DISREPAIR

If this is the state of the streets in the capital, imagine what it is like in the rest of the country.

Exactly a year ago this week, Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa assured Parliament’s Good Governance Committee that the government would “coordinate with stakeholders” to fix roads in the capital.

“Due to the negligence of contractors, development projects have not moved ahead and efforts have been made to get them going in coordination with concerned ministries to improve the conditions of roads in Kathmandu,” Thapa was quoted as saying by state news agency RSS on 14 August 2018.

A year has passed. And like most government promises, it was never kept. Kathmandu’s roads this monsoon are in an even worse state than last year. Streets dug up for laying water mains or sewers are abandoned like booby traps, like this pit in Sasepokh (left). After locals along the Boura-Lagharpur stretch blocked the street earlier this year in protest, the government hurriedly started repairs. But the monsoon turned the road into a quagmire again.

It is worse in the hinterland, where not only are the roads never repaired but new ones are being dug through the mountains just to spend budgets, unloading rockfalls on farms and settlements below.

Government SUVs drive along roads that are in poor shape because the budgets to repair them have been spent on expensive cars. Our investigation (page 4-5) shows that in the past three years, federal and provincial governments spent a massive Rs258 million on buying SUVs. This may be an absolute majority government, but it has been an absolute failure in service delivery. Meanwhile, the federal government this fiscal year spent 4.4% of its total budget on buying vehicles even though most infrastructure is abandoned or half complete after private contractors with political protection absconded with money.

Read more PAGE 4-5

Driving Nepal deeper into debt

QUAGMIRE

nepalitimes.com
KASHMIR AND KATHMANDU

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

At a meeting of Nepalese Times (then the UK) on 18 August 2002, important decisions were made on every aspect of the newspaper. Each day of the week was set to be covered by different sections of the newspaper: Monday's focus was on technology, Tuesday was for business, Wednesday was for education, Thursday was for sports, Friday was for entertainment, Saturday was for society, and Sunday was for culture. This meeting was attended by all the editors and journalists of the newspaper.

In Kathmandu, a group of students held a protest against the government's decision to introduce English as the medium of instruction in schools. The students were demanding the reinstatement of their native language as the medium of instruction. The protest was peaceful, and the government eventually listened to the students' demands.

In Kashmir, the situation remained tense due to the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan. The ceasefire agreement signed in 1993 was not fully implemented, leading to frequent cross-border firing incidents. The situation was further complicated by the presence of militant groups operating in the region. The Indian government continued to increase troop strength in the area to maintain peace and stability.

On 14 August, both houses of the Indian Parliament passed the bill for the abrogation of article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. The bill was passed with a majority of 36 votes in the Lok Sabha and 12 votes in the Rajya Sabha. The bill was signed into law by President Pratibha Patil. This decision led to widespread protests and unrest in the region.

16-22 AUGUST 2013 | W.F.73

LIVING BELOW NEPAL'S MELTING MOUNTAINS

Biden's historic trip to the Himalayas

Living below Nepal's melting mountains

by Abhishek Kumar

With the world's lowest point, a high in the Himalayas, the world is witnessing a dramatic change. The Himalayas, the world's highest mountain range, are melting at an alarming rate. The melting of glaciers and ice caps is leading to the rise of sea levels and changes in the world's climate. This is causing a threat to the world's biodiversity and the lives of millions of people who depend on these resources.

The Himalayas are home to some of the world's most diverse ecosystems. The melting of glaciers is affecting the water supply for millions of people in the region, as well as the habitats of many species. The melting of glaciers is also leading to the loss of traditional livelihoods, such as herding and fishing.

The Himalayas are not only a natural wonder but also a symbol of the world's interconnectedness. The melting of glaciers is affecting the entire planet, and the world needs to come together to find solutions.

Most popular on Twitter

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EUROPE

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TURKISHAIRLINES.COM
A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER
Driving Nepal deeper into debt

Ramesh Kumar

In the past three years, federal and provincial governments have spent a massive Rs216.5 million on vehicles. If we add the budget allocated to vehicles this fiscal year, it adds up to more than Rs250 million, not including the budgets for cars of local governments and projects.

All three spheres of government are ignoring their own declaration to minimise expenses, and are wasting money on frivolous items. And the irony of it all is that the SUVs are driving along roads that are in advanced stages of disrepair because the money has all gone for expensive cars.

Though the government has been slow to provide development and service delivery, vehicle-related expenses have grown six-fold since 2013. The federal government is the biggest spender; provincial governments accounted for just Rs10 million spent on cars in the past three years.

This fiscal year the federal government spent 2.6% of its development budget on vehicles. While it is permanently unable to fully disburse that budget, it spent four times more on vehicles than the amount allocated, even transferring money from other budget lines to do so.

"Using unspent development budget to buy vehicles is just an unnecessary expense," says former government secretary Purna Chandra Bhattarai. Other experts say that it is not just elected representatives, bureaucrats are also draining state resources.

According to the 56th report of the auditor-general, among the 800 vehicles in the 22 Singha Deuche-based ministries, only 522 are operational. Some are not being used even though they are in running condition — new vehicles are being bought before old ones are phased out. After an order from the PM's office, 205 vehicles were handed over to various organisations this year, including many that were still in working order.

"Buying new vehicles involves kickbacks, so the tendency to buy new vehicles is increasing," says former finance secretary Rameshwar Khanal.

Your four Scorpios were bought for deputy attorney generals last July, not because they were necessary but because the existing five-year-old vehicles were considered too old. At the end of the last fiscal year, 16 Scorpios were purchased for the chieft of

Turkish Airlines to India

Turkish Airlines is a new sponsor of Argentine football team River Plate. Turkish is the first airline to sponsor River Plate, also known as 'The Mill Stampeders'. The three-year agreement will see the Turkish Airlines logo displayed on River Plate's jerseys until the end of the 2021-22 season.

Nepal Lit Festival

The Bookworm Kathmandu has announced that the NLI Nepal Literature Festival will be held in conjunction with Paris Book Fair from 5 to 10 December. The winner of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature will be announced in Paris on 16 December. Celebrations including Indian MP and writer Shashi Tharoor, poet and screenwriter Jayant Keshar and actors Shabana Azmi have confirmed attendance.

Coca-Cola ‘AgriPack’

Coca-Cola has launched the 250 ml ‘Agri-Pack’, offering a new driving experience for Nepali consumers. Made using the latest packaging innovations, consumers can find Coca-Cola, Sprite and Fanta in the new pack.
Provinces move into high gear

Last year, including budget allocated this year

663
359
413
684
923

SOURCE: PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

the House of Representatives and National Assembly, displacing 10-year-old vehicles.

The National Inclusion Commission bought five vehicles costing at least 64.4 million for its chief and 4 members. But to date the commission has only one member — the others have not yet been appointed. The vehicles are sunshine and stored on the office premises. Many other new commissions have already bought vehicles for their yet-to-be appointed members.

According to the auditor general’s report, there are 1,333 officer-level officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, and 1,577 vehicles in operation. There are 174 vehicles for 50 officers in the Finance Ministry and 331 vehicles for 94 officials in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). Many senior officials are accused of having separate vehicles for home and office use.

According to a guideline issued by the Finance Ministry, new vehicles should be bought only for newly-established organizations.

Other offices should buy new vehicles only every 15 years. This guideline is considered legally binding, so ministries and other bodies are actually breaking the law. Only officials at joint secretary level and above are supposed to get vehicles, but today deputy secretaries and even junior officials are riding in government vehicles. Some officials have even acquired the habit of buying a new vehicle immediately after they are promoted or transferred.

Joint Secretary Bimal Kutwar of the PMO says the office has made efforts to have an inventory of vehicles in working order, but hasn’t succeeded because of lack of cooperation from government entities. The Ministry of Finance does have guidelines on the capacity of vehicles that can be bought, but they are routinely ignored. Even money allocated to build public infrastructure is being spent on vehicles.

Repair and maintenance of vehicles is another area full of irregularities, including money being allocated for the upkeep of vehicles that have been in storage for years. Kataria says the vehicles have become a long-term burden on the state. The Ministry of Finance continues to dole out huge sums of money to keep officers happy, and the government has taken no steps to regulate it, despite the fact that the Finance Ministry has issued guidelines to reduce operating costs. This includes a rule that government vehicles should not have private license plates, but this is also ignored.

The government also has a policy of buying electric, but continues to buy fossil fuel vehicles. Former Finance Secretary Rameshwar Khanal, who himself drives an electric Kia Soul, explains: “There are fewer dealers of electric vehicles in the market, so there are less kickbacks in their purchase. Besides, you cannot make up fake bills of repair and maintenance of electric cars, which is why they are less popular.”

RAISING THE BAR
Nepal’s BEST VODKAS

"निम्नाली २ सहकार्य सहित गरी खुर्सकता: लैलिक हिसा विक्रिय छौट्ने दिनिए छिन्नाली"

"लैलिक हिसा विक्रिय १६ दिने अभियान: हिसाबिल्को समाचारको हाली आफ्ना छिन्नाली "

"लैलिक हिसा विक्रिय हासी आफ्ना: निर्माण नसील सय २ समाचारमुक्त समाज छिन्नाली "

Nepal’s Most Loved #1 Vodka
Nepal’s Ultra Premium Vodka
Nepal’s First Gold Infused Premium Vodka
A working mother’s guilt

I like to consider myself an exemplary parent, but probably all mothers think that. The truth is that my two sons were dropped into the wake of my own enthusiasm. Lucky their father seldom left home, so my selfish priorities may not have always featured family first. Our photo books support me in providing a perpetually and sometimes idyllic childhood, but always to suit my travels, my schedules and my work in wildlife, conservation and adventure.

Two little boys posing in checkered shirts on a Khumbu chorten; peering out of a tent on a remote tundra hillside with early morning peaks behind, bundled in life jackets hanging on through the white water, and embracing an elephant deep in the jungle grasslands. There were many years of birthday cakes for Tim Jack Sangay or Rinchen, moulded out of elephant dung, elaborately food and delivered by a decorated hut, a perilous delight with everyone valiantly keeping up the well worn joke to please the grown-ups.

Brought up in Kathmandu, our boys attended the British School until their early teens, both speak Nepali like natives, and both consider this Valley their home. As children they were forced to follow me on various missions – the picture albums show coconut-throwing competitions in Sabah, canoeing in the back waters of Sundarbans, volcano trekking in Indonesia, horse-riding in Mongolia, cycling in Vietnam, rock climbing in Kenya and abseiling in Wyoming. After a particularly arduous trek across wailing rivers and lost in the Chaudhary hills, Rinchen declared: “Never again, Mum.”

There were the usual close shavee shavee as toddlers, Sangay rambling down a flight of stairs, almost being swept into a flooded stream, crushing from the top steps of a slide, and falling backwards off a sofa through our sitting room window; the ensuing wound’s 12 stitches still show as a white scoured patch when his thick dark hair is cut short.

Rinchen must have been less reckless as I recall few childhood mishaps, but instead a healthy curiosity and keen observation. Driving to school one morning a small voice from the back seat asked: “What are those dogs doing Mummy?”

“Mating, darling,” I replied, with an attempt of innocence. There was a long pause. “Looks like awfully hard work to me!”

One result of their upbringing was an early affinity with animals. Sangay’s first spoken word was “tigal”. Stepping for a break at the riverside village of Makalu, its fish delicacies being skewered ready for the barbecue at the shop front. “Don’t it hurt the fish?” asked Sangay, aged three. I was stuck for a Gibbs answer.

He allowed the same concern for a pig on the solid iron spit resting over a pit of burning coals in front of the Lodge — a favourite for special celebrations that could take 24 hours to cook, laboriously turned by relay of men through the night.

Rinchen’s self-preservation served him well as a pageboy, aged two, at my brother’s wedding in Chelsea Old Church. Both boys made it down the aisle behind the beautiful bride in their tights, with the other usual clothes, white tights and ballet shoes (progressing they’d look “just like Nina Turtle”, when Sangay aged four refused to put his on. But during the service, Rinchen was last to remain standing alone in attendance behind the happy couple, all the other older bridesmaids and pageboys having fled back to their parents in the pews.

I can hardly bear to recall the time they were missing at my mother’s home on that same British ski. (“They’ll be absolutely safe playing out in the garden,” she had said, never dreaming they would venture beyond the hawthorn hedges.)

After an agonising half hour, they were found wandering near the main Oxford London railway line a couple of fields away. I was soaked chatting with mountainbuilding friends when we noticed they were gone. After a frantic search with thudding heart, we heard the reassuring announce: “Would the mother of two small boys please collect them from lost property.” A kindly old Kiwi couple had found them on the sidewalk outside and handed them in.

Rinchen had done his python encounter during a gap year job at a river running camp near Rishikesh, but never expected to meet a python so happily. Finding a python being burned by villagers mistakenly to protect their livestock, they reported this violation of an endangered species to the Uttarakhand wildlife authorities. Three of the team were arrested for their pains, and the poor snake died anyway.
Worldwide women’s activist

Bandana Rana has risen from local campaigner to a policy-making role on gender rights at the UN

Sewa Bhattarai

The first Nepali elected as a member of the committee of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), journalist and gender rights activist Bandana Rana is looking forward to further challenges after being elected a Vice Chair of the committee this year.

Rana started out as a journalist more than 30 years ago, reading and producing the news on Nepal Television. Working on reports and documentaries about rural women, she wanted to go deeper into the field. Eventually, she co-founded Saathi, one of the first organisations working on domestic violence in Nepal, and Sandhi Charita, a forum for women journalists. In those roles, Rana was involved in drafting shadow reports for CEDAW — analyses on the status of women drafted by civil society and non-government organisations to complement the government reports that are submitted every four years. Friends then suggested that she contest the election for the CEDAW committee.

“I was inspired by the prospect of being a part of that mechanism, since I have worked in gender rights for more than 30 years now,” says Rana.

She remembers the whirlwind three months of campaigning as she met every ambassador in Kathmandu, others in Delhi, travelled to Istanbul to meet foreign ministers, and to New York three times to convince countries to vote for her.

When the results came out, Rana had secured sixth place among 23 spots, and was the only South Asian member on the committee. In January she was also elected one of the Vice Chairs and is now part of CEDAW’s policy-making body, a rare position for a Nepali.

In that role, Rana reviews the reports submitted to CEDAW by governments and civil society’s shadow reports, and conducts dialogues with countries. She tries to focus on violence against women. “I like to look at the mechanisms in place to address these issues in all spheres — economic, political, and social. What is the engagement of the media? How do countries engage men and boys in combating violence? Are there enough shelters? What are the ways victims can access justice, and how are justice officials sensitised?”

For Rana, her role is also an opportunity to take her local experience global. “I think I bring many unique points to the table,” she says. “As a citizen of a small South Asian country, I have that perspective to a global scale. CEDAW has a majority of legal experts and their language tends to be highly legal. As a communicator, I simplify the communication style of CEDAW so that the dialogue is constructive and not intimidating to member countries.”

One wonder if such activism has had an impact on the situation of women in Nepal. Rana thinks it has. “Today we are openly talking about domestic violence and sexual abuse, while these ‘private issues’ were taboo topics before. The change is apparent even in rural women. Nepal’s conflict has taught them to institutionalise themselves and seek support in groups,” she says.

That leads us to the women’s movement. Rana is all for a modern, modern way that takes the fight forward. “I myself was molested when I was younger, by a relative who attempted to assault me when I was coming home. I did not dare to speak up about it to my parents, because those were the days when victims would be ashamed of these assaults,” she remembers.

Things have changed now, and the women who spoke up have encouraged others, especially younger girls, to speak out. This changes relations in their families and communities. “Women are now bolder and are bolder and are bolder and do many things. But I say that only the men who misbehave have any reason to fear,” Rana says.

Rana is clear about future priorities. “In the past few years, Nepal has made great progress in laws but their implementation is weak, and that is where the next challenge lies,” she says. “We must invest in finances and knowledge, and we must put in place a strong monitoring system to check if our system is working. Also, strong international political will to solve these problems is a must.”

MOMICOLUFA
Sonam Choekyi Lama in Dolpo

The dazzling beauty of Dolpo is confined mostly to the ink-blue waters of Phoksundo Lake, which overshadows the district’s other destinations.

The remote valleys of Nepal’s most remote region hide the ancient monasteries and culture of the Bon religion, an animist faith that is said to have existed in the Tibetan rim lands for 16,000 years — long before Buddhism got here.

Today, Bon Po has been overtaken by Buddhism and later Communism in Tibet, but it still thrives in parts of the plateau that today lie in Nepal, like Dolpo. The 600-year-old Thasing Tholing Bon Monastery, with the Phungmo Gompa, are the jewels in the crown of Bon animism.

Thashing Tholing is a cluster of nine private monasteries and one community gompa a 15-minute walk from Tso village. What is distinctive about the adherents of Bon Po here is their deep reverence for nature, so that conservation of the ecosystem is not some outside concept but deeply ingrained in the belief system.

Killing for meat was banned, so many villagers in this arid land used to chase wild animals to the edge of the cliff, where they fell to their deaths.

Appalled by the cruelty, Lama Tenzin Tsultrim founded this monastery many centuries ago so that the killing would stop, and the wildlife would be protected,” explained Khenpo Nyima Samdup Lama, the present head monk of Thasing Tes. Thasing means ‘protected cliff’, and tso is ‘lake’.

Through the centuries till today, the monastery acts as a religious warden of the holy Phoksundo Lake and its surroundings, protecting its wildlife and restoring the ecological balance of the mountains.

Elders who live near the lake remember when musk deer and other animals came down to the shores to drink water, and ruined the forests surrounding the monastery. With poaching the numbers declined, but as the monastery actively preserves traditional conservation customs the animals have started to return.

The Bon worship the landscape, mountains, lakes, rocks, rivers and wildlife. In short, nature is sacred, as illustrated in this chant in their dialect: "we are the earth’s guardian", which means ‘we are guardians of nature’. Generations of Dolpo Po, therefore, have grown up with an innate understanding of how nature is linked to their daily lives.

The Bon monastery is a habitat for musk deer, blue sheep and other small mammals, which are prey for the snow leopard and the Himalayan wolf. Given its relatively recent genesis, Phoksundo does not have fish and conservationists say carp must be taken out to introduce any alien aquatic species.

We are now seeing more and more snow leopards on the prowl in the forests around the monastery, and in the cliffs above. In winter, when there are fewer people, they even venture out to the shores to drink water,” said resident monk Geshe Nyima Samdup.
showing visitors around the shrine. Although Shey Phoksundo National Park was set up in 1984, it was the long-established Bon tradition that really helped conservation on the ground, says snow leopard researcher Takling Lamu Lama. "Local conservation traditions were very important for preserving the nature and culture of Dolpo, and the two are linked. The national park is only 35 years old, but the gompas have been here for 500 years," she added.

Besides Thamser Tholing in Ringmo, the other cradle of Bon civilization in Dolpo is the less travelled Puniko Valley. This wild and scenic landscape is the lap of Mt Kanjiroba is two hours off the main Dolpo Trail, and few visitors ever come here. The villagers worship Kanjiroba as the ‘ruler of kings’ as just as they reverse the cliffs, streams, waterfalls, trees and ravines that make up the topography. The local Bon dialect has words for the: Yul Lha (lord of the land), Yul Sa Sui Sa (great for nature god), Stman Mo (female spirit). The belief is so strong that locals believe that transgressing nature will bring down wrath and misfortune. Livestock will perish, crops will fail and the salt canvases will be struck in blizzards. The nature gods could also retaliate with hailstorms, earthquakes and disease. "We are not allowed to cut trees as it is slaughtered here. We only eat animals that die of natural cause. We are not supposed to cut trees because they are gods too, and so are the rivers and lakes," says Yungdron Lama, whose family lineage carries the Bon tradition.

Lama Loma is the elected ward chair in Puniko village and says the Bon way of life is integral to everything his community does. Locals believe they have to perform the Yul Sa Sui Sa ritual to ensure a good harvest. Lama says, "sometimes the weather is bad for crops, so we pray to the sky gods to restore the natural equilibrium."

For thousands of years, the Dolpo Po have survived on a bi-annual journey back and forth across the Himalaya. But the winds of change have affected the ancestral occupation of the yak canvases that used to take grain and cotton up from the lower valleys to barter for rock salt and carpets from Tibet.

The modern monetized economy, the spread of transportation in Tibet and Nepal, education and emigration have all contributed to erode this traditional practice. And now added to this list of factors is climate change, which has made weather unpredictable in the trans-Himalayan valleys.

This year, unusual spring blizzards closed the high passes that the canvases use for trading. Tourism was hit, as trekkers were stranded. Dawa Gurung and his family take his yaks and horses into the pasture of Dhanagad, crossing the Rup La pass at 5,000m. "We heard the Chinese border is opening soon and we need to go to Chang (Tibet) but this year I do not think I will go — the trail is still tenuous and there is not much to trade," Gurung said.

The grain-salt barter trade between Nepal and Tibet has now been replaced by just one precious commodity: yaks, the caterpillar fungus that grows out of the ground in meadows above 4,500m and is prized in Chinese medicine. Yarsa means ‘summer grass’ or ‘winter worm’ in the local dialect and has raised living standards here. But lately, due to over-picking and climate change, yarsa harvests have slumped. Dolpo traders used to sell yarsas across the border in Tibet and buy rice, sugar, blankets and even solar panels in China.

“This year it snowed continuously from February to April, and in Saldang half the yaks died. The melting snows also made the ground soggy, and all the yara rotted," said Tshew Pho-Drup Lama of Tse village.

The weather, crops and health of livestock are so closely tied that the loss of yarsas and yaks has meant no trade with Tibet, which means no salt and no butter. As a result, for most villagers in Dolpo this year there are no ingredients to make the salty Tibetan butter tea.
Pride Parade
Celebrate love at the annual Pride Parade. March with fellow LGBTQ+ supporters, dance, and end the day with a Rainbow Concert.
16 August, 12pm-6pm, Thamel to Taudaha (911) 4500001

Nepal Retrospective
Film South Asia presents “Nepali Retrospective”, a series of 8 exceptional Nepali documentaries from the last 20 years. Film Times have English subtitles.
25 August-5 October, Every Thursday, 5:30pm onwards, R360, Hole Nyge Kershaw, Patan (01) 522213

Freedom
Sumitra Rana’s solo exhibition “Freedom”, her 8th solo painting exhibition. The event was inaugurated by the honourable farmer Chef Justine Shukla Karki on 9 August. 12-17 August, Sashosson Art Gallery, Kakarakhola (01) 4011407

Painting Exhibition
Daiw, South Asia presents “Volume IV Structural Beauty” by Sachiyo Kc. This is a series of paintings inspired by KC’s tour of Mustang a couple of years ago.
3-17 August, 10am onwards, Batello’s Galerie Hotel, Thamel (01) 4701436

Nadav Ragon
Enter Nadav Ragon’s musical playground and immerse yourself in the Drummer musician’s mesmerising 360° degree show. 23 August, 6:30pm, Senate Cafe & Bistro, Thamel (01) 4701167

Pema the Pianist
Listen to Pema’s masterful rendition of Pema the Pianist while you sip a refreshing cocktail.
16 August, 7pm onwards, G Hotel Parnasso Regency, Thamel (01) 4700013

Kanté Diddi Dab
Loosen up a star, percussion and bass combine for a unique contemporary performance.
16 August, 5pm-10pm, Social Cafe, Gokarna (01) 4401330

Black Source
Tangram Museum presents “Black Source”, a series of creative artworks by Ching-Hsi Hsu. The exhibition will be inaugurated at 6:30pm on 18 August.
19-20 August, 10am-5pm, Tangram Museum Contemporary Art Gallery, Rishikesh Regency, Bhaktapur (01) 601150

Polyphonic Concert
Listen to the polyphonic songs of ‘Tremblant de Célias’, a musical group formed in 1996 by Laurent Binet. They specialize in the interpretation of the medieval and cappella repertoire.
27 August, 6pm onwards, Ararat Freres de Karmouth, Jomarkha (01) 346270

Blind Faith
Come see the Blind Faith Band play the greatest hits of Om Bikan Sita, who is regarded as the Nepali King of Pop. This tribute will take the audience down memory lane, with songs from the 70s.
16 August, 7pm onwards, Rs 1,500, Privy Nepal, S170/2530

Tyography Workshop
Bring words and life to this Expressive Typography Workshop. You will learn about the basic elements of design, typography and typographic. Make sure to bring your laptop. Basic photoshop and illustrator skills are recommended.
17 August, 10am-2:30pm, Rs 5,000, Sadru Meda Arts Collect (01) 5227812

Scrumptious Shicaun
Enjoy the best of Shicaun’s dishes with Shicaun chefs. Chinese grass noodle salad, honey dishes with honey, spicy range, crispy and more. 16-25 August, 6:30pm-10pm, Rs 2,500 plus tax per person, Ararat Regency (01) 5712334

Akama Hotel
A new property in Kathmandu, Akama hotel boasts a fusion of local Newari and Himalayan culture as well as luxurious facilities. The hotel offers a spa, a pool, a gym, and a variety of dining options.
25 December, (01) 5370556

Balathali Village Resort
A simple and cozy retreat just beyond Kathmandu Valley, Balathali Village Resort is ideal for anyone seeking to get away but not too far away from the city.
19 September, (986) 3697702

Mount Princess
Surrounded by mountains and forests, Mount Princess is a haven for city dwellers. Spend the morning sipping a warm cup of Nepali tea while you take in the breathtaking views.
28 November, (01) 4380816

Raniban Retreat
Located on a hillside of Raniban forest, this environmentally-friendly boutique hotel offers a spectacular view of the mountains.
28 November, (01) 5169055

Air Quality Index
KATHMANDU, 9-15 August

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Regular reading and right showers, this past week kept Kathmandu Valley’s air quality mainly clean, though some particular episodes of pollution were noted. The upstream winds transported smog from the eastern region to the capital.

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The air quality index for Kathmandu Valley is mainly clean, with some occasional episodes of pollution. The upstream winds are transported smog from the eastern region to the capital.

Kathmandu’s festival of the mysterious dancing goddess

The Nil Barahi festival, 17-20 August, re-enacts a centuries old tradition

Alok Siddhi Tuladhar

The Tantric goddess has the face of a boy, and she moves slowly through the narrow streets of Bodney with 19 other masked dancers representing various other deities in attendance. The parade goes on all night for three nights as the dance turns into a trance.

Starting near midnight this Saturday, Bodney’s Nil Barahi festival will be held as it has for the last 600 years, a tradition that some believe goes back to the Lichhavi period, perpetuated by King Subhamala Malla of Kathmapur and later the Shah dynasty.

Turn north at Thimi on the road from Kathmandu to Bhaktapur to a quaint little Newar settlement called Bodney and the nearby dense forest of Tiniga. At a raised clearing in the forest is the shrine of Nil Barahi. Legend has it that the goddess, disguised as an old man, abducted Bodney farmers and taught them a tantric dance that the locals have performed continuously every year since then.

The highlight of this annual festival, known locally as the Nil Barahi Dev Pyaksh, is a slow-moving but animated masked dance procession, acted out by an ensemble of about 500 residents of Bodney: gurus, dancers, musicians and a supporting cast. The 19 dancers, who represent Bhadrak, Nil Barahi, Kumari, Singha, Dwarpati and Gaiadha, have taken on the responsibility for life.

Once the dance begins, their masks they draw on a divine power and sways through the streets of Bodney all night long, moving their limbs and bodies languidly to the tune of dhals (drums), sa and bhaya (cymbals), poga and zimba (flutes).

Once activated with tantric powers, the elaborately painted masks allow the humans behind them to achieve a physical haddiap that they cannot even imagine bearing in ordinary circumstances. Once the procession begins, the dancers cannot eat, drink, sit, sleep, talk or relax for 15 hours every night for three nights.

People believe it is divine intervention from the gods that allows the dancers to take up this superhuman challenge. Some of the dancers, now in their late seventies, have been performing this role every year for the last 60 years.

From Chaudri Atmoha Shrestha, representing the god Nil Barahi, says all 19 gods adhere to strict moral discipline throughout the year. “That is why people know me more as Barahi, and not by my real name,” Shrestha explains.

Local people treat us as gods even when the festival is not on. I am now 68 but have never fallen sick, and have never taken medicine.”

Most families in Bodney, and their visiting friends and relatives, line the streets, staying awake till early morning to conduct special ritual worship as the gods dance past their neighbourhood, offering food and money, which goes to the guild to organize the annual festival.

The offerings fund the complicated and elaborate rituals, but it is not enough. So the municipality has been helping out since 2013, says Ward Chair Dev Krishna Mote Shrestha.

Though celebrated with much passion, the origins of the Nil Barahi festival is shrouded in mystery. Some say it is a victory ritual commemorating an ancient battle, but others reckon the subdued nature of the music and dance moves signify a desire for societal well-being.

I think it is a protective dance, since most of the dances are in some way related to good fortune,” says researcher Swarup Adhikari.

Despite the vibrant atmosphere, there is growing concern among the elderly that the tradition might not survive because of the strict rules governing the lives of the dancers.

Laman Bhun Shrestha, a 40-year-old panga player, however, says Bodney’s youth are excited to be a part of the ritual. “They find it an honour to be chosen to represent a deity, and there is competition if one of the dancers passes away.”

In recent years, many young men and women, come to Bodney for the festival and can be seen recording the dances on their phones. Youth-driven publicity over social media platforms has resulted in a marked increase in the number of visitors, increasing the money collected as well.

From Nitish Shrestha of Bodney sums it up: “Money is vital in keeping the festival going, but with a growing number of devotees attending in recent years we are confident it will survive into the future.”
McGoray as young Simba is full of life, naive and entitled. Chiwetel Ejiofor presents a different Scar, downright menacing and terrifying, a departure from Jeremy Iron’s charismatic villain. But the highlight have to be Simba’s malekiddie, Pumbaa and Timon, voiced by hilarious Seth Rogen and Billy Eichner.

Hans Zimmer and Elton John return for musical composition. Circle of Life, as the opening of the film, is a shot-for-shot adaptation of the original. The high-spirited Hakuna Matata and snailful Can you Feel the Love Tonight are full of nostalgia.

Director Jon Favreau made The Jungle Book in 2016, and used some of the new technology in this. Lion King. During promosions Favreau said it was important that the Team have the illusion of being a naturalistic documentary. The fact that the Lion King is based in Africa drives home the reality of deforestation and biodiversity loss caused by human greed and the climate emergency.

One might ask why we need a photorealistic Lion King with Mufasa explaining to Simba the circle of life when ecosystem collapse is already so real. Besides, we have Animal Planet and other nature documentaries. Here’s why the Lion King anthropomorphizes wildlife, forcing children hooked on cartoons to learn early about nature’s balance and the need for conservation. The message is more powerful when the digital animals are more realistic.

Cartoons are keeping pace with animation technology, and this can only make them more relevant at a time when the Planet is facing its sixth extinction. If they can be entertaining and good the next generation to be activists for the Earth’s protection, that can only be a good thing.

Sonia Aware

M-

visits Nepal: US Ambassador to Nepal Randy Berry meets with newly-appointed Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Raghuwar Shrestha (right) in Kathmandu to discuss US-Nepal Year 2020.

GREAT MINDS: Former President Ram Baran Yadav (right) displays a book by Shilu Lawal unveiled on the former’s 83rd Birthday, in Patan on Wednesday.

ANNIVERSARY GIFT: Indian Ambassador Manjeev Sing Puri gifting ambulances on the occasion of 73rd Independence Day of India on Thursday at the Indian Embassy.

ON THE BALL: The Nepal Junior Tennis Team is participating in the ITF Asian Team Championship Finals in Astana, Kazakhstan. So far, Nepal has prevailed over Thailand and Yemen, confirming its spot in the Top 8.
“Unusual appointment ... extraordi

Nepali Times: You now head a
ministry infamous for frequent
changes and wheeling-dealing. How will you clean up its image? Yogesh Bhattarai: As the 37th Tourism Minister, my appointment is unusual, and I have a pile of extraordinary tasks to complete. I will only step down after we have accomplished them. The centres of power in this country are the government and the Nepali Communist Party, so there is no room for any wheeling-dealing.

How are the preparations for Visit Nepal 2020? Since there was no minister for a long time, the preparations are not satisfactory. Infrastructure has not taken off. The challenge is to speed it up, and within two weeks we will release a detailed workplan laying out the responsibilities of the government, the ministry, the department, Nepali Tourism Board, organizing committees and embassies for the Visit Nepal Year.

The last 80 Everest climbing season was controversial. What are your plans for future expeditions? Much of it was intended to
give Nepal’s mountains a bad reputation. There are some weaknesses on our side, but the weather window of just three days led to the crowding. Like every year there were casualties and we are concerned about reducing them. Some agencies are also cleaning up the garbage on Everest. We will issue new climbing rules and from the next season, only trained liaison officers will be employed.

Where has the investigation on fake helicopter rescues gone? The investigation committee under the general secretary has made some recommendations. Based on that document, further investigations are underway and the culprits will be punished.

The number of tourists has increased, but their spending has not. This year, average spending per tourist came down to $44 from $55. But transactions via informal channels have been reduced.

You said you would make Nepal Airlines “wow worthy”. What did you mean?

We have to make Nepal Airlines fly high again and turn it into a flag carrier we can be proud of. There are problems — we know what they are. The company should be in profit, and pay its debts. We cannot achieve that in two months, and there is no silver bullet. We need shock therapy.

Mismanagement and political interference are blamed. I don’t wish to blame anyone personally. I don’t think anyone intended for NAC to collapse. But as I said, we are looking at a dramatic turnaround in management. Those who can handle the change will stay, those who can’t will have to go. If management can convince the government that the company is financially viable, then it will invest.

You seem to be all for building Jigad Airport. What about the trees? I am not here to cut trees, but we need to build the airport. Its investment modality will be decided after a discussion with the Investment Board Nepal. We will talk with the Ministry of Forests, and local governments will work on resettlement. It is a national pride project, so it also requires political commitment. We aim to lay the foundation stone by November.

Nepal’s aviation is still under the EU blacklist, even if ICAO has debated it from the list of countries with safety concerns. As per ICAO, a country should score a minimum of 65 points to pass the safety test — we have 65 points and have been debated. But as far as the EU is concerned, a team is visiting Nepal for a safety audit. We believe that Nepal will soon be taken off the blacklist.
Nepal is turning into a

Increase in inter-ethnic marriages blurs cultural distinctions, complicating job quotas

Sanghamitra Subba

Ever since Nepal’s founding King Prithvi Narayan Shah described the nation he forged as a garden of 4 castes and 36 ethnicities, besides considering themselves ‘Nepali’, most people have also kept a distinct sense of sub-national identity.

The Muluki Ain of 1854 defined this social hierarchy, and the 2011 census lists all 136 castes and ethnic groups, forming the basis on which the new Constitution defines Nepal’s reservation policies for the civil service, government and Parliament. But with an increase in inter-ethnic marriages producing an even more multicultural society, there may be a need to redefine ethnicity as the country becomes even more diverse.

“Growing up, my most cherished memories are visiting my grandparents from both sides of my family and being exposed to diverse beliefs, traditions and food,” recalls Rubena Mahato, who has a Newari father and Mahottari mother. “The two ethnic backgrounds merged seamlessly without one undermining the other.”

But despite embracing her dual heritage and being raised in a household with no concept of caste hierarchy or religious superiority, and taught to respect people regardless of their ethnicity, Mahato says society kept her in a box and limited her identity.

Mahato recalls that the first question asked on entering a school was about her caste and ethnicity. As children who didn’t know better, her classmates made assumptions based on what they had seen in their parents’ doings. Mahato was seen only as a Maratni, leading her to feel self-slated over her Newari identity. While she embraced her duality, her peers and teachers did not.

The caste and ethnic categorisation in the Muluki Ain and a rigid perception of identity pose obstacles for Nepalis who want to adopt their hybrid identities. Sita Tamang is a political scientist whose research focuses on social exclusion. She says, “Regardless of how people might choose their ethnic and other identities, society at large will see and treat them according to the social categories that society has and groups itself by.”

Historian Pranayosh Othi of Mahottari University of Nepal believes that Nepalis have three types of responses to multiethnic identities: embracing their hybrid ethnic identity, resenting one ethnic identity while rejecting the other, or identifying themselves only as Nepali. Keeping a single ethnic identity as long as it abides by the ongoing paternalist system aligns with the current perception of ethnic identity, but there is social and political confusion for many like Mahato who want to preserve their hybrid ethnic identity.

Maheshwori Lawoti, professor of political science at Western Michigan University, who has written extensively on Nepal’s reservation policies, says, “Ethnic identity is not just shaped by the individual’s perception of themselves, but also society’s recognition of them. Ethnic identity is ultimately a social construct.”

Indeed, the ethnicity of a person in Nepal is still largely determined by the father’s lineage. But this can lead to even more confusion over the freedom of women to change their ethnic identity and to have more marriage and the matter of reservation policies.

Besides a mandatory quota for women in government and civil service, there is also affirmative action for indigenous people, Dalits and other ethnicities. But as marriage creates more multiethnic identities and a weaker attachment to a single ethnicity, the future of the reservation policy comes into question.

“The reservation policy should be reflective of society and should respond to changes in the social dynamics,” says Lawoti. “The state does not recognize multiethnic individuals, but it should respond to this new reality.”

However, whether offspring of inter-ethnic marriages will seek to assert their hybrid identity, or take on one or other of their parental identity is also uncertain. Some may prefer to assume the identity of their Dallit or indigenous parent rather than their higher caste parent in order to benefit from reservation.

Lawoti and Othi both agree that policies should be more flexible to accommodate multiethnic individuals. This applies to women who marry someone from a multiple occasions where I have had to lecture perfectly educated young people for eating caste meals. Most are embarrassed, some are quite taken aback and some refuse to eat. But I know that we cannot let such behaviour go unchallenged.”

On the same note, we should envisage a model of egalitarian, inclusive, multicultural society that is applicable not only at the most general level of the nation state and society but to all levels and all regions, so that we can negotiate and renegotiate our fluid, multiple identities.

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Maithili–Newar

Growing up in a Maithili–Newar household, Rubena Mahato combined her colourful and multicultural heritage, celebrating both Rukshya bandhan and Bhatrika with Newari mandalas and eating Mithila dishes like dikuwa, khyahya and daal puri during Chait and delicious yomari during Newar Lepri bhoj ke. “My dual heritage merged seamlessly and they always have,” says Mahato.

From a young age, Mahato was taught to respect everyone regardless of their ethnic or caste background. But she did not always receive the same treatment from others, and witnessed others get harassed because of their heritage.

“Because of my upbringing, it was inconceivable for me to engage in ‘othering’ and exclusion, or to suffer it. I remember arguing with my friends over it and refusing to participate. Over the years, there have been multiple occasions where I have had to lecture perfectly educated young people for eating caste meals. Most are embarrassed, some are quite taken aback and some refuse to eat. But I know that we cannot let such behaviour go unchallenged.”

Mahto never caviled at the pressure of Nepal’s patriarchal society to conform to her father’s Maithili identity. Living in Switzerland with her husband, Mahato remembers, “Our home is a riot of colours, tastes and flavours from our various heritages. What could be more Nepali than that?”
nation of hybrid identities

Tharu-Tamang

Sukarai Chaudhary was in her early 20s and working in a garment factory in Kathmandu Valley when she met Chhelaw Lama. Amid the hum of sewing machines and heaps of fabric scraps, the two fell in love.

They went their separate ways, but five years later they both found jobs in a Lalitpur and got married soon after. Although she is Tharu and he is Tamang, the wedding ceremony reflected neither culture but was performed using Brahmic rituals.

“I think it was easier for us to have an inter-ethnic marriage because both our parents were no longer with us and our other relatives also had inter-ethnic marriages,” says Chaudhary. Lama’s parents and Chaudhary’s father had passed away years before they met.

The only time they faced any difficulty over their mixed marriage was when they returned to Lama’s home in Kavre for the first time after getting married. She recalls, “At first, his extended families didn’t really understand why he had married a Tharu.”

But when Chaudhary was asked to sit in a traditional Tamang puja by Lama’s family, she felt welcomed and accepted. It was then for a conservative family to allow a person from another ethnic background to worship with them.

A year after their marriage, Lama and Chaudhary had a daughter, who grew up in a multilingual household. She is now 22 and Chaudhary says not teaching her daughter Tharu customs, just as she herself never had the chance to learn about her heritage. As the only Tharu family in a predominantly Brahmin/Chhetri area, as a girl she was only familiar with the customs and practices of the ‘higher caste’ community.

Today, the family has added other rituals to their celebrations. For example, during Dashain, they put white tikas on each other in the evening as per Tamang custom. Lama says, “When we were raising our daughter, we neither raised her strictly as a Tharu nor as a Tamang. She is a combination of both and a product of an intermixed family.”

Despite the challenges, the couple is hopeful that their daughter will be able to navigate between the two cultures.

Regardless of how people might look at them, for now Chaudhary and other societies, society at large will see and treat them according to the singular homogenised identity and strata of the Muluki Ain.

Sita Tamang, Political Scientist

INTER-ETHNIC LOVE: Prime Minister KP Oli presents rhododendron blossoms to his wife Radhika Shakya on 27 February during Khasi Festival in Bhaktapur.

The reservation policy should be reflective of society and should respond to changes in the social dynamic. The state does not recognize multietnic individuals, but it should respond to this new reality.

Mahendra Lawali, Professor of Political Science at Western Michigan University

different caste or ethnicity. Women should be allowed to either keep their birth surname or change it to their husband’s, if they are allowed to change when it fits their immediate purpose, the system perpetuates unless.

“Women should be allowed to change their ethnic identity when they get married but not to simply blash the system,” says Lawali. In Nepal’s patriarchal society, even with inter-ethnic marriages there is a tendency for wives to adopt the customs, traditions and culture of her husband’s ethnicity, forgiving her own. Children are raised with the culture of their father’s ethnicity. When doing so, the ethnic background of women erodes and hybrid identities are less likely to be formed.

However, with greater geographical mobility, the spread of education, and people moving out of historical ethnic enclaves, there are more possibilities of mixed ethnicities. Politicians Tripura P Gurung and journalist Ramendra Limbu raise their children with a fusion of ethnic customs and practices. Both Gurung and Limbu traditions are preserved flexibly within the home – a trend that many families with inter-ethnic marriages now practice.

A report of Suanari district in eastern Nepal is perhaps one of the most multiracial, multilingual and multilingual networks in Nepal. Anthropologist Chudamani Basnet researched inter-marriage in the town and found that although Janajatis have been intermarrying people from higher caste groups, there were none of the expected cultural conflicts.

A Limbu woman married to a Guria man found that as they had migrated away from their families and were more economically independent, they faced very little inter-ethnic conflicts.

However, not all such marriages are accepted. Tharu’s people who have married Dalits, for instance, are routinely ostracized by their own community. Sometimes couples who have crossed caste or ethnic lines to stop have been publicly humiliated, beaten, or driven out of their villages.

Baset attributes much of the opposition to the loss of cultural heritage and language. “Intermarriage was possible by a common language, Nepali, which has facilitated interaction among people of different ethnic groups, but at the cost of their mother tongue,” he adds.

As offspring of inter-ethnic marriages create and practice their own fusion customs, some of the distinct cultural and linguistic attributes of the original ethnic groups tend to erode. The future of hybrid identities with the current social and political state of Nepal is therefore uncertain, even though Prime Minister KP Oli and his wife Radhika Shakya, and other senior politicians, themselves have married across ethnicities.

Inter-ethnic marriages in Nepal come in waves. During the Punyaayat, many underground Communist leaders, like KP Oli, developed relationships with young women in the households where they rested rooms, or in the neighbourhoods of inner city Patan and Kathmandu. During the National Development Service, college graduates were mandated to serve a year in rural areas, and get married to locals. The third wave was during the conflict, when Maoist guerrillas could set married with the party’s consent.

Today, education, mobility and connectivity have unblocked a new wave of inter-ethnic marriages. Uncertainty is also perpetuated by the lack of data regarding inter-ethnic marriages. The Department of National Integration and Civil Registration refused this paper’s repeated requests to release data of inter-ethnic marriages or to comment on the trend, citing issues of privacy and discrimination.

Regardless, Nepal is celebrated as a multicultural, multilingual and multilingual nation, characteristics that have been embedded in the Constitution. But while the country as a whole may have a rich ethnic diversity, it is also becoming a new melting pot.

HYBRID NATION

Watch interviews with social scientists and inter-ethnic couples talking about Nepal’s new melting pot. The country’s ethnic diversity is being turned into an advantage as multicultural identities will have a profound impact on reservation policies and national integration.

nepaltimes.com
You Want It Darker?

I don’t know about you, but I miss the good old days when Nepal was a feudal landlocked Himalayan kingdom in which nights were still dark. Then, we went from feudal to federal, even though no one can tell the difference. We replaced one king with a herd of them. With our own merchant marine we will soon no longer be landlocked, and we have emerged from the dark ages to become a nation of fly-by-nights.

Many of us are still old enough to remember that Nepal used to suffer load shedding for up to 18 hours a day. This was the single most outstanding achievement of the past 20 years. It convinced those at the helm of power to enact a law to provide electricity to all homes at the end of load shedding.

Nepal cannot sell its darkness as a tourist attraction anymore. We have gone from being a nation of star-gazers to a country of navel gazers.

Nepal Tourism Board will have to scrap imaginative slogans like ‘Nepal: You Want It Darker’, or ‘Be a Torch-bearer in Kathmandu’, and replace them with ‘Make Nepal Dark Again’.

- Diesel generator importers have gone bust.
- The sale of Nightvision visors has plummeted since the war is over and people will no longer need these to take accurate aim in the general direction of waterbottles at night.
- The sun has set on solar panel vendors.
- Nepal has doubled its carbon footprint, and will soon become a middle income state.
- Instead of engaging in our national pastime of playing interactive games with each other in the dark in order to procrastinate, most of us now just fiddle fones.

As a result, the country will soon have below replacement level fertility. Who is going to take care of us in our next incarnation?

The proposed 17-floor skyscraper on Paras Bus Park was all set to be a symbol of national pride and get listed in the Guinness Book as the Tallest Building in the World Without a Pontooning Lift. But now that we have 24-hour electricity it will just be listed as the Ugliest Erection in South Asia.

There is more electric power now, but it is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.