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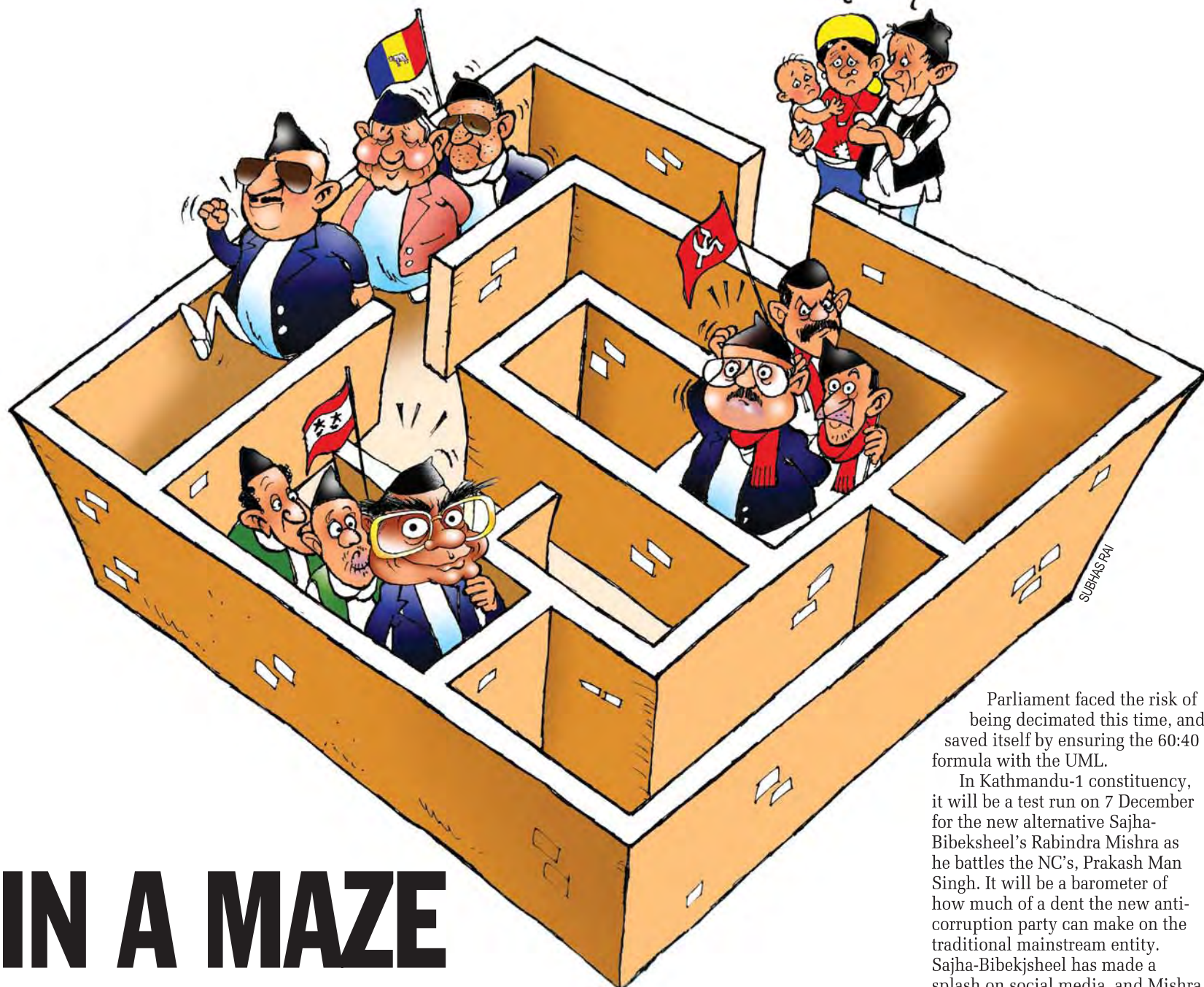
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IN A MAZE

Nepal's electoral politics was thrown off-kilter by the surprise alliance between the Maoist-Centre and the UML. The aftershocks are still being felt with only three weeks to go for voting, and as candidates filed their nominations for the second phase on Thursday.

Provincial and parliamentary elections on 26 November and 7 December will be a milestone in more ways than one: it is the first election under the new federal constitution and marks the end of the peace process that began after the ceasefire in 2006. It should usher in an era of stability, reform and inclusiveness, but the fact that most of the same personalities from 20 years ago are in the fray, including politicians who have been ministers and prime ministers multiple times, does not arouse much hope. In many areas, tainted

candidates with questionable, and even criminal, backgrounds have been nominated.

The NC was caught off-guard by the UML-Maoist alliance, and its main intention now is to stop the UML from gaining a majority in the new parliament. But its strategy of allying with the RPP and the RJPN frayed as senior party members fought bruising battles for candidacies. There was a tussle between whether the NC's Krishna Sitaula or the RPP's Rajendra Lingden stand from Jhapa. The NC's Bimalendra Nidhi also fought it out with Rajendra Mahato from the same Province 2 constituency. The NC's strategy of allying with the RPP (even while the Maoists are still in government while partnering with the opposition) has led to the biggest government in Nepal's history with 64 ministers.

The left alliance

has been able to sort out its ticket distribution relatively smoothly. The UML thinks it can build on its success in local elections by riding the same nationalist platform, and is aiming for a two-thirds majority with help from the Maoists. But that is unlikely because of the arithmetic of proportional representation in the new House. The Maoist-Centre, which was the third largest party in the previous

Parliament faced the risk of being decimated this time, and saved itself by ensuring the 60:40 formula with the UML.

In Kathmandu-1 constituency, it will be a test run on 7 December for the new alternative Sajha-Bibeksheel's Rabinendra Mishra as he battles the NC's, Prakash Man Singh. It will be a barometer of how much of a dent the new anti-corruption party can make on the traditional mainstream entity. Sajha-Bibeksheel has made a splash on social media, and Mishra has been busy in door-to-door canvassing, but we will have to see if he has the heft to challenge the structure of the established NC.

The other duel to watch out for is Baburam Bhattarai of the New Force vs Maoist Narayankaji Shrestha in Gorkha. Bhattarai tried to join the left alliance, but quit to ally with the NC to fight in his home constituency.

Kunda Dixit

UNSTOPPABLE EDITORIAL

FLASHBACK EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



buzz KHUMBU Then, and now

Climber and mountain geographer **ALTON BYERS** uses repeat photography to go to the same photopoint from where pictures were taken 60 years ago to show how much the Khumbu has changed due to global warming and tourism. The results are dramatic.

PAGE 8-9

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UNSTOPPABLE

It has become a habit for Nepal’s rulers, most of whom have been with us since the restoration of democracy in 1990, to play brinkmanship. You just have to read the Flashback Editorial (*below*) to realise how little things have changed in 15 years. Even the prime minister in 2002 was the same guy we have now, and he was playing the same games to stop elections even then.

The Nepali people have learnt from this long experience never to trust what their rulers say, and to always suspect that a conspiracy of some sort is hatching behind the scenes. That is why we hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

And so it is, with just over a month to go for provincial and parliamentary elections on 26 November and 7 December, that Nepalis are not talking about who they should vote for, but about whether the elections will even go ahead as scheduled. Politicians, as is their wont, are fanning the flames of uncertainty which the mass media duly transmits as evening talking heads on the screen – further confusing the people.

Enough already. It is time for a media moratorium on the extreme pronouncements of politicians because all they are trying to do is stay in the headlines by saying the most outrageous things, or misleading citizens and keeping them in the dark. The reason for such immaturity is the low intellectual level of most politicians, their famous greed and

ambition which have been amply and in full display for the past 27 years.

Things became highly charged just after the holidays when the UML and the Maoists decided to form an electoral alliance leading to supposed unity of the two parties after polls. This upset the Nepali Congress’ apple cart, and it suddenly looked like it would be decimated by the left juggernaut. So the NC has allied with the Hindu-right RPP as well as the RJPN. Even Baburam Bhattarai, after flip-flopping, has come under the NC umbrella. Wonders never cease.

This phase of uncertainty began with a writ filed by a member of the ruling coalition in the Supreme Court demanding that there should be separate ballot paperes for parliamentary and provincial elections. The Court left it for the Election Commission to decide, which it did by passing the buck to a task force. The same person then filed a Contempt of Court which then asked the EC for clarification. These events, played out from one day to the next on the front pages of the papers have completely confused the people.

Even so, despite an early onset of winter, high mountain districts voting in the first phase on 27 November are caught up in the heat of campaigning. There is tremendous interest among voters about the elections, and the traditional politicians from the mainstream parties are being grilled about their past misdeeds and promises not kept.

To be sure, the political parties deserve credit for bringing the country out of war, and despite the prolonged transition, promulgating a new Constitution under which there have been local elections and hopefully national polls soon. We may be taking one step back every time, but we always manage to take two steps forward.

However, it must be said that Nepal does not have stability, governance and economic strength because of the lack of accountability, gross neglect and fecklessness of these same parties. Our only hope is that there are enough promising young leaders within the main parties as well as the new anti-corruption Sajha Bibeksheel to take this country forward.

The onus is now on the voters to exercise their franchise and not elect lawbreakers to the new law-making body.



BHANU BHATTARAI

FLASHBACK EDITORIAL

Excerpt from Editorial in *Nepali Times* #117, 1-7 November 2002

Public opinion polls are useful only when political forces heed them. Sadly, our elected national leaders have stopped caring about what the people think. On the other side, the Maoists, in their revolutionary zeal, are so convinced they have all the answers, they don't need public opinion. In fact, their punishment for disagreeing is physical elimination.

Yet, the results of the public opinion poll we publish in this issue remind us that our rulers and those who aspire to rule ignore public opinion at their own peril. The Nepali people know that the leaders they voted for have squandered their mandate, but they don't agree with the Maoists: neither with their brutal methods nor their ultimate goal.

Disapproval of the decisions taken by the Sher Bahadur Deuba government are glaringly evident. More than three-quarters of those polled said that the term of



local bodies should either have been extended or fresh elections held. More than half didn't agree with the way elections were called.

There are other revelations. This is the first public opinion poll taken since the royal massacre, and we see that less than 1% of those polled see absolute monarchy as a reliable solution to the Maoist problem. And despite the nostalgia in Kathmandu Valley for strongman rule, the people blame the failure of politicians, and not the breakdown of the system, for the country's problems.

The message from the people is clear: they want all political parties, the king, the security forces and even the Maoists to work together to get this country back on track. If that is

unrealistic, then there should at least be a coalition among those who believe in parliamentary democracy. The people want such a force to emerge out of this chaos.

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Have you tried cardamom lassi or iced tea? Or cardamom black coffee? How about laptop bags and wallets made from cardamom fibre? Help cardamom farmers from eastern Nepal by buying finished products made from this exotic spice. Find out how the farmers are adapting to volatile prices and climate change. Join us on a video trip to the kingdom of cardamom, Taplejung. Read story on page 14-15.



CYCLE DELIVERY

More than 20 local entrepreneurs are already using the newly introduced Portal Cargo Bikes for their businesses in Kathmandu Valley. *Nepali Times* filmed how Bharat Prasad Koirala is using the bicycle as an alternative to a van in the city's narrow alleys. Go online to watch the video.



RUN, PEDAL, SWIM

Nepal has always been a popular destination for adventure junkies and seekers of mysticism, but the country also has huge potential in sports tourism. Join us online as we follow participants of the Seventh National Triathlon Championship as they run, cycle and swim around the scenic city of Pokhara.

LHOTSAMPA AND ROHINGYA

There has also been the case of Burmese of Nepali descent expelled from that country back in the Sixties ('Lhotsampa, Rohingya', Kanak Mani Dixit, #881). So, add to this, the recent Rohingya tragedy perpetrated under Aung San Suu-Kyi's direct watch, it has only exposed the continued capacity of the Burmese state for sheer human rights violations and the hollowness of Suu-Kyi as a Nobel Laureate. In the case of Bhutan's Lhotsampa, the government of India has been as much complicit, because it was India that dumped the Bhutanese refugees to third country, Nepal. Despite the latter's resettlement in the West, there are still several thousand of them in the refugee camps in Jhapa who continue to bide their time in hope that they would one day make it back to their homes in Bhutan. While India just recently claimed that it 'defended' Bhutanese sovereignty in Doklam, although uninvited, the 'biggest democracy' clearly could have prevailed over its protectorate, Bhutan, to end this more than a quarter century long human tragedy. To that extent, India, otherwise the self-proclaimed 'biggest democracy' comes out once again -- in line with their earlier hosting, aiding and abetting Nepali Maoists -- as the enabler of barbaric actions in South Asia. So, if India did nothing in the case of Rohingya, it is not only because nobody would take it seriously, but also because the country remains morally bankrupt as a democratic state.

Bihari Shrestha

WHAT'S TRENDING



#BreatheFree

by *Ayesha Shaky*
Air pollution in Kathmandu, much like in most Asian cities is a life or death issue. A social media survey reveals the true extent of the health impact of Kathmandu's deteriorating air quality. View the results of the survey and find out the implications air pollution has on our health in last week's multimedia package.

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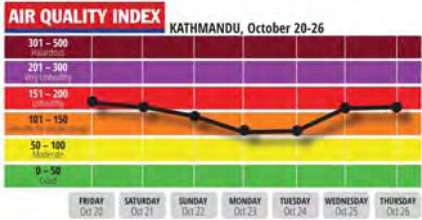


Lhotsampa, Rohingya

by *Kanak Mani Dixit*
The Rohingya tragedy and the crisis of Bhutan's Lhotsampa have nearly identical genesis. But while international geopolitical configuration made third country re-settlement available for the latter, the former has had no such luck because of their one fault -- being born 'Muslims', writes columnist Kanak Mani Dixit. Visit nepalitimes.com to read the feedback and let us know your view.

Most commented

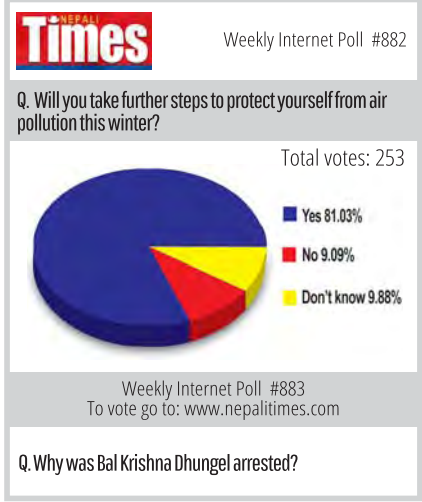
QUOTE TWEETS



Bhushan Tuladhar @BhushanTuladhar
Good to see @nepalitimes publishing #AirQuality data from @USEmbassyNepal. Wonder when we can see @DoEnv_Nepal official data in newspapers?

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
A respondent in a survey stated that he decided to study abroad to get away from #Kathmandu's worsening #pollution. <http://bit.ly/2gNBtAQ>

- आदित्य बिक्रम कार्की** @A198923K
Sad state. Do the authorities even care for their health?
- david seddon** @pigreen
and its not just in Asia - the UK and especially the large cities have unacceptable levels of air pollution



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Publisher and Chief Editor: **Kunda Dixit**
Associate Editor: **Om Astha Rai** | Design: **Kiran Maharjan**
Published by **Himalmedia Pvt Ltd** | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
Marketing: **Arjun Karki, Surendra Sharma** | rachanas@himalmedia.com | Subscriptions: **Santosh Aryal** | santosha@himalmedia.com
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This is the first installment of my new fortnightly column in Nepali Times. In this space over the coming months I will try to change the way we think of Nepal and to help start a positive conversation to enable this beautiful country to become prosperous and well-governed.



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared in his rousing speech in 2014 to Nepal's Constituent Assembly: "Kya nahi he apke paas" (What does Nepal not have?). We indeed have it all, and yet we are still focused on what we do not have.

Decades ago, the joke in Kathmandu was that planners and politicians who travelled to Europe concluded that the reason the UK was 'developed' was because even small children spoke English. Many remember the Prime Minister Deuba's outburst on BBC Sajha Sawal that there was no way he could get enough Oxford educated people to run this country.

For many years, Nepal's rulers have complained that one could never develop a country that was so mountainous, not realising that it is the same mountains that give us our huge potential to generate hydroelectricity. For decades we looked upon our youth population as a liability, while other countries took them away and put them to work building infrastructure and their own economies.

Instead of taking advantage of the fact that Nepal is situated in between two of the world's largest and fastest growing economies, we have blamed our poverty on something we can do nothing about



GOPEN RAI

Beggars can choose not to beg

Nepal is not poor, it is just poorly managed

— that we are landlocked.

Every two weeks in this column I will challenge this mindset and explore new possibilities for Nepalis. Over the years Nepal has been a beneficiary of aid which has actually diminished our ability to manage and solve challenges ourselves. The real capacity seems to be to convert every problem into a begging bowl. We are now too addicted to aid that we have no shame in asking China to donate stationery to be used in our voting booths in the last elections.

Is Nepal poor? No, it is just so much easier to beg. In the meantime, our government has no

problem buying expensive vehicles for politicians and officials. Look at the vehicles that ply the congested streets of Nepal, look at the houses we live in, the clothes we wear. Look at the restaurants we eat in. Nepal is not poor, just poorly managed.

I am naming this column ½ Full because the Nepali 'glass' has a lot in it already. It is at least half full. We need to build on what we have, and not try to start from zero. We do not need to invent a door every time we have to leave the room. The aspirations that we have for Nepal are achievable if we focus on these assets, capabilities, skills and

knowledge, but more importantly, the good decisions we need to make.

Nepal's glass is also half full because good decisions come from experience, and experience can consist of past bad decisions. We have made enough mistakes, and this has made us more experienced. We must have a larger public debate that leads to good decisions for a prosperous and peaceful Nepal.

This week the media is carrying a story quoting the Ministry of Agriculture that Nepal is to have a bumper rice harvest worth Rs108 billion, which translates into a record 5.4 million tons of Nepal's favourite and staple food. That

is a lot of rice, food, nutrition, carbohydrates and should be able to meet the annual requirement of 146 kg of rice a year of every Nepali eating two meals of rice a day.

The government says the greater harvest was due to an increase in cropping area, good rainfall, irrigation, technology, fertiliser and seed inputs. And yet, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank brought down its earlier GDP growth forecast saying the floods in September reduced rice production. Let's wait and see who is right. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc <http://www.siddharthinc.com/>

Obor, or not Obor?

Can the convergence of US-India interests contain China?

NEW DELHI -- India and the US are increasingly finding points of convergence on strategic partnership on security and development in the Indo-Pacific region, but will this be able to contain China's rise they hope it will?

During his India visit to New Delhi this week, United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested that the world's two largest democracies should partner to build road connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region, as a kind of an alternative to the Chinese One Belt, One Road (OBOR).



DEL-KTM
Akanshya Shah

Such an initiative will invariably include Japan and Australia as well, which are also wary of China's rising power in Asia and globally. Tillerson is learnt to have pushed for road connectivity also with Bangladesh and Afghanistan, so that even Pakistan could be persuaded to join in.

In addition, the US has already acknowledged India's role in reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan and is very critical of Pakistan for its perceived reluctance to combat terrorism. The US has repeatedly offered to help enhance India's military capacity through sale of military hardware.

There is expected to be deepening Indo-US collaboration in military, terrorism and trade, but balancing China seems to be the real objective of the Trump administration's



new South Asia Policy.

OBOR is China's ambitious project to build a 'New Silk Road' of ports, railways and roads linking Asia, Africa and Europe. India is opposed to it mainly because one of the components of OBOR runs through a disputed part of Kashmir. The US threw its weight behind India's opposition to that \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and earlier this year skipped China's the Belt and Road Forum summit due to its sovereignty concerns over CPEC.

The US believes that OBOR is China's way of securing control over Asia in an eventual

hope of dominating Eurasia and exploiting natural resources -- directly against the US policy and interests. Any effort by China and Pakistan to come closer will therefore be resisted by the Americans. Of late, the US has put increasing pressure on Pakistan, even threatening cut military assistance if it fails to crack down on terrorist havens inside its territory.

The increased polarisation will prompt China to trigger more confrontations in South Asia the like recent standoff at Doklam on its border with Bhutan. China feels that its relation with any country is not at the

expense of any other, and that should be true for India's relation with the US or Japan as well.

Beijing has warned against attempts to 'contain' China through steps such as US weapons sale to India or groupism in the region. But with its technology and resources, it will be difficult for India to stop China's rise. Beijing has already got Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh besides Pakistan to sign up to OBOR, which automatically makes them its strategic partner in connectivity and development.

China will continue supporting Nepal's development and expects to become a key stakeholder. This message was conveyed to Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun during visits to China in July, and when Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar went to China to participate in the 2017 Euro-Asia Economic Forum. Besides aid in infrastructure, China wants to build key linkages with the Nepal Army, which was a message relayed during Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang's visit to Nepal in August and Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan's trip in March.

Nepal's policy of equidistance between its giant neighbours will be severely tested by this new development in Indo-US ties, which also includes Japan. An alternative to OBOR could soon be in the offing which Nepal will not be able to stay out of.

As it is, Nepal's hurried acceptance of OBOR in May was not to India's liking. New Delhi officials have since warned Nepal's leaders of falling into a debt trap with China much in the way Sri Lanka has. 🇳🇵

Canada quake aid

Canadian Ambassador to Nepal Nadir Patel announced an additional \$14.7 million in aid to support Nepal's post-quake reconstruction during his visit here last week. *Nepali Times* caught up with Patel to discuss Canada's future aid and development priorities. Excerpts:



Nepali Times: What are some of the details about the additional aid you announced?

Nadir Patel: Canada has made a commitment of \$51.7 million to support the reconstruction process, I am here to announce additional \$14.7 million, of which \$10 million is going to a number of NGOs and Canadian development partners that are already active in post-earthquake development efforts. In addition, \$ 4.7 million will be given to the World Bank Group for rural housing and another \$200,000 to UNHCR for refugee resettlement. During my meeting with Prime Minister and President, we talked about gender and environmental issues, tourism and education.

What are Canada's development priorities around the world?

Our government recently announced a new Feminist International Assistance Policy with a special and primary focus on gender. Ensuring gender equality and opportunity for girls in terms of education and health will, we believe, contribute to more prosperous society. This underpins our priority around the world, including Nepal.

How about climate change in the Himalaya?

Canada is working with a number of organisations on the issues of

climate change. International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has funded various research dealing with effects to climate change in the mountainous regions, water management and irrigation techniques to ensure that the impacted population is benefitted. Canada is playing a leadership role to address the issues of climate change, our Prime Minister and political leaders have been vocal about it not only in Canada or for Canada but globally.

Is there a backlash within Canada to your government's liberal immigration policy?

We don't have the same sentiments that have been expressed in the number of other countries around

the world about opening up on the immigration process. Canada, not only now, but in the future will continue to rely on immigration to support our economic growth. Canada is settling Syrian refugees in an informed way to ensure that our institutions can manage the settlement to ensure support for the refugees. With Permanent Residence we have a robust process in place so that growth is managed in a responsible way.

Were you able to share Canada's experience on federalism and autonomy, especially vis-à-vis Quebec, with Nepali leaders?

During my meeting with Prime Minister Deuba we discussed Nepal's transition to federalism and the movement towards democracy. Despite the challenges, the progress and success has been quite noteworthy. It is not easy to promulgate a new constitution and bring into force for the first time municipal election. I think the federal election is a great thing and it moving to a right direction. From Canada's experience, I think the challenges of going into a federalism would be significant because it not easy to implement a new electoral systems at different sub-national levels.

prabhu Bank BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish on Chandragiri

Turkish Airlines and Chandragiri Hills Cablecar have entered a collaboration under which customers and employees



one company will get discounts on services provided by the other company. (See page 12)

A330 for Shiraz-Doha



Qatar Airways has upgraded its operation to Shiraz in Iran from an Airbus A320 to the 260-seater Airbus A330.

Cathay's new flights



Cathay Dragon is starting a new four weekly service between Hong Kong and Nanning in Guangxi, beginning 8 January.

Smart 4G



Smart Cell has launched 4G service in Kathmandu and Pokhara, with plans to extend to Chitwan, Nepalganj and Birganj.

Leading the way

Himalayan Airlines has been awarded 'Leading New International Airlines in South



Asia' at South Asian Travel Awards. A Nepal-China joint venture that started in 2014 currently flies to Doha, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai and Dammam.



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The lyrical life of Desmond Doig

Editor, writer, painter, designer, photographer, expeditioner, conservationist, Renaissance man, and a Kathmandu everyman

The flowers in the Shangrila Hotel garden in Lazimpat were newly planted, and the trees still small and immature. I sensed Desmond Doig's arrival without turning in my chair – the air was charged with energy as he swept onto the lawn with a posse of acolytes and armfuls of architectural drawings. Desmond was never one to travel alone. "Hello, la. What a glorious day!" he called to me, before issuing instructions with much arm waving to those in his wake.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

Although his name may no longer be a household word in Kathmandu and Kolkata – "Cal" as he called it – his lyrical influence and ringing enthusiasm still reverberates. Desmond was an editor, writer, painter, designer, photographer, expeditioner and conservationist – a Renaissance man, although more accurately a Kathmandu everyman. After he retired here in the late 1970s, his passion for the Valley's magic never failed to inspire us, and he delighted in its vibrant living



artistry and people – the "ethnic mosaic" and "crucible of culture" to use his own words.

Born of Anglo Irish parents in India, Desmond studied in Kurseong, served with the Gurkhas in WWII, and made his name as a reporter with The Statesman. His weekly Artist's Impressions series captured Calcutta's fast-vanishing old buildings and monuments

before they disappeared forever. As founding editor of The Junior Statesman, a cult youth magazine of yesteryear known as just JS, he hired a team of legendary journoes including Jug Suraiya and Dubby Bhagat. He was first to bring the world's attention to an obscure Albanian nun named Mother Teresa, and with his friend Sir Edmund Hillary pursued a 1963

quest for the yeti in the high Himalaya.

Desmond's sure taste and design style can still be enjoyed in the oasis gardens of the Malla and Shangrila hotels that he landscaped, and the original concept of the Shangrila Hotel reflects his legacy. His poetic watercolours and delicate drawings decorate the walls of many Kathmandu homes,

including my own, presenting the verdant Valley that he loved so intensely and recalling altogether more innocent times. I also have the only known oil that Desmond ever painted, a portrait of me in 1980 adorned with enigmatic griffin imagery.

Once ensconced in the cosy, chaotic Panipokhari house opposite the then-American Embassy, Desmond's myriad talents seemed to blossom in the sparkling air of his beloved "emerald valley". Kakani and Tiger Tops were occasional escapes, but mainly Desmond was hard to extract from his home. His book titles show the whimsical nature of his attachment: Look Back in Wonder, In the Kingdom of the Gods, and My Kind of Kathmandu, the volume that his best friend Dubby Bhagat faithfully produced to honour his memory, and which many moons ago they entrusted me with the grave responsibility of delivering the suitcase of original watercolours to his London publisher.

Desmond's friendships ranged through Himalayan royalty to the most humble of artists and artisans. He was unfailing in his encouragement of the young and talented. Occasionally he would take time out to commentate a movie or help me with a special event. He persuaded his protégé Yeshe Tshering (now my brother-in-law) to be the Great Khan with Hollywood actor Michael York as Marco Polo for a rather dubious commercial. ("How did you get here, Marco Polo?" "In a way, Great Khan, that you can never imagine. On Cathay Pacific Airlines!")

It was Desmond's idea to arrange the first lamp-lit al fresco dinner in Bhaktapur's Nyatapola Square to celebrate travel pioneer Lars-Eric Lindblad's birthday. One of his best stories was taking a group of posh Brits on a sightseeing tour of Kathmandu. As the bus paused in the heart of Durbar Square, a fruity voice rang out disapprovingly from the back seat: "Awful lot of people hanging around doing nothing!"

Desmond's eclectic dinners usually featured Burmese curries with coconut, peels of laughter, and conversation resounding with tales of historic Himalayan personalities – imitations of Sikkim queen Hope Cook's voice were a speciality. He loved rural picnics and special occasions, and contributed the "From Ballet to Belly" cake at Boris Lisanevich's 75th birthday party. The then-British Ambassador was a particular favourite, memorable for his vague demeanour and fondness for gin-and-tonics, and for the lunch when he mistook a poached egg starter for "lovely fish". Dubby and I were still laughing about "lovely fish" last time we met. 🍷

nepalitimes.com

For more pictures go online.

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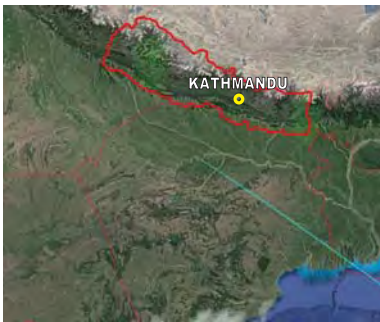
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The low pressure area fanned by the westerlies passed through Nepal early this week, and although we predicted precipitation we'd never have been able to forecast that freak hailstorm over Kathmandu Valley on Saturday night. The trough dumped at least 0.5m of snow on the high passes, and brought the mean temperatures to 4 Celsius below normal in the city. The sun will be out now, although morning mist mixed with smog will blanket Kathmandu most mornings. temperature will climb to more normal levels.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
24° 11°	24° 11°	24° 11°

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Superbike

Cargo bicycles can ease daily chores, save money and transform businesses

GOPEN RAI

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Are you a local entrepreneur pondering an auto loan? Forget it, says a local bicycle maker, who believes his machines can do the job for you. Designed and built in Nepal, Portal Cargo Bikes were first tested in 2014, targeting local entrepreneurs and social businesses. Happy with the reaction, the company's American founder Caleb Joel Spear officially launched the venture in September. "Portal is a social business on a mission to develop the world's most innovative and adaptable bicycles that transform lives and power businesses," says Spear, who made his first cargo bicycle

by hand in 2004 for his own use in Kathmandu. A successful bicycle entrepreneur in the United States, he says businesses can use human pedal power to make deliveries while families make them a part of their daily chores and even to deliver children to school. One bike can carry over 150kg of cargo, excluding the driver. Spear moved to Nepal in 2013 with an aim to introduce innovative bicycles to transform peoples' lives. Portal Cargo cycles are available in 'long-tail' and 'mid-tail' and come standard with seven gears, front disc brakes, extra strong wheels, and heavy-duty parts and components. The parts are imported from Taiwan and the bikes assembled in Nepal. Both versions of the cargo bikes sell for Rs 32,500.

Dustin Alarid, administrative director at Portal Cargo Bikes told *Nepali Times* he believes the venture can have a major impact in Nepal: "Cargo bicycles are essential for people who can't afford motorbikes. They are an affordable first vehicle for businesses." After his master's degree in Development Studies from Kathmandu University, Alarid joined Spear to launch Portal Cargo Bikes. Bharat Prasad Koirala, a entrepreneur in Chakupat, Lalitpur uses the bicycles to transport products: "This cargo bike is equivalent to a delivery van for me since I can make multiple deliveries in a day." Koirala is one of the first to deploy the cargo bike since the pilot project in 2014 to supply sanitary pads, napkins and kitchen

items to shops located along narrow alleyways. "My business increased compared to the time when I was using Indian bicycles. This bike is much more suitable for small scale businesses like mine to transport goods," he adds. The cargo cycle has another unique feature: it can power a grain thresher, sheller or grinder – ideal for farmers who can use the multi-purpose pedal power on the farm as well as to transport the produce to market. The devices can be attached to the transmission wheel and powered by pedalling. The cycle has a motorcycle-style kickstand so riders can also sit on the bike when it is stationary. Portal Cargo Bikes plan to open a showroom in Narayanghat targeting the Tarai market in

2018, and to start focusing on exporting the cycles in the longer term. Currently, the company works out of its showroom in Jhamsikhel, where potential customers can take the bikes out for a test spin. 🇳🇵



Local entrepreneur Bharat Prasad Koirala uses Portal Cargo Bike for deliveries. He couldn't afford a van but he has no regrets. Portal Cargo Bike is making his business efficient along the city's narrow alleys. Watch video online to see the bike in action. nepalitimes.com

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Imja in 1955 is a debris-covered glacier, which has seen its ice melt since the end of the Little Ice Age in the 19th century. This process has been accelerated by post-industrial global warming.

ERWIN SCHNEIDER



Pheriche in 1956

FRITZ MÜLLER



Pheriche in 2007 where the huts now have corrugated metal roofs, the Khumbu Khola has expanded due to glacier upstream, and there is less ice on the surrounding peaks.

Khumbu then, and

A photograph captures an instant. But we can represent time and the change it brings by repeat photography. Pictures taken decades, or even a century apart, show us how the world has changed and is changing. Nowhere is before-and-after photography as dramatic as in portraying climate change, urbanisation and the rapid transformation of a culture.

Alton Byers is a mountain geographer, conservationist and climber specialising on the impact of climate change in high altitude areas. He did his PhD on the changes of vegetation in the Khumbu, and knows the area well, both the good and bad of how the region has been transformed by tourism, rising living standards and, lately, global warming.

Byers has chosen repeat

photography as the ideal medium through which to document change.

“It provides an effective educational tool that quickly and dramatically illustrates changes in glaciers, forest cover and cultural landscapes over time,” Byers says.

Indeed, his slim new volume *Khumbu Since 1950* does just that: tell the visual story of how much the land of the Sherpa people has changed in the past 70 years. The region is better documented visually than other parts of Nepal because the first mountaineering expeditions to Mt Everest started arriving in the early 1950s.

Global warming has been so rapid that even in that short span of time (in a planetary, geological terms) one can see shrinking glaciers, receding snow lines, scars of flashfloods, increased forest cover in some places, and how

mountaineering income has raised living standards and led to the visible growth of Namche Bazar, Tengboche and other towns.

Byers sourced old photographs from Charles Houston who was the first western climber to visit the southern approaches to Mt Everest in 1950. He collected images by John Hunt and Charles Evans both from the 1953 British Expedition,



as well as the Austrian climber-cartographer Erwin Schneider’s glacial panoramas from 1955.

Interestingly, Schneider’s maps of the Everest region from that period show glaciers where today there are large lakes like Imja (*Byers pictured left above the lake*). There are also rare photographs of the Khumbu Glacier from Swiss-Canadian glaciologist Fritz Müller who was part of the Swiss Mt Everest Expedition in 1956. Byers himself first visited the region in 1973 and has his own archival photos from that visit.

Repeat photography essentially means going to the same photopoint where the original picture was taken, in the same season, at the same time of day, in similar weather and shoot an ‘after’ picture of the same place. The findings are dramatic in more ways than

one. The thinning of snow and ice cover was, as expected, the most visible change. However, contrary to the scientific consensus of the time, it looks like the Khumbu did not suffer much denudation of vegetation, in fact the book shows some marked increase in forest cover after the Sagarmatha National Park was set up and as local conservation initiatives took effect.

Byers is donating the book to schools and monasteries in the Khumbu region. He is also returning next year to train two Nepali and US graduates in repeat photography methods who can replicate other archival photos, and interview local people to find out about the changes. The book is being launched in January 2018 in Kathmandu, and the captions will be translated for a Nepali edition.

Kunda Dixit



The Pokhalde Glacier on Kongma La in 1956.

FRITZ MÜLLER



By 2007, the glacier had completely melted away.

ALTON BYERS



Imja in 2014 with global warming having melted the permanent ice in the basin to create a lake 2km long, 550m wide and 50m deep. It is calving at a rate of 52m/year.

ALTON BYERS



Floods from melting

ALTON BYERS



Dingboche in 1977, with Mt Lhotse looming on the horizon.

B JEFFRIES



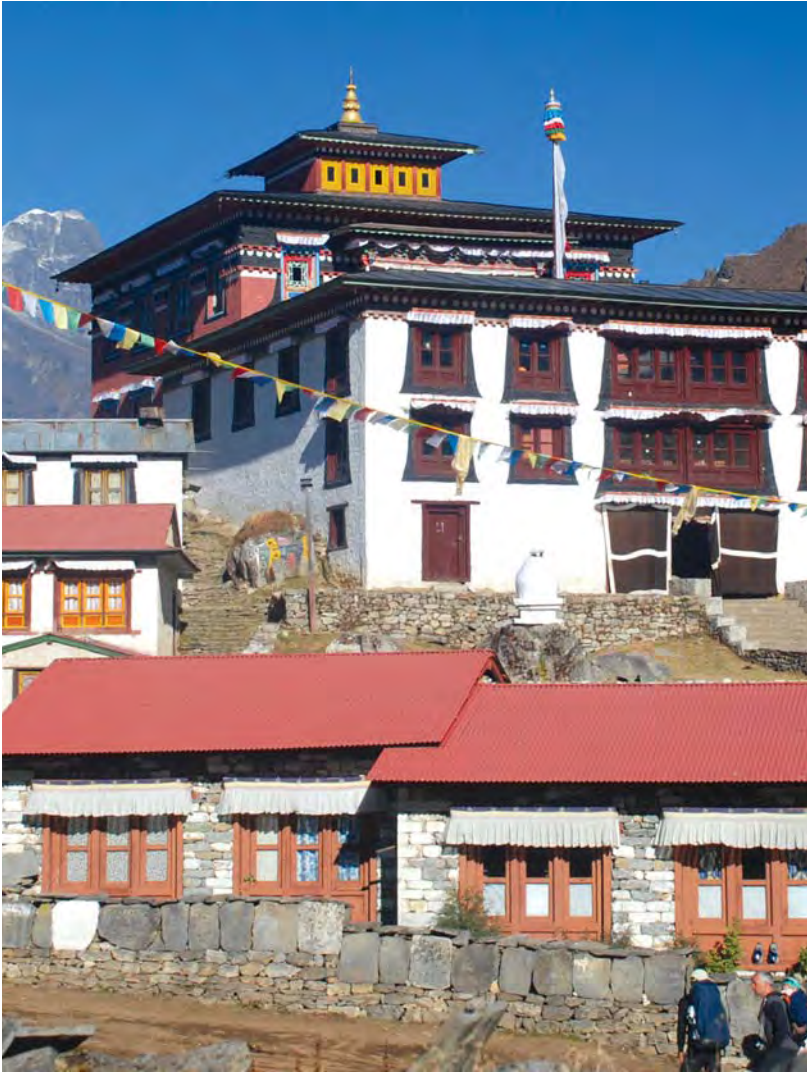
Dingboche in 2011 with new lodes, while many of the older slate-roof buildings remain.

R GARRARD



Tengboche Monastery in 1953

JOHN HUNT



The restored monastery in 2007, with upgraded lodges.

ALTON BYERS



Namche Bazar in 1973. Most trekkers in those days stayed in people's homes and potato fields were used as camp sites.



Namche Bazar amphitheatre in 2015.

now



Khumbu Since 1950

Cultural, Landscape, and Climate Change in the Sagarmatha (Mt Everest) National Park, Khumbu, Nepal

By Alton C Byers, Ph D
Vajra Books, Kathmandu 2017
120 pages Rs 1,000
vajrabooks@hotmail.com

EVENTS



Film Southasia

Save the date to watch your favourite films from the list of 63. SAARC country entries include 12 documentaries of dissent and six student entries. 2-5 November, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, <http://www.filmsouthasia.org>, (01) 5552141, 9841908528

FRIDAY, 3 November

MAJLIS

10.30 am Dancing with Dolly (72')
12 pm Daughters of the Curved Moon (90')
1.45 pm The Books We Made (68')
3.10 pm A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness (28')
Is it too much to ask? (30')
4.30 pm Ask the Sexpert (81')
5.45 pm Panel Discussions (60')

GAUSHALA

10:45 am Re Tracing Freedom: Goa Chapter (22')
Sawari (5')
11:25 am The Unbearable being of Lightness (45')
12:20 pm March March March (18')
In the Shade of Fallen Chinar (17')
The Scar (23')
1.30pm Holy Cow (59')
2.40 pm Muzzaffarnagar These Days (147')
5.20 pm Campus Rising (74')



BAGGIKHANA

10 am Prison Sisters (90')
11:40 am Burma Storybook 81 min 7:00 PM Satsaal in Inferno (90')
1:15 pm Kairana: After the Headlines (27')
Ma Yan Chan: Waves of Transition (29')
2:30 pm Last Days. Last Shot (53')
3:30 pm Perween Rahman: The Rebel Optimist (66')
5 pm Demons in Paradise (94')

COURTYARD

7 pm Satsaal in Inferno (90')

SATURDAY, 4 November

10:00 am A Delicate Weave (62')
11:15 am Lyari Notes (70')
12:40 am Ima Sabitri (57')
1:55 pm Soz - A Ballad of Maladies (85')
3:35 pm Rasan Piya (80')
5:10 pm Even When I Fall (90')

BAGGIKHANA

9:30 am Save Gangamaya (90')
11:15 am Nicobar, a long way... (60')
12:30 pm Himalayan Refugee (28')
The Unreserved (60')
2:30 pm Sri Lanka, Ghosts of War (56')
3:30 pm Trembling Mountain (83')
5:05 pm Lock and Key (83')

GAUSHALA

10 am Discussion on Documentaries of Dissent (120')
12:50 pm Shepherdess of the Glaciers (74')
2:25 pm K2 and the Invisible Footmen (54')
3:45 pm Worker's Voices (58')

COURTYARD

7 pmThe Cinema Travellers (96')

SUNDAY, 5 November

MAJLIS

10:30 am Hospital (59')
11:45 am The Running Hawker (95')
1:35 pm Fireflies in the Abyss (88')
3:20 pm Up Down and Sideways (83')
5:00 pm Roshi(10')
Machines 75

BAGGIKHANA

10:00 am The Worker's Cup (89')
11:40 pm Overruled (52')
12:50 pm Famous in Ahmedabad (30')
1:30 pm Born Behind Bars (52')
2:40 pm Afghanistan Night Stories (66')
4 pm Nuclear Hallucinations (55')
5:05 pm The Color of My Home (World Premier) (65')

COURTYARD

7 pm Among the Believers (84')

MUSIC



Classical concert,

Brendan Evans and The Righteous Girls will be performing as part of the Gharana Musical Festival 2017, which runs until 4 November in selected venues. 3 November, 5:30 onwards, Le Sherpa, Lazimpat, Bansbari, Rs1,500, Rs350 (students), 9861631197

Lakshya Live,

Lakshya band is back with its rich original folk music for a live performance. Reserve your seats. 5 November, 7-11pm, Trishara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200



Songs of the Himalayas,

Don't miss this musical treat featuring Nepal's Singing Nun, Ani Choying Drolma, and Bollywood music director Shantanu Moitra. 19 November, 6pm, Rastriya Naach Ghar, Kantipath, Rs10,000 (includes dinner and meet and greet with artists), Rs5,000, Rs3,000 and Rs2,000 (Balcony), 9801141261

Tattwa live,

Make your weekend memorable at Shambala Garden with a taste of barbeque and live performances by Tattwa Band, just Rs2,000 per person (net). Every Friday, Shambala Garden, Hotel Shangri-La, (01) 4412999

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 3 November

The crime-comedy movie Fateko Jutta is based on the lives of people living in Nepal-India border. Directed by Naresh Khadka, the movie revolves around the life of an aspiring don. Priyanka Karki, Saugat Malla, Kameshwar Chaurasiya and Rabindra Jha are in the lead roles. ' I am sorry' song from the movie is already a hit on YouTube with more than five million views.

DINING



Bubbly brunch,

Bubbly brunch, Book your seats and enjoy Saturday brunch with friends and family for only Rs1500 per person (net). The amazing shawarma and pasta won't let you down. Every Saturday, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Shangri-La Hotel

Prazada,

A new pick in town. Spend the weekend with good food and draft beer. Baluwatar, 9801120222



Cellar's Café,

A perfect place for breakfast, lunch or dinner. The only place in town where you can shop for wine as you dine. Lazimpat, (01) 4410463

Mezze by Roadhouse,

Spot a superstar at one of Kathmandu's most popular restaurants. Mercantile Plaza, Darbar Marg (01) 4223087



Creole cuisine,

For exotic and tantalising dishes from New Orleans, Italy, Spain, Africa, Germany, the Caribbean and Portugal Rs2,000 per person 27 October-5 November, 6:30-10pm, The Cafe, Hyatt Hotel, (01) 5171234

GETAWAY



Hotel Mystic Mountain,

Plan a weekend trip to this newly-opened exquisite resort located in the forest of Nagarkot hill. Nagarkot, (01) 4426646

Glacier Hotel,

Good value and friendly service for travellers on the lap of Lake Phewa. Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 463722, www.glacienepal.com



Kantipur Temple House,

Located in the heart of the city, this eco-friendly boutique hotel is an epitome of cultural heritage in itself. Don't forget to try the organic food. Thamel, (01) 4250131

Mango Tree Lodge,

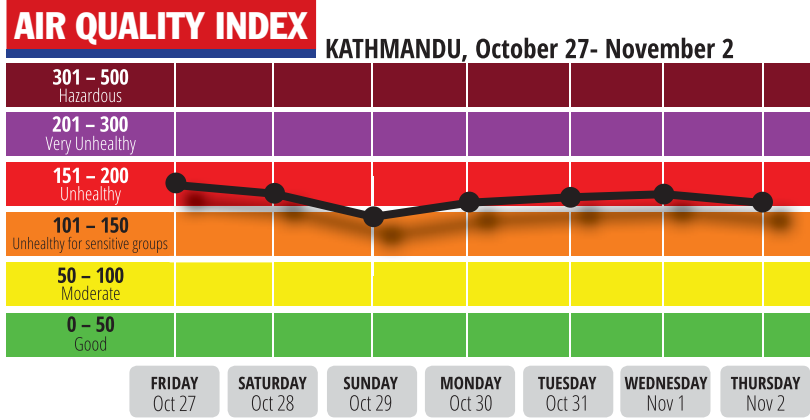
Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park. Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com

Park Village Resort,

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Himalayan Peace and Wellness Centre, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286, peace@wellness.com.np

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



Nepali Times and the U.S. Embassy in Nepal have started collaborating on this weekly graph of air pollution in Kathmandu based on measurements from the monitoring stations in Maharajganj and Phora Darbar. The Air Quality Index values in the graph represent concentrations of small, airborne particulate matter of 2.5 microns or less mostly contained in vehicular emissions, and are the most harmful to health. Higher AQI values indicate pollution levels and greater cardiovascular and cancer risk. Despite the hailstorm on Saturday and rain on Monday morning, PM2.5 concentrations remained at unhealthy levels (red and orange), indicating higher levels of pollution from traffic exhaust. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

The movement to rebuild Kasthamandap

Trail-blazing community-led initiative could be a model for reconstruction of other heritage sites

ALOK TULADHAR

The 2015 earthquake damaged more than 750 heritage structures in Nepal. Many collapsed to the ground, including the iconic Kasthamandap originally built in the 7th century at Kathmandu Durbar Square.

For over a millennium, Kasthamandap stood witness to the timeline of the civilisation of Nepal Mandal. The pavilion was used for many purposes, from royalty-sponsored, as well as community religions ceremonies. It was always a public space, where people, including travelers from Tibet and India came to shop, rest, worship or socialise.

Kanphattajogis, followers of Gorakshyanath, actually lived in the pavilion for centuries until as recently as 1966. It was a colossal, living symbol of Kathmandu's religious harmony between Hinduism and Buddhism, as many believed the physical structure of Kasthamandap from the foundation to the finial represent various teachings of the Buddha.

Until a few decades ago, community engagement was at the heart of the practice of continuing traditional culture and heritage. Urbanisation, relocation and social factors slowly started dismantling these forms and processes. Community engagement in preserving heritage took a backseat, with state institutions taking over these roles and responsibilities.



Government measures for the conservation of cultural sites and monuments have been mostly inadequate, and quite frequently, negligent, resulting in miserable failures one after the other.

What started out right after the 2015 earthquake as a campaign to bring Kasthamandap into the government's radar as much as Dharahara was, soon gathered enough public support to be able to put a brake on the Kathmandu Metropolitan City's (KMC) decision to give out the reconstruction of Kasthamandap to the lowest-bidding contractor. A concentrated series of events followed suit to drum up public sentiment towards community leadership in reclaiming lost heritage.

On May 12, 2017, the National Reconstruction Authority formally authorised the community organisation registered as the Kasthamandap Punarniman Ko Lagi Abhiyan (the Campaign to Rebuild Kasthamandap) to undertake all activities for the reconstruction of Kasthamandap, while giving

supervisory roles to the KMC and the Department of Archaeology.

The newly elected local government leaders of Kathmandu, however, have tried to downplay the community's initiative, and claim they will rebuild Kasthamandap on their own. It is common knowledge that the KMC's lack of vision and technical inability, financial regulations and inherent bureaucracy will cause disastrous results if it goes ahead to try and rebuild Kasthamandap, as proved by its previous track record of dealing with heritage reconstruction, including the glaring example of the catastrophe of Rani Pokhari.

Recently, to try and achieve a breakthrough, a think-tank group including the mayor's top advisers and a former Kathmandu mayor have devised a practical mechanism where the Kathmandu mayor will chair the steering committee that will direct and monitor



the implementing body Rebuild Kasthamandap. The status quo will hopefully end soon and open up the path to start a community-led reconstruction, creating the template for public-private partnership that many other groups can adopt in cultural restoration.

While the political and public lobbying goes on, the technical team of Rebuild Kasthamandap made up of part-time volunteers have quietly prepared the complete set of architectural drawings: plan, section and elevation of each floor, as well as the foundation, taking reference from existing photographs of the building elements and in consultation with senior architects, master craftsmen, archeologists and historians. The team is currently working on the detailed drawings, as well as the computational and modeling aspects in order to assess the structural integrity of the building as per the drawings that have been developed – using

traditional construction materials and methods.

The need for communities to come together to take ownership and become a part of the rebuilding process has never been as critical as it is now. The Rebuild Kasthamandap movement has been unprecedented process to reach out to the wider community to rekindle the values of local engagement, and to develop a sense of ownership so that they take the lead in building back a part of history that is a part of their lives.

Our ultimate goal is to see communities all over Nepal actively take the lead in rebuilding heritage sites. The physical rebuilding of Kasthamandap, with the community playing a central execution role, will be a trailblazer. The KMC and other government bodies should embrace this local initiative rather than try to undermine this genuine, innovative effort. 

The author is an active member of the Rebuild Kasthamandap Movement



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Viceroy's House

For those of us who studied in Nepal through high school, our knowledge of history was limited to the bloody conflicts between the Shahs, Thapas, Pandeys, and Ranases over the course of Nepal's unification and the Machiavellian struggle for power that followed for a few centuries. Year after year, unthinking teachers rammed the same history down our throats in varying degrees of detail while we memorised dates that didn't really serve us in the future.

We never studied the history of the world, and not even that of our nearest neighbours. Watching Gurinder Chadha's *Viceroy's House* about the partition of India and Pakistan, released earlier this year in the UK with a dubbed version a few months later in India, was therefore a jolt even though this is admittedly a bit of chocolate box of a film.

Starring the immensely likeable Hugh Bonneville (of *Downton*

Abbey fame) as Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, the film tells the story of Mountbatten and his wife Edwina's (the formidable Gillian Anderson) moral quandary when they are sent to India in 1947 to "give India back to its people".

This lofty goal quickly devolves into one of the most mired ethical predicaments of the past century when Mountbatten is faced with the intransigence of the Hindu and Muslim leaders of India, Nehru (Tanveer Ghani) and Jinnah (Denzil Smith), who refuse to budge regarding their notions of religious hegemony seeded by the British who sought to divide and rule over three centuries.

Following the anguish of everyday Hindus and Muslims as they face extreme violence brought on by the imminent division of their beloved country, and mirrored by Mountbatten's distress, the film is hard to watch even while it is so much more costume drama than neo-realism,

giving the viewer an inkling of how horrific it really must have been.

Chadha's script takes its politics from *The Shadow of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India's Partition* – Narendra Singh Sarila's book from 2006, and while the twist make for great cinema, not being a historian myself, I am unsure of the historical accuracy of what occurs in the latter half, shocking everyone onscreen and off to the core.

At a time when Nepal is on the verge of elections that will finally propel us towards federalism, *Viceroy's House* comes with the warnings of what happens if we allow our venal politicians to use race, religion, and ethnicity to divide instead of unite us. The India-Pakistan partition is a searing reminder of how hatred can triumph over unity – sewn by leaders who only look towards enhancing their own power.

Nepal has a wretched history of feudalism that has worked consistently against the poor, the marginalised, the 'others' (which includes women of all castes and ethnicities), and that continues today, no matter how much we may want to deny it. Our federal borders have been drawn, but the struggle to be inclusive will continue for decades to come. *Viceroy's House* while not perfect, is a difficult, essential, reminder of what might happen to us.



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



GOPEN RAI

ALL MEN: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba along with other Nepali Congress members launch the party's declaration for upcoming elections at their headquarters in Sanepa on Tuesday behind portraits of past leaders.



BIKRAM RAI

JOURNALIST TO POLITICIAN: Rabindra Mishra of Sajha Bibeksheel Party files his candidacy from Kathmandu 1 for the upcoming parliamentary elections in which he is pitted against Prakash Man Singh of the NC.



SANU BABU TIMLSINA

TRAGEDIES: In a deadly week on Nepal's highways 30 people were killed when a speeding overnight bus fell into the Trisuli River 40km west of Kathmandu on Saturday. A day later another 22 were killed in two other bus plunges in Gulmi and Udaypur.



REBUILD KATHMANDU

HERITAGE PLANNING: Participants inspect a miniature model of a monument destroyed in the 2015 earthquake during a Rebuild Kathmandu workshop on Saturday.



TURKISH AIRLINES

DEAL SEALED: General Manager of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Tuncer Keceli and Abhishek Bikram Shah of Chandragiri Cablecar sign a cooperation agreement on Thursday.

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BIKRAM RAI

“Elections are a life-line”

It's a miracle. But there has been little improvement in the peoples' standard of living. This is a problem, and the elections will be a measure of the people's enthusiasm.

But there is still uncertainty about elections.

I, too, thought so. Even though I was in government, I suspected there may not be local elections. These days, I am campaigning for votes and the same doubts have returned. The reason for this uncertainty is that because the transition the belief that decisions are made elsewhere is deeply ingrained. People suspect a conspiracy. Elections are also being decided by the courts, that could be why.

Is there a conspiracy to postpone polls?

I don't think so. There may be some power centres and individuals who want that to happen, but I don't think it will affect the elections. If the NC and the UML didn't want elections they could have scuttled it earlier. We are accusing each other, but both our parties are focused on elections.

So the main parties are geared for polls?

Absolutely. They are doing what needs to be done to make it happen.

But we take every opportunity to accuse each other of not wanting elections. That is politics.

People say the NC is divided about polls because of the left alliance?

There were some who thought it wasn't necessary to have elections by January, but a large portion of the party was, and is, of the view that the elections should not be postponed. The uncertainty will wipe out the NC as well because it may give time for the UML-Maoists to actually unite.

Will the dispute in the courts over ballot papers affect polls?

It won't and it shouldn't. The courts also know this. It is not necessary to postpone polls just because we have only one ballot paper. I don't think the court will insist on two ballot papers either.

How will the left alliance affect the NC's performance in elections?

Because of our electoral system and current political reality, no one party will have an absolute majority. That is why we were in talks with the Maoists as well as other parties to forge an alliance. The sudden announcement that a party in the governing coalition would unite with an opposition party was obviously going to have

an effect. We had to change our entire electoral strategy. That is why we also want to have alliances with other parties. The left alliance has given us a chance to woo back some of the democratic votes from UML supporters who do not agree with its alliance with the Maoists.

Has the left alliance pushed the UML to the left, or the Maoists to the centre?

I think the UML will shift from centre to the left mainly because of the talk of party unity with the Maoists. They will have to support the Maoist insurgency. So we have an opportunity to pull some UML voters to us, while retaining our traditional vote bank. We need to put forth more clearly our political relevance and principles.

Is geopolitics behind the left alliance?

Many political observers think so. And the democratic alliance that is being formed is also seen by some to be pushed by others. This has made us all weaker. We have to stop blaming everything on outside forces, and say that despite differences we have made our decisions ourselves.

Is there a danger of the NC being pushed to the right because of its alliance with the RPP?

The question is not whether the NC will drift to the right, but whether the RPP and others will come to the centre. But the NC now must change itself, and I am personally glad that the left alliance has given us that opportunity. I am just a little worried that the moderate left will be pushed to the far left.

Interview with NC leader Gagan Thapa in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 Oct-5 Nov

हिमाल

Himal: How important are these elections in socio-political terms?

Gagan Thapa: For three reasons: if there are no elections it will be a disaster for the constitution, political instability will increase pressures on society, and it is important to end this prolonged political transition. In other democracies there is concern about who will win, but here we are worried mainly about whether there will be elections or not.

These elections will hopefully take us towards stability, raise the public's trust in democracy, move the constitution forward, and streamline institutions of government. These elections are Nepal's life-line.

Have you found much interest among the people towards the elections?

The people may still asking 'what's in it for us' because they haven't experienced good governance due to past misdeeds of the political parties. We have achieved a lot: we have made the constitution and implemented federalism.

Dhungel in dungeon



NAGARIK

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 1 November

नागरिक

It took Nepal Police eight years to nab Maoist Centre leader Balkrishna Dhungel whom the Supreme Court had sentenced to life imprisonment. When Police Chief Prakash Aryal refused to follow the Court's order to arrest him, Aryal himself had to face a contempt of

court. It can be understood that the main reason the Police did not arrest the man was because of political pressure. It is disappointing that an accused found guilty of murder by the courts cannot be arrested by the Police. A photograph showing Dhungel sharing the podium with the Police Chief at a function (*left*) became symbolic of the state of impunity in this country. After removing a king, we now have many kings who seem to be above the law. This a worrying situation for the future of democracy in this country.

Even though Dhungel was moving around in broad daylight in full view of the public, the state was pretending it couldn't find him. Chief Justice Sushila Karki had to issue an order to the Police to catch Dhungel within one week. Even then, Dhungel was at large and after the left alliance was formed he seemed to have been even more emboldened. This confirms the suspicion that with the alliance between the UML and Maoist Centre human rights violations and transitional justice will face a setback. This will entrench impunity even more, and there will increase public outrage as well as the pain of the families of the victims of conflict.

Highway of death

Naya Patrika, 29 October

नयाँ पत्रिका

A bus heading to Kathmandu from Saptari plunged into Trisuli River on Saturday 28 October leaving 31 people dead. The overloaded bus was carrying people who were returning from the eastern district after celebrating the Chhath festival.

The accident took place in Gajuri Rural Municipality-5 in Dhading district and this section of Prithvi Highway has been marked as 'black spot' by Road Division. The driver lost control of the bus at high speed at a bend at Bange in Ghatebesi early morning. Reckless speeding is one of the major causes of bus crashes on Nepal's highways. It is mandatory to have two drivers on a

long route, but the law has never been implemented.

The Home Ministry has directed the local administration to make public transportation safe and even formed a three-member investigation committee. It is a norm for Home Ministry to form such committees right after a serious road accident, but the findings are never implemented. And everything is forgotten till the next accident.

Two years ago, the government decided to enforce special licenses for drivers of public transport vehicles to decrease the number of fatal bus crashes, but the rule also fell by the wayside. As a result, inexperienced and incompetent drivers literally have the lives of innocent passengers in their hands.

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The kingdom of cardamom

Climate change and price collapse force farmers to diversify

SONIA AWALE
in TAPLEJUNG

Nestled in the lap of the world's third highest mountain, hillside terraces here are draped in cardamom, the cash crop that has raised the living standard of the whole region. Farmers have built fancy new cement houses, sent children to schools in the city and bought motorcycles from the cardamom bonanza.

Nepal is still the largest exporter of the spice in the world, but a collapse of cardamom prices in recent years, extreme weather due to global warming and out-migration of men have left farmers in the region uncertain of their future.



"Cardamom was easy to grow and needed little or no care, and it was so profitable we switched from growing other crops to cardamom," recalls Rekha Gurung, 25, (*above*) who has seen the boom and bust cycle of the cash crop. "But then the prices collapsed, and the plantation was damaged by disease."

Sujan Dahal (*below*) still remembers the day when his father



PHOTOS: SONIA AWALE

brought the first large cardamom seed to plant in their farm. The family was making up to Rs 2,900 per kg from the cardamom harvest, but in the past two years the price has gone down to Rs 660 per kg. Says the 44-year-old farmer: "I wish there was a stable market price for us, and the government cushioned us from the fluctuations."

Although there is a lot of attention to how climate change is affecting agriculture across the Himalaya with erratic monsoons and extreme weather, for farmers here the drastic decrease in cardamom prices has been much more damaging.

Large cardamoms, also known as 'black gold' were introduced to Eastern Nepal from Sikkim in 1960s, and is now cultivated in over 40 districts, with Taplejung being the biggest producer. The spread of cardamom and the oversupply brought down prices.

Some 65% of farmers in Taplejung depend on the cash crop for extra income. They sell the pods to middlemen, who in turn trade with wholesalers in Bhadrapur or across the border in India. Higher production also has not improved productivity, and farmers sell raw cardamom which means they have not benefited as much from the processed or value-added crop. In addition, increased dependence on just one crop has made farmers vulnerable to price fluctuations.

The Kathmandu-based regional research centre ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) through its Himalica Project is trying to change this by encouraging farmers to diversify not just to other crops, but also benefit from using different parts of the cardamom plant for handicrafts and processed food, as well as promote homestay tourism in the farms.

"We are encouraging diversification from the monoculture to bee-keeping, fruits, vegetables to reduce the dependency and risk for farmers in cardamom is reduced," says Surendra Raj Joshi of the Himalica initiative (*below*).



Cardamom is a sensitive plant and needs shade, good drainage and proper soil conditions, and is susceptible to global warming and pest infestation. Which is why farmers are encouraged to inter-crop for shade management and



Farmers without

Nepali Times accompanied ICIMOD Director General David Molden on a field trip to Taplejung to look at the centre's attempt to share the experience of Nepal's cardamom farmers with those in Sikkim and Bhutan.

Nepali Times: Hows much has climate change affected farmers here in Taplejung?

David Molden: Climate change is felt strongly across the Himalayan region. We probably hear more about glaciers melting. But here in the field, talking with the farming community, we see the impact is quite strong.

Farmers are reporting different kinds of pests and diseases, increased heat and changing rainfall patterns. They have had to think of

newer ways of farming.

Here in Taplejung we have been working with farmers to see some options to adapt to climate change. People grow cardamom which is highly sensitive to water, soil conditions and temperature.

Here, like in this farm, we have fantastic examples of people using varieties of techniques to manage their cardamom terraces using fertiliser made of animal urine and herbs, which acts both as a water source and pesticide.





use *jholmal* bio-fertiliser for pest control and soil fertility. They are also encouraged to store rain in ponds to recharge groundwater for the dry season.

Harka Gurung, 40, (*above*) is a farmer who has adopted all these methods and is an example of how innovation and hardwork can make farming good business in Nepal. His terrace farm on a slope below Taplejung is brimming with cardamom intercropped with kiwi, greenhouses for tomatoes, vegetables and shitake mushrooms, and has initiated vermicomposting for selling at local markets. Gurung is also drying his own cardamom in an energy-efficient stove, and employs dozens of local farmhands.

“Cardamom was profitable enough, but I chose to add other crops because the price kept fluctuating and it ensured a steady income,” says Gurung, carrying his baby daughter. “This also means

my family does not have to eat pesticide-laden vegetables from the market.”

Himalica has brought cardamom farmers from across Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan to look at Gurung’s farm as a model under the Kangchengjunga Landscape initiative so they can replicate his ideas in their own farms.

“One way to respond to climate change is more income for cardamom farmers so they have more options, this farm is a fantastic example of that,” says David Molden, Director General of ICIMOD. (See interview.)

Large cardamom is one of the four products besides tea, coffee and lokta paper in the Nepal Trade Integration Strategy 2016 because of its potential for export income to reduce the country’s trade deficit. At a recent launch of the program, Commerce Secretary Chandra Kumar Ghimire said cardamom exports needed value-added growth.

The SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers (SABAH) has been doing just that by collaborating with ICIMOD to develop and market a range of cardamom-based drinks, candies, spices and even accessories like bags, purses, and mats made of cardamom fibre. (See box.)

Says Robina Man Amatya of



SABAH (*above*): “We are trying to improve farmers’ income from cardamom and other raw material by going one step forward to produce value-added products. We ensure quality control and find a market for these finished goods in Nepal and abroad.”



Large cardamom is not just your regular spice, not anymore. Watch this video to find out about drinks, cosmetics and accessories made of cardamom. And travel to Taplejung to see farmers adapt to low prices and climate change.

nepalitimes.com



Tri-nation landscape

Eco-systems do not respect boundaries between countries -- rivers, forests, wildlife, and even the weather pass across them as if they did not exist.

Which is why the Kathmandu-based research centre on the Himalaya, ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) has designated seven ecologically fragile areas that need trans-boundary protection. One of them is the Kangchenjunga Landscape which covers a 25,000 sq km area in eastern Nepal, Sikkim and West Bengal in India and Bhutan below the world’s third highest mountain.

Glaciers of the Kangchenjunga massif feed some of the major rivers in the region like the Tamor, Teesta and Torsa. Heavy monsoon rains and enormous altitude variation gives the area one of the most diverse flora and fauna of any mountain region on earth with 4,500 species of plants, 160 mammals, 580 birds and 600 butterfly species. The area is especially rich in orchids with more than 500 varieties, as well as 40 types of rhododendrons.

Many of the animals here are endangered, and some are found nowhere else on the planet, including the snow leopard, red panda, takin, black bear, musk deer, tigers and elephants -- all are protected in the region’s 16 national parks and nature reserves.

ICIMOD hopes to establish habitat linkages across national boundaries through the Kangchenjunga Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KLCDI) under a 20-year strategic plan agreed between Nepal, Bhutan and India for the 7.5 million people who live here.

“We are trying to prove that the border is not a barrier for exchanging experiences and ideas,” says KLCDI Coordinator Nakul Chhetri. “And the great advantage is that we literally speak the same language across the three countries: Nepali.”

In Nepal’s eastern districts, Sikkim or western Bhutan, the people’s livelihoods are similar, they farm more or less the same crops, depend on eco-tourism, and they are all impacted by climate change.

Cardamom is a major cash crop in the region, but the recent collapse of cardamom prices has affected farmers hard in all three countries.

ICIMOD is using the Kanchenjung Landscape partnership to diversify cropping and enabling farmers to cope with erratic weather as a result of global warming. (*See main report, left*) The Centre is facilitating the exchange of scientists, researchers and farmers between all three countries so they can learn from each other.



“We have learnt a lot from Nepal’s farmers about how they are trying to be less dependent on one crop by growing mushrooms, fruits and other products, attracting tourists for homestay holidays, and ensuring reliable water supply,” says

Ugen Palzor Lepcha from Dzongu in Sikkim (*left*).

The KLCDI has identified joint priorities for the region that include raising living standards, adapting to climate change, ecosystem management by local communities and resource conservation.

“The added value of making cross-border activities is to bring people together so they can share their experiences in meeting the challenges of fluctuating prices, protecting livelihoods, dealing with climate change, and benefiting from eco-tourism,” says David Molden, ICIMOD’s Director General (*See interview, left*)

The KLCDI adds to another initiative to set up a ‘Vertical University’ in eastern Nepal in the Kosi Tappu to Kangchenjunga Belt to conserve eastern Nepal’s rich biodiversity. Formulated by former Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal, Rajeev Goyal, the initiative hopes to share the in-depth and inter-generational knowledge of local farmers of eastern Nepal living between Kosi Tappu at 67m above sea level to below Mt Kangchenjunga at 8586m.

Says Sikkim-based Ghanashyam Sharma of The Mountain Institute India: “The Kangchenjunga Landscape is an attempt to look beyond the nation state when it comes to eco-system management to an entire watershed to harness and share opportunities, and test them out in the field.”

Sonia Awale in Taplejung

CARDAMANIA

A three-story modern house with flashy new paint stands out from among traditional dwellings here in Taplejung. It was built by a local farmer with the bonanza he earned from cardamom sales, and is now rented by the local unit of the SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers (SABAH).

The rooms are noisy with the clatter of weaving machines. Four women in a row weave strips of cardamom stalks into elegant table mats. In another room, a dozen women are slicing kiwis and ginger produced by local cardamom farmers, others are foil packing cardamom tea into packets. The aroma of fresh cardamom pervades the whole house.

“Cardamom farmers here are dependent on middlemen, so we decided to diversify their product mix with value-added packaged cardamom commodities. We also find them a market for their produce,” says Robin Man Amatya of

SABAH Nepal.

Being the largest exporter of the spice, Nepal is a cardamom superpower, but only 5% of the harvest is consumed within Nepal. The rest goes to India and from there to the Gulf and the rest of the world where it is in demand as an ingredient in food, for medicine and cosmetics.

Kathmandu-based SABAH Nepal has been collaborating with ICIMOD to reduce the farmers’ dependence on a single cash crop and in middlemen by training them to produce finished goods which can increase their earnings.

Cardamom stems and stalks used to be just thrown away, now the delicate fibre and its unique earthy colours are used to make fabric for accessories like bags, wallets, carpets, mats and other elegant home decorations.

“We’d like to go large scale and spread these niche products to cities and the international market by ensuring quality control, training women on new designs and provide employment here,” says Amatya, who has a showroom in Pulchok in Kathmandu.

SABAH has also hired certified food safety experts so the products meet international standards, no artificial additives and chemicals are used in cardamom-infused drinks like iced tea, iced coffee, lassi and mango milk shake, which are served in its Village Cafés in Kathmandu. Cardamom-based green tea and masala are also already available in shops in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Sonia Awale

to cardamom so that the farmers can benefit even more. If we work with the government and extension agencies, then there is a better chance of it being upscaled across the region.

How exactly are farmers in the region adapting to climate change? Let’s face it, one big way to respond to climate change is more income for farmers, moving up the income ladder so they have more options with their money to manage climate change. Cardamom is important but so is diversity. One advantage of mountain area is we have high value mountain products like honey, cardamom, non-timber forest products, and range of different fruits and vegetables. We are also looking at other options like agricultural eco-tourism for example. If we employ this multi-

faceted approach, farmers have a better chance of adapting to climate change. So that even if the market price of cardamom drops, there are some other options.

So the entry point to all this is cardamom?

In this case, yes, the entry point was cardamom. But farmers need to diversify. For example, homestay tourism is a fascinating opportunity. A lot of people want to experience what it feels like to be in nature, to be a farmer. And this is a fantastic place to have that experience.

But far as development projects go, the important lesson is that you have to look beyond your one silver bullet but just a range of options, what is suitable for a certain location may not work in others. We have to work closely with communities involved to make sure those options fit in well.

borders

This isn’t just a problem unique to Nepal, right?

The cardamom belt stretches across eastern Nepal, Sikkim and West Bengal in India and some parts of southern Bhutan. We work across all those countries through what we call the Kangchenjunga Transboundary Landscape that provides a very interesting canvas for development and conservation to share lessons from cardamom farming between different countries through our Himalica program.

What we’d really like to see is upscale the program right across the cardamom belt. We are co-developing knowledge, both with farmers, agricultural agencies and also with private sector to develop an approach that is acceptable to farmers and can be readily replicated through appropriate technologies, looking at market links and ways to add value



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Bottoms up

Being the Fifth Column of the Fourth Pillar of the State as well as the mouth organ of democracy, and thanks to new safeguards in the new Constitution to forgive us our press passes, this slightly asinine media person has no qualms this week to devote these column inches to how well things are going in our Fedup Democratic Republic. Yes, today we will delve into how everything is hunky-dory here in the boondocks. (OK, you can now take away that sharp object poking into my backside. Thank you.)

The main national accomplishment this week was that the Erection Commission has done the impossible by successfully setting fire to 15 million already printed ballot papers. This is no mean feat, and much more challenging than printing 30 million new separate ballot papers

asking what more the government can inflict on us, we should be asking what together we can do to escape from its clutches.

Given the plethora of triumphs in the state's Pandora's Box, someone has to take the bull by the horns of a dilemma and open this can of worms. It is like flogging a dead horse to insist that we could very well be a fly in the ointment and not a storm in a teacup had we not already been in the aforementioned horny dilemma.

So, let's begin with this week's main achievement which is the good news that Nepal has established diplomatic relations with Eritrea. About time. I know there is always a question that springs to the minds of most Nepalis when they see a news item like that, and the question is: "Where the hell is Eritrea?"



pertinent and timely general knowledge question is that the government hasn't told us yet, so we can't tell you. It's a closely guarded secret.

As a part of Nepal's global diplomatic offensive (Official motto: "Let's be as offensive as possible.")

Nepal has also signed a Non-aggression Pact with São Tomé and Príncipe, which significantly reduces the chances of full-scale war breaking out between us. This will allay fears in many patriotic minds about threats to our national security from the Tomians, if not the Principians, so that we, as Nepalis, can rest even easier than we have been resting so far in the days to come. (Editor's note to self: Google São Tomé and Príncipe).

Given the number of candidates in forthcoming elections who are convicted criminals, mafia dons, traffickers, tycoons and typhoons, Nepal can now take a leap in the global corruption rankings from 89 to 127. This is not necessarily bad news: it all depends on whether you are counting from the bottom or from the top. Since we have traditionally taken a bottoms-up approach on these matters, this is great news: we can soon overtake São Tomé and Príncipe.

As Nepalis we shouldn't be

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