

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Creatures of culture

As befitting a country whose patron deity is The Lord of Animals, Nepal's autumn festival cycle is about offering buffaloes, goats and fowl to the goddesses, and worshipping cows, dogs and even crows.

But our reverence for animals does not carry over into our day-to-day treatment of the animals in our midst. Owners are unmindful of how firecrackers frighten pets, municipalities

IN AN ANIMAL FARM EDITORIAL PAGE 2

lynch dogs, abandoned cattle roam the highways, buffalo calves die of suffocation in the backs of lorries, and the ultimate in cruelty: Gadimai Mela. How a country treats its animals tells us a lot about its culture.

All this fatalistic brutality hardens us as a society, and translates into abuse of fellow human beings. State neglect condemns many to die due to lack of health care, and decrepit roads kill

2,000 people every year. No one has atoned for war crimes committed during the war. For a decade, Mohamad Aftab Alam got away with burning eight people alive in a brick kiln. An excavator driver in Baitadi last week swung his boom at people, injuring eight.

For festivals to be really about the triumph of good over evil, we have to fall back on what all religions teach us: compassion, tolerance, non-violence against sentient beings, and a reverence for nature. 🇳🇵

Waiting till the cows come home

Saving Nepal's last wild dogs

A dog with altitude

PAGE 14-15



Nepal Times

Wishes Readers Happy Tihar and Chhat कहु देवा किरतुला ११४८०

Because of the holidays, there will be no print edition of the paper on Friday, 1 November. The next hardcopy issue of *Nepali Times* will be on 8 November, 2019. Visit www.nepalitimes.com for daily updates and new multimedia content.

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IN AN ANIMAL FARM

George Orwell wrote 1984 to warn us about tyranny perpetuated by fear, and Animal Farm to tell an allegorical tale of the decay of communism. As history steps into the new decade of the 2020s, it looks frighteningly like 1984 has already arrived in the post-truth world.

Animal Farm may have been a parody of Stalin's Soviet Union but it has many parallels today, perhaps nowhere more so than post-revolutionary Nepal, where just about every character from Orwell's farm has a corresponding political figure. Just fill in the blanks: Farmer Jones (.....), Napoleon the pig (.....), Boxer the horse (.....) Moses the raven (.....) The 9 Dogs (.....) and Benjamin the donkey (.....). History is recurring farce.

animals, Diktel Municipality last month beat dozens of community dogs to death with iron rods. In Kathmandu, dogs scalded with boiling water or acid land up in shelters every day. While we worship our pets on Sunday, hundreds will be so frightened by firecrackers they will get lost trying to get as far away from the explosions as possible.

We will worship cows on Sunday even as thousands of abandoned street cattle roam the East-West Highway (see story, page 14-15). A ban on cow slaughter and the lynchings of Muslim traders across the border in Uttar Pradesh has meant that cattle forsaken by their Nepali owners are now homeless.

Sacrificing goats during Dasain is a ritual,



Nepal may now be a secular republic, but the country's patron deity is still Pashupati Nath, the Lord of Animals.

Paradoxically, for a country that worships animals Nepal is increasingly known as a country that mistreats animals. We love our animals to death.

Animals are ascribed godlike qualities, only to be tortured and killed. All this comes into sharp focus during Dasain and the upcoming Tihar festival. You cannot eat meat without killing an animal -- we get that. But why kill in the cruellest way possible? Take a peek at the buffalo trucks that transport the animals to Kathmandu's slaughterhouses. It is guaranteed to put you off buff momos for good. See how goats are unloaded at the Balkhu market, or how a dozen chickens tied to the backs of motorcycles are taken to the butchers with their beaks scraping the asphalt.

When faced with criticism about blood sacrifices, Nepalis get defensive and go on the offensive, pointing at factory farms and assembly line abattoirs in industrialised countries. True, the west has perfected the art of mass killing of animals for food. But there is now a backlash: cruelty to animals and the climate impact of eating meat have led to a dramatic increase in vegetarianism and veganism in Europe in the past five years. Ten percent of Britons are vegetarian, and one-third of women there do not eat meat.

This Tihar, Nepalis will worship crows, cows, dogs and bulls by garlanding and offering them treats. The festival is imbued with deep spiritual meaning, much of which has been lost. Despite this reverence of

We love our animals to death.

and the meat is consumed during family feasts. But how does one explain the mass bloodletting of sacrificial animals at Kot? Or the unconscionable slaughter of thousands of buffaloes, goats, fowl and even pigeons at Gadimai? It is difficult to justify carnage on such a horrifying scale in the name of tradition, killing for the sake of killing just so the wishes of those doing the killing are granted. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that the Gadimai slaughter was indefensible cruelty, but next month organisers once more expect 6 million visitors to the temple in Parsa, and more bloodshed.

It is worth pondering whether all this fatalistic brutality hardens us as a society. Forget animals -- look at how we treat fellow humans. State neglect condemns mothers and infants to die unnecessarily, corruption in the medical sector is a death sentence to many, our highways are in a perpetual state of murderous disrepair.

In 10 years 17,000 Nepalis were killed at the hands of fellow Nepalis, and no one has atoned for the unspeakable crimes against humanity committed then. Mohamad Aftab Alam got away with ordering eight supporters to be burnt alive in a brick kiln to destroy evidence of bomb-making in the 2008 elections. This week, video emerged of an excavator driver in Baitadi swinging his boom at people, injuring eight of them.

For festivals to really represent the triumph of good over evil, we have to go back to the basics of what all religions teach us: compassion, tolerance, non-violence against sentient beings and a reverence for nature.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The front page of Nepali Times #473 of 23-29 October 2009 reads as if it could have been written this week:

At a time when India-China relations are returning to near-Cold War levels, the Maoists have been trying to play Nepal's two giant neighbours off against each other. Having concluded that Delhi masterminded its downfall from government in May, Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been cosying up to China. Beijing, which was happy with the way the Maoists cracked down on pro-Tibet activities while they were in power, seems to be only too happy to play along. Dahal's visit to China last week, during which he also met briefly with Premier Hu Jintao, was either perfect, or disastrous, timing.

We don't know what China's message was, but sources say Beijing underlined the need for stability in Nepal and Premier Hu was worried about the growing political drift in Kathmandu. What Dahal's visit seems to have done is made the Indians even more paranoid, and to conclude that the Maoists can't be trusted.



ONLINE PACKAGES



CATS AND DOGS

Why should kukur puja be restricted only to canines? Watch a pair of unlikely friends, Ginger the mongrel and Momo the feline, enjoy being worshipped and fed their favourite treats. Don't miss this special Tihar video only at nepalitimes.com.



DHAKA FASHION

Traditional dhaka fabric has been part of Nepal's unofficial national dress for decades, and is now becoming a fashion item. The fabric is no longer restricted to the ubiquitous topi -- today it is used in saris, shawls, wedding jackets, cushion covers, tote bags and even shoes. Watch the video and read the story: page 8-9.

SUICIDES IN KOREA

Absolutely heart-wrenching account of the plight of Nepali migrant workers in Korea ('Dead end of the Korean Dream', Ki Mindo, #981). This ought to be a subject for the governments of Korea, Nepal and an NRNA joint commission to find short-term relief and long-term solutions. It will be important to avoid a similar situation arising in the future in Japan as more Nepali workers are now going there.

Kul Gautam

GEOPOLITICS

Indeed, we are of strategic importance to them -- that's why countries are investing in our country ('Trans-Himalayan handshake', Editorial, #981). Only the people of Nepal can uplift Nepal.

Milan Poudel

■ This article, by a relatively distant observer in Bhutan, lacks sufficient depth in the understanding of the dynamics that have been reshaped positively in recent years between Nepal and India ('Political geography of India-Nepal-China ties', Passang Dorji, #981). With Nepal choosing to move closer to China after the 2015 blockade, India is now much more cooperative and considerate with Nepal.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha

■ Insightful analysis. Finally, Nepal seems to be moving towards proactive diplomacy from the conventional reactive or defensive one.

Ngamindra Dahal

DOLPO'S HIGHWAY

We are just asking for a safe road, so that people don't die. (New High Way to Dolpo, Sonam Choekyi Lama, #981) Lives will change, children will go to school and people will be linked to the rest of the country. It won't hinder tourism but make it flourish.

Krishna Dahal

■ In Dolpo the local MP seemingly calls all the shots, most notably on 'roads'. Dozer drivers are left to their own devices. On roads along trekking routes, nothing is worse for a trekker than having dust spewed over them! Finally, on opening up the trekking trail to Dolpo from Mustang -- challenging!

Sam Cowan

WHAT'S TRENDING



Greens from Nepal in Qatar's desert

by Upasana Khadka

Fresh veggies are joining migrant workers as Nepal's main exports to Qatar. Read how one entrepreneur saw an opportunity and grabbed it. The popularity of this uplifting story proved that Nepalis are hungry for good news.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook

🔍 Most visited online page

Comrade Xi, come back!

by the Ass

We should get President Xi and Prime Minister Modi to visit different parts of Nepal every other month so that the potholed roads are fixed, airports spruced up and towns made spic and span. The donkey's suggestions were a hit on social media.

🐦 Most popular on Twitter

New High Way to Dolpo

by Sonam Choekyi Lama

Nepal is grappling with how to balance road access with tourism and heritage conservation, as seen in a trip to trans-Himalayan Dolpo, the last district in the country to be connected to the highway network. Local lodge owners and trekkers are not happy with motorcycles overtaking them in clouds of dust. Read the field reportage, watch the video and join the discussion online.

💬 Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
A Nepali entrepreneur saw Qatar's reliance on imported vegetables, especially after the Saudi embargo, and set up a company to sell Nepali veggies in #Qatar. Qataris are now buying *gundruk* and Pakistanis are purchasing *dalle khursani* chillies.

Sujeev Shakya @sujeevshakya
This is the globalising market for #Nepali products. If cartels did not control transportation and pricing, the opportunities would have soared

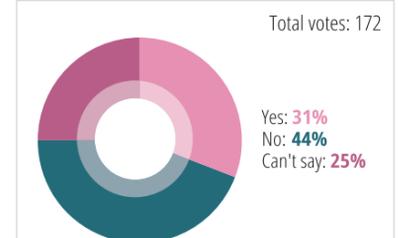
Sameer Khatiwada @Khatiwada_S
A little imagination and risk taking: a Nepali entrepreneur finds 'a niche export market' for vegetables grown in #Nepal in Qatar, where close to half a million migrant workers live. Stories like these make me hopeful for #Nepal

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
In 1973 @lisachoegyal became the only female member of a British film team driving overland from Venice to Central Asia, researching a film on Marco Polo. She calls it trying to make a movie about a belt & road initiative before the term was even invented.

Shyamal Shrestha @ShyamalShrestha
It's always a pleasure to read Lisa's column. She is an encyclopaedia for Nepal's tourism industry and has contributed no less to marketing Nepal as a safe and fun tourism destination. She should consider publishing a memoir.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #981

Q. Does the treatment of rape-accused MP Krishna Mahara mark a turning point for justice in Nepal?



Weekly Internet Poll #982
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Is it wrong to worship animals one day of the year and mistreat them on the others?

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

HAPPY TIHAR

We wish you and your family a happy Tihar filled with happiness, peace and prosperity.



TURKISH AIRLINES

Can Nepal be the powerhouse of Asia?

Yes, by creating an environment for investment in renewable energy to meet domestic and regional demand

The Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal (IPPAN) is hosting the Nepal Power Summit on 21-22 November in Kathmandu. The event will draw over 700 energy experts from Nepal and globally.



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

Past Hydropower Summits and Energy Conclaves have yielded little results, and there is mental fatigue among Nepalis about seminars, conferences, workshops and summits because they are usually talk shops with no follow up or real tangible impact.

This year's summit is based on Nepal's recent past achievements in the sector, and will focus on regional energy trade, transmission line infrastructure, enabling regulations and financing. The key breakthrough in mobilising investment in energy will depend on breaking monopolies and opening up new markets. No one will invest in power unless there is somewhere to sell it.

This is why Nepal needs to create greater demand at home. The summit will look into all possibilities, including energy for transport, which presently is almost solely dependent on imported fossil fuels. The idea is that we must use as much energy as possible for productive



domestic end uses before we plan to export.

The theme for this year's summit is Powering the Asian Century, which signals the goal of the region becoming an engine of global economic growth. Rising living standards of Asians demand goods and services that are produced with clean, renewable energy that does not exacerbate the climate crisis or

contribute to air pollution.

Nepal can and should position itself as the source of clean hydropower for the Asian century. We need to grab this opportunity — it could be our chance to bring really big change to Nepal.

While some people cursed the darkness during the years of power cuts, the private sector stepped up and took the lead. The public and the government began to engage,

and then came the investors. Nepal was still addicted to foreign aid and pleaded at donor meetings to get other countries to build power plants for us, free of cost.

The idea of investment replacing aid is now catching on, however old habits die hard and the dependency syndrome is still deeply rooted. Chinese President Xi just reminded us that only Nepalis can develop Nepal. Others can help mobilise

resources and give us access to technology and finance but at the end of the day, Nepalis will have to do the heavy lifting.

Nearly one in four Nepalis are now working, earning and sending money home from all parts of the globe. The spending power of Nepalis can be felt during these weeks of festivities. Gold and land remain the preferred investments for people who still do not trust the market, businesses or the government.

Hydropower is perhaps the one sector that is now able to draw public investment. We just have to remind people that investing in it is a good idea, and then protect the money that small and big investors put into energy by expanding domestic and regional demand for the electricity generated.

The next step would be for Nepalis to wean themselves from imported LPG, petrol and diesel. The energy sector can create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and help keep our young professionals at home. Along the way, we have to learn how to better negotiate with our neighbours and respond to their market needs.

We are not fooling anyone by lining our streets with flower pots and draping cloth banners to disguise our dirty rivers for a couple of days. Ensuring the prosperity of 30 million people is hard work, but powering the Asian century is our historic opportunity. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc.

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Turkish to Hanoi

Turkish Airlines is launching direct flights to Vietnam's Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, after previously operating the routes as



connected flights. The flag carrier will have daily flights to Ho Chi Minh and will fly to Hanoi six days a week (except Sunday) then seven days a week starting in April 2020.

Laxmi Bank winner

Teesha Shrestha has won the My Card Ideas competition organised by Laxmi Bank. The first ever Visa debit card design crowdsourcing competition aimed to foster



engagement and collaboration with current and potential customers of the bank. Shrestha will receive Rs350,000 for her seven winning designs.

Qatar football 2019

As official airline partner of the FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2019, Qatar Airways invites customers to book flights and receive match



tickets to see the stars of world football in action at the FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2019, 11-21 December. Passengers who have already booked tickets in that period can add stopovers in Doha and get match tickets.

Carlsberg Golf

Maj Nischaya Rayamajhi scored 37 points to top the Carlsberg Golf Series, leapfrogging to number 1 from 4th place on the leader board. He earned a full paid trip to Malaysia to participate in the Carlsberg Golf Classic during the first week of November 2019.

iNi Cinema

The first outlet of iNi Cinema has opened in the Karmacharya Complex, Gongabu. With two spacious auditoriums and total seating capacity of 335, the complex features Leadcom seats for ultimate comfort, a projector from Barco 20C and the GetD 3D device to assure optimum resolution.

prabhu BANK

Turkish Airlines' Istanbul hub is humming

Six months after an overnight shift from Istanbul's old airport to its new one in a carefully choreographed 'Great Move', airlines and passengers appear to be getting used to the sheer size of the international hub, an airport bigger than the area of Kathmandu.

With three of its six runways and four of the five concourses compete, the airport at the edge of the Black Sea is well on its way to becoming the world's busiest. Taking advantage of the airport's location, Turkey's flag carrier will have a 500-aircraft fleet serving 400 cities around the world by 2025.

Most passengers flying Turkish Airlines to and from Kathmandu transit this 76-million-square-metre terminal with five piers and 145 boarding gates. Disembarking at gate F17 and connecting to a flight out of A14, for example, means taking into account walking time between the two ramps and also a security check.

But once upstairs in the transit lounge, there is plenty of help — including from a friendly multilingual robot with a perpetual smile that can help passengers find gates and facilities in the main terminal. Family-friendly lounges and snooze rooms make it easy to pass the time.

"The new airport was a must to accommodate Turkish Airlines' growth plans, and we hope to give passengers to and from Nepal much more comfort and flexibility with better connectivity during Visit Nepal 2020," says Turkish's Nepal Manager Abdullah Tuncer Keceli.

Istanbul airport's architects have ensured it is different from other modern airports



by giving it a Turkish ambience. The duty-free area is laid out to resemble the Misir Carsisi spice market in the city, with stalls selling baklava, cheeses, dried fruits and other delights. Turkey being a gastronomic superpower, the transit lounge has a enormous range of Ottoman-style eateries, from cafes to dumpling kiosks. Nepalis will notice how much of our culinary and linguistic heritage is intertwined with Turkey, with familiar words like kebab, pilaff, köfte and halva.

Even though transit passengers can get city tours or even layovers if the time between flights is more than 9 hours for

business and 12 hours for economy, there is a case to be made for just staying at the airport since the city is a good 45-minute ride away. Passengers with a round-trip ticket and connection time of over 20 hours can get Stopover privilege of a free one-night stay in a 4-star hotel (economy class passengers) or two nights in a 5-star hotel (business class passengers) in the city.

Turkish Airlines has upgraded its business lounge and the emphasis, again, is on food. There is Turkish coffee and an elaborate tea room built in traditional style. You can watch chefs prepare your orders, and the lounge is a case study on how a country

should project its attractions to turn transit passengers into future tourists. In fact, like the airport, the Miles&Smiles business lounge is a destination in itself — almost making you wish the layover was longer.

Some people eat to fly, and others fly to eat. Turkish Airlines does not confine its culinary attractions to its lounge, but also takes it up in the air. The food is prepared in an enormous gourmet kitchen in Istanbul managed by Turkish Do&Co and staffed with internationally-trained chefs, some 500 of whom actually fly as part of the crew and prepare dishes onboard. The flight kitchen has 2,500 staff preparing 200,000 meals a day. The menus change on a weekly basis and differ according to inbound or outbound flights. It has been called 'The New Silk Road' and Turkish Airlines is exploiting Istanbul's strategic location between Africa, Europe and Asia to connect non-stop flights to anywhere in the world. There are 60 capital cities within a 3.5-hour flying distance of Istanbul, most of which are among Turkish's current 306 destinations in 125 countries. Passengers from these cities can connect to anywhere in the world through Istanbul on long-haul flights.

Turkish' Vice-President Sales for Asia and the Far East, Tuncay Eminoglu, told *Nepali Times* in an interview: "Istanbul is really at the aviation crossroads of the world, and with our fleet of medium and long-range aircraft we can connect any point in the world to any other point through this hub, especially in Asia, where the growth in passenger traffic is highest." 🇹🇷

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Adieu, Jazzmandu till next year

Another big mishmash of human improv



ALL PHOTOS: SHEILIN TEO

Sheilin Teo

Played slowly and masterfully, the tabla makes a sound like plump water drops hitting a deep well. The lilting, devotional sound of Nepali tabla maestro Rabin Lal Shrestha was sorely missed this year. Having performed at the Surya Nepal Kathmandu Jazz Festival for the last 16 years, Shrestha passed away recently.

This year festival faithfuls at the Jazz Bazaar in Gokarna Forest Resort were introduced to his son, Bijay Shrestha, alongside

an ensemble of his father's students, all seated in white, low on the stage floor sounding out melodious, plaintive repetitive chants. They played in unison, down to each tabla beat, as though a single spirit engulfed them as they played.

Nepali *bansuri* flute and *sarangi* strings also feature in the music presented by Blue Fret. *Jiri Blues* is a walk down memory lane: a friendly toe-tapping tune with an undercurrent of nostalgia and longing. The airy whistle of the *bansuri's* lets the *sarangi* tease out strains of yearning.

Also there was the German

band RSxT, headed by keyboardist and electro-sound manipulator Roman Shuler with a heady mix of music styles in seamless transition, each vibe layered over another, tickling at nostalgia one moment, setting the ground aroar with grooves the next, somehow sounding jazzy to the bone.

Dhokaima's intimate courtyard was transformed into a sophisticated sound arena replete with Tihar lights and Latin Jazz aficionados milling about or sitting transfixed by the opening act of French songstress Faby Medina (above, left). Some in the audience were sufficiently transported to

a Caribbean ambience not just with her sound but by the heat and smell of grilled seafood being flambéed.

Medina's style is trad cool, and her mellow mellifluous voice hits each emotion, wink and wince of her songs perfectly. She jazzes up the Beatles' stalwart *Blackbird* with lilting poignance, sings the sweet, sad, cheeky souls of good time girls in jazz classic *Love for Sale* and a French tune, *Non Musieu*. She is just as at ease playing with scatty transitions to her bandmates' solos, sounding witty, jazzy hoots and gasps, to working her lyrics with

measured, precise and well-honed enunciation. And when she let loose her native twangy French in a creole tune, it is transportative, and her song took the audience from a balmy Jazzmandu evening, to the balmy salt-scented islands of her birth.

Joining the soirée is Adrian Crookston, joined on stage by Cadenza Collective's drummer Nabin Chhetri doubling as Forro vocalist, and Cadenza bandmate, guitarist Rajat Rai. Together, the trio drew eager waves of dancers toward the stage with their Palouse Forro Experience, infecting the crowd with frenetic, rousing pace of Brazilian street music, reminiscent of troubadours and wandering gypsy bands, sometimes winsome and far too easy to dance to.

Returning to Jazzmandu this year was Tropic Green from Singapore. There was a particular thrill to hear horns blow in unison across a movement, then split off individually for a moment, melting into the other strains being played, only to regroup again with synchronised gusto. The band is obviously well formed and well practiced. They know their parts and work beautifully together, and it is like listening in on a big friendly conversation.

Also returning was Paul Tynon with Jake Hanlon. Tynon lit the stage in Gokarna and the Finale with his solo take on Cadenza's crowd-pleasing *Baza Gaza* anthem. Playing to a quieter crowd earlier on at the Yak&Yeti stage during the festival finale, Tynon's muted trumpet and Hanlon's unctuous guitar notes had aching humility and sheer beauty. This was the kind of music you could lock yourself away from the world with and escape into, sitting alone by a fire, whisky in hand.

In the week that brought the Valley's jazz lovers together visiting musicians also held free masterclasses at the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. Considering its long run since 2002, it is no surprise that the events were well timed, well run, and world class. Through its 17 years, Jazzmandu has kept the festival fresh with talent and enthused audiences with quality music. Jazzmandu reminds us that we are one big mishmash of human improv. 🇳🇵

Jazzmandu 2020 will take place from November 4 to November 11 next year. Details will be announced on their website.
<https://jazzmandu.org/>

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The overcast skies of the past week were a result of a big low-pressure circulation over the Arabian Sea that is moving northeast towards the Gujarat coast. Another depression over the Bay of Bengal is also carrying northeast, and the combination of these two systems has sent a plume of high altitude clouds over Nepal, but not much by way of precipitation. The effect of the Arabian Sea depression will persist into the weekend, bringing cloud cover and reducing the maximum temperature to winter-like levels, in the low 20s.



ASHIS GHIMIRE

Mixing Nepali folk with jazz

Nepal's premier jazz band released its fourth album, *Himalayan Songlines: Cadenza Collective*, on 16 October with a rousing performance at Jazz Upstairs, Lazimpat. In the cosy, warm interior with graffiti walls, uneven wooden tables and music enthusiasts holding glasses of frothing beer, Cadenza delivered its new fusion numbers.

The album is another iteration of the band's signature: blending western classical instruments like saxophone, drums and guitar, with infusion of Nepali sounds. The foot-tapping first song, the popular *Lai Bari Lai*, starts with a saxophone melody, is carried over by enthusiastic drumming and fades off into eternity with a hum.

"This song is about how life has been for us after our last album, growing up, having fun and moving on with life in Nepal," says the group's founder Navin Chhetri.

The next song, *Darjeeling Tea*, is about Chhetri's memories of that little piece of Nepal in India. The edgy number is fast moving, and brought some in the audience to the floor to twirl and twist. With fewer melodies, more drumming, and quite a bit of scatting, this is an effervescent number.

Pari Gau is reminiscent of naughty memories of

youth, with a mix of melody and rhythm. *Eh Maya* is a thoughtful and contemplative song, with a slow, lilting melody that makes you want to close your eyes and sway in your seat. The saxophone is prominent here, and the band's gentle singing about love adds to its dreamy charm.

A surprise is *Blueselo*, which fuses the blues with selo, the folk genre of Nepal's Tamang community. Cadenza reproduces almost exactly the sound of the tungna - string instrument prominent in selo - using modern guitars, and goes on

to play Tamang *dampfu* rhythms on snare drums. The song introduces jazz listeners to Nepali folk music, and also updates and broadens the scope of Tamang selo. The song increases in tempo and ends on a loud jubilant note, bringing wild applause and whoops from the audience.

Cadenza's latest album, with some short and some long numbers, is a treat for jazz lovers, and its cosmopolitan sound is not restricted to Nepal. It has improvisation, introducing many facets of Nepali folk to an international jazz audience. Cadenza has made a niche for itself in Nepali jazz thanks to its cultural amalgamation in music, and its latest album cements that reputation. **Sewa Bhattarai**



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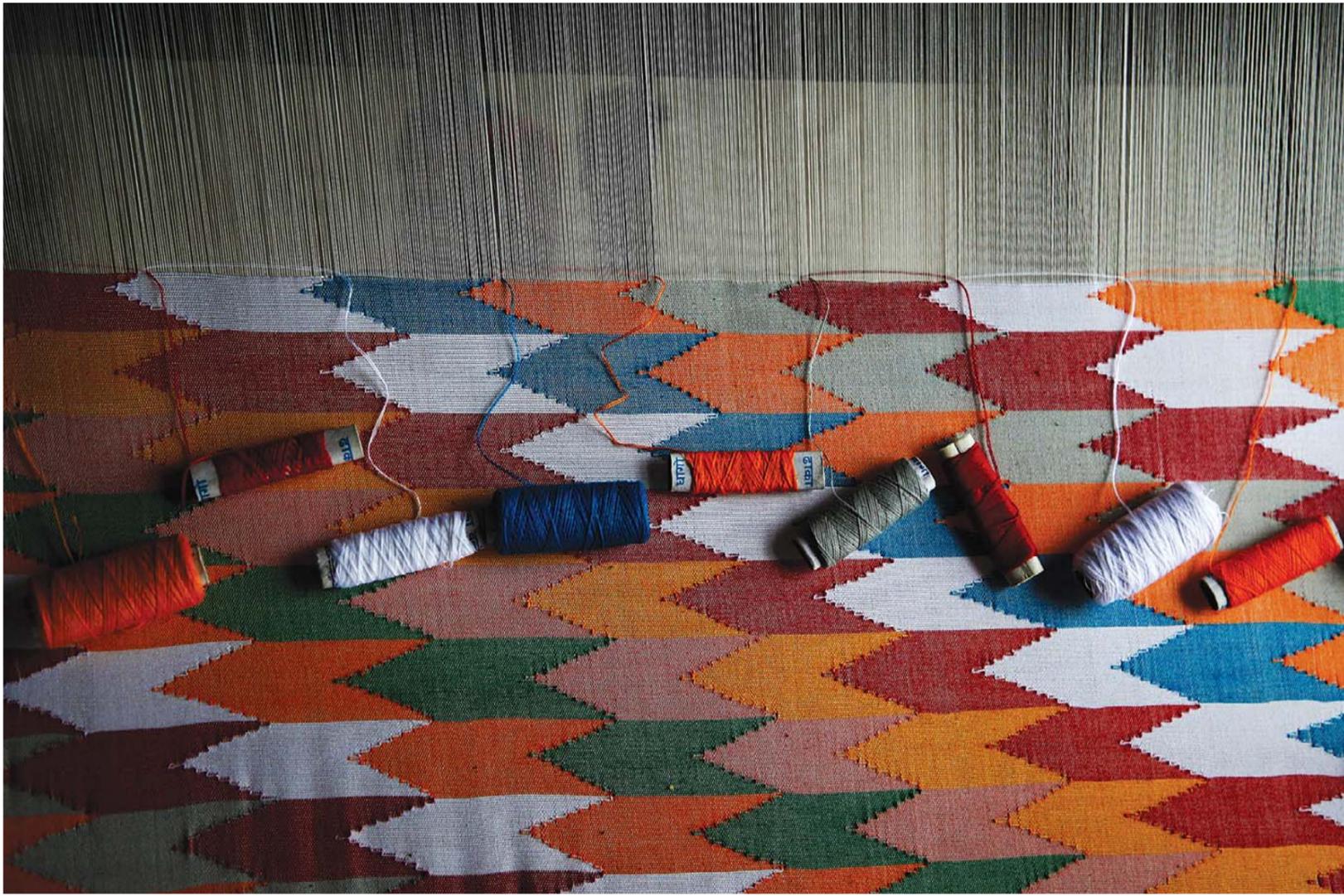
Internet and Digital TV

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From heads



MONIKA DEUPALA

Nepal's traditional dhaka fabric makes a subtle entry into contemporary fashion

Sanghamitra Subba

King Mahendra made it mandatory for government officials to don the dhaka topi to work 60 years ago, giving the traditional weave state sanction. The fabric had been part of Nepal's unofficial national dress long before that royal nod, and is today becoming a fashion item.

Dhaka fabric is no longer restricted to the ubiquitous topi — today it is used in saris, shawls, wedding jackets, cushion covers, tote bags and even shoes. In recent years, Nepali designers have

experimented with the traditional cloth, transforming both its conventional geometric patterns and colours.

Dochaa, a Nepali shoe brand, has curated a line of minimalistic tie-up sneakers with a patch of traditional Nepali fabric woven in (see photo). Their flagship shoe: The Buna Dochaa (*buna* means woven) comes in maroon and grey dhaka and is woven in looms in Dhankuta, Terathum, Palpa, Kathmandu and Lalitpur.

"We wanted to connect urban

and semi-urban Nepalis with traditional dhaka fabric," says co-founder Watsal Rajbhandari. "Fabric from different parts of the country have distinctive weaves, so we wanted to create a contemporary footwear with that fabric as it would be appealing to our customers, who shy away from 'glammed' and glittery use of dhaka."

Dochaa has chosen to be understated, but other designers have been more audacious with their use of dhaka. Actress



Info age boost for

Open data applications could revive the once booming export

Aakriti Shrestha

Although one of Nepal's best-known exports, the success of the pashmina industry unravelled in recent years. From a peak of Rs5 billion in 2000-1, exports fell to Rs1.8 billion in 2004-5 because of a surge in cheap counterfeit, lack of processing facilities, shortage of skilled labour, over-production and under-cutting.

The launch of the 'Chyangra Pashmina' brand has helped the industry recover slightly, with exports earning Rs2.2billion in

2017-18. But there is another tool that could revive Nepal's fine wool product and boost exports: open data.

Information that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone for any purpose is called open data. It can be used to innovate, improve business efficiencies and performance. In Nepal, the availability and use of open data has been restricted because it relies heavily on government websites. Still, private businesses have slowly started using open data

to identify customers, calculate pricing and assist in product development.

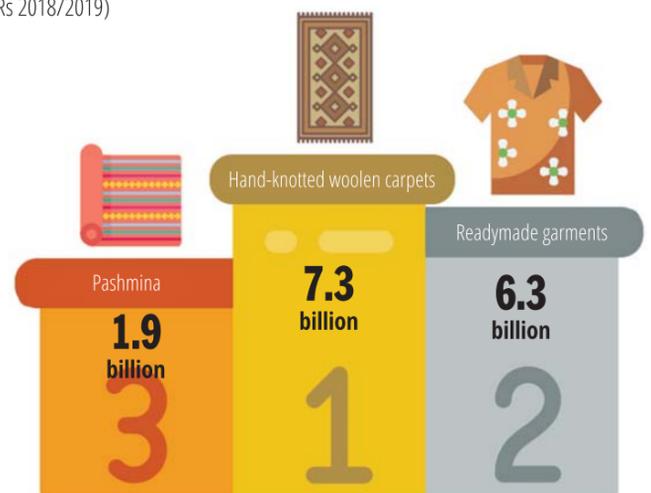
Yet most businesses involved in the pashmina industry still restrict themselves to using internal data, for example, analysing past years' revenues and expenses to set targets for following years, when they could be doing much more.

Producers could use data on imports of processed raw materials and exports of finished goods to set specific financial targets. Through data released by the Department of



Chyangra Pashmina

Nepal's Largest Overseas Export Items
(in NRs 2018/2019)



SOURCE: TRADE AND EXPORT PROMOTION CENTRE



LAKHEY NEPAL

to toes

Swastima Khadka recently wore a full dhaka fabric pantsuit at the SAARC Film Festival, where she won an award for her performance in *Bulbul*. The outfit was designed by Muku Boutique's Mukta Shrestha.

"Seeing how young, modern and bright Swastima is, I wanted to create something that reflected her contemporary style," says Shrestha for whom dhaka is an "exciting fabric" with limitless possibilities. Her modern take on dhaka involves bold, bright colours and innovative patterns.

"Whenever you see dhaka fabric, it is visible, it is very

"To me, the dhaka fabric is very unusual because of the widely used colour choices. The greens, blues, red and oranges do not go with the aesthetic I want for my brand," she says, which is why her use of dhaka is limited to the fabric itself, choosing solid colours instead of multi-colour patterns.

Currently, Shrestha is simplifying dhaka with pastel patterns that she plans to use in designing full-length overcoats, preserving the fabric's simple woven foundation without the distracting colours. 🇳🇵



DOCHAA

Nepali," says Shrestha, adding that she wants to bridge the disconnect between urban youth and the classic fabric by developing her own patterns and colours to customise dhaka according to the latest trends for items like evening gowns.

Designer Erina Shrestha, founder of Lakhey Nepal, focuses more on the fabric itself rather than experimenting with patterns, melding traditional dhaka with her minimalist clothing designs for a nostalgic effect.



Traditional dhaka fabric has been part of Nepal's unofficial national dress for decades, and is now becoming a fashion item. Watch in video.

nepalitimes.com



MONIKA DEUPALA

Is dhaka from Dhaka?

Although the dhaka fabric is now emblematic of Nepal's national dress, it did not originate here. As its name suggests, it actually came from southeast Asia, via then East Bengal during the British days. In fact, experts have traced the patterns and colours of Nepali dhaka to the Bangladeshi jamdani dhakai.

While the patterns vary, simply because each piece is a unique creation of the maker, the Nepali dhaka and the jamdani dhakai are both made with cotton, and mainly in handlooms.

"The geometric flower designs of Bengal's fabled woven air or jamdani textiles has been skilfully interpreted by the Nepali weaver and block-printed to create the dhaka textile," writes Emma Martin, curator and lecturer in museology at the University of Manchester.

Martin could have been referring to Jessie Brown (1888-1983), a British woman who came to Nepal in the 20th century as a nurse of Princess Nani, the granddaughter of Chandra Shumsher. "Brown produced a design that was 'heavily influenced by jamdani and dhaka textile motifs'," says Martin in her sketchbook.

Mohan Raj Sharma of Palpali Dhaka Pasaal in Maitidevi, who has been in the dhaka business for more than 30 years, says that most dhaka traders believe that the Nepali dhaka was inspired by fabric brought from Dhaka in East Bengal, which became Bangladesh in 1971.

But how did Palpa become famous for dhaka weaves? Sharma says that in the late 1950s, Ganesh Man Maharjan from Palpa travelled to Dhaka (then in East Pakistan) and encountered beautiful saris made from the delicate muslin jamdani dhakai.

After learning the process from weavers, Maharjan set up his own factory in Tansen, the Swadeshi Vastrakala Palpali Dhaka, establishing an industry worth more than Rs200 million a year today, according to the Micro Enterprise Development Program.

Indeed, Bangladeshi jamdani dhakai closely resembles the Palpali dhaka with its thinner threads, unlike the thicker Purbeli dhaka fabric, and seems to have inspired the Nepali dhaka we see today.

According to Sharma, Nepali weavers had to minimise costs so opted for geometrical patterns that were more convenient to design and print, and a sturdier weave to withstand the mountain cold.

Nepal's pashmina

Customs or the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, producers could find niches for items that are most exported and generate more revenue. All this information can help them invest time and effort where it is more profitable, increasing organisational efficiency.

The pashmina sector could also take advantage of such data to understand markets of importing countries, including trends, pricing style and seasonal demands, which they could use to better respond to those countries' needs.

Despite the industry's shortcomings, Nepali pashmina still enjoys a strong international reputation and a variety of pashmina items, such as shawls, mufflers, scarves, blankets and sweaters, are exported to over 60

Pashmina Product Exports
(in NRs billions)



countries.

Hari Chandra Aryal of the Nepal Pashmina Industries Association (NPIA) notes: "We have taken steps to start using open data and developed a tracking system that includes labels with bar codes and a hologram that can be scanned, enabling suppliers to track exports."

However, Aryal admits that the database is not being updated as employees either overlook the task or are too busy to update details of each sale. The NPIA could also use data to tackle the shortage of skilled labour by better understanding their employees' strengths and weaknesses, then organising targeted training to address workers' skills gaps.

According to research by FACTS Research and Analytics,

68% of businesses in Nepal believe that better access to government data could help them identify new customers. Likewise, 61% believed data could help them do market research, 59% said the information could be used to develop new products, and 49% said it would aid in making better pricing decisions.

A sustained commitment is required from businesses that wish to profit fully from open data. Despite demonstrable benefits of investment in data sharing, stakeholders in Nepal's pashmina industry are not investing in awareness and application. It is time to change that. 🇳🇵

Aakriti Shrestha is a researcher at FACTS Research & Analytics.

ABOUT TOWN

EVENTS



Kag Tihar

On the first day of Tihar, crows are worshipped. They are believed to be the messenger of the gods, in particular Yama, the God of Death. The day is also referred to as Yampanchak.
26 October

Laxmi Puja/Gai Tihar

In the morning, cows, the symbol of wealth and motherhood in Hinduism, are given garlands and treats. In the evening, Laxmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune and prosperity, is worshipped with a puja, homes are decorated with colourful mandalas and Laxmi's footsteps are painted on floors.
27 October



Kukur Tihar

Dogs, believed to be the agents of God Yama, are worshipped for their loyalty on this day. They are given treats and decorated with garlands and tika in the morning.
27 October

Mha Puja/ Newa New Year

During the Newa New Year, Newa communities celebrate Mha Puja, the worship of oneself. It is believed that this puja contributes to the prosperity and longevity of the individual.
28 October

Gobardhan Puja/ Bhai Tika

Oxen are worshipped with garlands and treats. Sisters put tika on their brothers, give gifts and receive money in return. Deusi Bhailo, a performance of dance and music by young boys and girls, also occurs in the evening.
29 October

VAST

Surya Performance Lab, an aurovillian dance theatre company, presents VAST, the story of a young Nepali man who yearns for the Himalayas as he is forced into the slums of India. This dynamic performance, featuring talented dancers, brilliant choreography and a moving story, is one not to miss.
7 November, 6pm-8pm, Ticket: Rs500 (members)/ Rs800 (others), Alliance Française de Katmandou, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221



32 Hours in Kirtipur

On the auspicious occasion of Swanti Nakha Tihar, visit Kirtipur, celebrate the Newa New Year, immerse yourself in the Newa culture, experience the flavourful adventure of an authentic Newa bhoj, and revel in the rich culture and history of the "City of Glory". Pre-registration required. ourkirtipur.com.np.
28-29 October, Kirtipur, Rs1,200++ (depending on the package), 9869631848

Com Cos Con

This year, Comic Cos Con is back and better than ever. You can choose to dress up as a character from your favourite anime, manga, comic or video game, but it's not mandatory.
1-2 November, 10am-6pm, Free Entry, Labim Mall, Pulchok



Annapurna 100

A part of the Golden Trail World Series, The Annapurna 100 is Nepal's premiere ultra trail race. Runners will be passing beautiful mountains, forests, Nepali villages and locals cheering them on during the 55km race.
25 October, 6am onwards, Dhampus, Pokhara, info@annapurna100.com

MUSIC



Seashells on the Mountain

Spend the weekend listening to 13 live musical performances by local and international artists, or visiting an art installation, food and market stalls. Douglas Dare, Pahenlo Batti Muni, Udumbara, Celloop — Flavia Massimo and Marta Del Grandi are just a few of the artists who will be performing!
25 October (5pm onwards), 26 October (11am onwards), Rs500-Rs1000, Hotel Vajra, Dallu

Tihar Festival

Gear up for Tihar with an evening of musical performances. Staying true to the spirit of the festival, you can also enjoy a cultural dance performance and deusi bhailo.
26 October, 6pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5528362



Paleti with Suman Thapa

This edition of Paleti brings you Dr. Suman Thapa, an ophthalmologist and musician. Thapa will be playing his rendition of 'Songs of Vision', music created by Poet Shrawan Mukarung and Musician Aavaas.
25-26 October, 6pm onwards, Rs1,000+, Nepa-Laya, Kalikasthan, 9803919266

Coffee Gig

Various Rotaract Clubs in Nepal present Coffee Gig, an afternoon of good coffee, acoustic music and stimulating conversations.
26 October, 1pm onwards, Rs200, Bikalpa Art Cafe, Pulchok, 9801084772

Reminiscing Adele

Listen to Subeksha and the Band cover songs by award-winning artist Adele. Subeksha's take on Adele's heart-wrenching lyrics and the band's musical talent will have you wanting more.
26 October, 3pm onwards, The Yard, Sanepa (01) 5532965

DINING

Baked N Fresh

Known for its scrumptious chicken patties, this bakery offers some of the best baked goods in Kathmandu. Everything is made fresh in the morning and is gone by the evening. Try the apple cake on your next visit.
Kupondole (01) 5545448

Fuse-On Pizza Hub and Cafe

With a great crust and a large variety of toppings, Fuse-On's pizzas hits all the right spots.
10am-10pm, Kamal Pokhari Chok, 9843313726



Southern Comfort

If you're looking for juicy pork ribs, mac n' cheese and a taste of America's southern cuisine, Southern Comfort is the place to be.
Jhamsikhel (01) 5525144

Krishnarpan Restaurant

The Krishnarpan Nepalese Restaurant is one of the three main restaurants in Dwarika's Hotel. Enjoy a 6, 9, 16 or 22-course meal served by waitresses dressed in traditional Magar, Newar, Gurung, Chhetri and Sherpa clothes. The meal offers dishes from Nepal's different ethnic groups, from the Newari samye baje to the sisno soup.
The Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali (01) 4479488



Salon de Kathmandu

For a memorable meal and welcoming ambience, Salon de Kathmandu is the place to be. They have some of the best desserts, sandwiches and pasta in Kathmandu. But the highlight of the menu is the fried snack platter, which will leave you and your company feeling full and happy.
Lazimpat (01) 4411820

GETAWAY



Neydo Monastery Hotel

The Neydo Tashi Choeling Monastery Guest House is just 22km away from Kathmandu and offers guests a peaceful stay, healthy food, and a chance to meditate alongside the 200 monks who live in the monastery while learning about Buddhism.
Pharping (01) 6924606

Harmony Spa

Enjoy a soothing ayurvedic body massage, hair oil massage and other relaxing treatments at this quaint spa in Boudha.
Opposite The Hyatt Regency, Boudha (01) 4462996

Lalit Heritage Home

The Lalit Heritage Home is a quaint bed and breakfast style stay in Patan. Guests can view the temples in Patan Darbar Square from their rooms, dine in the traditional Nepali restaurant and have easy access to the square.
Patan (01) 5530021

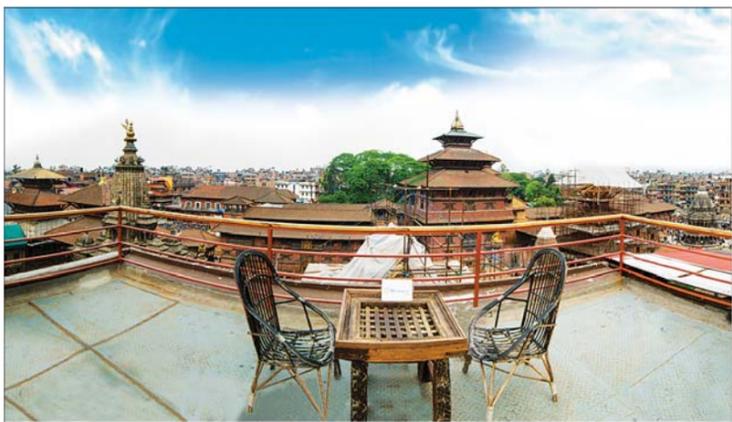


Community Homestay

For non-locals looking to get a real taste of Nepal, community homestays are the way to go. If you're looking for a safe and reliable place to stay, Community Homestay, a Kathmandu based start-up offers homestays in Panauti, Patan, Palpa, Nuwakot, Bardiya and 14 more locations. Not only will you experience the local lifestyle, but also the food, culture and history of that place.
Locations vary, Prices start at \$11 per night, 9801902572

The Last Resort

The Last Resort's variety of thrilling activities is perfect for adrenaline junkies. You can do the canyon swing (the highest one in the world), bungee jumping, rafting in swift rivers, tandem swing and explore hidden canyons. But if you're looking for a relaxing getaway, you can stay at Bhote Kosi Riverside resort and take in the beautiful scenery.
Bhote Kosi River, Nayapul, Sindhupalchok, (01) 4700525



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OUR PICK

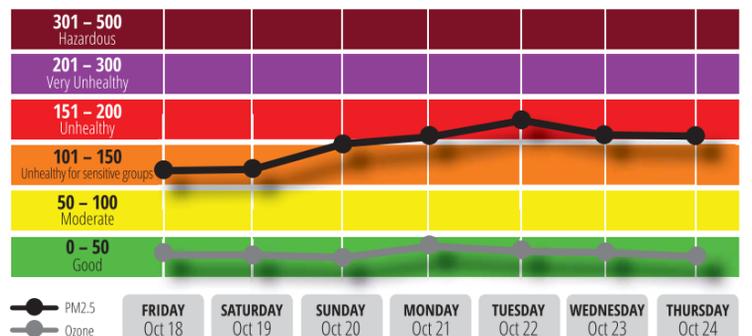


Opened in Kathmandu on 25 October

Directed by Hem Raj BC, *Ghamad Shere* is a social drama about Shere (Nischal Basnet) who struggles after returning to his village in Nepal from Doha and starting a farming business. Circumstances lead him into a major fight with the system. Watch this story of a family man's struggle for survival.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 18 - 24 October



Health Warning: After a monsoon with relatively clean air, Kathmandu Valley's daily average Air Quality Index is back to the 'Unhealthy' red zone. Just to remind ourselves: Tuesday's measurement of AQI 161 is eight times the level deemed safe by the World Health Organization. But that was just the daily average for Tuesday — during rush hour the AQI level crossed 200 in Kathmandu. Expect this situation to get worse as winter sets in, polluted air is trapped under an inversion layer, and we get additional particulates carried across the southern border. For live hourly AQI readings, for to: www.nepalitimes.com
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



SEWA BHATTARAI

The mental scars of violence

A world apart, Nepal and Colombia struggle with the mental health burden of conflict

Sewa Bhattarai

Children sit in a circle experimenting with different colours on palettes at a shelter in Godavari one morning this week. Some design flowers in bright colours, others draw homes nestled below mountains.

Many of the children were rescued from traffickers or domestic violence, from circuses in India where they worked like slaves, or from sexual abuse. The one thing they have in common is mental trauma.

For Colombian painter Dairo Vargas (pictured above with students of Kitini College) who is coaching these and other Nepali children, the situation is very familiar to that of his own country. Vargas himself suffered depression as a teenager, and believes art can be a great healer in a country wracked by war.

"When I was depressed, I could not focus on anything. But when I start painting, I am able to concentrate on what I am creating. That gives me a sense of calm, and slowly helped me overcome depression," says Vargas, who now helps others like him around the world.

Nepal and Colombia share the common burden of war trauma — people in both countries today struggle with the violence of their past, and seek closure. Nepal signed a peace accord with the Maoists in 2006, and Colombia made peace with the FARC rebel group 10 years later, ending a conflict that

killed over 220,000 people and displaced 7 million.

While many victims and their families have received compensation for physical wounds or loss in Nepal, mental trauma has been largely ignored. Likewise, various studies indicate that up to 40% of the population in Colombia suffer from mental illness at some point, and lifetime prevalence may be up to 20%. There too, the Ministry of Health has recognised that the issue is under-reported and inadequately addressed.

Vargas works with former FARC guerrillas and others in Colombia who suffer post-traumatic stress, but finds it hard.

"Of course the guerrillas have many mental health issues, but they are not happy to do anything about it at the moment. Also, they have made so many enemies in society that reintegrating them is very difficult," he says.

Vargas is attempting to bring his own experience in Colombia to fill this gap in Nepal. His mission is to spread awareness about mental illness, and make painting more accessible to traumatised people through his movement #TheArtListens. He is using the technique with children at the Chora Chori shelter for rescued children in Godavari, where they paint, sketch and draw.

As in Colombia, mental health is still a stigma in Nepal, especially for families of the disappeared, children who witnessed violence and victims of war rape.

These survivors rarely seek help, even though a 2012 study showed 80% of conflict-

affected people suffer anxiety and depression, 50% have PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and former child soldiers are far more likely (45-50%) to suffer from these symptoms than children never conscripted (20-37%). Social reintegration continues to be a challenge, and many former combatants and relatives suffer stigma.

Suraj Koirala of TPO (Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation) has surveyed and counselled many conflict-affected Nepalis, and says the most common problems are depression, anxiety and PTSD.

"Children and women have suffered the most, and it is prolonged for victims of sexual abuse and family members of the disappeared," says Koirala.

One of them is Bhagiram Chaudhary of the Conflict Victims' Common Platform, whose brother and sister-in-law were disappeared during the conflict but who has never sought counselling or therapy.

"If I see anyone who looks like my brother, I still take a second look, wondering if it is him," he says. "We are unable to perform his last rites, because we don't know if he is still out there. Not having closure means that we are still undecided about how to take our life forward."

Gita Rasaili of the Conflict Victims' National Network was 13 when she saw soldiers taking away her sister. Her family later found the decomposed remains of her body. After that, Rasaili's mother used to faint often and was unable to perform household

chores. After years of therapy, she did get better. "There are many war victims like me who suffer from mental health crises, but we do not recognise it and never seek help," says Rasaili. "If you go to a mental hospital people think you are mad. A lot more needs to be done for the nation to heal."

Like Rasaili, other war survivors suffer from symptoms like lack of sleep and concentration, inability to focus, disruptive memories and depression. The bigger concern is that these problems could transcend generations.

"If parents are unable to deal with trauma and express their mental state in unhealthy ways, their children could be impacted as well," says Koirala of TPO. "Social reintegration is already difficult for combatants, and this could create another generation of outcasts."

As in Colombia, some victims of the conflict and the 2015 earthquake in Nepal have found ways to express themselves through art. Rasaili keeps a journal, saying it helps her find relief from stress, and she knows others who paint and sketch. But they all found these outlets through personal effort — there is no systematic approach to artistic therapy in Nepal.

Says Vargas: "Traumatised people often cannot express their suffering to other people, and art is a space where they can free themselves. Completing a piece of art also helps the brain make connections, and gives a sense of achievement and confidence." 



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Nepal-Norway orchestra finds harmonies

Rajkumar Shrestha flicked his baton, musicians raised their instruments, and the audience at the Academy Hall in Kathmandu stood up for Nepal's national anthem gloriously rendered with violins, violas, cello, sitar and flute by a 60-member orchestra.

The lyrics of 'Sayaun Thunga Phool Ka Hami, Eutai Mala Nepali' ('We are different flowers of the same garland') evoke Nepal's ethnic diversity, but last Wednesday they also defined the diversity of the musicians from Norway and Nepal, of various ages and ethnicities.

And because this was a project of the Nepali-Norwegian Orchestra, the soothing tones of the Norwegian national anthem came next. In the centre of the orchestra, surrounded by violinists, was Eivind Rossbach Heier from the string quartet Kwartalkvartetten on the cello, alongside his father who played the viola.

Raised in a musical family with his mother, a cellist, and his sister a violinist, Heier first came to Nepal in 2015 as an instructor with 3 other tutors and 15 young people through a youth orchestra in Norway. Their goal was to teach Nepali musicians classical music in order to establish orchestras in the country.



JAYADEV KRISHNA SHRESTHA

The Annapurna Chamber Orchestra met the Norwegian musicians from Kwartalkvartetten through the World Federation of Amateur Orchestras. The project trains Nepali students for a week and organises performances in different venues of Kathmandu.

Ten Nepali musicians also go to Norway for the week-long annual Orchestra Summer Course to interact and exchange music with their Norwegian counterparts. During the course, Nepali and Norwegian musicians play music from both countries even though they sound completely different.

Says Heier: "Despite their differences, the appreciation of music is universal. Nepali music has more melodies but not many harmonies, which is the biggest difference from Western music."

But it is the language of music that brings us together."

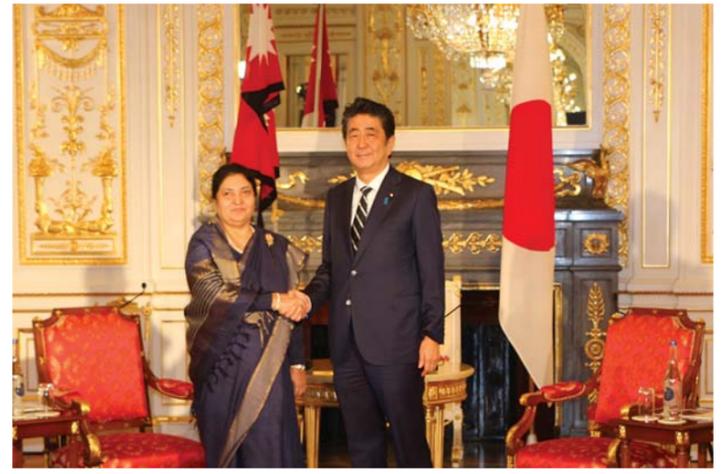
The exchange has also helped the musicians learn about Nepal through music and share a commonality. "It was interesting that after we heard the translated titles of the Nepali songs, we were reminded of patriotic songs from Norway as well," said music instructor Ole Rasmus Bjerke.

In the last five years of the project, the instructors as well as the young musicians know that their music has improved. "I used to play in the junior orchestra, and now I play with the seniors. I can feel the difference and my confidence building up," says 18-year-old Bikalp Singh Dura.

The number of Nepali musicians has also doubled since 2015, from 30 to 60, and is projected to expand in coming years. They range in age from 10 to 60.

"The future of the Nepali orchestra is bright. It is growing through these programs," says Rajkumar Shrestha, conductor and chairman of The Annapurna Chamber Orchestra. "The only challenge is that most students leave the country after Grade 12 for higher studies and we lose good musicians."

Reeti K.C.



SHYAM RIMAL/RSS

KON'NICHIIWA: President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a meeting at Akasaka Palace in Tokyo on Sunday. President Bhandari was in Japan to attend Emperor Naruhito's enthronement ceremony.



CHANDRAKALA CHETTRI/RSS

STRONG BASE: Prime Minister KP Oli lays the foundation stone for the construction of the Japanese-supported Nagdhunga-Sisnekhola Tunnel Way at a ceremony on Monday in Chandragiri Municipality.



RICHARD MORRIS/TWITTER

FORMAL FAREWELL: Outgoing British Ambassador Richard Morris with a team of British Gurkhas in Kathmandu on Wednesday to mark the end of his posting in Nepal.



UNFPA NEPAL

HEALTH FOR ALL: Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Natalia Kanem (2nd from right) met with Health Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Upendra Yadav in Kathmandu on Monday. Also present was Valerie Julliand, UN Resident Coordinator for Nepal.



PRADEEP RAJ ONTA/RSS

STAR SCIENTISTS: Nepali students return home after winning big at the 8th Asia-Pacific Young Scientist Conference held in Russia. Swaraj Sagar Pradhan (centre) won three medals, including a gold, defeating competitors from 23 countries.

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Getting away with murder

The Aftab Alam case is a litmus test of impunity vs the rule of law in Nepal

Kiran Nepal

Rautahat MP Mohammad Aftab Alam, now in police custody charged with murder, has refused to take a polygraph test, angering police and making a mockery of the law. In fact, everything about this case has mocked the rule of law for the past 12 years.

Before Nepalis could enjoy Dasain and witness Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit this month, they were shocked by the revelation of the Rajpur Farhadwa massacre, which had been covered up since 2008, with its perpetrators scot free. The terrifying stories that have surfaced have shocked the nation, offering proof of the criminalisation of politics and politicisation of crime in Nepal.

Nepali Congress politician Aftab Alam is accused of burning more than a dozen people alive in a brick kiln. A day before the first Constituent Assembly election in 2006, several people were making improvised explosives at a farmhouse in Rautahat, Farhadwa - 4. The house belonged to Sheikh Idris, a deceased NC politician and relative of Alam.

An influential leader in Rautahat, Aftab Alam wanted to win the CA election at any cost, and decided to import Indian bomb-makers to place explosives at various election booths to scare voters and capture the booths. He had collected raw material for bomb-making, arms and ammunition from across the border.

While the explosives were being assembled, they accidentally went off at the farmhouse, killing three people and injuring many. Those injured were rendered unconscious with injections, and thrown into the furnace of a nearby brick kiln along with the bodies of the dead. The number of bodies disposed of that day is unknown, but is said to be more than 20, including professional bomb makers from India.

Alam's apt nickname in the district is 'Tiger', and he did not want the injured to reach a hospital, and the truth to come out. The police would have taken their statements and conducted autopsies on those killed. He feared a backlash against him a day before the election, which would cost him the coveted CA seat. Instead, he resorted to an inhumane way of 'managing' the casualties, depriving the living of treatment and the dead of proper funeral rites.

What was even more shocking was the coverup that followed



in which the Nepali Congress, local police and bureaucrats appeared to be involved. The local administration seems to have assisted Alam in removing evidence of the massacre, and threatening witnesses and relatives.

According to a field report by the human rights group Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) immediately after the crime, residents said it was the police themselves who escorted the tractor carrying victims to a brick kiln owned by a family member of Alam. Some of the victims were still conscious and weeping, and behind them in a car was Alam himself. Relatives and residents were terrified by what they saw. The house damaged in the blast was soon repaired, the brick kiln demolished and all evidence destroyed.

The local police inspector at the time, Indra Subedi, was the first police officer on the scene, but was mysteriously transferred the same night, suggesting political collusion in the coverup. Now a DSP in Kathmandu, he says there was no time to even start an investigation.

The families of deceased Trilok Pratap Singh and Vasi Akhtar Miya organised a press conference soon after the incident. Miya's mother Ruksana Miya filed a complaint with police, but she was also murdered — found dead a few days later with a bullet wound in her temple. There has been no investigation of any of the deaths.

Victims were traumatised for many years, and shuttled from one government office to another. Often, officials gave them answers

like "there was lack of proper investigation", and "it is not necessary to file a case". District police, the government attorney's office, the courts and the attorney general's office all seem part of the nexus to protect Alam.

The Farhadwa massacre is a crime against humanity, committed by the powerful to protect their power. It was covered up for more than a decade with the active collusion of politicians, police and successive governments. Alam himself was elected to the constitution-drafting assembly, and benefitted from respect and government protection, while the families of those massacred lived in



JUSTICE DELAYED: Nepali Congress MP Aftab Alam being presented at the Rautahat district court (left, above) for a massacre in Farhadwa in which at least 20 people were killed.

Ruksana Khatun's son was among those killed, but she was herself shot dead in 2009 for demanding justice (top).

The house of deceased NC politician Sheikh Idris, where the explosion happened (left).

sorrow and were threatened by the state into submission and silence.

The Nepali Congress was unwilling to accept any action against Alam when the Maoist party had the majority in the CA and the Congress were in opposition. As the political power play continued during the post-war transition, Alam avoided investigation and evaded justice.

A Supreme Court verdict four months ago forced the state to arrest him. On 21 June, a bench of judges Anilkumar Sinha and Kumar Regmi ordered the Attorney General, Police Headquarters and the District Police of Rautahat to implement earlier court verdicts and present a

detailed, updated report of the case to the court within 30 days.

While this is a shocking tale of impunity and absence of the rule of law, the arrest now sends the message that the judiciary's role is being respected. The Farhadwa massacre is a litmus test for independent legal prosecution.

Combined with the arrest of Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara on a charge of attempted rape, the prosecution of MPs who have resorted to violence and vandalism in the past month show that no one can get away with crimes just because they wield power and political clout. This has restored some confidence in the rule of law.

A lot now will depend on whether the Mahara and Alam investigations are independent and the verdicts are implemented. Alam's emissaries are already trying to woo the relatives of the victims with money, imploring them to recant their accusations. The victims are terrified that if Alam is released, they will be in danger.

Mahara himself is said to be reluctant to give up his Speaker's chair, and is resisting prosecution, alleging a political conspiracy against him by rivals.

Everyone who had a part in committing or covering up the Fardawah massacre must be brought under the purview of the law and receive maximum punishment. Justice in this case is necessary not just for the victims, but also to send a message that the rule of law is not dead in Nepal. Violence on this scale cannot be justified — it is not related to any political philosophy or the religion of the perpetrators.

The ruling NCP touts stability and prosperity as its slogans. There can be no stability without good governance, and there can be no prosperity without ordinary citizens feeling that they have the full protection of the law. 🇳🇵

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Waiting till the cows come

This Gai Tihar, spare a thought for hundreds of stranded cattle on Nepal's highways

Kunda Dixit
in Kailali

The first thing one notices these days while travelling by road in the Tarai are hundreds of cattle blocking the East-West Highway, mainly at intersections like Atariya or Kohalpur.

The 'cow emergency' hit the headlines in September, when 24 cows were found dead below the highway in Surkhet and hundreds of others were wandering in the jungles. Police investigation revealed that the cattle were being transported from Nepalganj to Dailekh as part of an effort by the municipality to reduce the population of street livestock.

What few people know is that dozens of cattle had died earlier this year when Sukla Phanta Municipality near Dhangadi spent Rs5.5 million to round up cattle and put them in shelters, where most of them died of starvation and lack of care.

There is no estimate of the number of cattle on the highways near border towns of the western Tarai, but on a recent trip reporters counted hundreds just on the stretch between Dhangadi and Atariya. Locals said there were a lot more street cattle previously, and the numbers had actually gone down.



KUNDA DIXIT

Saving Nepal's last wild dogs

Protecting the endangered ancestors of the domesticated dog from its wild reputation



Yadav Ghimirey

Wild dogs get a bad press in Nepal, almost as bad as hyenas. The fact that the Nepali word for the wild dog (*bwanso*) is also used to refer to the wolf is part of the problem.

Bwanso is used to describe a ruthless or evil human being. However, the Asiatic Wild Dog (also called *dhole* in India) is a wildlife species on the endangered list, because of habitat loss and a reduction in

primary prey like sambar and chital deer. This has led the dogs to attack livestock, so that farmers are now poisoning prey carcass to kill dogs.

The wild dog belongs to the same family as the domestic dog, *Canidae*, and like the wolf is a pack-forming animal. It has a rather gory way of hunting — it tears away bits of the flesh of its prey during a chase before finally killing it.

This could be one reason the wild dog has a PR issue with the public in rural Nepal. In any case, there has been



RAMKI SREENIVASAN

A wild dog chasing an adult spotted deer in Pench Tiger Reserve.



RUPAYAN DATTA

This chital fawn has been mauled by a pack of wild dogs, but is still running despite being grievously wounded.



FRIENDS OF NATURE

An Asiatic Wild Dog camera-trapped in the Annapurna Conservation Area.

a sharp decline in the population of wild dogs in the densely populated midhills, while they are still present in the Tarai national parks.

Like most canine species, the Asiatic Wild Dog is known to form social packs of up to 35 individuals, providing them a distinct advantage over larger carnivores like the leopard or tiger, which have superior hunting skills but stalk prey alone.

The Gurung people in the Sikles region of the Annapurna Conservation Area compare the *bwanso* to an untamed wind — it can be anywhere at any time, but is difficult to control. Elders who used to see wild dogs in abundance today report very few sightings, including in the Annapurna Conservation Area, Chitwan National Park, Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, Parsa National Park and Tinjure Milke Jaljale.

It is estimated that only 500 individuals survive, and even this figure could be inflated. Globally the species is estimated to number only up to 2,200, and negative public perception means it is difficult to mount a campaign to conserve the wild dog. The only way to save the animal from extinction therefore, is to reintroduce it into protected areas where it was once found in abundance. 🇳🇵

Yadav Ghimirey is a conservation biologist at Friends of Nature.
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home

Local officials said the main reason for the cattle crisis was the ban on beef in north Indian states, especially after the election of high priest and Hindu nationalist politician Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 2017. Media reports of lynchings by religious extremists of Muslim traders suspected to be transporting cows put a stop to the unofficial 'export' of cattle from Nepal to India.

There used to be a thriving crossborder trade in aged oxen and cows that had stopped giving milk. But sensitivity about cow slaughter in India after the rise of the BJP, as well as the new border fence on the India-Bangladesh border, has meant that the cattle are abandoned on the streets.

Nepalgunj Mayor Dhawal Rana thought he had solved the problem by finding communities in the mountains willing to take the cows, however the transporter contracted to take the cattle to Dailekh let the cattle loose in the jungle near Surkhet in September.

There are other factors at play: increased mechanisation of agriculture and the use of threshing machines, disc ploughs and the replacement of ox carts with tractors means that bulls are no longer in high demand in the Tarai.

"Ten years ago I sold my bulls for Rs50,000 — now there are no buyers. I can't even pay someone to take the bulls away," says Biru

Ram Chaudhari of Lalitpur village of Kailali.

The outmigration of Nepali youth to India, the Gulf and Malaysia has meant that agriculture in general has seen a downturn, and there are fewer households keeping water buffalos and cattle at home. The urban expansion of Dhangadi and Nepalgunj municipalities has also forced households to abandon home dairies.

The stray cattle are now grazing in jungles by the highways, munching away at the undergrowth. Forests planted for flood control have also been affected. Sugarcane and paddy farmers have lost their entire crops as the cattle move through the fertile farms of the western Tarai.

Says local farmer Gayadin Chaudhari: "It used to be elephants and wild animals that destroyed our crops, now it is the cattle. In Mohanpur they lost 8 bigha (1.5 hectares) of sugarcane to stray cows."

In Attariya, police say there has been an increase in highway accidents and fatalities because of collisions of vehicles with stray cows at night. They say the only solution is to tag cows so that they can be traced back to their owners, who will then be forced to be more responsible. 🇳🇵



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A dog with altitude

The large shaggy dog with a great mane, thoughtful droopy eyes and a deep bark that echoes across Himalayan crags is not just a breed much sought after to guard livestock. The Tibetan Mastiff, scientists say, is one of the first species to be domesticated, evolving from wolves to live alongside human beings.

Found in Himalayan settlements in Nepal and the Tibetan Plateau right up to the upper limits of human habitation at 4,500m, the dog's body is so adapted to low oxygen levels in the thin air that its blood is 50% more efficient at carrying oxygen than that of mutts living in the plains.

Latest genetic studies have shown that domestic dogs emerged from two types of wolves found in the eastern and western edges of Eurasia 15,000 years ago. Analysis of the mitochondrial DNA of early dogs shows that the eastern branch of canines on the Tibetan Plateau may have been the first dogs to be domesticated by early humans.

The modern dog that most resembles early canines after they split from wolves, researchers say, is the Tibetan Mastiff. The German Shepherd could be the descendant of early dogs that evolved in Europe, while Huskies are said to be a mixture of both.

Just like the physiology of Nepal's ethnic groups and Tibetans who live at high altitude has adapted to living in the cold, thin air, the Tibetan Mastiff has also evolved for high altitude — with its lower oxygen concentration — and became a professional guard dog some 3,000 years ago in the Himalaya.

Scientists have now found why mastiffs, which can weigh up to 170kg, are so hardy: they carried over more gray wolf DNA in their genes than their lowland comrades. This could be because the mastiff interbred back with the Himalayan gray wolf, picking up mutations that gave its blood a greater ability to transport oxygen.

Pasang Sherpa, 85, from Salleri, remembers accompanying his father on trips to India to sell Tibetan Mastiff puppies. They bartered the dogs for food, clothes and basic items, walking up to three weeks to the

Indian border. The puppies were in high demand in India as guard dogs because of the mastiff's reputation for fierceness, but most died from the heat in the plains.

"They used to be loyal and vigilant, guarding our sheep, goats and yaks from wolves and leopards," recalls Sherpa, lamenting that there are very few mastiffs left in Khumbu as the number of nomadic shepherds has declined.

In Dolpo's Shey Gomba a chained Tibetan Mastiff guards the monastery, barking fiercely at intruders when it is not sleeping. Tibetan Mastiff puppies today can fetch as much as Rs300,000, although half-breeds go for less.

In 2011, *Nepali Times* carried the story of a Tibetan Mastiff named Tashi, which walked 200km from a village in Ramechhap, its adopted home, back to Kathmandu to find his canine friends and Japanese owner in a Patan neighbourhood.

Former Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal, Don Messerschmidt, has been studying Tibetan Mastiffs since the 1980s and authored *Big Dogs of Tibet and the Himalayas: A Personal Journey*. He has nothing but admiration for these noble dogs.

He wrote this tribute in 1983 in the journal *Rangelands*. 'Against the predatory denizens of the range, and as a faithful and intelligent companion, the Tibetan Mastiff has few if any peers. Vigilance is the quality of alert watchfulness against danger. The primary role and natural instinct of these dogs is to protect the pastures, animals and compounds of their master... they uphold their responsibilities of protection with a faithfulness and a reserved, dutiful attachment and native intelligence that reflect the well-earned fame of the breed.' 🇳🇵

Sonam Choekyi Lama



Big Dogs of Tibet and the Himalayas: A Personal Journey by Don Messerschmidt Paperback 282 pages, \$27 in Amazon Orchid Press, 2011 ISBN 978-9745241305

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Guy Puja

It would not be an exaggeration to say that animals have it better than people in the Feral Democratic Republic of Nepal. In fact, this country is only fit for animals. Proof of the high regard we have for all creatures great and small is the ongoing Tihar festival, during which they are dedicated a day each to be worshipped.

Lots to Crow About

Saturday is when we honour our feathered friend by getting up as the cock crows to pay homage to the neighbourhood raven flock. We get to worship at the feet of Yamaraj's Roving Ambassador and Plenipotentiary here on Planet Earth, and honour the bird's remarkable contribution to recycling and upcycling Kathmandu's garbage. Without the contribution of His Excellency the Crow to solid waste management in the capital, Kathmandu Valley would have long ago been buried under buffalo wings, chicken drumsticks and goat chops.

Praying to the Pooch

Sunday is the day we give due recognition to man's best friend in this dog-eat-dog world of contemporary Nepal for being such excellent security guards that they enforce a night-time curfew in most neighbourhoods. The sons of bitches are so good at their job that they do not even let dog's best friends get back into their own homes, and when they do, they will continue to yowl all night to real and imaginary enemies of

the people and anti-nationalists. It would not be an exaggeration to state that this country is going to the dogs, and thank dog for that because otherwise it would have gone to the hyenas in government. Sunday is when you can get away with saying "Oh my dog!" because dogs are gods for 24 hours.

Holy Cow

It is proof of the high regard secular Nepal continues to accord our erstwhile national animal that we allow them right of way on major thoroughfares and highway arteries. Imagine the chaos that would ensue if these taurine traffic islands did not regulate the flow of vehicles by their very presence, chewing the cud along the faded centreline. Not even President Xi's motorcade is accorded as much priority on Kathmandu's roads as the city's cattle herds. The street fauna feed on yummy plastic bags in the neighbourhood garbage heap, and are allowed to deposit bullshit anywhere, even in open-defecation free districts where we higher primates are not allowed by law to take a dump anymore. That is why on Sunday, we will take the bull in the china shop by the horns to feed it marigold garlands and recognise their contribution to the national economy by being our favourite cash cows.

Day of the Donkey

The public is hereby notified that kicking and licking Ass is henceforth allowed any day of the current fiscal year.



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Civil Mall, Sundhara, Tel: 9861584279
Basundhara, Tel: 9851193433
Kumaripati, Tel: 9843144204
New-Baneshwor, Tel: 9851019207

Chabahil Chowk, Tel: 9819009338
People's Plaza, Khichapokhari,
Tel: 9851199046, 9880315815
BG Mall, Gongabu, Tel: 9814145265
Eyeplex Mall, New Baneshwor Tel: 9860806194
Sitapaila, Tamrakar Complex,
Tel: 9810082278, 9841205410
Old Baneshwor, Bhimsengola. Tel: 9851066632

Outside Valley

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Bahrabise-4, Sindhupalchowk, Tel: 9851047099
Singh Complex, Butwal, Tel: 9857025137
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