GAME OF THORNS

Shrestha Karki

A month after the downfall of his government, KP Oli’s inability to keep his party together is still shaking Nepali politics with aftershocks.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has repeatedly transgressed his predecessor’s attempts to allow parties to split through ordinance – exactly the sin his five-party alliance accused Oli of committing.

Deuba ended the Parliament session, budget debate be damned, to get President Bidya Devi Bhandari to sign the ordinance that will now allow his ally Madhav Kumar Nepal to form a new party.

Deuba’s move, when it became clear just before the end of the Parliament session, has been condemned by senior members of his own Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

“Doesn’t matter who does it, it is wrong to pass an ordinance like this in a democracy. It was wrong then, and it is wrong now,” the NCP’s Gagan Thapa posted on Twitter.

“Anyone who stood against Oli’s moves back then has no right to support it at this time,”

Experts agree that ordinances passed to serve short-term partisan interests will have far-reaching consequences for Nepal’s political and parliamentary processes.

“The prime minister passed this ordinance allowing parties to split with just 20% support, what if in future other ordinances bring down the required votes to 10% or even 5%,” asks political analyst Parajnan Acharya.

Oli seems to have gotten wind of Deuba’s move, and on Tuesday expelled 14 party members including Madhav Nepal before that could happen. That finally sealed the fate of the UML.

Nepal moved quickly on Wednesday to register his CPN-UML Socialists at the Election Commission with 96 Central Committee members, 84 of whom have switched over with him from Oli’s UML.

Ironically, Deuba’s ordinance seems to have also directly benefited Mahanta Thakur, who would not have been able to muster 40% of membership to register his own JSP (Democratic).

UML’s second-ranking leader, Mahantha Thakur, has come under fire for his attempts to distance himself from Oli’s faction. Thakur recently resigned from the UML to form his own party, the JSP (Democratic), which is now struggling to gain traction.

Thakur’s move has also triggered a political crisis within the ruling Nepal Communist Party, with the possibility of a split in the UML.

Party leaders have been divided on how to respond to Thakur’s actions, with some calling for a united front against the JSP (Democratic) and others supporting Thakur’s decision.

The move has also raised questions about the future of the UML, which has been struggling to maintain cohesion since Oli’s downfall.

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Dying to get vaccinated

The unprecedented speed at which the COVID-19 vaccines have been discovered is truly inspiring. The problem with accessibility and distribution of these vaccines, however, is another story. The speed with which medical science has come up with effective Covid-19 vaccines has been a game-changer. If this is followed by treatment protocols, it will be an even more significant achievement.

GUEST EDITORIAL
Buddha Basnyat

The best example to showcase efficacious treatment has been the Oxford University-led Oxford-AstraZeneca (Oxford-AstraZeneca) trial, which was the first actively participating site outside the UK. In June 2020, the results of this trial showed that a combination of inexpensive and widely-available drug, deoximethasone, plus corticosteroids substantially reduced deaths in hospitalised patients requiring oxygen. The drug has saved millions of lives.

The trajectory of the pandemic has led to revelations. How the immune system acquired with respiratory and gastrointestinal infections seems to be an unassailable and robust way to seek protection from the virus. This is illustrated with the spread of the Delta variant in India, where many people, including doctors, doubt their role in reducing the overall antibody protection.

The most dramatic observations of the pandemic have been in human behaviour. The lockdowns, the isolation, the litigations people (many in high-income countries) have to work in factories are being transformed into work at home policies. If the lockdowns were necessary, they were also a shock to the system of public health facilities that had to be readied to take care of millions of people in full swing.

So, while vaccine stockpiles are nearing their expiry dates in the United States and parts of Europe, people in Africa and Asia are literally dying to be vaccinated.

An excess of human knowledge is also closely linked to public health measures. In the best of the world, countries of northern Europe, countries who were caught unaware of the virus, were brought to their knees with the spread of the Delta variant. Those who astutely followed public health measures have had to face the same.

In conclusion is in full display. Early grandioses talk of vaccine equity in high-income countries even before the discovery of the virus was seen forgotten as countries stockpiled up to four times what was needed to vaccinate their eligible populations with two doses.

Buddha Basnyat is a physician and clinical researcher at the Academy of Sciences and the head of Nepal Times.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

It’s all in the mind

The human brain is a complex machine with psychological mechanisms. The brain is a marvelous thing. And it is the most powerful organ of the body. But can a person change his brain? Can a person change his mind?

In the past, the majority of scientists were of the opinion that a person’s brain is fixed. But, in recent years, there has been a shift in opinion. The brain is not a static organ. It is constantly changing and adapting to new experiences.

In a study published in the journal Nature, researchers found that the amount of gray matter in the brain of people who had learned a new language increased. This suggests that the brain is capable of plasticity, or the ability to change in response to new experiences.

This discovery has important implications for education and learning. It suggests that the brain is capable of learning new things throughout life. This is good news for people who want to learn a new language or skill.

However, it is important to note that the brain does not change forever. It can continue to change and adapt over time. This means that people should continue to learn throughout life.

In conclusion, the brain is not a fixed organ. It is constantly changing and adapting to new experiences. This discovery has important implications for education and learning.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT’S TRENDING

Dying to get vaccinated

Many countries did not put their money where their mouths were, even though vaccine nationalism. The concept of vaccine distribution equities, such as the one proposed by motherhood and apple pie.

The virus clearly showed us that the world needs not only universal health coverage but also universal basic income, but just as much universal behavioral hygiene. Every country wants to show that enlightened self-interest, high-income countries should ensure universal vaccination because science cannot exist unless people are safe. In other words, if people remain unvacinated, the more the damages of vaccine inequalities.

Here, even 70% vaccine coverage will take time, Napal needs to continue to mask up, wash hands and avoid crowds – preferably all three. Avoiding crowds is easier said than done, but we must try or face another cucumber.

The Delta variant is one such country that needs to be monitored carefully. The Delta variant is currently spreading rapidly in the country, and it is expected to increase in the coming weeks.

Delta’s variant is the most infectious strain of the virus, and it is believed to have originated in Bhubaneswar, India. The Delta variant is highly transmissible, and it is spreading rapidly in many countries, including Nepal.

Delta variant’s wake-up call for Nepal

The Delta variant is a more transmissible and more lethal strain of the virus than previous variants. It is expected to spread rapidly in Nepal, and it is crucial that the government takes immediate action to prevent its spread.

Delta is highly transmissible and can cause severe illness within a short period. It is especially dangerous for unvaccinated people, and it is expected to cause a surge in hospitalisations and deaths in Nepal.

The government should take immediate action to prevent the spread of the Delta variant. This includes increasing vaccination rates, implementing strict social distancing measures, and encouraging people to wear masks and get tested for COVID-19.

Delta variant is not just the loss of a hospital bed for Nepal

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Photojournalism looking for solutions

On World Photography Day 19 August, a look at the past, present, future of visual journalism

Min Ratna Bajracharya

For the four decades that I have been a photojournalist, the technology has changed so much and made photography so easy to take and disseminate that everyone with a phone is now a photographer.

Just a few decades ago, the film rolls in which I took photographs with my Soviet-made camera had to be processed, the negatives turned into positives, and scanned into digital files. Even then, newspapers would amend their print deadlines on letter press.

We are in the age of great photojournalism. Online platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and others have levelled the playing field, offering anyone and everyone the opportunity to post pictures and videos online. The mainstream media is no longer the sole purveyor of photography.

There has been a tendency to strive for hits and hits like, manipulation and deep fake imagery, but the technology has also allowed public interest in photojournalism. Involvement in media schools and training institutes in Nepal have jumped, as many want to graduate to learn more about the techniques of professional digital photography. There is even a retro trend of descovering film processing in dark rooms.

With all this technological advancement, it is easy to forget about the purpose of photography. What is all for? Does photography have a higher calling to spill reform and promote social justice? Or is our job just to visually capture what is out there, and let the chips fall where they may?

In my career, I have learnt that photojournalism can be a powerful catalyst for change — usually for the better. One of my first photo trips I took during the 1990 People’s Movement, by clambering up an electricity pole for a higher perspective of student activists clashing with police, led to me being rescued by the crowd with a victory sign, because an iconic image of the pro-democracy struggle. I would like to think that it helped raise awareness in the public about democracy.

Photographs of flash floods survivors have done more to show the public the impact of climate change than thousands of thousand-word articles. Photographs have warned us about the seriousness of the pandemic, and also spread public awareness of the need to protect ourselves with vaccination and masks.

Pictures by citizen journalists from Kathmandu airport this week, posted live on social media, brought home the desperation and fear of the Afghans, and will be stored in the public memory for decades to come.

We are also reminded that photojournalists are by definition on the frontlines of events, no matter how dangerous. This is why there is such a high mortality rate among us, with the death of APP’s Danish Siddiqui in Kandahar on 16 July being just the latest tragic example. There is also increased risk now from state control even in supposedly democratic states, from police, and from having to risk getting caught and killed in a war zone while covering the pandemic.

We also have to accept that photojournalists do not have a very good image in the public. Paparazzi are seen as nosy partners. They have been called ‘vultures’, or ‘wolves’ who hunt in packs. We are accused of being invasive, aggressive, and not respecting the privacy of people who have just suffered tragedy.

As in all other forms of media, photojournalism also suffers from a “negative bias.” It comes from the very definition of news: that it has to be something out of ordinary, absurd, or sensational to be newsworthy. This makes some of us on focus on disasters, zoom in on suffering, and portray the worst human qualities, cropping everything else out.

In some ways, that is the nature of the beast. The news business is built on negative bias. But in those personal times, does it burden or help? Does it just reinforce our worst fears about a nightmarish future, underline the futility of tackling climate change or working for peace, and paralyse us collectively as communities from taking action?

Fortunately there is now a trend among media educators and editors to promote “solutions journalism.” Not to whitewash society’s problems and misery, but to present in a new light that restores hope in the future, builds solidarity, and encourages constructive action.

The World Press Photo Foundation is also helping to promote a Solutions Visual Journalism initiative so that photojournalists do not just dwell on difficult issues and dire situations, but use in-depth field reporting to photograph them taking action to solve these problems.

Many Nepali photojournalists are already doing this, and we must continue to push this kind of photography at a time when disasters, instability and societal breakdowns are becoming self-fulfilling prophecies because of an exclusive focus on how bad things are. There is a better way.

On World Photography Day we 19 August, let’s connect with our colleagues in the profession, personal fulfilment and self-satisfaction in their work.

Seasonal metering

To help increase electricity consumption and reduce power demand, the government is planning to implement power tariff for different types of consumers as well as separate rates for monsoon and the rest of the year.

NEA Chief goes to court

Folkart Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli’s reinstatement of Kulman Ghising as chief electric engineer, the minister informed Deepa Shrestha, who had filed a writ in the Supreme Court demanding the appointment be scrapped. Shrestha had been reinstated as an engineer in the Energy Development Corporation in 2008 by the then Government of Nepal, which had selected her position.

Mukthinath savings

Mukthinath Bank has brought its mobile application ‘Mukthinath Mobile’ which provides the highest interest rate. It can open an account with a minimum balance of Rs 200. Customers can also open an account as well as apply for loan and deposit remittance online.

Samsung AI

Samsung has launched three models of washing machines in Nepal with visual Artificial Intelligence that analyse consumer patterns and offer washing options accordingly. All three models have an AI-powered, frontload washing machines with flexible technology and smart washing patterns in their remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing patterns in the remanufactured envelopes, and smart washing pat...
By Krishnamani Baral in Pokhara

Hundreds of thousands of international tourists used to visit Nepal every year, driven by adventure sports options available in scenic Pokhara. Besides climbing, rafting, bungee and ziplining, the most popular was paragliding from Sarangkot.

Before Covid-19, there would be hundreds of paragliders soaring above Fewa Lake all day under the stunning backdrop of the Annapurna, Machhapuchhare, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri. Pokhara had also become the venue for international sporting events such as the Paragliding World Cup Asian Tour.

However, Pokhara’s days as an aerial sports hub is numbered with the much-delayed airport coming into operation next year. Most companies offering paragliding and ultralight flights will have to relocate.

Aerial sports and sightseeing companies were badly hit by the collapse of tourism, but had started to pick up with Nepali tourists replacing internationals.

“Even the tourism was down and out following the first lockdown, there were 1,000 Nepali tourists paragliding every day in the skies above Pokhara, in part due to heavy discounts,” says Kranthi Mhashkar of Nepal Airsports Association. “Pokhara residents and domestic tourists from Kathmandu, Ghairwa and Nepalgunj kept the business running.”

But following the second lockdown in May this year, paragliding activities have remained shut. “The pandemic also delayed the opening of the new airport, and the new opening date is July 2021,” Pokhara International Airport, which began construction in November 2017, was supposed to be completed by 10 July 2020. “Due to the pandemic the first test flight would have happened this month, followed by regular international and domestic flights. The 250km long 45km wide runway is aligned east-west, and departure would fly right above the city and Mustang, making it impossible for paragliders to be there. The delays are due to the fact that construction material from China could not be imported. Chinese technicians were also not able to travel. However, the airport terminal and ancillary buildings are ready to operate.”

There are 356 para-pilots, 342 of them Nepalis. 350 people can take a flight at a time from Sarangkot.

In addition, there are five ultra-light companies offering sightseeing flights to the Annapurna from the current Pokhara airport. They were also hit by the tourism collapse, and it is not yet certain whether they will be allowed to operate from Pokhara International Airport. If not, they may have to move to the unused airport in Budhanilkantha or even Ramechhap.

“Paragliding directly or indirectly supports even a thousand people with employment, and even at we speak there are 25 Nepalis currently undergoing training to become commercial paramotors,” says Balram Acharya, also of the Nepal Airsports Association.

Some say the new airport is also an opportunity to diversify paragliding and ultralight flights across Nepal and boost other local economies post-pandemic. Safety has also become a concern with overcrowding on Sarangkot, and there have been several fatal crashes in the past three years.

The terrain in Syangja, south of Pokhara, is deemed the most ideal for paragliding, and even holds international cross-country paragliding competitions and a thriving training school run by MB Everest committee and adventurer Sanu Bobu Sumavat.

Meanwhile, Pokhara’s new airport still has to address issues like relocating landfill sites also in a 3km radius from the airport that are a hindrance for aircraft. Pokhara Municipal’s Mahesh Baral says the work of relocating landfill will take place once the new site is identified.

“The municipality doesn’t have the budget to keep track of new landfill sites. If the government had also allocated money for adjoining works involved in national pride projects, we wouldn’t have had unnecessary delays,” he adds.

Meanwhile, the forested Rhupant Hill on the eastern approach to the runway at Pokhara’s new airport needs 45m to be shaved off to allow safe landings and takeoffs. Despite the government’s approval to do so back in March, it continues to be the last hurdle for the completion of the airport, as they can handle direct international flights, bringing tourists directly to Pokhara, bypassing Kathmandu.
Kathmandu and Kabul are far apart, but the two countries share some difficult history

During the British Raj, Kathmandu and Kabul were nominally independent, but both countries were vulnerable to the British. The British used their influence to exert control over both countries, especially in the 19th century. The British forces together with Nepali soldiers of the ‘Army of the Indus’ entered the Bolan Pass on route from Quetta to Afghanistan in 1839. The campaign ended in a bloody disaster. Engraved by Louis and Charles Haghe.

Nepal and Afghanistan are us

As the Afghans and Pakistanis move in on the fledgling democracy of Nepal, the history of the two nations comes to the forefront. The two countries share a long and often troubled history. The British were involved in both countries, and their influence is still felt today. The Afghans and Pakistanis have a long history of conflict, and their actions in Nepal are a reminder of the past.

Afghans and Afghanistan are us

We are not Americans, the young Afghan man told me angrily, and I thought, patently. It was 2004 in Kabul and we were in the middle of a fierce debate on the independence of media and women’s rights, the two issues which have come to the fore in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover of Kabul.

The young man, R., was insistent that all this talk of rights was an American imposed program, alien to the culture of Afghanistan. “Now an American,” I answered, emphasizing that my footprint was firmly in the region.

My shift to a regional paradigm changed the tone of the conversation that day, and we were able to have a discussion based on substance rather than on stereotypes. I was able to find this again and again as I navigated through the complex space of a country emerging from years of isolation, one, which seemed, then, to be on the brink of a more hopeful future.

To me it seemed as though the complexities of the country and the opportunities, its strengths and its problems mirrored ours, different certainly in scale and acuteness but

Aunohita Majumdar

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The Taliban's second coming

Jalaluddin to Ghani

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Afghanistan kept going back to Afghanistan - to fight. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar had a Durand Line engaged in frequent skirmishes with Pakistan. And in 1989, while other Afghan soldiers were returning home from Berlin, France and Gallipoli, soldiers of the Soviet Army were sent to Afghanistan to help the British counter a rebellion in Waziristan. These troops for the "Third Afghan War" were led by Gen Babar Shamsheer Rana. In the midst of this, the people of Afghanistan suffered as superpowers mucured their way in. In 1979, Afghan king Zahir Shah was overthrown, and at the end of the Mujahideen era that followed against Soviet occupation, President Najibullah was dragged out of the UN compound where he had sought refuge, tortured and hung at the gates of Kabul in 1996 by the Taliban.

Unable to face the resistance of Afghan guerrillas, the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 and cast off their puppet government in the American abandoned Ashraf Ghani in 2021. During this whole time, Afghanistan policy was decimated as a result of instead of the Americans after 9/11, NATO forces, Pakistanis and Saudis, who were much more likely to be threatened.

While all that money landed up at the hands of the Afghan elite and warlords, ordinary Afghans died and suffered. Millions became refugees in Iran and Pakistan, and more refugees are streaming out as this is written - the desperation seen in Afghan men trying to attach themselves to C-130 on the runway at Kabul Airport this week.

The irony of it all is that some of the descendents of the son of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who fought in Helmand and Kabul nearly 20 years ago were back as part of the Gurkha units in the British deployment in the same place as part of NATO's ISAF mission. The blood and sweat they sacrificed seems to have been in vain, as Prime Minister Ashraf Ghani flew out of Kabul on 15 August. Ghani said he wished to prevent bloodshed, and would have doubts have also feared meeting the same fate as Najibullah. But this seems to have been part of a larger with which all were involved with the dialogue with former opposition negotiators who wanted to return to Kabul on behalf of the UN or other partners.

One of the consultants that the Taliban brought to work on the 2006 to advise leaders here about past conflict rehabilitation was Ashraf Ghani himself. The author of the book Why stations fail, Ghani wrote in one of his columns for Nepali Times then: "Surely the people of Afghanistan deserve leadership from their politicians to ensure that the Taliban embark upon a path towards a future. It is no longer a dream, it has become possible.

The Taliban has not been brutalised and ravaged by a series of proxy wars as Afghanistan has been for the past four decades. It did suffer the violent 1979 internal conflict, but the peace process took hold, and the country held two elections to a Constituent Assembly that wrote the new Constitution. Afghanistan's violence, the killing of innocents and religiously-motivated expression, has been at a whole different level.

If it was soldiers that the Taliban used to send to Afghanistan in the past two centuries, in the last two decades it has been its military development experts, gender and media consultants, and personnel advisors who went to Kabul on behalf of the UN or other partners.

And then there are the estimated 25,000 to 30,000 guards protecting the various embassies, hotels, bases and installations in Kabul - attracted to the country because it pays better.

While some Nepalis are starting to return on repatriation flights this week, there are many stranded in Afghanistan. The Taliban government must establish contact with the new regime in Afghanistan to ensure the safety of its citizens there. It is also hoped that the soft language emanating from the Taliban's victory about allowing safe passage to all who want to exit, reflects a genuine commitment.

The fact that the Taliban is in control in Kabul is a fact. Afghanistan must accept this end, while working to extirpate its citizens from Afghanistan, and help Kabul join the South Asian sphere.

Long before the Americans abandoned Afghanistan, we in the region had abandoned our claims to a shared kinship with Afghans

nevertheless familiar and treasurable. The problems facing Afghan women had developed over time to the Taliban. Some areas experienced much greater freedom, and some faced more problems. The most brutal interpretation of Shi'a was that, but it is still a brutal political system to see an Afghan from execution for perceived blasphemy.

I also grew a growing erosion of support for women's rights. An Afghan woman activist was beaten to death by a parliament because her work for safe houses for women who faced it. Women were still being incarcerated in Pul-e-Charkhi prison outside Kabul for the crime of running away from abusive husbands.

They were guilty since, as possessions of the family, they were bound to their husbands and had committed a theft against their family by running away. Women ran radio stations and became TV anchors. In some places they were also forced to leave the radio stations they had joined as their voices air was considered uncouth by their families.

The space which had opened up after the removal of the Taliban was full of possibilities. It was also full of struggle. It also felt familiar, the way it did in many parts of India where many women like me had many more rights than others did. It felt familiar the way it did in my villages in India where I had reported from homes where Hindu women observed deep punishment as many Afghan women continued to do.

In Kabul I wore the same head covering I had worn in my villages in India on reporting trips and received some lectures from Western women journalists on how I was supposed to show the way to Afghan women by discarding it. When some of the women's rights started being eroded under the growing clout of the ultra-conservative militia leaders they had put in power, Western diplomats started to talk about cultural relativism. I found myself asserting that I came from a similar culture but that the right to life, liberty and safety were neither relative nor negotiable.

The reign of the Taliban was one of oppression of religious minorities. Except that in the popular narrative it was oppression of non-Muslim minorities - the Hindus and Sikhs. What I found in Afghanistan was different. That of the first dark days of the Soviet invasion, of the end of the Afghan war, and of the first defeat of the mujahideen as an Indian journalist was with the leaders of the Sikh community in Kabul's Kart-e-Faran area.

The Sikh leaders complained about the deterioration of security after the departure of the Taliban. They said their religious rights had not been impinged upon by the Taliban whose focus was on making Muslims aware of all the religious practices.

I thought about that today when I heard the Indian government had decided to discriminate on religious grounds, and offered help only to the Hindus and Sikhs of Afghanistan. I thought about the arrests of over independent media in Afghanistan today as we report on挤压 and_frame while reporting on the muzakhan procession.

I think about the outrage of the destruction of the Buddhhas of Bamiyan. When I visited the Bamiyan valley I also saw the areas where communities of Hazaras had been massacred around the same time, with much less international concern.

I had gone to live in Afghanistan in 2003. In 2002 I had marched in the streets of Delhi and organised meetings after the state-sponsored massacres of Muslims in Gujarat. I would not have been working in Afghanistan had the Taliban still been there and I could see the young Afghans I worked with and met around the opportunities.

They would see my third card from the Taliban times, long boarded and morose, laughing at how much older they had looked than - but it also felt familiar, like the struggles of much of our region against female and infanticide, against horrific dowry deaths and, against the use of state power to brutal ends. It didn't feel like another planet the way it seemed to do in Afghan westen.

The truth is that long before the Americans abandoned Afghanistan, we in the region, had relinquished our claims to a shared kinship based on geography, history and culture, looking at the country as a mutation of our worst fears, and one can draw a line, perhaps not so straight, from there to what we see today.

But now, perhaps, it is time. It is time we in the region set aside our grudges and, to claim Afghanistan and Afghans as one of us.

Ammolaha Mejmodar is a Malayalam journalist. She lives and works in Delhi for five years.
Heritage tour
The logo of the virtual Heritage Tour series designed by Story Cycle will take viewers on a journey to a historic and culturally significant monument of the Lachung River, from Thumthab to Lekhu. Make reservations at a Google form at Story Cycle’s Facebook page.
27 August, 6pm-9pm

Art workshops
Art students are invited to participate in mobile library Nepal’s series of online workshops from artists Framers Dautola, Kripa Shrestha and Yugesh Shrestha on children’s book illustrations, photographic reading, and Tharu wall paintings respectively. Details on Facebook.
19 September

Soorya Yoga Studio
Join Senior Wellness and Yoga center’s virtual studio for yoga sessions available to everyone for self-practice at home. Teachers are available on prior appointment. Go to the Soorya Wellness Facebook page for details.
9778486795

Labin Bazaar
From fresh produce to crafts by local businesses, there’s something for everyone at the weekly market at Labin. Safety guidelines apply.
Saturdays, 10am-6pm

Photowalk
Join aspiring photographers for walks around the city and take pictures that inspire. Followulous organizers. Get details about photowalks schedules on PokharaInNepal’s website.

Dining
Vino Bistro
Tucked in the hub of French cheeses and imported wines in Nepal, Vino offers delivery for cheese platters, charcuterie, pates and some of the best cheeses, all paired with the perfect wine.
9804562302/9811852195

Podcasts
King Falls AM
A bi-monthly podcast, King Falls AM centers on a library of mountain travel, true-life AM talk radio shows and its paranormal, peculiar happenings and inhabitants. Find on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

Feast Meets West
In Feast Meets West, tired by pylons, Ju in NYC and I’m Van Kerckhove in Hong Kong trace the origin and journeys of Asian food and food trends to the west. Listen to episode 109 where the hosts interview New York-based Tulika Jhang, who owns and operates Mona Delight, a food cart in NYC.

Binge Mode
Episodes of this pop-culture podcast produced by The Finger give detailed recaps of much-hyped television shows, films, or other pieces of media. Find Binge Mode on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

Revisonist History
In Revisonist History, The New Yorker’s Malcolm Gladwell re-examines overlooked and misunderstood elements; in events, people, ideas, and even songs of the past. Find the podcast on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

Invisibilia
A study of human behavior, Invisibilia fuses narrative storytelling about the unknown elements that shape our ideas, beliefs, and assumptions with science that will make you view your life differently. Find the podcast on Stitcher.

About Town

Our Pick

The Village Cafe
Get freshly made, home-made food from the Village Cafe delivered at home. Order set meals, flour meals and salads. Call the cafe for deliveries, or order through Kathmandu Organics. (01) 554772

Bota Momo
Thinking about momo at home and enjoy them in an rainy afternoon? Save time and get frozen momo from Bota. Beef momo and Guchha momo are also available to order.
(01) 5001140

Kathmandu

Getaway

Club Himalaya
Escape to the cozy mountain resort with breathtaking views away from the bustling of the city for the weekend.
Angkor, MU123117, MU123158

Godavari Village Resort
Snead over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views, and traditionally styled cottages and buildings overlooking the river.
Godavari (01) 5569675

Patalabhan Vineyard Resort
Patalabhan Vineyard Resort is an eco-resort with great views, single walls, and panes to rejuvenate from the stress of a tedious routine.
Obigain, (01) 5445994

Alpint
Located near the heart of Thamel, Alpint, a global chain at heart, offers some of the best modern Services and architecture in Kathmandu. From beauty salons and spas to restaurants and shops, ALPINT is a place for visitors to indulge.
(01) 5022600

Grand Nitroing
Take a trip to the outskirts of Kathmandu to the serene nature of Gokarna, and enjoy sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer, flocks, and the garden. Get details about the resort’s momo package on Facebook Gokarna (01) 4701796

Aloft

KATHMANDU

The air Quality Index (AQI) measured at the US Embassy, Pashupati Estable in available day by day on www.nepalair.com. In this, we use a 50 percent pattern of better AQI, which was quite favorable in the day of Nepal. The AQI for Kathmandu will continue until the end of the monsoon season. After which AQI will deteriorate again.
This is to be monitored by the Car owner and the Car user. This will help to take precautionary measures.

#SERIOUSABOUTBEER

THE VERY BEST OF GERMAN BEER Engines.
Big message for small businesses

Multimedia messaging can be a stepping stone for stores going digital during the pandemic.

The same goes for stationary items like notebooks, pens, stationery, etc. These businesses often need to get going by collecting contact numbers of regular customers and asking Facebook page visitors to message them with the title or category of the book they are searching for. This is only the stepping stone towards an e-commerce website, which some Nepal's online booksellers (like booksmart.org.com and libary.np) already have. Nepal could someday have its own staples.com, an online store of a global retail chain that houses stationary and office supplies.

Paper Products: Thanks to e-commerce, plastic packaging is contributing to mounting piles of garbage. Nepali paper, recycled paper or lokta is part of our cultural esthetic, and an industry that needs revival – especially due to the sharp dip in tourists buying creative paper goods made in Nepal. If paper goods manufacturers use multimedia messaging to take orders, the market may see an upward trend in affordable paper lampshades, pretty gift packaging and photo frames.

Festive Decor: With Ekaiya, Bandhan, Krishna Ashram and Taj around the corner, the as well as major festivals like Diwali and Tihar coming soon, festive decor, puja items and related paraphernalia will force people to visit crowded markets in Asan and Patan for affordable deals, further spreading the virus. But if small businesses choose to pre-book orders via WhatsApp and Viber, bundling both decor and puja goods for customers to shop efficiently without wasting time and risking their health, their sales are bound to rise. Asan and Patan will not be the major focus of customers, instead they will opt for online shopping as they are more convenient and time-saving.

Hair, Skin and Beauty Services: Neighbourhood barber shops, kiosk-based meltdown artists and local beauty parlours have all seen a drastic decline in customers because they need physical proximity. Home services and doorstep services may be the way forward for them. After all, smaller businesses thrive on their efficiency, not their brand experience. These businesses can benefit greatly from booking appointments using messaging apps, and carrying a kit to their customer’s home, while also changing extra for personalized at home services. With innovative platforms like UrbanTap and Hussley seeing tremendous success in the Indian market, Nepal could also get started. But for now, getting a haircut on the home doorstep, thanks to a simple Viber message to a trusted barber, is a solid beginning.

If you want to help your local small businesses take a step towards post-Covid Nepal, volunteer to help set up their phone, teach them to read a Facebook past or show them the magic of in-stream videos and voice messages, and see where it takes them.

Who knows, this could be a ‘one tiny phone tap for a Nepali shopkeeper, one giant leap for Nepal!’

Saniaa Shah and Santa Akaik, a film production studio. Her modeling career helped her develop a keen interest in tech and digital color.
Tikapur’s prostrated

Six years after the massacre of policemen, Tharu wrongly jailed for it awaits justice

On 25 August 2019, Ram Prasad Chaudhary was in a meeting with the principal of the school he taught at in Jodhpur when he was suddenly gunned down and rushed in. He was handcuffed and blindfolded without being told of the charges against him. The beating began in the police van. “From Tikapur to Dhangodi, they tortured me. I had no hope of coming out of there alive,” recalls Ram Prasad, who fainted in and out of consciousness until they reached Dhangodi. More torture and humiliation would follow in prison.

The previous day, Tharu activists demanding greater autonomy for their indigenous group in the new Constitution had confronted Akhanda Sudur Paschim supporters, and the police intervened as the clash became violent. As things escalated, eight policemen were hospitalized in Tikapur, and a two-year-old toddler was shot dead by Tharu activists.

In the following weeks, as the mainstays of the violence and those known to have whipped up the agitation slipped away, police took revenge on innocent Tharus.

Ram Prasad Chaudhary

Ram Prasad Chaudhary was finally found out in jail that he had been arrested for the killings of the policemen in Tikapur on 24 August. He had been a constituency-level leader of the then Madhesi Janadikust Forum (Democratic), and had participated in the protest but was not involved in the killings. Since his release from jail, the court ordered that Ram Prasad receive treatment for his injuries. Doctors found that he had suffered blunt force trauma to the head, arms, and chest from incessant beatings. Six years later, Ram Prasad is still on medication for his injuries.

The week ahead of the anniversary of the tragedy, Tharathul Central Coordination Committee has started a sit-in in Kathmandu demanding the cases filed after the massacre be withdrawn and the report of the government’s investigation be made public.

The Tikapur protest was not the only example, but the epitome of the Tharu movement, similar to movements by other ethnic communities across the country. The Tharathul Struggle Committee (TSC) had rejected the seven-province federalism model that placed Kailali and Kanchanpur in Far-Western Province, and had been agitating for a separate Tharathul Province.

Madhav Chaudhary, Kailali

Tight-knit networks were arrested from the grassroots movement, as this was the pay-off for his wife. She was held for over a year, and then released after a year and a half.

The local administration imposed a lockdown in Tikapur, but TSC members gathered thousands of Tharu in Tikapur to replace ‘Nepal Government’ in signboards with ‘Autonomous Tharathul Province’.

The police were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of protesters. By the end of the day, SSP Lanam Neupane, Inspectors Bahram Bista and Krishna Bhatta, Constable Shyam Bahadur Khadka, Police Constable Lokendra Bahadur Chaudhary, Senior Constable Lali Saud, Assistant Constable Ram Bahadur Chaudhary, Constable Janak Nogy, and the two-year-old son of one of the policemen, Tej Bahadur Saud, had been killed by protesters.

Police filed cases against 58 suspects in the Tikapur District Court, out of which two were Muslims, and the rest Tharu. Of them, only 27 suspects were arrested, and 22 are still on the run. Of the 27 arrested, 17 have since been released. All of them spoke to us of being tortured while in police custody.

Two days after the Tikapur incident, police tried to move communal harmony, but by then most TSC leaders had fled. That night, police went house-to-house arresting any TSC member they could find.

Satya Kumar Chaudhary, who ran a liquor shop in Barhan, was one of them. His wife Yamuna Devi Rastagi remembers the police bringing alcohol, getting drunk and beating both husband and wife.

The incarcerated policemen led by Inspector Bishnu Shrestha then kicked down the door to the home of Brijendra Chaudhary, who lived nearby. He told us: “Around 12 drunk policemen broke in at 1 AM and began beating me and took me to jail.”

Kisan Lal Chaudhary remembers the torture in custody. “They used sticks and even their gun but to beat us senseless,” says Kisan Lal, who still needs treatment. Vegetable vendor Rakesh Chaudhary was also arrested that night, and severely tortured. Santrum Chaudhary, a teacher from Barhan, had to be taken to hospital after the torture shattered his right femur.

Even before the 24 August 2015 killings, Rajan Kumar Karki and Sunil Kauri, of Panuchha village, were shot in police firing and had been hospitalized.

But the police picked them anyway, accusing them of being involved in the killing of policemen. Rajan Kumar’s brother-in-law Ram Kumar Kathaiya went to the hospital with clothes and money, and stayed there overnight. On 25 August, Rajan, Sunil Kauri and Ram Kumar were arrested at the hospital.

“They asked us if we had gone to the priests and killed the policemen,” Rajan Kumar recalls. “I told them that it was impossible because I had been shot by the police before the killings, and was in hospital. But they beat me up anyway.”

Seven months into custody, Rajan Kumar’s wife Sita gave birth to their son. Sita would visit Rajan Kumar in prison with their infant son. Even as he was filled with joy, the first sight of his child, whom he couldn’t hold or even touch, broke his heart. “I wish I had been with Sita when she was pregnant,” says Rajan Kumar, holding his son at his home; just last week, six years after that horror-filled day. “I suffered thinking about her going through it alone.”

The Kailali District Court ruled that Rajan Kumar would serve a life sentence for the Tikapur killings. However, in December 2019, the Dipyal High Court reduced Rajan Kumar’s sentence to five years. By that time, however, he had already spent six months more than his term. Rajan Kumar’s brother-in-law Ram Kumar was finally sentenced to three years in prison, even though he had spent longer than those who killed five years in jail by that time.

Sundoshari Chaudhary suffered multiple tragedies during his five-year incarceration. He lost his daughter to jaundice, and his son was purchased after an accident. “I didn’t have any idea what was happening to my children, school fees, and rent, and did not know how to pay it,” she said.

Others, like Lalbheram Chaudhary, spent six months more than his three-year sentence, while Jodhur Chaudhary and Brijendra Chaudhary spent four more months than their five-year terms.

Nepal’s National Ombudsman Code stipulates that no one shall be subjected to torture, and those perpetrating it face stiff fines and jail terms. The code further states, “Any person who commits such an offence shall not be allowed to claim that they have committed the offence under orders from a superior officer, nor shall they be exempt from punishment.”

But although the torture of the Tharus of Tikapur while in custody was secured in court, there was no subsequent investigation by law enforcement. And no compensation.

Ram Narsh Chaudhary lived
trauma

Righting historical wrongs

It’s high time for the government and law enforcement agencies to take responsibility for their actions and address the grievances of the Tharu community. The recent incidents in the Tika neighborhood where Tharu protesters were arrested and beaten by police have deeply shaken the community. The Tharu people, who have been living in the area for generations, are now demanding justice and compensation for their suffering.

I am a Tharu and I have lived in the Tika neighborhood all my life. The police brutality against our community has been ongoing for years. We have been ignored and neglected by the authorities, and our voices have not been heard. This is not right, and it needs to change.

We need the government to take action and ensure that our rights are respected. We are not asking for the impossible, but rather for the basic rights that every citizen should be entitled to. We want justice, we want equality, and we want our voices to be heard.

The Tharu community has been living in this area for centuries, and we have a rich cultural heritage that we are proud of. However, our identity and culture have been threatened by the actions of the police and the government. We cannot continue living in fear and oppression.

It is time for the government to take responsibility for its actions. We need to see a change in the way we are treated, and we need to see a change in the way our rights are respected. We are not asking for sympathy, we are asking for justice, and we are asking for our rights to be respected.

I urge everyone to join us in our fight for justice. We need your support, your understanding, and your solidarity. Let us stand together and demand the rights that are our due.

Signed,
[Your Name]
CPN (Asinine)

It doesn’t look like anyone is about to give Prime Minister Prakash Lama a honeymoon period. The same folks who were burying for CPI's blood are now staking their flags into the lion's jugular. And it's not even 100 days yet.

That is very unfair, give the man some time. He has been a prime minister five times before. He knows what he’s doing. He is in no hurry to expand the cabinet because the country seems to run just fine with only four ministers. The longer he can delay adding ministers, the less headaches he has, and the more money the country saves.

The Asin just did some back of the envelope calculations, and it seems Nepal's exchange has saved 12.5 billion Nepali rupees (NPR) and 47.5 lacks just in the past 6 weeks by not having to pay for a jumbo planes size cabinet. We have salvaged on honorarium for all these new honorary ministers, salaries for their brothers-in-law to serve as PA’s, on allowance for a Armed Police Force patron for every minister, SUVs, smartphones, Dassier bonuses.

Three savings will add up to so much that they will wipe out Nepal’s burgeoning budget deficit. This is Prime Minister Oli’s masterstroke to save the economy from collapse. It looks like we do not really need a budget debate in this protracted parliament, after all because we have no balance of payment deficit anymore as the opposition is back the government about. A skeleton cabinet also means there is less corruption. Imagine all the kickbacks not partaken of, the bribes uncollected, the commissions not hankered over under the table. This means the treasury has healthy cash flow so we can send ex-prime ministers for health checkups to Delhi.

But now that the Unified Marxist-Leninists are not unified anymore, Brave Lion will have more mouths to feed in the new cabinet. That can easily be resolved, what is more worrying is what we are going to call all these new communist party members — they are splitting like smokes in heat.

It used to be pretty straightforward in the old days, there was just one Communist Party of Nepal (CPN). But then there came the CPN (Mao) and CPN (Manal) — yes, they were different parties. After that, there were the CPN (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) which merged with the others to form what we now know as the CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist). The CPN (Maoists) got so sick of it all that they preferred to go underground and shoot everyone.

But now with Mekanute registering the CPN (UML-Socialist) he has opened a Pandora’s box. Does this mean that the other CPNs are not socialists? If no, what does this mean for dialectical materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat?

And since the comrades seem to be suffering from ideological precarity, we have to make space for more communist parties in the days to come.

UML (Socialist)
CPN (Marxist-Leninist-Hilutuism)
CPN (Maoist-Monarchist)
NCP (Big Fleg)
CPN (Revolutionary)
CPN (Revolution)