rautahat are literate. The national literacy rate is now 65%.

"The largest section of our budget is devoted to building roads and canals, and to help flood victims. We support schools through salaries, but upgrading their buildings is beyond our budget, so we have to ask the central government," explains Arun Kumar Saha, mayor of Durga Bhagawati rural municipality where the school is located.

But Gokarna Dhawaj Karki, DEO of Rautahat, passes the buck right back: "Since the country went federal, the central level does not do local budgeting. The District Education Office only has enough budget to operate its own office. Municipalities have to make their own budgets, and our task is only

to oversee and approve it."

Indeed, two years after local governments were elected in Nepal's new federal structure, there has been no palpable improvement in schools here. A report by Rudra Pangen for the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) indicates that this is not an exception but the rule across the Tarai, as local budgets ignore the social sector and focus on infrastructure.

In Rautahat and Sarlahi, several municipalities allocate half their budget to construction, and less than a fifth to education and health combined.

As the country is still figuring out a new working mechanism, it is still not clear what rights and responsibilities each level has, and so real local priorities continue to get overshadowed by more showy instant development work, like roads.


Officials are happy to blame Rautahat's grinding poverty for its low school performance. Indeed, Uma Primary School serves children from the Chamar community, the lowest of the Dalits according to the traditional social hierarchy, and Muslims.

TOO POOR TO MATTER: The bamboo shed that serves half the 124 students enrolled at Uma Primary School in Rautahat district (*above*).

The school's main building and the thatched hut do not have a compound wall (*below, left*).

Most of the furniture in the classroom is broken, while children under five play in this corner (*below*).

Children from Dalit families often drop out of school to help out at home, and Rautahat's Muslims who make up 20% of the population mostly send children to madrasahs.

Families that can afford it, send their children to private schools. But government schools have reported increased enrolment and improved attendance when students are given school bags, scholarships, and lunches. But these programs are sporadic and occur only if NGOs step in. 





Among Prakash Ranjit's 365 illustrations on display at Nexus Cultural Center in Patan, many are of human faces with bodies of animals. A man sleeps on the roadside inside the body of an elephant, another one stares at the computer from inside a huge lizard, and there is one grimacing with porcupine quills popping out all over his back. "These animals personify human emotions, and the behaviours that we human beings have come to associate with them," explains the artist. "For example, an elephant symbolises weight, I have played around with the concept of *hatti lai palera rakhnu* (to provide for an elephant), which symbolises a great burden. The lizard is a hungry boa, and the bristling quills of the porcupine obviously represents anger."

Ranjit used animals because he found it easier to identify with them. After years of struggling with mental health issues, beginning with eating disorders

as a child, Ranjit was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and borderline personality disorder as an adult. After schema therapy, his doctor recommended that he write down his thoughts and maintain a daily diary. Ranjit, who had graduated in fine arts from KU in 2014, found that he was sketching more than writing in his journals. Since it helped him identify and process his emotions, he stuck with it.

Initially, as an experiment, he gave himself a 30-day challenge. Every day, he would take a piece of paper and work with different painting materials: pen, brush, ink, crayons, pencil colours, and posted the sketches on his social media.

The day he was feeling anxious, he drew a picture of a tower on fire. A day he felt affectionate, he drew a pair of cuddling foxes. He experimented with tarot cards, monsters, and many other motifs that helped him express his emotions best. And if he felt too overwhelmed to delve into human emotions, he used animals.

365 is not just a number

The result is a series of sketches that almost overwhelm the viewer with their emotional intensity. The sketches also document the lives of the urban poor, which seems to be a recurring subject of interest for Ranjit who noticed people's hardships during his walks. A little boy carrying tea getting wet in the rain, porters talking about eating chicken and rice after their next trip, a woman selling flowers outside a temple, or a man who repairs shoes at a street corner, they are all rendered with sensitivity and great detail. His artwork is not just a record his emotional journey, but a documentation of society as well.

Some of his works are also satires of social reality like traffic jams caused by VIP motorcades, and the destruction of forests to build a new airport in Nijgad. They are all drawn in clean and precise lines, some are whimsical, others use fantasy as the real world blends with the imaginary. Strange creatures walk beside humans, masked dancers meld humans and animals, monsters and fairies live underwater, and elves peep out from behind bushes.

After Ranjit worked on his daily sketches for more than a year, he stopped since it helped him deal with his inner demons, and decided to exhibit and sell originals. "Maybe I will try other mediums, or maybe I will devote more time on a single piece unlike now," says Ranjit, "this is not just a job, it is therapy."

Sewa Bhattarai



MY NAME IS OLI: Prime Minister KP Oli received his National ID card in Kathmandu on Tuesday. The government plans to distribute biometric ID card to all citizens within the next two years.



HELPING HANDS: German Ambassador to Nepal Roland Schafer signs an agreement with the Finance Ministry to provide grant assistance worth €24. 3 million to be used in solar power, maternal and child health projects.



MENACING MONSOON: Dark monsoon clouds over Phewa Lake in Pokhara on Monday evening. The monsoon was delayed by nearly a month this year.



HOWZAT: Nepali Under 19 cricket team beats Hong Kong by 6 wickets to win U-19 Eastern Region Championship in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday and qualifies for the 2019 ACC U-19 Asia Cup to be held in Sri Lanka.



BEAUTIFUL BATIK: Indonesia Ambassador to Nepal Rina P Soemarmo and honorary consul of Indonesia to Nepal Chandra Prasad Dhakal jointly inaugurate the Indonesian Batik Festival at Hotel Annapurna in Kathmandu on Thursday.

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“Nepal has spread its wings”

Nepali Times: There have been transformative changes in international diplomacy and geopolitics. But Nepal seems to be stuck.

Pradeep Gyawali: Every country has a set of long-term goals, and some flexible policies that change with the times. Nation states have permanent values like sovereignty, territorial integrity, dignity and independence. These beliefs do not change with changes in governments, they do not even change with a change in governance systems. Our adherence to the concept of *panchashila*, or the United Nations declaration does not change. That is why we also look into our fixed goals and immediate policies based on changes in international and regional relations. We have adapted to new realities from the standpoint of our national interest.

Will this be enough for Nepal to reach its goal of being a middle-income country in the next ten years?

We have to keep in mind global changes, and specifically the geopolitical, economic, demographic changes in Asia. We have to adapt to the fact that our two neighbours are moving forward rapidly. For this, we do not play favourites, or let our relations with one country be at the expense of another. We want to benefit from the economic growth and development of our two neighbours. We are conveying to China and India that a prosperous and stable Nepal is also in their interest. We are telling our development partners that Nepal is a safe country for foreign investment, from where it is easy to export to other countries. We are very sensitive to the fact that 4 million of our young men and women are working abroad and through diplomacy, we want to ensure their security, rights and dignity. And we will extend our involvement and cooperation with multilateral agencies.

The Indian media and intelligentsia are accusing Nepal of tilting towards China.

Both our neighbours are equally important for us. We are not tilting more or less in any direction. We don't compare our relationship with either of them. Neither of our neighbours should forget that Nepal has neighbours on both sides, and ask us to deal only with one of them.

There is lot of talk about Nepal falling into the Chinese debt trap.

I keep reminding people that in the 1990s and 2000s many Latin American countries nearly went bankrupt and had to be bailed out. It was not called a 'debt trap', none of them had loans from China. Greece still has not been able to come out of its economic crisis, and I don't think they are in trouble because they had Chinese investments. These accusations are not based on an objective economic analysis, but a negative attitude towards the rise of China and its political system. Besides, Nepal has the ability to decide what is in its national interest and what is not. If it is in the national interest we can take not just aid, but also loans. But if it is not in our interest, we will not even take assistance.

And China seems to be suspicious of Nepal's involvement in the Indo-Pacific Alliance. Can a Nepal that is already a member of the BRI risk being involved in the Indo-Pacific?

The suspicions about the Indo-Pacific is a storm in a tea cup. Our Chinese friends are not really worried, they are sure that Nepal will not allow anti-Chinese activities. The first official visit by a Nepali foreign minister to Washington recently, and the first American visit at the level of the foreign minister to Nepal have added a new milestone to Nepal-US relations. The Japanese foreign minister visited Nepal after many years, we have also deepened our



relations with India, the EU and other development partners. Nepal has increased its involvement in the international arena. The Prime Minister's recent Europe visit has sent the message that Nepal is no longer what it used to be in South Asia, it has spread its wings. It could be that some cannot digest Nepal's higher international engagement and are uneasy about it. There is no question of Nepal ever joining any strategic alliance. We look at our own national interest, and we also try to make sure that our decisions and involvement does not hurt the interests of our neighbours,

development partners or other friendly countries.

What are the main achievements during your tenure?

During the conflict, Nepal's economic development suffered a setback, it affected our foreign policy and we became an arena for proxies. Now, with the end of the political transition and political stability, we are fixing our mistakes and moving ahead. Nepal used to be a backbencher in the international fora. Now, we are being seen and heard. The Prime Minister's participation at Davos, his one-on-one meeting with

G-20 leaders sent the message that Nepal should now be heard on the world stage. Recently, the head of the IFC said that Nepal was a 'rising star', so that must carry some weight.

We have also restored our relations with our neighbours, after overcoming difficult times. Others have now realised that they must take Nepal along. Despite obstacles, we hosted the BIMSTEC Summit and the Colombo Process Ministerial Conference in Kathmandu. I would consider the past year quite successful.

Interview by Hari Prakash Chand and Binu Pokhrel



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New treatment offers hope for

Hospital has novel solution to heal wounds, but no cure for stigma and ostracisation

Sonia Awale

A revolutionary treatment for open wounds has dramatically reduced the healing period of leprosy patients in Nepal, saving them money and prolonged pain. The new procedure has huge implications internationally, as it reduces the medical cost for treating patients with chronic open wounds.

The technique, called Leukocyte Platelet Rich Fibrin (LPRF), was devised for dental surgery by Nelson Pinto of Chile and has proven to accelerate the healing of tissue. Now, it is also being used to treat hard-to-heal skin lesions of diabetes and leprosy patients.

“LPRF has shown miraculous results in the treatment of chronic wounds in Nepal,” says dental surgeon Sushil Koirala who is pushing the new treatment in government hospitals. “It does not need special equipment, is cheap and, so simple even paramedics and nurses can perform it.”

There are three specialised leprosy hospitals in Nepal: Ananadaban in Lele, Green Pastures in Pokhara, and Lalgadh in Dhanusa. Anandaban Leprosy Hospital 16 km south of Kathmandu has been trying out LPRF on patients with excellent results.

Leprosy is a biblical disease in which bacteria called *Mycobacterium leprae* damages the patient’s nerves and causes the fingers, toes and limbs to go numb, leading to further injuries. Leprosy is treated with antibiotics, but some patients suffer antigen reaction and need long-term rehabilitation.

One of the patients at Anandaban is Phelit Sahi, who was ostracised by her community in Jumla because she had leprosy and had been living in a cave for 25 years. Reporters who had gone to cover a local event in a helicopter found out about her, and flew her to Kathmandu for treatment.

Every week, doctors draw 80cc of blood from her and place it in a special centrifuge for 12 minutes. The clear plasma separates from the red corpuscles and is compressed to form a high-density fibrin clot which is applied to her wound.

“She is among more than 100 patients that we have treated with LPRF, and we have gained enough experience in this technique to lead the way for the world,” says surgeon Indra Bahadur Napit at Anandaban, who presented his results at WHO in Geneva.

Raju Lama was 27 when he was diagnosed with leprosy, but because of late diagnosis, his fingers and toes were deformed, and he had to abandon his job. Doctors recommended amputating his right leg, but became the first patient to get LPRF treatment. He is happy with his “*ragat upachar*” (blood treatment) and says after several LPRF procedures his wounds are healing much faster.

Ram Kumari Sah and her husband from Janakpur have been living with leprosy for decades. She does not feel pain in her hands and legs and often hurts herself. Her lesions become infected and never healed. This week, she was waiting for her turn at the LPRF ward in Anandaban.



The hospital’s LPRF pilot study has shown that 97% of the cases healed completely within seven weeks. The results are so encouraging that news of this revolutionary treatment has spread through word of mouth. A dozen patients, currently at Anandaban were referred by hospitals in India. A team of Nepali doctors is also training doctors in Burma, Bangladesh and Nigeria.

The new treatment is expected to add to Nepal’s success in reducing the prevalence of leprosy from 21 cases per 10,000 in the 1980s to less than 1 today. Nepal was officially declared leprosy-free in 2010 when the prevalence rate came down to 0.79%.

However, in recent years, the prevalence rate is creeping up again, and was 0.94% in 2018. More than 3,000 new patients are diagnosed with leprosy every year, with most of the cases found in Province 2. Experts say this could be a result of active case finding and may not mean that the prevalence is increasing.

Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy but many do not get treatment on time. The

Miraculous healing

When Nelson Pinto’s favourite horse broke its leg, he had two options: either put it down or amputate its leg. The Chilean dentist decided on a third option.

He drew some blood from the horse, spun it in a centrifuge to separate the autologous fibrin matrix which is rich in platelets, and applied the plasma to the horse’s wound. After a few weeks, the horse was cantering again.

Pinto knew about the technique because Leukocyte Platelet Rich Fibrin (LPRF) was developed for dental implant treatment. The surgeon was so convinced that the new process would be useful in treating chronic open wounds that he embarked on a global crusade to spread its use.

Pinto convinced fellow-dentist from Nepal, Sushil Koirala, whom he met at an international conference, to adopt the technique. Since then, Koirala has been trying to convince the government and private hospitals to adopt the procedure, but without much success. However, Anandaban Leprosy Hospital in Lalitpur has seen phenomenal improvements in the healing time of lesions among its patients. (See *adjoining report*)

LPRF is now used to treat diabetic wounds, lesions caused by leprosy, localised burns and surgical wounds, and with this, healing time is often cut in half. It is also being used in cosmetic surgery to remove wrinkles and rejuvenate the skin. The reason why it is so effective, Pinto explained during a trip to Nepal last month, is because it is completely natural and autologous, which means a patient is not receiving any foreign tissues or chemicals.

And the treatment is cheap. A similar treatment used in Europe, which involves a kit manufactured by a multinational pharmaceutical company, costs \$3,000 per patient. LPRF costs only \$30. But it seems as though private hospitals are not interested in this treatment as patients heal so quickly. Many doctors are also not enthusiastic because LPRF can be administered by a paramedic or a nurse.

Says Sushil Koirala: “The reason they don’t like it is because there is no money in it. LPRF only uses the patient’s blood and there are no chemicals or equipment involved for multinational companies to make money out of.”

Koirala’s Punyaarjan Foundation has donated centrifuge machines to a few hospitals in Nepal including the Sushma Koirala Memorial in Sankhu, Anandaban Leprosy Hospital, Bir Hospital in Kathmandu and to three hospitals in Burma with varying degrees of acceptance.

The Bible relates how Jesus Christ miraculously and instantaneously cured ten lepers at the gates of Jerusalem. LPRF may not cure leprosy lesions as quickly, but the procedure is nearly as miraculous.

Nepal's leprosy patients



KUNDA DIXIT



SECOND CHANCE: (clockwise from left) Surgeon Indra Bahadur Napit guides a paramedic during a session of LPRF on a patient with leprosy at Anandaban Hospital.

Phelit Sahi was found in a cave in Jumla where her family abandoned her after she got leprosy.

Kalpana Pariya, 40, has been with Shanti Sewa Griha in Pashupati since she was 14. She married a fellow-leprosy patient and earns a living sewing.

Patients from India wait for consultation at the leprosy hospital in Lele this week.

Dental surgeon Sushil Koirala chats with a leprosy patient undergoing LPRF patient.



PHOTOS: SONIA AWALE

incubation period is five years on average and symptoms may occur within a year, but can also take as long as 30 years to become visible, making the disease difficult to diagnose, and the delay leads to nerve damage and deformities. Leprosy is transmitted through the air during close and frequent contact with untreated cases.

"Leprosy can afflict anyone but there is a correlation between the disease and poverty," explains dermatologist Mahesh Shah. "If one's immune system is strong, the bugs do not do any damage. But poor hygiene and nutrition increases susceptibility. Neglected people from neglected countries suffer from leprosy the most."

Up to 40% of patients undergoing multidrug treatment develop a reaction, and need long-term hospitalisation. Since the patients are poor, most private hospitals are not interested in treating them. At Anandaban, treatment is free as it is supported by government grants and charities.

Since 1% of cases suffer from relapse in Nepal, active door-to-door case finding is important to meet the WHO target of zero leprosy transmission by 2030.

Even more daunting is to

counter societal stigma and ostracisation of leprosy patients. Family members regard the disease as punishment from the gods, and even some medical interns and nurses refuse to touch patients despite patients being on antibiotics and unable to spread the disease. Nepal's laws still allow husbands to divorce their wives if they have leprosy.

"It is a complicated disease made even more so by stigma and ignorance," says Napit, "but with LPRF, we now have a powerful weapon in our arsenal. A vaccine would be the final solution, but no one cares about leprosy. All the funding goes for diseases like HIV." 🇳🇵



Follow our reporters to Anandaban Hospital and watch how a simple, cost effective technology is allowing leprosy patients to heal faster, how Nepal is now a leader in trying out LPRF treatment, and why it is not being picked up by government and private hospitals.

nepalitimes.com



Life after leprosy

Kumar Tamang, 47, is putting the final touches on his painting of an elephant with a bejewelled crown and a howdah. He dips his paintbrush on a palette and paints the border bright red. His fingers are numb and deformed by leprosy, yet he has been painting for 25 years. His love for Mithila art is on full display on the walls, pillars and ceiling of Shanti Sewa Griha, a leprosy clinic set up by the German charity, Leprahilfe, in 1992.

Nearby, in a dark corner, is 50-year-old Nathuni Barai from Nawalparasi, who also has deformed fingers which he uses deftly to draw intricate patterns on a letter pad. Both Tamang and Barai are former patients at Shanti Sewa Griha, making a livelihood from products that Leprahilfe buys from fundraising. Their families live nearby, and their children attend a school set up by the charity.

Now, nearly three decades after the clinic was set up, Shanti Sewa Griha runs a school and orphanage in Budhanilkantha, an organic farm in Sundarjal and a rehabilitation centre near Pashupati.

As the number of patients grew, they were trained in painting, tailoring, quilt making, carpentry and jewellery making as a form of livelihood. Bags, uniforms, paintings, stationery and decorative items are sold as souvenirs

to raise money for the upkeep of the shelters and to pay former patients.

"This is a form of operational therapy which tries to break the vicious circle this disease has formed," said Marianne Grosspietsch, one of the founders of Leprahilfe. "Our goal is to create hope in Nepal."

In 1974, Grosspietsch adopted a young boy named Puskar Limbu who had leprosy like the rest of his family. She took the boy to her home in Germany, treated his leprosy and sent him to school. Limbu went on to pursue a successful career in graphic design in Germany and is a grandfather himself today.

Children of former leprosy patients have also gone on to become nurses and doctors.

Kalpana Pariyar (above) was 14 when she was diagnosed with leprosy before there was serious nerve damage to her fingers. She grew up in the shelter and married fellow-patient Krishna Majhi, whom she took care of until he died eight years ago. She now has a college going daughter and an eight-year-old son.

"I have spent my entire life here. This is my home, this is where I made my life and found peace," says Pariyar, looking up from her sewing machine on which she was weaving dhaka fabric.

Sonia Awale

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Nepal DipTels leaked

Why the big fuss about the trans-Atlantic scandal over the leak of diplomatic cables sent by Britain’s ambassador in Washington? In Nepal, the news has been greeted by loud yawns because our own diplomatic service leaks like a water buffalo on diuretics in the monsoon. In fact, no one bothers to read diplomatic telegrams Nepal’s ambassadors and plenipotentiaries dispatch to the Ministry of Foreigner Affairs in Kathmandu, which explains why they are all top secret.

On the other hand, highly classified cables Kathmandu-based dips send to their capitals are two-way encrypted and marked FYEO. Deep-penetration agents from Nepal’s Department of Military Intelligentsia (DMI), nevertheless managed to successfully hack their servers and lay hands on thousands of confidential documents. The information Kathmandu-based ambassadors send to their capitals is vitally important for the Government of Nepal to find out what the Government of Nepal is up to. That is why we reprint redacted versions of some of these leaked cables below. *Editor’s Note: Top Secret. After you read this, shred this paper and eat it.*

LONDON:
Official Sensitive
To: FCO/SA/NP From: AMBKTM
The NCP is a bunch of inept, insecure, incompetent and dysfunctional commies engaged in vicious infighting, knife-fights over turf and power. Nepal could be at the beginning of a downward spiral, and the govt

could crash and burn. Baluwatar is mired in scandal, and Singha Darbar is beholden to the dodgy Chinese. But Oli may nonetheless emerge from the flames, battered but intact like Yossarian in Catch 22. PS: The Everest marathon went well.

PYONGYANG:
All hail to The Great Leader. All hail to The Dear Leader. All Hail to The Young Un. May petals rain from heaven on The Glorious Immortal Ruling Family. Nothing to report from Kathmandu this week. Over and out.

WASHINGTON:
Highly Classified Top Secret
URGENT To @AmbJohnBolton: Nepal is landlocked and 3,000 miles away from the Strait of Hormuz. It does not have torpedos, but out does have a naval flotilla in Phewa. We are keeping an eye on them in case they are weaponised and threaten global oil and gas supplies.

EXTREMELY URGENT To: POTUS/FLOTUS/IVANKA/VEEP Ex:USEMB/NP
From Merriam-Webster for future reference:
Nipple: (n) /ni-pəl/ The protuberance of a mammary gland upon which in the female the lactiferous ducts open and from which milk is drawn.
Nepal: (n) /nə-p-lē/ Hillary visited twice. Not Sir Ed, the other one.
Button: (n) /bə-tʌn/ A key that can initiate a catastrophic global thermo-nuclear exchange.
Bhutan: (n) /bū-tən/ They sent us 90,000 happy refugees.

NEW DELHI:
EX: EAMKTM TO: @RSJAISHANKAR
SUBJECT: THEY WANT TO BAN OUR VEGGIES STOP ADVISE STOP SUGGEST OIL STOP GAS STOP



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