

A top-down view of a white ceramic cup filled with a latte. The coffee foam is artfully designed into a smiley face, with two dark coffee circles for eyes and a curved line of foam for a mouth. The cup sits on a white saucer, which is placed on a dark wooden surface.

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SHREEJANA SHRESTHA



PHOKSUNDO

Pilgrimage to Dolpa's stunning lake

BY JAY POUDYAL

PAGES 8-9



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CARTELLING OF CARNAGE

The bloodbath on Nepal’s highways is a direct result of Kathmandu’s syndicated politics

Floods and earthquakes cannot strictly be called ‘natural calamities’, because what actually ruins lives are ill-planned attempts to channel rivers, and poorly constructed houses. Similarly, tragedies like the bus plunge on 15 August in Kavre that killed 27 people cannot be termed an ‘accident’ — like other crashes, it was a direct result of political patronage of bus companies by the four-party syndicate that has been running this country.

This cartelling of carnage is not restricted to highways. Hospitals and the medical education sector are in the iron grip of politicians profiteering from the trade in human health. One of the reasons Govinda KC is still on the streets and threatening to go on his ninth hunger strike is that even his voice — and that of thousands who have protested in support of the cause he champions — has not been heard by the politicians backing the medical mafia.

Six bus passengers die every day on Nepal’s highways, many of these have become so routine they are not even reported anymore. More people have died in highway disasters in the past ten years than were killed in the decade-long war — 9,000 have lost their lives since 2011 alone.

After every vehicle crash like this, police come up with possible causes: in this case it was because there were 90 people crammed into the Kavre bus which was also carrying sacks of rice, and it stalled on a steep and slippery dirt road. But such technical reasons mask the underlying political source of the tragedies that maim and kill Nepalis every day. Contractors bribe officials to build substandard roads, obsolete and badly-maintained buses are allowed to carry double their capacity, drivers are often inexperienced or have fake licences — and all this is made possible because bus syndicates enjoy generous political protection.

It has been 20 years since the last local elections, leading to a lack of accountability at the VDC, DDC and municipality levels. Unelected bureaucrats work with politically



MASS MURDER: Bodies of the Kavre bus crash victims being cremated at Pashupati Aryaghat last week.

connected contractors to build pointless roads that go from nowhere to nowhere. Local politicians own excavators that gouge out the mountains, scarring farm terraces with landslides. Only 17 per cent of Nepal’s highways are black-topped, and even if tarmacked they lack basic road furniture that would ensure safety.

Highway fatalities rank fourth in the cause of death among Nepalis, whereas internationally it is considered only the tenth most common cause of death. Tracing the ownership patterns, emergence of private operators, lack of regulation, and inadequate implementation of safety directives, one sees a critical and shocking failure of the government to fulfil its primary role: to protect its citizens’ lives.

Over the past decades of political change private

companies have taken over the public transportation network, pretending that they operate in a competitive, free-market economy. On the pretext of regulating them, bus management committees nationwide wield so much power that even national-level politicians are loathe to rein them in.

The syndicates protect their routes with goons, and new operators who want to improve the quality of service often have their brand-new buses vandalised with complete impunity. Far-western Nepal had no buses plying for a week last month because of a dispute between syndicates. Transport monopolies are so influential they can hold the country, and the travelling public, hostage. And they are literally getting away with murder.

After the Kavre disaster, newly installed Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said this is now the last chance to crack down on transportation cartels. This will also be his final opportunity to show that he cares about at least this aspect of the public good, and not about protecting the turf of syndicates owned and nurtured by politicians in his coalition.

At an interaction this week on highway safety, former Chief Secretary and social reformer Leela Mani Poudyal could not have been more direct in blaming an “unspoken agreement” between senior ministers in government and bus companies. Poudyal said the root of the corruption was the Welfare Fund that transportation cartels used to fund political parties, pay for goons, and bribe bureaucrats. “From what I know, some CDOs get Rs 100,000 a month, the district police chief gets up to Rs 80,000, and the money goes right down to the individual traffic policeman,” Poudyal said.

It is obvious the rot runs deep, and we must start looking at deaths on our highways not as accidents, but as crimes in which politicians are culpable. But we do not have the luxury of waiting to fix the politics in order to to improve road safety. Meanwhile, the bloodbath on Nepal’s highways continues.

Times

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POLITICALLY CORRECT

What is political correctness ('Politically correct', Editorial, #822)? Is it to deny justice to Ganga Maya Adhikari, and let her die while on a hunger strike? Is it to give politicians a licence to loot and murder people? Or is it to allow them to become Prime Minister over and again, and ruin the country?

Rahsid Alam

SIX DECADES

Six decades after the first democratic movement, our political parties have yet to develop fully as democratic institutions. But the irony is that these ill-managed parties want to manage the country.

KK Sharma

THE MADHES MESSAGE

If we fail to resolve the Madhes issue, we will fall into a never-ending cycle of violence and a political quagmire ('The Madhes message', Chandra Kishor, #822). Kashmir in India is a good example of how things can go from bad to worse if political grievances are not addressed on time.

Suman

WHY NOT SCRAP

Why not scrap the proposed seven federal states? These provinces are not

Bikash Lamsal

ECONOMICALLY VIABLE

We need to redraw federal boundaries keeping in mind the country's development. The author argues that Madhesis are fighting to be treated like Nepalis. But how can a constitution make them feel Nepali when they are asserting their ethnic and regional identity?

Binod

THE ASS

The author has not correctly used the idiom 'let the potato chips fall where they may' ('Journalism Exam Paper Leaked', the Ass, #822). But it did make me smile. It is an old phrase used from the 1800s referring to a woodcutter's task of cutting down a tree and not worrying about where the small wood chips land as the tree is felled.

Terri Duffy

FANCY FOOTWORK

Diplomacy is more about perception than about facts ('Fancy footwork', Om Astha Rai, #822). The perception in Nepal is that Beijing wants political stability in Kathmandu, but New Delhi does not. It must be a sign of worries for India.

Bikash Lamsal

Bishnu Neupane @BishnuBn

Also there is saying a person who tries to please everybody could please nobody!

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

"Dahal is trying to please New Delhi and Beijing, but he might end up irritating both." <http://bit.ly/2bBEGxc>

Nissim Raj Angdebay @nissimang14

How foolish! Technology is vital if we are to preserve future heritage from crumbling again. Mato is not strong as concrete.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

Protest against use of cement in reconstruction of Rani Pokhari, a 17th-century heritage site <http://bit.ly/2bg9Ud>

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #823

Q. Do you agree with the government's decision to give Rs 1 million each to the families of the 52 persons killed during the Madhes unrest?

Total votes: 347

Yes 36%

No 51%

Don't know/Maybe 13%

Weekly Internet Poll #824

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the use of cement in the reconstruction of earthquake-damaged heritage sites like Rani Pokhari?

Times

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A party supposed to struggle for the liberation of the proletariat has left taxi drivers destitute and in debt

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Every time a political party calls a general strike in Nepal, it deploys cadre armed with petrol bottles at strategic intersections early in the morning to vandalise and set fire to buses, taxis and motorcycles.

It is standard operating procedure to terrorise the public so that as news of the attacks spreads through FM radio and social media, no one dares to venture out or open shops. The tactic is often effective, and by evening the party can proclaim that the strike was a 'success'.

The national economy pays a heavy price for these strikes, with an estimated Rs 2 billion lost each day. There have already been six day-long strikes this year, most of them called by the hardline faction of the Maoist party led by Netra Bikram Chand, aka Comrade Biplav.

The terror tactics have a human cost as well. At least

three taxis were set on fire by the Maoists in strikes in the past eight months, leaving owners and drivers destitute and in debt.

Like thousands of young men, 19-year-old Chitra Bahadur Khatri initially thought of migrating abroad. He left his landless

family in Dhanusa and came to Kathmandu to seek his fortune, deciding to invest in a taxi after giving up his studies.

He took out a Rs 900,000 loan for a second-hand Maruti, and worked night and day to pay it back and take care of his family.

It was usual for him to work late, and on 25 July he headed home at 3:45 am to avoid the Maoist strike that had been called that day.

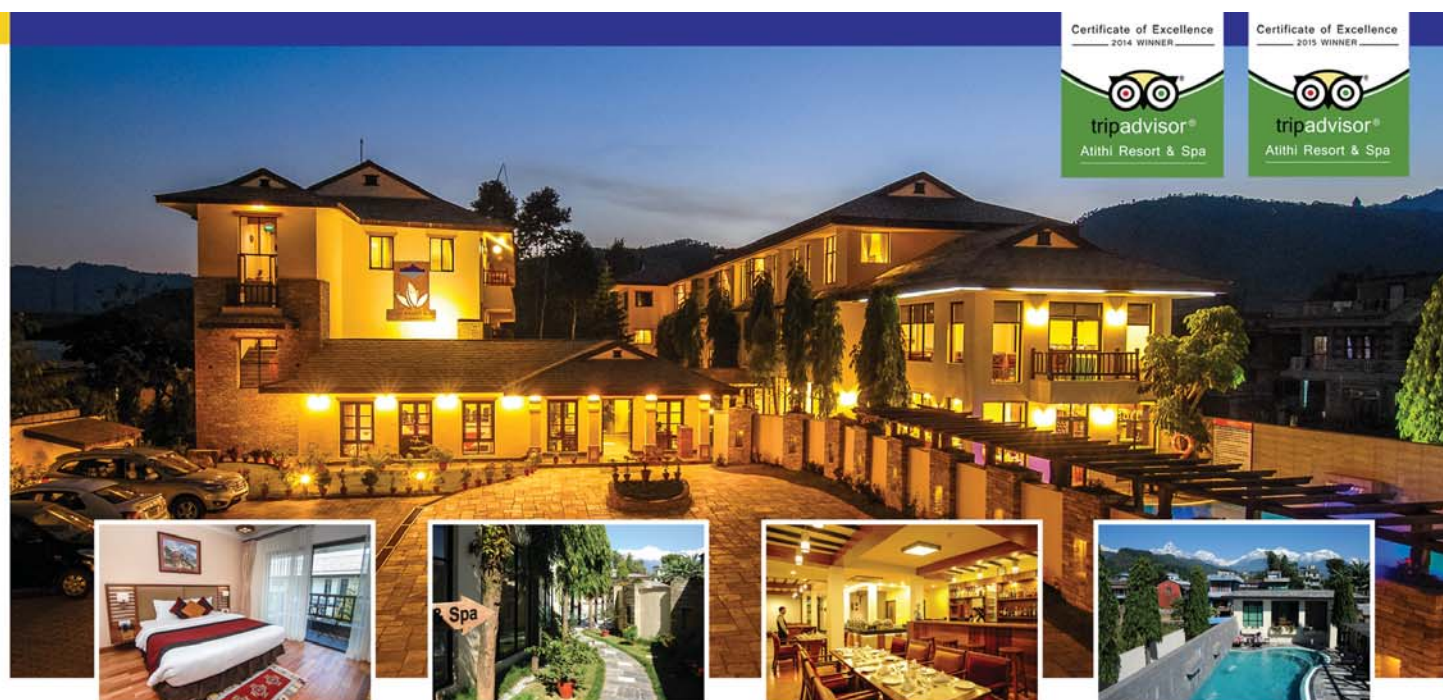
Five men stopped him in New Baneswor and hurled a petrol bomb into the back of his vehicle.

Khatri was nearly burnt alive as he tried to save his car. The attackers ran off, and it took almost two months for him to come face to face with them again at a meeting set up by *Nepali Times* this week.

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PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

FENDING FOR THEMSELVES: Chitra Bahadur Khatri, 19 (*left*), in front of his taxi at the New Baneswor Police Station. It was set alight by Biplav Maoists during a strike on 25 July, but he thinks he can repair it.

Rakesh Tamang, 33 (*above*), in his rented room in Gongabu. He became jobless after his taxi was burnt by Maoists enforcing a strike last year.

Both Khatri and Tamang are deep in debt and have received no compensation.

Communications, Printing and Publications Workers' Union (Revolutionary) is very close to where Khatri's cab was attacked in New Baneswor. Nabin Bista and Bhanu Acharya looked fidgety, but politely offered seats to Khatri and his uncle.

Khatri did not look like he wished to talk, and without any eye contact painfully recounted his narrow escape from the burning cab. Bista and Acharya repeatedly denied being involved. No apologies were offered, and both said they had been picked up randomly by police.

"We have no idea about where and how your taxi was set on fire," Bista told Khatri. "The police picked us up on the street and

tortured us."

Bista held forth on the party line, saying it was not Maoist policy to vandalise vehicles. Khatri appeared neither convinced nor bitter, and just did not seem keen to engage in an argument. He just wanted to know if the party would offer compensation.

"I had plans to clear my debt within the next four years and buy a new taxi," Khatri told them, "now I have no option except to wait for compensation from your party or the government. It's a lot of money to pay back, I don't know how I will survive."

Bista and Acharya repeated that the Maoist party was a defender of the rights of the working class, and as Khatri and his uncle got up to leave they asked for his contact number in case the party decided to offer financial help.


Khatri has been able to get permission from the District Court to take the rusted hulk of his cab out from the New Baneswor Police Station. He thinks the car can be repaired for Rs 500,000, but does not have the money. "I can't even think of buying a new car now, I have to pay back the loan and take another loan to repair the old cab," Khatri said.

Rakesh Tamang, 33, also had

his taxi set on fire by the Maoist faction last year, on the day the parties agreed to promulgate the new Constitution. He is also lucky to have climbed out alive from the burning car.

"I couldn't afford to stay at home that day even though there was a strike, because I had to pay my loan and feed my family," he recalled. A year later, Tamang's family is struggling to survive. He spent the whole past year visiting government offices for compensation that never came. His arsonists were never caught.

"I am so stressed that my mind doesn't work properly, I look alive but feel dead inside," says Tamang in a low voice, holding a sheaf of documents needed for his compensation claim.

At least three taxis have been set on fire by strike-enforcers since last year, according to the Nepal Meter Taxi Association, but the party that is supposed to represent the working class denies responsibility and is not offering compensation to drivers like Khatri and Tamang. 



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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

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Laxmi Intercontinental recently announced the winners of its 'Dashain, Tihar, GET, SET, GO' offer. 56 customers won a Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge Smartphone under the 'SET'



scheme while Sumi Shrestha from Butwal bagged the bumper prize, a new Hyundai Creta under the 'GO' scheme.

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The sanctity of silence

“There is an elephant in the room which everyone feels and sees, but no one dares touch.”
- Khagendra Sangroula

Of all the forms of action, silence is the most dangerous — it is the most political act of all. Those who take their beliefs to the street or make themselves heard through the press or other forms of physical and intellectual activism collectively push our society to think hard about the challenges we face.



ONE TO MANY
Bidushi Dhungel

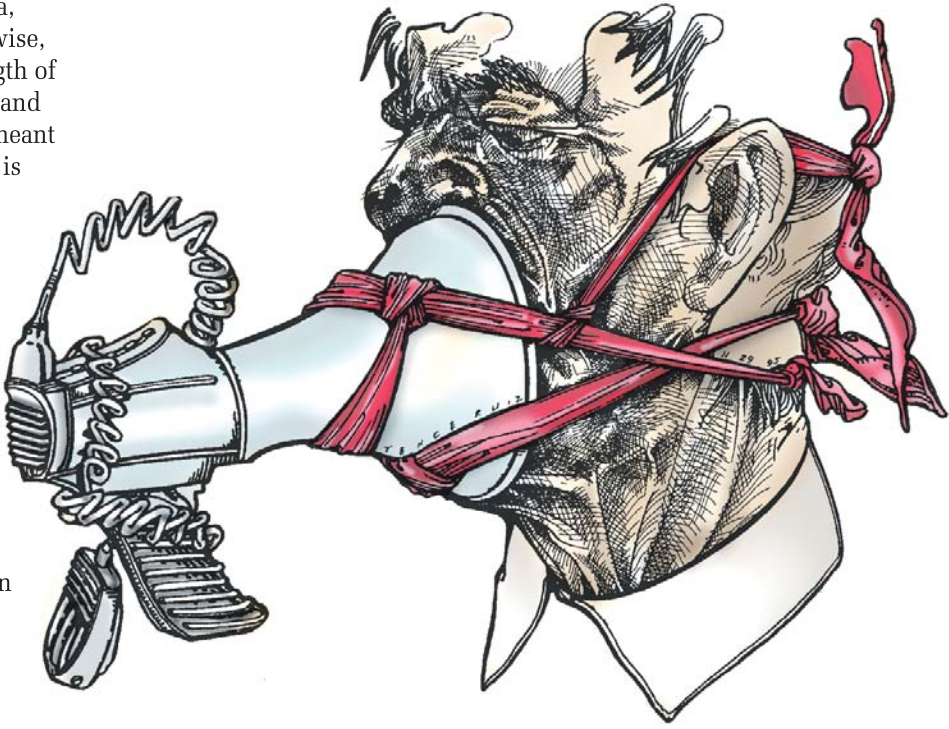
Whether we stand up for or against a cause, person, institution or idea, it is an expression of the openness of our society. The very ability to have debate and public rebuttals is how our democracy is realised in everyday life. It is one thing to disagree or even dislike opinions and thought processes, but the very fact that we are able to do so openly is what keeps society from becoming closed.

The minute opinion stops being produced, and debate and discussion die — that is when the real threat to open society

surfaces. The life of an idea, whether political or otherwise, is determined by the strength of the voices both in support and against it. That is what is meant when we say ‘all publicity is good publicity’. So long as there is a dialogue around a particular topic, for and against, the spirit of the cause is kept alive. When there is silence, the spirit of the cause is killed and we move towards a closed and less democratic space.

This ‘culture’ of silence manifests both as a result of direct intimidation and the utilisation of a politics of fear, such that individuals are silenced even in the absence of an immediately real threat. Instead, individuals are silenced out of trepidation of what is to come, a ghost-like terror of social ostracisation, political persecution or character assassination. A collective and consuming fear of persecution is normalised and as such, silence breeds further silence. When the pillars of open society — among the media, parliament, civil society and public intellectuals, and sometimes even the judiciary — fall prey to silence, a real crisis is born.

Over coffee recently, writer



Khagendra Sangroula mused: “Listen, there is an elephant in the room which everyone feels and sees but no one dares touch, except those one-off *pagals* (crazies). But the truth is that in every society and throughout history, change has always been led by the *pagals*.”

We had spent an hour mulling over how to galvanise the parliament and party honchos, vis-à-vis the media, civil society and public intellectuals, to stand up and challenge the high-handedness

and anti-democratic character of a parallel government being run by the CIAA chief. But what does one do when the most effective medium to pressurise parliament (opinion makers, media and civil society) engage in self-censorship?

Political leaders colluded to appoint him, in exchange for being absolved of their own past corruption. In every instance when a political leader has spoken against the crusade led by Dr Govinda KC to rein in this parallel power centre,

there is the stench of corruption, blackmail and protection. The ongoing freak shows at the Reporters’ Club expose the real character of our so-called leaders; it proves to the public where their loyalties lie and, importantly, why. The people will deal with them sooner or later.

But, what do we do with those we cannot vote in or out? The silence maintained by the so-called harbingers of democracy and open society is most disappointing and worrying. It is unacceptable that those who have made a career out of democracy, built businesses and empires and gained public recognition, should choose silence at a time when the very foundation of their success is being challenged. These are the forces we rely on to nudge the political class into action to save their parties and leadership. Public intellectuals, therefore, must come out of their cocoons and pay their dues to open and free society.

We are at a point in the political development of Nepal where there are no more systemic revolutions to be had. Now, there is no choice but to consolidate and strengthen the system of democracy. We must force the political class to become accountable to parliamentary politics and immediately jolt them into shaking the emerging despot off from their backs, the weight of which could bury the foundations of our hard-earned democracy and take us back to the dark ages. 🇳🇵

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The monsoon is now reaching its climax, from now on it will be in slow retreat from west to east. But that does not mean the rains are going to stop. In fact, there will still be monsoon depressions bringing heavy rain — although we do not see any major ones on the horizon. For Friday and the weekend, expect bright morning sunshine, and hot and humid afternoons leading to passing showers (some accompanied by lightning) in the evenings and nights.

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OPERA IN NEPAL:
Rehearsals for Arjuna's
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ERIC GARRISON

Bhagavad Gita as opera

East meets West in the performance of *Arjuna's Dilemma* at Patan Museum next week

SMRITI BASNET

One of the most exciting events in Kathmandu's cultural calendar is happening next week, as world-renowned opera performers offer audiences a trilingual rendition of the Bhagavad Gita. *Arjuna's Dilemma* recreates scenes from the epic Hindu scriptures written four millennia ago, with lyrics in Sanskrit, English and Hindi and a melodious blend of western and Indian classical and jazz, under the stage direction of Deborah Merola. In a small room in Baneswor, rehearsals are in full swing as the actors glide in synchronised motion across the room, dancing and singing. The chamber opera picks up the story where doubt consumes



ALL SET: A 3D design of the set of *Arjuna's Dilemma*, to be staged in the Patan Museum courtyard.

GREG MITCHELL

Pandava Prince Arjuna about fighting the war against his kinsfolk, and he approaches Lord Krishna, the prince's charioteer and guide, for advice. Originally composed by Douglas J. Cuomo, it will be staged by One World Theatre in Nepal from 3-11 September in the Patan Museum courtyard.

Various engaging and eternal philosophical questions about life, death and faith come up, and it is fitting that the venue for the performance is opposite Patan's famous Krishna Mandir, which will itself be a focal point during the celebration of Krishnasthami, the god's birthday, this week.

"The Gita is not a linear story, it has different meanings depending on the interpretation," explains Merola, who is using an international cast and production team, trained musicians, and theatre artists, to tell this complex and compelling story through a western art form. The swift changes in the set, powerful voices of the opera singers, and soul-stirring rhythms of the tabla, cello, violin and saxophone keep the audience enthralled. Premiered in 2008 at the BAM Next Wave Festival, the 70-minute fusion opera was Cuomo's brainchild, who wanted to pen a piece for his friend Amit Chatterjee to perform in. Having always been intrigued by eastern religions, Cuomo took the opportunity to explore the sacred text. "The Bhagavad Gita is an emotional and dramatic text, when I discovered this I decided I would compose something around it," said Cuomo. "I am hoping that the music is universal enough for people to respond to, because when one is not used to opera, the singing may be somewhat unfamiliar." The Patan performance will feature a live orchestra, with Jonathan Khuner as the music director. To make it more relevant to Nepal, Merola draws from the experiences and rituals of the country and blends these into the story. The April 2015 earthquake, which devastated the square outside the performance venue, will add poignancy to the performance. "We have been very clear that we are not coming here as a group of westerners trying to interpret the sacred text. We are bringing in art forms that we are familiar with," said Merola. Opera singer Roy Stevens, who will be the voice of Arjuna, learnt Sanskrit only after he came to Nepal, and it will be the sixteenth language he will be singing in. "It is a true collaboration and cultural exchange. The opera is a fantastic piece that finds common ground between two different worlds of music," Stevens said, terming opera as a "gift for the soul" that can give back honour and respect to Nepali society through this partnership. Actor Rajkumar Pudasaini, playing the role of Krishna, also feels he has had to push beyond his comfort zone to accommodate an unfamiliar style and form, since the parts are sung separately by professional opera singers. Said Pudasaini: "As theatre artistes, we are trained in the audiovisual medium. In this I have to give my best to convey it only through the visual aspect. That has been a new challenge."

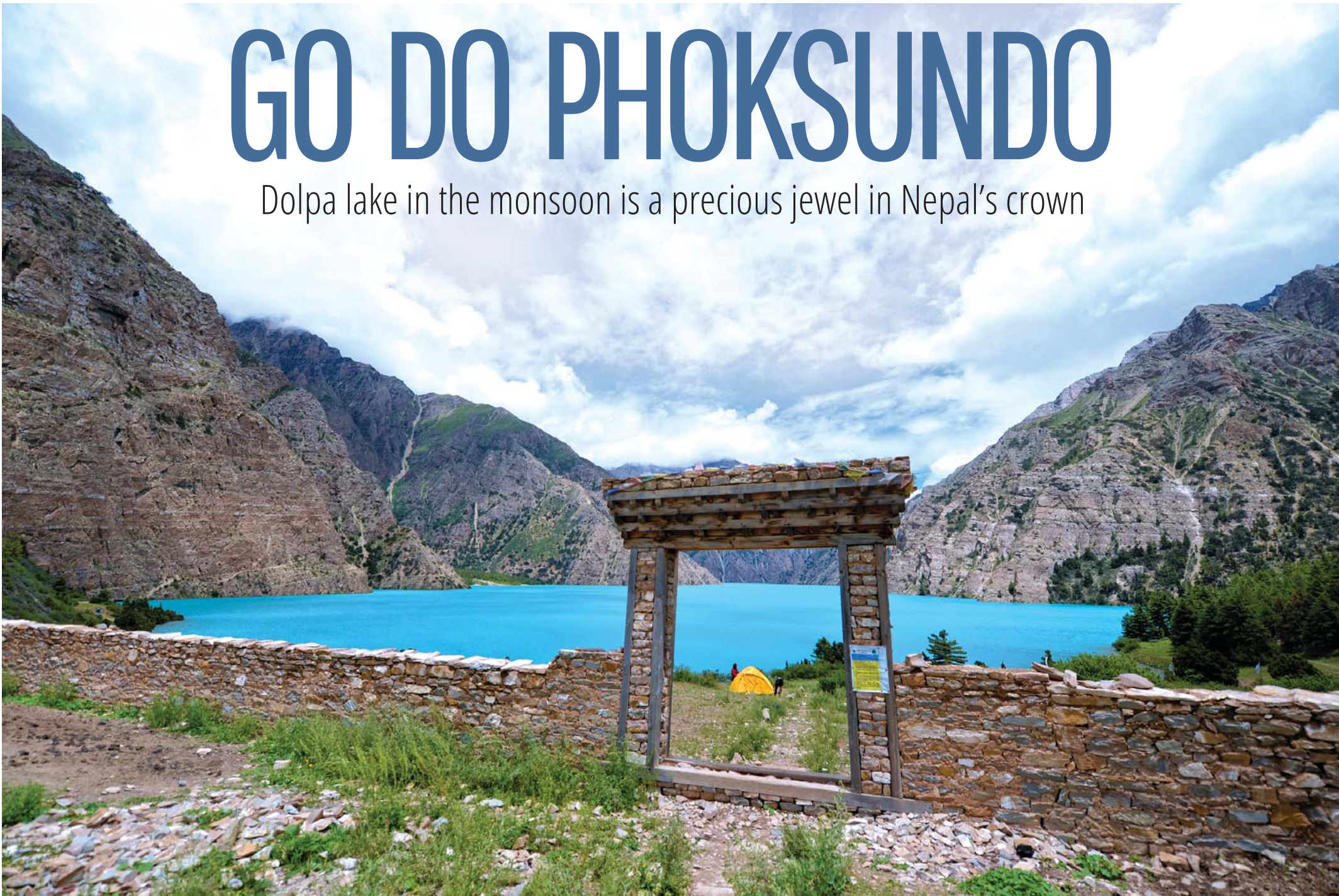
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Dolpa lake in the monsoon is a precious jewel in Nepal’s crown

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PHOTOGRAPHS by
JAY POUDYAL
in DOLPA

With most monsoon clouds blocked by the towering Dhaulagiri range, this is the time to visit Dolpa — Nepal’s mysterious and little-explored trans-Himalayan district. Dolpa’s scenery is the stuff of legends, depicted in David Snelgrove’s classic, *Himalayan Pilgrimage*, or Peter Matthiessen’s book, *The Snow Leopard*, and inspired by films like Eric Valli’s *Caravan*.

Following the footsteps of these early explorers, one can see the reason for Dolpa’s allure. Nothing appears to have changed here. It seems the same as it was not merely 60 years ago when Snelgrove walked through, as the mountains, rivers and the lakes have a primordial feel.

But, of course, things have changed. The airfield at Jufal has been asphalted, and there are more regular flights from

Surkhet and Nepalganj. The highway from Rukum has arrived at Triveni, three days’ walk south of the airfield.

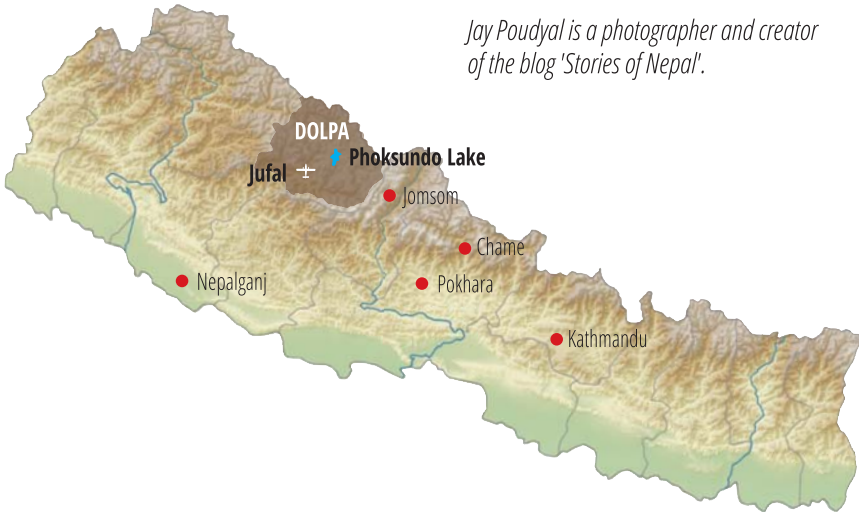
It takes three days to get to Dolpa’s stellar attraction: Phoksundo, Nepal’s most spectacular lake. None of the photographs here do justice to the green waters of this 145 m deep lake, into which plunge sheer mountains. This time of year the walk from Jufal goes past

dazzling green forests and terrace fields of Ringmo village. Geologists believe that a huge landslide about 40,000 years ago dammed the river that formed the lake.

The water overflows through the stunning 170 m waterfall which you can hear hours before you finally arrive at a ledge from which you get the first glimpse of the lake, located at 3,611 m.

Go to Dolpa before the world gets there.

Jay Poudyal is a photographer and creator of the blog 'Stories of Nepal'.



THE SPECTACULAR 170 M-HIGH WATERFALL THAT DRAINS PHOKSUNDO.





THE VILLAGE OF RINGMO ON THE HIKE FROM JUFAL TO THE LAKE.



THE VILLAGE OF KAGNI ON THE WALK UP FROM JUFAL AIRFIELD.



THE OUTLET OF PHOKSUNDO LAKE, WHICH WAS BLOCKED BY A GIGANTIC LANDSLIDE 40,000 YEARS AGO.



PHOKSUNDO LAKE CHANGES ITS COLOUR EACH PASSING HOUR FROM SUNRISE.

Trekking as if the people mattered

In Dolpa, as elsewhere, it is not simply a question of ‘more’ tourism, but tourism of the ‘right’ kind

JOY STEPHENS
in DOLPA



JOY STEPHENS

The Bhabun River that drains the north side of Dhaulagiri is so off the beaten track that it is rare to meet another soul on the path.

At a school courtyard at Seri (3,900 m) boarding pupils from far-flung villages are beginning to arrive for the new semester. With 65 pupils, three teachers — two government and one community-hired — the school that was built with assistance from a French trekker, just goes up to Grade 3. But it is hoping to add a new class each year.

“The government promises, but nothing happens. We can’t wait for them to help us,” parents lamented. Few are literate but they want their children to learn, in the hope of a better life. Farmers here barely survive on oats and potatoes, supplemented by harvests of yarsa.

Committed to spread our expenditure to benefit the local community, we asked a young couple to prepare food for us. They were surprised but agreed, and once the payment for the first night’s meal was in their hands they asked us to come for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

“It’s been a poor yarsa season this year,” the husband explained, cradling his young daughter. “I returned empty-handed.”

Six hours down the trail in Dhadagain, there was a school but no teachers. “They come and they quit. No one stays,” said the woman who prepared our food. “Now we send our children to Seri. It’s costs more because they have to board.”

Two days walk away in Chharke (4,200 m), which was featured in Eric Valli’s film *Caravan*, two girls aged 12 and 13 (pictured, above) showed us around their school. Both are in Grade 2. They did not know where they would go to school next year.

Nepal’s largest district in area is also the most sparsely populated, and running schools in Dolpa is a challenge. Children are scattered and retaining teachers is difficult. But these are excuses, not reasons. If lack of budget is the main constraint, some of the \$500 that every foreign trekker in Upper Dolpa has to pay the government could be ploughed back. In 2014, the district received 469 tourists, thus generating Rs 25,199,370 in revenue — more than enough to improve schools and health services in Dolpa.

“We don’t see any of that money,” said a hotel owner in Chharke. “The money is kept by Kathmandu. If we could get more tourism here we could afford to fund the schools ourselves.”

It is not simply a question of ‘more’ tourism, but of the ‘right’ tourism. Dolpa and other fragile mountain areas of Nepal need the type of trekker who injects money into the local economy so that communities will have the resources to spend on their own priorities, and not depend on the government to do things for them.

Just outside Chharke we came upon a well-equipped camp of a group of 10 trekkers guided by a foreign-based agency. Four of them were trekking the whole of the Great Himalayan Trail, and were on Day 120 out of 150. Each had paid \$35,000 for the privilege. Some of that money went to Kathmandu for the Restricted Area fee and other permits. The remainder went to a foreign trekking company, with a slice of that to its Kathmandu-based partner. Most of the food was bought from Kathmandu or towns en route. None of the guides and porters was hired locally.

Not much of the money is left to filter into the local economy. Our modest trek

probably put more money into the village economy than a high-budget trans-Himalayan trek.

One of the reasons the government gives for restricting access to Upper Dolpa with the \$500 fee per trekker is protection of the local culture. Some controls are certainly necessary to preserve the history, traditions, and the natural environment. But looking at how parts of the Round Annapurna Trek have been spoilt by the intrusion of roads, one suspects this is a smokescreen.

There are two options for Upper Dolpa: one is to keep the current fee structure but for the government to channel half of the revenue back into the communities, by building infrastructure and providing top-up incentives for teachers to remain in their placements.

The second option is to simply reduce the fee to a level that would generate a surge in tourism that would benefit the local economy, but not so great a rush that it would overwhelm the cultural and natural environment. This option may be better since it gives greater choices to local people.

Un-treked valleys such as the Bhabun should be promoted as new trekking routes, and locals encouraged to operate homestays. One challenge is that the exit routes from Bhabun Valley to the Kali Gandaki pass through Upper Dolpa, which would mean having to pay the \$500 fee.

Allowing trekkers to exit the Bhabun Valley via Mukutgaon or Chharke to the Jungben La pass for a modest fee would encourage tourism, and indirectly support the health and education of villagers along the way. 🇳🇵

Joy Stephens works with pro-poor tourism, and to improve children’s access to education. www.offthebeatentreks.org



ALL PICS: MILAN THAPA

Thrill and chill in Pokhara

Once a famous destination for honeymooners, Pokhara has increasingly become an adrenaline junkie's go-to paradise. Not that newlyweds cannot partake of the range of sporting activities, but Pokhara — widely known as the Lake City — is now more renowned as a place for both chill and thrill seekers.

When I was young, Pokhara meant a visit to Devi's Fall, Barahi Temple and Mahendra Gufa. While these places are still popular, and Pokhara is still the takeoff point for treks to the Annapurnas, it is now a mandatory adventure destination for Nepali youngsters. Pokhara hoteliers say Nepalis now spend more and stay longer than many foreign tourists.

The first thing that sets Pokhara apart is its gorgeous setting: almost tropical at only 800 m above sea level but startlingly close to the mountains — Machhapuchhre's 6,993 m-high summit is only 25 km away in a straight line. The lakes in Pokhara provide a stunning foreground to the high horizon.

Pokhara has accommodation that caters to everyone: Nepalis on shoestring budgets, foreign budget tourists, middle-class urbanites with family, as well as high-end tourists willing to spend up to \$300 a night. The new Pokhara airport, scheduled for completion by 2018, should improve the town's connectivity, with direct flights to countries in the region.

Pokhara is preparing itself for a tourism windfall, but for many the adventure boom is already here.

Must-do adventures

On my last visit to Pokhara, I got hands-on with several outdoor activities there. I ranked the activities on a scale of 5 to 1 based on the thrill threshold, with 1 being the most fun:

5 Water balling: This new aquatic sport on Fewa and Begnas Lakes involves zipping oneself inside a large transparent floating ball. I tried a slightly larger water ball that can hold up to four or five persons, while the other type can fit only one. All you have to do is get inside the ball, and run as fast



as you can. You have to be extremely fit to keep up, but that's the joy of it.

Fun tip: It is much more enjoyable water balling with friends than strangers. If you are claustrophobic, this is not for you.



SAMRIDDI RAI

4 Stand-up paddling: The closest thing to surfing in landlocked Nepal is stand-up paddling. I did not expect to enjoy the sport as much as I did, but going solo really maxed the thrill element.

Fun tip: If going solo, inform the company you hire the paddle board from, so they keep a lookout and have their rescue boat on standby in case of an emergency.



3 Zip-lining: When it comes to adventure, Nepal boasts the world's fastest and longest zip-line, from Sarangkot to the lake. The intense safety instruction session by the conductors builds up the thrill. Then a 600 m vertical drop at the start of the ride spikes the adrenaline. But after the initial spell, the rest of the two-minute ride is not quite as heart-thumpingly scary.

Fun tip: Don't forget to soak in the lush green beauty around you.



2 Paragliding: Paragliding has been synonymous with Pokhara for some time now. What is unbeatable is not just being able to soar with the eagles that are always alongside, but also to look up at the Annapurnas and down at the lake throughout the glide. Make the most out of a tandem flight by establishing a connection with your pilot, who can provide a vivid running commentary on the mountains and landmarks all around, and even allow you to try out a few safe aerial stunts.

Fun tip: If you are prone to motion sickness, beware. Either eat something at least an hour before paragliding, or not at all.

1 Bungee jumping: This always tops the list of adrenaline sports, and for all the right reasons. After all, looking down at the canyon below from a dizzying 90 m height, and still choosing to jump off, is a decision your mind makes despite how hard your physical body fights against it. The senses are heightened, the heart races, the breath becomes shorter and more rapid, and the sweating is not due to the heat! Ultimately, the triumphant glory of having conquered the fear, wins the day.



Fun tip: Wear comfortable attire, and make sure your t-shirt is well-fitted or tucked in so it does not hinder your movements when you are dangling upside down. It helps to stretch before the jump, to prep your muscles for the bungee jolt.

Adventure DNA

Canyoning

Lwang Ghalel is the best location for a day of canyoning in Pokhara. Even if canyoning is not on your itinerary, pay a visit to this gigantic waterfall just to witness its sheer beauty.



White-water rafting



Kali Gandaki, Marsyangdi, Trisuli and Upper Seti also offer options for rafting nearby.

Lower Seti is perfect for a half-day rafting trip, with its crystal clear water, fascinating rapids and a breathtaking view of the Annapurnas. The

Tubing

Tubing is simply going solo down the white rivers in a huge tyre tube. Most rafting companies also feature tubing. It is advisable to indulge in this after the monsoon, and with trustworthy expertise.



Riding

Whether it be for a relaxing ride by the lakeside or along a forest trail, renting a mountain bike for at least one day on your trip to Pokhara is mandatory.

Hiking

As opposed to trekking, hiking involves a day walk along Pokhara's scenic ridges. Popular hikes include stops at Naudanda, Panchase, Thulokot, Sarangkot and the World Peace Pagoda.



nepalitimes.com

Watch video





LOVE & FRIENDSHIP

Literature classes have been devoted to the enduring popularity of Jane Austen's sharply written, finely balanced novels that continue to spawn spoofs, pastiches (*Pride and*

Sense and Sensibility, the screenplay for which was written by no less than Emma Thompson, who also stars as the sensible Eleanor alongside Kate Winslet's free-spirited Marianne.

Love & Friendship is adapted from *Lady Susan*, a piece of Austen "juvenilia" — a literary term for works that are considered slightly immature but still crucial to the understanding of the writer's development. That somewhat immature voice is marked in *Love & Friendship* by the extremely witty, overly verbose dialogue which lacks just that bit of levity and warmth that is so evident in Austen's later novels.

The film is a delight to watch though, made as it is with much dexterity and excellent casting. Kate Beckinsale steals the show as the clever, manipulative Lady Susan Vernon who, being recently widowed, is on a mission to

find herself, and her innocent daughter Frederica (Morfydd Clark), suitable, extremely wealthy and, of course, aristocratic husbands.

The plot is essentially a caper, with Lady Susan unabashedly winding every eligible man around her finger while she blithely confesses her schemes, without an iota of remorse, to her loyal but slightly bland American friend Alicia Johnson (Chloë Sevigny), who has been forbidden by her very square husband Mr. Johnson (the delightful Stephen Fry) from associating with her scandalous pal.

In modern terms, Lady Susan would be deemed a shameless, compulsive liar, or even a sociopath. But in the days when women had to marry to keep themselves from falling into abject poverty, the social context of this woman's outrageous antics perhaps calls for a measure of understanding of the limitations imposed on women at the time.

Still, while undeniably very funny and thoroughly entertaining, *Love & Friendship* — as with most of Stillman's films — lacks warmth. There is no Elizabeth Bennet or even the proud Emma here to bring real gravity to this light, frivolous film that does not hesitate to poke fun at every single one of its characters, barring the lovely Frederica who, thankfully, is the (only) moral anchor in the otherwise insufferably snobby, socially conscious world of this film — a world that Austen succeeded in both rebuking and celebrating with her luminous prose. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
Trailer

HAPPENINGS



PREPARING FOR POLLS: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal inspects the Electoral Education and Information Centre of the Election Commission on Monday.



FROM DELHI WITH LOVE: Deputy Prime Minister Bimalendra Nidhi returns to Kathmandu from his five-day India visit on Tuesday.



BREAKING SILENCE: Supporters of satyagrahi Govinda KC stage a demonstration outside the Prime Minister's residence at Baluwatar on Saturday, demanding swift implementation of the agreements between KC and the government.



SAVE HERITAGE: Youth activists protest in Kathmandu on Wednesday against the government for using cement instead of local materials in the reconstruction of Rani Pokhari, a 17th-century heritage site destroyed by last year's earthquake.



SALUTING THE ACE: Nepal Army Chief Rajendra Chhetri felicitates football star Nawayug Shrestha in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

WWF Nepal, the global conservation organization leading international efforts *for a living planet* seeks applications from qualified Nepali candidates for the following full-time positions under the Hariyo Ban Program.

The Hariyo Ban Program is a USAID-funded five-year initiative implemented in Terai Arc Landscape and Chitwan-Annapurna Landscape, running from July 2016 to July 2021. Led by WWF Nepal and implemented by four consortium partners, the program addresses biodiversity threats and climate vulnerability with the goal of increased ecological and community resilience.

If you think you are an achiever and willing to work within a diverse team in a multicultural environment with commitment and passion for what you believe in, you are highly encouraged to apply.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Documentation Officer (based in Kathmandu)

Major Responsibilities: Under the supervision of the Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Documentation Officer will be responsible for maintaining the programmatic database of the Hariyo Ban Program, engage and support in M&E capacity building activities, field monitoring, and M&E system designing and implementation. S/he will also support in learning, knowledge management and documentation. S/he will coordinate with Hariyo Ban Core team, consortium partners and other implementing partners in strengthening the monitoring and evaluation activities of Hariyo Ban Program and conduct periodic review and reflection, capture learning and support the preparation action plans to address critical gaps and emerging needs. This position requires frequent travel to the project areas.

Qualifications: A Bachelor's or Master's degree in Natural Resource Management, Environment Science or Natural Science related field is required. S/he should have at least five years of work experience with 3 years specifically in monitoring, evaluation, learning, knowledge management and documentation. Knowledge and use of statistical tools is required. S/he should be adept in MS Office & SPSS, with strong communication and organizational skills. Strong interpersonal and team-player skills are essential.

**** This is a re-advertisement for the position of Monitoring, Evaluation & Documentation Officer published on 2nd & 3rd August 2016 and candidates who have previously applied need not apply.**

Interested applicants are requested to download the **application form** on the below mentioned website and send the same with an application letter to the **email address** below by **17:00 hours** on **6th September 2016**. Please mention the position you are applying for as the subject. Emails without an application letter and completed application form will not be entertained. Only shortlisted candidates will be informed. Detailed TOR for the above mentioned position can be downloaded from our website.

Website: <http://www.wwfnepal.org>
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Increased canopy cover

Abdulla Miya in *Kantipur*, 23 August

कान्तिपुर

The latest government study shows an increase in forest cover by 5.14 per cent in the last 15 years, from 39.6 per cent in 1999 to 44.74 per cent this year.

The scientific forest survey that lasted shows that forests cover 40.36 per cent of country's land area and 4.38 per cent by shrub. The latest survey even establishes that more forest area is in the mid-hills section while the previous studies stated that the Tarai belt contains more forest area.

Out of the total forests, 37.8 per cent are in mid-hills, 32.25 per cent in mountains, 23.4 per cent in the Chure area



and 6.90 per cent is in Tarai. The tree census revealed 2.56 billion trees are of more than 10 cm in diameter. These included 443 species of trees belonging to 239 genera and 99 families.

Bharati Pathak of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) credits the contribution of community forests to forest conservation. "In the past, community forestry was blamed for deforestation, but this study proves that community forests have played an important role in increasing total forest cover."

Canopy cover in the mid-hills is growing due to transmigration of people to the plains and urban areas, according to the study. "Land abandoned during the conflict is now covered with trees," said Yam Prasad Pokharel of the Department of Forest Research, which conducted the survey. "Small patches of forest, which were not visible earlier, were noticeable during the research and ultimately contributed to the increase in forest area."

This has augmented Nepal's total carbon sink, at a time when the government hopes to cut down on emissions of greenhouse gases.

Sitaram Baral in *Nepal*, 21 August

नेपाल

When the doors of the former royal palace opened to the public in 2009, missing from the list of exhibits was an important symbol of the Nepali monarchy: the royal crown. Citing lack of space and a secure display case, the royal crown was locked up in a safe compartment in the saloon room of the palace.

Visitors expressed their interest in viewing the crown, and a working committee was created under Narayan Regmi in 2010-11. As per its recommendations,

two rooms were prepped with bulletproof windows and CCTV cameras, a special bulletproof showcase was purchased in 2012, and five Nepal Army personnel were stationed to provide security but, four years down the line, the plan has not moved ahead.

Despite the security preparations, the lack of coordination amongst the government agencies over who would be responsible for the protection of the crown when it is on display has been




cited as the main reason for the delay.

The museum and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation had tried to insure the crown, but the Federation of Nepal Gold and Silver Dealers' Association deemed the royal crown — with its closely set diamonds, pearls, and emerald drops with a cascade of bird-of-paradise plumes — too priceless for valuation. The museum and the Ministry had also approached the Nepal Army regarding the safety of

the crown, but never received an official reply. Unofficially, the Nepal Army had put forth a condition that if the crown is put on display, responsibility for its security should be divided amongst the Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Central Investigation Bureau.

Last year, the museum and the Ministry planned for the second time to place the crown on display on the occasion of Republic Day, but that plan took a back seat when the earthquake hit. Plans for its exhibition are now underway for the third time but the security concerns persist.



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HIGHWAYS OF DEATH

Transport syndicates guarded by greedy politicians and corrupt bureaucrats kill six Nepalis on the road every day

SANTA GAHA MAGAR

A day after 27 people were killed in a bus accident in Kavre district last week, the government decided to cancel route permits of overloaded buses.

The Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport decided — after a meeting with transport operators, Department of Transport Management, Department of Roads, Nepal Police and Traffic Police — to revoke the licences of drivers who take more passengers than allowed.

Ironically, the government authorities and transport operators who took those decisions are part of the same transport syndicates responsible for most road accidents, including the latest one in Kavre.

On 15 August, an obsolete and poorly-maintained bus was negotiating a steep and slippery section of a dirt road along the Sun Kosi. The bus had only 35 seats, but there were 95 passengers, as well as sacks of grains, crammed into it. The engine stalled twice, but the driver kept going.

The Arniko Transport Committee that owned the bus had not allowed other companies to ply this route so people had no alternative but to cling to its sides

and ride on the roof.

This week, former Chief Secretary Leela Mani Poudyal made a sensational revelation about just how deeply entrenched the transport syndicate is, and why state functionaries are not willing to dismantle it.

“From top politicians to police constables, everyone benefits from the syndicate,” he said. “The Chief District Officer and the district police chief get Rs 100,000 and Rs 80,000 each every month, and politicians and bureaucrats do not want to stop them because they also receive money.”

Transport companies like Arniko Committee are organised under the National Federation of Transport Entrepreneurs Nepal, which has set up a welfare fund to support drivers who get into trouble. But it is used to bribe politicians, bureaucrats, police and other law enforcers to protect the cartels.

“Unless the transport syndicate is dismantled, accidents like the one in Kavre will continue to happen,” says Premlal Maharjan, of the National Consumers Forum Nepal. “But it is impossible to get rid of them without ending the political patronage that it receives.”



In the last 10 years, over 16,000 people have been killed in accidents — almost as many lives lost as in the Maoist war from 1996 and 2006. Nepal has one of the highest highway fatality rates in the world, with 17 out of every 100,000 people dying on its roads.

The Ministry of Health and Population says accidents are the fourth-biggest cause of death among Nepalis, as only infectious diseases, heart ailments and cancer kill more people. Across the world, highway fatalities rank only tenth as a cause of death.

Highway accidents maim 11 people and injure 33 in Nepal every day. A National Health Research Council report shows accidents as the third-biggest

CARTELLING OF CARNAGE

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

cause of physical disabilities in Nepal. What is more worrying is that the accident rate has been increasing sharply over the last decade, and there are no signs it will decrease unless the politics is cleaned up.

“Highway fatality is one of the biggest threats to Nepal’s public health,” says Baburam Marasini, former Chief of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. “Most accidents can be avoided, and the failure to do so is akin to not curing curable diseases.”

Most crash victims are from the 15-40 age group, which is the most productive section of the population. In 2013, the government issued a report on road safety that identified a cost

to all this: Rs 220 million. That year the government also unveiled a strategy to reduce accidents by half. But more people are dying on Nepal’s highways than ever before: from 1,787 in 2013, to 2,004 in 2014 and 2,006 in 2015.

Strict law enforcement could be one of the means to curb accidents, but police are looking the other way. For example, the bus that met with an accident in Kavre last week had been fined by traffic police in Dhulikhel for carrying more passengers than its permitted capacity. But the bus was allowed to go on, picked up more passengers on the way and eventually fell down the mountain.

On 6 November 2014, traffic police had fined a truck in Sarlahi for carrying an excessive load.

What happened to public vehicle driving licences?

Two years ago, worried by the rising number of fatal bus crashes, the government decided to enforce special licences for drivers of public transport vehicles.

A bus had fallen off a road in Jajarkot, killing 55 people in November 2014, and there was public pressure on the government to do something. Last week, 27 people were killed when an overcrowded bus tumbled off a road in Kavre, and there is similar outrage.

However, like all government rules, the one requiring public vehicle drivers to have special licences fell by the wayside.

The government did introduce new rules to regulate driving licences for public vehicles, including stringent tests and other requirements for drivers. The Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport prepared the Public Vehicle

Driving Licence Regulation 2014 but it has not yet been implemented.

Madhusudan Silwal of the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division said that this failure to enforce the law shows the government’s lackadaisical attitude towards



RAMU SAPKOTA

transportation safety.

“The number of road accidents would have definitely gone down if we had implemented the stricter rules for drivers who want to obtain licences for public vehicles,” said Silwal. “The government should have also moved forward to regulate public transport by ending the monopoly of bus syndicates.”

Under the new policy, bus drivers must have at least passed the School Leaving Certificate exams in order to acquire a driving licence to operate public vehicles, and the age threshold has been raised from 21 to 25. Drivers would also be required to have two years of experience driving lighter vehicles, before driving larger buses.

Daya Kanta Jha of the

Department of Roads says the number of highway fatalities is rising because of technical reasons, rather than legal ones.

“The Department of Transport Management should strictly monitor those operating with route permits, but such inspections are rare,” he said. “In the recent Kavre accident, the driver was solely responsible for overloading the passengers. There must be stringent criteria for public vehicle licences.”

But Basanta Adhikari at the Department of Transport Management said his office could not implement the new rule for public vehicles, as parliament has not yet passed the law.

He added: “We are the implementing agency but we can’t interfere with the government’s procedure on passing any regulations.” *Shreejana Shrestha*

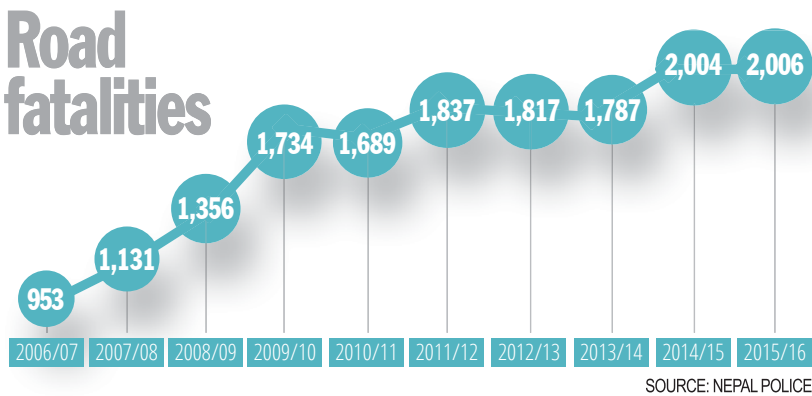


PRATAP THAPA/KANTIPUR



UNNATURAL LOSS: Family members of those killed in the Katre bus accident last week (*left*).

Wreckage of the bus accident in Dhankuta that killed 15 people, including ex-Minister of State for Finance Hari Khewra last month (*above*).



The truck could continue its trip after paying a fine, but later overturned in Makwanpur, killing six pedestrians.

According to a report prepared by a parliamentary committee, inexperienced or overworked drivers, poorly maintained buses, and syndicates that prevent modernisation and competition, are to blame.

A bus driver who belongs to a syndicate does not have to go to jail even if his reckless driving kills people. The syndicate provides compensation to the families of the victims, and the driver therefore feels there is no punishment for over-speeding for careless driving.

Activist Premal Maharjan says: “The syndicate holds a licence to kill people on the road.” 🇳🇵



The Government is a big syndicate


Saroj Sitaula
General Secretary
National Federation of Transport Entrepreneurs Nepal

After every big road accident, transport entrepreneurs are blamed for running a syndicate and killing passengers. That is not fair.

The Rs 3 billion transport industry contributes 19 per cent of the total revenue to the exchequer. Nearly four million people are directly and indirectly employed in the sector, but our contribution to the economy is never appreciated.

Most of us have bank loans to pay, no one wants a bus to go off the road. Syndicates represent the government's failure to regulate the transport sector. The government did not have a mechanism to manage transportation, that is why we had to form the syndicates to coordinate ourselves better.

The government is a syndicate too. For example, it issued permits for 1,500 new taxis for earthquake survivors. Isn't that also a syndicate? Politicians are ready to split ministries to make room for coalition partners, but they are never concerned about setting up a strong authority to regulate and manage the transport sector.




THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

Sow a thought, reap an action;
Sow an action, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character;
Sow a character, reap a destiny.


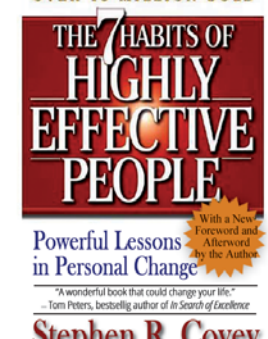

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How to stop the fuel haha-car

Ever since bilateral relations were established between Nepal and the Indian state of Bihar, the two have shared cordial historical and cultural ties that are based on the age-old custom of not having customs. In fact, if there is one thing that makes the two states intimate it is the smuggling of contraband across no man's land.

For a long time, the two-way flow has helped Nepal and Bihar to improve their per capita GDP, augmenting economic growth and cementing this two-country co-prosperity sphere. When the price of diesel has even a 50 paisa differential, fuel flows from one country to the other. Gold biscuits are smuggled south and Britannia Thin Arrowroot biscuits are smuggled north. The Secular Federal Democratic Republic now exports herds of bulls and oxen in the middle of the night, while water buffaloes go in the opposite direction to be converted into momos.

The best thing that happened to crossborder trade between Nepal and India is Chief Minister Nitish Kumar banning the production, sale and consumption of alcohol. Bihar is on the wagon, and this has put Nepal on the bandwagon. In fact, if the Indians aren't careful, the informal economy may fully remedy Nepal's balance of trade deficit if booze exports continue



at the present rate. The Nepal-Bihar border today is one huge moonshine strip. Rum is smuggled across by the tanker-load, and it has encouraged small- and medium-scale businesses to thrive as individuals walk across the border with bottles strapped to their bodies in a manner they seem to have learnt from suicide bombers (pictured).

But wait, there is a slight problem. How come when Darbhanga's liquor shops go dry, so do petrol pumps in Kathmandu? Is there a correlation? Is the mysterious petroleum shortage in Nepal this past week — as soon as His Awesomeful took over as

Prime Minister — somehow linked to the crackdown on Nepali bootleggers in Bihar? It proves, does it not, that you don't even need an Indian blockade to have a petrol shortage in Kathmandu. If so, why wasn't hooch diplomacy on the list of agenda items that Comrade Needy discussed with his counterparts in New Delhi last week?

As usual, the Ass has a perfect solution to foster the exchange of bodily fluids between Bihar and Nepal, and prevent it from escalating into a diplomatic incident. Nepal has a huge trade deficit with India, and most of this is because of our insatiable thirst for petroleum, right?

India has oil. Nepal has alcohol. Let there be a fair barter. In one swell foop, we eradicate the trade deficit, Biharis get the booze they crave, we don't have to wait in line for petrol anymore.

As time goes on, this bilateral trade will grow to such an extent that it will not suffice for Nepal to smuggle diesel in jenkins from India, and Biharis to smuggle, concealed on their person, high-octane liquor from Nepal. (That last message was

brought to you by 8848 Vodka.

This is where things get really interesting. We have heard from the grapewine that the Indo-Nepal Petroleum Pipeline from Raxaul to Amlekhganj will be extended to Kathmandu. This is the best piece of news for India-Nepal relations since the Kosi Barrage was built. Diesel, petrol, kerosene can henceforth be pumped up to feed Kathmandu's petrol stations, and there won't be landslides, strikes, chukka jams or blockades to create fuel haha-cars in Kathmandu. And at night, when no one is looking, we can send vodka, gin, whisky and beer in the opposite direction to Raxaul. The beauty of it is that we don't even need to pump the booze down — gravity will do it for us, thus reducing the overheads considerably.

And this week we have breaking news that Nepal's *raxi* and *ayla* have been ranked 41 out of the 50 most delicious drinks in the known universe, by none other than CNN. This adds another item of export that we can send down to the Biharis on the Indo-Nepal Daru Pipeline in exchange for petrol.

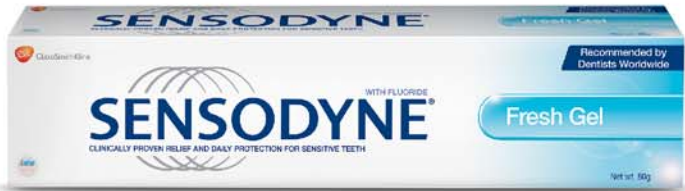


The Ass



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