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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

In wait-and-wait mode

Before Prime Minister KP Oli flew to Singapore on 18 August for the second time in a month, he made sure he left with a provocative statement to Parliament that he intended to serve out his entire term. He was trying to divert attention away from his own kidney ailment, and banish all thoughts of impermanence that anyone might have had.

In an outburst at a party meeting, the Prime Minister even chastised Madhav Kumar Nepal for rejoicing in his imminent demise. Once in Singapore, he held a much-publicised Skype conference call with the Cabinet in Kathmandu. Not much transpired, but the medium was the message — don't count me out just yet.

No surprise, then, that Nepal's current politics is now in suspended animation, and its future course will be determined by the Prime Minister's health prognosis. The PM's transplanted kidney is producing too many antibodies, which has led to complications. He is getting plasmapheresis treatment to replace blood plasma. The procedure cannot be repeated too often and if he responds well, Oli should return in the next two weeks. But if he does not, he will need retransplantation of the kidney, for which he will need a donor, say Baluwater insiders who were briefed by the PM's doctors.

When Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal agreed to go half-half on prime ministership and to share the party chairmanship, Dahal may have calculated that Oli's health would deteriorate and he would get a chance at the helm sooner rather than later.

This time, Dahal was designated stand-in, and he immediately convened an NCP party meeting on Monday (page 13) to sort out the unfinished business of allocating positions within the united party.

In the triangular power struggle between Oli, Dahal and former Madhav Nepal, it is

Nepal's turn now to be isolated. In fact, Prime Minister Oli seems to see more of a threat from his erstwhile UML colleague than from the former Maoist Dahal.

Oli did manage to woo away Bamdev Gautam, and could still use him to thwart Dahal in future. Anything is possible between these three comrades, such is their distrust of each other.

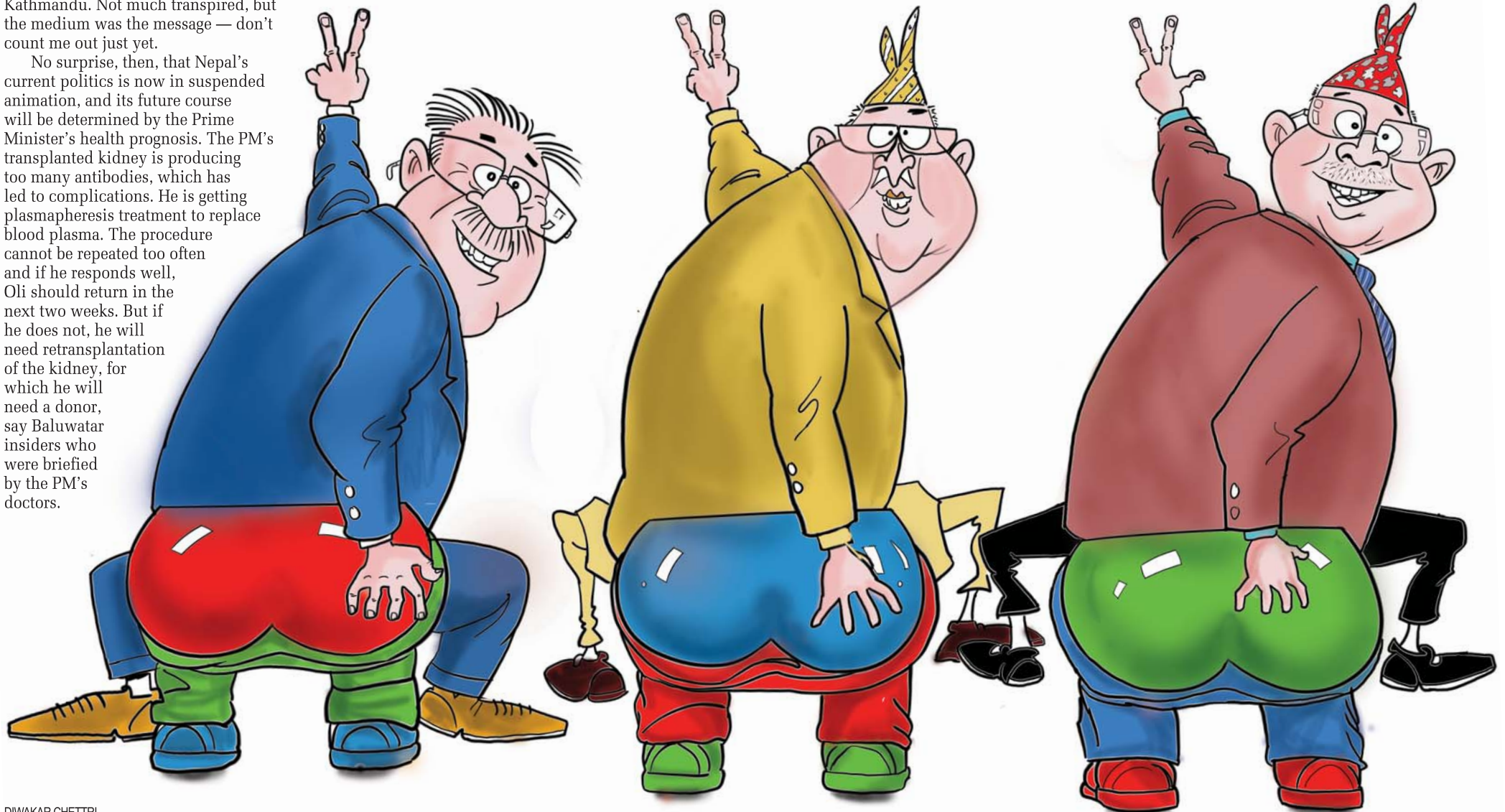
Dahal himself can do nothing but be in wait-and-wait mode. Oli has another year to go till half-term, and Dahal could be betting he does not have to wait that long.

Kiran Nepal



Trashing Everest

PAGE 8-9



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EVEREST POSTMORTEM

Ever since the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India determined that the world's tallest mountain was Peak XV located on the border between Nepal and Tibet, Everest has brought out the best and the worst in us. Nepalis have conveniently forgotten that the summit is on the border, and only the southwest face of Everest is in Nepal — the east and west faces are wholly in China. While the Tibetans had a name for the mountain (Chomolungma), the Nepali Sagarmatha was bequeathed to the peak only after it was determined to be the highest in the world.

When Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary returned from Everest in 1953, Nepalis claimed Tenzing as our own, garlanding him profusely while ignoring Hillary. Dharma Raj Thapa composed a folk song that implied Tenzing had to drag Hillary to the summit.

The 1996 disaster, when 15 climbers died on the mountain (eight of them on a single day, 11 May), made 'overcrowding' synonymous with 'Everest'. The bestseller *Into Thin Air* and the IMAX movie *Everest* created the hyper-reality of Everest being trampled by climbers and buried in trash.

The truth, as usual, is much more complicated. As a report in this issue concludes (*pages 14-15*), while the number of climbers on 22 May this year might have been a factor in some of the fatalities on Everest, inexperience, altitude sickness and lack of oxygen were more significant. There were 642 climbers, porters and guides from 43 countries on the summit this spring. Of them, 223 stepped on the top on 22 May alone. Nine of the climbers died on the south side this season, but news about the 10 more who died on other 8,000m peaks, where there were no significant crowds, was buried in the avalanche of news about Everest.

Reacting to the media spotlight, the government on 7 June set up an expert committee to recommend reforms in the management of expeditions. Last week, the committee issued its report, which should address many of the problems.

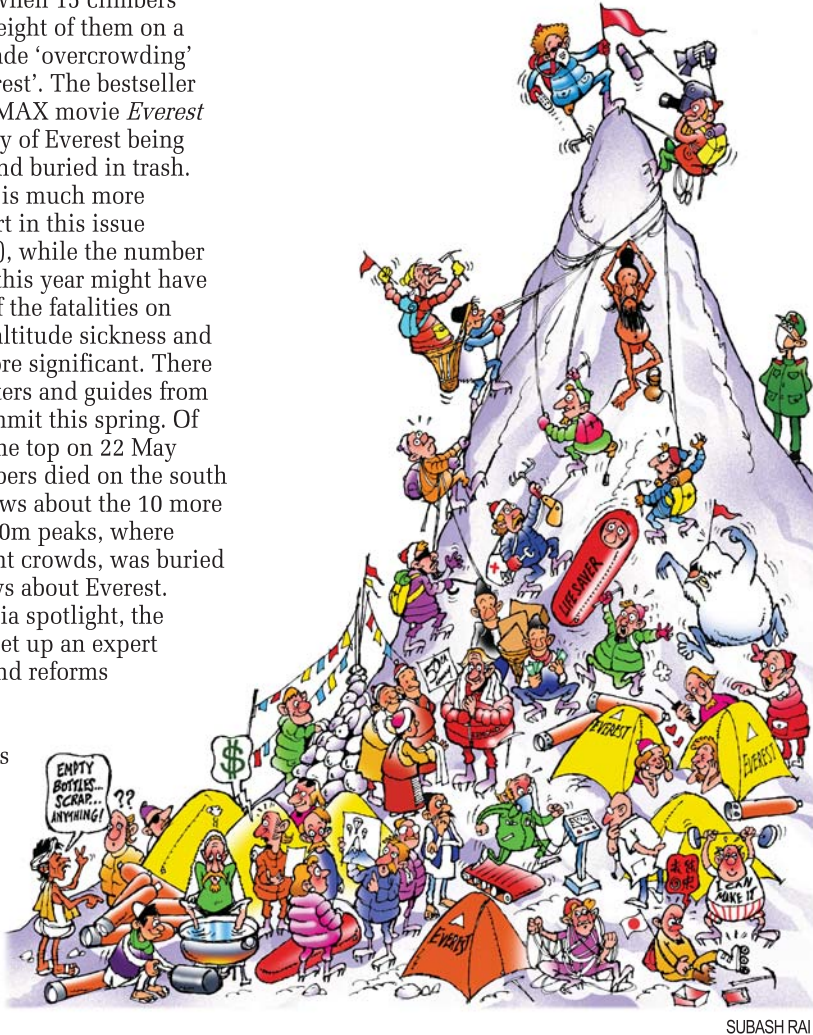
The committee carried out a post-mortem of Everest 2019, and found the main cause of the nine fatalities was the narrow weather window, inexperience and lack of fitness, altitude and medical conditions. One could argue that long queues contributed to altitude sickness and exhaustion, so crowding was a contributing factor. Summiteers say lack of experience at altitude and limited climbing skills were also causes for delays on the summit ridge on 22 and 23 May. Even though 'traffic jams' may not have been the main cause of fatalities this year, publicity about them did prompt the government to act.

The committee's recommendations, if enacted into law and enforced, could change Himalayan climbing. For example, only those who have been on a peak higher than 6,500m in Nepal will be allowed to climb a mountain

above 8,000m, and mountaineers must have climbed at least one peak below 6,500m before they can climb a peak higher than that. This will not only ensure diversification away from Everest and benefit other parts of Nepal, but also guarantee that only experienced climbers get to scale mountains like Everest, Kangchenjunga, Makalu or Manaslu.

However, the committee appears to only have taken altitude into account and not the technical climbing grade of mountains. There is a vast difference between climbing the relatively easy Cho Oyu (8,021m) and the technically difficult Kusum Kangru (6,367m).

The committee has also proposed that Everest climbers must show proof they have paid a Nepali agency at least \$35,000. While this may lessen crowds, it will not be much of a deterrent against rich but inexperienced trophy hunters.



Mt Everest brings out the best and worst in us.

The committee found that cheap expeditions did not stock up on enough oxygen, and that guides with little experience were a danger to clients. The solution to this could be a payment threshold and minimum experience for support crews. The criteria for liaison officers are also being changed, requiring them to stay at Base Camp till the end of expeditions, to thwart fake climbers and to do a trash inventory.

As with everything else in Nepal, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Given endemic corruption and the likelihood of forged documents, it remains to be seen if these rules will be followed. But if implemented honestly, these reforms should clean up the mountain's tainted image.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Times issue #466 of 28 August-3 September 2009 drew attention to climate change, and warned that the Himalaya was warming faster than previously thought. The Editorial 10 years ago titled 'Climate Climax' looked ahead at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit:

'Nothing we do (or don't do) in Nepal will affect global temperatures. But whether or not we switch to renewable energy as the mainstay of our economy will determine whether we survive economically as a nation. Nepal needs to reduce its carbon footprint not to save the planet, but to save itself. As the world approaches Peak Oil and our petroleum import bill widens, our huge trade deficit with India, continued dependence on fossil fuel, and climate change will exacerbate all the economic, development and social challenges we already face. Our elected representatives, think-tanks and the climate experts in the bureaucracy must exert pressure on the politicians and persuade them to begin the switch to a hydro-economy. It's not the ecology, stupid, it's the economy.'



ONLINE PACKAGES



A RURAL LIFELINE

Most rural hospitals in Nepal are understaffed and unequipped. But Bayalpata hospital in Achham district is changing the face of rural medical care. Follow us to this remote part of the country and watch patients and doctors talk about accessible and affordable treatment at Bayalpata. Story: *page 14-15*.



UP AND DOWN

Nepal is a lush vertical country, and what better way to 'regreen' Kathmandu than with vertical gardens? Visit two of Spanish artist Iñigo Iriarte's creations and be inspired. Story: *page 11*.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Thank you *Nepali Times* for putting electric vehicles on your front page and centrefold. Good to see demand for electric cars rising but the real impact on air quality, congestion and petroleum imports will come when our public transport system goes electric.

Bhushan Tuladhar

■ Is there a proper analysis of the environmental impact of electricity consumption of electric vehicles? The replacement batteries? Does it add up? Love the electric revolution, but am worried about the environmental impact of increased electricity consumption.

Satyajit Pradhan

NIGHT TOURISM

Anil Chitrakar has nicely explained the opportunity of night tourism in Kathmandu Valley — cultural programs + dining under full or semi sky ('Nepal By night', #974). They have profitably explored similar tourism activities in Hanoi and Saigon. The basic requirements are clean environment, sufficient light and people's mindset.

Shree Govind

INSPIRATION

Wonderful ('Pancha Kumari Pariyar: Still She Rises', Muna Gurung, #974). An example and inspiration to us all.

Sam Cowan

TJ SONGS

It's very good to see Nepali traditional duet *tij* songs changing beyond love n loss to include women's empowerment and injustice. But what about their increasing vulgarity ('Nepali folk songs move beyond love and loss', Reeti KC, #974)?

Naresh Chand

LORD KRISHNA

A welcome writeup as opposed to the mundane political gossip that grabs daily headlines ('My Sweet Lord Krishna', Sewa Bhattarai, #974). Great authorities, which include demi-gods such as Brahma, Shiva and Indra, and sages such as Parashar, Vyasa, Angira, Shankaracharya and Ramanujacharya, recognise Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and the original cause of all causes.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

WHAT'S TRENDING



Nepal by night

by Anil Chitrakar

It is a myth that Kathmandu goes to sleep early. In fact, it is a city that never sleeps. Devotional music, mask dances and chariot festivals go on till dawn. This could extend visitors' stays, enrich their experience and increase revenue from tourism.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Plug-ins

by Sanghamitra Subba

Demand for electric vehicles is surging in Nepal as upfront and running costs, plus increased range, make battery powered vehicles more competitive, environmental benefits aside. Our special package on electric vehicles was a curtain-raiser for the NADA Auto Show this week. Visit nepalitimes.com for a catalogue of the best buys.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Nepali folk songs move beyond love and loss

by Reeti K.C.

Tij songs are changing — today's lyrics in the traditional duets are about empowerment and social injustice. Not only is the content expanding into social issues, male singers are also performing. Go online to access the most read story of last week.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The second International Conference on Quality Education begins today at Rato Bangala School, Lalitpur. Until 26 August, it will host policy-makers, district-level officials, teachers and researchers from Nepal and around the world.

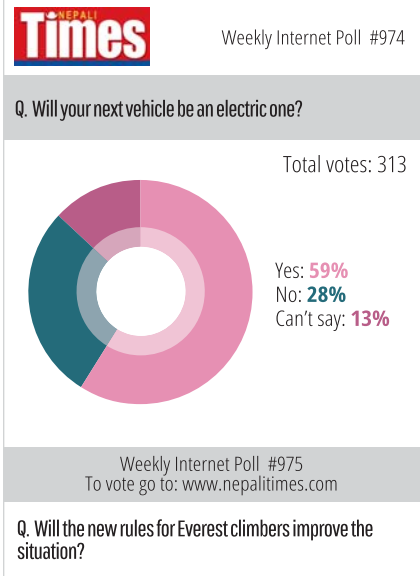
Navita Srikant @NavitaSrikant
#Kathmandu hosts International Conference on Quality Education. #SouthAsia region will benefit as #India, #Nepal and others are undergoing national education reforms. #EducationMatters

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The commercialisation of the entertainment industry and the advent of YouTube and Facebook have cost Nepali folk #songs their cultural value. The new voices have brought positive changes too, reports @kc_reeti.

KYU Yeti @KyuYeti
Not to mention the gradual destruction of family ties/values. But everyone seems happy, hip and modern because they conform to supposedly 'better' and 'cool' values that have been adopted not adapted. Any unique identity we have will in 20 years be folklore. Sad but true.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Many visitors to #Nepal complain that there is not much to do after dark besides go to their hotel rooms to watch tv. But #Kathmandu has a different kind of vibrant nightlife, people just don't know about it yet, writes Anil Chitrakar.

Alienepalien @Alienepalien
Agreed! This is the kind of nightlife I'd like to explore. Thamel is too tacky. Tourists do Thamel only because there is no other option.



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TURKISH AIRLINES

MEXICO

Homestay brings locals home

Tourism has helped restore Kalabang village, the 'virgin land' of Pokhara



Friends of Shangri-la

Pokhara's Desmond Doig-designed Shangri-La Hotel has been around for nearly 30 years, and many of its staff are from Pokhara Valley itself. Quite a few are from Kalabang, a village on the other side of Phewa Lake which today keeps much of its traditional charm in festivals, architecture and culture. However, there has been a big outmigration of young people to the city or overseas for work.

Now, the hotel is supporting the Kalabang Gharedi Community Homestay (*left*) a local initiative to use tourism to create jobs so people will stay. The village is now seeing a revival of its culture and economy because of the homestay initiative.

Last month, the group Friends of Shangri-La Hotel made a hike to Kalabang to see how the village was doing, and to generate publicity for it. "The visit showed us the many attractions that Kalabang has for visitors, we got feedback from guests and the community, and it was good for promotion," said Babita Pandey of Shangri-La Kathmandu.

Prakash Gurung (*right*) who established the homestay said the partnership with Shangri-la meant more inquiries from travel companies.



PHOTOS: REETI KC

Reeti KC

Beads of sweat roll down the forehead when the 30-minute hike up the steep path ends. Local men and women in traditional Gurung dress welcome guests with flower garlands in front of a big signboard that reads Kalabang Gharedi Community Homestay, while traditional music plays.

After the ceremony, musicians and the locals of Kalabang guide guests further into the village. The steep pathway is surrounded by

trees and the air is fresh.

Kalabang is a sanctuary from the city, yet explored by very few in Pokhara. It lies in the centre of Pokhara municipality, in ward number 22. To the east it borders famous Fewa Lake while its western edge touches Syangja district.

Pokhara is known for Fewa and Begnas boat rides, the Sarankot sunrise, World Peace Pagoda views and Lakeside nights but only few know about the community homestay in Kalabang, though it is less than an hour away from Lakeside. That's why Prakash Gurung, President of Kalabang Gharedi Community Homestay,

calls it "virgin land".

The village offers 18 houses for homestay — 11 of those are from the Gurung community, 6 from Brahmin and 1 from Dalit. In total there are 32 rooms with 85 beds, and 6 houses have attached bathrooms and hot/cold showers. But what makes Kalabang special is its authenticity. The traditional village houses are set in a beautiful, hilly backdrop and the food served is organic. The people grow their own crops and serve dishes such as *kodo ko selroti* (millet selroti), *bhuteko makai* (roasted corn), and fresh greens.

Until recently Kalabang was

in decline. According to Gurung, around 60 years ago 281 families lived in the village, but due to migration the number dropped to 156. As the majority of residents are Gurungs, many men left the village to join the British and Indian armies, while others set out to work in Gulf countries. Others moved to Pokhara to get better education for their children. With fewer children, Kalabang's school had to merge with another nearby.

But things changed in 2010, when the English-medium government school, Shree Bhagawati Basic School, was established. "Since 2010, no one

has migrated for education," Gurung, the school's chairperson, proudly tells *Nepali Times*.

Next, the community worked to reverse out-migration. "Setting up the homestay was the solution that we found. We started it but did not know how to run it so we received training from an NGO," Gurung added.

This is the homestay's fifth year. "Nine of the houses are owned by returnees from foreign countries," says Gurung. "They earn 25-30 thousand per month in average through homestay, so why do they need to migrate for employment?" 🇳🇵

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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS



Turkish to Mexico

Turkish Airlines has enhanced its flight network by launching new flights to Mexico City and Cancún. Mexico City is the second biggest city of Latin America, and Cancún is one of the favourite holiday centres of the region. The cities are Turkish Airlines' 18th and 19th destinations in the Americas. The Istanbul-Mexico City-Cancún route started thrice weekly flights on 21 August.

Qatar & Malaysia

Qatar Airways will launch a new service to Langkawi in Malaysia starting 15 October. The route is part of the airline's strong



expansion plans in Southeast Asia and marks Qatar Airways' third destination in Malaysia, after Kuala Lumpur and Penang. The route will begin with four weekly flights to Langkawi via Penang, increasing to five times per week from 27 October.

MD of Dolma

Joseph Silvanus has been appointed Managing Director for Dolma Consulting,

the advisory arm of the Dolma Group. He previously worked as the CEO of Standard Chartered Bank in Nepal. Silvanus also worked at ANZ Grindlays for 27 years. Dolma Consulting offers services to development partners wishing to attract international and local private-sector capital.

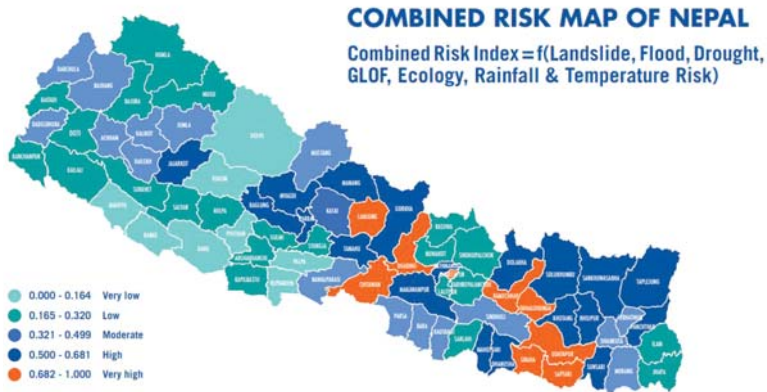
Nissan KICKS

Nissan has launched its KICKS XV Premium Option with a 1.5 litre diesel engine. The vehicle features a first-in-class around view monitor with four cameras. Other features are leather seat upholstery, front fog lamps with cornering function, rain-sensing wipers, follow-me-home headlamps, a console storage lamp, rear fog lamp and side airbags.

prabhu BANK

Cash for climate

The federal government's spending on climate adaptation need to be monitored



The Nepal government's response to the climate emergency often seems too little too late, and the scope of the global crisis is such that one country by itself cannot tackle it. But the federal government should be investing to adapt and mitigate the climate crisis and its impacts, says a new report called the *Nepal Citizen's Climate Budget*. A survey in the report, which was created by Freedom Forum with technical support from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and International Budget Partnership, a US-based NGO, and funding from the UK Government concludes:

- 100% of respondents in the central mountains saw an increase in cold waves while 100% in central hills experienced a decrease
- 99.3% of participants reported drought
- 97.7% witnessed an increase in diseases and insects and

- sporadic rain
- 84.6 found the monsoon delayed by 1-4 weeks
- 84.5% experienced a decrease in surface water.

The report summarises the state of the climate crisis: 'Nepal ranks in the top 20 countries that have suffered the most from the impacts of climate change, through floods, forest fires, drought and other climate-induced disasters.'

Further, 29 districts are vulnerable to landslides, 22 are at risk of drought, 12 could be hit by a glacial lake outburst flood and 9 are in danger of flash floods.


Between 1983 and 2005, the economic cost of climate change averaged Rs1.2 billion a year, while in 2017 the price tag for flood damage alone was Rs60.7 billion, adds the report. There is no data for economic losses caused by

drought and forest fires, it notes. How have Nepal's governments reacted to the climate emergency? More than a quarter of last year's federal government budget was 'relevant to climate change'. Examples cited include:

- Development and expansion of hydroelectricity and renewables
- Production, import and use of electric public transport
- Soil test through mobile lab
- Melamchi Project.

By contrast, in 2013-14 just 10% of the budget was climate related. But the picture changes on closer inspection. Just 20% of the 2018-19 climate change budget was allocated to 'highly relevant' activities -- programs where at least 60% of the budget is related to climate change.

While climate-focused spending has been growing as a proportion of the overall federal budget, the chunk of it considered 'highly relevant' has been shrinking. It was 48% in 2013-14, 31% in 2016-17 and 20% in 2018-19. In addition, the proportion of the budget that is actually spent has been falling, from 80% in 2013-14 to 57% in 2016-17 and 43% in 2017-18.

Noting that the central government did not publish climate-specific climate date for the last fiscal year, the report urges citizens, civil society and people's representatives to monitor government spending on climate. 

Covering Climate Now

Nepali Times has joined more than 170 media outlets from around the world for Covering Climate Now, a project co-founded by the *Columbia Journalism Review* and *The Nation* aimed at strengthening the media's focus on the climate crisis.



MONIKA DEUPALA

All outlets have committed to running a week's worth of climate coverage in the lead-up to the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York on 23 September where the world's governments will submit plans to meet the Paris Agreement's pledge to keep global temperature rise 'well below' 2 degrees Celsius.

"The need for solid climate coverage has never been greater," said Kyle Pope, *CJR's* editor and publisher. "We're proud that so many organisations from across the US and around the world have joined with Covering Climate Now to do our duty as journalists — to report this hugely important story."

Covering Climate Now now ranks as one of the most ambitious efforts ever to organise the world's media around a single coverage topic. In addition to *The Guardian* — the lead media partner in Covering Climate

Now — *CJR* and *The Nation* are joined by major newspapers, magazines, television and radio broadcasters, and global news and photo agencies in North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Among the outlets represented are: *Bloomberg*, *CBS News*, *El País*, *the Asahi Shimbun*, *La Repubblica*, *The Times of India*, *Getty Images*, *Agence France-Presse*, *the Nepali Times*, scholarly journals such as *Nature*, *Science*, and the *Harvard Business Review*, and publications such as *Vanity Fair*, *HuffPost*, *BuzzFeed News*, and *The Daily Beast*.

"Collaboration with like-minded colleagues makes both journalistic and business sense in today's media environment, and The Nation is happy to encourage such collaboration and proud to share our climate coverage as part of this exciting initiative," said Katrina vanden Heuvel, publisher of *The Nation*.

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A full list of participating outlets online.

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The religion of rugby

The 20-nation 2019 Rugby World Cup will kick off in Japan next month, but many in Nepal will not know it

I was hemmed in on all sides by a resonating wall of damp dark jackets, the wide bodies of my enthusiastic neighbours. The crowd was on its feet roaring and whooping, the joyous chants as intense as any South Asian festival throng.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyol

Fuelled with drink and devotion, unadulterated passionate approval greeted the latest score. Sheets of winter rain fell steadily on the green grass field, droplets glistening in the glare of the arc lights above us, but nothing could dampen the mass ecstasy.

I was in the midst of the unlikely temple precinct of Eden Park, Auckland’s sports stadium and the shrine dedicated to New Zealand Rugby Union. The worship of New Zealand’s All Black team is well known to inspire national religious fervour, the adoration accorded to the elite players up there with divine beings and Himalayan gods. Team selection is headline news, coaches are considered heroes, deaths of past players are marked with respectful silence, and any match lost, god forbid, is mourned as a national disaster.

The collective veneration, power of the pack and crush of bodies adulating a selfless common cause had all the hallmarks of a spiritual jamboree — the festive throng of Krishna Jayanti, the orange host of Pashupati’s Shivaratri sadhus, the glittering red sea of Tij, acres of cross-legged Kalachakra Buddhists, and the multitude of pilgrims at India’s Kumbh Mela, the huge gathering held every 12 years in northern India.

Granted, the Kumbh crowd is counted in tens of millions rather than mere tens of thousands in



Auckland and, instead of black jerseys and protective headgear, most devotees are naked except for a loin cloth, matted hair, sacred threads or vibrant saris.

Although from a country of less than five million people, the All Blacks are respected throughout the world as the side to beat, the champions hardly ever knocked off their rugby number one slot. Masters of the oval ball, their intimidating Maori haka is performed before each match, calculated to inspire awe in the opposition with beefy knees bent, eyes wide, tongues protruding. The squad of massive, muscled, tattooed athletes are household names in New Zealand, nurtured, trained and

toned as the global Kiwi sports symbol — the silver fern logo was recently proposed to replace the national flag.

‘Great win last night!’ The country rejoices, quiet satisfaction unites the hordes of black-clad supporters filing out after the game. Kiwi reserve and natural politeness keep the mob from overt gloating, but the yellow sweaters of the defeated Australians are treated with quiet disdain.

My excitement at these great international clashes is recently acquired, and my grasp of the finer rules of the game is slender. Both sons played at school, but I had been a neglectful ‘soccer Mum’ seldom on the sidelines. Sangjay captained the

school First XV and even made the under-18 Victoria side for a precious few minutes before a knee injury had him carried off the field.

With a twice broken nose and dislocated shoulder between them, the boys decided discretion was the better part of valour and retired before the terrors of college league games, lined up against the big guys from the Pacific Islands. That’s a relief for a mother, as the injuries get worse as the stakes rise.

My early interest in international rugby centred on the post-match revelry in the busy bars of Edinburgh’s Rose Street that followed the Scottish internationals played at Murrayfield. Not that we actually ever got to watch the game, just shortcut straight to the pub parties

afterwards, either celebrating a win or drowning a defeat. In the final year of my stifling Scottish school, dusty classrooms and echoing corridors behind the grim grey façade of George Square, I left with disappointing marks and a general impatience with what I perceived as an oppressive establishment.

My dishevelled schoolfriend Kate and I would rock up after weekend work at her family cafe, a groovy spot serving vegan delights and fresh chopped vegetables from their farm along the Moray Firth. It still exists as a favourite Edinburgh eatery, upgraded to Henderson’s Salad Table and now run by the next generation or two. Kate and I were no doubt wearing miniskirts, deeply inappropriate for the chilly climate, or weird flared trousers fashionable in the 1960s, and unsuitable heels, lethal on the wet cobbles of Scotland’s gloomy capital city on a late Saturday night. We were relieved to be out of the constraints of navy school uniforms, crumpled white shirts and hideous burgundy striped ties.

Kate’s counter-culture Mum was my first conscious contact with the Himalaya that became my home. She had returned from a Karma Cola spiritual quest to India with amoebic dysentery — wonderfully exotic and evocative in contrast to the predictable cold and flu afflictions of the dreary British north. It was not long afterwards that I finished school, graduated from the rugby pubs, found a way to break the oppressive bonds, and set off on my restless journey. It was a long circuitous quest that would eventually lead me to Nepal.

Next month the 2019 Rugby World Cup kicks off in Japan, a six-week bonanza in which 20 nations battle for the coveted championship. New Zealand’s All Blacks are defending their reigning title, and supporters worldwide are preparing for the ultimate clash of the giants. Held every four years, this is the first time the tournament is being played in Asia, outside the traditional heartlands of rugby union. You can guess who I am supporting. 🇳🇵



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The monsoon is now in a ripe stage, and a new low-pressure area has built up in the Bay of Bengal that will gradually move towards us with the pulse bringing another period of squally rain early next week. The moisture system preceding it will dump evening and night rain in Kathmandu Valley. Precipitation levels, which were below normal at the start of the season, have now picked up and the long-term forecast from the Indian Met Office is that the monsoon will be robust for at least another month.

Going places together - qatarairways.com

Replaying male machismo

True West has contemporary resonance in the age of toxic masculinity

Sewa Bhattarai



Lee and Austin are brothers who don't seem to have much in common. Austin is a cultured man with an Ivy League degree trying to make it as a screenplay writer. Lee is a wanderer who lives in the shadows. But when they come together in a difficult situation, it seems they are not different at all: each brims with toxic masculinity.

Nepal-based director Deborah Merola has chosen to stage this Pulitzer-winning 1980 play by American playwright Sam Shepard without translation or much adaptation. You can Google the plot, spoilers and all, but we are just going to tell you that Austin suddenly stands to lose his dreams, despite his superior education and manners. And Lee, though on the brink of gaining everything, knows he cannot make it without his brother's refined education. And so the brothers blame each other for their plight and battle it out, with an alcoholic father and a passive mother added to the mix.

Brothers envying one another is familiar to most of us: while Lee thinks that Austin — with his fancy degree and a foothold in Hollywood — is living the glamorous life, Austin thinks that Lee is a daredevil racking up new adventures every day.

This intense drama simmers with an undercurrent of violence that threatens to explode. And sitting in the present, we cannot help remind ourselves of masculinity today — that however much things change, they remain the same. Lee's desire to dominate everyone around him is an obvious example but so is Austin, whose manners are a mere veneer for what lies underneath.

"This drama is relevant today in the era of Donald Trump, when toxic male machismo is on the rise," Merola tells us after a rehearsal this week at Kausi Theatre.

Perhaps because of its contemporary resonance, the drama is enjoying a revival today with

a recent Broadway production starring Ethan Hawke and another starring *Game of Thrones* protagonist Kit Harington. Set in the US 30 years ago, it is considered a quintessentially American play, but the cast here feel that it has universal resonance today.

"We in Nepal think the grass is greener on the other side, and many of us go abroad with great expectations. But often what awaits is disillusionment," says Divya Dev, who plays the younger Austin. Dreams can come crashing down any time and when that happens, Austin has nothing to hold on to, and reverts to base instincts.

Alejandro Merola, who is menacing as the older Lee, feels every well-written drama has a wide resonance. "The lone alcoholic who slowly drifts out of respectable social circles and lives a criminal life on the edges is a universal character," he says. "The play reminds us that there is an increase in such characters today."

Eelum Dixit has a powerful stage presence as the easily manipulated producer Saul who doesn't speak up against bullies, and Kurchi Dasgupta makes an impact as the lost, possibly depressed, mother who stays indifferent even as her sons fight. Divya Dev is at his best as the melancholy Austin, who appears a gentleman but is full of passive aggression. Alejandro Merola frightens us with his outright hostility until he makes an unbelievable transformation.

The drama is a stark portrayal of the unrealistic standards of success that modern society demands, and of the loss of simplicity and innocence. We see these mores manifesting now in Nepal, as well. Says Kurchi Dasgupta, who plays the mother: "Even though it is set in a particular time and place and has a distinctly American feel, you can draw allegories to the current time." 🇳🇵

True West
Kausi Theatre, Teku
6-15 Sept

Internet and Digital TV

01-4235888 | www.subisu.net.np | www.cleartv.com.np

Overkill on Everest

It is politically correct (but factually wrong) to blame fatalities on Everest solely on overcrowding



TO THE TOP: Climbers on the Southeast ridge of Mt Everest as seen from the South Summit (*left to right*) taken by Scott Fisher on 10 May 1996, the disastrous year when 15 climbers died on the mountain. Nirmal Purja's famous photograph snapped on 22 May 2019, and the one taken a day later by Damien Francois showing far fewer climbers.

Damien Francois

Earlier this month, a government panel that was set up after this spring's fatalities on Mt Everest were blamed on overcrowding recommended that permits be issued to climb Mt Everest only to those who have already scaled a Nepali mountain taller than 6,500m.

It also suggested that each foreign mountaineer spend at least \$35,000 during an Everest expedition and \$20,000 for other mountains. Expedition support teams should also have at least three years' experience in organising high altitude climbs.

Though welcome, the immediate question is whether these rules are enforceable. Certificates can be forged and bought, and the 6,500m threshold is not enough — Everest climbers need technical skills and higher elevation experience, at least to 7,500m. A summit of Ama Dablam (6,856 m) would qualify climbers for the big mountains but Mera Peak (6,474 m) would not. Baruntse (7,129 m), although less technical than Ama Dablam, would

qualify on the height criteria.

Charging \$35,000 (for permit only) would be a scandal. It would certainly reduce the crowds since that amount equals a full expedition budget currently, but it would not deter the affluent and 'bucket list' climbers from tackling Everest.

This spring, I almost turned around at the South Summit on 23 May, even though the infamous 'traffic jam' was not as bad as when Nirmal Purja took the now famous photo the day before. I did summit at a relatively late 10am — it had taken my EverQuest team 13 hours to climb from Camp 4 on the South Col to the summit.

We had trained hard, were fit and experienced and had sufficient supplies of oxygen. We descended in a storm, but all made it safely back to Camp 4, and then descended to Base Camp on the 25th. We had done our homework and were prepared.

Four of the 9 climbers who died on the south side of Everest this year were Indians. Two more died on Makalu and Kangchenjunga each. Of the 21 climbers who died in the big Himalayan mountains in the spring of 2019, 8 were from India. Since Indians made up the

highest numbers of climbers on Everest this spring, it could be they had a higher fatality rate. Most Indian expeditions were on lower budgets and had less oxygen higher up the mountain.

Although the number of permits issued has risen since the first congestion drama on Everest in 1996, things are still pretty much the same. As Jon Krakauer wrote in his famous piece in *Outside* magazine in September 1996: 'Everest deals with trespassers harshly: the dead vanish beneath the snows.' I agree, but the dead do not vanish. They are pretty visible.

Too much rubbish has been written in the past months about trash (*see box, overleaf*) and overcrowding on Everest. The number of permits this year was nearly the same as in 2018. A lot of clients on Everest should not have been there at all — they did not have enough experience, and were not fit enough.

I passed the body of Don Cash, an American climber who died of a heart attack close to the Hillary Step. A Sherpa who had passed me on our descent while climbing down the Lhotse

Face fell to his death because he suffered an epileptic seizure just when he was changing his safety clip at an anchor point. Neither died because of overcrowding.

Ever since the 'Into Thin Air' 1996 drama, it has become a tradition to speak of the 'traffic jam', 'chaos' or even 'carnage' on Everest. Granted, I passed six dead climbers myself this year, but was there carnage? Chaos? Is 'traffic jam' the right metaphor at all?

It is politically correct (but factually wrong) to blame the numbers. Is Everest really more dangerous? An ExplorersWeb calculation shows that the summit-to-fatality ratio on Everest has been steadily declining from 12.1% in 1996 to 1.2% this year.

Let us compare the 22 May (Nirmal Purja) photo with my 23 May picture and the Scott Fisher photo of 10 May 1996 (in John Krakauer's book, *Into Thin Air*). As seen from the South Summit, there are definitely many more climbers on the traverse to, and on, the Hillary Step in 2019 than in 1996.

On 22 May there was more 'traffic' than on the next day. There was definitely a problem.



But was the higher number of climbers really the reason for the deaths of nine climbers on the Nepal side that day?

In 2019, besides lack of fitness and self-appreciation, there were two other factors: a narrowed 'weather window' for the summit and insufficient supplies of oxygen. Some teams opted for an earlier

Adventures in Robert Macfarlane's

British author blends philosophy and adventure as he dives into deep time

Kunda Dixit

Camping on the glacier, the snow fell softly all night, making the tent sag. But the stars were out when we set off at dawn along the steep snowfield, climbing with the sun. At the Col, we turned left and stepped on the 3,870m summit of Mont Blanc de Cheilon before noon.

Under the dazzlingly blue summer sky the shiny peaks of the Pennine Alps rose like pointed clouds, with the fang of Matterhorn in the distance and the Lac Dixence reservoir a long way down. The euphoria of summiting must have made me careless as we descended: that night's new snow had covered the slippery ice underneath.

The crampons did not hold, and in less than a second I was hurtling past the Indermühle brothers, Fritz and Urs. Both instantaneously dug their axes into the ice, and their combined strength on the rope arrested my fall with a jerk.

'We made it, of course — I wouldn't be

writing this otherwise...' Robert Macfarlane writes about his own close shave on nearby Lagginhorn (4,100m) in the first chapter of his book *Mountains of the Mind*. What possesses human beings to climb mountains despite, but probably also because of, the fear and danger?

The book came out in 2004, but this passage is worth re-reading in the context of what transpired on Mt Everest this spring:

'What makes mountain-going peculiar among leisure activities is that it demands of some of its participants that they die... Life, it frequently seems in the mountains, is more intensely lived the closer one gets to its extinction: we never feel so alive as when we have nearly died.'

As a boy, Macfarlane was inspired to climb after spending a summer in his grandparents' library thrice re-reading Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna*. What possessed Mallory, Herzog and others to put their lives on the line? Macfarlane inserts his own adventures and near-death experiences in the Alps, Pamir and Himalaya to dissect the philosophy of mountaineering. We learn

about the early Western fascination with mountains and their 'conquest', starting with Thomas Burnett, Charles Lyell and others. Charles Darwin, we learn, used his ability to peer into deep time to ponder not just the origin of species, but also the impermanence of mountains. Alfred Wegener showed peaks have a past and future and are constantly reshaped by continental drift.

'To understand even a little about geology gives you special spectacles through which to see a landscape,' writes Macfarlane in his elegant prose. 'They allow you to see back in time to worlds where rocks liquefy and seas petrify...'

So it is while trekking in Nepal. What seems to be stunning scenery frozen in time is actually just one frame in a timelapse video that began millions of years ago, and will continue for millions more as mountains rise and fall.

The book devotes a whole chapter to mountains maps, and how they 'do not take account of time, only of space'. A flat map of mountains does not show the vertical scale. All maps of mountains should be in 3-D, and





DAMIEN FRANCOIS

summit around 19 May, while others went for 25 May. But the weather changed, leading to a higher number of climbers aiming to summit on 22-23 May. It seems many operators are stingy and try to save on oxygen. This creates problems when there are delays, which are not always due to overcrowding and to be

expected in the mountains. But if you have pushed so hard that you are already ‘too far gone’, disaster will strike with or without traffic jams. You can count on that. Because of this, it is very important to know how far you can go. Experience and fitness, as well as being part of a good team, will help you deal with and

even avoid dangerous situations. Especially when there are many people on the hill — something that will certainly not change in the coming years, even with the new rules. 🇳🇵

***Damien Francois** is a climber and author of The Holy Mountains of Nepal. This spring's expedition on Everest was his 19th in Nepal.*

Stop trashing Everest

The politically correct mainstream media has been trashing Everest for decades. No journalists, Nepali or foreign, seem to be able to counter the established narrative that Everest is ‘the world’s highest rubbish dump’. Rubbish. To me, the *beyul*/sacred valley of Khumbu is as clean as the Alps, and certainly cleaner than the local forests in Belgium. Yes, there are dumps here and there, and there is a trash disposal issue. But the garbage is being managed, and it can no longer be called the ‘toilet paper trail’. Everest Base Camp (5,300m) itself, where up to 1,500 people live April-May every year, is actually very clean. Do a few chocolate wrappers turn a town into a shithole? Most mountaineers are environmentally concerned and do a good job at not polluting. At the end of the season, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) will collect the garbage that expedition teams might have left there. I myself took part in a large cleaning campaign after the 2015 earthquake.



Let’s be honest — the garbage we see on the Everest trail and slopes is mostly left there by porters. Shiny *khaini* foil, WaiWai plastic discards and Hall’s candy wrappers are typical of locals, not tourists. But SPCC has hired people to pick these up along the trails and campsites. I was positively surprised to see that Camp 1 and 2 on the Western Cwm were cleaner this year than in 2018. Obviously, the cleanup expeditions are doing their job. There is still trash left at Camp 2 because it is used as an advanced base camp, where climbers will stay up to 5-6 nights during an Everest or Lhotse expedition. Much of the trash is being taken down but some, like tent material encrusted in ice, is difficult to remove. The main problem on Everest remains Camp 4 on the South Col, at almost 8,000m (*pictured, left*). Despite cleanup campaigns, there are still empty gas cylinders, bent tent poles, cans and wrappers. There are no oxygen cylinders lying around simply because they are too valuable to be left up there. There is also talk of problems with human waste but most use drums at Base Camp and C2. And peeing on the Western Cwm is not really a pollution issue. Some have argued for a moratorium on Everest climbs to allow the mountain to ‘cleanse itself’. As the author of the book *The Holy Mountains of Nepal*, I have some credentials to say that it is all right to climb sacred mountains. Mountains are made holy and sacred by humans. If those humans who decide which mountains are holy are comfortable with climbing these peaks, why do Western neo-imperialists declare that they should not be climbed? Are the abbots of Tengboche and Pangboche monasteries betraying the mountains if they give their blessings to expeditions?

***Damien Francois** in Khumbu*

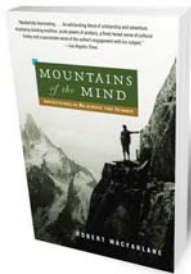
s Aboveworld and Underland



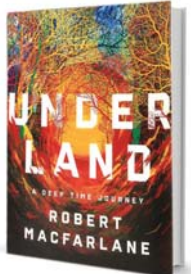
DAMIEN FRANCOIS

even depict the time dimension. For example, how to show that Everest Base Camp is now 50m lower than during the 1953 Hillary and Tenzing expedition because the Khumbu Glacier has shrunk? Swiss cartographer Eduard Imhof’s 1962 map of the Everest region shows glacial ice on Imja, where there is now a lake 2km long. After writing about the ‘upper world’ of the mountains, Macfarlane has just come out with *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*., in which he employs the same methods of personal exploration combined with musings on our subterranean consciousness. The chapters on Greenland are especially relevant during this climate emergency. Both books force us to expand our understanding of time, to time beyond our lifetimes, beyond the existence of our species, beyond cataclysmic meteorite hits. In that vast timescale, our day-to-day concerns, poverty and suffering, wars and genocide appear like a blip. The Anthropocene is a passing phase, and the Yellow Band on the summit of Everest will once more be at the bottom of a future ocean.

Both books remind us of the insignificance and impermanence of our own species in the vastness of space time. Human beings have moulded and modified the surface of the Earth, in some cases irreversibly, but there are other worlds below and above us that are untouched and unknown. Macfarlane’s lyrical prose lends itself to the spiritual message for humankind of looking at existence from a cosmic perspective — this is not at all reassuring when we are confronted with a climate apocalypse. But somehow in a mysterious way, it is comforting to know that none of this really matters. Not petty nationalism, not fake news propagated by our leaders, not who wins Nobel Prizes, not overcrowding on Everest. At a book signing ceremony of *Underland* in Brooklyn’s Greenlight Bookstore recently, I asked Macfarlane about the traffic jam on Everest. “When I saw that photograph of Everest, I said to myself this is not climbing, this is not queuing, it is dying ... these were people standing in line ready to fulfill what to me is



Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit
by Robert Macfarlane
Vintage, 2004
\$17.95
306 pages



Underland: A Deep Time Journey
by Robert Macfarlane
W.W. Norton Company, 2019
Hardcover \$16.14
496 pages

a profoundly philosophical and problematic vision of conquest, of the need to be the highest, the need to take a summit selfie that proves you have dominated nature. That is not supposed to be what all this is for.” 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Auto Show
Visit the 13th edition of the Automobile Association of Nepal's (NADA) Auto Show. This year, it features eight electric car brands and six e-scooters.
27 August-1 September, 11am-6pm, Rs200 (regular)/ Rs150 (student), Bhrikutimandap

Object in Focus
Globally renowned contemporary artist Ang Tsherin Sherpa's art exhibition, "...and the winner is" opens 3 September at 4:30pm.
4-13 September, 10am-5pm, Taragaon Museum, Boudha (01)5178105

Against the Patriarchy
Fight the patriarchy at Kaalo.101's 'Post. AxV: GUFFINGxJAMMINGxLOOTING against the patriarchy'. The event will include legal counselling, discussion, a garage sale and musical performances.
31 August, 1pm-8pm, Kaalo.101, Patan, 9803553123



The Curated Closet
The Curated Closet will be showcasing designer pieces from Kashvi Handloom, Bhomra and more.
5-6 September, 11am-6:30pm, Marriott Hotel, Naxal

Mahaabhoj
Mahaabhog, written almost 40 years ago in India, has been adapted for Nepal for the first time by director Anup Baral.
31 August-29 September, 5pm onwards (except Monday)/ 1pm onwards (Saturday only), Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar (01) 5705761



Nijgadhi Rally
Join the rally against the building of the Nijgadhi International Airport. Contractors have estimated that more than 2.4 million trees will need to be cleared for the airport.
#WeStandWithNijgadhi
30 August, 2:30pm-4pm, Maitighar Mandala

Debut Fashion Show
With models and designers from around the world, Debut 2019 is the fashion event of the year.
30 August, 6pm onwards, Patan Darbar Square



Art market
Support local Nepali artists and kick off Visit Nepal 2020 with a Saturday immersed in local handicrafts and artwork.
31 August, 1-5pm, The Yellow House (01) 5545655

La Tarte Tatin
Learn how to make La Tarte Tatin, a caramelized apple pie with sugar and butter, at Alliance Française de Kathmandu's Le Bistro.
3 September, 10:30am-12pm, Rs250 (AFK students)/ Rs300 (non-students), AFK, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221

MUSIC



Naren Limbu
Enjoy Naren Limbu's blend of folk songs with a modern sound.
6 September, 7pm onwards, Privé, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 9801090111

Katja Šulc
Slovenian singer Katja Šulc will be performing her latest project, 'KAMLISAJLAN'. Her music is a medley of contemporary gypsy poetry from the Balkans and Eastern Europe.
30 August, 7pm-10pm, Bikalpa Art Cafe, Pulchok, 9851147776



Lekali
Listen to the musical performance of trio Lekali Pariwar, a veteran Nepali band that was founded more than 50 years ago.
30 August-1 September, 6pm-8pm, Nepalaya, Kalikasthan (01) 4412469

Acoustic Night
Listen to the soothing sounds of Pravin and Chiku at Belle Ville's acoustic night.
31 August, 7pm onwards, Belle Ville Cafe & Pub (01) 4411266



Voodoo U
A product of the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Voodoo U will be playing neo-soul and R&B songs this Friday evening.
30 August, 7pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5528362

DINING



Detox Cafe
Looking to kickstart your health regime? Detox Cafe is the place for you. With their healthy smoothie bowls, quinoa salads and green juices, you can still eat clean when eating out.
8am-8pm, Labim Mall, Pulchok, 9849371072

Happy Hour
Sip a refreshing cocktail during happy hour at Thamel's hottest new bar. Buy one drink and get one free!
4-6pm till 7 September, WXYZ Bar, Aloft Hotel, Thamel (01)5252000



Mechung
Eat the best of Tibet at this authentic Tibetan restaurant. The sha phaley, thukpa and gyuma are a must.
10:30am-8pm, Boudha (01) 4477759



Pho 99
With the end of summer, comes the cool breeze of autumn that calls for soul-warming food. Pho 99's pho and new Vietnamese chicken stew is the perfect combination to eat in preparation for the colder seasons.
11am-9pm, Jhamsikhel, 9803203119

Aloft Buffet
Celebrate womanhood with a buy-one-get-one-free buffet dinner at Aloft. Deal only applies to women.
7pm-10pm, 26 August-1 September, Rs2,200+, Aloft Kathmandu (01) 5252000

GETAWAY



Karma Hotel
Karma Boutique Hotel, located in the heart of vibrant Thamel, is inspired by an amalgamation of Tibetan and Nepali culture. It has brightly decorated rooms and artwork hanging everywhere.
Thamel (01) 4246131

The Fulbari Resort
With its distinctive Nepali architecture, The Fulbari Resort offers a different space than the other getaways in Pokhara. And with unparalleled spa amenities, it is the perfect place to wind down.
Pokhara (061) 432451



Riverside Springs Resort
100km from Kathmandu on the way to Pokhara and Chitwan, the resort offers a vast swimming pool, exciting activities like horse-back riding and rafting, cosy rooms and attentive service.
Kurintar, Chitwan (01) 5544263



Cora Nepal
Cora Nepal is the perfect guesthouse for anyone looking for a tranquil getaway. With its modern, minimalistic design, Cora is a sanctuary for guests.
Sanepa, 9818988152



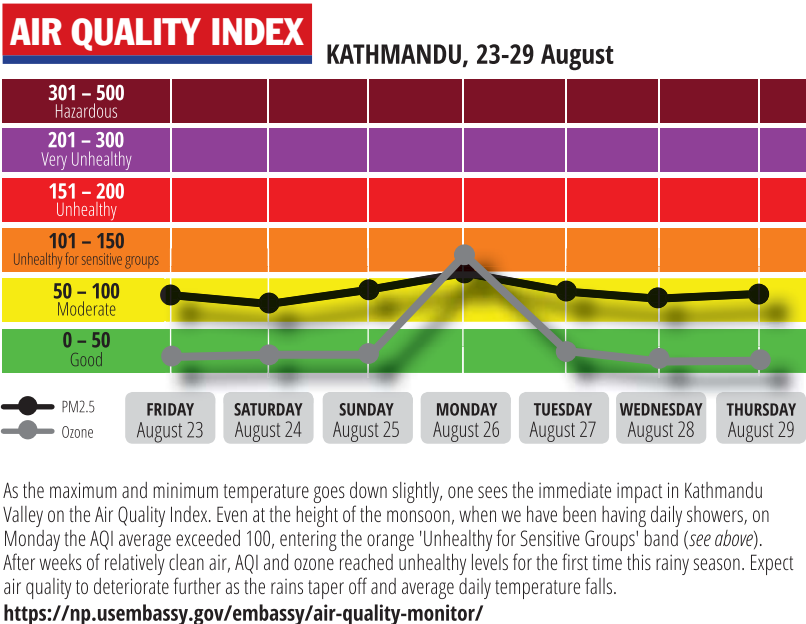
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OUR PICK

MISSION MANGAL

Opened in Kathmandu on 15 August

Based on the real-life story of the Indian Space Research Organisation's Mars Orbiter Mission, Director Jagan Shakti's *Mission Mangal* follows Tara Shinde (Vidhya Balan) and Rakesh Dhawan (Akshay Kumar) on their journey to launch India's first satellite to Mars. With dynamic characters and a plot that keeps you on the edge of your seat, you'll be rooting for underdogs Tara and Rakesh in no time.



Garden walls

Kathmandu can restore some of its lost greenery with vertical gardens

Sheilin Teo



INIGO IRIARTE

Kathmandu was described by early expats as an ‘emerald valley’. During the monsoon, terrace paddy fields and forested hills carpeted the basin in verdant shades of green.

Today, there is barely any green spaces left. But in a small way, Spanish artist Inigo Iriarte is out to change that. ‘Indi’, as the Pamplona native likes to be called (*in photo below*), paints walls with a palette of living plants.

His geotextile canvas is a moist fabric wall alive with leaves and roots, flowers and fruits, water, air and colonies of tiny living creatures. The vertical gardens are living art with broad strokes of a variety of green and tufts of vivid moss, daubs of purple, orange or white where flowers have bloomed.

Iriarte borrows heavily from expressionist tendencies when he paints on stretched canvas. Similarly, these living compositions

take residence on nutrient-rich walls. Sometimes, parasitic plants hitch a ride on their nursery hosts and take root alongside them, becoming part of the family. Occasionally, plants fail and need to be replaced.

One of Iriarte’s sites, at the rooftop Rain Restaurant in Jawalakhel, is alive with over 25 varieties, from orchids to monstera, ferns to succulents, bromeliads to bamboo and surprisingly — on a wall of matted fibre and root substrates of crumpled fabric — fruiting citrus plants. There is also rosemary, happily sticking to its sunny spot on the south facing wall. “Plant health and happiness, and their ensuing resilience, is key,” explains Iriarte.

The wall at Rain is based on aquaponics and recycles water from a fish tank below the plants to the microbially dense geotextile wall. The wall acts as a biofilter



KUNDA DIXIT

speak of the artist’s dual love for the city and nature, but also of how they struggle to coexist.

Iriarte moved to Kathmandu two years ago with his wife and found reasons and an opportunity here to venture beyond his indoor paint-and-canvas studio into open space. It all started after he was invited to not just paint the inside wall of a spa at Shaligram Hotel, but also cover a blank white wall in the courtyard with a vertical garden.

The result was a stunning green wall stretching across a dhara spout and basin like an oasis. A sudden calming presence, perfect preparation for a spa client to experience a restful treatment to come.

Kathmandu’s latitude is subtropical, but its altitude lends a distinctive climate, rich with summer rain and cooled with dry winters. There is enough moisture and warmth for plants to thrive, so a cityscape of blank walls and hard surfaces could easily be regreened by vertical gardens.

Inigo Iriarte is inspired by French botanist Patrick Blanc, a pioneer of vertical gardens, but takes an ecosystem approach to his selection of plants. Many vertical gardens fail because they are ornamental and used for a wow effect, with little regard for how individual plants like to grow.

Iriarte optimises nature’s own tendencies to create resilient ecosystems and microclimates that regulate themselves. He selects plants and places them according to natural growth patterns: those that prefer drier root biomes are higher, where there may be less water. Plants that thrive in wetter conditions are placed lower on the wall.

He does not pander to those who just want a green wall — he will leave space free for moss and other unidentified free loaders to

convert water rich in ammonia from fish waste into water rich with nitrates and other nutrients that the plants can absorb, thus making it clean and safe enough to be returned to the fish tank in a water cycle.

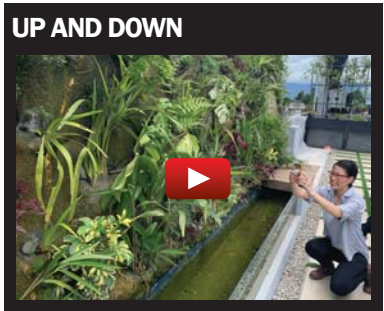
Rain’s bartender Tara Adhikari plucks sprigs of rosemary or fruits from the tiny lime tree for some of his classy cocktails, saying: “We make good cocktails because of the freshness of the ingredients we use, some of which come from Indi’s wall. A vertical garden is a new concept in Nepal, and we took a risk, but the guests like it.”

Every installation is different, tailored to its context, taking into account aspect, exposure to the elements and purpose. For the three walls Iriarte has installed in Kathmandu, including a testing bed at home, all the hardware and plants are locally sourced.

“It would be great to see plants of the surrounding mountains here to green the city using the least space possible and with maximum effect in cleaning the air and creating calm living environments for people and other living creatures,” says Iriarte.

Not many other countries can boast a landscape as three-dimensional and vertical as Nepal, and it is fitting that even as Kathmandu is built up, vertical walls can help it reclaim some greenery and bring back plants, birds, insects and microbes to coexist with humans. 🇳🇵

Instagram: [the_vertical_garden_architect](#)



Nepal is a lush vertical country, and what better way to ‘regreen’ Kathmandu than with vertical gardens. Visit two of Spanish artist Inigo Iriarte’s creations in Kathmandu and be inspired.



SONIA AWALE

Yes, Mughlai cuisine can be vegetarian

Mughlai food, or the food of the Mughal emperors of India, is known to be rich, spicy and meaty, but Kakori restaurant at Soaltee Crowne Plaza is also making an effort to cater to vegetarians.

Famous for its north Indian food, Kakori has brought in chef Hardev Saini, who adds even more exotic flavours to the menu. His platter of vegetarian appetisers is, well, appetising, beginning with *Alu Nizashe*. Whole potatoes are peeled and roasted, and served on skewers. Combined with yoghurt chutney and green chili chutney, the dish makes for a crunchy start to the meal.

Khumb kaju ki galawat tastes as exotic as it sounds. The little nuggets are made of mushroom

and garnished with a cashew, but they look and taste very much like mutton. These mini-bites go well with *warki paratha*, a rich, buttered flat bread. The veg *kofta biryani* is a pleasant surprise — a packet full of mild and delicious flavours that provide the full satisfaction of biryani, minus the meat.

You can savour all this and more of the usual Mughlai cuisine from Lucknow at the ongoing food festival. While most Indian and Nepali food can be made at home, Mughlai cuisine is complicated to prepare and needs slow cooking over low heat for hours and sometimes days at a time.

For meat lovers, Kakori offers the usual delights. *Gosht Seekh Gelafi*, a type of minced chicken mixed with an array of aromatic

spices, onion, coriander and capsicum, is a pure burst of flavours served with mint chutney. *Kalmi Kebab*, a classic tandoori chicken marinated with garlic, onion, cashew, yogurt and spices, is so soft it melts in one's mouth. Equally tender is *Kundan Kaliyan*, almost a typical mutton curry, except it's cooked in brown onion and brown nuts, enhancing its taste.

Galouti (which literally translates as 'soft') Kebab is another lamb dish, this time based on minced meat marinated with ground spice powder. This delectable kebab, with strong hints of green cardamom, is often served with a tang of lime and coriander leaves. There is also an option of *Keema paratha*, for those who would like to go for Mughlai's complete non-veggie experience.

But the highlight of the meal has to be Kakori's dessert selection, which we were pleasantly surprised to learn includes the unique *mirch ka meetha*. Chili does not sound like a great option for dessert, but here the chef minces red capsicum finely, fries it and later adds the sweeteners, making a dish as rich and delicious as *gajar ka halwa*. In fact, it is so flavourful that one forgets it is made of capsicum.

Kakori will be revising its menu after the festival, so several vegetarian dishes that are most popular during the event will be incorporated into the restaurant's regular offerings.

Food lovers can also enjoy soothing musical numbers with their meal as gazal performers croon nearby.

Mughlai Food Festival
Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza
Until 31 August



PMO NEPAL

LONG-DISTANCE LEADER: Prime Minister KP Oli, who is in Singapore for health treatment, conducts the Cabinet meeting via video hook-up on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

CLIMATE JUSTICE: Youth activists stage a demonstration demanding protection for Amazon rainforests, outside the embassy of Brazil in Kathmandu on Monday.



UN INFO CENTRE NEPAL

BUILDING PEACE: Nepali UN Peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo work on the Blukwa Bridge, which was in an advanced state of disrepair.



YETI AIRLINES

ELECTRIC AIRLINE: UNDP Country Director Ayshanie Medagangoda-Labe and Managing Director of Yeti Airlines Chanda Sherpa launch a Mahindra electric van for use at the Kathmandu airport as part of Yeti's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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First, internal party democracy

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 28 August

नयाँ पत्रिका

A meeting at the headquarters of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) on Monday cautioned members not to be publicly critical of the leadership, leaders and cadre, and to channel any disapproval through established procedures. This probably means no criticism should be made via social networking sites, unofficial gatherings and meetings. A similar directive was issued in the opposition Nepali Congress recently.

This proves that both of Nepal's big parties are worried about their diminishing public support, and want to present a united front to threats from outside. The moves also reflect an existential crisis within the parties, where various factions are engaged in power struggles. But it is not in their long-term interests to try and brush the quarrels under the carpet and pretend nothing is wrong by suppressing dissenting voices.



RSS

In his speech to Parliament last week, the Prime Minister said that the present system of government itself was being challenged. This reveals that the government is now scared of its own shadow because of its falling popularity, public disillusionment and its own fecklessness.

It may seem that the directive to stifle dissent is prompted by a feeling that there has been an erosion of party discipline. However, the move is also a matter of greater public concern, as the Constitution envisages a marketplace of ideas and inter-party competition. The kind of parties that rule over us is determined by the kind of parties that we make. Essentially, the party leadership wants to control this debate so things do not get out of hand.

Suppressing different views and stemming the free flow of ideas will block constructive criticism from reaching the policy-making levels of the governing party. The rank and file cadre will not be heard, and will not be able to rise up the party hierarchy. This will result in the undermining of internal democracy. Such restrictions will have a dampening effect on freedom of expression and ultimately undermine the party's democratic governance mechanism.

Keep the debates open, try to make them decent and disciplined, and only then will we establish and strengthen a democracy fit to be called an open society.

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This is how to upgrade

Bayalpata Hospital represents a functioning model of accessible and affordable medical care in remote Nepal

Sewa Bhattarai

Deukali Shahi, 26, looks relieved after delivering a healthy baby girl, but her calmness belies her traumatic childbirth. Her eyes fill with tears as she speaks haltingly of the previous baby she lost and the desperation she felt this time to reach the hospital fast enough so this one would live.

Soon, Shahi is overcome with grief and cannot say more. Her sister-in-law Tulaja fills in the rest of the story. The baby was in breech position, but the family did not know this until Deukali was already in labour. They took her to a nearby healthpost, where the nurse said there was nothing they could do. They went on to the district hospital in Mangalsen, which did not have a surgeon to perform a caesarean.

“We drove another four hours and arrived here at two in the night, and the doctors operated on her,” Tulaja said. “Now we have a healthy baby girl.”

Deukali lost her first child due to the same complication, but the family did not know why the baby would not come out. In these remote mountains of Achham, home delivery is the norm and the district has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in Nepal.

All that is changing with Bayalpata Hospital, which serves as the informal referral hospital for Achham and six surrounding districts. The government hospital is managed by the non-profit Nyaya Health Nepal as a private-public-partnership, and now serves 100,000 patients per year.

Bayalpata’s safe motherhood program is accessible at any hour of the day. In the severely understaffed Far West region, Nyaya Health is practising an experimental model of healthcare



that has become a lifeline for thousands of people in nearby districts. Province 7, which includes Achham, has 13 public hospitals, 16 primary health care centres and 376 health posts, but most of these are under-equipped, under-staffed and under-funded. Aside from government neglect, geography is a further challenge in these mountains. Patients like Deukali have to walk or travel for days to reach a proper hospital like Bayalpata.

The World Health Organization recommends a doctor-patient ratio of 1:1,000, and while it is 1:850 in Kathmandu Valley, the rate is 1:150,000 in rural areas. A recent report by the Nepal Government shows that 20% of staff positions in the healthcare system are not filled.

When Nyaya Health took up an abandoned government hospital in Bayalpata 10 years ago, there were no doctors for the people living in the area. The unmet need was so great that the newly-opened hospital could not cope with demand, and soon expanded its facilities. (See box)

“Nepal’s per capita income

is very low, and more than 70% of Nepalis cannot afford private healthcare. So a model like this, which makes healthcare free and accessible, is very necessary in Nepal today,” says Bikash Gauchan, healthcare director of Bayalpata Hospital.

With grants from the government and donations from philanthropic individuals and organisations, the hospital provides free medical care to up to 500 patients a day, covering a catchment of 230,000 people in Achham’s neighbouring districts.

“The perception in Nepal is that a PPP model is meant to bring in investment for large-scale infrastructure projects like hydropower. When we proposed a model where hospitals would utilise the government funding they deserve, it went against the grain and people found it hard to understand,” says SP Kalaunee, executive director of Nyaya Health.

“But we want to get the best of both worlds: use government funding and resources, but enhance them with our knowledge, skills and management expertise.”

Among many things that make



Bayalpata different from the average government hospital is its Integrated Healthcare System, digitising patient records. The software is unique in Nepal and allows the facility to track the health of patients including pregnant women, children under two and those with chronic diseases. Community health workers reach out to these patients door-to-door instead of waiting for

them to get so sick that they have to travel to hospital.

“Each of us meets patients in our village once in 1-3 months, as per the need,” says community health worker Dwarika Rawal.

“I meet women of reproductive age and talk to them about family planning, tell them about the different methods available. I also check the weight and health of children below 5, and counsel



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Nepal's rural health



PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

their parents about child health and hygiene.”

Rawal also follows up with patients living with chronic diseases such as diabetes, HIV, TB, high blood pressure and mental disorders, including to see if they are taking their medicines.

In the past decade, health indicators in this region have shown a marked improvement because of Bayalpata Hospital, even surpassing targets in Nepal's National Health Strategy (NHSS) for 2020 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. In the Sanfebagar area, institutional deliveries have gone up to 96%, compared to the NHSS target of 70% and the SDGs' 90%. Neonatal mortality has fallen to 6 per 1,000 live births, a third of the NHSS target (18), and half of the SDGs target (12).

Eventually, Nyaya Health hopes to not just improve service to its patients, but push through its Integrated Healthcare System, which would make local governments more responsible for providing overall healthcare rather than just operating a particular medical facility.

“What makes our model

successful is more accountability, and that is what is needed in our public healthcare system. We do not necessarily need more health facilities, we need to make them functional: make sure that the staff are always available, the medicines are stocked and the equipment functions as it is supposed to,” says Kalaunee. “Public healthcare needs to incorporate the use of technology and outreach to become comprehensive.”



Most rural hospitals in Nepal are understaffed and unequipped. But Bayalpata hospital in Achham district is changing the face of rural medical care. Follow us to this remote part of the country and watch patients and doctors talk about accessible and affordable treatment at Bayalpata.

nepalitimes.com

Building a rural hospital from scratch



When a group of Nepali and American public health students set up Nyaya Health Nepal and took over an abandoned district hospital in remote Achham district in 2009, there was not a single doctor for over 250,000 people.

Ravaged by government neglect and endemic TB and HIV/AIDS, the region had some of the worst child and maternal mortality rates in Nepal, and the shortest lifespan. Subsistence farmers moved to India to work most of the year so they could support families back home.

Soon, Bayalpata was treating 12,000 people a year out of two rooms, and today it sees 100,000 patients from Achham and six surrounding districts. The facility needed to expand to cater to the huge unmet healthcare demand of Far West Nepal.

Paid for mostly by crowd-funding, the \$4 million three-phase expansion of Bayalpata Hospital is now complete. Coming round the bend on the highway from Surkhet, the modern facility with its state-of-the-art architecture seems like a mirage in the middle of nowhere.

Today, Bayalpata Regional Hospital is not just unique for its successful model of a private-public-partnership for rural medical care, but also for its distinctive design using rammed earth technology.

An obsolete government facility is now one of the most modern and eco-friendly hospitals in Nepal, providing accessible and affordable health care to the most underserved part of the country.

“Our specs were to use local materials as much as possible, keep energy costs low, and respect the local context,” explains Arun Rimal, a Nepali architect with the US-based Office of Structural Design (OSD). “The rammed earth uses local clay and sand from the river. The thick walls give

thermal mass for insulation, and the skylights optimise sunlight and ventilation.”

The reliance on local material turned out to be a huge advantage because the project faced unforeseen logistical problems due to the 2015 earthquake and Blockade. However, the four-year construction was delayed by just six months because it did not rely too much on bricks, steel and other imported material.

The facility has a rainwater harvesting system, treats its wastewater and has a network of greywater-irrigated terraces and bioswales to control erosion and recharge the aquifer. A 100kw solar array on the roof meets most of the hospital's electricity needs, even powering the facility's only air conditioning unit in the surgical ward.

“It was a deliberate design decision to work with the natural environment as much as possible and also to address the cultural context,” says Tyler Survant from Sharon Davis Design in New York, which also conceptualised the unique Women's Opportunity Centre in Rwanda. “We had to plan for a different kind of hospital from the West: here you have patients and relatives who have travelled for days on foot to get here.”

Bayalpata has public outdoor spaces and canopied courtyards to serve as comfortable waiting areas, while the operating theatres and wards are recessed. Unlike in the US, staff housing also had to be integrated into the facility since it has fulltime resident doctors, who live with their families.

Bayalpata has been shortlisted for the World Architecture Festival 2019, and besides providing vital medical care for much of the Far West, it is sure to become a landmark for sustainability in Nepal's architectural landscape.

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Retire in Nepal

As the country gets ready to herd 2 million tourists into Nepal in 2020, there may be one category of long-term visitors we are overlooking: retirees.

Thailand, for example, is already way ahead of us in providing incentives for westerners to spend their retirements in a warm climate, with beaches, world class medical care, and qualified masseuse. Nepal must do the same, but since the Thais are way ahead of us, we should promote our USP as a retirement destination targeting discredited Indian godmen, tax evaders, money launderers, smugglers, alimony fugitives, deposed tyrants and tycoons.

There is a huge untapped market for thieves and knaves on the lookout of a safe haven, where they will be left alone in the autumn of their lives to splurge their ill-gotten wealth, but among their own kind. Nepal offers the perfect retirement destination for them: laws are lax, the scenery is nice and they will feel right at home here among local crooks who are among the world's friendliest.

But just like everything else, I am sure we are going to bungle it and arrest the first war criminal to arrive at Kathmandu airport and hand him over to the ICC. If we want Nepal to be a serious destination for the world's gangsters, we have to gird up our loins. After all, competition is stiff. The Saudis, North Koreans and Burkina Fasonistas are already offering tax holidays, one-window

cash repatriation and a free dental plan for retirees.

We have to loosen up our archaic banking laws to make it is easy for despots to move their money in and out of Nepal without let or hindrance — provided they give us a cut. After all, France allowed Emperor Bokassa to spend his retirement in Paris in exchange for parking the moolah he plundered from the Chadian exchequer in France. Baby Doc Duvalier also retired in the south of France with his Tonton Macoute comrades and found it quite agreeable. Florida is the favourite destination for Latin American junta retirees, superannuated death squad leaders and failed coup plotters. The Saudis hosted Idi Amin in Riyadh and even allowed him to indulge in occasional cannibalism.

What I'm trying to get at here is that despite Nepal's myriad advantages, it is not going to be a cakewalk to convince the world's tinpot dictators and elected despots to retire here. What do we offer the world's scum that others don't?

The first thing of course is never to sign any extradition treaties with anyone. The second thing is to restore dictatorship in Nepal so overseas authoritarians can hobnob with our own authorities and teach them a few more useful tricks. Disband the CIAA and get out of FTAF: both have terrible acronyms anyway.





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