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FRONTIER POST: The Kerung-Rasuwa Gadi border bridge shows the contrast in infrastructure on the Chinese and Nepali sides.



SYLVIA CHANG/CHINA DAILY ASIA WEEKLY

Future on track

Many Nepalis probably do not even know that Nepal has a Department of Railways. Set up a few years ago, it is now coming up to be an important government agency charged with surveying the alignment of the proposed East-West Railway and two cross-border railway lines linking Biratnagar and Janakpur to India.

After years of inaction, the imminent arrival of the Qinghai-Xigatse railway to Kerung on the Nepal-Tibet border by 2020, and the dispatch of the first container train with Nepal-bound cargo from Lanzhou to Kerung last month, seem to have stirred everyone into action. The Indians, in particular, appear to be keen to revive the railway projects they want to be involved with, including the East-West Railway.

The Chinese decision to make Kerung the new trans-Himalayan gateway instead of Kodari appears to be linked to Rasuwa

Gadi having a gentler gradient for track-laying. After the earthquake and Indian blockade, the Kerung-Rasuwa Gadi border is bustling. The Nepal government is expediting infrastructure on the Nepal side so it will be ready when the train arrives in four years.

The government is widening the Galchhi-Rasuwa Gadi Highway and building a multi-storey border office and dry port in Rasuwa. It is hoped that the road will ultimately pave the way for a railway corridor between India and China through Nepal. During his visit to Beijing in March, Prime Minister KP Oli urged China to help build a rail network. The China Railway Construction Corporation has approached the Nepal government to carry out a feasibility study for a train to link Rasuwa Gadi with Kathmandu, Pokhara and Lumbini, for which the Finance Minister announced a feasibility study in his budget speech last month.

Mohan Basnet of the Inter-Modal

Transport Development Board said: "The Rasuwa Gadi customs office, dry port, rail and all other projects are being built with a view that Nepal can be a trade transit point between India and China in future."

Meanwhile, the Biratnagar and Janakpur rail projects will be the first of several cross-border train links at Kakadvitta, Bhairawa and Nepalganj to the Indian railway network. Rajeswar Man Singh of the Department of Railways told us: "The project was delayed by the blockade, but we have now begun building the railway embankments."


After a prolonged debate over whether the East-West railway should be built through Chitwan National Park, the Department has finally settled on an alternative route that would circumvent the sanctuary.

BY **OM ASTHA RAI**Read full story **pages 14-15**

EX-COMRADE LALDHOJ

If Baburam Bhattarai musters the courage to admit mistakes and apologise, his New Force party would be on a much surer footing

EDITORIAL
PAGE 2





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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

NEW AVATAR

If Baburam Bhattarai musters the courage to admit mistakes, his New Force party would be on a much surer footing

For most Nepalis the high-profile launch of Baburam Bhattarai’s Naya Shakti (New Force) party resembled the unveiling of a new brand of cosmetics. Indeed, some of the full-page jacket ads in national dailies on Sunday morning were followed the next day by similar false covers promoting a new detergent.

The irony of it was that both were makeover exercises. The washing powder in question (coincidentally also named ‘Shakti’) was taking on a new name. And the New Force party was trying to airbrush away its association with Baburam Bhattarai’s violent past.

Ever since he split off from the Maoists, Bhattarai himself has been repositioning his public persona from a proponent of political violence to a benign technocrat. For someone who had told us in an interview in 2001 — while conducting a war in Nepal from a New Delhi suburb — that the Khmer Rouge genocide was ‘western media propaganda’, he has done rather well for himself. Bhattarai’s metamorphosis, as with several of his comrades, has meant deliberately (and conveniently) forgetting words and actions from the past. Good thing we have Google.

His Maoist party has now broken up into no fewer than five pieces, although Pushpa Kamal Dahal has managed to reunite some of the splinter groups under the newly renamed CPN-Maoist Centre. A loony fringe led by Comrade Biplav has been trying to burn taxi drivers alive and torching telecom towers across the land.

All this helps Baburam Bhattarai, who can now tell the people: I parted ways with them because they are all either fanatical, or have become power-hungry and corrupt. I am the one who has the country’s future all figured out, hence my slogan — ‘The Way Out: Economic Development’.

Being the political chameleon he is, Bhattarai has dropped any mention of the ‘M’ and ‘C’ words from his party’s manifesto lest we recall he was once a fervent Maoist communist leader.

To be sure, successive opinion polls over the years have shown Bhattarai to be head and shoulders above other politicians in terms of popularity. People generally tend to



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

give the Doctor the benefit of the doubt, and they even want to forgive him his misguided justifications of past violence. With his PhD he is seen to be far more intelligent than the current Prime Minister, who is only a high school graduate.

As Prime Minister from 2011 to 2013, Bhattarai engaged in public relations gimmicks — like driving around in a ‘Made in Nepal’ Mustang car, travelling in economy class once when he flew to New York, and taking the media along for his sleep-overs with peasants. Many in the capital

pooh-poohed these as publicity stunts (which they were) but they were advantageous in branding Bhattarai as a man of action. Kathmandu citizens grumbled about corruption, but they still gave him credit for the road-widening drive in Kathmandu. Other leaders just made speeches, they said, at least Baburam tried to do something.

The slick advertising that accompanied the party launch at the National Stadium on Sunday was much talked about, and speculated upon. Many wondered on social media where the money came from. But most were impressed, and seemed willing to believe that Baburam Bhattarai had changed his spots. The urban middle class, which is the New Force’s target vote bank, is fed up with the current crop of politicians, all of whom goofed up multiple times when given the chance to set things right.

We do not want to write Baburam Bhattarai off just because of his past, or because he has been less than transparent about who bankrolled his expensive party inauguration. Let’s wait and see what he will do. If it looks like he can fulfil even half of the promises he has made about economic transformation in the next 25 years, it will have been an achievement. In fact, this is not a difficult target, assuming there is integrity, efficiency and accountability in government, but that is perhaps asking too much.

Bhattarai has unveiled a do-able blueprint: unleash job creation with an all-out campaign for infrastructure development, reduce outmigration, and create economic multipliers once the hydropower, highway, irrigation and transportation projects are completed.

Still, Bhattarai is haunted by the ghosts of his past, and hobbled by the stigma of being seen as an Indian puppet, his unwillingness to recant some of his more bizarre justifications of murder and mayhem in the name of revolution, and the vainglorious reputation his wife has earned for herself.

We understand it is hard for a born-again Maoist to renounce beliefs once held dear, or admit mistakes and apologise. But if Bhattarai could muster the courage for all that, his party would be on a much surer footing.

Times

THIS WEEK

SHOONEY FILMS

Most reached on Facebook
Narrating Nepal by *Smriti Basnet*
Rendezvous with director of critically acclaimed movie *Kalo Pothi*.
(8,743 people reached)

Most shared on Facebook
Long way to the promised land by *Ayesha Shakya* (18 shares, 28 likes)

Most popular on Twitter
What about whataboutery? by *Bineeta Gurung*
(43 retweets, 47 favourites)

Most visited online page
Nepal, cursed by sons-in-law?, Matrika Poudel in *Naya Patrika* (3,134 views)

Most commented
Long way to the promised land by *Ayesha Shakya*

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

NEPAL, CURSED BY SONS-IN-LAW?
It is sad to read this xenophobic nonsense (“Nepal, cursed by sons-in-law?”, Matrika Poudel, #812). Would it not make more sense to try and use the talents of foreign sons-in-law? My son, who has a Nepali mother (my wife), is now in the UK for his studies. Will he return? Probably not, because Nepal’s outdated citizenship laws require him to forego his British citizenship if he wishes to obtain a Nepali one. Would it not be better for Nepal to retain the educated youth, and use their knowledge, energy and skills for the good of the country?
Steve K

In his original Nepali article, Poudel referred to the sons-in-law in racist terms: he mentioned that they were ‘white-skinned’, and he also mentioned that there are many Rob Penners in Nepal. I am curious as to why *Nepali Times* did not translate these particular details, which give a fuller picture of Poudel’s racial and xenophobic logic.
Manjushree Thapa

NEPAL AIRLINES
It is nice to dream, better still if you are a Nepali (“Spreading wings further”, Kunda Dixit, #812). Lately, we have had so many dreams — having our own shipping company, piped cooking gas and even railways. It is nothing new for Nepal Airlines and its executives to dream about wide-body aircraft. But the existing Airbus 320s remain underutilised, due to the total disregard for human resources required for an efficient operation. I wonder how Nepal Airlines will have a pool of requisite cockpit personnel without a robust domestic fleet of its own. Its domestic fleet is far too deficient compared with its regional one, with a mix of differing brands of new and old aircraft. The experiment with the Chinese aircraft has been unspeakably disappointing.
Anupam

SAFE EVEREST
It has been said and written a thousand times that Mt Everest needs to be made safer (“Making Mt Everest safer”, Christopher Kelly, eSpecial, 5 June). But perhaps it is time to stop ignoring that most ordinary Nepalis need years to earn what high-altitude workers make in just a couple of months.
Damien Francois

AMBER GURUNG
A touching tribute to the music maestro (“Life is smiling”, Kunda Dixit, #812). As someone who grew up in eastern Nepal, it was a privilege for me to enjoy his songs on Radio Nepal. He was not only a talented musician and singer but also a self-respecting man. It is no surprise that he did not have a house of his own despite such a long and illustrious career. You will be sorely missed, Amber.
R Rai

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #813

Q. Who is responsible for the lack of dialogue between the government and the Madhesi parties?

Total votes: 437

- The ruling coalition 20.82%
- The main opposition NC 5.28%
- The Madhesi parties 29.30%
- All 44.62%

Weekly Internet Poll #814

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Will the government be able to hold local, federal and parliamentary elections by December 2017?

Times

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JACO OTTINK

Mt Everest needs a government health warning

Inexperienced climbers crowded the world's highest mountain this spring, leading to congestion and fatalities

BUDDHA BASNYAT

Climbing Mount Everest is no longer the domain of seasoned climbers. Affluent, inexperienced climbers have been seeking to 'conquer'

the world's highest mountain, and with the appeal of recent Hollywood movies it is likely that more novices will continue to attempt to scale Everest. This spring's climbing season that ended two weeks ago was the first time there were

expeditions on the mountain after the deadly avalanche and earthquake in 2014 and 2015. Over 400 climbers reached the summit, and there were six fatalities that could have been avoided. There are several lessons we must learn from this year's expeditions:

of 6,000 m to gauge individual physiology at an extreme altitude. This would be time well spent before attempting to go up the world's highest peak, and may not only help the individual climber but also boost Nepal's mountain tourism as climbers turn their attention to other peaks in the Himalaya.

who succumbed to falls or avalanches while carrying loads to higher camps did so while ascending in the Icefall area.

Many climbers want to climb Mt Everest without supplemental oxygen, either because they want to do the 'pure' thing or want to be 'cool', or a bit of both. There is data to show that climbing an 8,000 m peak without supplemental oxygen is more likely to result in death than with it. Breathing bottled oxygen is protective for the brain especially when important decisions have to be made in the oxygen-depleted atmosphere. The amount of oxygen at the top of Mt Everest is only one-third of the normal amount at sea level. In addition, mountaineers are exerting themselves, making it even more challenging to adapt to the decreased amount of oxygen. Data indicates that there may be longterm brain injuries influencing cognition post-8,000 m climbs without supplemental oxygen.

There are clearly many other lessons, and the three points above are certainly not new, but many of today's climbers may be unaware of them. The Nepal government — specifically the Ministry of Tourism — can take a simple and innovative step by providing these recommendations to those who apply for permits. It may be even better if the mountaineers signed a non-legally binding informed consent form attesting that they have read and understood the information.

Obviously, climbers are free to choose whether to follow the guidelines, but this simple gesture will show that the government of Nepal is serious about, and proactively helpful in, maintaining safety in Everest climbs.

Buddha Basnyat, MD, is President of the International Society for Mountain Medicine and Medical Director of the Himalaya Rescue Association.

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1 A strong mountaineer with good technical skills in the Alps — where the highest mountain is less than 5,000 m — may not fare well on Everest (8,848 m). Climbers must note that the acclimatisation of the human body to high altitudes is not completely dependent on just gradual ascent. The physiological make-up of the individual, which is essentially genetic, also plays an important role. Overrepresentation of HIF (Hypoxia Inducible Factor) protein, which may be crucial 'messengers' in adaptation, in people of Tibetan origin like the Sherpas may be an important reason why they are such strong, agile high-altitude climbers.

A novice alpinist attempting Mt Everest should therefore scale one of the many trekking peaks

2 Some mountaineers died this year because they did not reach the summit of Everest early enough in the day. As statistics from the British Medical Journal of climbs from 1982 to 2006 reveal, most deaths of Western climbers occurred during descent on both the North and South routes. Many climbers who reach the top very late in the day are extremely exhausted and may be suffering from high-altitude cerebral edema (HACE), a deadly form of mountain sickness. To avoid a late ascent of the mountain, astute climbers have followed a 'turnaround time' of 2 pm while climbing Mt Everest. Climbers consistently underestimate the arduous task of descent, hence the fatalities. The figure also shows that many of the Sherpas

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Service is paramount



During a visit to Kathmandu last week, Qatar Airways Vice President for South Asia Vincent Bernard Coste spoke to *Nepali Times* about the carrier’s achievements on the Nepal route and future plans.

Nepali Times: Qatar Airways has been flying to Kathmandu for two decades, how has the ride been so far?

Vincent Bernard Coste: Qatar Airways is performing exceptionally well in Nepal with three flights a day to and from Kathmandu. The airline is well-positioned to serve Nepal with flights in the morning, evening and night from Kathmandu, with one-stop connections via Doha to more than 150 destinations across the world for business or leisure.

You are the number one carrier operating in Nepal in terms of passenger volume. As the market leader, what are your priorities? Qatar Airways’ priority has always been to provide excellent standards of service to all our passengers. Testimony to this is the fact that we won Skytrax’s ‘Airline of the Year’ award this year, and also three times in total. Our advantage is that we offer a combination of value-for-money fares with award-winning service and superior, modern aircraft. We offer Nepali travellers the best possible product in the local market: renowned hospitality onboard, among the youngest fleets is the sky, award-winning cuisine, and one of the most spacious cabins in both Business and Economy classes.

What are the challenges you face on the Doha-Kathmandu route? We did face a few in Nepal during the time of the earthquake and then the shortage in aviation fuel, which impacted our operations to some extent. Qatar Airways maintains a very robust relationship with the airport authorities and the Civil Aviation officials of Nepal, and due to their support Qatar Airways was the first commercial airline to touchdown at Tribhuvan International Airport following the first earthquake. We were able to continue our relief efforts to Nepal for an extended period of time, providing dedicated freighter aircraft to transport much-needed relief aid to those in need, including medicine, food, water, generators and even volunteers.

There have been complaints about delayed baggage delivery at Kathmandu Airport, have you raised this with the local ground handlers? Qatar Airways has been working closely with the airport authorities in Kathmandu to improve the baggage delivery process at the airport. Qatar Airways is very particular about delivering its

five-star service excellence for our passengers both on board and on the ground.

What are you doing to cut transit times in Doha? Doha is a leisure destination and commercial hub in the Middle East, and the number of leisure and business passengers to Doha is continuously growing, but it is still exceeded by the number

of travellers transiting through Doha. During the 2015/16 financial year, the airline carried over 30 million passengers via Hamad International Airport, its hub there. As we have three flights operating at different times from Kathmandu, passengers have the flexibility to book flights with the least transit time.

And what future plans for the Kathmandu route? The Kathmandu route has evolved significantly in the last decade, with the air traffic growing manifold. For travellers from Nepal, there is significant traffic in various categories, especially in the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) traffic, followed by business and leisure travellers to Europe, Americas and the Middle East.

In a short span of time, Qatar Airways has grown to over 150 destinations worldwide. The airline is expanding strategically and Nepal is a vital part of our growth and expansion plans in the subcontinent.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

What’s in a name?

Detergent brand Shakti Wheel has become Rin Shakti and vows to strive for continuous innovation and product improvement. The global brand, which uses bright clean technology, has Reecha Sharma as its brand ambassador.



Triveni in Itahari

Arun International has opened a new showroom in Itahari district offering branded electronic products associated with Triveni Byapar. Products from Yasuda, Samsung,



Panasonic and Symphony are available at the showroom.

Lounge and unwind

Etihad Airways has opened its flagship first-class lounge and spa at Abu Dhabi International Airport’s Terminal 3.



The lounge features 16 zones for the guests to enjoy. More features include an à la carte restaurant, showcase bar, fitness room, cigar lounge, Six Senses Spa, Style and Shave barbers, nail bar, TV room, prayer room and children’s play room.

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Trouble in the alliance

Once more, a clash of personalities among leaders undermines the Madhes movement

Madhesi and Janajati leaders are on a relay hunger strike in Kathmandu, while the Prime Minister has sent another official letter inviting them for negotiations. And, predictably, differences have surfaced among the leadership of the Federal Alliance.



MAKING IT PLAIN
Navin Jha

The main reason for the disunity is the infamous and chronic personality clash between the leaders. But there are also ideological underpinnings about which way the agitation should now go.

The Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) boycotted the relay hunger strike started by the Federal Alliance two weeks ago at the Khula Manch in Kathmandu. The party is preparing for its first convention, and said its leaders were too busy to fast. Insiders tell me the real reason is that the TMLP and the Sadbhavana Party leaders are unhappy with the leadership role played by the leader of the Madhesi Front, Upendra Yadav.



They don't agree with the coordinator role he is playing in the Federal Alliance, which groups parties in the Madhesi and Janajati movements. Last year, the top stalwarts of the Madhesi Front had said they would lead the movement by rotation, but Yadav is accused of having unilaterally taken the decision to go it alone when the TMLP and Sadbhavana leaders were outstation.

To a certain extent this is also a clash of egos between various

leaders, and it has demoralised the rank and file of the Madhesi cadre as well as the people of the plains. Although the agitation last year and the brutal crackdown of the state had rallied the Madhesi parties together and forged unity among them, public sentiment is once more turning against them.

The mainstream parties in Kathmandu will be tempted to take advantage of this disunity with the Madhesi leadership; however, they would do well

to remember that if these senior and moderate leaders lose their support, there are younger and more radical elements waiting at the fringes. Rajendra Mahato hinted at this on Tuesday when he said the agitation could turn violent if the peaceful protests do not work.

Madhesi leaders are also disunited because they want to safeguard their own class and caste vote banks in the Tarai. They have their eyes on the next

general elections, and perhaps even provincial elections. The Madhesi people and some intellectuals have moved on, but the leaders are still trapped in their mindset for short-term power.

The fraying unity among the top leaders ironically comes at a time when a social media campaign to 'Say Sorry' has gone viral, as some privileged Madhesi apologise to the marginalised and caste groups for generations of exploitation. The campaign has received a groundswell of support in the plains, but the Madhesi leaders in Kathmandu seem oblivious. At this rate, the leaders will soon find the rug being pulled out from underneath them.

All eyes are on the TMLP leader Mahant Thakur — the most senior and respected among the Madhesi leaders — to take the initiative to bring the various interest groups together. His party is going into its first convention next week, and that could be the forum where he can announce a bold step for unity. The convention is important for Thakur's political future, not just as a leader of his own party, but also for the leadership of the Madhes and as a leader with national stature.

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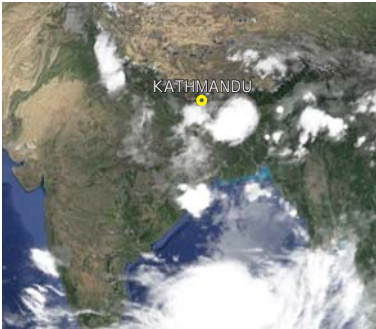
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As we mentioned last week, the true indication of the arrival of the southwest monsoon in Nepal is that the wind direction will change from westerly to south-easterly. That has not happened yet, except briefly on Thursday. We will still see thunderstorm cells passing from west to east over the weekend. But by Monday the east wind will win the tug-o-war over the westerlies, and bring us the first monsoon pulse characterised by prolonged day-long drizzles, high humidity and rain without lightning storms.

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SMRITI BASNET

When Rajesh Siddhi, Bhaskar Dhungana and Nakim Uddin (*pic, left to right*) revamped and launched the standalone movie theatre QFX Jai Nepal in Kathmandu over a decade ago,

little did they envision that they would one day go so far as to build a mall. Years of experience, knowledge of the market and the added challenge of introducing something unique to the retail scene in Nepal compelled the trio to try their hand at mall development.

"People want a complete lifestyle experience. Eating, shopping,

entertainment — all these go hand in hand. That's why our mall is designed to emulate an ecosystem," said Bhaskar Dhungana, one of the owners of Team Quest, the company that built LABIM mall after acquiring Lalitpur Bishal Bazar, a previously desolate mall in Pulchok.

Spread over 200,000 square feet in

the heart of Lalitpur city, LABIM epitomises the sophistication of a modern-day mall with its blend of contemporary and classic architecture, open spaces and a huge gleaming sun roof.

"We want to create an ambience where people, even from outside Patan, will make the effort to come. Our goal is that LABIM becomes a destination," said Rajesh Siddhi.

To cater to the needs and desires of urbane consumers, the four-storey complex boasts a wide array of well-curated and sought-after brands — North Face, Timberland, US Polo, Converse, Lego are all instantly recognisable — along with a make-up salon and electronics stores. Roadhouse, Dalle Momo and Crema Cafe are among the restaurants stationed on the second floor, while kiosks for eateries like Himalayan Java and Bajeko Sekuwa populate the open area on the ground floor. QFX cinemas, with three theatres with silver screens, 4K projectors and an average seating capacity of 180 each, draw crowds to the topmost floor.

"We hand-picked all the tenants, and took great care in terms of strategic placement in all aspects," said Nakim Uddin, who emphasised the importance of having the right tenant mix to ensure success. "All lots have been rented out."

"We have tried to encapsulate the feel of the streets of Durbar Marg with an open mall concept. People should feel they are strolling on the streets rather than inside a mall," explained Grihendra Munankarmi who oversees marketing and sales at Team Quest.

This atmosphere is enhanced through the airy contours of the structure and natural light filtering through the sun roof. Besides being a practical and cost-saving innovation, the design also takes into account how city dwellers value outdoor rather than enclosed spaces.

Despite added costs due to the earthquake and blockade, and the likelihood that it will take some years to break even, the developers are hopeful for LABIM's future. "We don't necessarily need to be conservative, sometimes new schemes do work," said Siddhi.

In fact, almost a month-and-a-half after its opening, things are already looking up. Uddin claims that customer response has been positive and the mall is garnering popularity. However, far from being complacent, the proprietors intend to introduce various events to ensure customer engagement throughout the year.

Said Dhungana: "The priority is to keep interest alive. Fresh ideas are a must, and we plan to constantly present novel attractions and happenings in LABIM mall." 🇳🇵



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THAT TIME OF THE MONTH

Many adolescent girls are getting their periods earlier than the previous generations

SAHINA SHRESTHA

TALKING PERIODS: Students from grades seven to ten look out of a window in Champidevi Higher Secondary School, Lalitpur (*top*).

Grade eight students from Shree Mahalaxmi Lower Secondary School, Nakhipot during a discussion on menstruation (*right*).

Three years ago at Dasain, Suprina's entire family had gathered for the festival when she got her period for the first time.

The 11-year-old fourth-grader had heard whispers about "that time of the month" from female family members, but had not expected it so soon and did not really know what to do. For the next 11 days she was confined to a room and was not allowed to look at male family members or perform any of the Dasain rituals. At school she was one of the first in her class to have her period, so she did not have any friends to ask about it. Her textbooks had no answers either.

Renu was in Grade 5 when she got her first period when she was 11, and was ill in bed when it started. "I thought there was something terribly wrong with me, I went to the bathroom and cried my eyes out," she recalls.

Now 23 years old, Renu says her mother comforted her and told her what was happening. "I had

heard about it before, but I didn't think it would happen so soon," she says. "If someone had told me exactly what to expect, it wouldn't have been so traumatic."

Notwithstanding taboos about talking openly about it and stigmatisation of girls reaching puberty, and the superstitions that lead to the ostracisation of young women, more and more girls in Nepal are getting their first period at an increasingly younger age. Neither families or society, nor the school system is prepared for this change.

"I have seen girls as young as nine start menstruating," says Kathmandu-based gynaecologist Kundu Yangzom. A study in western Nepal six years ago found the average age of menarche among those surveyed to be about 12.8 years, while their mothers got their first periods when they were nearly 14.8 years old. The study also found girls in private schools, and those with more siblings, are reaching puberty earlier.

Precocious puberty is a



worldwide problem, which scientists think may be caused by obesity in young girls, the spread of chemicals called endocrine disruptors found in pesticides and other chemicals in the foodchain, and even the stress induced in young daughters by broken families.

In Nepal, the decreasing age of menarche has exacerbated existing social problems. Because of cultural and social taboos associated with menstruation, girls are often caught off-guard when they have their periods for the first time. In most families, it is not a subject that is discussed openly,

and in school the topic does not come up in the curriculum until Grade 6.

"By the time the word menstruation was mentioned in our textbook, many of my friends and I had been having our periods for two years," recalls Suprina, who is now in Grade 7 at Champidevi



PICS: GOPEN RAI

Higher Secondary School. "Even the textbook wasn't of much help, it didn't have any explanation."

Bina Pandey, who teaches Environment, Population and Health (EPH) in Grades 6 to 8 at Mahalaxmi Lower Secondary School in Nakhipot, says that although information on sexual and reproductive health has been added to the course, the information on menstruation is still very skimpy.

"Menstruation is mentioned a few times in the Grade 6-7 curriculum but it isn't until Grade 8 that students get to learn more. Even then it is only about the biology of menstruation," Pandey explains.

Hema Pant, who also teaches EPH in Grades 9 and 10 at Champidevi Higher Secondary School, says: "The textbook may say use sanitary napkins when you have periods but it doesn't mention how frequently it should be changed."


Upama Adhikary Tamang at Wateraid says: "Menstruation should be included as a separate chapter in the school curriculum." The popular youth talk program on radio *Sathi Sanga Manka Kura* gets many queries from young women in the districts who want to know more about menstruation.

Binita Shrestha, who hosted the program 10 years ago, says: "In those days the questions related to

basic information during the first period, but now it is more about health, hygiene and social stigma."

At schools, students say they want more detailed and practical information on menstruation to be included in earlier grades so that girls can be better informed about upcoming changes in their bodies.

"It will be better to have information like whether to use sanitary pads, how often they should be changed, and about infections," says Laxmi, 14. "Since not everyone has access to the Internet and not every parent is open about these issues, it would be helpful for us if we can learn from the textbooks."

Another Grade 8 student, Kamala, says one problem is to convince family members to break away from superstitious rituals: "If the textbooks say that menstruation is a natural process and there is nothing to be ashamed of, maybe more girls will talk about it openly and can convince their parents to do so too. Right now the textbooks are not very practical." 

**Names have been changed*



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EVENTS



KJC Kids,
Music, games, songs and more for kids at KJC music classes taught by Spanish kids class specialist Albertina Barcelo and music teacher Bhintuna Rajbhandari.
May to August, Age: 3-5 year olds Saturdays (11.30 am to 12.30 pm), Age 6-8 year olds Tuesday (4 to 5 pm), 4-6 year olds Sunday (11 am to 12 pm), Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554, Fee: Rs 24,000 per month, Rs 700 per class

Cycle for refugees,
Mark World Refugee Day by participating in a cycle rally organised by UNHCR Nepal and Cycle City Network Nepal.
19 June, 8 am onwards, Kathmandu Darbar Square, (01) 4414724/441 4989, nepka@unhcr.org, nepjh@unhcr.org

Lyrical healing,
A poetry workshop led by Samyak Shertok encouraging participants to share experiences of the April 2015 earthquake through poetry.
25 June, 2 to 4 pm, NexUS Culture Nepal, Bakhundol, (01) 5522393, 9851026155/9849568115, nexusculturenepal@gmail.com



Yoga sessions,
Rejuvenate and unwind in a week-long Isha Yoga program with trained instructors and varied discussions, meditations and yoga practices.
28 June to 4 July, 6 to 9 am or 2 to 5 pm, Lakshmi Narayan Sewa Samiti Ashram, Tangal, 9803867394/9841586573

Art exhibition,
Mark your calendars for Umesh Shah's exhibition of artworks titled Invention in Tradition III.
Till 30 June, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048/4433930

Basketball in wheelchairs,
Cheer six male and three female teams on as they participate in a wheelchair basketball league championship organised by ENGAGE, with the support of the Swiss Embassy and Turkish Airlines.
11 June, 8 am to 2.30 pm, Army Physical and Training Center, Lagankhel, 9813053115, info.engagenepal@gmail.com or engagenepal@gmail.com



Preparing Kombucha,
Learn how to make Kombucha tea, a fermented drink made using tea, sugar, bacteria and yeast, which has its origins in China.
17 June, 10.45 am to 12.30 pm, Kar.Ma Coffee, Jhamsikhel, Fee: Rs 2,000 (including equipment and scoby which can be taken home), Rs 500 (for those who only want to watch and learn)

Israeli films,
Don't miss out on the screening of award-winning Israeli films at the tenth edition of the Israeli film festival, jointly organised by Nepal Film Society and the Embassy of Israel.
23 & 24 June, Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari, For more information: (01) 4413419, 9841413727

Female protest,
A solo art exhibition titled Female Protest by L. Bajra Lama showcasing satirical paintings and art installations.
17 & 18 June, Het Pannenkoekenhuis - The Dutch Pancake House of Nepal, Sanepa, 9843411753, saa.gun@gmail.com

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Moondance Restaurant,
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Lakeside Road, Pokhara, (061) 461835



The Café,
Relish South Indian culinary delights prepared by Chef Arun Prasad and enjoy cuisines from across Kerala, Chettinadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
20 to 30 June, 6.30 to 10.30 pm, The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs 2,000 per person plus taxes (including one Coca-Cola product)

MUSIC

Music day,
A music-filled day with performances by Spirit X, Mukut, Kings Among Men, Manda, SPACE and other bands to celebrate Fête de la Musique (International Music Day).
21 June, 4 to 8 pm, Alliance Française, Tripureswor, (01) 4242832



The Edge Band live,
Enjoy Saturday evening with popular Nepali rock band The Edge Band as they belt out some of their hits.
25 June, 7 pm to 4 am, The Victory Lounge, Darbar Marg, Kathmandu, Ticket: Rs 1,000

The Mix Tapes live,
Enjoy a musical evening with beer and the The Mix Tapes band as it performs its members' bucket-list songs.
17 June, 8 pm onwards, Sports Hive Bar & Lounge, Jhamsikhel, 9841320007

GETAWAY



Water Front Resort,
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Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 466370, www.waterfronthotelnepal.com

Himalayan Wellness Centre,
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Budhanilkantha, open all week, 9801066661, www.himalayanwellness.com.np

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	6.45 pm	
	Iceland vs Hungary	
	9.45 pm	
	19 JUNE	
	Portugal vs Austria	
	12.45 pm	
	20 JUNE	
	Switzerland vs France	
	12.45 am	
	Romania vs Albania	
	12.45 am	
	21 JUNE	
	Russia vs Wales	
	12.45 am	
	Slovakia vs England	
	12.45 am	
	Ukraine vs Poland	
	9.45 pm	
	Northern Ireland vs Germany	
	9.45 pm	
	22 JUNE	
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	12.45 am	
	Croatia vs Spain	
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KUNDA DIXIT

Götz Hagmüller feted

Noted Austrian architect Götz Hagmüller, who has been involved in heritage restoration in Kathmandu Valley for the past 40 years, was awarded the Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class by his native country.

Hagmüller was conferred the medal on Tuesday by Austrian Chargé d'Affaires Georg Zehetner at the Patan Museum, which Hagmüller himself helped design and restore with support from the Austrian government.

"It is an honour to receive this distinction, especially in this location which we designed in various stages over many years, and sometimes with considerable difficulty," Hagmüller said.

Hagmüller was trained as an architect in Vienna, was actively involved in preservation of cultural heritage all over the world, including in Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Luang Prabang in Laos. He has called Nepal home since 1979 and has been involved in the restoration of Bhaktapur, Patan Museum, and the Garden of Dreams in Kathmandu.

"I am happy to add this decoration to the other one I received, from King Birendra just before he died in 2001," Hagmüller said.

The Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class pays tribute to Austrians and foreign figures who have 'distinguished themselves and

HONOURED: Austrian restoration architect Götz Hagmüller (*left*) receiving the Cross of Honour for Science and Art from Austrian Chargé d'Affaires Georg Zehetner at the Patan Museum on Tuesday.

earned general acclaim through especially superior creative and commendable services in the areas of the sciences or the arts'.

Previous recipients include Frank Sinatra, Plácido Domingo, and Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa. 🇳🇵



Born to travel

Nothing daunts Prabhu Ghat, be it a gorilla pressing its nose against his lens in a Rwandan national park, or having his camera stolen while crossing a river in the Congo.

A long conversation Ghat had with a Chinese farmer while climbing a trail up a holy mountain in China is etched in his memory, because neither of them understood a word of what the other was saying. Yet, both laughed at each other's jokes.

People Ghat has met while travelling have always inspired him irrespective of nationality, race, colour or age. After decades of roughing it across 115 countries and at age 74, Ghat has compiled his travelogue, *By Thumb, Hoof and Wheel: Travels in the Global South*.

"I want to encourage people in our part of the world to move beyond just going to the West, or Bangkok and Dubai, and to get off the beaten track by travelling in the South, which in many ways is educational, especially before it changes unrecognisably with the forces of global homogenisation," says Ghat, who was in Kathmandu last week for a book talk.

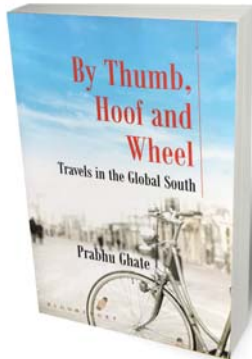
Asked by a member of the audience to mention one favourite country, he replied: "The entire world is beautiful." But he narrowed it down to Mexico, Ethiopia, China, South Africa, Yemen, Rwanda and Georgia. And he added Nepal to the list.

Ghat has his eyes, ears and nose close to the ground when he travels. He lets chance take him places, and waits for serendipitous meetings in surprising places like the 2.7 km-wide Iguazu Falls straddling Brazil and Argentina. He talks about the Tao of hitchhiking, discovering prehistoric cave paintings, the treasures of the Silk Road, and running into people on the road who have since become lifelong friends.

Ghat was destined to travel from a young age, when he first took a flying boat with his father who worked for the United Nations. He hitchhiked around Spain as a teenager, and ventured further afield as he got older and when he worked for the Asian Development Bank in Manila. His interest in microfinance took him all over the world: on a paddle-boat steamer called 'Rocket' in Bangladesh, and exploring the Sri Lankan highlands.

Says Ghat: "One doesn't need to be particularly rich to travel, or young. You just need to have the will and be young at heart."

Shreejana Shrestha



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SHOONEY FILMS

KALO POTH

Min Bahadur Bham's first feature film *Kalo Pothi* (*Black Hen*) is an example of the new wave of Nepali cinema, the kind that chooses to portray stories with truth and heart, over melodrama and action.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Bham's film is a move towards portraying aspects of Nepali life that are often neglected in mainstream narratives — the minutiae of village life and the marginalisation caused by the caste system that is rarely a focus for Nepal's urban-centric cinema.

Kalo Pothi is set in a small village in Mugu in northwestern

Nepal. At the time of the conflict, villages like these across the country were victimised by Maoists and state forces alike, the former with forced recruitment, the latter with often indiscriminate punitive action against those suspected of being in league with the insurgents.

Set against this backdrop of war, *Kalo Pothi* tells the story of an unusual friendship between two boys, Prakash (played beautifully by Khadka Raj Nepali), a Damai boy, and Kiran (Sukra Raj Rokaya), the grandson of the high-caste head of the village.

The rhythm of this story is gentle village life, and the cast of characters, prejudices and politics are all introduced, albeit slightly confusingly for a viewer who may be unfamiliar with the social dynamics of Nepal at that time.

Slowly the friendship between the two boys, their personalities, their hopes and fears, which in this case involve rearing the hen from the title of the film and selling her eggs to pay for cinema tickets, become the pulsing heart of the narrative.

This is an engaging film, full of charm, heartbreaks small and big, and hilarious scenes that are written by someone who knows how to portray the rowdy, tender friendship between little boys, and the things they laugh at and bicker over. There are many things to love about *Kalo Pothi*, mainly its ability to make you care about the adorable little hero with a big heart who decides to name his beloved hen Karishma, after a famous movie star.

While this is not a perfect film (few are), it is a good one, evidenced by the reaction of the houseful of viewers who laughed through the funny bits, and remained suitably silent during the sombre ones.

Sometimes, particularly in the beginning, the film appears amateur, stumbling as it tries to introduce its setting and characters. By the interval, though, I was utterly engrossed, eager to get back to Prakash and Kiran's quest to retrieve their hen amidst an increasingly intensifying war that would undoubtedly take a toll in their adult lives, even as they struggle through their impoverished but innocent childhoods.

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

NEW FORCE: Ex-Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai announces his new political party Naya Shakti Nepal in Kathmandu on Sunday.



BIKRAM RAI

PURSUIT OF JUSTICE: Conflict victims, including Suman Adhikari (*second from right*), the son of school teacher Muktinath Adhikari who was publicly executed by the Maoists in 2002, lodge complaints at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

RESPECT TO ELDER: Poet Madhav Ghimire arrives at Basantapur, Kathmandu to participate in a program to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

ISRAELI CINEMA: Israeli film director Dan Wolman interacts with journalists in Kathmandu on Monday, ahead of the 10th Israeli Film Festival scheduled to begin at the Russian Cultural Centre on 23 June.



GOPEN RAI

HOMAGE TO NATURE: Members of the Kham Magar community perform Bhume Naach, a ritual dance paying obeisance to nature, as part of their celebrations during the Bhume festival in Tundikhel, Kathmandu on Wednesday.

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OVER THE HUMP: Trucks navigate the treacherous road on the Nepali side of the border in Rasuwa (*left*), trucks waiting for customs clearance at Timure of Rasuwa, where China is helping Nepal build a dry port (*centre*), tents for earthquake survivors in Jilong just across the border in China (*right*).



COMING SOON

The Tibet Train

China's railway arrives in Kerung in 4 years, Nepal should get its border infrastructure in place by then

OM ASTHA RAI

China's Qinghai-Tibet railway may not boast a bullet train, but the tracks are being laid down at breakneck speed and will be at the Nepal border in Rasuwa by 2020. On the Nepal side the highway and facilities are rudimentary, and the government hopes to upgrade the highway and construct a dry port.

Work on establishing new transport connectivity between Nepal and China is the result of two disasters: the earthquake that damaged the Kodari border link, and the Indian blockade that woke up politicians in Kathmandu to the need to have an alternative trade access route.

China has already extended the world's highest railway line

from Golmud to Lhasa to Xigatse, and plans to bring it down to Kerung, which is only 25 km north of the Rasuwa Gadi border (*see map*). Last month, a freight train made the 2,500 km journey from Lanzhou in central China to Xigatse with 86 containers bound for Nepal. The containers were later transported to Kerung and on to Kathmandu by road.

At the moment, the contrast between the two sides of the border could not be more stark. While there is an imposing seven-storey block on the Chinese side of the Bhoté Kosi River, there are only blue tin huts in Nepal.

Not to be outdone, the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) has issued a tender notice to also build a seven-storey block to house the customs, immigration, quarantine

and other offices.

"We want to be ready when the Chinese rail arrives in Kerung. When the Kathmandu-Rasuwa Gadi road is expanded, the volume of trade through this border point will escalate and we will need a high-end integrated

border checkpoint, so this building is for the future," says Surya Prasad Sedai, Director of the Department of Customs.

The highway linking Galchhi on the Prithvi Highway to the Rasuwa border is also being upgraded. The Nepal Army is

already working to widen the 18 km dirt track from Mailung to Syabrubesi, the Department of Roads is upgrading the 45 km Galchhi-Mailung section, and the Chinese are getting ready to fix the last 17 km stretch from Syabrubesi to the border.

"If an Environmental Impact Assessment is conducted in time and the necessary budget is allocated, we will open this track within two years," says Major Sanjay KC who is in charge of the Nepal Army's road taskforce. "We are confident it can be completed by the time the train arrives in Kerung."

The alignment of the Mailung-Syabrubesi track was to follow the right bank of the Bhoté Kosi, but

Why is Kodari still closed?

Nepal's most important trade route with China via Kodari was damaged by last year's earthquake. After the Indian blockade, Nepal repeatedly requested China at the highest level to reopen this route, but despite its assurances Beijing has not made moves to do so.

"The Kodari Highway is no longer obstructed by earthquake-triggered landslides, and our office at Tatopani is in operation, but the Chinese are not allowing the cargo trucks to cross over into Nepal," said Dibya Raj Pokhrel, chief of the Department of Customs at Tatopani.

In March, when Prime Minister KP Oli visited Beijing, Nepal and China signed a 10-point agreement on trade and transit. But

Oli failed to convince the Chinese leadership to reopen the Kodari Highway.

China is reportedly worried that Kodari was a conduit for free-Tibet activists and wants to keep it sealed, preferring to make Kerung — where the movement of people is easier to control — the new entry point. Chinese officials cite the damage caused by the earthquake and the continuing danger of landslides as the reason for the closure of Kodari.

Last week, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) sent a letter to the Chinese government requesting the resumption of movement of people and goods through Kodari. Said MoFA's Jhabindra Aryal: "We are still waiting for a response from China. We have proposed to set up a mechanism to clear backed-up cargo even if customs, immigration and quarantine offices cannot be restored immediately."



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was shifted because there are four hydropower projects coming up on the river, including the 216MW Upper Trisuli-1 and the 60MW Trisuli-3A. The projects will all benefit from the infrastructure upgrades.

The construction of the new customs-immigration-quarantine office is expected to cost more than Rs 850 million and to be finished by 2019. This building is coming up at the exact spot where last April's earthquake set off a huge rockfall and buried the customs office, killing four persons.

"The mountain is still unstable so we are constructing a concrete buttress to protect the new building, which will be safe from rockfalls and landslides," explained DUBC engineer Macha Kaji Maharjan.

After the earthquake, the Rasuwa Gadi-Kerung check-point was closed for more than six months. Not only had the earthquake damaged the customs office but the road to Trisuli was blocked as a result of landslides. The earthquake also obstructed the Kodari checkpoint, which was at that time the busiest road crossing between Nepal and China.

It was the Indian blockade and the shortages of fuel and essential goods that injected a



sense of urgency in Kathmandu to expedite reopening the road links to China. Kathmandu requested Beijing to help restart the border points. Beijing acted quickly to do so at the Rasuwa Gadi-Kerung border, but has so far kept Kodari sealed even though the earthquake damage there has been repaired.

As Nepal reeled under a severe fuel shortage, China's symbolic donation of 1,000 tons of fuel was brought in through Rasuwa Gadi. Nepali traders also quickly switched to importing Chinese goods through this border point.

The Department of Customs — which collected only Rs 240 million in revenue at Rasuwa Gadi in 2015 — has already raised Rs 1.54 billion in taxes in the first five months of 2016 alone.

This trade is expected to soar once the train arrives at the border, and in preparation Nepal is also building a dry port at Timure, 3 km south of the border. The Ministry of Commerce and Supplies has set up the Inter-Modal Transport Development Board to build this dry point. Executive Director Laxman Basnet told us: "We have

acquired the land and will begin construction by the end of 2016 and complete it in three years."

The Board is looking at the Timure dry port as being a customs point not only for Nepal, but for the entire South Asia region. The hope is that once the train arrives, Chinese goods bound for India and Bangladesh will also use this shortcut via Nepal. Shipments of Chinese goods to Nepal via Kolkata port can take up to 35 days, while it can reach Nepal in 10 days via Kerung.

More than 150 Chinese traders and tourists are crossing over into Nepal from the new border point every day. However, Nepali traders are still finding it difficult to cross over into China, and have to rely on local drivers from Rasuwa to transport goods from Kerung.

Says Ramesh Baral of the Nepal-China Businessmen Association: "The Chinese give one-day entry passes to Rasuwa locals, but not to all Nepali traders. This is not good for free trade. It has to change." 🇳🇵



ON TRACK

The Chinese railway has reached Xigatse, and will get to Kerung by 2020. The first Nepal-bound Chinese train carrying 86 containers came to Xigatse last week. The banner of the locomotive, written in Chinese, reads: South Asia Road-Rail Inter-modal Freight Train (Lanzhou-Xigatse-Kathmandu).









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Coming and going

Since Nepal has now been voted multiple times as the World's Top Adventure Tourism Destination, the gobarment is looking for ways to increase the thrill of a Himalayan Horriday. That is why on certain airlines (which shall remain nameless because they might advertise with us in future) the inflight announcement goes something like this: "Ladies and Gentleman, welcome on bored, in case of sudden loss of cabin pleasure, just pull oxygen mask, clobber your nose and mouth, and bleed normally. Please put your seats in an uptight position, enjoy our complimentary turbulence, and be careful when opening the oval-head rockers."

The real excitement starts after landing, as the Ministry of Marxism and Tourism requires all inbound

buccaneers to fill out Disembarkation Forms. Failure to do so results in an on-the-spot fine in cash or kind, of an amount not exceeding \$100 (in unmarked \$10 bills plus 10% VAT and 2% Tourist Tax handed under the counter), or retroactive defenestration from an altitude of 35,000 ft over Waypoint Romeo, whichever comes first.

A Disembowelment Card is an important document that records for posterity who and how many people dared visit Nepal.

Our immigration forms are already the most inclusive on earth, in fact even more progressive than the draft of the new Constitution. But Arrival and Departure Cards are living documents and must change with the seasons. It is time to change ours:



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