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.
TOXIC PSEUDO-NATIONALISM

It is hard to say which is more worrisome: that pesticides-laced Indian vegetables were coming into Nepal, or that the government cared to do nothing about it. A recent survey showed that the most used pesticides in the country are among the 103 most hazardous chemicals banned by the 1998 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). This Convention is supported by 166 member states, including Nepal. The Nepal government, however, is one of the few countries not to have signed the Convention. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the ministry of agriculture does not have the necessary equipment to test the quality of the food products coming into the country. A survey by the local NGO, Nepalese Environmental Action, revealed that 98% of the 1,000 vegetable samples tested were contaminated with pesticides.

The pseudo-nationalism of Nepal is a problem we have been discussing for a long time. It is not new, but it is gaining momentum, and it is getting worse. The government has failed to take any action against the import of contaminated vegetables.

In summary, the situation is dire, and the government must take immediate action to protect the health of its citizens. The Nepalese people deserve better, and they deserve a government that is committed to their well-being.
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Nepal's fatalistic ke garne culture

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

Asan 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 also the month to head to spend the dry spell budget quickly. Many of these training programs are never really conducted, but the bills get made and submitted.
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 prosecuting this week against Malaysia’s former 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 RM2 million (approximately $10 million), as a bribe for letting the Malaysian company, Utra 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 Nepali workers between 2013-17 who were migrating to work in Malaysia. Utra 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 Utra 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 receiving at least RM2.5 million (Rs2.5 million) through illegal means, and 45 cases were filed at the High Court, including 27 cases of money laundering, 15 of bribes, and 4 for accepting bribes.

Among the charges of bribery was one that alleged that he accepted more than RM3 million from three companies including Pradana Radiance, which is said to have bribed the passports of Nepali workers and taken them to the Malaysian Embassy in Kathmandu. The charge sheet mentions that Hamidi accepted a total of RM3.3 million in bribes (approximately Rs300,000) from Aiman Shah Idris, the Director of Pradana Radiance. Malaysia’s Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi met Nepal’s then Labour Minister Tek Bahadur Gurung in 2015 and outsourced the work to Utra Kirana Sdn Bhd, which required Nepali migrant workers to apply for work visas through the Kathmandu-based affiliate, Malaysia VLN Nepal. The agency charged Rs2,390 from every Malaysia-bound Nepali worker, and collected Rs1.9 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 Bintanet Sdn Bhd, a tech firm run by Hamidi’s brother-in-law Amin Bin Abdul Nor. Hamidi’s brother

Abdel Hakim Hamidi and ex-Malaysia Environment Minister Abul Kalam also reportedly owned shares in Bintanet.

Bintanet partnered with Nepal Health Professional Federation (NEHPF) to carry out biometric screening through 19 medical centres which charged Rs4,300 from each migrant worker for biometrics. Bintanet denied the allegations, and in a statement published in July 2018, they hinted that it could take legal action against Nepal 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 Rs750, and could have medical tests done at any of 100 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) in October 2018 to resume sending workers. The Ministry 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 racket in visa processing remains the same,” Bista told Nepal 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.

Addressed reporting by Abdul Rashid in Kuala Lumpur
Nepali women take to media to expose abuse

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

Reeti KC

A

fter a flurry of accusations by Nepali women of sexual harassment by co-workers, bosses, teachers, family members or strangers in public, 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 issues 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 able to hit back, I can write about it,” said Durga Karki, who wrote a courageous account in Annapurna Post titled #Nemo.

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.

On Twitter, there are well-known media personalities, recently shared a write up in Kantipur titled ‘#Nemo’ which recounted incidents of harassment she has 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 Thami. “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 Hara Ko Kuchha’ in Bhadra 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

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

One of the most talked about recent write ups is by Kanta Sharma because it was about her former husband, Megh Raj Sharma who is better known as the singer ‘Manju’.

The two are literary personalities, but Kanta Sharma writes about how despite being educated and supposedly independent, she suffered physical and mental exploitation from her husband. Sharma is educated, yet I was like a doll inside a toy house and served as a sex slave.” Sharma, now 74, applauded.

Sharma and her son filed a defamation case in the Lalitpur District Court against Manju, but Sharma was not happy with the court’s decision. When a DNA test proved that Manji was indeed the father of their youngest son, the court fined him a mere Rs100.

“Our society is infected with patriarchy. Women have to mustered 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.

Yadav University recently filed a sexual harassment FIR against economic teacher Jagadish Muni Koirala, but he is absconding. Simal Acharya who edits the weekend section of Annapurna Post and published both Kanta 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 encourage others to do the same. #CatastropheKTM on Instagram gives space for women to share testimonies, and was opened by a 36-year-old woman who says she was frequently harassed. She proffer anonymity for now, but 16th 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.
Indra Shilpakar is following the ancestral profession of a traditional woodcarver. His works adorn temples, and he is now being recognized as an artist as well. He balances the tension between tradition and modernity.

Indra Shilpakar is following the ancestral profession of a traditional woodcarver. His works adorn temples, and he is now being recognized as an artist as well. He balances the tension between tradition and modernity.
To make up for monsoon slack, Nepal opts for spiritual tourism

Sonam Cheokyi Lama

When 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 Himalayas 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 pilgrimages inside Kathmandu and around various sacred places in the Himalayas.

Alex d’Artois and Susse Budolfen (pictured above) started Himalayan Hermitage after spending many years in Nepal studying Buddhist, 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...
partners to facilitate meditation pilgrimages in Nepal, India, Bhutan with spiritual journeys into sacred valleys like Tsam, Solu Khumbu, Dolpo, Mustang and Manang where they practice meditation amidst sublime scenery.

"These sacred valleys of the Nepal have a serenity that is hard to explain, they have healing properties," adds d’Arts, a Canadian who has studied Buddhist philosophy.

Himalayan Heritage 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-reflection 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 Sine 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," claims Kanchu Bhatti at Nepal Tourism Board (NTSB).

Kopan’s Russian-Hollywood connection

One of the first centres to promote meditation tourism in Kathmandu Valley’s Kopan Monastery which now gets more than 1,500 students every year for 10-15 day classes. The history of Kopan is closely tied to the legendary daughter of Russian emigre Tina 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 Arik Thubten Chokyi Wangpo (above, left) and was ordained in Dharma by Gyurme Rinpoche. She built the land on which Kopan Monastery now stands in Kathmandu Valley for the Nepal Mahayana Gompa. An offer that she set up with Lama Thubten (above, right) whom Rachevsky met in Darjeeling. "Kopan became a refuge for those finding materialism and artificial modern lifestyles," explains Geshe Lobang Sherap, "Among them was Tina. She met our guru, Lama Vetshe and Lama Tsepin Rinpoche and became their first disciple in 1968."

The first of 15 American tourists came to Kopan in 1969 to attend a meditation course taught by Gyurme Wangpo. The Rachevsky died of cancer while on a meditation retreat in Thame in Khumbu in 1973 at the age of 42.
Kora Cycling Challenge
On the 5th edition of Kuthumari, Kora, a 100-km cycling challenge that invites cyclists from all over Nepal to take part. The challenge includes a time trial on the famous Kuthumari village for the winner of the race. The race is open to all age groups and is suitable for both road and mountain cyclists. It is the perfect opportunity for cyclists to showcase their skills and compete against others from around the world.

Doodle Workshop
For kids aged 8-15, 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. 10 July, 10-12am, Kantoyna Innovation Centre, Gyanpath, (01) 4443996.

P.C. Showcase 63
Hosted by Photo Centre, the 63rd P.C. Showcase 63 gathers photographers that participate in exhibitions around the world as they showcase their work from the International Street Photography Workshop and the International Film Photography Workshop. 10 July, 7pm onwards, Mimosa Outdoor Life Style, Narayanelu, (01) 44482379.

GETAWAY

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Horns and Bones
Ever been curious about what happens to unused animal parts? At Shali Craft, you can explore how neglected buffalo horns from around Kathmandu are upcycled to create custom and personalized jewelry. 10 July, 7pm onwards, Shali Craft, Godawari, (01) 4448927.

Philosophy Discussion
Organized by Nepal Literature Society, a philosophy discussion led by Dr. Nishit Pradhan. 10 July, 7pm, Martin Chauvet, Nepalgunj, (01) 4446207.

France-Nepal Art Exhibition
Celebrating 70 years of French-Nepali diplomatic relations with a collaborative painting exhibition by Nepal and French contemporary artists during the opening on the 16th at 4:30pm and throughout July. 17-17 July, 10am-7pm, Alliance Francaise de Kathmandu, Pashupatinath, (01) 4448237.

Nomads Transition
In the newly renovatedibaloka Art Cafe, join Nomads Foundation, a local lokale cafe. for a night of fusion jazz music. 10 July, 8pm onwards, Bihaloka Art Cafe and Bar, (01) 4448237.

Zen Bistro & Cafe Restaurant
Zen Bistro offers some of the best Red Curries and Phe (Bho) for anyone who wants to venture into the palatable world of Thai food. Try the refreshing Papaya Salad on a hot summer day in warm bowls of Tom Yum on a cool monsoon night. 10am-11pm, Bandarkosi, (01) 4443805.

Tasneem King’s Kitchen
Tasneem’s mouth-watering authentic Balochi-Muslim cuisine is a must for anyone who loves Taiwanese, spicy and savoury dishes. From slow-cooked Dum Biryanis to traditional 10-course Bhoonis, Tasneem is a plate that brings food lovers together. Open 10am-10pm, (01) 4443805.

Deepak Rajacharya & Rhythm Band
I listen to the rhythmic Deepak Rajacharya and Rhythm Band play their greatest hits. 10 July, 7pm onwards, Lord of the Drinks, (01) 44482379.

Acoustic Friday Night
Unwind from the busy week with chill music by Nobel Peace Prize winner and Sahi Jams on Airtight Bar. 10 July, 7pm onwards, Airtight Bar, Kathmandu, (01) 44482379.

Places Jazz Night
Start off the weekends with some jazz tunes with fellow jazz lovers at one of Kathmandu’s favorite musical hubs. 10 July, 7pm onwards, Places Restaurant and Bar, (01) 44482379.

KuKu & Fiddlers Band
Listen to an eclectic medley of Nepali songs while munching on traditional Newari dishes. 10 July, 7pm onwards, Sooso’s, New Newari Restaurant, Thapathali, (01) 44482379.

Hankook Sarang
Enjoy a variety of Korean dishes like Tteokbokki, Gambalbi and Bobalbi. You can also sample our unique Samgyeopsal side-dishes with Korean BBQ. You can cook the meat yourself and enjoy the tempting taste of pork and chicken while you wait. 10am-10pm, Taikung, Taisa, (01) 44482379.

Managamo Nepal
Managamo is a fun fusion restaurant that serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Enjoy Mala Rolls, Sashimi, Dumplings and more and all with a side of cocktails in this new quixotic eatery. 10am-10pm, Parkgarden, Lojatpur, (01) 44482379.

Air Quality Index
Kathmandu 5 - 11 July

| Date       | AQI | Category   | Air Quality
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<td>10 July</td>
<td>40</td>
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Daily average concentrations of four pollutants (PM2.5, PM10, NO2, and SO2) in Kathmandu have been significantly increased since the lockdown. However, especially during the recent days, the concentrations of pollutants have decreased and are below the national and international guidelines. The government has taken several measures to reduce pollution levels, including the ban on diesel vehicles, restrictions on the use of coal, and increased use of alternative energy sources. The air quality index chart shows that the air quality in Kathmandu has improved significantly over the past week.

Dine out in style and enjoy the freshest ingredients in the heart of Kathmandu. Visit our website for more information on our menu items and pricing. We look forward to welcoming you to our restaurant soon!
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 but looks like the many cowsheds that dot this district in the central Tarai.

But it is actually a classroom for some of the 134 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 Index like health, life expectancy, and gender equality, Rautahat trails even remote mountain districts like Humla, Bajhang and Bajura.

Its literacy rate (47%) 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 63%.

"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 Sah, mayor of Dhangadi Bhagawati rural municipality where the school is located.

But Gokarna Dhawari Karki, DED 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 Pauwan 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 Saptari, 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 such 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 Chaurar 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 134 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 26% of the population mostly send children to madrassas.

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.
365 is not just a number

As 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 starts at the computer inside a huge tangle, and there is one grimming with porcupine quills popping out all over his back.

“Those animals portray human emotions, and the behaviors that we human beings have come to associate with them,” explains the artist. “For example, an elephant symbolizes weight. I have played around with the concept of ‘stati lai palere sakther’ (to provide for an elephant), which symbolizes a great burden.” The tangle is a hungry hair, and the brittling quills of the porcupine obviously represent anger.”

Ranjit used animals because he found it easier to identify with them. After years of studying 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 2016, 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 tart 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.

The result is a series of sketches that almost overwhelm the viewer with their emotional intensity. The sketches also document the life 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 his getting well 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 of his emotional journey, but a documentation of society as well.

Some of his works are also set in social reality like traffic jams caused by VIP motorcades, and the destruction of forests to build a new airport in Nepal. They are all drawn in clean and precise lines, some are whimsical, others use fantasy as the real world bleeds with the imaginary. When creatures walk beside humans, masked demons mock humans and animals, monsters and fairies live underwater, and elves pop 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

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HAPPENINGS

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

HOWZAT: Nepal Under-19 cricket team beats Hong Kong by 6 wickets to win U-19 Eastern Asia 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 Kofo F. Samurarma and honorary consul of Indonesia to Nepal Chandra Prasad Dhukul jointly inaugurate the Indonesian Batik Festival at Hotel Annapurna in Kathmandu on Thursday.

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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 life 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 his getting well 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 of his emotional journey, but a documentation of society as well.

Some of his works are also set in social reality like traffic jams caused by VIP motorcades, and the destruction of forests to build a new airport in Nepal. They are all drawn in clean and precise lines, some are whimsical, others use fantasy as the real world bleeds with the imaginary. When creatures walk beside humans, masked demons mock humans and animals, monsters and fairies live underwater, and elves pop 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

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Helping Hands: German Ambassador to Nepal Roland Schulz arranges an agreement with the Prime Ministry to provide grant assistance worth €14 3 million to be used in solar power, maternal and child health projects.
“Nepal has spread its wings”

The Indian media and intelligentsia are accusing Nepal of tilting towards China. Both our neighbors 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 neighbors 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 too went bankrupt and had to be bailed out. It was not called a ‘debtor trap’, none of them had learnt 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 RCEP be taken into 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 here 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 neighbors, 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 backbench in the international fora. Now, we are being seen and heard. The Prime Minister’s participation at Davos, his one-on-one meeting with C-20 leaders sent the message that Nepal should now be heard on the world stage. Recently, the head of the IMF said that Nepal was a “rising star”, so that must carry some weight. We have also restored our relations with our neighbors, after overcoming difficult times. Others have now realized 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 Bal Prakash Chaudhary and Abu Baker

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Applicants must have fluency in English, an ability to relate to students and a willingness to learn.

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Honorary Consul General of Czech Republic to Nepal, MO of MAW Group of Companies

for being rewarded

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by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czech Republic. The award was presented by

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New treatment offers hope for

Hospital has novel solution to heal wounds, but no cure for stigma on stigmatisation

Sonika Awale

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

The technique, called Leprosy Pliofilm Rich Flurry (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: Anandadhun in Lalitpur, Green Pastures in Pokhara, and Lalgaid in Dhanusa. Anandadhun Leprosy Hospital 160 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 infections. Leprosy is treated with antibiotics, but some patients suffer antigen reaction and need long-term rehabilitation.

One of the patients at Anandadhun is Pushpa Shrestha, who was ostracised by her community in Jharkhanda 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, flew her to Kathmandu for treatment.

Every week, doctors drain 800cc 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.

“The treatment involves 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 Dr. Subhash Koirala at Anandadhun, who presented his results at WHO in Geneva.

Kamal Mahendra, 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 recomputed the length of his right leg, but because the first patient got LPRF, treatment. He is happy with the result. “The procedure is much faster,” Dr. Koirala says after several LPRF procedures his wounds are healing much faster.

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

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 Anandadhun 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 1990s 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 rambles 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 walking again.

Pinto knew about the technique because Leukocyte Plasma Rich Flurry (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 convened fellow-dentists 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, Koirala’s legacy 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, localized 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 $5. But it turns out that even 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.

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 an institutional company to make money out of it.”

Koirala’s Punyaganj Foundation has donated centrifuge machines to a few hospitals in Nepali hospitals. Yushma Koirala Memorial Hospital in Samaiti, Koirala’s legacy hospital, Bir Hospital in Kathmandu and three hospitals in Burma with varying degrees of acceptance.

The blame falls on the fact that the research is miraculous 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

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 affect 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 increase 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 Anandabazar, 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’s 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 worse by stigma and ignorance,” says Nepal. “But with L2RP, 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.”

SECOND CHANCE: (clockwise from left) Surgeon Indra Subedi helps a paramedic during a session of L2RP on a patient with leprosy at Anandabazar Hospital.

Photo: Sah was found in a cave in Jumla where his family had abandoned him after she got leprosy.

Kalpana Parajy, 40, has been with Shanti Sewa Griha inhippajli 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 Jhapa this week.

Dental surgeon Sushil Kanla chats with a leprosy patient undergoing L2RP treatment.

Life after leprosy

Kumar Tamang, 47, is putting the final touches on his painting at an ex-servicemen’s building and a cowshed. He dips his paintbrush on a plate and paints the border bright red. His fingers are numb and disfigured 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 care centre run by the German charity, Lepra International.

Nearing, in a dark room, is a 50-year-old Nauthari Barai from Nawapani, 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 leprosy patients buy from fundraising. Their families live nearby, and their children attend a school set up by the charity.

Now, nearly three decades after the disease was set up, Shanti Sewa Griha runs a school and orphanage in Butwal, and an educational centre near Thahalajali.

As the number of patients grew, they were trained in painting, tailoring, quilt making, carpentry and jewelry 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 shelter and to pay former patients.

“This is a form of occupational therapy which tries to break the vicious cycle this disease has formed,” said Mairamer Grinspan, one of the founders of Lepra International. “Our goal is to ensure hope in Nepal in 1974, Companion adopted a young boy named Sujal Limbu who had leprosy like the rest of his family. She took the boy to her home in Germany, trained 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 Pant (above) was 14 when she was diagnosed with leprosy before she 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 18-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 Pant, looking up from her sewing machine on which she was weaving shala fabric.

Samina Asale
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 nomenclatures dispatch to the Ministry of Foreign 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 Intelligence (DMI), nevertheless managed to successfully hack their servers and key 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 those leaked cables below. Reader’s Note: Top Secret. After you read this, shred this paper and eat it.

LONDON: Official Secret
To: ECOSAP/ from: AMBER

The NNP is a bunch of idiots, morons, imbeciles and dyplomatic cretins engaged in vicious infighting, fake fights over turf and paper. Nepal could be at the beginning of a downward spiral, and the govt could crash and burn. Baluwatar is mined in scandal, and Singha Durbar is beholding to the dodgy Chinese. But Oil may nonetheless emerge from the flames, battered but must like Yosarian in Catch 22. PS: The Everest marathons went well.

PYONGYANG: All hail to The Great Leader. All hail to The Dear Leader. All hail to The Young Un. May pesas rain from heaven on The Glorious Immortal Ruling Family. Hat tip to report from Kathmandu. It’s work, over and out.

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

EXTREMELY URGENT: To POTUS/FLOTUS/ BAE/SEXY: ECOSAP/ From: Mr/Mrs/Minister (for future reference.

Nipple: To: AMBER The presence of a mensa gimmick, which in the female, the luscious ducts open and from which milk is drawn.

Nepal: To: AMBER/4 Fury visited twice. Not Sir Ed, the other one.

Button: To: AMBER A key that can initiate a Global to Global thermo-static exchange.

Bluestar: To: AMBER/1 They sent us 9000 happy refugees.

NEW DELHI: EX: MASHIMA/ To: GROSS/HARARI SUBJECT: THEY WANT TO BAN OUR VEGGIES/ STOP ADIPOSE STOP SUGAR/ OK, STOP GAS STOP.

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