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Sumita Mahara is a 35-year-old Dalit woman from Dhanusa and has been at the forefront of all protest rallies organised by the Federal Alliance in Kathmandu this week.

On Tuesday Mahara (*pictured*) was injured as riot police clashed with Madhesi and Janajati protesters. But the very next day, with her right elbow bandaged, she was back at a rally at Ratna Park. When Abhas Labh belted out the parody song that has become the anthem of the protests, Mahara had tears streaming down her eyes.

“The hill dwellers have always looked down at us as outsiders,” she told us in Hindi. “We are here to tell them that we are also Nepalis.” Three people were killed by police in Dhanusa during last year’s Madhes Movement.

Despite deep resentment among participants at the rallies, the protests led by figures from plains-based parties and indigenous groups have failed to gather momentum. Attendance has been dwindling and there are rifts within the Madhesi leadership. The government is hoping the protests will fizzle out, but even so, the Federal Alliance this week said it would continue the agitation in the capital for 10 more days.

After its six-month agitation in the Tarai backed by an Indian blockade failed to exert enough pressure on the NC, UML and Maoists to rewrite the Constitution, Madhesi parties found common cause with Janajatis even though the two have mutually contradictory demands. The Madhesis want the eastern most Tarai districts of Morang, Sunsari and Jhapa in their province, while the Janajatis insist they belong to their hill province.

Urmila Devi Sah, an MP from Dhanusa, says the Federal Alliance was forged only after Janajati parties agreed to the Madhesi demand for two provinces in the plains that included the disputed districts. But Lila Nath Angdembe of the Federal Limbuwan State Council says: “Without the three eastern plains districts, our province will be much poorer.”

The protests may not be powerful enough to force a rewrite of the Constitution, but it could destabilise the UML-Maoist coalition. Prime Minister K P Oli sweet talked the Maoists into giving up their bid to topple the government earlier this month, but if he does not step down after the budget, the Maoists could side with the NC and use the Madhes crisis to try to unseat him again.

Om Astha Rai

WAGES OF SIN
EDITORIAL PAGE 2



BIKRAM RAI

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

WAGES OF SIN

The 9-point Agreement proves just how much the Maoists, especially its leader Comrade Prachanda, are still haunted by the ghosts of their victims.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Oli managed to save his coalition from an attempt by the opposition NC to woo away his Maoist partners in government. The wily Oli acted quickly to convince Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal not to abandon him, and within 24 hours staged a ‘counter-coup’ to avert an overthrow of his government.

The two signed a 9-point Agreement the content of which makes clear the extent of the paranoia among the comrades in the former rebel movement about being hauled over the coals for war crimes. It is apparent that certain verbal points of agreement were not reduced to writing, including Oli’s pledge to step down after the budget announcement and let Dahal become prime minister for the second time.

Even so, the fact that five of the nine points address issues of transitional justice show just how worried the Maoists are about having to answer for the crimes against humanity they committed during the conflict from 1996 to 2006. One of the points obligate the UML and Maoists to amend the laws on transitional justice within 15 days, so that they ‘reflect the spirit of the Comprehensive Peace Accord’ — an euphemism for immunity from prosecution. The two leaders also agreed to include provisions to grant amnesty and pardon, dismiss ‘political’ cases, and register land titles that were handed out by the Maoist government during the conflict.

The UML gave in to these Maoist demands solely to prolong its hold on power -- that much is clear. But the compromise points involving transitional justice violate the peace agreement itself, existing laws of the land as well as international human rights conventions and norms. The agreement, once more, proves just how much the Maoists -- especially its leader Comrade Prachanda -- are still haunted by the ghosts of the people they murdered. The 9-point



ROBIN SAYAMI

Agreement may have extended the life of the coalition, but it slaughtered justice.

The agreement drives home the fact yet again that as far as justice is concerned, the peace process has been an unmitigated failure because war crimes by both sides have been wholly unaddressed. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission on Enforced Disappearances are politically-driven fig-leaf bodies that have been set up for the sole purpose of exonerating the perpetrators of atrocities.

Bal Krishna Dhungel, who killed Ujjain Shrestha in Okhaldhunga in 1998 over a family dispute, walks free today even though the Supreme Court convicted him, and he served time in prison before being freed by a Maoist-led government in 2010. Agni Sapkota, accused of the murder of Arjun Lama in 2005, is now Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation,

and faced no consequences for his alleged crime. The named accused from the Panchkhal Barracks involved in the rape and murder of 14-year-old Maina Sunar in 2004 were never prosecuted. Krishna Adhikari was murdered by the Maoists in Chitwan in 2004, and the boy’s parents Nanda Prasad and Ganga Maya Adhikari went on a prolonged hunger strike until Nanda Prasad died in 2014. Ganga Maya is still in critical condition in hospital.

Politics makes strange bedfellows, we are told, and there are no permanent friends and foes. But the UML’s whole-hearted support for the Maoist insistence on amnesty and pardon for war crimes just for momentary political survival is a cruel joke — especially when so many of the victims of murder and torture during the war were their own cadres.

The Maoists and the UML have pardoned themselves, and the opposition NC hasn’t uttered a peep because it was itself in government for most of the war years commanding the state security that perpetrated excesses. Neither side won the war, the former enemies are now the state, and they have colluded to wash the blood from each other’s hands.

One can understand the Maoists trying to absolve their guilty consciences and not wanting to pay the wages of sin. But we certainly did not expect this of the so-called democratic parties like the UML who ostensibly have, among their guiding principles, democracy, rule of law and social justice. As for the NC, we can only remind it of the Hungarian proverb: “If you are among crooks and remain silent, then you too are also a crook.”

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

CHARLES MCDUGAL

Thank you for your work, Chuck ('Charles McDougal', #808). We will always be grateful to you for contributing to tiger conservation. But what saddens me is that the Nepali media was unaware when another tiger conservationist, Kirti Man Tamang, passed away last year. Tamang worked all his life to preserve forest and wildlife. Was his demise not worthy of an obituary, like to McDougal?

BB

■ Let us rename Chitwan National Park after Charles McDougal.

Hans Hoefel

KAKISTOCRACY

I always find the Foreign Hand column spot on, and last week's installation was also based on thoughtful analysis, an unbiased interpretation, and an honest desire to see a better Nepal ('Kakistocracy', Foreign Hand, #808). But I don't believe our situation will ever improve until and unless the educated and better-off Nepalis wake up to demand an accountable government. Anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista's 'Fatalism and Development', written

decades ago, is still relevant today, especially when it comes to the mentality of the so-called upper middle class, and their unwillingness to act. It is high time they rose to hold politicians' feet to the fire. No external force can bring about positive changes in Nepal, whether it is India, China or the international development community. Change has to come from within and Non-Resident Nepalis, like myself, can also contribute to the effort

An NRN

IT'S ABOUT US

Who is 'us', Puru Shah? You want to create two Nepals – one of Madhesis and another of non-Madhesis ('It's about us'. Puru Shah, #808). Better be clear who you are talking about. You agree that Penner indulged in activities that he was not supposed to and go on to defend his actions. Manjushree Thapa? She is a social aristocrat who has a comfy life in Canada and uses the condition of Nepali women to elevate her international profile.

Binod

TAX ON KICKBACKS

What Belayati Prime Minister David Cameron told Queen Elizabeth about

'fantastically corrupt countries' shows how ignorant he is about Nepal, and some other countries ('tax on kickbacks', Backside, #808). It was certainly partial, ethnocentric, bigotry and shameless act on his part to leave out Nepal from the list. He should have also included countries like Cambodia, Kenya -- and the UK. If he only read about various Russian oligarchs and how the UK elites make money out of them, which was covered by the Panama Papers he would not have left out the UK.

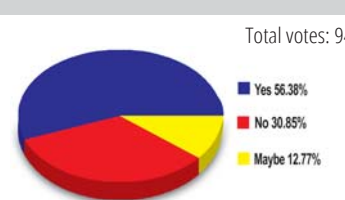
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Weekly Internet Poll #809

Q. Should UML and Maoists scrap their nine-point deal?



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Q. Is unification of Maoist parties good for Nepal?

Times THIS WEEK



YU WEI LIEW



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Tread carefully

The Nepal Government must consider sending a high-level special envoy to New Delhi

It has all too quickly become a truism to say that Nepal-India relations have never been this bad. There is an enormous load of humanitarian vulnerability and



COMMENT
Kanak Mani Dixit

economic distress that this reality represents, added what looks like a further downturn in relationship in the days ahead.

Among the players in Kathmandu and New Delhi, the Nepal Government of KP Sharma Oli is a hodgepodge of political parties with irreconcilable positions. It has been brought low by the difficulties in implementing the new Constitution, giving momentum to post-earthquake reconstruction, challenging the syndicates seeking to establish crony capitalism, and reviving the economy/development. This has led to despondency among the people.

According to the gentleman's agreement with Sushil Koirala, Oli was to have led the joint coalition government after constitutional promulgation. Left adrift after

the NC reneged, Oli has had to lead his motley cabinet with false bravado and loud promises. His singular achievement was the agreements in Beijing on connectivity. However, there is no replacement to having a stable, confident relationship with India.

The other main actor is New Delhi's external relations establishment, whose activities in Nepal are mostly the subject of rumour, conjecture and some evidence. But the hyper-activism that started when MEA-India 'noted' the Constitution's adoption in September is lost on no one.

The ideal situation would be for India's political leaders to set Nepal policy, and diplomats to implement it. But it is impossible to find out what is going on amidst the competing and complementing Indian actors on Nepal, represented by the rash of acronyms – the PMO, NSA, RSS, BJP, MEA, IB and R&AW.

We would really like to know



BHANU BHATTARAI

who is calling the shots on Nepal, and whether the intelligence tail is wagging the dog as seems to be the case. For decades after 1950, Kathmandu's democratic elders had direct and personable access to India's ruling class, but that line ended with the passing of Girija Prasad Koirala. Today, Nepali politicians scramble to be influenced by second-rung diplomats and apparatchiks.

There is really no evading the inordinate Indian activism on Nepal, by whichever

entity – the power plays in Kathmandu, involvement in plains politics, micro-interest in governmental and constitutional appointments, and activism on government formation and collapse. Shrouded as it is in deniability, one does not even know whether India's hyper-activity in Nepal is a part of implementation of articulated strategy or whether it is the whimsical product of unaccountable entities.

And so, what led to the five-month blockade, whose responsibility the plains-based parties were made to shoulder? It could have been the result of unintended consequences, of Modi's PMO tuning off, an attempt to influence the Bihar elections, irritation at Nepal not having been declared a 'Hindu state', or the need to have provincial delineation of the kind that New Delhi wanted...

Conceding that it is the progressive pusillanimity of Kathmandu's political class – including civil society – that has brought us here, it is nevertheless important for New Delhi to wake up to the fact that Nepal is headed towards layered crises. And it has contributed to the instability which is set to spiral out of control, impacting Nepal and Nepalis, but the blowback to India will not be insignificant or pleasant.

Prime Minister Oli's penchant for impromptu and unbelievable declarations mostly harm his personal credibility. But for the sake of the polity as a whole, it is vital for him to urgently improve the tone of GON's engagement with New Delhi.

Regardless of the provocations, the nature of which have not been shared with the people, the cancellation of President Bidya Devi Bhandari's trip to India and the recall of Ambassador Deep Kumar Upadhyaya both lacked diplomatic decorum.

The spat between the Nepali and Indian states should never be allowed to descend to the people's level, which would leave those on the ground vulnerable to opportunists on both sides. Indian citizens in Nepal and Nepali citizens in India will be vulnerable. To take the example of 'Nepalis' in India, there are at least three million citizens of Nepal living and working there, economically and socially exposed. Further, there is no saying that Indian citizens of Nepali origin would not be buffeted by the Nepal-India downturn.

One must demand that the Indian state revert to a bilateral diplomatic relationship as guided by the PMO and implemented by MEA. Meanwhile, issues related to the implementation of the Constitution should be left to Nepali forces within and outside Parliament, minus external mediation or instigation.

As for the Nepali state, it is urgent that the Oli government send a special envoy of unquestioned stature and credibility to New Delhi to meet key political leaders and try and stabilise the relationship. Otherwise, we will continue to have to live amidst rumours and conjectures, and the bilateral relationship will be dragged to a further depth. 🇳🇵

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ALL PICS: YU WEI LIEW



where the rafting trips start. “Managing logistics is one of our biggest challenges,” says Kamal Thakuri, a senior rafting guide who runs expeditions on the Seti-Karnali.

It would save operating costs to have an outfit in Dipayal run rafting expeditions, but there is currently a lack of expertise and equipment among the locals. At a recent meeting between rafting experts and local businessmen, the head of the Doti chapter of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry promised to position rafts here.

Thakuri, who is also with the Nepal Association of Rafting Agencies (NARA), says the Seti River is a perfect fit for first-time rafters because of its low level of difficulty. “There are enough rapids to keep people excited,” he said, “but they’re not so hard or risky that they’ll be scared.”

Rapids are classified according to their level of danger and difficulty on a scale of I to VI, with VI being the most dangerous. “There used to be some good class III rapids just above Dipayal,” said Thakuri. “But they have already disappeared because of the hydroelectric project.”

With more reservoir projects like the West Seti and Chisapani High Dam planned on the Karnali, it would make sense to raft in Nepal’s wild west before this remote part of Nepal changes forever. 🇳🇵

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Recognition and respect

Failure by Kathmandu to address Madhesi demands of self-rule will lead to a prolonged agitation

This is the third time the Madhes has been engaged in a movement in the last ten years. The first time was in 2007 just after the interim constitution was proclaimed by a reinstated parliament. Violent protests broke out in the Tarai.



MAKING IT PLAIN
Navin Jha

A year later, when the main parties announced elections, the Madhesi parties once more took to the streets. It was only after an agreement was reached that the Madhesi parties took part in elections of 2008.

Last year, after the major parties pushed through a fast

track constitution, violent protests broke out once more in August 2015 in which nearly 60 people were killed and the country had to suffer a six month blockade. The Madhesi parties boycotted the promulgation of the new constitution.

This week's protests in Kathmandu with mass sit-ins in Singha Darbar and Baluwatar by the Federal Alliance are an extension of the border blockade, and an attempt by the Madhesi leaders to change the nature of their protests and bring it to the seat of power in Kathmandu.

For Madhesi leaders, the Kathmandu-centric agitation is also a psychological war. And they believe they have already achieved what they wanted to: make the KP Oli government take them seriously. The fact

that the buses carrying Madhesi protesters to Kathmandu were stopped by security personnel at the Nagdhunga check point shows that Oli has realised the power of Madhesi parties.

Early this month, the government invited Madhesi leaders for talks. But the Federal Alliance has concluded that Oli is not serious about dialogue, and it wants to continue with Kathmandu-centric protests, at least until Oli shows genuine concerns for a breakthrough.

The Madhesi leaders are saying that since Kathmandu did not listen to them during the border blockade last year, they have brought the protests to the central administration.

All the protests in the past decade have been about the constitution, electoral systems

and representation. It is an attempt to get Kathmandu to recognise the demographics of the plains and give it fair and proportionate representation in polls. The newer issues are about citizenship and the demarcation of future Tarai provinces.

After the blockade, the mainstream parties in Nepal have all said they are serious about resolving the Madhesi demands. But it has turned out to be just lip service. This has widened the gap between hills and plains, and the lens through which the Madhesi demands are looked at.

Kathmandu still sees the Madhesi problem as one of national disunity, fragmentation, or even secession. Whereas in actual fact it is about respect, representation and self-rule. A new generation of Madhesi youth

has emerged which is clearer about its rights and identity, and if these aspirations are not recognised by the capital it cannot be contained.

Madhesi intellectuals say they have to make more of an effort to understand the real grievances of the plains, and not try to foist a solution that protects their own power base and is convenient only to them. They still see Madhesi demands as an extension of Indian influence.

The new generation of Tarai people are not ready to accept the old mindset of Kathmandu-based parties. It is already too late to address these festering grievances by amending the constitution. Unilaterally going ahead with the constitution will leave out nearly half the country's population. ■



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BE JEWELLED

Upcoming bijouterie designer Aayusha Shrestha creates treasures

Ayusha Shrestha never really wanted to be a jewellery designer, but after being bored by the similarity in designs displayed in store after store in the streets of Patan, Thamel and Basantapur, she thought there could be a niche market for designer jewellery in Nepal.

Taking inspiration from Nepali architecture, heritage and her personal life, Shrestha's jewellery designs are conceptual, intricate and innovative. And for the first time, it is not a foreigner adapting Nepali jewellery for export, but a Nepali designer making them for Nepalis.



SAMIR SHAH



AAMO BY AAYUSHA SHRESTHA/ FACEBOOK

“The local skills and designs have never been harnessed to make contemporary jewellery in the country. It is always the outsiders who discover these skills, and export it. I wanted Nepal to be represented,” said the designer who showcased her own handcrafted jewellery brand AAMO by Aayusha Shrestha last year via Instagram.

Another of Shrestha's series is called Garima, and draws inspiration from heritage buildings in Patan Durbar Square: gold-plated brass neck pieces, cuffs, rings, and hoops have been made to resemble the fading or damaged wood carvings of the historic sites.

She has also made a Dharara cuff to commemorate the fallen structure and the victims of the earthquake, a Shakti series dedicated to goddesses, a Chandra-Surya



series with the national flag emblems, the sun and crescent moon, to remind us of our roots.

Shrestha works with three local artisans at a handicraft workshop in Mahapal in Patan, and aims to introduce new designs every four to six months. Placing emphasis on value of work rather than the quantity, she is determined not to turn the workshop into a sweat shop, a trend popular in Nepal where designers are made to copy and mass produce the design they have been sent.


"I always make it a point to take the inputs of the artisans, and they seem to enjoy this kind of an interaction and relationship with their employer," said Shrestha. She limits her orders to 20-50 pieces for smaller items and five pieces for bigger items, like neck pieces.

One of the artisans, Dharma Dutaraj, agrees: "Some of the pieces take a lot of time, but we get to show our abilities."

Not all of Shrestha's designs are for sale. Believing that experimenting is the only way to growth, she gives her designers the chance to discover new techniques and skills on their own.

Given that AAMO has no flagship showroom and the designs are only put up on Instagram, the response has been exceptional given that Shrestha has spent next to nothing in marketing.

The designer gradually plans to venture into textile and bags, another area where she has seen a dearth of originality and local skills. "I want to get rid of this notion that local products are supposed to be cheaper, people don't realise the hard work that goes into making them," said Shrestha, whose designs can fetch anywhere between Rs 3,000 to Rs 60,000.

Shrestha has received offers to export her work, but she wants to only sell where her artisans get due credit. She said: "People do not understand that I am not in it for the profit." 

Smriti Basnet



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Bhutanese refugees in the United States have a new life but hold on to their roots



NEW BEGINNINGS: Dambar Magar a former refugee from Bhutan with his wife and daughters in their apartment in Oakland, California.

AYESHA SHAKYA

CALIFORNIA'S LITTLE BHUTAN

AYESHA SHAKYA
IN OAKLAND

For Dambar Magar and his family, a humble two-bedroom apartment in Oakland is a world away from the bamboo hut they called home in Sector H2 of the Beldangi Refugee Camp in Jhapa. Tucked away in a residential neighbourhood largely inhabited by Mexicans, the Magars share the apartment complex with other resettled refugees from Bhutan and some Nepali students. Originally from Daga Dzong district in south Bhutan, Magar, his mother and two sisters were among the 100,000 people forcibly sent to Nepal in 1992 during the

Druk regime's eviction of Nepali-speaking Lhotsampas. "Before coming to the United States, I was apprehensive that our new lives would be similar to the refugee way of life we had back in Nepal, but after being here for a few years, it has been all right," says the 45-year-old who is here with his wife and five daughters. "It is difficult at our age to resettle in a new country. But after my brother's son arrived in the United States in 2008, I knew I would have family here." Magar worked as a carpenter and mason, and after coming here has worked in a bakery, as a delivery guy for Papa John's Pizza, and even as an Uber driver. "The first few months were

extremely difficult and I would often feel helpless. My biggest fear was paying the rent. We heard rumours of people not being able to afford rent and saw some people become homeless and were afraid the same would happen to us," recalls Magar. The International Rescue Committee and the Bhutanese refugee community played a big role in helping Magar's family get acquainted with the new life in California. Unlike other families who received food stamps for only a few months after arriving in the US, Magar's family still receives them because of his young children. Older former refugees are happy that they are no longer stateless, but they struggle to

adjust to a new way of life. "When I first came to the U.S., I was lost in school. The students and classes were different and I didn't know English. But I am happy because there are more opportunities here for me to pursue my dreams," says 16-year-old Sushila Magar. The older siblings clearly miss Nepal, even life in refugee camps, running through forests, bathing in the river in Ilam and 'amilo chatpate'. "I miss my childhood because that is the best memory from Nepal. There was no technology and we just had fun. Even the festivals and singing bhailo was more fun in Nepal," says Sushila. Although his older daughters are still connected to Nepali

culture, Magar's younger daughters have little or no memory of Nepal and cannot speak Nepali. Following the footsteps of other Bhutanese refugees, Magar and his family are now planning to move out of California to Iowa, largely because of the high cost of living here. "Apart from the cost, another reason I want to move my family to Iowa is because there are Nepali classes there. Even if my children do not know Magar bhasa, they should not forget Nepali," he adds. 🇳🇵

[nepalitimes.com](https://www.nepalitimes.com/watch-interview-with-dambar-magar)
 Watch interview with Dambar Magar

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Healing in a new land

As a young teenager in Sanischare Camp in Morang, Robin Gurung harboured a lot of anger towards the Bhutan government that evicted his people. "When you live in a camp, you feel like it's a cage. When I used to be outside the camp, I would hide the fact that I was a refugee and it is so difficult to hide from your own identity," says Gurung (*second from right in picture with other Bhutanese social workers and American mental health expert, Patricia Ann McIlvride*).

Now in the US he is working with fellow-refugees on mental health issues often neglected in resettlement. Refugees from Bhutan have one of the highest suicide rates among emigrants in the US, with 24.4 suicides for every 100,000. "In the camps, the refugees are somebody but when they come to the US, they are nobody. Younger people adapt more easily to American culture, but older people find it harder," says Gurung who is currently working with

Community Health for Asian Americans (CHAA). Without a community to depend on, most migrants feel alienated and are already dealing with inter-generational wounds. Gurung has been in touch with the Gross National Happiness Centre in Bhutan, but the Thimphu regime is not ready to accept that they were evicted. Says Gurung: "Bhutan needs to open doors to reconciliation. For people to move on, old wounds need to be healed."

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EVENTS



Buddha Jayanti,

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21 May

Critical Mass,

Join hundreds of other cyclists to encourage a biking culture in Kathmandu.
27 May, 6 pm onwards, Jawalakhel

Hamro Jatra,

Yoga, zumba, kickboxing, live graffiti and many more activities to choose from in Global Shapers Kathmandu Hub's Hamro Jatra. For age 13 years and above
21 May, 7 am - 11 am, Patan Darbar Square, For registration: goo.gl/forms/A5IOOssZjZ

Showcasing talent,

Attend an art auction by Amir Bomjan, the 16-year old handicapped artist from Palung.
20 May, 2pm-4pm, Russian Centre of Science & Culture, Kamalpokhari



Heritage walk,

Explore the alleyways of Patan in a heritage walk organised by the Rotaract Club of Kupondole and Know Your Heritage.
11 June, 8 am onwards, Mangalbazar, 9849592287, <http://www.rckupondol.org.np>

Film screening,

Don't miss out on the screening of Troubled Water and Seoul: The Stream of Consciousness, two documentaries showcasing the relationship between water and humans.
Tickets: Rs 100
20 May, 3 pm onwards, Gallery MCUBE, 985-1170110, gallerymcube@gmail.com

Hidden treasures,

An exhibition of photographs and portraits of the Ranas from the private collection of Kamala Lama.
Till 13 June, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048/ 4433930

Futsal for women,

Join in on the fun and participate in the 5-a-side women's futsal tournament. Rs 3000 for team registration and Rs NPR for individuals.
4 June, 10am - 5pm, Grassroots Recreational Center, Last day for registration: 27 May, <http://www.theWEunitedproject.com>

BAC mela,

Local products, foodstuff and a second-hand garage sale plus entertainment for the whole family in BAC'S first monthly mela.
28 May, 1 to 7pm, BAC Art Café, Pulchok, www.bikaplaartcenter.org

Facing the camera,

A photography exhibition that traces the history of studio photography in Nepal.
Until 12 August, 10am to 5 pm, Inner Courtyard, Patan Museum, (01) 5521492



Run in Langtang,

Gear up for the Lantang-Gosainkunda Half Marathon being celebrated on the occasion of the 38th anniversary of Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal.
Registration fee: Rs 5000
29 May, For more information: www.taana.org.np

MISS MOTI-VATION

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DINING



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Thamel, (01)4250210

The Café,

Kick off your weekend with a decadent brunch at The Café, with vegetarian and non-vegetarian buffet spreads on Saturdays and a Chinese dim sum menu on Sundays.
Entry fee: Rs 2,300 plus taxes and service charge.
21-22 May, 12.30 pm - 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, (01) 4491234



Vootoo,

The new home of Newari cuisine that also has a safe continental menu for those who are not yet ready to experiment with new dishes.
Lajimpat, (01)4005222

Shambala Garden Café,

Unwind with Hotel Shangri-La and enjoy a live performance by Ciney Gurung every Friday. 7pm onwards, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat, (01) 4412999, Rs 2000 per person

MUSIC



Tribute to Dylan,

Celebrate late American singer-songwriter legend Bob Dylan's 74th birthday, and sing along as they play classics like Like a Rolling Stone and The Times They Are a-Changin.
24 May, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5528362

Kanta dAb dAb Live,

Sepnd a musical evening with the Nepali fusion trio Kanta dAb dAb before they leave for their Europe tour at the end of May.
21 May, 6pm - 9pm, RS Moto, Gahanapokhari, rsmotonepal.com



Cobweb live,

Enjoy your Friday night with the famed Nepali rock band Cobweb at Wicked Spoon.
20 May, 7 pm onwards, Wicked Spoon, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5522968, wickedspoonnepal@gmail.com

Top of the World Festival,

Join the Top of the World Festival at Jiri with music and art, held in celebration of Buddha Jayanti. Tickets available at www.rocknrollnepal.com.
20 to 21 May, 11am onwards, Jiri, Dolakha

Ankit Tiwari Live in Nepal,

Catch Bollywood sensation Ankit Tiwari, who was behind hits like Galliyan and Sunn Raha Hai Na Tu, at this event.
21 May, 4pm onwards, Jawalakhel Football Ground, Lalitpur

GETAWAY



Raniban Retreat,

Nested inside the Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range, Phewa lake, and Pokhara. World Peace Pagoda,
Pokhara, (061) 692136, 9841382053

Mango Tree Lodge,

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Gokarna, (01) 4451212, info@gokarna.net

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Sanga, Kathmandu, (011)664061, 664082



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Buddha's birthplace on his birthday

If visitors look beyond its neglect and crassness, Lumbini offers a spiritual reawakening

PICS: SEULKI LEE

SEULKI LEE
IN LUMBINI

Before visiting Lumbini, I had been warned that the birthplace of the Buddha was a neglected backwater, and the temples were extravagant structures by Asian countries trying to outdo each other. One previous article in this paper even compared it to a 'Buddhist Disneyland'.

Contrary to expectations, a visit to Lumbini this week as preparations were underway for Buddha Jayanti on Saturday, was a pleasant surprise. The place is lush with sal and simal trees and teeming with birdlife. The World Heritage Site, all 23 hectares of it, has a refreshing green and calm ambience befitting a place of such important spiritual significance.

Of course, the facilities and infrastructure are rudimentary at best. It is difficult to get to and get around once there, but that is better than an over-developed and commercialised destination dominated more by tourists than pilgrims.

Indeed, Lumbini became a place of pilgrimage as early as the 3rd century, when the Mauryan emperor Ashoka visited and erected his famous commemorative pillar at the nativity site of the Mayadevi Garden. Then Chinese monks travelled here and wrote about it in their chronicles. Today, more than 120,000 devotees visit Lumbini every year from all over the world.

The sal tree which Maya Devi is believed to have held on to while giving birth to Siddhartha and the sacred pond where she washed herself afterwards are still here. The nearby archaeological excavation is housed in a white temple and visitors can look down on the nativity site from a gallery.

The Lumbini Development Trust, after being in limbo for decades, has tried to more or less follow the master plan for its development laid out by Japanese

architect Kenzo Tange in the 1970s. The forested buffer zone now has at least 12 temples and monasteries from Asian Buddhist countries.

As a Korean deeply influenced by Buddhism both in cultural and curricular upbringing, there were two aspects of Lumbini that made an impression on me. One was the peaceful environment with thick forests which almost recreates the world of the Tarai at the time of the Buddha's birth two-and-half millennia ago.

The other was the surprising sight of a golden figure of the Little Buddha outside the museum complex in which he points to the sky with the forefinger of his right hand and down to the ground with



his left.

While most Buddhas in Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere depict him sitting in a lotus position with his eyes half-closed

in meditation, the baby Buddha figure here relates to a story in the sutras in which the infant Siddhartha took seven steps in the four cardinal directions as soon as he was born, then pointing to heaven with his right hand and to the earth with his left, proclaimed: "In the Heavens above and on the Earth below, all that exists in the Three Worlds in suffering, but I will bring comfort."

This mythical nativity tale is a dramatised version of the Buddha's 45 years of teaching in this world: that each of us is born with potential 'Buddhatva' inside. Everyone of us can attain enlightenment.

This week, milling around the golden Baby Buddha in Lumbini

were pilgrims from Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, South Korea and Japan. A visiting Chinese minister was also at the Maya Devi Temple, Ashoka's Pillar, the sal tree and he even collected water from the sacred pond in his bare feet.

As in life, in Lumbini you see what you look for. There is neglect and crass commercialism, but looking deeper, a visitor can gain true spiritual reawakening. As the Buddha himself said: "You only lose what you cling to."



Seulki Lee is a Korean journalist with the Nepali Times.



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THE LITTLE PRINCE

The *Little Prince* is a classic novella written in 1943, originally in French, by author and aviator Antoine de St Exupéry. It has been translated into over 250 languages. The original text is so whimsical, charming, mysterious, and riveting, filled with the loveliest,



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

strangest little illustrations by St Exupéry himself that it has always been a challenge to adapt, having lived so successfully in people's imaginations based on the book's own visual strengths.

Last year around this time, the animated movie *The Little Prince* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival out of competition. Made in the English language by

Mark Osborne, the film is a daring take on the original text, choosing to frame the story of the novella involving a little golden haired boy from space who inhabits asteroid B-612, within another story about a little girl named Jessica Riley (voiced by Mackenzie Foy) who is struggling with her mother's attempts to rush her through an accelerated childhood so that she might attend a prestigious academy to ensure her future success.

The film begins a bit unsurely, with the story of Jessica and her highly-strung, hyper ambitious mother Roxanne (Rachel McAdams) as they rush around trying to train Jessica to jump through the absurdly high hoops expected by the clearly nefarious Werth Academy. When Jessica falters during her terrifying admissions interview, Roxanne moves their single parent home to a

neighbourhood that ensures that the children will attend the aforementioned institution. Jessica must prepare through the summer to become worthy of Werth Academy, as her mother leaves for work each day, Jessica sits down to an absurdly rigorous work plan of her own, designed to make her a highly successful automaton.

Luckily, Jessica's homogenous neighbourhood has one surprising feature: an elderly aviator (obviously a homage to the late St Exupéry himself), voiced by the great Jeff Bridges who lives next door in a shabby house with an actual garden and an old aeroplane that he hopes will take him to see his old friend, the Little Prince, who he once met in the Sahara desert when his plane crashed.

Visually, and in terms of narrative, the film finally begins to capture the magic of the novella once Jessica starts to read the story of the aviator's encounter with his strange little friend, a happening that finally brings her in touch with the glories of a child's imagination. This is a theme celebrated throughout the source material.

The film ultimately succeeds, in this slightly bizarre Americanised version, because the creators thankfully understand the core of what makes *The Little Prince* so captivating. Ultimately, the film is a celebration of the novella, and therefore, a worthy iteration of an important artwork.

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



ANANDARAM DANGOL

SEE OFF: National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) CEO Sushil Gyawali sees off Prime Minister KP Oli after the launch of the Post-earthquake Recovery Framework at Soaltee Crown Plaza, Kathmandu last week.



BIKRAM RAI

KATHMANDU AGITATION: Madhesi and Janajati protesters clash with police as they try to encircle the PM's official residence in Baluwatar on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

SINGING FOR SURVIVORS: Nepathya's frontman Amrit Gurung performs at a concert in Jawalakhel on Saturday to raise funds for earthquake survivors.



GOPEN RAI

MISS PINK: Transgender models during a beauty pageant held in Kathmandu on Tuesday to mark the International Day against Homophobia.



BIKRAM RAI

YALAMAYA TURNS 10: Kathak dancer Subima Shrestha performs a solo dance recital during an event to mark the 10th anniversary of Yalamaya Classic at Patan Dhoka on Sunday.

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“Ncell has complied to all obligations”

An interview with Simon Perkins, Managing Director of Ncell Nepal

Himal Khabarpatrika, 15-21 May

Himal Khabarpatrika: What is the row over Ncell’s Capital Gains Tax all about?
Simon Perkins: Ncell’s ownership transfer was the biggest ever transaction in Nepal, and it was natural for the deal to draw everyone’s attention. While we were in a dialogue with the Large Tax Payers’ Office over the issue, the dissemination of one-sided news and views created confusion.

So what is the truth?
The transaction between Axiata and TeliaSonera (now known as Telia Company) involved the sale and purchase of 100% of Reynold Holdings shares, and did not involve Ncell shares. The only transaction that involved Ncell shares was the sale of the 20% of Ncell by the previous local shareholder, Niraj, to Sunivera, for which the 15% advance tax was duly collected and deposited by Ncell. CGT, if applicable, is the full responsibility of the seller, Telia Sonera.

Since Ncell was not a party to the transaction involving the sale of Reynold Holdings shares, it does not have any information relating to the proceeds and acquisition and investment cost of TeliaSonera. However, Ncell, in all of its correspondences on this matter, has stated its intention to work with the LTPO to find an amicable solution with the seller, TeliaSonera. Despite not being a party to the transaction, we have agreed to perform the calculation and deposit the amount based on our calculation.

What next after your payment of Rs 9.96 billion?
Ncell has followed the directive of the LTPO to calculate and deposit 15% of the gains based on information sourced by Ncell through public domain. We fully stand by our calculation and the source of the information on which the calculation was based, and we have fulfilled the LTPO requirement.

But 15% of Rs 136.40 is still Rs 20.46 billion. Why such a huge discrepancy?
The amount we deposited at the LTPO was calculated on the basis of information from the Norwegian Business Registrar Office. We fully stand by our calculation and source of information.

Ncell seemed hesitant to pay the tax at first, why?
Firstly, it is important to note that TeliaSonera sold 100% of its ownership in Reynold Holdings. Reynold owns 80% of Ncell, and Ncell was never a party to the transaction nor has it made or received any payment in relation to the transaction, so it does not have in its possession any information relating to the transaction neither does it have



any information relating to the acquisition or investment cost of TeliaSonera in Reynold Holdings. The extension request was mainly to work with the LTPO to try and obtain the relevant information from TeliaSonera to perform the calculation as directed by the LTPO. However, since the extension was not accorded by the LTPO, Ncell is still closely working with it and was able to perform the calculation based on information

obtained from public domain, and made the deposit payment as directed by LTPO within the stipulated timeframe.

Why didn’t Ncell declare its taxes then?
As I said, the only transaction involving the sale of Ncell shares was for the 20% ownership of Ncell, between Niraj as the seller, and Sunivera as the Buyer. Under this transaction, Ncell has duly complied with the obligation to collect and deposit the 15% gain pursuant to the tax provision of Nepal within the permissible timeframe.

Why did you meet the Chief of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority?
The meeting is unrelated to any of the events and it is just a courtesy visit to the regulatory authorities of Nepal.

We have heard that some Nepalis had demanded a stake in Ncell

when Axiata was taking over from TeliaSonera.
Again, the sale by TeliaSonera involve the sale of Reynold shares. The events you described above was related to the transaction involving the sale of 20% of Ncell between Niraj and Sunivera Capital. We have heard about the interests from other local individuals and entities for the 20% shares and it is common to have such interest given Ncell’s superior performance to date.

What do you have to say about the No Tax No Ncell campaign on social media?
This campaign is unfair as it is directed against Ncell, which has not received or made any payments in relation to the transaction involving the Reynold shares.

TeliaSonera’s logo is still used with Ncell, when are you planning to rebrand?
We will do it soon.



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WASTE NOT: Douglas MacLagan demonstrates how a biogas digester uses hotel sewage and farm waste to fuel the kitchen at The Pavilions Himalayas in Pokhara.

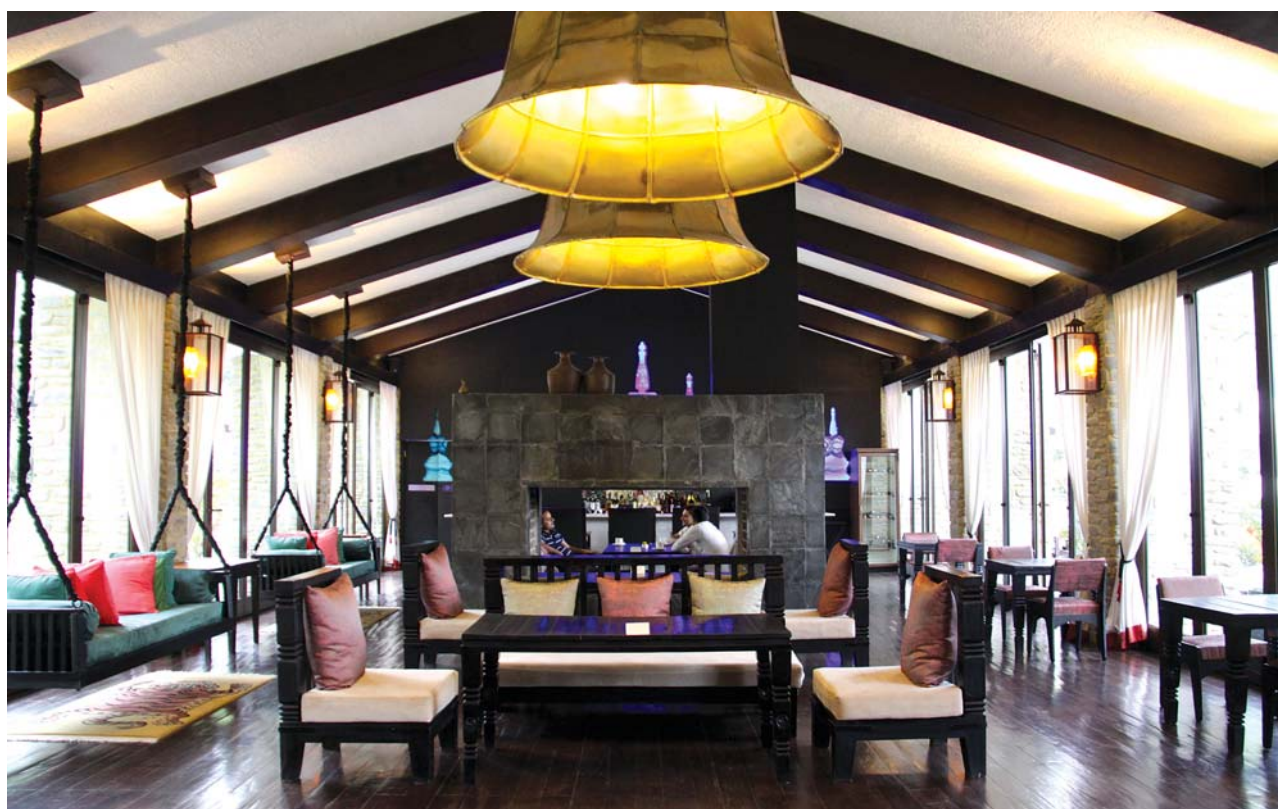
The elegantly designed club house is well insulated and doesn't need air-conditioning.

MacLagan and his wife, Insuba, plan to plough 70 per cent of the profits from the resort to fund projects for disadvantaged children.

alongside paths farmers use daily to reach their terrace fields.

The 12 villas were built mostly from local material, the stones hewn on site, the slate roof is from the valley, timber was locally produced and the Newari-Tibetan interiors were done by local craftsmen. The buildings were designed around the landscape's contours with minimal landfilling.

"I had a very clear ideology to build a boutique resort that would be ecologically and economically sustainable and pay for our social work, it was a labour of love," MacLagan explains.



The Pavilions generates all its own power from a solar array on the roof of the elegantly designed club house. A quarter of the water used is harvested rain, the soapy 'grey water' from sinks and showers are filtered

and fed into the flush tanks, and the sewage pipes empty into a large underground biogas digester where it mixes with farm manure to generate methane for the kitchen, which would otherwise have used up eight gas cylinders

a week.

The walls and windows are so well insulated that air conditioners are not required even in the heat of the Pokhara summer. Any plastic used is biodegradable, the toothpaste

Doug MacLagan has been helping thousands of abandoned children in Nepal with schooling and health, setting up projects to protect the environment and provide vocational training for Nepali youth. So, as he turns 50 after spending half his life in Nepal, the Scotsman should be sleeping more soundly than most of us. But MacLagan says he cannot afford to sleep, there is just too much left to be done.

When he first came to Nepal in 1994, MacLagan was struck as much by the fortitude of the people as the neglect of health care in Kaski villages. With his Nepali wife, Insuba, he started raising money to improve medical care, and soon found that the needs of children were even greater. He set up Child Welfare Scheme Nepal and Right4Children in Pokhara.

"But as I grew older and older, my donors were getting younger and younger, and I asked myself how long can you keep on doing this," MacLagan recalls, and hit upon idea of a self-sustaining high-end resort to support social causes.

With savings, donations and a bank loan, The Pavilions Himalayas was inaugurated in November 2015 as part of The Pavilions Global Collection that has boutique resorts in Bali and Phuket. The hotel in Chisapani near Pokhara has already won multiple awards for its designer, Alex Shrestha (*see box*).

As luck would have it, the opening coincided with a tourism slump after the earthquake and blockade last year. However, even with 20 per cent occupancy it is already breaking even. And unlike other hotels The Pavilions was unaffected by the fuel shortage because it runs completely on solar power, uses biogas for cooking, and grows most of its own food.

"Our philosophy is to be a part of the community we are in, employ people from the community, have a very small ecological footprint, and provide guests a luxurious off-the-grid experience," explains manager Rajiv Deshraj Shrestha, who adds this is the most fulfilling job he's ever had.

The resort is a radical departure from other eco-tourism hotels. The bungalows are situated among farm houses, interspersed with corn fields and vegetable patches, and



ALL PICS: KUNDA DIXIT



and combs are wooden, the shampoo and paper soap are all manufactured locally by Insuba MacLagan from herbs and aromatic plants found in the surrounding forests. She also oversees a farm with

12 cows and buffalos, goats, chicken and even boars that provide meat for the menu and manure for the biogas plant. Effluent from the digesters in turn fertilise the vegetable patches. Douglas MacLagan is endlessly

hatching new ideas: his children's charity has started a radio program broadcast on local FM stations, government schools have children's clubs, there are children's books, a Children's Development Bank is run by abandoned children.

He is also upscaling an existing project supported by Mövenpick to finish by next year a hospitality training centre nearby to provide qualified staff for Pokhara's tourism sector, including The Pavilions itself. The centre will be managed by Kathmandu-based GATE with half the 200 trainees subsidised by fee-paying students.

"It's a positive Robin Hood model," says MacLagan, "I want guests to feel that their support continues long after their holiday in Nepal. We set out to build one of the world's most eco-green hotels, and I think we have succeeded." 

Kunda Dixit in Pokhara



Green architect means business

Alex Shrestha (pictured above) grew up mostly outside Nepal, first with his flight engineer father, in school in Darjeeling and studying architecture in Manila. It was perhaps to make up for being away that he had a strong urge to give back to his country.

Now he has: next week he travels to Hong Kong to receive the the '40 Under 40 Award' for his design of The Pavilions Himalayas resort in Pokhara.


"I have always wanted to come back to Nepal and do something to make my country proud," said Shrestha, whose Patan-based firm, Wonaw & Associates, was cited by Hong Kong's architecture magazine, *Perspective*, for 'representing a new generation of architects creating a positive impact across the Asian landscape'.

the Pavilions Himalayas had earlier been placed among the top four resorts in Asia at the prestigious 2016 Asia Hotel Design Awards in Singapore and has been given membership of Green Pearls, an exclusive handpicked collection of sustainable and eco-friendly hotels worldwide.

The two had to think outside the box in terms of energy self-sufficiency. The hotel is completely solar powered, recycles its water, uses sewage and farm waste to generate gas for the kitchen. Clever insulation has made air-conditioning unnecessary so that even when there is a daily fluctuation of 13 Celsius outdoors, the room temperature stays the same.



Shrestha was 36 when he started work on the hotel in 2012, and says he was challenged by Douglas MacLagan's ambition to make one of the world's most unique hotels not just in terms of design, but also its environmental and social contribution to the community and country.

"During the construction I sometimes I felt bad for Doug because he was firmly committed to a 100 per cent eco-green project, and this raised the cost," Shrestha recalls, "but it has paid off because the resort is a win-win that puts out a strong environmental statement, makes total economic sense and serves a social cause." 



Nepal on bucket list of countries to visit before you kick the bucket

You'd be forgiven for thinking that with all the firanghis being rounded up and deported these days, Nepal is a hostile and unwelcoming place. Farangs don't seem to want to leave us alone, and they keep coming back for more even when we try to push them out. Our country seems to be inhospitable only in the sense that it is too expensive to go to hospitals here.

Nepal, in fact, is a desirable destination because you can enter with a 30-day tourist visa on arrival, hobnob with monkeys on Swayambhu, help pull the Machindranath Chariot while under the influence, participate in one of many political demonstrations, and (if you are lucky) get deported by the Department of Tourism and Marxism-Leninism to become a cyber-celebrity on Twitter, and we'll even throw in a free editorial about you in The Times of New York.

Nepal is the favouritest destination in the world through no effort of our own.

Not a week goes by without some web site or other voting us into a Bucket List of Ten Top Destinations to Visit Before You Kick the Bucket.

In the past months Nepal has made it to the Top Ten Destinations of Lonely Planet, the Rough Guide List of Most Desirable Places to Visit in 2016, and (BREAKING NEWS) this week the appropriately-named Elite Daily came out with 11 Reasons Nepal Should Be Your Next Backpacking Destination. At the rate we keep on making it to international travel listicles, it seems you avoid Nepal at your own peril.

All this is on top of the new attractions that we have added recently so that Nepal is an even more exciting place to visit before you get reincarnated:

Baggage Carousels Fixed

Under its Twelfth Five-Year Plan, Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Incontinent Airport has finally repaired its two malfunctioning carousels, but has retained

loaders who borrowed stuff from your luggage. No longer do arriving passengers have to wait two hours to check-out their checked-in bags, they get it super quick but with its contents confiscated by our ever-alert and frisky baggage handlers.

Mt Everest Height Reduced

After receiving complaints from mountaineers that Mt Everest was too difficult to climb, and to increase revenue from fees the gubberment has decided to reduce the height of Mt Everest, according to the aforementioned The Times of New York. The Ministry of High Altitudes has already dynamited two cliffs at the Hillary Step after expeditions complained that they were not getting their money's worth. In the longer-term, a motorable road is being built to the top of Mt Everest via the South Col. With these new infrastructures in place, the Touristy Ministry will be able to live up to its motto 'Climb Everest Or Your Money Back'.

Visit Nepal While It Still Exists

For many reasons, many of which I can't get into here because of space constraints, this is the time to visit Nepal.

First of all, you may as well go while the country still exists. If you wait too long, you may have to undertake time travel and go back into the past.

Also, it's a good idea to visit Nepal while it's still dark and before load-shedding is ended in two years. Visit Pokhara before the bullet train gets there from Xigatse. Come to Kathmandu before every household has piped gas. Visit before the Tarai Fast Track Highway is built without foreign investment in the next 50 years.

And you must absolutely get here before all 75 districts are declared open-defecation free.



The Ass


Shikhar Health Insurance



उपचार खर्च

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Shikhar Biz Center, Thapathali, Kathmandu. Ph: 4246101, 4246102. Fax: 4246103
 Email: health@shikharinsurance.com Website: www.shikharinsurance.com
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