Fourteen years after the end of the conflict, a series of controversial actions by leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) have raised doubts about their commitment to transitional justice.

The most glaring was the appointment of Agni Sapkota to succeed Krishna Bahadur Mahara as Parliament Speaker. Sapkota is pictured above on Thursday after having registered his name for the candidacy. Nepal’s cyberspace buzzed soon over a person accused of murder replacing someone charged with rape when all the while a highly qualified female candidate, deputy speaker Shambhavi Thumka, was available for the post.

Sapkota has been accused of ordering the murder of Arjan Lama, a UML activist, in Kavre in 2005. Ironically, the UML is now a partner with the former Maoists in the NCP.

In 2016, Agni Sapkota was denied a US visa for “serious and specific human rights allegations associated with his conduct during the insurgency”. He was earlier also prevented from going to Australia.

“Theoretically, the Speaker should be someone able to rise above the party line, and not someone controversial. That does not seem the case with Sapkota,” said political analyst Krishna Khanal. “In fact, that has never been the case in Nepal. The Speaker’s post has always been a launching pad for those interested in higher political status.”

The appointment of the Speaker was deadlocked for more than a month by the power struggle between Prime Minister Oli and his would-be successor Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Sapkota was Dalal’s choice, and Oli wanted a loyalist from his former UML party: neither supported Tumbahangphe’s nomination.

At a farewell press conference this week, the fiery Tumbahangphe lashed out at her own party leadership for not trusting a woman to do the job, saying: “We succeeded in abolishing the monarchy, but we still need to work hard to abolish patriarchy.”

Human rights activist Bheraj Timlina from Sapkota’s home district of Kavre said: “A person accused of such grave crimes should be investigated like anyone else.”

But few expect that to happen. Of Sapkota’s nomination, Lama’s wife Parinita Tamang said: “Now I have lost all hope of Justice.”

In another move, the opposition Nepali Congress (NC) joined the ruling NCP to appoint apparatchiks to vacant posts in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission for Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CEEDP) despite strong opposition from activists.

The two parties did hold a consultation with victims’ groups about the nominations, but the consultation was boycotted by many and was condemned as a merely cosmetic gesture. “This is just a ploy by leaders to give legitimacy to their nominations and it is not acceptable to us,” says Bhalulal Chaulkuri of Conflict Victims’ Common Platform.

“It also mocks the rule of law, and gives a negative impression of the country in the international arena.”

Last week NCP co-chair and former Maoist leader Dahal said he took responsibility “only” for 5,800 of the 17,600 Nepalis killed in the conflict. Dahal’s insurgency overthrow of pre-1980-era crimes was seen as a mockery of the rule of law.

Since 2006, the Maoists under Dahal and later the NCP have tried to turn both the TRC and the CEEDP into pawns and prevent prosecution of perpetrators of proven wartime atrocities.

“These are troubling signs,” wrote Mona Khadka Gargal, South Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, on Tuesday. “International crimes cannot be brushed away with political trickery. If justice is denied in Nepal, victims may be forced to take their cases to courts abroad.”

Sewa Bhattachari
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The analysis of bilateral ties in an article titled "10 years ago this week" shows that the power balance in the region has shifted. In the past, power was shared between India and China, but now the power is more concentrated with China. The shift in power balance has been driven by several factors, including the geostrategic importance of the region, economic growth, and the need for a stronger voice in international forums.

On the other side, our opinion is that there is a scarcity of data on the complex and dynamic nature of the relationships between China and its regional partners. The analysis highlights the need for more research and data on the topic.
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Counting what counts in Nepal

The state of the toilet at Kathmandu airport is a better indicator of progress than the Human Development Index

A nyone who visits Nepal opportunities will look at two indicators: the first is the exchange rate of the Nepali rupee against major currencies, and the second is the state of the toilet in the airport arrival hall.

½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

When asked a simple question such as “How far is Bhaktapur from Thamel?” The answer in kilometers may be easy but it is nearly impossible to answer in units of time. The answer therefore will be “It depends”. What does it depend on? Well that also depends. In a country where we cannot tell anyone how long it will take to get to the next city, we have the world’s most complex and sophisticated statistics to indicate where Nepal stands on anything and everything compared to the rest of the world.

Does this country really need a Human Development Index, a Doing Business Index, a Multi-dimensional Poverty Index and many others? How do you monitor and verify so many indicators? It is quite obvious that the number of times in Chitwan is an indicator for the deer population there, and the growing area and water available to the deer. The tiger count would serve as a proxy indicator for the state of the environment.

The system of conducting a national census was first carried out in the United States in 1790. In Nepal, the first census was conducted in 1991 during the reign of Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher. We are now preparing for the National Census 2021, which will provide many indicators that will then hopefully be used to set priorities and allocate our scarce financial resources.

The reason we cannot say how long it will take to get to Bhaktapur is because of the huge traffic jam at Koteshwor. Is the number of two- and four-wheeler vehicles that converge to this junction and many others in the valley an indicator of the severity of seventy years of rural development?

Why are people not staying in the villages where the government has been pumping annual budgets for as long as we know? It is very unprofitable to tell development experts that rural Nepal does not need another school building because the parents have moved their children to the cities or to India or further afield. Pregnant women move to the nearest urban area with its good maternity health facilities when they are six months into their pregnancies.

Two and half billion people will need old-age care globally by 2050 and this indicates that nursing is a good choice of profession. The sizes of different boarding houses at major street junctions indicate which countries top the list of places to which young Nepal is migrating to move. Japan and Korea seem to be most popular, and yet these billboards are small compared to the English boarding school signs found all over Nepal. The ruling parties of Nepal have a vision and a mission – prosperous Nepal, happy Nepali. Can we agree on three indicators for each and hold politicians accountable to them? And then make sure that each cabinet and parliament session always begins with a report on the six indicators and reporting to the citizens on where we stand on each?

A problem with statistics is that data is best kept out of court. For example, does the high growth we have seen in the domestic aviation business indicate Nepalis are getting rich or that road travel is risky?

Does the growing number of private hospitals indicate wealth or that people are becoming sick? Does the increased forest cover in Nepal indicate that people have internalised conservation or that imported LPG and cement have made it redundant to collect firewood and building materials? While GDP per capita is the most popular indicator we use, we know few report their true income. Should income be replaced by the prices of the phones we carry or the size of the TV owned or vehicle driven?

Indicators are a good management tool, but we often do not like to be held accountable to them. There are too many variables that affect our work and hence the goal post keeps changing. But if we agree that the toilet at the airport is a critical indicator to inspire potential investors, we need to make it functional and impressive.

Anil Chitrakar

Make yourself a hot rum punch

All the rain and snow this winter calls for the Khasi special drink. A standard punch is all well and good when the weather is fine. But it is cold enough right now to chill our bones, and we are in need of stronger stuff.

Hot rum punch is a winter drink that was allegedly created by British sailors in South Asia in the 17th century as an alternative. And we’ll bet you didn’t know that the word ‘punch’ comes from the Tamil word meaning ‘five’. That is because the drink was made from five ingredients: alcohol, sugar, lemon, water, and tea or spices. So you thought ‘punch’ in the hot rum drink was so named because it delivered a punch, think again.

In Nepal, the rum in the hot rum punch must come from the legendary Khukuri Rum – one of the best celebrated rums in Nepal, if not the world. During the 1975 coronation of King Birendra, the rum was sold in bottles that had the shape of the kathikam. This version of hot rum punch can easily be made at home, and the ingredients you need are already there in your kitchen cabinets.

Ingredients: cardamom, clove, star anise, ground cinnamon, honey, lemon, hot water and Khukuri XXX Rum.

High Hyundai

Hyundai will now make the all-new IONIQ 5 electric commercial vehicles for the global market. The electric car will be produced at the YS Business Park in Anyang, South Korea with a production capacity of 100,000 units a year.

Manchester United

Villiers Travel is offering a ‘mountain’ flight deal to Nepal: 2020.

Mountain Flight

Villiers Travel is offering a mountain flight deal to Nepal: 2020.

NMB Bank

NMB Bank has opened its branch office in Chitwan, Tharuhat as the practical aftermath of Tharuhat Development. The new provincial office was jointly inaugurated by Minister of Food and Pradeep Khandi, members of the bank’s board of directors.
The number of helicopter rescues in Nepal has soared in recent years; at least a third of them are said to be unnecessary.

“Most porters accompanying trekkers are from lower valleys, and suffer from altitude sickness because of poor acclimatization. Sharpas and other high-altitude guides do not suffer as much from acute mountain sickness,”

To counteract this, the KTWK (Kathmandu Trekking and Wildlife Korea) has implemented new rules governing search, rescue, and treatment of trekkers to check fraud. The rules were implemented in 2018.

The KTWK, which is a local non-profit organization, has been running a rescue clinic in Kathmandu since 2018. The clinic is staffed by local doctors and nurses who provide medical care to trekkers and porters who need it.

The clinic is open 24 hours a day, and is available to all trekkers and porters who suffer from altitude sickness or other medical emergencies.

The clinic has treated over 500 patients since it opened, and has prevented many cases of serious illness.

The KTWK is also working with local hospitals to ensure that patients are treated promptly and effectively.

For more information on the KTWK and its rescue clinic, please visit their website at www.ktwk.org.
Nepalis go salmon fishing in Kamchatka ... and discover one of the last untouched stretches of river on the planet

Arun S Rana
in Petropavlovsk

Few Nepalis know where Kamchatka is, and the ones who do probably heard about it from the board game ‘Risk’, where it is described as the remote region between Asia and North America. Kamchatka Krai, as it is known in Russia, is a fund of active volcanoes and hundreds of thousands of pristine rivers that flow down to the Sea of Okhotsk. It teems with brown bears, salmon and trout.

For a group of eight Nepalis brought together through their passion for fishing, this was paradise. In the past, we had explored Himalayan rivers in Nepal and India in pursuit of the iconic golden mahseer. But observing, habitat loss and failures of conservation have led to massive depletion of this magnificent fish.

Taking a roundabout route via Moscow and Moscow, the Nepali fishermen landed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatka Airport 43 hours after leaving Kathmandu. Our guides for the trip, Arndt, Victor and Serge, and our cook Tanya, met us at the airport, and took us to a store to buy supplies — including a stack of vodka, an essential in Russia for warding off the cold.

We had all bought waders in the hopes of fly fishing, but these were more useful as wind breakers. Despite the thick thermals we were under them, we found it too cold to stand in the water of the Bystrya River for more than 15 minutes at a time. Meanwhile, the macho Russians bathed in the frigid water and walked around in t-shirts.

There are six species of Pacific salmon, and all of them swim in the waters of Kamchatka. From June to October, different species run up the rivers at different times to spawn. Unlike our golden mahseer which also migrate upstream to spawn but return to the depths of our big rivers every year, a salmon spends its entire life in the river and then enters the ocean when it grows into an adult. After two to five years, the salmon swims back up the river to the exact spot where it was born, to spawn and then die.

The indigenous people of this region revolve the salmon as a deity. Brown bears go on salmon and store the energy thus gained to sustain them through their winter hibernation. Rainbow trout, char and grayling feed on salmon eggs and delaying salmon flesh. What the bears and other fish do not consume decays and provides nutrition for the vegetation along the river.

When we stopped into the Bystrya in mid-September, the last of the sockeye salmon were bright red and exhausted. Big silver spawners shimmering in the water initiated trout, and even as they gasped for life, the dying sockeyes bravely fought off predators to protect their eggs.

The sight of thousands of juvenile salmon leaping joyously into the air was comforting. We slept well knowing that the sockeye had done their duty, and that millions of salmon would be swimming into the Sea of Okhotsk this year as they have for countless years.

Salmon undergo a drastic metamorphosis when they enter freshwater rivers from the ocean. Their bodies contort into humps and they develop backs and gnarly teeth. Fish that are bright silver in the ocean turn red and green in the river, and are considered inedible. Only the silver salmon are eaten.

On the first day we could not hook a rainbow trout, until we discovered that they were taking pink flies. Up to 15 rainbow trout were then hooked before lunch, including a monster 34-inch that weighed 4.5 kg.

As we ventured into the Kamchatka wilderness, salmon had coloured the forest in yellow and red, interspersed with green. Every living thing was stockpiling for winter. A dream brown bears were fat from their salmon diet, and human beings too were starting salmon, cleaning hundreds of fish and packing them in beds of salt to preserve them through the winter. It is impossible not to develop a deep reverence for the salmon, and we all hoped that sustainable angling would win over commercial greed.

Every evening we stopped rafting around five o’clock, and set up camp for the night. Our three guides used chainsaws to quickly cut logs for the fire, and before long Tanja had two pots on them, one for coffee and the other for borsch. Inside the dingy kitchen tent, she got on with other dishes — some of the tastiest meals we had ever eaten.

Fresh caviar, straight out of the salmon gut, washed and lightly salted; fried salmon steak; baked rainbow trout; grilling sausages; pumpernickel bread; pancakes and an assortment of chocolates for dessert. Generous shots of vodka, of course, to wash it all down. The organisation of the trip was meticulous and exemplary.

We landed more than a hundred fish in five days, and learned that fish see in colour — how else do you explain the trout’s preference for pink flies? We learned that despite their rough exterior, Russians are mild-mannered, honest, hardworking people who look after their guests well.

It is heartening to know that there are still a few magpie, untouched places on this planet where human beings and nature coexist. For us Nepalis, there was a parting wish that we could keep just one river in our own country flowing free and clear, and that we might set aside the mighty golden mahseer.

Arun S Rana is fishing enthusiast

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Following the death of 24-year-old Dilip Mahato for opposing the 'Crusher' industry in Dhanusha that was illegally mining sand from a river. This week, another Dhanusha native, former president Ram Baran Yadav, spoke to Nepali Times about the Chure conservation program he initiated.

"Business, bureaucracy and politicians all plundering the Chure"

On 10 January, 24-year-old Dilip Mahato was killed for opposing the 'Crusher' industry in Dhanusha that was illegally mining sand from a river. This week, another Dhanusha native, former president Ram Baran Yadav, spoke to Nepali Times about the Chure conservation program he initiated.

Nepali Times: Dilip Mahato was murdered in your home district, and your former constituency. What does his killing tell us? This is a grave crime. Dilip had been mobilizing the villagers and talking about Chure conservation. The people were responding to it positively. Those who were earning millions from illegal mining of the river beds were alarmed. So they murdered him.

Why does the trade in sand affect the people of the banks of the Chure? The price of aggregate and sand for construction in the high-right river. The materials are even exported to India. Money is at the heart of the matter. Everyone wants to become rich quickly by selling natural resources. Businessmen, mafia dons, politicians, local administration, and elected representatives are all complicit. One river is constructed at the cost of Rs50 million. Malpractices increased after the practice of allocating money for Chure development shifted to the local administration.

The crusher industry is also influential in politics; many have parliamentary stakes on their pay roll, and some owners are even MPs themselves. They do not care what the exploitation of rivers will do to the environment, or what kind of earth we are leaving behind for future generations. Dilip was fighting to protect our future, and he paid for it with his life.

What environmental impact does river extraction have on the Tarai? More than half of the Chure forest has been destroyed in my lifetime. Rivers and wetlands are drying in the Tarai, and the groundwater table has receded. Water scarcity is increasing in the eastern and central Tarai. In summer, people come to the highways carrying drums on bullock carts to fetch water. Fewer migratory birds winter here now. Human-wildlife conflict is increasing. The Tarai used to be our breadbasket, and we used to export grain till 40 years ago. That is no longer the case.

While you were President, you established the President Chure Conservation Program, and there is also a Chure Conservation Master Plan. But the present government has not heeded the reports. The 10-year Chure Conservation Master Plan outlines activities to conserve the Chure. The government has included it in its National Pride Projects, but Parliament has not made any laws pertaining to it. That shows that the government is not serious about it.

All the construction projects in the Chure negatively impact its natural resources, for example the East-West Highway that was built right across the jungles. An east-west railway is being constructed at a distance of 20-30 km from the highway. The proposed mid-hill highway runs parallel to it, and the postal highway is under construction too. Another proposed highway, the Mahat Shambhur, is being built from Bhapa to Dallandhara. The impact of these 'highways' on the environment was not considered. That shows the government is not serious about the environment.

What do you say about the proposed Nijgad airport? The government just wants to destroy our last remaining jungles. It wants to chop down the forest to build a new capital in Kathmandu. Do we need a fourth international airport when international airports are already under construction in Sharanwa and Pokhara? This is just immature. If we don’t listen to conservationists, the Tarai will become a desert in a few decades.

Laws should be made to implement the Chure Master Plan, and an environment-friendly policy drawn up. But this subject is never raised in the federal Parliament. All three levels of the government should be active, and the government should understand that once you tamper with nature, the effects are irreversible.

RAM BARAN YADAV

Following the death of 24-year-old Dilip Mahato for opposing a sand mining contractor in Dhanusha, former president Ram Baran Yadav, who is from the same district, speaks out against the quarry mafia. Watch the former president talk about Chure conservation and Nijgad airport.
Bipin Thapa

One of the best hiking trails close to Kathmandu is the Champadevi-Chandragiri trail. The path travels through thick forested land with wildlife and offers a splendid view of both the Himalayas and the city sprawled below.

But as the path becomes a popular attraction for urbanites seeking solace in nature, it is increasingly marred by plastic trash. Now, a community effort led by the Mira Rai Initiative (MRI) has started a clean-up and awareness campaign along the trail. The goal is to see that the place is not only for locals and hikers but also for people who take advantage of nature walks everywhere in Nepal.

Last month, MRI started by international champions trail runner Mira Rai, mobilised 65 volunteers who hiked the forest path picking up litter and installing 30 doke dust-bins and 20 anti-litter signs. Altogether, the volunteers collected 80 bags of garbage, paper, food wrappers, beverage containers, and straws from along the trail.

MRI made arrangements with Dhulikhel Municipality and local garbage recyclers to ensure regular collection and disposal of the trash from the doke bins.

MRI promotes trails and trail running across Nepal while encouraging and empowering female trail runners in particular. Rai has said she wants to give young Nepali women the same opportunity she had to become world-renowned racers.

Nepal has some of the most exquisite natural and geographical features, and holds enormous untapped potential for trail running.

The Champadevi Trail

Located along the southern rim of Kathmandu Valley, Champadevi (2,300m) is the Valley’s third highest ridge. It is named after the forest protector goddess, whose shrine is at the summit. The peak and the shrines hold great religious significance and in recent years Champadevi has also become popular as a destination for day hikes, trail running, cycling and picnicking.

The trail to Champadevi climbs up through planted pine forest towards new-growth oak, rhododendron, and wise community forests. The summit can be approached from Chandragiri, Hattiban, or more directly from Khirtipur via Deurali and Machhangu. The ridge offers unparalleled views of the Himalaya from Annapurna to Numbur, with Gokyo, Himal, Langtang, and Dorge Lakpa being the closest peaks. Far in the distance, of course, Everest is visible in clear weather.  

More pictures and video of the clean-up online.

nepalitimes.com

Mira Rai’s initiative to clean up hiking trails

Because of the Champadevi-Chandragiri trail’s natural beauty, accessibility, and proximity to the city, it is gaining popularity among both tourists and locals. There has been a rapid growth in the number of hikers and picnickers, and this has meant that the trail suffers from plastic and other litter. The negative impact of this on the trail’s beauty and appeal could in turn reduce its popularity. Popularity does not necessarily translate to pollution. The problem faced by the Champadevi-Chandragiri trail is a lack of awareness and inadequate instructions against littering and at school and at home. The problem is also the lack of bins and containers for waste collection, in the absence of which people throw their waste on the trail itself. This is why MRI installs waste collection bins and focuses on awareness and the ongoing preservation and maintenance of the trail. A clean trail would also motivate more runners.

“If we can create a wonderful playground for enthusiasts, we can help create more Mira Raies, who can be torchbearers of our nation on the international stage,” says Mira Rai, who has taken part in 20 international ultra-marathons worldwide. 

The former Manista also received the National Geographic Adventurer of the Year Award in 2011.

She adds: “Such community efforts aid in the promotion of tourism and the ongoing national campaign for Visit Nepal 2020.”

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Mira Rai’s initiative to clean up hiking trails
marathoner’s drive for trails, starting with Champadevi

Nepal’s fantastic female runner

Mirai Rai is already well known in Nepal and in the international athletic community as a trail runner, and a new book spreads her fame beyond that by introducing her to other audiences around the world. Fantastic Female Adventurers by Lily Dyu features Rai as one of 13 contemporary women who have had extraordinary adventures.

Mirai Rai from Bhaktapur did not know that mountain running could be a sport, until she won a race. Born and raised in a farming family, Mirai was used to walking up and down steep mountain paths every day carrying grass for cows. She walked two days to the nearest market with her mother whenever they needed groceries. This stamina came into good use when she briefly joined the Maoists during the conflict. After the war, when she learned that what she did every day could be a sport, she competed in some of the world’s most challenging trail races, won several awards, and broke three world records.

Rai’s story is an extraordinary one, since she achieved so much despite not being able to afford training or proper equipment. But even more extraordinary is the possibility of what could be happening in Nepal: how many other ordinary young men and women going about their everyday tasks are so toughened by the tough terrain of Nepal that they are already elite athletes?

Like many other Nepali youngsters Rai was planning to go to Malaysia to work, and would have done so if her life had not taken the dramatic turn it did. Today she is busy competing in races, leading environmental initiatives and helping other youngsters in athletics.

Lily Dyu brings Rai’s story alive in her book, documenting her phenomenal rise in sports. Mirai Rai’s chapter is beautifully illustrated by Clotilde Carol, with a village street scene of traditional mud houses, women carrying fodder and boys pecking at the ground.

Author Lily Dyu hated sports as a child but took up running in her adulthood. She realized that one of the reasons she had been averse to adventure was that she had never known examples of women adventurers. Like everyone else, she had grown up seeing and reading about male explorers, and thought that outdoor activities were for men. After cycling all over the world, hiking and swimming in far-flung places, and even coming to Nepal to complete the Manaslu circuit, Dyu decided to write about other women who were out and about in the world.

Dyu’s book features Ann Daniels, who skied to the North Pole, Tina Jeong, who cycled around the world, Karen Darke, who hand-bled in the Himalayas; Sarah Outen, who kayaked in a range of fire; Emma Tumlin, who explored Australia on a stand-up bike, and others. Between them, the women cover not just half the sky, but the entire planet.

Sewa Bhattarai

Fantastic Female Adventures by Lily Dyu
Shire Ltd, Sheffield, UK
257 Pages
£12.99

All photos by TNN Media
Passage of time
A solo exhibition of artwork by Krishna Lama. 25 January-1 February, 10.30 am- 5pm, Nepal Art Council, Boudhanath. 6342075

Call for Artists
Sathy Media Arts Gallery invites artists to apply for Last & Found. Meet in March, a five mural project in Honorary and Markh where they will paint scenes from mythology around Kathmandu. All artworks January, 4pm, Apple Media

Art Afternoons
Art Afternoon at CIM Nepal: invites children of all ages to spend the day painting, snapping and dipping their hands in sensory bins. Every weekend, 3pm-4pm, Children’s Art Museum, Basantapur. 88688922

Sonam Lhosar
Celebrate Sonam Lhosar at the Hyatt with great food, music and karaoke. 25 January, 12.30pm-10pm, Rs 2600+ per person, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 5777234

Jhilkye Fire
Jhilkye and Company will be releasing its latest EP, Jhilkye, with brand new hits on the 24th. 3pm onwards, Tobacco, Bouda. 8500819

Garage Sale
Have any vintage knick knacks or curated objects? Bring your treasure to the garage sale and let them find a new home.
26 January, 11am-3pm, Cafe & Restaurant, Dhulikhel. 7655555

Swing Dance Classes
Want to try something new this year? Take a swing dance class and learn the Lindy Hop from teachers from the Swing Dance Academy. 27 January, 6pm onwards, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Jhamsikhel. 88688822

Handicraft Market
The second edition of Chitgai Centre’s Handicraft Market presents a vast collection of handicrafts from some of the best artisans in the country. 27 January, 11am-8pm, Cafe & Restaurant, Thamel. 5251210

Music & Madness
Nabin K Bhattarai, known for his blend of rock, folk and pop sounds, is a musical marvel that has been producing some of Nepal’s most popular songs in the last decade.
29 January, 3pm onwards, WP Restaurant, Lounge, Thamel. 6584967

Utpala Cafe
Located within a Buddhist monastery in Boudha, Utpala Cafe offers an excellent vegetarian menu. It features locally grown produce and the mushroom dishes are a must try!
Boudha. 8978990

Train to Thamel
Getaway

Hotel Moonlight
At the outskirts of Thamel, this hotel offers respite from the busy city. Relax in the diaper rooms and grab a hearty meal at the beautiful garden-side restaurant.
Ph: 4838652

Fish Tail Lodge
Located on the quieter side of Phewa Lake, this lodge is an oasis surrounded by blue waters. Add to this an innovative architectural design and breathtaking panoramic views of mountains, and this place is a must-visit.
Phewa lake, Pokhara. 8661407

Dhulikhel Mountain Resort
This resort blends culture and comfort seamlessly together with well-designed bungalows and Needless attracts.
Dhulikhel. 8269078

Sapana Village Resort
Experience the lush Tharu and Churepung culture, marvel at the beauty of the lush national park, witness elephants roaming through the forest and relax at this picturesque getaway in the heart of Chitwan.
Sapana, Chitwan. 8813988

Hatthiban Resort
Hatthiban Resort is the perfect place to get away for the weekend. Grab breakfast at the heart’s content before casting off on your boat tour where you will get the chance to witness the amazing Bhote Koshi river, get a massage at the spa and take a tour of the village.
Hatthiban. 8176740

OUR PICK

Our Pick

Ootam in Kathmandu: 24 January
Jojo Nepal-Japanese fusion - a genuine fusion plate with a variety of dishes. An early 1500. 24 January, 3pm onwards, Jojo Nepal, Durbar Square. 8176032

AIR QUALITY INDEX
KATHMANDU - 17 - 23 January

Our Pick

Jojo Nepal-Japanese fusion - a genuine fusion plate with a variety of dishes. An early 1500. 24 January, 3pm onwards, Jojo Nepal, Durbar Square. 8176032

32 - 50
25 - 50
10 - 25
5 - 10
0 - 5
24 - 31
31 - 32
Tipping point on menstrual banishment in Nepal

Change happens when local women take the lead

It's easy to be cynical about recent reports of actions taken to end chhaupadi, the traditional practice in parts of western Nepal of segregating menstruating women.

Since December, after the Home Ministry ordered district officials to strictly enforce laws that bar the practice, hundreds of the chhaupadi sheds where women live during their periods have been demolished. Local officials have warned that they will withhold social security payments to anyone found to be involved in the practice of menstrual banishment.

We have heard such threats from officials before, and many of the recently dismantled sheds were likely previously broken down and rebuilt. But something (was) different this time about the campaign to end this practice that has killed more than a dozen women and girls in the past decade, most of them by exposure to cold or starvation or suffocation from fires to warm the windowless sheds in winter. It seems we might be at a tipping point.

Reason for optimism comes in the form of some good news from Naya Health Nepal, the NGO that runs the Bayalpata Hospital in Achham. Naya has 58 community health workers (CHWs), who form the hospital's link to residents in its catchment area. Of these 58, 29 had not practiced chhaupadi since before they began working at Bayalpata, and, according to the hospital, 28 of the remaining 29 have given up the practice in the time since.

Efforts of the hospital clearly have something to do with this.

Anusha Thapa, healthcare design director at Bayalpata, says that sporadic informal discussions with CHWs were followed by regular discussions in 2017, and by more formal interventions in 2018-19. “We started with baby steps, to understand the issue and to help provide a safe platform for CHWs to openly discuss and support each other. Last year we added a few more interventions, including social mapping and reaching more pregnant women,” added Thapa in an email interview.

The mapping found that 65% of the 14,000 women of reproductive age in the hospital’s catchment area practise chhaupadi, compared to 5% of the CHWs before Bayalpata’s intervention. CHWs are required to have at least Grade 10-level education, which is far above the district average, and perhaps that higher level of education explains Bayalpata’s success in helping these women give up sheds.

“Education and the understanding of menstruation as a biological phenomenon universal to the general population is allowing this change (in attitude towards chhaupadi) to take place,” says Thapa. “However, there needs to be a trigger for that final decision. For many CHWs, that point was that they wanted to give up the practice themselves before preaching to other women.”

In December, Partibals Kun of Achham became the last reported victim of chhaupadi. For the first time, an arrest was made over the death. - Partibals’ brother-in-law Chhatri Rana, for banning her to the shed. Unofficial reports from Achham say that he is on bail, punished only with having to report to the police twice monthly for three months.

Many activists say that banishment to sheds is only the most extreme form of the menstrual segregation that occurs throughout Nepal among women of all socio-economic groups, both rural and urban. A 2005 Supreme Court decision outlawed chhaupadi, and a 2017 national law made forcing a woman to use a shed punishable by up to 3 months in jail or a fine of Rs. 10,000. Yet, these changes, along with various local regulations that punish the practice or reward women who reject it, have failed to end it.

In one ward in Achham, senior citizens’ allowances were reduced as punishment for banishing women to sheds. This was effective because elders tend to be the most immersed in the traditional beliefs surrounding chhaupadi, such that not going to the shed once a month will anger gods and result in sickness, or worse, death.

Such local initiatives, and especially women-led campaigns to destroy sheds, have helped CHWs to give up the chhaupadi practice. “It is the fact that these campaigns are led by local women that makes them so effective. I think it’s peer influence, pressure, that’s playing its part,” says Thapa.

For other CHWs, the decision to give up the shed was driven by practical considerations - the absence of caregivers for their children, in cases in which the women do not live with their in-laws and their husbands have to be away for work. Says Thapa: “They ended up staying at home to ensure care for their children.”
Nepal's Tarai

Sonam Lama in Nepalganj

Nepal is expanding as a hub for western Nepal, with a new six-lane highway linking it to Kohalpur and upgrading work underway at the airport. But these days the city and its surroundings have also become a hub for abandoned cattle.

They are everywhere, sitting along the road dividers and sidewalks of the East-West Highway and other roads in the thousands. The cattle have been abandoned by owners after they could not be transported across the border for sale in India. Cattle from Uttar Pradesh have also been transported into Nepal after the increase in street lynchings of cattle traders by cow vigilantes since 2014.

That there are no abandoned water buffaloes or mules along the highways is proof that only animals that have no economic value but are “protected” by religious groups are left by the roadside to fend for themselves.

The cattle problem in the western Tarai hit the headlines last September when 24 cows and bulls were found dead below a highway in Surkhet after they were thrown off a cliff by truckers hired to ferry them to the mutton shops in Dhalai.

Following the incident, officials responsible for arranging the transport of the cows from a Nepali-based slaughter were detained. The killer, or “Kuji” house, is supposed to keep cows until they are claimed, or until a permanent home has been found for them, but the officials had decided to send these cows away. Although the outrage over the cattle deaths has evaporated and the problem has disappeared from the media headlines, the plight of stray cattle has only grown.

In August 2018, in response to a writ petition by a human rights group stating that the stray cattle were causing highway fatalities, the Supreme Court issued a mandamus against Nepal’s Sub-Metropolitan City, Kohalpur Municipality and five rural municipalities last February, directing them to put the cattle in Kuji houses.

ROYAL DUTIES: Princess Astrid of Belgium at meet with Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali on Sunday. The Belgian royal was in Nepal for a campaign against tuberculosis and syphilis.

EYES ON THE BALL: Women footballers in action during an opening match of Mahila Premier League in Kathmandu on Saturday.

HELP CENTRE: British Ambassador Nicola Pollitt with Far Western Province officials at the inauguration of the new humanitarian staging area at Dhangadi Airport.
is over-run by cattle

Shelters are overwhelmed by the growing problem of abandoned livestock from both sides of the border

Metropolitan City, but the problem is much bigger than a cattle shelter can handle and the shelter has been overwhelmed with cows and bulls being driven into Nepal across the open border with Uttar Pradesh after crackdowns there.

Nepalgunj mayor Bhawal Shumsher Rana admits the scale of the problem makes it difficult to manage. “The kapiji house is supposed to give refuge to stray cattle until their owners pay a fine and take them back, but these cattle have no owners, and their number just keeps growing. That was why we had decided to ferry these cows to Dalbakh. The city blames the transport company for abandoning the cows along the way. In another, less-publicised incident, Sukla Phanta Municipality in Kalai rounded up cattle last year and put them in shelters in which they then died of starvation and lack of care. The Nepalgunj kapiji house currently shelters only 137 cows and oxen, whereas there are tens of thousands out on the roads.

At the kapiji house, Pawan Kumar Kansiyal says he has taken up the offer of adopting cows after providing proof of citizenship and personal details. “We cannot take care of so many cows, so we introduced this provision with a view to help them get better care and treatment. But there are few takers,” Kansiyal says. Animal Health Technician at the kapiji house, Laxmi Ghim, says many cattle are out in the open and die from cold during the winter fog. Others die by having ingested much plastic from feeding on roadside garbage.

Mayor Rana says the city is planning to build a new Rs70 million kapiji house in the Karanaha neighbourhood of Nepalgunj, which will aim at proper management of the cattle, providing them food, health and treatment.

Animal activists say the problem can be solved with cattle being tagged and with better monitoring at the border. Because this is a cross-border problem, the local and national authorities in Nepal and India need to get involved, they added.
Sanghamitra Subba

As a 9-year-old, James stood before a white lion statue in Kathmandu Durbar Square, his sighted partner took his hand and guided it across the curves of the lion’s belly and the discs inside its gaping mouth, all the while describing to Alex what he was touching. Other sighted and visually impaired travelers in the group were doing the same.

Having travelled extensively throughout the years, James says, “For me, travelling is a chance to explore new countries and have a sensory experience. There is nothing more exciting than experiencing the sounds, smells and feelings of a new city. Sighted guides who go out of their way to help those who can’t see make it easier.”

Visually impaired tourists like James rely heavily on their sense of touch, smell and sound when visiting Nepal. Their guides help them navigate the landscape and describe their surroundings. Through the years, sighted guides have encouraged tourists to experience new places with senses other than sight.

Sightseeing brings visually impaired and sighted tourists to Nepal

This group was the second to visit Nepal through Travelyes, a British holiday company for blind, visually impaired and sighted travelers. Last November, sighted Guides described the mountains in Pokhara to their visually impaired partners. Led by their hands, the sighted travelers across prayer wheels in Boudha, described the sacred cremation rituals at Pushpagiri, helped them navigate uneven pavements and rocky stairs, bent a hand when boarding rafts in Trishuli and led them to dance circles during cultural performances in Chitwan.

Suey Jestow, tour manager for the trip, speaks fondly of the group’s adventures in Nepal. She says, “The trip was incredible and the visually impaired guests are absolutely inspiring. They are thrill seekers and live life to the fullest.”

Blind travelers are paired with sighted guides on a rotational basis on the morning of each travel day, allowing everyone to get to know one another during the trip. Tour managers like Jestow give a short introduction to the day’s plans and a few tips to help the travelers as the weeks go by. But the best guides may be the visually impaired individuals themselves. “All the sighted guides have to do is ask them how they would like to be assisted, and describe the stairs or landscape. It works well because all the sighted guides have to do is be the visually impaired’s eyes,” says Jestow.

But traveling with visually impaired guests is less about sightseeing and more about a holistic sensory experience. Travelyes, with the help of Malla Travel and Tika Tours, designed an itinerary that incorporated

Sarah Bhattarai

Sarah Bhattarai shares how she began helping Nepal’s deaf and blind communities contribute to society

Sarah Bhattarai is a deaf and blind member of the Nepalese deaf community. She is passionate about promoting the rights of people with disabilities and advocating for the deaf and blind.”

She was born blind, but that didn’t stop her from being curious about the world around her. She had a natural inclination to explore and learn about everything she encountered. Her parents encouraged her to ask questions and seek answers, even though they knew that their questions might not always be answered.

Sarah Bhattarai

Hearing for the deaf, seeing

Hearing for the deaf, seeing

from which she can compare the two worlds, and understand and articulate the unique needs of their inhabitants.

Giri recalls her moment of epiphany: “I realized that I had been dead with a capital D or culturally dead. I could hear very well, but I was completely deaf to the unique language of the deaf community.”

Back in Nepal, she started helping the deaf community organize art exhibitions, since the visible world is so important to those whose hearing is impaired. Every wall in Giri’s 3-storey house in Kathmandu is covered with works of deaf art — paintings that express the feelings and experiences of deaf people.

In one painting, bricks and stones fall to one side of the canvas, while feathers float on the other, suggesting that for deaf people, bonds sound fall as gently as dawn.

Giri says deaf people want a channel of communication with the rest of the world, but for that they need proper schools where they can learn standardized sign languages. If not, they will be stuck with making improvised signs and communicating only with those close to them.

Every country has its own sign language — and learning at least standardized Sign Nepal sign enables deaf people to communicate with others who know it in Nepal. It is best if they learn American sign too, which is quickly becoming the lingua franca for deaf people like Giri.

Giri herself is fluent in Nepali, Indian and American sign languages (each of which are completely different from each other) and communicates effortlessly in all three. Her husband Tuki Giri was always supportive of her work, and she took time off from it to care for him before his death in 2018.

One day after her husband passed away, Giri was walking along the Kathmandu when she heard a plaintive voice singing. “It was really strong and it touched my heart,” recalls Giri, who on hearing the sound of its source found the singer to be blind.

She invited him home, and along the way described everything to him: the roads, trees and buildings outside. Giri says she learnt that sound is as important to the blind as vision is to deaf people.

After working with people with two different types of disabilities, Giri has insights into their unique worlds. For example, the deaf have two names — one given by their parents which they may never have heard and may not answer to, and one in sign language which they identify with.

“Lighting is very important for deaf people. Something that normal people would see as mysterious dim light settings would not appeal to them, because they cannot sign and talk there,” she explains.

It is just the opposite with blind people, where light is not important, but sound and touch is.

When Giri brings her blind friends home, she describes everything to them — the colour of her living room, the texture of the table in front of them, what lie behind

NATION

24 - 30 JUNE 2022 | 1984
Listening to the hearing impaired

In 2013, a government directive required every national television channel that broadcasts news to broadcast it in sign language at least once a day. Seven years later, even the government-owned NTV broadcasts news in sign language only once a week. The other channels don’t bother.

The reason given for this is the lack of sign interpreters, and for NTV the lack of the extra camera needed to include sign narration. According to Nepal’s laws, sign-language interpreters should be available not just in public offices, but also for budget speeches and discussions in Parliament. Since there are only 28 recognised professional interpreters in the country, however, deaf people are not getting the facilities to which they are entitled.

In the first Constituent Assembly, the Parliament secretariat had employed interpreter Radha Bohra to sign for MP Raghab Vir Joshi from NCP (Sanyukta). Joshi’s private secretary Dinash Shrestha also worked as an interpreter. But Parliament has not employed an interpreter after that.

Even though it is not possible to provide interpretation facilities everywhere, they should be available in crucial places like hospitals, schools, and police stations,” says K F Adhikari, president of National Deaf Federation Nepal. The Sign Language Interpreter Association has 68 members. But many of them have since changed their profession. Interpreters work on a project basis. When projects end, they become unemployed, so there is no professional security for them,” explains the group’s Shalu Sharma.

Nanu Shrestha Jayan used to present the news in sign language on Nepal Television. After working for more than 13 years as an interpreter, she quit. “We don’t get regular work, so I could not stick to this profession. I still provide the service for free if anyone needs it,” she says. Dinash Shrestha has been working as an interpreter for 12 years, but does not have a certificate to prove his skills. Some countries require interpreters to study for two years and work for a year before being certified, but there is no agreement about who should be responsible for certification. Interpreter Sani Khimbuta believes the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare should issue the certificate, but the Ministry has passed the buck to the Ministry of Education.

The Nepali sign language also has a limited vocabulary, and interpreters are hard pressed to communicate difficult or subject-specific words and names of people and places. “There are many words for which there are no signs, and that creates difficulties when presenting news on television. We spell those words out, but we are not sure if the viewers understand the spellings,” says Shalu Sharma.

Interpreter Dinash Shrestha, who worked for former MP Joshi, also says he found his job difficult because there are no signs for many political and legal terms, and these are difficult to communicate through spelling. The Deaf Federation has been working to further develop Nepali sign language, and five years ago it published a new dictionary with 4,736 words.

Nanu Shrestha

for the blind

them or beside them.
She often takes blind friends on a walk to get them familiar with their surroundings because they may trip and fall in new places. “We can control things in familiar places, but the world is a live hazard for blind people,” she says. “We use construction materials on pavements, and sometimes street animals are lying around.”

Giri says she has learnt from the disabled community that they do not want to be just helped or faculty. They want to be contributing members of society. Her foremost example is a recent outing to Rakkshi Nepal, an organisation that helps sexually exploited women, that she made with a band of blind musicians called Puanas. The visit was healing for both communities.

Giri also helped organise an IT challenge with Bright Star Society, founded by a blind friend Sudhak Adhikari. Gestam Pokharel, the first blind person to pass the public service commission examinations and become a Nepal Telecom officer, won the challenge. Giri speaks with pride about these men and about many activist friends within the blind community.

“I admire the work of Sitava KC, who lost her eyesight late in life and now helps friends through the organisation Blind Rocks,” she says. “Taarti Nepal, Saniya Shrestha, and Saras Lamichhane work on empowering women and help protect them from gender-based violence. This thread of sensitivity, interest in human values and spiritual quest runs right across the community,” says Giri.

“The blind people often do not exercise correctly, because they cannot see how to do it. I want to give audio instructions for exercise for blind people, and am currently looking for open space in which to do so,” she says.

With her rich immersion in these two contrasting worlds of experience, her sensitivity to difference, and her strong motivation to help, Giri is determined to do what she can to help Nepal’s deaf and blind people.
Nepal is a fine country

Our leaders have repeatedly promised to turn Nepal into a Singapore, and that has always seemed like a mirage. But thanks to the glorious dictatorship of the politburo that dream is finally coming true. Kathmandu, too, is becoming a ‘Fine City’.

Having once nearly had to pay a double fine for hiding a bubble gumกลเตย under a park bench on Samruddi Beach (SGS500 for chewing contraband and SGR1,000 for littering, making a grand total of SGR1,500 plus 10% GST refundable at the airport) I have on all subsequent trips to the city state looked over my shoulder before repeating the heinous crime. And, I am proud to say, I have never been caught since.

There is no doubt that fines work. For example, Singapore has a fine of SGR100 for not flushing the toilet. (Always wondered about that, though. How do they know? Do they have a hidden CCTV camera inside the cubicle?)

Being a Turd World country, however, Nepal must fine those who do flush unnecessarily, so that we can conserve our valuable water resources and not let them flow down the drain, as it were. For most Nepalis, ‘flush’ is a game of cards and not a waterfall in the loo. Let’s keep it that way.

The authorities showed a can-do attitude this week by reintroducing stiff penalties for jaywalking. However, things have got so out of hand that fines may not suffice. We need corporal punishment as a deterrent to instill good behaviour in citizens.

Member of the Gandaki Provincial Legislature Deepak Manange has the right idea to get people to fall in line. This week, he manhandled a member of the Kaski branch of ANFA in Pokhara for perceived misdemeanours. It was wholly appropriate that The Right Honourable Manange lodged a flying kick on a football official. That should be a lesson to all those who do not treat public officials with the respect they deserve.

Any celebrity singer who henceforth refuses to pet her coffee cup through the airport X-ray scanner, will be singled out for physical shewdown. (Those with 30kg of golden ball bearings concealed in their false bottoms will be deemed national assets, and will not be X-rayed.)

Any school staff painting their building yellow will be beaten black and blue. Local columnists will be kicked in the Ass.