Love of heritage

German architect and curator Wolfgang Kern first came to Nepal in 1974 to work on the Bhaktapur Project. But it was not until the 2015 earthquake that he met Nepali archaeologist Sukra Sugar Shrestha amidst the rubble of the Nautale Darbar. The two found a common passion for heritage conservation, and in particular saving the erotic art in Kathmandu Valley temples.

The earthquake brought down many of these monuments, and their meticulously carved wooden struts were stoned among the debris. Kern and Shrestha realised how precious and fragile the carvings were, and set about carefully collecting, photographing and documenting them. The result is the book "Erotic Carvings of the Kathmandu Valley: Found on the Struts of Newar Temples," an exhaustive collection of the priceless items rescued from the quake debris five years ago, but also a catalogue of all possible positions of sexual congress. (Caution: Some readers may find the content of this book too explicit.)

The first part of the book analyses the evolution of erotic art in Hindu Buddhist Tantric theology and mysticism, from its antecedents in Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra, through the eroticism of the temples of Khajuraho and Konark in India, right up to the eruption of temple building in Malla era Nepal 300 years ago. The authors discuss various reasons for ubiquitous eroticism. Some have explained these carvings in terms of the importance of the Shiva-Shakti sexual union in Hinduism as a symbol of spiritual fulfillment. Others suggest they provided sex education for young people who congregated at temple squares during festivals. These explanations, however, do not account for the level of obscenity in these carvings, and the fact that many of them depict practices that are deviant by any standards.

Some argue that the carvings actually depict the do's and don'ts of acceptable sexual behaviour. And the most common explanation is that the shocking acts shown here are meant to be too disgusting even for evil spirits, who would then spare the temples in question from lightning strikes or earthquakes. But that did not protect the Nautale Darbar in Kathmandu and the Char Narayan Temple in Patan from destruction in the earthquake of 25 April 2015. Both had some of the most sexually explicit carvings in Kathmandu Valley on their eaves and corner struts, including orgiastic scenes, bestiality, and the use of sex toys.

Shrestha rescued and cleaned the struts at Char Narayan, and Kern painstakingly photographed them to be catalogued in this book along with sketches based on them by Roshan Dongol and Ekram Singh. The restoration of Char Narayan was completed by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust this month.

Sukra Sugar Shrestha passed away in 2017, leaving behind much of the research for this book. His daughter, Sili Shrestha, writes in the Foreword: "My father was worried that no heritage conservation expert would dare write about erotic carvings of Newar temples, but he and Wolfgang did it because of their love for heritage."
DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

The Sagarmatha National Samantha’s new issue this week was a class referral for a bigger international event slated for April. Nepal’s own version of Davos. Fittingly, the theme for the national gathering was “Climate Change, Mountains, and the Future Humanity.”

The title may be grandiose, but that is because the rate of warming we are currently seeing, mass extinction is an imminent threat. Thresholds agreed upon in Paris in 2015, and in last year’s Himalayan Assessment brought out by IGMEO may have to be revised because the rate of polar ice melt predicted for 2050 is already beginning to happen.

The concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere has risen from 360 parts per million (ppm) at the start of the Industrial Revolution in 1820 to 413 ppm today. Contributions to the loss of albedo as Arctic ice melts, the warming of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet and SAS, and the 2008-2009 wildfires by warm ocean currents, and methane released from deforestation now mean that the global warming is not linear. Greenhouse gas emissions from the massive burning of fossil fuels in the past few decades have warmed the atmosphere by 1.3°C. Another 1.1°C increase is expected in the next 30 years. And due to a phenomenon called “elevation-dependent warming,” during which the time the Himalayan mountains are expected to warm 0.6°C more than the rest of the world. Himalayan ice will be nearly gone during this century. The impact of this on biodiversity, weather, stability of slopes, society, economies, and ultimately politics, will be catastrophic. There is just not enough time to adapt.

This is why it is important for Nepal to take the lead in drawing global attention to the unique crisis faced by the Himalaya, for this does not just affect us. It affects 3.5 billion people living downstream from Asia’s water towers.

While global CO2 emissions are on the rise, we can see that forward, Nepal and other countries in the region need to quickly come up with ways to reduce risk, and to manage the severe disruptions in natural systems that are sure to gain pace in the coming decades.

Even without the climate crisis, Nepal faces enormous environmental challenges. We rivers are ravaged by sand mining, our mountains are muscled by excavators, and infrastructure projects are underscoring gaps in forestry. Air pollution in urban areas exceed accepted international standards all year round, waste management is a mess, and plastic litter the countryside.

The climate emergency is happening in parallel with an unprecedented transformation in all spheres of life. Nepal used to be known as a predominantly rural, agriculture-based society. Not anymore. Agriculture, however, comprises only 27% of the economy. More than 60% of Nepal’s population lives in towns.

But 79% of Nepal’s still rely on biomass for cooking and heating, which gives us the advantage of being poor – there is still time to leapfrog directly to a green economy, bypassing fossil fuel energy.

The most affordable small-scale biogas plants can reduce the pressure on Nepal’s forests, but only 3% of the population use them. There is vast untapped potential to extend this, as well as ubiquitous scale biogas plants. Making electricity accessible and affordable will enable more farmers to switch to electricity for cooking and space heating, reducing our per capita carbon footprint, stemming global warming, lifting LGP imports, and improving indoor air quality at the same time.

It is time for Nepal to stop placing the blame on historical emissions by industrialized countries and end fossil fuel use in neighbouring India and China. Fossil fuels for energy needs do not move towards clean energy sources. Cutting air pollution will not just improve our health, but also reduce the need for polar ice and accelerate glacial melting.

There are tendencies in Nepal to blame everything on the climate crisis. Food deficit in the Kathmandu Valley, out-migration, and floods in the Tarai all pre-date the climate crisis. As we address the structural issues, we will automatically become climate resilient.

Nepalis emit only 0.2 tons per capita per year of fossil carbon ( Qatar emits 40 t) and so whatever we do will not make a big dent. Nepal needs to switch to a green economy and renewable energy projects to save the planet, but to save our economy from the mounting burden of petroleum imports.

We need a government with a single-minded focus on creating jobs through renewable energy projects and tourism development. In the final analysis, everything rests on improving governance, and setting far-sighted goals that are sure to bring us prepared for this global emergency.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

An editorial 10 years ago this week discussed how people in rural Nepal still felt of the plights that determined their daily lives, because of the health, disease, and hospitalish spells. Sadly, that editorial would have been written today. Our health system continues to be a failure to many rural people, so we need to make sure we have good health care at our fingertips that many of us still dream of.

This is still a world where people deal in simple, preventative care. A large number of people expect modern medicine and a visit to the nearest doctor. We need to do what we can to improve people’s public health. Apart from what farmers want, the country needs regular health and alternative therapies. In fact, the SAPF is taking the country by storm, so my role is to come up with district health by training from intensive to basic. In the rural areas, I am also thinking a bit about what we can do to improve public health.

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ONLINE OFFERINGS

AGRI APP

The Great Trans-Himalayan Bird Migration

Of the 800 species of birds in Nepal, 10 are migratory, many of which spend their winters in Siberia. But today their numbers have declined. What are the preliminary findings of an ongoing important study? Go to our website for the full story.

WHAT’S TRENDING

Coronavirus outbreak may curb wildlife trafficking

Bimala Tumkewat: Publishing cinema on the map of Nepal

Bimala Tumkewat: Publishing cinema on the map of Nepal

Electoral systems in Nepal is known for its hunger. The country has the highest number of undernourished people in the world. This year, the election season has come with a new wave of hope. The youth are taking to the streets, demanding a change. The future of Nepal is in the hands of the young.
LOVE IS EVERYWHERE

Happy Valentine’s Day.

TURKISH AIRLINES

ARTVIN - TURKEY
Building an information bridge for Nepal’s farmers

Rajan Bajracharya quit a secure job to help farmers with relevant data through a mobile-based app

In this space over the past three months, we have profiled successful entrepreneurs from various areas of business. All have in common that they are determined to make their ideas work, are willing to take risks and learn from mistakes, and have a passion for what they do.

The goal for these people is never simply to make money but to create something new. Rajan Bajracharya is another such entrepreneur. He left the comfort of a secure job as a geographic informational systems (GIS) specialist to found his business three years ago, ignoring the many who told him the move was foolish. Bajracharya didn’t take the leap into the unknown on his own. He convinced his buddies in information technology to do the same, to leave their full-time jobs to start a company with him.

“What really excited me, despite a lot of fears of financial risks, was to use my freedom to create innovative products without any limitations and inhibitions,” says 43-year-old Rajan, who led his team to work on a world-class agriculture information web and mobile-based app called Geokiwi to provide crucial contextual and location-specific information for farmers during each stage of the agricultural cycle, from planting to harvesting.

The project has received international recognition. It was awarded the U.S. Data Driven Farming Award in a global competition with entries from over 60 countries and got a cash prize of $100,000, which Bajracharya has plowed back into the company for use in agricultural research and development.

Rajan’s team translates scientific data and research into inputs that ideally can reach real beneficiaries of that information. Although the share of agriculture in Nepal’s economy has fallen to 36%, some 93% of the population is still dependent on farming. Much of this is subsistence agriculture, which is rainfall-dependent and low in productivity.

Nepal must aim for self-sufficiency and surplus in some agricultural products, but for that farmers need data. There is no scarcity of research on how mechanization or changing crop rotations and cropping patterns could help, but that information must reach where it is needed.

“If we do not work on information delivery mechanisms, even the best information will be of little use,” explains Bajracharya.

“Information gives us the power to make good decisions and build new confidence, and Geokiwi has really made a difference to many farmers like me,” says Tilak Sharma, a 35-year-old farmer from Kapun Khurd Rural Municipality of Salyan district.

Through the Geokiwi app, Sharma learned about safer production practices that use less pesticides, reducing farm expenses, and proper scheduling of different stages of the agricultural production cycle. This information has helped him to increase the productivity of his farm by over 20%. Sharma shared his new learnings with 40 fellow subsistence farmers in his region and hopes that the productivity of their farms will increase as well.

Sharma now also sends feedback to the Geokiwi team to help it create more locally-relevant content. The collating of farmers’ knowledge in this two-way information exchange helps Geokiwi to customize information to the local context, thereby better serving farmers in each region.

“Nepal has tremendous potential to export niche products. The country’s geographical diversity and altitude variation give it subtropical and tropical regions, mountains as well as river basins, and different micro-climates across the country during the same season. This is nature’s gift to Nepal.

“There are no limits to innovations in this sector. It is time for tech companies to not just focus on products but on creating platforms that reach out to the most neglected communities, like the farmers,” says Bajracharya. These platforms are important to create functional connections between farmers, agri-based vets, traders, marketers, scientific communities and consumers.

For now Bajracharya is not making a huge profit, but as a social entrepreneur he believes the company’s value is not just based on cash returns but on its ability to help millions of struggling Nepali farmers to benefit from their hard work.

Turkish to Malabo

Turkish Airlines’ flight operations to Malabo on 7 February, making the capital of Equatorial Guinea its 119th destination. As the 60th-anniversary of the global carrier on the continent of Africa, flights to Malabo will be operated on an Airbus A-310, Kemano - Malabo - Iborri with Boeing 737-900 aircraft.

Elthad

Elthad Airways has announced a partnership with Norwegian technology developer Braintours IT to develop TravelPass, a subscription-based travel solution, that allows customers to purchase a pass for a set number of trips or a particular travel period instead of purchasing flights one by one.

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Durganath Sharma, pioneer TV broadcaster

The careers of many journalists of Durganath Sharma’s generation spanned the technology transition. We started out as reporters in the age of cold type and letter press, and then graduated to Linotype and seeing our stories laid out with photographs in zinc blocks.

Then in the 1960s came photocomposition and offset printing, and after that we got rid of film and went straight from computer to plate. Now there are digital presses. We reporters filed our stories by postal mail, dictated them on landline phones, used typewriters, fax, dial-up, and finally email and internet apps.

Durganath Sharma, who died at age 71 on Wednesday in Kathmandu, was a celebrated and celebrity television journalist. But he started out in Ghodhpura in the age of the letter press, and his career advanced with the advent of printing and broadcast technology.

From the Radio Nepal broadcast studio in Singha Durbar, his “Yes Radio Nepal ho. Abe Durganath Sharma beta samachar samalai” was the most recognised voice across Nepal as he read the morning news on the short and medium wave bands.

Later, when Nepal Television started relatively late in the 1984, Sharma was the chief news anchor and set the standard for camera presence and audience connection.

The joke then was that he should say “Abe Durganath Sharma beta samachar samalai”. Durganath Sharma travelled across Nepal, often accompanying King Birendra on his annual winter inspections of Development Zones, visiting remote areas of the country by rotation. Because of his frequent reportage from the field, close friends had given Durganath the moniker ‘Durgan Kastha’ (Remote Area), a play on his name.

In radio too, Sharma provided over rapidly changing technology, from analog shortwave to AM amplitude modulation, and witnessed the spread of FM (frequency modulation) and finally satellite radio and digital broadcasting. He worked through the evolution of television technology from the age of video parlours to terrestrial broadcasting, and on to cable to direct to home dish. From cameras that were large and heavy they had to rest on bulky shoulders, to the Sony Handycam of the 1990s, and finally mobile phones that could take videos and edited.

Durganath Sharma was the screen persona telling Nepal what was happening around the world. This was the age of Panchayat, so domestic news had to be taken with a pinch of salt. The democrat in Durganath Sharma valued the freedom of press, but while cynical in private about censorship, he was not an activist and did not question it. Later, as the Panchayat gave way to democracy, he used his reach on Nepal Television to start the News:Choice (World News) program, a video news aggregator that catapulted him to even greater stardom.

In the age before Twitter provided instantaneous notifications about goings-on at home and abroad, News:Choice became a window on the world for a whole generation of Nepal. As anchor, Durganath Sharma did not just list the news line-up but also explained the background and context that drove events like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Chernobyl, the Security Council debates and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In later years Sharma taught media studies and penned several handbooks for journalists. He had a bypass surgery 15 years ago, but continued to teach and write columns in Kathmandu newspapers. He died of cardiac complications on 4 February, and with him we lose a media practitioner with institutional memory of Nepal’s political transitions and the advent of mass media technology over the past decades.

Kunda Dixit

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NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.

TRIBUTE
The Climate-Smart Great Himalayan Trek

It has been eight years since the hikers and a dog walked across Nepal for tourism and highlight the climate crisis.

A broad smile lit his bearded face as Drew Steven Sherpa strode towards us down the narrow path. The afternoon sun glinted off grey stone walls and wheeling crowds crossed overhead on his approach, a dark coloured dog trotting cheerfully at his heels.

Behind Drew, Ama Sherpa grinned broadly, a diminutive figure trimmer with more energy, followed by Samir, the tall, fair photographer hung with cameras, and an entourage of assorted small children and curious hangers-on. After a month walking the Great Himalaya Trail the team were bronzed and hardened, their legs muscles solid under the dusty grime, and shoulders rippling beneath sweaty t-shirts and big packs.

"Great to see you guys. We are almost halfway" called Drew Steven optimistically, hoping his girlfriend who had travelled with us to the path. The afternoon sun was still shining on the Kathmandu mountains that morning. "The dog has been with us since Thamel! After our early start we were tzadik and divided with the party exchanging news over cups of milky tea in a village shop, prior to the official municipal welcome festivities within the left precincts of the Gorkha palace.

The Great Himalaya Trail Climate Smart Celebrity Trek was the brainchild of Pushpa Sherpa, traversing the 1,780km length of the Nepal Himalaya through 22 districts from Guahwa in the shadow of Mt Kangchenjungas in the east to Dhankuta in Nepal on Nepal’s far western border. Its high-profile purpose was to draw attention to the effects of climate change on mountain ecosystems, and spread the word to the local communities through which they passed.

The historic town of Ghokha was a convenient meeting point, although closer to see the third of the total length, Phalash and I had brought a bush-load of Kathmandu-based media to further publicize the initiative. And to check how they were getting on in those three days before widespread cell coverage connected the hills.

Apu, the first ‘Super Sherpa’ to summit Everest 21 times, came from his Utah home for the awareness raising event, and Drew Steven took a break from mountaineering and climate-ambassador advocacy activities. Pushpa’s Himalayan Climate Initiative was just newly formed in 2012, and keen to make its mark on the government, local NGOs and foreign donors concerned with environmental issues whom he had persuaded to fund this novel expedition.

The effort was headed by the President and Prime Minister, and several top diplomats and Kathmandu development workers accompanied sections of their hike. Messages of goodwill and “good speed” were received from international supporters such as Al Gore, Reinhold Messner and Joanna Lumley. At a roadhouse in Sindupuchok, Apu was presented with a certificate from the boss of the Gutmaikw Book of Records in a makeshift ceremony. Films and photos taken along the route are still being used today, showcasing some of the most rugged and breath-taking mountain landscapes on earth, as part of a month-long exhibition and presentation beneath the white of the world’s highest peaks. Both VNBC2020 and Nepal Tourism Board are dedicated to promoting the Great Himalaya Trail as a long-distance multi-day walk, conveniently divided into bite-sized sections to encourage repeat visits. Taka Airlines has painted the GIT logo onto its STOL aircraft and boarding pass.

Himalayan Climate Initiative has since become one of Nepal’s most innovative organisations, dedicated to finding sustainable solutions and practical business responses to the rapidly escalating environmental concerns that are engulfing Nepal. Recycling plastic bottles, producing re-usable shopping bags and collecting rainwater are just some of the ideas they have turned into thriving social enterprises. Based in an expansive Buddhamalka site, I recently listened to exciting experiments from college kids that included vertical vegetable farming, natural water purification, plastic waste for road building, and teacher’s house grey water.

The celebrity trek was cleverly created as part of the overall Great Himalayan Trail Development Programme, a government project supported by the British and Dutch, and designed by a TRG team of Nepali consultants of which I was team leader. Our objective was to spread tropical benefits and stimulate local livelihoods by promoting trekking beyond Sagarmatha, Langtang and Annapurna. In 2010 an estimated 95% of all trekkers to Nepal were concentrated in those popular protected areas with only 6,000 tourists venturing further afield. Today, that figure has grown to nearly 30,000, and more when Nepali trekkers are included.

I certainly did not conceive this iconic and globally significant new tourism product for Nepal, but I was the first to weave it into government plans – the National Ecotourism Strategy and Marketing Plan first featured the Great Himalaya Trail in 2001, a long time ago.

Two people had strolled upon the GIT concept concurrently from their different perspectives – marketing and rural development. Jamie McGurns of Kiwit climber and trek organizer, one evening in 2000 at my pink sedan sitting room, explained his inspired idea to film a multi-country trek along the length of the entire Hindu Kush Himalaya. Shortly afterwards, Malcolm ‘Mac’ Odell of The Mountain Institute, over lunch in his Baladwapa home, shared his brainwave to harness tourism to bring benefits and business opportunities for remote communities by giving them the three established trek areas.

We modified the route to maximize opportunities for mountain residents, using a cobweb of lower trails weaving east to west through the middle hills, ensuring the widest appeal for hikers and even bikers. Like the Historic Silk Road, the precise path moves with the times of year and aspiration of the trekker.

Walking goodbye in the sunshine outside the glowering brick walls of the Ghokha palace, Apu, Drew Steven, Samir and their team still had a very long way to walk. Spending along the trails as their fitness levels increased, and despite daily stoppages to explain their mission to ever-growing crowds of interested villagers and local authorities as word spread ahead of them, they completed the traverse in just 99 days.

And when they returned to Kathmandu, they were triumphant. Seated the dog ‘with yellow eyebrows’ was still with them.
Nepal earthquake in art

Erna Anema is a Dutch artist who has painted landscapes, worked with copper, and created digitally. A professor of art at Rietveld Academ in Amsterdam, she credits Nepal with having inspired the artist in her. She is currently in Kathmandu with her students for a collaborative project with the Kathmandu University School of Arts. An collaborative exhibit of her work titled Earthquake Blue: 53 seconds, 5 years later, is on display at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Baber Mahal Revisited 14-17 February. The students’ work will be exhibited under the same title once it is complete in March. Anema spoke with Nepali Times this week about the exhibit, the collaboration with local artists, and her love for Nepal.

Nepali Times: What role has Nepal played in your development as an artist?
Erna Anema: I have always loved Nepal and I have been coming to this country for over 40 years now. I saw a documentary about Tenzing Norgye and Edmund Hillary’s ascent of Mt. Everest as a child and decided then that I would grow up and travel to Nepal. I trudged around Nepal and started off as a mountain landscape painter. Nepal really inspired the artist in me and I have returned time and again. I even had a short stint of teaching arts at Nepal Arts Academy and managed to exhibit my first project at Siddhartha Art Gallery in 1996. The culture, heritage and art work is so versatile here that the more you explore, the more there is to learn.

The 53 seconds, 5 years later exhibition depicts the 2015 earthquake. How did the idea come about?
This is a collaborative project with my peers Elifet Haltjema and Renee van Haren. The idea was initially unclear, but with the help of Renate, we settled on ‘earthquake blue’ and I went on display in Amsterdam in 2019.

Why Earthquake Blue?
When I was in Kathmandu, everywhere I walked I saw the blue colour, either the blue plastic covers wrapped to create a makeshift home or to cover the debris, or the blue sky. In the hundreds of pictures I took, blue was the most prominent colour. The Earthquake Blue exhibition started in Amsterdam and this is the third time it will be on display in Kathmandu.

How different will the display be in Kathmandu? While Earthquake Blue in Amsterdam was a solo exhibition, 53 seconds, 5 years later is a collaboration between 20 students each from Rietveld Academy and Kathmandu University School of Arts. The Dutch and Nepali students will work in pairs with a starting point of where the Nepali students were during those 53 seconds of earthquake. The project is a month long and I am looking forward to seeing the results. Their work will be on display by March 30.

Also, Renate and Elifet’s work will be exhibited for the same duration as my work, and they present visual stories of the contradictions we encountered, the destruction and the same time the indomitable life.

What has been your experience of collaborating with Kathmandu University?
This isn’t the first time we have collaborated with Kathmandu University, but this year’s project is really special. Working with the department head Sujan Chitrakar has been an honour. The ideas that have stemmed from here are amazing and have helped both groups of art students to learn from one another. I hope we can have more collaboration in the future too.
Single and no one in your offline life to ask on a V-Day date? There are plenty of ways to find someone in cyberspace. We have to admit that a lot of these methods are more suited for millennials. Many in their 20s and 30s have found their matches through social media - through Facebook, and now increasingly through applications downloaded to their phones. Dating apps are not just about finding ideal matches. They can help singles to find love, but also new friends, professional connections, or casual partners. Try these out:

**Tinder**

Tinder has earned a reputation in some parts for facilitating casual sex - through life has a mind of its own and married couples that met here do exist. This dating app invented the format of swiping right on the profile of someone you are interested in. Either because of social stigma or because many women are looking for a level of commitment. Tinder in Nepal is populated largely by men. Because of this, it took 23-year-old Amuj three months on the app before he found a date in December. “We were together for an hour or two in a nice restaurant,” says Amuj. “We talked about everything under the sun, and it was a good moment, but that’s about it.” Neither asked for a second date. Amuj is now back to swiping left and right to hatch himself a date for Valentine’s Day. “I am not ready for commitment,” he says. “But maybe a casual date would be a good time-passer.”

**Bumble**

Bumble is new to Nepal, and set up similarly to Tinder, but here only women can initiate conversations. This encourages them to break out of gendered expectations to make the first move, and it has been found in many places that women feel safer online when the ball is in their court. Women, if you want a date this Valentine’s Day, or any day, just be bold.

**CoffeeMeetsBagel**

Coffee Meets Bagel seeks to avoid small talk and push users into something deeper. “When were you last excited?” the app asks. “What are you passionate about?” What did you have for breakfast? Such pre-questions may lead to a person having more interesting dates. Started in 2012, the app is now to Nepal but many users find it works for them.

**Grindr**

Grindr is dedicated to lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people, and is popular among those who so identify. It has more explicit questions for you about your preferences than the other apps. Grindr has had some damaging news coverage internationally and in Nepal.

**Must love dogs**

Not many in Nepal know yet about Dig, the dog person’s dating app. But Hollywood has shown us that people who love dogs will love each other. Dig helps you find a suitable match not just for yourself but for your pooch as well. Available on both iOS and Android, Dig has dogs and you go on a double date and discover puppy love.
The new age of Romance
Some ways to find yourself a date in cyberspace

Dating in no time

Ahna Diljavi (left) is co-founder of the greeting-card company Little Things and organizer of speed-dating events in Kathmandu. At these fast-paced events, 25 women and 20 men each have five minutes to interact with each other one-on-one. Ubiti spoke with Ahna Diljavi recently about organizing Speed Date 3.0 for this Friday.

Nepali Times: When did you begin the speed-dating program?
Ahna Diljavi: Feb 14, 2016. We wanted to host an event. Our company has a lot of love-themed products and we wanted to do something for singles.

This is going to be your third speed-dating event. How does your upcoming event compare to the previous two?
Honestly, we were planning not to do it since many other companies have jumped on the bandwagon. But since September we have been getting many queries about the 'next speed date', so we decided to continue.

We wanted also to do quick speed dating, but we didn’t want to be repetitive and do it ourselves. We have reached out to our queer friends and as soon as they agree to co-host, we’ll organize it.

Who is eligible to participate?
If you go through our registration form you’ll see that it’s very inclusive. People even to be single and 25 or older, but they also need to understand the concept of consent and be able to handle rejection. The form we designed will make clear that we’re looking for quality participants.

Do you know of any past participants becoming a couple?
There are three pairs who have found love through our events and it makes us happy.

Any tips for the participants?
Be confident but also be cool and respect your counterparts.

(Meghna, Dharmesh)

Shikha M Kafle
Sundar)
**VOLUME 10**

**EVENTS**

**Figure Skating**

The 2nd part of the Nepal Figure Skating Tournament 2020/21. Attend the first 5000-rupiah ticket sale on February 10th. All rink tickets are free on February 10th. For more information: 48404088.

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**Chocolate Workshop**

Experience the journey of getting chocolate with your hands and learn how to connect rich, fresh, and chocolate. 15 February, 5 pm, Copper, 4th Floor. See the video on YouTube.

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**Art and Music Festival**

A festival of artists and discover the real story of art in Kathmandu. 14 February, 8 pm, Gallery of Creations, Thamel.

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**Stills from Films**

Photographic show of the Rastafarian movement and its rich history in Nepal. 14 February, 7 pm, Hotel Annapurna, Durbar Marg.

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**Word Warriors**

A literacy event for children and adults. 14 February, 8 pm, Sir Jee Food Hall, Thamel.

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**Playback Theatre**

A performance by a local theatre group. 14 February, 8 pm, Food House, Thamel.

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**ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI**

**KRIPA JOSHI**

**PLANT FOR BEES AND BUTTERFLIES**

Bees and butterflies are crucial pollinators and crucial to our ecosystem. Without them, many plants would die out, and the food chains would suffer. Welcome bees and butterflies by planting a variety of pollinator-friendly plants. To learn more about plants and flowers, visit these websites: www.pollinator.org and www.learner.org. For more information, visit www.missmoti.com.

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**MUSIC**

**Panheko Batti Muni**

Live performance of a new song by Panheko Batti Muni. 14 February, 7 pm, Thamel Cafe, Thamel.

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**DINING**

**Hotel Annapurna**

The secret ingredient is always one but great food definitely tops it. Celebrate with your loved ones at Hotel Annapurna’s Valentine’s Day menu with a special menu at The Food Court, Annapurna. 14 February, 7 pm, Annapurna, Durbar Marg.

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**GETAWAY**

**The Famous Farm**

This unique boutique hotel located on the outskirts of Kathmandu offers a serene and peaceful environment and experience. Known for its delicious menu and breath-taking views,

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**Ramadan Retreat**

Kabala is an ancient site in northwestern Nepal, known for its serene atmosphere and peaceful environment.

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**End of the Universe**

In this cosmic sanctuary, located in scenic Nagarkot, set into one of the rustic cabins, take a peaceful stroll and enjoy the view of the mountains.

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**Hotel Mountain Top**

This mountain top hotel offers a panoramic view of the Himalayas and a perfect place to witness the sunrise and sunset.

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**OUR PICK**

**EMERGE LIVE**

A music festival featuring live music from local and international artists. 14 February, 7 pm, Food House, Thamel.
Two takes on the Nepal-India nexus

Shyam Saran and Sudhesh Sharma have diametrically opposing views on Nepal's political transition.

Alisha Sijapati

The Nepal-India Nexus — the English translation, with updates, of the 2013 book published by Praagshayak by editor Sudhesh Sharma — offers readers a rich account of Nepal's ten-year conflict — its inception, its movement, the fragile transition that followed, and the Maoists' subsequent rise to power. The translation was done by Sanjaya Dixit for Praagshayak, and the book was released last year. Sharma, who was and is once more the editor of Kantipur, begins with a personal account of his experience as a war reporter during the time of the state-Maoist conflict. Although he dedicates the book as an inside account of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the reader finds it more of an account of Prachanda's rise to power, and only tangentially of the party he led.

Sharma has a soft spot for Prachanda, and does not conceal his sympathies for the erstwhile revolutionaries the man led. "It is my view that the major credit for revolution should go to the Maoists," he writes. This may come across to many as giving too much credit to the CPN(M) for what was essentially a violent short-circuit to power. To be fair, the journalist in Sharma tries to be objective and balance his views with those of others, through expert interviews. (See interview, right.)

The book is essentially a page-turner, but has gripping revelations about the dynamics between the palace, Parliament, the (Royal) Nepal Army, Nepal Police and the Maoists between 1996 and 2006. The account of just how much India's intelligence agency RAW was micro-managing Nepal politics throughout the conflict is detailed, and during and after the 2001 royal palace massacre gives new insight into the cloak and dagger world of spooks.

One of the highlights of Sharma's book is his treatment of Nepal's relations with its neighbours, in particular India's role in helping the Maoists join mainstream politics — apparently as a way to weaken a nationalist monarchy — and to show India's own Maoist revolutionaries that there was a political path to power to take.

Shyam Saran, who was an Indian ambassador to Nepal (2002-2004) and went on to become foreign secretary (2004-2006), looks at the broader question of India's place in the world through his book. There are sections in How India Sees The World that deal with the same historical period as The Nepal Nexus, but from New Delhi's perspective. Saran arrived as envoy after the royal massacre and witnessed Gyanendra's four years of steady power consolidation. By 2005, the king was in open confrontation with New Delhi, and Saran writes that India's twin pillar doctrine — to support constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy — became untenable, and Delhi turned to the seven party alliance and the Maoists (nicknamed 'SPAM').

Almost every Nepali is an expert on relations with India, and social media has profuse conspiracy theories about Big Brother. Many writers and diplomats have dissected Indo-Nepal relations during the turbulent period from 1995-2017. For his part, Sharma tries to provide evidence of India's constant meddling in Nepal's internal affairs — from the 1990 Treaty to the 2015 blockade.

Sections of Saran's book that deal with Nepal present things quite differently, of course, and that is to be expected. He has an additional take on New Delhi's handling of the war.

In the chapter 'India and Nepal: A Relationship of Paradox', Saran describes the scoring of the relationship between the neighbours after the promulgation of Nepal's Constitution in 2015 and the economic blockade that followed. Saran defends India's handling of that tumultuous period, advising South Block and the PMO of all blame for allowing bilateral relations, which Prime Minister Modi had rebooted with his 2014 visit to Kathmandu, to dilapidate. But the chapter may as well have been titled: How the Indian State Wrecked Relations with Nepal.

Saran describes how it was India that steered the Maoists into above-ground politics in 2006 and introduced secularism into Nepal's Constitution, and how India opposed that same constitution for the sake of the right to secession. He attributes regime change and the rise of the BJP in India — hence New Delhi is no longer a fan of Nepal's secular constitution.

Sudhesh Sharma's analysis of the Indian blockade calls a spade a spade. India was angry about not being consulted about the new Madhesi province, which did not include the districts of Bajura, Bhojpur and Saptari in the east and Kanchanpur and Kalahari in the western Terai. "After it refused to entertain India's counsel and criticism, much of the thinking thought India decided it was time to teach a lesson to its small neighbour." The blockade attempt, "with the ultimate weapon of a border blockade", writes Sharma, providing examples of covert Indian involvement in supporting the Maoists' agitation.

Shyam Saran sees it differently: "Supplies from India to Nepal were blocked by the Maoists in the border to further their sentiments among Nepalis." Saran sticks with the story that India supported the rights of Madhesi in the writing of the 2015 Constitution. He writes, rather confusingly, that India has always been generous towards Nepal and that, despite all the help, Nepal has always misunderstood their large neighbour.

Interestingly, Shyam Saran himself reviewed Sudhesh Sharma's The Nepal-India Nexus in the India's Business Standard newspaper. He wrote: "This book creates the impression that the Madhesi issue is somehow created by India and that it flows from the ethnic links of the people of Nepal. This is false, and those living across the border in UP and Bihar. However, there are some million Indian citizens of Nepal origin especially in Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Assam, and they are all from the large districts of Nepal. Mr Sharma could have at least acknowledged some of these additional and significant dimensions of the relationship between the two countries."

Saran goes on to accuse Sharma of making of the "illegal claim" that India was afraid that the communist insurgency would spill over from Nepal into India via the Ganges plains and destabilize the entire region, and that this was why it felt the Maoists must be dealt with.

Bilateral relations between Kathmandu and New Delhi were once more at a low point because of the border dispute over Kalapani, and this perception led Saran not to engage beyond the state's official line will not help in the search for a peaceful ground. Hopefully both political leaders and the general public in Nepal and India will better understand the complex chemistry of their ties, and will find a better way of engaging one another. Also, neither of these books will help do that.

How India Sees The World: Key to the 21st Century by Shyam Saran Magrath 2017 Rs 295 pages RRBC

The Nepal Nexus: An Inside Account of the Maoists, the Uprising and New Delhi by Sudhesh Sharma Penguin India 2019 Rs 327 pages Rs 120 (hardcover)

Sudhesh Sharma on Nepal Nexus

Sudhesh Sharma, who has returned once more to Kantipur as editor, speaks to Nepal Times about the English translation of his book The Nepal-India Nexus and how it has been received in Nepal and India.

Nepali Times: How has your book been received?

Sharma: I have always wanted readers of English to be able to read and have documentation that would help them in their research. I have seen that various books shops in and around Kathmandu to sign my book, but it was in Pokhara that I saw the overwhelming reaction of readers. At this week's Kantipur Conclave there was much positive response and the book has been selling well in Delhi's Book Market.

What is different in The Nepal Nexus as compared to Praagshayak?

Praagshayak was released in 2013 after the Constituent Assembly had just been dissolved. Since then there have been significant changes in Nepal's politics. Nepal Pradesh not just translated version of Praagshayak is rather updated with four additional chapters that take up to the present state of the Constitution in 2015: the Madhes movement, the Indian blockade, the rise of CP Uli and Kamala Madyal and the growing relationship with China.

How did the idea of The Nepal Nexus come about?

Soon after the release of Sayaghat, USSR had invoked me to releasing the book in English as well. It was interesting, Sanjaya Shukal did the translation with initial help from Tarshis Ball.

While many have appreciated your book, some have not. Ever if critical or superficial, India never declared the Indian border blockade. But I have documented the facts with research and information. Naturally, some people do not like what this book says. But many of the readers think the book is based on the history of Mao's movement, but in reality, it's about, three entities that have concerned Nepal — the monarchy, Maoists and New Delhi. The monarchy is gone, and the Maoist party is dissolved, and we are still trying to mend our relationship with New Delhi.

Former Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran criticised your book in a review.

He was not challenged me personally. We all have different interpretations and it is fair for different opinions. As a matter of fact, I liked his review. The book is now public property, everyone is entitled to their opinions. The more discussion, the merrier.

Where are India-Nepal relations now?

Nepal and India need to have a relationship that is built on equality and respect. India has always tried to misguide Nepal, and that was clear when they sent a special envoy to stop the Constitution in 2015. It was difficult for them to realize the really damaged relations. Nepal and India should have a vibrant relationship; there are problems and we need to find solutions to find solutions. There are more problems from India, but Nepal too has problems.

How can the two neighbours redefine their relationship?

There are many causes and reasons that should be revised. Particularly the 1950 Treaty and some other agreements that have kept Nepal as an unequal and unfair position. India needs to change its mindset and should not treat Nepal as its "little brother". Nepal also has to change its behaviour. We are not only dependent on India, and it needs to be reduced. If treaties and agreements are revised, I am sure the relationship between these two neighbours will be stronger than before.
Covid-19 outbreak

China ban on wildlife markets could stop threatened species being smuggled through Nepal

Sonia Awale

China is the world’s biggest market for the illegal trade in wildlife for food and traditional medicine, and Beijing’s blanket ban on the wildlife trade may save some endangered species from extinction.

The Chinese government said the ban on selling wild animals in markets would be in force “until the end of the national epidemic”. However, conservationists, including Chinese academics, are pushing for a permanent ban and believe the outbreak can be an opportunity to protect endangered Asian and African wildlife.

“A temporary ban does not address the larger problem. There will always be a risk of infections like coronavirus as long as there is demand for wildlife in China,” says Tulshi Lama, Swal of Nepal’s Small Mammal Conservation and Research Foundation, who did her PhD on pangolins from National Pingtung University in Taiwan.

Early studies have pointed to bats as the source of the 2019 novel coronavirus – now named Covid-19 – and scientists are trying to figure out how it jumped from animals to humans. The origin of the epidemic has been traced to a seafood market in Wuhan that also sold wild animals.

Last Friday, some Chinese researchers said that pangolins, the world’s most trafficked mammals,

SAY CHEESE: Visiting speaker of the Canadian Senate, George Furey, flanked by Canada’s Ambassador to Nepal Nadir Fredj (right) and Canada’s Honorary Consul to Nepal Buddha Basnyat in Kathmandu this week.

TEAM SPIRIT: US Ambassador Randy Berry receives a jersey from the visiting US cricket team on the final day of Cricket World Cup (group J) on Wednesday. Nepal defeated the United States in the shortest match in the history of One Day International.

UNITED WE STAND: General Manager for Nepal of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Tuner Koseci (left) and Joey Foster of British College after signing an agreement on Wednesday to facilitate travel for higher studies of its students and employees.
could be the missing link between bats and human beings. Arthritis and Asian pangolins are hunted for their meat, considered a delicacy in China. Their scales are also used in traditional medicine. All eight species of the mammals are on the endangered list.

“Bats alone are known to carry anywhere between 40-200 different viruses. Eating the meat of wild animals or having close interactions with one can transmit the virus to humans,” says Sanjin Thapa, who is pursuing a Ph.D in bats at China’s Qinghuang fluffy. Whatever the mode of transmission, the Covid-19 epidemic has once again highlighted the rise of zoonotic diseases and their critical association with the flourishing illegal wildlife trade, especially in China.

There is a fear that the Covid-19 epidemic will push many in China to resort to powdered rhino horn as a cure for the flu. Rhinos poaching in Africa and India already fuels the demand in traditional Chinese medicine.

Covid-19 has killed at least 1,300 people as of Thursday, more than 33,000 in China, despite its lowest fatality rate of 2.2% against 9.6% for SARS. The newer virus, however, is the more contagious and has spread to 28 countries with over 80,000 confirmed cases.

Kushal Gang. SARS and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) also originated from animals. The SARS virus moved from bats to civets and then to humans. Camels were the source of the MERS virus in 2012 in West Asia. The Ebola outbreak (2013-16) was also traced to bats. Experts believe that the Covid-19 strain will lead to a decline in poaching and trafficking of wildlife in Nepal, which is on the traditional route for the trafficking of endangered species from India to China and has in recent years flourished as a transit hub for pangolins, rhino horns, tiger and leopard skins and elephant tusks.

“Once the demand in China goes down, poaching and smuggling here in Nepal will also decline. Conservation efforts in Nepal will gain a lift if a permanent ban on wildlife trade is placed in China,” adds Foul. “This is also a good time to create awareness about the higher risk of zoonotic diseases on these involved in the illicit trade so that they are discouraged to continue.”

According to the District Forest Office in Kathmandu, 3,798 wild animals and their body parts from ten different wildlife species were confiscated in the last eight years. Of these, 3,408 belonged to different species of birds, 96 to red pandas, 92 to leopards and 42 to proboscis believed that 666 cases against poachers in the last 18 years. This has brought to light the fact that there is a lack of coordination between local communities and the government. The local communities have been involved in this trade for a long time.

“Unless there is a consistent assumption that illegal wildlife trafficking is a problem, we can never generalize,” says Kirs, a conservationist from Nepal, currently a researcher at the University of Cambridge. “What is the extent of the poverty that leads to wildlife poaching? How many people face the risk of death for their family, or do they not have enough money to afford a car or a bunglow?”

Three years ago, Paul Environmental 114 individuals serving time in jail across Nepal for trafficking wildlife, and it has published some of his findings in a recent paper in the journal Conservation Biology. He used interviews about their trade practices, economic conditions and motivations.

With additional reporting by Mulchand Pradhan.
Crossborder cybercrime and punishment

Nepali women blackmailed over private content on the social web seek justice

Sabina Devkota

Rama married Raju of Lalitpur, after which Raju moved to Sydney in pursuit of studies. The two always talked regularly over the internet, exchanging sentimental messages and intimate pictures. Rama was blindsided when she found out later that those pictures and conversations had been sent to her relative’s phones from fake accounts on Facebook and as links to pornographic websites.

Amrita, a 22-year-old from Dhanusa, had been a model at her local fashion agency. In her early 20s, she was blackmailed by a former colleague for pictures of herself. Although she did not file a report and only asked her colleague to delete the pictures, she was shocked to find that they were still appearing on social media.

Of the hundreds of photos and videos shared online, the one that has gained the most attention is the case of Sunita, a 24-year-old from Kathmandu. Sunita was blackmailed by her ex-boyfriend, who shared pictures of her with him on the internet, even after she broke up with him.

In all four cases the police contacted law enforcement and perpetrators, but failed to get a response. The suspects were not caught by extortion, blackmail, and illegal sharing of private images and videos on social media as well as the sale of such visual content to porn sites have become more prevalent as the number of Facebook users in Nepal approaches 9 million. The lack of media literacy in the population means most young people are unfamiliar with privacy settings, and naively share personal images. The laws allow for sexual predators to profit from their immediate environments but from all over the world.

Experts say Nepal’s cybersecurity policies and laws like the Electronic Transaction Act 2007 are not applicable in the context of cyber space at present. However, Rashiram Tiwari, joint secretary at the Ministry of Information, claims that the draft Information and Technology Bill addresses cyber-related concerns that the Electronic Transaction Act failed to.

As part of its draft, the National Cyber Security Policy 2007 does not clearly define laws or have set guidelines for investigating transnational crimes. According to the Metropolitan Crime

Trafficked Nepali woman’s testimony

I had to live with my father and stepmother, and never knew who my real mother was. I was around ten when my father died. I did not get to go to school. So I followed a relative to Kathmandu from Nawakot, and started washing dishes at a restaurant in the city. After about a year, my aunt came to see me, and told me she would educate me back in the village. Happy, I followed her.

Since I have motion sickness, my aunt gave me some medicines on the bus and I fell asleep. In the middle of a jungle, in a remote location with only a couple of small tea shops, I was woken up to eat. The next time I woke up, I found out I was in Delhi. I was 14 years old. My aunt had sold me for Rs 60,000.

Early the next morning, my aunt left me with a woman named Hema, and said she would come back in a month. When I tried to follow her, a Nepali woman called Laxmi Tamang beat me up. I was kept under lock and key, but one day when I got a severe headache they took me to a hospital where they put me on medication for two days and joined me with injections. That made me feel very hungry all the time, and I started eating a lot. For a month, they gave me whatever I wanted to eat. Later, I learnt that those medicines and injections were meant to spur my growth and make me appear more curvaceous and feminine.

Hema then sent me to Brothel Number 51 at Kashmiri Building in New Delhi with Laxmi Tamang. There, a manager called Suman told me to go with a man. When I balked, Laxmi again beat me up. Eventually, they sent three customers to be with me on the very first day.

After that I had to take up to seven men every night. Later, it sometimes went up to 25 clients a day. Sometimes I did not get to sleep all night. And if someone lingered too long, I was the one yelled at.

After about two years, everyone from Kashmiri Building was

transferred to Brothel 64 as that the girls would appear to be ‘new’ to a different set of customers. Thus, they took us one brothel to another for seven years. When I was in Brothel 64, I felt seriously ill. I had stomach ache and fever for days. But they gave me no medical attention, and did not take me to hospital. Every month when I menstruated, I bled a lot and it was very painful. But I did not get to rest. Often, I wished I was dead, or that someone would come and kill me.

Once, a truck driver from Gorakha called Arjun came to me. Then he started coming every month. When I was sick, he would secretly bring me medicines. Since I was an old employee by then, I was allowed to use a mobile. I used to talk to him secretly. He begged him to take me away from there.

Arjun asked me to go to Sikkim, but I was not so easy with CCTV cameras everywhere. Sometimes we old employees were allowed to go out. One day, when I was sick, I called Arjun and he took me away. He cooked for me and got me medical treatment as well. One day, a friend named Numa came to see me and said she was going home to Sikkim. Last year, I joined her and came to Sikkim.
Division, almost 29% of cybercrime complaints are transnational, and countries like Nepal are buffered for extortion, blackmail and breach of privacy.

"Social Media Operators and Internet Service Providers who are not based in Nepal are not legally obliged to provide the police with any information," says cyberlaw expert Baburam Aryal. "Because the authorities cannot access important details about the crime, they cannot build an ironclad case."

Police spokesperson DIG Sabish Chakraborty points out the difficulty of investigating cybercrimes that occur beyond our borders: "The challenge is that we have not been able to collaborate with Interpol due to time constraints and lack of personnel."

Through such coordination, parties involved in transnational crimes are usually brought under investigation through an international letter of request. But the success of this exercise depends on the diplomatic relationship between countries involved. It is possible to seek the extradition of criminals who operate across borders, but that requires bilateral extradition agreements.

Advocate Aryal says developed countries are international diplomatic networks to address cross-border cybercrime. In response to the transnational nature of crimes involving cyberspace, the Council of Europe agreed on the Budapest Convention in 2001. The treaty aims to combat cyber-related crimes through cooperation while recognizing the different legal and technological landscapes across countries. The treaty has been ratified by 64 countries, but Japan and Sri Lanka are the only two countries from Asia to have done so.

Advocate Sanjay Ghimire states that treaties like these will make cyber laws less complex and help the international community follow a common legal policy regarding cybercrime. He says, "It is time for Nepal to take the initiative to either make treaties like these or ratify ones that already exist to protect our citizens."

To celebrate Tanju, Arjun had told me that after I returned from Surkhet, he would marry me and we would go to Nepal. On the way back from Surkhet, he came to receive me in Nepalganj.

When the Mai of Nepal people at Nepalgunj border asked me about myself, I could not lie. The police even brought Arjun over for questioning. They kept me at Mai of Nepal, but they let him go when they learnt the truth. I do not know where he went.

When I was in India, I never thought I would come back home alive. But seven years later, I celebrated Basant at home. I have begun taking informal classes called School for Life. But my mind does not grasp what I am reading. I keep getting stomach aches, my blood pressure is high. Images of the brothel and the terrifying experiences there flash in my mind, making me cry.

I think of Arjun a lot. Maybe he would not have married me, but he had not reacted so I would still be in brothel 64 in Delhi.

With help from Mai of Nepal I have now filed a case against the uncle and aunt who sold me. The police have arrested them. But now I am scared they will be set free. I hope they do not come out of jail to torment me again.

Atleast I am free!
Selling sex tourism

Visit Nepal Year is off to a rocky start because coronavirus has gone viral, and it is unlikely that the country can meet its 2 million target for 2020. To compensate, it is the humble opinion of this scribe that Nepal Tourism Board, under new management, should sell sex.

You read it right. Nepal is losing a huge opportunity to cash in on the erotica depicted on our temples, monuments and other edifices as a value-added tourism attraction and should revive the slogan, ‘Visit Nepal. We Make Love, Not War’.

This Valentine’s Day let us pledge to honour our past Tantrick masters who, unlike present-day Nepalis, were not bashful about putting up porn on their sites. Our forebears didn’t beat around the bush when it came to depicting the birds and bees. No, they got straight to the point. It didn’t have to be explicit but something that was suggestive.

A lot of that research is now lost. But some of the early anthropological and ascriptive data can still be found in the Valley’s three Durbar Squares. A pair of powerful bituminous is all you need to unlock the secret of Nepal’s holy edifices (From Sanskrit: ‘old, virtuous, and ‘foss’-stuff).

The carvings allow us to take a sneak peek into what constituted fun and games for our prehistoric ancestors during lunch breaks while they were laying the foundations of our glorious civilization. And thanks to their meticulous documentation, we have evidence of the kind of playful bawdy pantomimes they indulged in. The carvings show us that they did not just mix business with pleasure, but they also made pleasure their business as they are caught in flagrante delicto on many of these exalted wood panels frozen in time immemorial.

After casual perusal, many visitors may get the mistaken notion that the temple caves are not amorous scenes, but depict memorable relays of prehistoric World Wrestling Federation bouts. Protagonists are seen grappling each other with rice-like body locks, tying themselves into knots, entangled in half-nelsons, and pulling each other over with gut wrenches and ankle-locks.

Our ancestors had such fertile imaginations that there are even carved statues of them exhibiting prehistoric motives towards sheep, water buffaloes and other semi-mythical fauna. They were such eager beavers they hummed anything that moved. They grappled in groups, and sometimes they even grappled with themselves.

This Valentine’s Day let us pay silent homage to these illustrious ancestors of ours who laid the groundwork of our proud heritage, and without whose seminal contribution we would not be here today to pen these words of grateful tribute.