No freedom after expression

Rights Bill, among others. But after strong protests on the streets and media, the government was forced to withdraw those bills. However, the controversial Special Services Bill will allow investigation agencies to arrest up to citizens and top phones without court order. This not only goes against the fundamental right of every citizen for privacy, but such surveillance is prone to misuse.

The other Information Technology Bill tries to curtail the citizens’ right to free expression by legislating stiff penalties for posting comments on Facebook or YouTube, and has been voted by a parliamentary committee. (See editorial: “This bill is against the Constitution, and the way it has been voted on without taking into account amendments and changes suggested by stakeholders, is undemocratic as well.”

Both bills are delayed because the winter session itself has had to be pushed back by the deadlock over the choice of the new speaker to replace Krishna Bahadur Mahara. Parliament is a casualty in the power struggle at the top of the ruling NCP between Oli and his co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, which is also affecting ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and other legislation.

Oli’s attempts to ram through the laws shows that he is increasingly on the defensive, and wants to strengthen his grip on power. Asks one NCP Central Committee member: “Oli is being criticised more from within his own party more than from the opposition. So who is he trying to defend himself from?”

Kiran Nepal
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

January 3, 2003

Nepal’s ruling unified Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party in the past year incrementally constructed freedom of expression, thinking no one will notice if they do it bit by bit. It has not gone unnoticed. There is an upsurge in social media, social journalists have been speaking out, but the government is using its numerical might in Parliament to pass bills that blatantly flout (constitutional) guarantees of basic individual freedoms.

2013 saw contentious amendments, and it started with a revision of the Penal Code that criminalises ridicule, satire, photoshopped images of politicians, and even banned reporters publishing personal information of public figures. The Media Council Bill, which was passed by Parliament, was described as “government was sure to be voted through when the winter session begins. It has hefty fines and jail terms for any content deemed offensive or demeaning” – infringement of Clause 83 is a fine of Rs.5 million and/or jail term of up to five years, and any content that violates Clause 94 (defamation and hate speech) carries a fine of Rs.5 million and/or 5 years in jail. Strangely, the punishment for social media incitement is much harsher than physical assault, libel or defamation in the legacy media.

“IT is wrong for this bill that it is argued regarding media freedom, asserts Khantipur in a strong editorial on Wednesday. “This is just the beginning of a very serious problem, and the definition of defamation is so broad, this bill will have a dampening effect on free speech, expression, and foster self-censorship.”

“Defamation,” in what constitutes objectionable content is intentionally defined broadly that anyone can be hauled in for any online post at any time. There is even a new directive against satire painted in the back of trucks. Even before this Act is passed people are being pulled behind bars for Facebook posts or YouTube satire. Rolling roses going out someone for posting an unflattering video of the new Prime Minister.

The bill was put to debate in the parliamentary committee, and the opposition Nepali Congress did push several amendments, none of which were accepted by NCP lawmakers. Now, the arithmetic of the full House means that the IT Act is sure to become law. (Fundamental) Rights of citizens, guarantees by the 2056 Constitution, are going to be severely curtailed.

“The government will decide what you can say and what you can’t,” says NC MP Gagan Thapa in an online video. “Just because it has a majority, the government can’t violate the basic principles of the Constitution.”

But Thapa is a voice in the wilderness, none of the other opposition politicians have bothered to speak up in defence of freedom of expression even when the attack is so systematic. Under the new law, internet service providers will be liable for content of users and global platforms like Facebook, Twitter and TikTok would be required to register in Nepal.

The Special Services Bill would also allow the state to snoop anyone’s data, tap phones and intercept emails. Politicians want their privacy protected from media, but do not respect the individual’s right to privacy. The ruling NCP seems to have decided that it can pressure the by withholding advertising, making media moguls beholden to it for survival, and tightening regulation. The NCP-affiliated Press Organisation in particular has been doing a better job at newsmaking than by framework to organize the media. It is so unfair these they did not serve by communism.

The state sees the free-wheeling nature of the internet and its impact on public opinion as a source of threat. Hence the attempt to restrict critical content on social media as much as its reach grows. More than 90% of Nepalis have mobile phones, half of them are smart phones, and this proportion is growing. The Internet has become synonymous with Facebook as almost everyone with a smartphone has an account on that platform.

Why is Nepal’s kastriocracy in such a turling hurry to pass this bill when much more urgent legislation on federalism and other laws languish in Parliament?

Thapa is a voice in the wilderness, none of the other opposition politicians have
NEW YEAR
NEW DISCOVERIES

126 countries to be discovered.
Happy New Year.

TURKISH AIRLINES
FINLAND
Russia, Nepal to mark 75 years since end of WWII

To mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations and the victory of the allied countries in World War II in 2020, diplomats of the Russian Embassy in Kathmandu visited the oldest surviving veteran of the late Balkar Bhanj Bhattarai at his home in Kathmandu last week.

Victory Day is widely celebrated in Russia every year on May 9, and this year it will be a special anniversary. During World War II the people of Russia were in action on both the western and eastern fronts, and Nepali soldiers fought on the same side as Russia against the Axis forces.

Nepali veteran Balkar Bhanj Bhattarai is now 98 years old, and was captured by the Japanese in Singapore, and was one of only four out of 400 Nepali soldiers fighting in the British Army who survived a POW Camp in New Guinea. Bhattarai took part in battles in Burma, Malaysia and Singapore before being captured, and lived through the horrors of being a prisoner-of-war.

During the meeting with Russian diplomats, Balkar Bhanj Bhattarai shared memories about the war. “He was very pleased to get to know that in Russia all veterans of all battalions of the Second World War are deeply honored and treated as brothers in arms,” said Artem Rashchianchits, Third Secretary of the Russian Embassy in Kathmandu, who was present at the meeting.

“In 2020, Russia intends to hold large-scale functions marking Victory Day in the Second World War, Nepal will join celebration of this momentous event,” said the Russian diplomat.

The victory of allied countries in World War II (1939–1945) laid the foundation for establishment of the United Nations, which was created with an aim to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and 2020 will also be celebrated as the 75th anniversary of the world body.

“It is worth reminding ourselves that during the Second World War peoples of Russia and Nepal fought for common cause and contributed to the victory. This page of history of the two countries should never be forgotten,” said another Russian diplomat, Andreeva, First Secretary of the Russian Embassy, who also attended the meeting with Bhattarai.
Make-or-break decade for climate action

In the 2020s the world needs to dramatically reduce emissions to avoid social and political catastrophe.

Earlier, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) pointed out that in the coming decade global greenhouse gas emissions need to fall 7.6% annually to meet the goals of the accord. But this goal seems unachievable, and we are likely to see increasing impacts on natural systems in the coming 10 years to 2030, and beyond.

A January 2019 assessment by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) warned that if present emissions rates continue (which from the world’s perspective looks certain), the Himalayan glaciers will be gone by the end of this century.

In 2019, Iceland’s Okjökull and Switzerland’s Pizol glaciers disappeared. Will Himalayan glaciers and snow volumes face a similar fate? Referring to the Gangotri Glacier, journalist George Black, in his book On the Ganges. Encounters With Saints and Sinners Along India’s Mystic River, writes:

“When glaciers decay, they become sad, decrepit things. The ice cracks and crumbles and turns dirty pale blue before melting away altogether.”

The disruptions in the Himalayan snow ecosystem are real and will occur alongside similar disruptions in the midhighs and plains. Changes in rainfall patterns are affecting conditions that sustain ecosystems, leading to the depletion of springs in the midhills with significant implications for the health and livelihoods of people living in them. Frequent and high-intensity rainfall, landslides and floods damage communities, decrease diversity of species and increase disease and pest dynamics.

The changes in rainfall and snowmelt will continue to reduce dry season river flows in the coming decade, leading to a reduction in the availability of fresh water, resulting in lower crop yields, lower electricity production and increased water stress.

Longer hot periods, which increase the demand for energy needed to run air conditioners, for example, will be a hallmark of the 2020-2030 decade.

The implications of these decade-long changes have not really hit the political class and civic leaders in Nepal and other South Asian countries, who have always focused on short political time horizons. Most of them consider climate change to be something in the distant future, not something to worry about now — a problem that someone, somewhere, most likely in the developed west, will provide technical and financial solutions for.

Yes, solutions will be technical and require new funds, but how we deal with the impending challenges is fundamentally governed by cultural, economic and political considerations. Greenhouse gas emissions are not decreasing fast enough and adaptation is unlikely to be automatic, linear or straightforward.

Sea level rise is a perfect example of this complexity. A 2019 report by the US-based National Climate Centr suggests that by 2050, 42 million Bangladeshis and 36 million people in coastal India are likely to be vulnerable to sea level rise. An earlier estimate was only 5 million each in the two countries. Displacement due to sea level rise will present major challenges for governance, urban development and alternative livelihoods for those seeking safe locations.

A recent Oxfam report says that climate-fueled disasters were the number one driver of internal displacement over the last decade, forcing more than 20 million people a year to leave their homes. Given the current political backsliding in many countries against migrants and refugees, the movement of people across borders will be even more curtailed. Yet those displaced will keep moving, despite migration becoming much harder and increasingly unsafe. Though handcuffed, Nepal may not remain immune to this upheaval, as the arrival of Burmese Rohingya refugees through Bangladesh and India has shown.

Throughout human history, entire civilizations have been affected by droughts and floods. Migration is also a strategy to escape poverty and insecurity stemming from political hazards, as well as an outcome of many pull factors, such as jobs and better livelihoods. Today, two to three million Nepalis live outside the country, mostly as wage workers.

Climate change is likely to further exacerbate prevailing societal inequalities, inequalities and other fault lines. These will seriously stretch institutional capacity to manage any new waves of migration. The socially excluded, marginalised, uneducated and those with limited livelihood options will be pushed into greater desperation.

In the past year, 15 major reports have come out warning of the threats to humanity and ecosystems from the climate emergency.

The tens of millions of people at the frontlines facing these new threats will be the aged, women, children, peasants, fisherfolk and those making a living off already-depleted natural resources. The political challenge is to act in the coming decade to avoid potential social and political catastrophes. The longer we wait, the bigger the price that humanity pays.

Inishaka Vivash, Executive Director of Kathmandu-based GST Nepal. His monthly column Climate for Change in Nepali Times deals with the impact of global heating in Nepal and beyond.

God created WINTERS, we created HOT RUM PUNCH

Khu Kin XXX Rum
Cinnamon Powder
Lemon Juice
Star Anise
Cardamom
Hot Water
Honey
Clove

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Eny responsibly.
Seize the coming decade

As we hurtle into the 2020s, time to recall a millennium eve 20 years ago and face the clean slate of the future.

From the skies above the Bungmati Khola in Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, we see the lights of Pokhara Valley twinkling in the winter cold, and the soaring white peaks glowing pale in the moonlight. On the hillside opposite some farmers were tending their fields, and the frost spread out slowly until they formed the unmistakable shape of a giant burning cross.

Jim Edwards leaned against the stone columns beside the Lodge’s picture window. “Perhaps we should heed such a powerful symbol,” he said quietly. Despite the cozy warmth and the blazing central fireplace, a shiver went down my spine.

There were a few things to worry about, not least the widespread concern that the digital world would come crashing down on the stroke of midnight, which had kept our diplomatic friends on constant alert in their embassies. To no avail as it turned out, but the rumours had been rife and convincing.

In Nepal, the brutal insurgency was rumbling with increasing vigour throughout the country, and would be another six years before peace was achieved, a time of such trauma that it is buried deep into a collective national amnesia. The horror of the royal massacre was 18 months ahead of us and, three months after that, the 9/11 terror tragedy of the twin towers which changed our world forever.

Pokhara Lodge had been shaken with an evening raid by alleged insurgents who carried off not only the terrace telescope and some staff cameras, but the bulging contents of the end-of-season tip box, which seemed rather harsh given their declared ideology. The attack was the first of relatively few direct clashes with terrorism during those deeply troubled times. No one was harmed, and even the resident guests were unalared, confusing the red bandanas, flags and bearded khaki khaki as part of a cultural show.

On that millenial eve, Pokhara Lodge had been operating for just over a year. The trees and wild landscaping had yet to mature around the honey-coloured stone bungalows, hand-cut from a local quarry, clustered like a local village adjacent to our community forest neighbours. The swimming pool was still in its infancy, but the peaks were already mirrored in its shimmering blue surface on a breathless evening as eagles, vultures and kites wheeled overhead.

Sir Edmund Hillary had done the inauguration honours, stopping stiffly to light the votive brass lamp on the broad slate veranda one clear October day, with expansive views of the Himalayan range stretching from Dhaulagiri to Makalu. At various stages of construction, monks and priests had blessed the hilltop site, selected by Colonel Jimmy Roberts as the first campground on Prince Charles’ original Royal Trek in 1986.

I had walked the first reece of that route for Mountain Travel with Pertempos Sharpa, a circuit now drivable down unpaved, dusted rutted roads, because Colonel Jimmy’s hogs were already falling him and his walking days were over. I stayed behind to manage the media that early December day 48 years ago, as the Prince of Wales strode uphill towards the silhouetted skyline tree that now bears his name, accompanied by Prince Dhurlendra and a royal retinue.

“The mountain views were ‘gorgeous’ for all four days,” Colonel Jimmy noted in satisfaction. As we hurtle into another shiny new decade, pondering on what lies ahead, hopes run high for a better prognosis as we face the clean slate of the future. Our New Year resolutions this time can be more ambitious than the annual self-improvements destined to peter out by February.

Nepal’s full potential for generating hydroelectric power can happen with the glacial retreat and river level drops, the patient quakes at hits and water laps testament to a depleting water table. The realities of rail travel are still a dream away, victim to the overwhelming odds against running rails through the world’s highest, youngest and least stable mountain chains. But electric bikes and cars are beginning to ply the Valley, and all sorts of innovative eco-plastic and waste solutions are being trialled and adopted.

The energy and opportunity of the much awaited Visit Nepal Year 2020 is upon us, with a plethora of creative events, new product ideas, and even an appreciation of the old and bold who have shaped tourism in the past. Hopefully, new international airports around the country will improve our travel patterns, pushing tourists beyond the much-traveled Kathmandu-Pokhara-Chitwan triangle with new destinations that can deliver the delights of Nepali culture and adventure. Even as roads peak over the heights and scar the hillside, trekkers can disperse beyond the Everest-Annapurna-Langtang circuits, bringing benefits to the pristine and scarcely-visited sections east and west along the Great Himalaya Trail.

At this dawn of a new decade, let us tune our ears to the rhythm of history, use the commitment of NY2020 and push beyond the cliffside. Plus ca change, plus c’est la même chose. Seize the decade. A future awaits.
Ex-refugee takes refuge in music

Gopal Gartaula
in Charlotte, USA

Manoj Rai was a 17-year-old student in a school in Taaligang, Bhutan in 1993, when soldiers arrived at his dorm and took away all the Nepali books. They piled them high in the courtyard, and set them alight.

A few days later, the boy decided to escape the army’s dragnet and without even returning home he went down to the border, where the Indian security forces were packing other Bhutanese like him into trucks and dumping them in eastern Nepal.

Thousands of refugees from Bhutan lived under plastic sheeting by the side of the Kankai River in Jhapa. Many fainted from trauma, culture shock and homesickness.

On a single day, Manoj Rai remembers counting 20 children who had died of epidemic.

“We refugees know very well the meaning of life,” Rai said with a wry laugh at the memory of what it was like at his home in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is among the nearly 95,000 refugees from Bhutan who have been resettled in the United States. Others have gone to New Zealand, Norway, UK, Australia, the Netherlands and Canada.

Rai opted for resettlement after seeing no possibility of returning to Bhutan, and tried to convince as many of his compatriots as possible to take up the offer. Some were resolutely refusing to move, but he tried to convince them that being a citizen of a foreign country, rather than a refugee, could help them return to Bhutan one day.

Many third-generation Bhutanese are now studying in the world’s top universities.

Rai has always been interested in music, often taking his small band house-to-house during Dasain and Tihar in Nepal, performing songs of longing for home in Bhutan. Villagers used to give them rice, pundra and vegetables, which the refugees cooked in the camps by the dusty river banks.

“We were always hungry, but we had to eat to live. And music was a way to feed ourselves,” Manoj recalls. “And now, on the other side of the world from home, we are trying to preserve our culture.”

Organizations like World Lutheran Federation, Save the Children, the UN High Commission for Refugees and others came to the rescue of the refugees, settling them in seven camps in Jhapa and Morang, where 120,000 Bhutanese lived for more than 20 years, until resettlement.

“We were floating like kites. We missed home, and slept in jute sacks on the sand,” remembers Manoj, who could not even go back to Bhutan when his mother died there. “That is my biggest regret—that I was not there for my mother. There are many Bhutanese like me.”

Manoj came to the US 8 years ago and recorded over 70 songs since then. He has also founded the charity Love and Sports, which supports Nepali art, culture and music with an annual gathering in which the best are honoured with awards.

Many of Manoj’s Nepali songs are about Bhutan. The translated lyrics of one of them:

‘In the top of the Himalayas is our dear Bhutan. We blossom as we live together as one. Don’t cry, mother, we will make you smile We will decorate our motherland with flowers.’
Tyler McMahon
in Manang

Reigning three-time winner, and current three-time 24-Hour Mountain Bike Race World Champion, Cory Wallace, defends his title, while Nepali Bishnu Baburam Tamang (Roan) takes 2nd and uses the training to win the South Asian Games Cross-Country Mountain Bike Gold two weeks later.

The Yak Attack organizing team wanted to change the race this year and added two stages full of singletrack, a new trail on Stage 3, and the world’s highest timed ‘Enduro’ section to make this edition an unforgettable one.

Stage 1 was a loop around Besishahar of Lamjung district, allowing racers to experience the trails and views before the race started climbing around the circuit. Three-time reigning champion Cory Wallace, determined to start his title defense properly, won the stage followed by Roan Tamang.

Stage 2 is one of the harder stages from Besishahar to Chame 2,960m with the first 40 km undulating. Wallace, looking to put a gap on the rest, rode the 46-km stage in under 4 hours, a new course record and nearly an hour ahead of second place Tamang.

Stage 3 took riders to Manang village (3,500 meters) adding a diversion to previous years that included a new singletrack climbing and descending via Gyritei-Mangar. Wallace and Tamang continued their hold on the race finishing 1-2 again.

After the rest day, Stage 4 took riders on 100% singletrack from Manang to Pisang, a 14km stage that is one of the hardest riding. Wallace and Tamang continued to lead, but 3rd place was a battle between 4 riders all within less than 20 minutes.

Stage 5 crosses Thorong La at 5,416m, and is the most feared stage of Yak Attack and can completely change the results. At 21km it is not the longest stage, but the first 3km is a near-vertical ascent that can take up to 4 hours for the average racer.

The downhill after the pass included a timed ‘Enduro’ section, the highest in the world. While Wallace won the overall stage, followed closely by Tamang, fellow Canadian and Kona Bikes teammate, Rob Verme, tied Tamang on the timed Enduro stage. He also finished 3rd overall for the day, a comfortable 20 min ahead of 4th place, securing him 3rd overall in the race.

Stage 6 was the new ‘Single Track’ that took riders on a loop from Kagbeni and Lubra Valley bringing them back to the finish. Wallace continued his dominance, while Verme finished a close second. Tamang had a slower day finishing off the podium, but kept enough of a lead to remain in second place for the race.

The final stage took riders from Kagbeni to Tadapani for a soak in the hot springs before the group ride and bus transfer to Pokhara for the closing ceremony. Wallace easily closed his 4th straight Yak Attack victory, while Tamang finished in 2nd place and Verme in 3rd.

Claire Demaret won the female category, while Yacka Lama won the 60+ age group for the second straight year.

Yak Attack will return in 2020 with a similar singletrack version and is currently offering a first-come, first-served entry sale.
POKHARA READY FOR TAKEOFF

Join us for a sneak peek of Pokhara’s new airport as it nears completion to serve as Nepal’s third aviation gateway. Listen to interviews with the project manager and the Chinese contractor. Look at the sweeping roof of the terminal building, and take a cruise down the new concrete runway.

SOUTH ASIAN GAMES SEGWAY

Following the Yak Attack, former National Champion, Xuan, who had missed qualifications due to injury, was a last minute call up to the South Asian Games XCO Mountain Bike Race. Using his fitness from Yak Attack, he dominated the race from the start to finish to win the Gold Medal as Nepal’s swept the podium in all mountain bike events for the Games.

POKHARA IV

Coming up in January 2020 is the Pokhara IV, a 4-day stage race based out of Pokhara. Initiated by MTB-Worldwide, the creators of Yak Attack, it is an entry-level mountain bike stage race for riders to experience Nepal without the use of altitude. The daily loop format starting and finishing each day at Lakeside through iconic landmarks like the World Peace Pagoda and Begnas Lake with plenty of course shortcuts.

Now for 2020 is the option to just participate for the two days of the weekend (25-26 January) to coincide with Chinese New Year. Pokhara IV takes place 25-28 January and entries are still open, with special discounts for local and expat riders.
**GETAWAY**

- **Boulder Competition**
  - Get in touch with your inner child at this Boulder competition! Untie your shoelaces and get ready for a friendly competition where all levels of climbers can participate, have fun, and win prizes.
  - 4pm, 11AM-6PM, Kathmandu Sports Climbing Center, Nagarkot, (01)4352635

- **Art and Photography Workshop**
  - Kayaksela Creation is organizing an art workshop for children aged 6-14 and a photography workshop for adolescents aged 14-19.
  - 6-9am, 9-11am, Kayaksela Creation, Kathmandu, (01)4352924

- **Font Treasure Quest**
  - Four leisure walks and story sessions, plus diving into different parts of the city. Participants will get a clue at the starting point and win attractive prizes if they follow it.
  - 7am, 10AM-4PM, Kathmandu, (01)4352924

- **Full Moon Concert**
  - Enjoy classical and devotional music at an open-air concert with vocal recital by Swadheena Pandit and recital by Sri Kri Kri at Bhaktapur Durbar Square.
  - 10am-4pm, Bhaktapur, (01)4352924

- **Kama Live**
  - The popular folk rock band Kama will be performing at a Friday night bash, making it a must-visit for music lovers.
  - 27th, 7PM onwards, Kama, Kathmandu, (01)4352924

- **Le Shemra**
  - Enjoy high-quality international cuisine with its elegant fine-dining setup.
  - Market, (01)4352924

- **Revive Leisure Park**
  - Here, you can enjoy food in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.
  - (01)4352924

- **Three Mountain Lodge**
  - A small but charming hideaway in Bandipur, the lodge has preserved an old-time atmosphere, and is aBeing museum of Newar culture.
  - Bandipur, (01)4352924

- **Tranquility Spa**
  - If you need to unwind and relax, this is the place to go with many forms of ayurvedic massages and mariculture/juice facilities.
  - Sip, (01)4352924

- **Sakila Boutique Hotel**
  - The hotel located in the heart of Sikkim, gives an up-close view of the Himalayas, providing all the comfort and amenities you will need.
  - (01)4352924

**MUSIC**

- **Innov8**
  - The brand new band is comprised of emerging talents and plays modern, experimental music. The group of four will be performing at Kirtipur.
  - 9-11AM, 11AM-1PM, Restaurant Innide, Kathmandu, (01)4352924

- **Lindy Hop Dance Workshop**
  - Grow to love jazz music as you learn Lindy hop, a dance popular in the swing era of 1920s and 1930s, fine workshop and top classes every day.
  - 4-5pm, (01)4352924

**DIASING**

- **Piano Piano**
  - The finest quality Italian drinks and wine to delight a connoisseur brings Piano Piano to life. The place to go for pizzas, pastas and fine wine at a moderate rate.
  - Inside Nomad food, Sip, (01)4352924

- **Asluha**
  - The humble potato mango in mind, bagging, scaling varieties at Asluha, blending local Newari and western flavours.
  - Bhaktapur Durbar Square, (01)4352924

**EVENTS**

- **Khuha Manch ma Khula Bhahas**
  - An open discussion about the increasing encroachment of tundikes, an important and open argument about the city center of Kathmandu.
  - 4pm, 7-9pm, Tundikes, Kathmandu

- **Web Development Workshop**
  - IT Nepal is hosting a free workshop about the programming language Python. Interested students can register for hands on learning and QA sessions with experienced instructors.
  - 4pm, 11AM-4PM, IT Nepal, BPO House, (01)4352924

- **Food for Street Dogs**
  - Dogs Nepal will provide food for 50-70 homeless dogs and perform a survey on their status, health and possibility of adoption. Interested individuals can join them.
  - 4-5pm, 10AM-11PM, Kripa, Facebook #dogs4nepal

- **Board Game Night**
  - The group Kathmandu Board Games: The Settlers of Catan laugh has board games rights every Thursday, and you can join by hand at the games even if you are new to them.
  - 9am-6pm, Kuhle Kuhle, Gyan, Kathmandu, (01)4352924

**ABOUT TOWN**

- **Step towards Self-Love**
  - Pratibha Kasturi is providing one-on-one counseling by mental health professionals. In this mental health networking and testing event, experts will lead the cognitive test and formation of support groups.
  - 4-5pm, 10AM-4PM, Kirtipur, (01)4352924

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**Tours and Trips**

- **Bhaktapur Tour**
  - Explore the cultural heritage of Bhaktapur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
  - (01)4352924

- **Lazimpat Tour**
  - Take a tour of the vibrant streets of Lazimpat, known for its local crafts and street food.
  - (01)4352924

- **Tours in Nepal**
  - Experience the beauty of Nepal with a variety of customizable tours.
  - (01)4352924

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**Air Quality Index**

The Air Quality Index (AQI) measures give a clearer picture of what you will be breathing in Kathmandu. Here are the AQI levels for today's air quality:

- **Good (0-50)**: Air quality is considered satisfactory, in fact, it is clean air.Only9 is experienced with such clean air.
- **Moderate (51-100)**: Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants, there may be a moderate health concern for sensitive groups.
- **Unhealthy (101-150)**: Air quality has become unhealthy. Sensitive groups may experience health effects.
- **Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (151-200)**: People with lung disease, asthma, or heart disease, or older adults and children are advised to limit prolonged outdoor exposure.
- **Very Unhealthy (201-300)**: Air quality is unhealthy for all groups.
- **Hazardous (301-500)**: Air quality is considered hazardous for all groups. This is when the air is so bad that everyone should limit time outdoors.

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**Historic Monuments**

- **Trinity Square**
  - Experience the rich history of Trinity Square, a marvel of architecture.
  - (01)4352924

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**Weather Forecast**

- **Temperature**
  - Daytime: 25°C | Nighttime: 5°C

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**Healthcare**

- **Doctors**
  - Expert doctors are on call to take care of your health needs.
  - (01)4352924

- **Nursing Care**
  - Highly qualified and experienced nurses are always on hand.
  - (01)4352924

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**Contact Us**

- **Kathmandu Health Care Center**
  - (01)4352924

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**Discounts**

- **10% Off**
  - Enjoy a 10% discount on all bookings.
  - (01)4352924
Nepal readies for influx of Chinese tourists

Travel trade hopes to raise visitors from China to half-a-million in 2020

Josie Wang in Khumbu

When Nepal chose famous Chinese actress Xu Jing to be its Goodwill Ambassador for Visit Nepal Year 2020 in China, she did not need much convincing. She was already in love with Nepal.

“My heart was racing when I saw the breathtaking view of the Annapurna range,” she gushed in a Weibo post from Pokhara, “This is the life I live for.” Xu posted photos of herself posing in front of Machapuchre, boating on Phewa Lake, wearing a traditional blouse, and dining outside with smiling children. The photos went viral, with 17 million of her followers on Weibo.

Xu Jing has won numerous awards in the past 20 years. Many of her roles are deeply rooted in the hearts of people, which makes her hugely popular on social media. Her account on Weibo, a Twitter-like social media platform in China, has more than 17 million followers.

“It was a wise move for Nepal to choose her as an influence to promote tourism from China,” says Chinese art curator Justin Zhao who has lived in Nepal for seven years, and founded the Himalayan Light Art Award. “Next, door China is the biggest potential market for tourism development in Nepal, and the number of Chinese tourists to Nepal is growing rapidly.”

Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yajing has also been projecting China’s soft power in Nepal through her social media feeds to promote Visit Nepal 2020. In a Tweet on new year’s eve on Twitter, she posted a pictures of herself modelling in Pokhara and wrote: “True beauty always touches the deep heart. Beautiful Nepal with history, diversity and nature deserves a visit. Wish #VisitNepal2020 successfull.”

And she tagged Nepal’s Tourism Minister Yogesh Bhattarai.

From January to October 2019, there were 134,281 Chinese tourists in Nepal, up nearly 10% for the same period last year. Chinese visitors account for nearly 14% of arrivals by nationality, second only to India. Numbers started going up in 2011 after Nepal announced free visas for Chinese nationals.

“Chinese Buddhists and those who enjoy sports adventures are the two most common types of Chinese tourists in Nepal,” notes Weng Ziqing, who runs a restaurant in Pokhara. Indeed, many of the visitors have nothing but praise for Nepal’s natural beauty and its friendly people.

“Although Nepal is poor, it is the happiest country in the world. You can actually see the real smile on people’s faces and feel their inner comfort. I taste a bit of my dream life here,” said one visitor on an online post.

Adds another: “You can see the cultural diversity of South Asia in Nepal. People of different religious faiths live in peace here. They understand each other and develop together.”

There are also negative comments, and deal mostly with poor infrastructures and the high airfares. Says restaurateur Wang: “Air tickets to Nepal are too expensive. The price in the peak season is more than double to similar destinations. If the price of air tickets comes down to the same as that of flying to Thailand, more people would love to come.”

With a target of two million tourists in 2020, entrepreneurs have made efforts targeting potential Chinese visitors, but many say that unless the infrastructure bottlenecks like airports and highways are fixed it will be difficult to meet the target even if the volume of Chinese tourists reaches 500,000 this year.

But here in Pokhara, restaurants, hotels and paragliding companies are gearing up for the influx of Chinese tourists. At Lakeside restaurant menus are in Chinese, as are shop signs. Shopkeepers do their part by calling out “Ni hao”.

HIGH LIFE: Chinese actress Xu Jing has become a brand ambassador for Visit Nepal 2020 in China, and posted pictures like this one from Annapurna Base Camp (left), Chinese social media from her recent trip.

Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, Hou Yajing has also posted photos of herself modelling in Pokhara. (Left) She said on Twitter: “True beauty always touches the deep heart. Beautiful Nepal with history, diversity and nature deserves a visit. Wish #VisitNepal2020 successfull.”

Tourism entrepreneurs in Pokhara, who have been lobbying to have Pokhara International Airport built, are excited that it will finally open next year, and there will be direct flights between Chinese cities and Pokhara, bypassing Kathmandu.

Pokhara became famous in China after the popular television serial “Meng Fei Lai Up (Up in the Wind)” was filmed on location here and the active took a paradigmatic flight. Since then, many young Chinese have flocked to Pokhara. For Wang Ziqing, it was love at first sight with Pokhara. He came on a visit, and never left, deciding to open the Pokhara Restaurant on Lakeside. He says: “Pokhara International Airport is about to be finished and there will be more Chinese tourists flying directly here. I am sure business will pick up.”

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Kunda Dixit
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Nepal’s future may not be in hydropower, as some assume, but actually in the dung heap. A new industrial-scale biogas plant near Pokhara has proved that livestock and farm waste producing flammable methane gas can replace imported LPG and chemical fertiliser.

Over the past 30 years, Nepal has become a world leader in spreading locally-designed household biogas digesters. There are now 300,000 of them, helping reduce deforestation, improving people’s health and lifting women out of drudgery and poverty.

Now, a company in Pokhara has enlarged household digesters into an industrial-scale plant that uses climate-friendly technology that could ultimately be scaled nationwide to reduce Nepal’s balance of trade gap.

Kushal Gurung’s grandfather was in the British Army, and he also applied for recruitment but failed the eyesight test. So, he set up Gandaki Ujra in Pokhara that works with wind, solar and hydropower, but he believes Nepal’s best option for sustainable growth lies in energy from waste.” Nepal must abandon fossil fuels, but even among renewable energy sources biogas has a three-fold advantage. It reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and is therefore climate friendly. It allows us to manage raw waste. And it can slash our import bill for LPG and chemical fertilizers,” says Gurung. “It is a win-win win.”

A huge truck has just arrived from Gorkha at Gandaki Ujra’s biogas plant at Kote near Pokhara, which with its dome digester looks like a nuclear reactor. The truck fills its container with tons of animal poultry waste into a pit.
where rotting vegetables and cow dung from a farm in Syangja are all being mixed before being fed into the 1,000 cubic meter digester that is kept inflated. In the absence of oxygen, bacteria already in the cow dung go to work to break down the waste into methane, carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide. The impurities are removed by filters to produce 206 cylinders of bio-CNG a day which are sold to big hotels and restaurants in Pokhara.

Customers pay a deposit for the cylinders and pressure regulators, and usually use up about two cylinders a day. The cost per kg for the bio-Compressed Natural Gas (bio-CNG) is the same as the state subsidised Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). However, customers prefer the biogas because it saves them up to 30% cost because it has higher calorific value than LPG, and there is no need that goes waste.

“So far, the customers are satisfied, and we see demand growing in the future as wood spreads,” says Ashim Kayastha, Director of Gandaki Uria.

Half the plant’s revenue comes from bio-CNG and the other half from the effluent which is dried and sold as organic fertiliser. The plant can produce up to 11,000 tons of fertiliser a year and is sold to surrounding farms.

The future of bio-CNG depends on scaling up the technology since any municipality generating more than 40 tons of biodegradable waste per day could have its own biogas plant. Nepal imports 500,000 tons of chemical fertiliser a year, and if each of 100 municipalities produced 3,000 tons of organic fertiliser Nepal could slash its import bill. This could also significantly reduce the country’s annual import of Rs33 billion worth of LPG from India which grew four-fold in the past 10 years, making up 2.5% of Nepal’s total import bill. But to scale up, industrial biogas needs the same government incentives as hydro, solar and wind power.

At the moment hydropower investors enjoy a 100% corporate tax holiday for 10 years, and 50% for the next five years. There is only 1% tax on imports of equipment for solar, wind and hydropower, there is no such provision for the equipment for industrial scale biogas. Instead, there is a tax on interest, and also VAT on bio-CNG.

“The government should look at this not only as an energy project, but at its multifaceted benefits,” says Kushal Gurung of Gandaki Uria.

“There is a waste-to-energy and fertiliser angle, too. If we want to make Nepal fully organic in the next ten years, projects like these need to be prioritized.”

Gandaki Uria got a boost from an unlikely source, business (Vepna U/RS) in Kathmandu which helps entrepreneurs running Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to scale up by injecting equity and providing technical assistance.

Says Siddhant Pandey of BO: “We are always on the lookout for climate investments, and we realised that this bio-CNG would be an incredible adaptive resilience investment. It would displace imports of LPG and fertiliser. It was going to be clean, no carbon footprint, and it made business sense because it met our internal return on investment expectation.”

The challenges are ensuring reliable sources of raw material and building knowledge for the technology within Nepal.

Says Pandey: “The Pokhara plant is a drop in the ocean, it can also replicate in all 7 provinces. We know it is scalable, and it depends how proactive provincial governments will be.”

CLEAN AND GREEN

nepaltimes.com

Join us on a trip to Pokhara for a tour of Gandaki Uria’s new industrial scale biogas plant that produces methane gas from farm and urban waste. The bio-CNG is sold to hotels in Pokhara, and the by-product organic fertiliser to surrounding farms. This is the future of energy in Nepal.
Debut novelist lets Afghans speak for themselves

Jamal Jan Kochai is the O. Henry Prize-winning author of the novel 99 Nights in Lugar, which was shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. Nepali Times spoke to him at the Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara.

Excerpts:

Nepali Times: An entire chapter in your English novel is in Pashto. What was your motivation?
Jamal Jan Kochai: Initially, I started out as a craft more than a story-teller. I had been trying to write that chapter for a long time. The entire novel leads up to that story within the novel, and it is actually based on real-life events: the tragedy that occurred in my own family. I knew I was going to be very difficult to write, but I did not anticipate that I would not be able to write it.

Whenever I heard this story, it was in bits and pieces, and it was hard to proceed, because I was only meant for Pashto and it was that story. That chapter ended up being directly from my father. He told the story, as he remembered it: it is the story of the murder of his younger brother during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Initially there was some, not necessarily resistance, but certainly questions. My agent had questions about it. My editor had questions about it. Other editors had questions about it, but when I discussed the intention of it and saw that it was not just a too much trouble-telling that story, ultimately, my agent, my editor, my publisher—everyone was very supportive.

It did use on its own sort of political ideological messages. What happens to stories when they are translated? Who is the book meant for? I finally decided, "I am going to have to remain in this state instead of translating it and risk nothing."

You also have all these non-English words in the novel.
In particular, this whole idea of the good Muslim versus the bad Muslim, which is a metric I find really troubling where certain populations of Muslims become bomb-able and destroyable because of how they are portrayed in the media.

Your book is semi-autobiographical? I would say a lot of elements are heavily autobiographical. When I was 12 years old, I went back to my parent’s farm village in Lugar and I had adventures with my cousin and his, certainly, it begins with my memories. Butdadost was our guard dog in our compound in Afghanistan. He absolutely hated me, that was true, but he never did like the tip of my finger. He did get lost out onto the village and we had to go after him, but I did not actually take part in the druse. My cousin did and I was something I would often think about. So the first time it really started with this idea, "What if I hadn't been afraid of going on this crusade with my cousin, what would have happened?"

Are there any Afghan Americans you are excited about?

As for the poetry collection, came out really and she had a poem published in The New Yorker as well. Very talented, I want to give her a shout out. Fragmented Futures, it was an up by Afghan American group in California and they put together this incredible magazine of just Afghan artists and it was photography, paintings, poetry and fiction all incredible work. I was especially interested by how talented they were — it got me very emotional. I'm particularly excited about this next generation of writers who are coming out of those communities in the States.
A nostalgic Hindustani novel

Amitabha Bagchi’s Half The Night Is Gone is melancholy and artfully written

Times

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BOOKS

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Sakina Abidi

There is not much to tell about Amitabha Bagchi’s Half The Night Is Gone that has not already been said. The winner of this year’s DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, awarded at the Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara last month, the book has been readily deemed the ‘Great Indian Novel’ of our time.

Bagchi sets most of his novel in Delhi, with parts in Agra and Benares. Writing in pre-independence times, Bilal’s rich lore and the old gang jammu beedi of North India is woven beautifully into the novel — with vignettes of a harder, less forgiving modern-day shown, in letters between chapters.

Bagchi carefully constructs his plot — a long winding ambitious tale that tells the story of two families and their men sprawled across generations. This story is told by the fictional, award-winning Hindustani novelist, Vishwanath, who takes breaks to pen letters to his brother, his dead son’s girlfriend and his estranged wife.

Govind Datta’s Ramcharitmanas (an Anawadi retelling of Ramayan) underpins the novel, with additional Sanskrit slokas, Hindi-Urdu couples, and Qu’ranic hadith referenced throughout, each with an English translation. Bagchi’s greatest feat is the way the quoted verses always add to the narrative, never distracting or pulling a reader away. As The Hindu put it, this is not an ‘Indian novel in English’, it is an Indian novel.

The men Vishwanath writes about are deeply flawed and violent — they beat, rape and abandon their wives (stylistically depicted as ‘claiming their conjugal rights’) and yet, somehow, they are always portrayed as layered and interesting individuals.

The writing is convincing, it is incisive. If the framing of women as always youthful, inerently lustful and scheming is meant to highlight the predicament of women in Indian society or if Vishwanath is just a bad writer, Whatever the motivation, it is the novel’s one glaring fault. It is difficult to read as Omwall (She manages to get a name — something not even female characters in the novel is granted) who is molested by her father in law, and as she stabs and wounds him in a ‘...a corrosive sweep that left her quivering. She felt acousal’. Later in the novel, her husband reaches for her and Omwall knows up again and again. In response, her husband beats and

Amitabha Bagchi lives in ‘remote’ Bengal, a place he knows intimately, often for days at a time. He has been described as an ‘enigmatic, solitary recluse’ who ‘lives in a remote area of Bengal’. He is a writer who has ‘never been seen with his wife or children’. His writing has been described as ‘enigmatic’, a writer who ‘lives in a remote area of Bengal’. He is a writer who has ‘never been seen with his wife or children’.

The novel is a rare glimpse into the lives of rural Indians, their daily struggles, their hopes and dreams. It is a story of love, loss, and redemption. It is a story of the human condition, the way we live, and the way we die. It is a story of the power of words, of the power of the human spirit.

Sakina Abidi
The Ass

So, it looks like we have come full circle, and the good old bad days are here again. After struggling for freedom for five decades since 1960, we are finally rediscovering that war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength in the Federal Democratic Republic of Animal Farm.

But we detect a certain complacency setting in among the Comrades: they are showing signs of smugness and hints of lassitude in decisively cracking down on dissent. It looks like The Dear Leader and his Commie Hardliners are losing the fire in their bellies, and becoming somewhat half-hearted tyrants. After coming this far and burning all our bridges, we can’t let this happen. There is still a long way to go before we can aspire to be DPRK.

The Party therefore now has to ask itself: is it being draconian enough in safeguarding Nepal’s hard-won authoritarianism? Why this piecemeal approach towards total control? As Mao said: “Revolution is not a dinner party, you cannot make a cheese omelette without milking a few yaks, and political power comes out of a barrel of whiskey.”

So, what are they waiting for? Why are they pussyfooting with the IT Bill, Media Council Bill and the Grocery Bill? This is no time for hemming and hawing, they should roll up their sleeves and get to work, since time and tidal wave waits for no man. More vigilance, that is what we need. And more vigilantes.

I wouldn’t make the mistake of saying our crackdowns have to be beefed up since that would ruffle religious sensibilities in a friendly neighbouring country, but there is no doubt that they need to be buffed up.

We can’t afford to leave even one stone turned upside down to weed out the vestiges of freedom. How come independent journalists and activists are still roaming around the streets in broad daylight hours? Why aren’t they in custody yet? We are now three days into 2020, and the Ass is still not under preventive custody for ridiculing, demeaning, and belittling the liliputs in government. Such a lackadaisical attitude towards implementation of our laws just won’t suffice. What do we have to do burn some tyres and set fire to effigies?

A cross-party caucus of politicians united under the umbrella group, the All-Nepal Federation of Unjustly Undetained Caucasians, threatened to launch a decisive nationwide stir if their demand to be arrested without further ado is not carried out with immediate effect by the concerned higher-up authoritarians in a ham-handed manner with excessive use of force.

The statement of the caucus said: ‘If they don’t put us under house arrest immediately, then we will escalate our protests and go into cardiac arrest.’