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Back to unity



GOPEN RAI

Nepalis on Thursday witnessed something they had not seen in a decade: both the ceremonial and executive heads of state offering flowers to the statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah—a divisive icon loved by many and loathed by some.

President Bidya Bhandari and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba celebrated Prithvi Narayan's birth anniversary as National Unity Day, signalling a shift in the way the state views the founder of modern Nepal.

After Prithvi Narayan's 13th descendant, king Gyanendra, was deposed by pro-democracy activists in 2006, the government of Girija Prasad Koirala cancelled National Unity Day saying Nepal's founding ruler was a feudal king.

Ex-Maoist guerrillas brought down Prithvi Narayan's statues across the country. They could not topple the one in front of Singha Darbar, so they covered it in a shroud. A section of nationalists opposed what they viewed as the Nepali version of China's Cultural Revolution, but their voices were ignored.

A decade later, as Maoists prepare to merge with the UML led by nationalist KP Oli, the Sher Bahadur Deuba government has revived Unity Day, giving re-birth to Prithvi Narayan as a unifying figure.

"Prithvi Narayan Shah should not be punished for what his descendants did," says Nepali Congress Spokesperson Bishwa Prakash Sharma. "He should

PRITHVI NARAYAN SHAH REBORN

GUEST EDITORIAL
BY SHEKHAR KHAREL

PAGE 2

be respected for giving us a sovereign and unified Nepal."

But some still resent Prithvi Narayan as a feudal lord, who they say invaded weaker principalities and annexed them to his Gorkha kingdom. They marked National Unity Day as Black Day.

"By reviving Prithvi Narayan Shah's legacy, politicians have proved they love the status quo, and do not regard our cultural diversity," says Janajati activist Om Gurung. "They masqueraded as progressive during the April Uprising, but they are now showing their true colours."

Gurung is hopeful that things will change, and that oppressed people will rise once again to challenge Prithvi Narayan's legacy. But that looks a far-fetched possibility, as nationalist Oli and ex-revolutionary Pushpa Kamal Dahal intensify closed-door negotiations to create a unified leftist party. They are hoping to rule Nepal for at least five years.

Despite his party suffering humiliating defeats in last year's elections, Deuba has managed to stay put so far. But his government has already decided to hold the Upper House elections on 7 February, after which Oli is expected to be the new Prime Minister.

Oli's second innings as PM will not be easy. When UML Chair Manmohan Adhikari became Prime Minister in 1994, he unveiled several welfare programs, a move that benefits his party to this day. But Oli may not be able to follow suit, with the state exchequer depleted and economists warning Nepal may not achieve 7% economic growth.

And, activist Govinda KC, after being arrested for contempt of court and released by the Supreme Court, will be challenging the new government even more vehemently. Oli's hatred for KC is not hidden, and his nexus with medical businesses, described by KC as mafia, is well-known. 

Om Astha Rai


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GUEST EDITORIAL
SHEKHAR KHAREL

Prithvi Narayan Shah reborn

In the heady aftermath of the 2006 Democracy Movement, new terminologies like ‘New Nepal’ and ‘*Krambhanga*’ (paradigm shift) were being bandied about to question Nepal’s established history, and images of unifying figures like Prithvi Narayan Shah or Bhanubhakta Acharya were questioned. Many got carried away by this typhoon of retroactive political correctness to question the whole historic base of the Nepali state.

Prithvi Narayan, the founder of modern Nepal, forged a unified Nepal through military conquest in the 1760-1770 period. But in scenes reminiscent of China’s unsuccessful Cultural Revolution, his statues were brought down across the country. His figure outside Singha Darbar was covered in a shroud, perhaps because the new rulers of the republic couldn’t bear to be reminded of his accomplishment.

Nepalis had been celebrating Prithvi Narayan’s birth anniversary as National Unity Day for decades. The new rulers, disciples of foreign philosophers like Karl Marx, Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong, decreed the banishment of the founding king from the holiday list. The so-called revolutionaries were so almighty that no writer, thinker or academic dared speak truth to power.

A decade later, the government has finally corrected its mistake. National Unity Day was cancelled by the post-April uprising interim government led by the Nepali Congress (NC) in 2006. But a government led by the same party decided to reinstate the holiday on Thursday.

A lot of water has flowed down the Bagmati in this period. NC leader Krishna Sitaula, who was Home Minister when unity day was cancelled, lost the election to a Hindu royalist. Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai, who coined the term *Krambhanga*, is no longer a Maoist, and is now a friend of his ex-foes in the NC.



Prithvi Narayan had his detractors, but the advocates of a unitary state have decided to reinstate him. The same people who tarred him as a feudal, exclusivist conquerer have now air-brushed him back into the history books.

Prithvi Narayan Shah’s legacy underwent a rigorous test in the past 10 years. The truth is, he was neither just the founder of a dynasty, nor a colonialist. Whether we are royalists, leftists, democrats or republicans, we all share the history of South Asia’s oldest nation state. And for that, we thank a visionary leader and remember him.



Govinda KC’s charges

1. It is an open secret that Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli possesses two citizenship certificates, and a judicial probe into this charge is warranted.
2. Parajuli has corrected his date of birth in his second citizenship card. As per his original citizenship certificate, he turned 65 (retirement age) in July 2017. It is illegal for someone who has exceeded the age limit to hold the position of Chief Justice.
3. Parajuli absolved Lokman Singh Karki (whose appointment as the head of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority was later nullified by the Supreme Court in 2015) of all the charges. And Karki returned the favour by appointing Parajuli’s nephew as a legal advisor to the anti-corruption watchdog. He abused his power, putting justice on sale and harming the reputation of the judiciary.
4. Whether Parajuli has passed his SLC exams is disputable. Chief Justice Sushila Karki’s verdict on a writ that questioned his academic qualifications and all the documents related to the case need to be reviewed. How can a man who does not even have academic certificates become Chief Justice?
5. What have the Judicial Council and the Constitutional Council decided with regards to the media reports about Parajuli’s academic and other qualifications? The original copies of the decisions made by these councils must be produced in the court.
6. A ruling by Parajuli’s bench has reversed the government’s policy on land management, directly benefitting the real estate mafia. A probe into this matter must be ordered.
7. Parajuli harmed the judiciary’s reputation once again at the expense of the state exchequer by ruling that hotels need not pay royalty for operating casinos.

- How can a judge who sells justice safeguard judicial independence?
8. Supreme Court verdicts in the cases involving Chudamani Sharma (the Inland Revenue Department’s DG arrested on corruption charges but released on general bail), Gopal Khadka (Nepal Oil Corporation head suspended by the government over corruption, but reinstated by the court) and Ncell have protected the corrupt. These cases, all after Parajuli became Chief Justice, have made a mockery of the rule of law.
 9. Parajuli awarded his relative Nahakul Subedi with three promotions (Supreme Court registrar, Registrar General and High Court Chief Judge) within just seven months. This blatant nepotism has disgraced the post of Chief Justice. He must go. So long as he stays put, our judiciary cannot be free and independent.
 10. Hours after an impeachment motion was filed against Chief Justice Sushila Karki, Parajuli assumed office as acting Chief Justice. How can an unethical person like this make the Supreme Court respectable?
 11. Kantipur was slapped with a contempt of court case for a news story that exposed how Parajuli shifted cases involving medical colleges to his own bench. Kantipur has already got a clean chit, meaning that its story was judicially proven true. The contempt of court charges against me are baseless. It is Parajuli who should face a contempt of court case.

(Govinda KC’s disposition at the Supreme Court on 8 January. The court released KC on Wednesday, seeking Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli’s citizenship and academic certificates to look into the allegations levelled against him. KC was arrested on a contempt of court case after publicly calling Parajuli ‘corrupt’.)

ONLINE PACKAGES



PAINTING GODDESSES

The white-washed gate at Patan Dhoka is being adorned with intricate paintings of Astha Matrika. For painters working on the project, it is not only about beautifying the space but also going back to their roots. Join us as we talk to the artists about their journey from modern to traditional art.



COFFEE MAN

Kazu Tanikawa worked as a paragliding instructor in Pokhara for 10 years. But the Japanese national is now pursuing his passion of roasting coffee beans. Take a trip down to the Valley of Lakes where Tanikawa and his Nepali wife are promoting coffee culture among the locals.

A HARD GOODBYE

The day I heard I had just finished climbing mount Vinson Massif in Antarctica and had, after many days of storms, just arrived at Patriot Hills camp waiting to fly back to South America (‘Sir Ed’s funeral’, Lisa Choegyal, #891). I immediately called Peter Hillary by satellite phone to give my condolences to the family. Very sad day.

Bryon Smith

■ Around midnight on the eve of Ed’s funeral, Mike Gill and I walked up to the cathedral because it had been announced that it would be open all night to give the people their last chance to file by his coffin to show their respect. People had been filing by for several days so Mike and I didn’t expect there would be a big queue at midnight but there was. It stretched for several suburban blocks and in fact we never found its end. It’s as though every family in Auckland said to themselves, this is our last chance to show our affection. I particularly recall half a kilometer along the queue a large Indian family including a 12 year old boy holding a large white flower plucked from his garden as they left home.

Michael Charles Dillon

WELL DONE

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) falling from 59.3% in 2006 to 28.6% in 2014 is indeed impressive (‘28.6%’, editorial, #891). Hats off to all those who have worked relentlessly in laying the foundation earlier and in the past eight years on the various areas/dimensions that make up the MPI. A lot of the work done by government, NGOs and others led to this decline in MPI and development aid did play a major role.

Poudyal

DIRTY POLITICS

Silence of Deuba, Oli and Dahal in the aftermath of Dr KC’s arrest is louder than thunder. Corrupt men have come to support Chief Justice Parajuli. If anyone should be arrested and sent to jail, it should be these big three. Corrupt election commissioners, corrupt chief justice, corrupt political leaders and political gangs... at least one honest man, Dr KC, is fighting. Shame to the rest of us.

Nirmal Rana

WHAT'S TRENDING



Sir Ed’s funeral

by Lisa Choegyal

When Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers to summit Mt Everest in 1953, it gave New Zealand a hero and Nepal a benevolent mountaineer who kept returning to help the Sherpa community. The detailed account of Sir Ed’s funeral 10 years ago, when close and far-off friends gathered at his hometown to bid the hero a final farewell, got much attention online last week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

The end of the road for Bhutan’s refugees

by Jenna Kunze

The resettlement program is closing in 2018 but the remaining 8,540 refugees wait to return or move on. Our coverage of the Bhutanese refugees’ plight raised concern among readers, with many urging the government to take them in. This most read story of the past week can be found at nepalitimes.com.

Most visited online page

Game of thrones

by Om Astha Rai

Although technical issues like choosing temporary headquarters of provinces, appointing the heads of state and electing the Upper House seem to be delaying the transfer of power, the game of thrones playing out after the parliamentary polls is what is actually causing difficulties in the changing of the guard. Go online to read feedback generated by this analysis on the roadblocks to a political transition.

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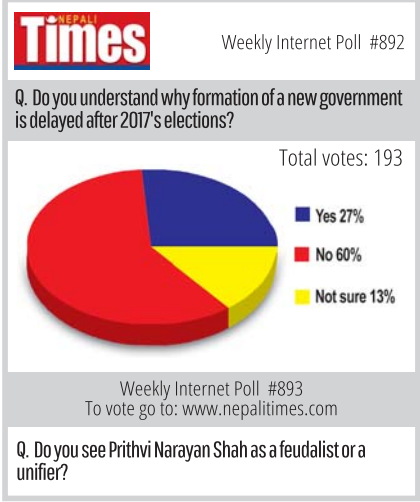
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Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Election Commissioners had unlimited discretionary powers to spend during elections last year. @Himal_Khabar investigation@ santagaha Read: http://bit.ly/2qDj6m7 #electioncommission #Elections #Nepal

dharma adhikari @dharmaadhikari
This story should have generated thousands of retweets. The headline is soft for a kada story. And interesting: ‘media houses that refused to give them kickbacks were not given public service announcements’. Wonder which media houses

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
As the resettlement program ends in 2018, remaining #refugees from Bhutan who spent 25 years in eastern Nepal are left with two options: repatriation to the country that exiled them, or assimilation in a country whose constitution denies them #citizenship.http://bit.ly/2AzFPix

EmperorofficeCream @IceEmperorof
When hundreds of thousands of Nepalis have become citizens in the West, and thousands more given extended visas, why not show greater compassion to the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese remaining here?



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Re-imagining tourism

Nepal is not land-locked, but land-linked, with untapped potential for Indian, Chinese and domestic Nepali tourism

In 2017, Nepal’s tourism arrival figures nearly reached 1 million for the first time. But Nepali outbound tourists spent more than what foreign tourists spent in Nepal last year.



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

Like everyone else, Nepalis love to travel, see exotic places, enjoy good food and drinks and shop till they drop. A Hong Kong immigration official once asked me politely: “Nepal is supposed to be a poor country. Yet, why is it that we see many passports in which the occupation says farmer and yet the purpose of visit is tourism?”

Nepalis have historically always been on the move, whether to trade, work, to fight world wars, or for pilgrimage. They brought back stories and gifts, encouraging more to travel. With ever-greater disposable income, mobility and social media posts, we can expect word of mouth publicity prompting more Nepalis to travel abroad in the years to come.

The tourist spending figure also does not take into account what Nepali domestic tourists spend within Nepal for food and



ZIYU LIN

drinks, which is often more than foreigners. But they do not like to pay for the room, because historically we never paid for the ‘floor’, or straw mat or rug on the floor.

Given that Nepali tourists outnumbered foreigners in Pokhara this holiday season, there is a ripe opportunity for hotels and lodges if they want numbers to grow.

The two-rate system for Nepalis and foreigners is also an issue: Nepali passengers are regularly off-loaded from flights and tourist buses. Yet a country of 30 million

with nearly 2.5 billion people right next door, tourism has huge market potential.

At a recent interaction in Bhaktapur we explored how the three markets could build more synergy. How can a Chinese or Indian tourist be convinced to spend more time in Nepal? When the new Bhairahawa and Pokhara airports are completed, tourists can be more spread out, and the sky would literally be the limit.

Nepal is not land-locked, but land-linked, and we can get far more tourists coming by land as

highways linking the country to China and India are upgraded. Millions of tourists can arrive by bus, rail, car, motorbike, or simply walk across.

On a recent flight, a group of Malaysian tourists proudly told me they were carrying bags of ‘old clothes’ to give away during their trip to Nepal. Shame on the firms making poverty a tourism product. Charity tourism takes visitors to orphanages and homes for destitute women and schools, where they display ragged and dirty children as tourism products. Nepal can never

get its true worth if we always sell the country as a cheap destination. Animals in cages and in chains, like the elephant breeding centre, and even safaris in Chitwan have no future either as animal rights activism grows.

The looming question is whether we will have enough service sector workers if we saturate the ‘off season’ with Nepali, Indian and Chinese tourists? In the Khumbu, ‘going south’ at the end of the peak trekking season means flying off to New York, California or Sydney to see relatives. Most qualified Nepali workers are in hotels in Dubai and Doha. One reason Nepali tourism entrepreneurs are not interested in investing in business expansion is because the children are not keen to come back to take up the family business.

Tourism can and should be an end but also a means to meet conservation goals and improve the quality of life for the local people. While the Chinese want to buy tiger bones as an aphrodisiac and Indians seek shawls made from Tibetan antelope wool, tourism could provide a way to experience these exotic animals in the wild so that tourists no longer desire to purchase illegal wildlife products.

Competition should not be only about who can sell Nepal cheaper. The tourism sector badly needs a cultural revamp, and we need to roll out new products and services. Who will be the first to open an oxygen bar at Hilsa for elderly Indian pilgrims going to Kailash? Can the Trump tax break be converted to bringing back American tourists for long treks and safaris? 🇳🇵

Anil is President of Siddharthinc.



Sujit Acharya, Chairperson of Energy Development Council (EDC) at the first Nepal Power Investment Summit in 2016

Power investors meet

Can Nepal generate 40,000MW of hydroelectricity in 10 years and unleash a slew of downstream industries? That is the ambitious goal set by the Nepal Power Investment Summit (NPIS) 2018 taking place 27-29 January at Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

The Summit is organised by the Energy Development Council, the umbrella organisation representing the entire energy sector, both private and public. The three-day conference will target knowledge-sharing on investment in Nepal, feature renowned speakers and provide a platform for investors, contractors and financiers worldwide to expand business and make deals in the energy sector.

The Energy Mart is the highlight of the summit, gathering sponsors and their products to attract project stakeholders to make deals. More than 100 qualified hydropower projects, 20 solar generation projects, 10 transmission line projects and 13 smart city plans will be showcased at the summit.

Nepal’s topography and natural resources provide the ideal conditions for the generation of hydropower, which has so far been largely untapped. More than 6,000 rivers originate in Nepal and flow to India, while Nepal’s six main rivers actually originate in China and flow across the Himalaya into Nepal.

While Nepal has potential to generate up to 48,000MW of economically feasible hydropower, only 600MW has so far been harnessed. Although 2,000MW is expected to come online in the next 2 years, the lack of investment in energy means much of Nepal’s hydropower potential flows unused into India every year. The estimated investment opportunity of hydropower in Nepal is US\$ 80 billion.

With the country likely headed towards political stability after elections, there is a sense of cautious optimism among investors about electricity generation. According to the government’s Energy Demand Projection 2030, per capita electricity consumption can reach 700-kilowatt-hour per year by 2030, for which a total of 8,000MW will be needed.

Fortune 500 companies and equity financing firms will participate in the summit with the result that engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) financing from US\$5 million to US\$ 20 billion will be accessible. China Construction Bank, the world’s second-largest bank, will provide training on how to get access to such loans. A step-by-step exclusive book, *How to Develop a Hydropower Project*, will also be available. 🇳🇵

Ziyu Lin

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Hyundai delights
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Islington expansion
Islington College has launched a new MBA course focused on senior leadership, e-commerce, international trade and entrepreneurship. The course is in partnership with Alibaba Group, China, and UTCC, Thailand.

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What's next for the Nepali Congress?

The Pradip Giri-Gagan Thapa duo can rejuvenate Nepal's founding democratic party

After suffering humiliating defeats in all three levels of elections under the new Constitution last year, the rank and file of the Nepali Congress (NC) is now debating how the party should move forward.

The NC's old guard argue that party President Sher Bahadur Deuba need not step down, and blame candidates, internal rivalry



COMMENT
Puranjan Acharya

and national-international factors for their electoral debacle. But the NC's young turks believe that they succeeded in the past only because of a divided communist vote bank, and that their top leaders ignored the need to strengthen the party. They argue that the NC needs an overhaul if it is to counter Left unity.

Last week, Deuba and his party's young firebrand leader Gagan Thapa engaged in a public spat over the issues of leadership and reforms. While Thapa was argumentative, Deuba looked impatient and irritated.

Thapa and young NC leaders are pressing the NC's old-generation leaders to retire, allowing the new breed of energetic, idealistic and visionary democrats to emerge. They are angry, and insecure about their political future. But Deuba

does not seem to care.

To be sure, the NC has suffered humiliating defeats before, in 1994 and 2008. It bounced back, but this time the task looks far more difficult. A party that was rejected by the people in the first elections, under the very Constitution it led in drafting, is unlikely to come back easily. Nothing is impossible in politics, but the party needs to do a lot of soul-searching to regain people's trust.

The fact that the NC will be out of power for at least five years could be a blessing in disguise — its movers and shakers will get more free time to contemplate, strengthen their organisation, reform policies and get a born-again leadership in the process. The NC can reclaim its lost glory if it takes on the role of a constructive opposition instead of wasting energy on cobbling together unnatural coalitions. It needs to be watchful about the policies, programs and roadmap that the communist government will be taking in the next five years.

In the '60s, Mao Zedong said that China would not export a political ideology. But Xi Jinping, arguably the most powerful leader since the Great Helmsman, has signalled he is out to consolidate his power. This may influence the way Nepal's communists behave.

The mandate that the NC has got from last year's elections is to balance the resurgent communists, safeguarding not just democracy but also liberal values. Ahead of



BHANU BHATTARAI

the 2017 elections, the NC stood in favour of diversity by supporting a Constitution amendment bill. But its leaders failed to explain to people that their stand was for an integrated and sovereign nation. As a result, they were viewed with suspicion and people voted them out.

The NC now needs a leader who is eloquent, argumentative and idealistic. Fortunately, the party already has a leader with all these qualities: Pradip Giri. If the NC appoints Giri as its parliamentary party leader and Gagan Thapa leads the NC in the federal Parliament, the UML-Maoist government will have to act more responsibly. The NC duo will also prevent the Left alliance from morphing into a totalitarian force.

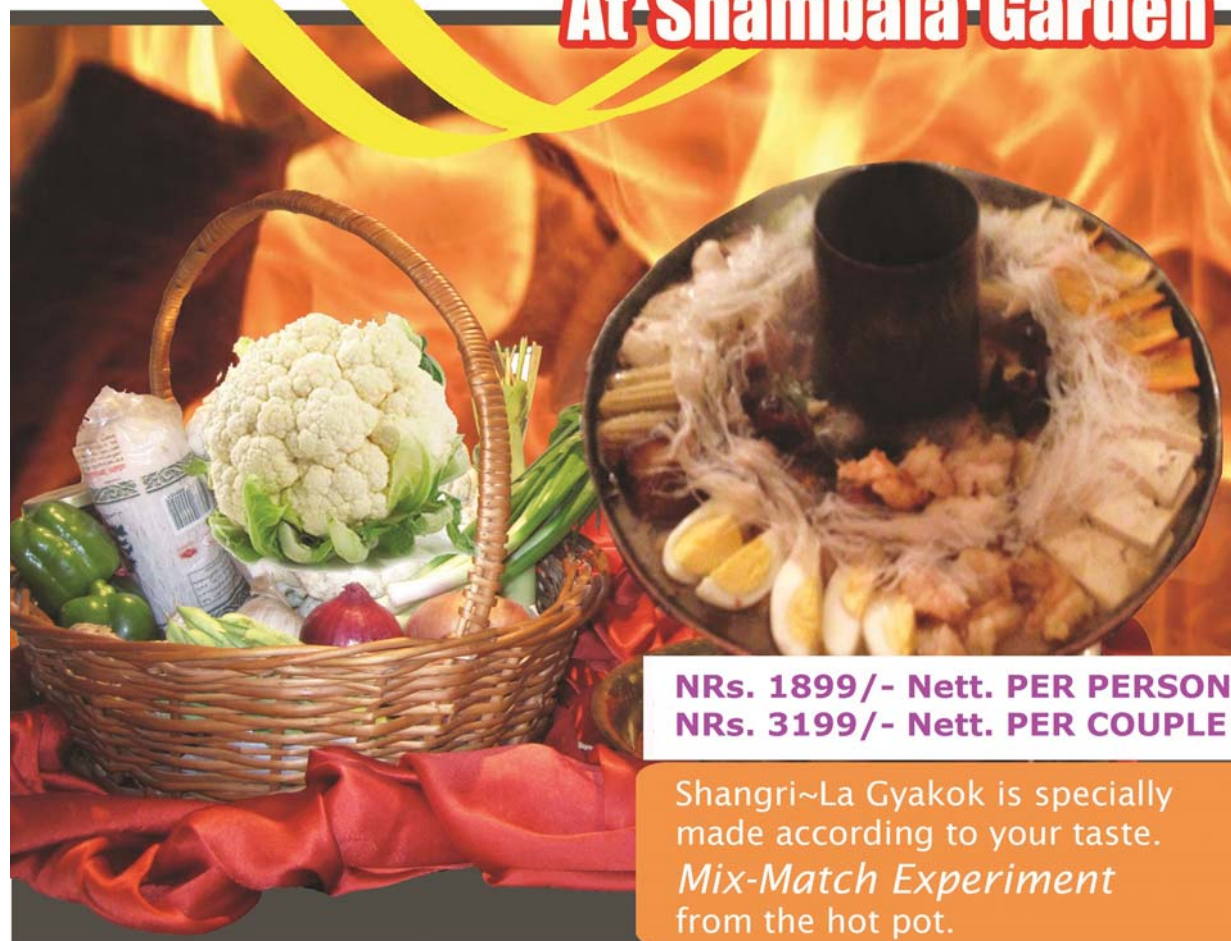
During elections, the UML-Maoist alliance effectively branded the NC as a party of the corrupt and criminals. The humbling of the NC shows that a large section of people subscribed to that description. The NC needs to shed this label, and rebrand itself as a party of patriots and democrats working to fulfil the dreams of the visionary BP Koirala. The current NC leadership is acutely incapable of doing this. If anyone can, it will be the Giri-Gagan duo. How can the NC help the farming-working class? How can it contain the outmigration of able-bodied Nepalis? How can it emerge as a party of Dalits, Madhesi and Janajatis?

For decades, the NC was dominated by BP Koirala and his clan. Deuba challenged the Koiralas, and took over party leadership. While the Koiralas are still trying to reinstate the dynasty, a resolute Deuba is trying his best to stay put.

The NC will be doomed if it doesn't extricate itself from their clutches.

Puranjan Acharya is a political analyst.

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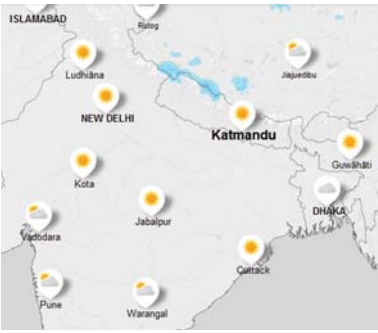
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After that sudden cold snap caused by a sudden change in prevailing winds, the minimum temperature over the weekend will be slightly higher. However, with no major westerly front on the horizon, expect bright days ahead —albeit with thicker than usual smog in Kathmandu Valley, where the city's pollution will be augmented by haze from the plains. The Tarai will continue to be fog-bound. Some passing high-altitude clouds over the weekend will keep maxima in upper teens in the Valley.

Day	Temperature	Weather
FRIDAY	17°C / 4°C	Sunny
SATURDAY	18°C / 6°C	Cloudy
SUNDAY	16°C / 6°C	Sunny

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Samjhana Pokhrel was taken to Maiti Nepal shelter for children after her mother passed away when she was five. Pokhrel is now an intern at Lumbini Medical College.



Priya Sherpa and her sister were forced to work as domestic help from a young age. She was rescued and taken to Maiti Nepal after her employer turned abusive.



As a young child Krishna Prasad Neupane slept with his family on the ground in Gausala.

Successful struggles

RAMU SARKOTA

Amidst all the scandals in the medical education sector, there are stories of struggle and sacrifice like those of interns Priya Sherpa and Samjhana Pokhrel, who rose from humble beginnings in rural Nepal and are on their way to becoming physicians.

Now 24, Pokhrel was 5 when her mother passed away in their home in Syangja. Her father was bed-ridden, and with no money she could not continue her studies so a

neighbour dropped her off at Maiti Nepal shelter for children.

Sherpa, 22 and from Jhapa, had an even more hardscrabble childhood. After she lost her mother at a young age, a neighbour took her and a younger sister to Kathmandu, where they were forced to work as domestic help, not given enough to eat and never sent to school. When the neighbour became physically abusive, Sherpa's sister ran away and reported it to police, after which both were rescued by Maiti Nepal.

Pokhrel and Sherpa were then admitted to Teresa Academy, a school established by Anuradha

Koirala of Maiti Nepal in 1998 with the aim of educating less fortunate children and orphans. So far, 250 students have graduated and many are now working as engineers, doctors, singers, or choreographers.

"I went everywhere asking for support so that the children could study. Their success today has given me a kind of satisfaction that is found rarely," says Koirala, adding that the school operates with funds from national and international donors.

As a young student in Teresa Academy, Pokhrel wanted to be a basketball player but when she excelled in her exams she decided

on a medical career. Sherpa also pursued medicine soon after getting commendable scores.

Koirala herself rescued Krishna Prasad Neupane from the streets when he was six. When the Neupane family moved to Kathmandu from Jumla 22 years ago, they sold herbs on the footpath in Gausala during the day and made the open ground their bed at night. Koirala saw their miserable condition and took Krishna to Maiti Nepal. The boy started imagining himself becoming a doctor after finishing his high school with flying colours.

Koirala then got all three of

them to study in Lumbini Medical College. Four-and-a-half years later, they are now treating patients, prescribing medication and dressing wounds in the emergency ward.

"If we hadn't arrived in Maiti Nepal, none of this would have been possible, we couldn't have found this happiness," says Pokhrel, who wishes to pursue an MD and earn a specialisation. "I want to serve the poor and victims of violence." Neupane aims to become a surgeon and work at Maiti Nepal's clinic.

Having been a victim of domestic violence herself, Sherpa knows she is fortunate and says she chose this profession so she could help others by specialising in public health.

Back at Maiti Nepal, Koirala is content: "They will soon become doctors and yet they make time to check up on me from time to time. What more does a mother need to be happy?" 🇳🇵

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RYAN CHANG

A year ago, Maru Tole restaurant owner Surendra Bajracharya got up to a rude shock: an emaciated street dog with third-degree burns was limping to his door. Someone had thrown scalding hot water at it, leaving a large patch on his left side furless.

Bajracharya was so moved he started volunteering for a neighbourhood animal management program, taking in injured, malnourished dogs and giving them canine penicillin paid out of his own pocket.

“If I had known who had thrown the boiling water on these street dogs, I would have heavily punished the person,” says Bajracharya, who blames street vendors from outside Kathmandu.

For a country that celebrates





ALL PHOTOS: RYAN CHANG



the Kukur Tihar dog festival every year, the love-hate relationship between Nepalis and free-roaming street dogs is complicated. There are an estimated 40,000 dogs on Kathmandu's streets: businesses see them as a public nuisance, they are an eyesore for tourists and considered a public health hazard.

Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) used to kill 10,000 dogs a year with strychnine poison, but there was no discernable reduction in population or rabies-transmission. Now, Kathmandu communities

have started having serious discussions about the suffering of dogs. The term used now for street dogs is *samudaik*, not the derogatory *bhusya* (stray mongrel).

"It's a dirty word – when you cuss people we call them bhusya," says Pramada Shah of Animal Nepal.

Nepali culture has always valued and respected dogs, with the violence directed towards them a recent phenomenon, and an indicator that society itself has become more violent and less

DOG DAYS

Clockwise from above:

A citizen feeds biscuits to a street dog near Kathmandu Darbar Square. Dogs in Kathmandu Ward 20. One was burnt on its left side after being hit with boiling water.

Trekking guide Sunil Tuladhar tends to a sick dog near Maru Tole.

Restaurant owner Surendra Bajracharya owns three dogs of his own, but also feeds and nurses the stray dogs, including the one pictured, out of his own pocket.

A woof of fresh air

Kathmandu gets citizens to be responsible for their community dogs

cognisant of traditional Buddhist values, says Shah.

After pressure from activists, KMC introduced a policy in April 2016 to help 'manage people to manage dogs' – which it says is a more sustainable way of keeping tabs on strays than organisations parachuting in to manage the population.

The ongoing program, called '*Manu Mitra*' (Friend of Humans), has succeeded in reducing animal cruelty and introducing the concept of animal welfare and community responsibility of street dogs.

The program aims to sterilise and vaccinate all dogs in the 35 wards of the city, and have the residents themselves bear the costs. While on paper it would seem an impossible task, more dog lovers than ever before have come out of the woodwork and volunteered, unpaid, to help save their own ward's community dogs, says coordinator Sangita Sapkota.

Manu Mitra has given these canine carers the label of 'animal management assistants', responsible for talking to members of the community routinely on the welfare of its street dogs.

City urban health chief Hari Kumar Shrestha says that after years of aid agencies stepping in to vaccinate and sterilise dogs, the challenge is to sustain the practice. "If people are taking care of everything on a dog-to-ownership level, all the problems will go away."

To help change perceptions, training programs and short films were shown in communities to dispel notions that street dogs are a nuisance. One short film showed how a butcher near Bhimsen temple had his wares saved in the night by barking street dogs who chased away thieves.

Ratna Maharjan, a musician, agrees with the premise of dogs as guardians of Newari communities: "Especially during festivals when the thieves are about, the dogs help protect shops."

Anjali Sindurakar, an animal management assistant in Kathmandu Ward 20, says that while she previously would have been disgusted with the mange-ridden dogs, she wept once while witnessing animal cruelty.

In order to instil a sense of pride about street dogs, school children have been educated on safe ownership and dog safety. This included creating a street dog mural in Shanti Nikunj school and a story competition for Grade 6 and 7 students, which resulted in



The Adventures of Bhusya, where students imagine themselves as dogs of the community.

Social worker and dog lover in Ward 20, Rajim Sthapit, says: "The whole perspective of community dogs has flipped and people have come together more closely as a result. Before in Kukur Tihar, we used to worship our own kept dogs in the vicinity of our own homes. Now we get together at public spaces and celebrate all dogs together."

Citizen policing has also toughened on criminals who don't abide by the new standards of animal welfare and citizen responsibility. A car accident two months ago at Guna Kamdev Marg, near Chikanmugal, left a street dog injured and unable to walk.

The motorist was about to leave the scene of the crime, but eyewitnesses said that butchers, shopkeepers and regular community members surrounded his vehicle, and forced him to pay a fine of Rs15,000 for injuring a dog belonging to their community.

"This would never have happened before: they would have let the dog die. Now we feel responsible," says Anjali Sindurakar. The money compensated was then directly used to treat the dog's injuries.

But not all street dogs are fortunate enough to enjoy the newfound warmth. Trekking guide Sunil Tuladhar says a certain proportion of street dogs in tourist areas, where there are fewer close-knit community groups, still suffer from occasional violence.

"There is awareness of *Manu Mitra*, but the human behaviour is yet to change," he says. "The real local people care, but people who work at the stalls are not from Kathmandu, and they throw stones at the dogs because they don't want their businesses disrupted."

Nevertheless, *Manu Mitra* is achieving its success of reducing the number of lactating female dogs in the area, and promises to deliver up to 80% vaccination and sterilisation rates in its wards because the community will follow up individual cases itself.

Other results of educating citizens to be kinder to dogs include fewer people being bitten by dogs, and reduced cases of suspected rabies, and fewer complaints about dogs. To celebrate World Rabies Day, Ward 20 was labelled the first 'animal managed ward' of the city.

KMC has said that it will create a registration system where dog owners and animal management assistants must mark down the birth and death of all animals, along with their owners. Any animals found without a guardian could then be traced back to their original owners, and the owners fined for abandonment. Using a smartphone app concerned citizens could scan an embedded microchip attached to an abandoned dog, linking it back to the registration system.

But the project to register all dogs (and to a lesser extent, cats) will have to wait until the next fiscal year, when the government is predicted to be more stable. 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Champadevi Hike

Hike from Pharping to Champadevi, elevation 2285m, for magnificent views of Langtang, Gaurishanker, Jugal and Dhorje Lakpa, and to explore the country side. The trek is organised by Mercy Nepal Travels & Expedition.
13 January, 7am-5pm, Star Mall, Putalisadak, (01) 4012584, 9841008306

3 Days Meditation,

Dr. Chintamani Gautam, an internationally recognised yoga expert with 20 years of experience, will instruct the meditation program. Focus, breathe and relax.
12-14 January, 5:45-7:15pm, Zumbandu Fitness, Baneshwor Spa, Bhimsengola Marg, Rs700-1,000, 9803266533/9843818794

Happy Hours,

An open community event to network, share and develop innovative business ideas. Drinks and snacks at Cargo Cafe Kathmandu and pop-up shops selling various items.
12 January, 5-8pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchok, (01) 5530229

Maker's Market,

Featuring products from Muskaan, Bhav, Little Things, Junkiri, Aji's, Haushala Creatives, Project Re-Define, Sprinkle Cakes, Miss Moti, Cake 9, #MakerKT and more, all made by female entrepreneurs within the SheEO and #MakerKT community!
13 January, 2-5pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan



Swing Night,

Put on your vintage outfit and swing along with Lindy Hop Dancers as Speakeasy, featuring Daahoud Salim, plays tunes from the '20s.
13 January, 7-8:30pm, EVOKE Café and Bistro, Jhamsikhel, Rs 300, For Tickets: 9851111051, evoke.cafebistro@gmail.com

MUSIC

Octave,

Enjoy Friday night with The Octave Band performing rock n roll classics at the beer garden.
12 January, 6:30-10:30pm, Biskalpa Art Cafe & Bar, Pulchok, 9851147776

Tattwa Night,

Live music by Tattwa band and a BBQ under the stars at Shambala Garden Café.
12 January, 7pm onwards, Hotel Shangri-La, Rs 2000, For Details and Reservation: 4412999 (Ext: 7520/7508)



Yuwa for Children,

Youths of YUWA join hands to organise 'Bal Balikaka Lagi YUWA', a charitable event to provide school sweaters to 487 students of Kudi Bari Secondary School, Dolakha. Artists Neetesh Jung Kunwar, Sandhya Joshi, Step On band and others will be performing to support the cause.
13 January, 2-10pm, Sports Hive Bar & Lounge, Jhamsikhel, Rs 250, For Tickets: (01) 4419489/4418747, 9841879240/9843680453

Adrian at Wicked,

Rock Legend, Adrian Pradhan will perform live to celebrate the bar's third year of a fine dining experience, accompanied by rock, blues and jazz music.
13 January, 6:30pm onwards, Wicked Spoon Fork & Rock, Jhamsikhel, 9843471625

Ash King,

The singer of hit songs like Baarish- Half Girlfriend, Te Amo- Dum Maro Dum, I Love You- Bodyguard and many more will be performing at the grand opening of Turtle Lounge & Club. The Mozart of Romance will be singing his hits.
13 January, 7pm onwards, Turtle Lounge & Club, Rs2,000, 9851090349/9813089163/9801031277

OUR PICK



Opening in Kathmandu on 12 January

Ram Babu Gurung, famed director of the *Kabaddi* franchise, has come again to direct *Mr Jholay*, which stars the Bir Bikram duo, Dayahang Rai and Deeya Pun. Supposedly the sequel to *Jholay*, the movie's trailer and its storyline give the audience a *Kabaddi* vibe. Karne (Dayahang) is in one-sided love with the daughter (Deeya) of a rich villager. The love story and Karne's friendship get a twist when a tourist makes an entry in the village.

DINING



Le Sherpa,

Experience conscious dining in Kathmandu that supports local producers and encourages sustainability, through a limited menu. Salad enthusiast should definitely try caramelized Beet Root-Mozzarella Salad tossed with Salsa Verde dressing and semi-sundried tomatoes.
Maharajgunj, (01) 4428604, dine@leshherpa.com.np

Hotel Shangri-la,

Windy winter days deserve great Tibetan hotpot—something like Shangri-la's Gyakok.
Shambala Garden Café, Lazimpat, Rs1,899 (single), Rs3,199 (couple), For details and reservations: 4412999 (Ext: 7508/7520)

Bhojan Griha,

The building of Bhojan Griha has been standing grandly for more than 150 years, serving traditional, organic and ethnic Nepali cuisine in an ambience that is purely Nepali. Important note—cultural dance starts every day after 7pm.
Dillibazar, (01) 4416423, bhojan@wlink.com.np

OR2K,

A haven for vegetarians and vegans, the restaurant serves Asian fusion cuisine in a funky atmosphere. Veggies have never tasted so good!
Thamel, (01) 4422097



Casa Mexicana,

Opening for dinner till 8 in the evening, this Mexican family restaurant have delicious vegetarian and non-vegetarian Tacos, Enchiladas, Torta Ahogada and much more.
Laxmi Marga, Gairadhara, 9840542082

Rosemary Kitchen,

Rosemary chicken, pasta and risotto are some of the frequently ordered dishes of this restaurant. If you are in Pokhara, you have the option to dine at the Lalupate Marg branch.
Thamel, (01) 4267554, rosemarykitchenktm@gmail.com

GETAWAY



Traditional Comfort,

Crafted by local artisans from Patan and Bungamati, from the dark wood carved beams to the bronze fixtures in the lobby and the decorative tile work in the bathrooms, every part of the boutique hotel is bound to surprise you.
Kamalpokhari, (01) 4410009, info@traditionalcomfort.com

Hyatt Regency,

The 5-star luxury hotel and resort, set on 37 acres of landscaped grounds and built in the traditional Newari style of architecture, has everything you look for in a getaway.
Taragon, Boudha, (01) 5171234, mohinishrestha@hyatt.com



Dalai-La Boutique Hotel,

Traditional Nepali architecture with accents of Buddhist leitmotifs, the boutique hotel provides eco-friendly service for a unique and unforgettable experience.
Chaksibari Marg, Thamel, (01) 4701436, info@dalaiboutiquehotel.com

Hotel Manaslu,

Named after the eighth-highest mountain in the world, Hotel Manaslu promises great comfort and service. Despite being close to the hustle and bustle of the city, you can have a relaxed stay here.
Lazimpat, (01) 4410071, hmanaslu@mos.com.np

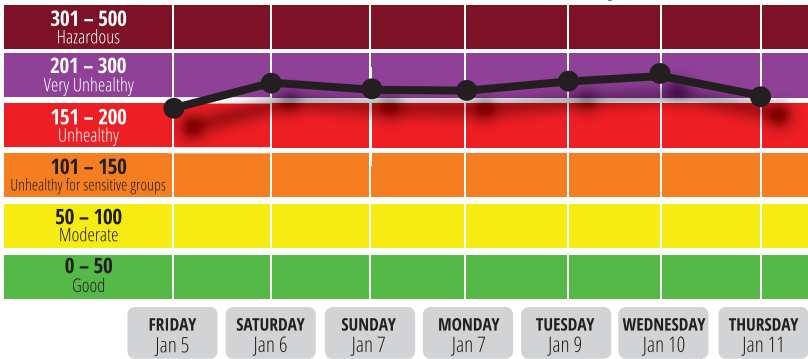


Kathmandu Guest House,

What sets Kathmandu Guest House apart is its cosy and picturesque courtyard garden, which many guests have described as an oasis. Providing service since 1967, the guest house excels in service and quality.
Thamel, (01) 4700800, info@ktmgh.com

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 5 - 11 January



What we had long been fearing has come to pass: Kathmandu Valley's average daily Air Quality Index measured at Phora Darbar was consistently in the purple Very Unhealthy level every day except Friday. The prolonged dry spell, increased vehicular traffic, roadside dust and the coal-burning brick kilns firing up for the winter season are some of the reasons. Minimise your time at street level, especially strenuous exercise at all times of day.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>





PHOTOS: RYAN CHANG

From seedy cyber cafes to sleek smartphones, online harm is just a touch away

RYAN CHANG

Two years ago, a college student in Kathmandu shared with her boyfriend a nude video of herself, trusting it to be a secret between just the two of them. They soon broke up, and the boy published the explicit video on social media out of revenge. Within days, the entire country was awash with the scandal. Online trolls posted responses and bombarded social media with GIFs of the video. Memes appeared comparing the student's college to the porn site 'Brazzers'. Tormented and shamed, the girl took her own life.

But the video is still circulating—its legacy locked in the permanent continuum of the Internet, even after the victim's death. It is a reminder that the web is far from safe in Nepal, and that millions of children and young adults are at risk. New technologies have made it more difficult for the authorities to keep up with child abuse and other crime in the cyber world, and Nepal's antiquated legislation has not kept pace with the challenges of the shifting online frontier. In its Children in a Digital Age report published in December, UNICEF recommended that governments worldwide take seriously the impact of digital technology on children's lives. Teenagers and young adults aged 15-24 are the most connected age group, with up to 78% of them

online compared to an average 48% of the total population. However new technologies—such as the Dark web and cryptocurrencies—allow 'made-to-order' child sexual abuse material to be livestreamed. Lack of education on how children can protect themselves online makes many of them vulnerable. Young victims in underprivileged areas become vulnerable the moment they are connected to the internet. Activists in Nepal say reporting on the issue has been minimal. "Every day we have more cases of children sexually assaulted from meeting strangers online, commercial sexual exploitation on social media," says Sumnima Tuladhar of Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN). Cases of cyber-crimes filed to date under the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) 2063 have mostly concerned financial transactions and online defamatory statements towards political leaders. Separate legislation to protect young people at risk online is urgently needed, says child-rights activist Anil Raghuvanshi. According to student Nikesh Tandukar, 20: "If the cyber crime laws are strong, then no boy will ever try to repeat the incident of the college girl's suicide to embarrass a girl." In Kathmandu, cyber-baiting has netted young victims who have just finished their SLCs. Nikesh Tandukar was lured on social media to join a recruitment program making incense sticks for

Rs15,000 a month. After paying an application fee of Rs2,500, Tandukar never heard back from the recruiters. Without proper knowledge of safe internet use, young adults hacked on Facebook face embarrassing and shameful consequences. Dibesh Awale, 21, had his timeline covered with pornographic GIFs and videos by a hacker. "My friends feared I would be arrested, they thought I was the one sharing this on public," he says. Children in Nepal are exposed to pornographic materials at a younger age than in many other countries. College student "Rabinda" told *Nepali Times* it was first shown to him when he was eight years old. "I was afraid and surprised: it felt like a horror movie for me," he

Swipe right for extortion



said. Now, 10 years later, watching pornography has become a daily habit for him. The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) says up to 62% of Nepalis were using the Internet in 2017, a staggering 95% of them on mobile phones only, with the remainder accessing the web on fixed computers. However increased access to the internet via mobiles has also given children, especially from marginalised backgrounds, the chance to be treated as people rather than members of known group. "When they are in the virtual world no one can discriminate against them based on who they are offline," Tuladhar says. In hard-to-reach districts such as Mugu, Humla and Jumla, where

SAFETY GURU: Anil Raghuvanshi of 'Childsafenet', in a web safety workshop session at Norling Resort with students from Bijeswori School schools are sometimes closed for up to six months at a time, the internet has replaced books as the de facto source of information. For college-aged students, the internet has become the best source of learning outside of school. Prasish Maharjan, a Kathmandu classical musician, credits free content on YouTube for teaching him advanced techniques for playing tabla when he was younger. "If a teacher asked me to buy cassettes and CDs now, I would think he's crazy," he says. 🇳🇵



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Jumanji

Welcome to the Jungle

A weird and welcome surprise to the world of sequels, *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* takes on the original film from 1995 starring the great Robin Williams, and turns it, cleverly, into something totally new.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

For those sick of mediocre sequels, this is not one of them. The writers, and director Jake Kasdan, have taken the film in a completely new direction, turning it into a fine comedy adventure full of some pretty great special effects and sidesplitting laughs.

The laughs come mainly from the amusing premise that arises when four teenagers innocently choose avatars that are completely different from them. They then find themselves sucked into the game and inhabiting those very


characters they so carelessly chose. When a young, very ditzy blonde teenager named Bethany (Madison Iseman) is turned into the rotund cartographer, Professor Sheldon Oberon (Jack Black), whose main weakness is endurance, in a game that relies on speed and cleverness, the joke is complete. The other avatars are almost as funny, but nothing can beat Jack Black acting like a feather-headed, attractive teenager whose phone is her Mecca. The film's writing manages to sustain the joke throughout, with some truly hysterical set pieces and yet, as good writers do, the characters evolve, bringing dimensionality into what might otherwise have fallen flat towards the end.

Jumanji the game for the uninitiated, is an entity that is determined to suck its viewers into the world of the game itself, so when this happens to these four new players, they find themselves with somewhat useful avatars but

a cluelessness and a finite number of lives that endangers their return to the real world. The game itself is constructed with levels, avatars, and some very malevolent bad guys designed to strike fear into the hearts of all players, and viewers.

This is a film for the large screen, not for the small. The effects, the scope of the game itself and the existential crisis that the characters face, will suffer from watching this self-indulgent treat on a smaller screen where the jokes may continue to be funny but the plight of the characters may seem ridiculous.

Jumanji cost between US\$90-110 million to make but it has grossed over \$519 million to date, making it a huge success and a clear indicator of how, sometimes, a good escapist film is what people, the world over, crave. With its sharp, sometimes risqué writing and the stellar cast that includes a surprisingly nuanced Dwayne Johnson, the great Karen Gillan (of Dr. Who fame), and the hilarious but in this case rather one-note Kevin Hart in lead roles (I have saved you the surprises of who turns into whom) the film is populated by some of the funniest comedians working today, making for a whole lot of really, really funny moments.

Despite its sometimes-flagging sense of originality in terms of plot, this is a great, extremely diverting film, with some jokes that are entirely inappropriate for the very young so beware of taking those under 13 years old. You can expect to laugh a lot but will also jump in your seats with the realistic special effects – another notable aspect of this fine, funny film. 



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



BIJAY GAJMER

#IAMWITHDRKC: Activist Govinda KC talks to journalists on Wednesday night after being released by the Supreme Court. He was arrested for contempt of court after publicly branding Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli 'corrupt'.



BIKRAM RAI

TABLE TALKS: Top leaders of the CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist (Centre) parties participate in a Left unity coordination meeting held at UML leader KP Oli's residence in Balkot on Tuesday.



RSS

TAKE THAT: Participants in the National Boxing Championship, organised by the National Sports Council, in action on Saturday in Birtamode, Jhapa.



MARTY LOGAN

DRAWING LIFE: Artists work on the intricate paintings of Astha Matrika on the white-washed gate at Patan Dhoka on Tuesday. A street celebration is scheduled to mark the end of the project.



BIKRAM RAI

HAPPY WINNING: General Manager of Turkish Airlines Abdullah Tuncer Kececi (left) and Abhishek Bikram Shah, General Manager of Chandragiri Hills (right) present the prizes to the winners of the 'Ride to fly' campaign last week.

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Commissions for commissioners

Santa Gaha Magar in
Himal Khabarpatrika

In 1992, when Nepal held its first parliamentary elections under the 1990 Constitution, the polls cost just Rs110 million.

In November-December last year, when the first parliamentary-provincial elections under the 2015 Constitution were held, the Election Commission (EC) spent that much in just repairing old vehicles.

The total cost of the November-December polls was Rs10 billion—181 times higher than in 1992, and double the amount allotted for the second Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in 2013.

One might argue that the election budget may have skyrocketed because of inflation and the necessity of simultaneously holding two tiers of elections. But the 1992 elections budget is equivalent to just about Rs810 million in today's currency.

"The latest elections were much more expensive than all the past polls, even after adjustment for inflation," says Nilkantha Uprety, former Chief Election Commissioner.

A *Himal Khabarpatrika* investigation has found that the parliamentary-provincial polls were wasteful because all Election Commissioners were hand in glove for kickbacks.

They bought luxurious vehicles and unnecessary equipment and materials at inflated prices. They even submitted fake bills, and



transferred the secretary who refused to go along with the scams.

Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav and Election Commissioners Ila Sharma, Ishwari Prasad Poudel, Sudhir Kumar Shah and Narendra Dahal unanimously decided to buy five luxury vehicles for themselves. When Secretary Gopi Nath Mainali opposed their decision, he was transferred out of the EC—a move that violated the election code set by the EC itself.

After removing Mainali, the EC fast-tracked the procurement process to buy the five vehicles, each costing Rs23.3 million. Sources say the five commissioners got a cut of R 10 million from this purchase, which they divided up among themselves.

Despite having four printing

machines at its disposal for printing voter ID cards, the EC bought another machine for Rs160 million. But the new machine was not used

to its optimum, and voters were ultimately allowed to cast ballots by just showing citizenship cards.

An EC official told us on condition of anonymity that the five commissioners got a kickback of Rs10.6 million for the new printing machine. "Election Commissioners bought the machine only to pocket their cuts," he said. "If the new machine was really required, it would not have been thrown into the storeroom."

Chief Election Commissioner Yadav took home TVs and air-conditioners bought for his office. Election Commissioner Ila Sharma was caught on CCTV camera taking a TV set out of her office. Her daughter rides in a car owned by the EC, and she has allowed her domestic help to use a scooter bought by her office.

The EC spent a huge amount of money on producing,

publishing, airing and broadcasting voter education materials, clearing the payments for work that was never done, or only partially completed. Sources say the commissioners ordered their accounts department to pay documentary makers who submitted blank CDs. If 10,000 copies of pamphlets were printed, the bill submitted was for 100,000 copies.

The Election Commissioners approved all fake and forged bills, claiming their cuts. And media houses that refused to give them kickbacks were not given public service announcements.

As a result, voter education was so ineffective that as many as 1.7 million votes were invalid in local elections. More than 1 million and 1.5 million votes were invalid in parliamentary and provincial elections respectively.

Signpost: Court Mafia
Goons: A big clap my friends
Playcard: Reform medical education sector

कान्तिपुर

Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 10 January

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Mark my words, we will leave the government only after Democracy Day.”

Minister for Law and Nepali Congress leader Yagya Bahadur Thapa in an interview with onlinekhabar.com, 7 January.

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With new airport, Pokhara

Much delayed project would transform tourism and the economy of Central Nepal

ZIYU LIN
in POKHARA

The land for Pokhara's new international airport was acquired 40 years ago, and has since been used as a pasture for livestock. But as heavy, earth-moving machinery finally start preparing for construction of the terminal building and levelling the ground for the long runway, there is hope in the city of a surge in economic activity.

The 200-hectare expanse on the outskirts of Pokhara is fast becoming engulfed by the suburbs of Lekhnath Municipality as speculators buy land along the highway and access road. The east-west aligned runway will be able to handle medium-range airliners and allow direct flights to major Indian and Chinese cities, as well as offer migrant workers from Central Nepal direct access to Malaysia and the Gulf.

The project was stuck because of the lack of political will in Kathmandu and controversy over awarding the US\$216 million contract to Chinese company CAMC Engineering, with the loan coming from China's Exim Bank. The price tag was deemed to be double what a similar airport in Bhairawa will cost to build.

The first order of business for CAMC is to reinforce the perimeter fence because villagers are still bringing their water buffalo and cattle to graze through holes in the wire mesh.

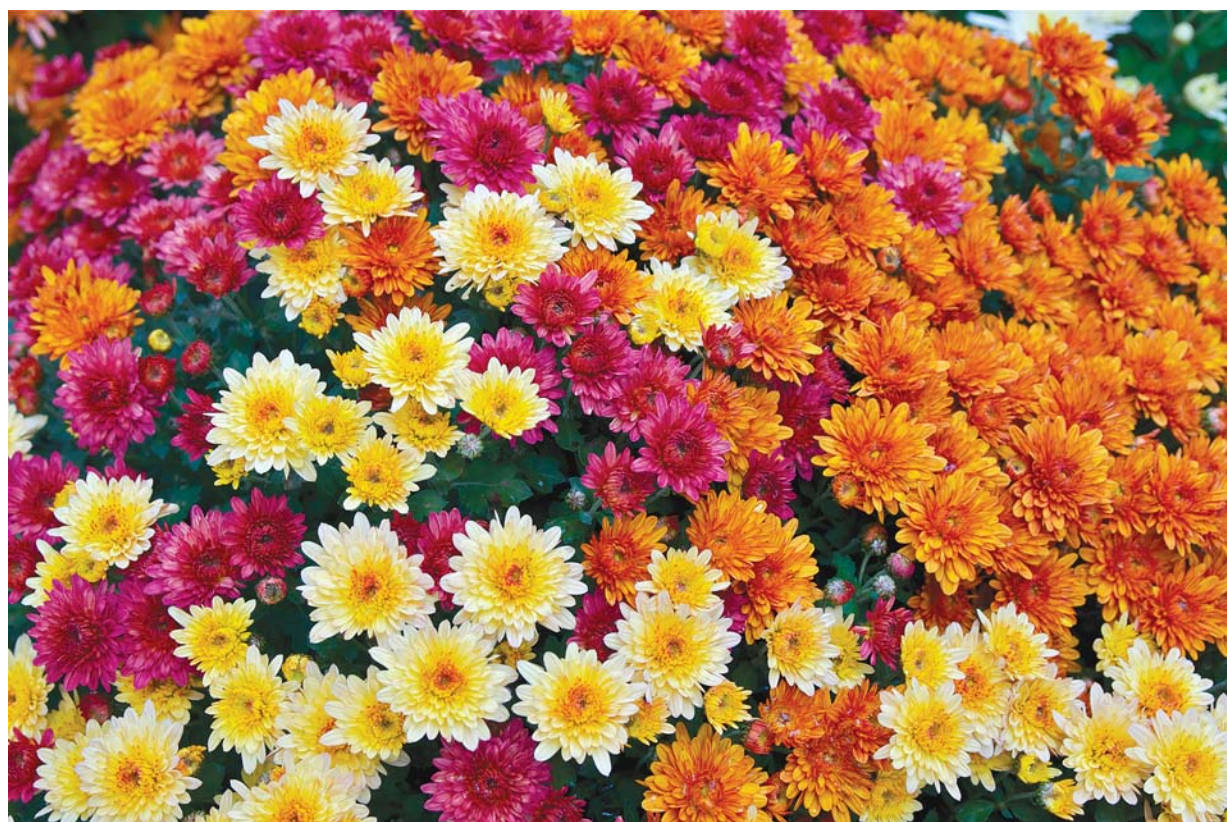
Chandra Kanta Baral and Lok Nath Baral say their families have used the field for grazing since their childhood days. But they are

happy there is going to be a modern airport in their neighbourhood.

"It's fascinating to see how busy the machines and workers are at the construction site," says Baral. "I will have to find a new place to take my buffaloes, but we are waiting for the economy to take off."

Two water tank trucks are driving around the site 12 hours a day, spraying water to reduce dust, and engineers say they want to make sure there is minimum disruption and harm to the environment from the construction.

The 2.5-km runway design is already visible on Google Earth, some 3km east of the existing domestic airport. The safety area



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PHOTOS: ZIYU LIN

HEAVY-LIFTING: Earth moving equipment busy catching up for lost time on the construction of the runway for Pokhara's new airport (*left*).

Chandra Kanta Baral and Lok Nath Baral (*below*) have used the area to graze livestock since they were children, but are happy they will now have an airport in their backyard.

at the east end of the runway had been built up 3m in order to level the ground within a month after construction began.

"The team is now working to flatten the ground and is expected to finish 80% of earthwork before the monsoon," says Krishna Chapagain of CAMC Engineering, which will focus on the runway and terminal building construction after the monsoon.

Other infrastructure, like workers' accommodation and a transformer room, are being built in parallel with the runway and taxiway work. "Some camps have already been set up for more workers during the peak season," says Xiang Shaohua, a Chinese contractor. There are already 36 Chinese (*see box*) and 150 Nepalis working on the site, and this will grow soon to 100 Chinese and 600 Nepalis.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) spent its own money to acquire land from local villagers and relocate them, but the agency says it hasn't received the compensation yet from the government. Chapagain indicates it is in the process and will be done soon.

The Chinese are hoping that the CAAN can smoothen any possible future problems with locals about compensation. But the main challenge for now is to bring in the 40 earth movers needed for construction, which are currently at Birganj customs.

According to the agreement, 75% of the total loan will be provided by China's Exim Bank at 2% annual interest while 25% will be interest-free. Chinese officials told *Nepali Times* there is a possibility that part of the loan could be converted into a grant in future if construction and bilateral negotiations go smoothly. 🇳🇵



YUVARAJ SHRESTHA

Tourist workers

People in Pokhara spent four long decades waiting for an international airport to be built, but even after China's EXIM bank agreed to finance the US\$216-million project two years ago construction could not begin.

Work was stuck because China's CAMC Engineering Company, which has the contract, cannot get working visas for its skilled and semi-skilled staff. The company has applied for 150 visas, but the application is tangled in bureaucracy, slowing progress in construction.

"Bringing in foreign workers to Nepal is like moving a mountain," says June Zhu, executive manager of the CAMC.

Last October, CAMC brought 36 Chinese technicians on three-month tourist visas, which are expiring soon, and the company's efforts to convert them into working visas are delayed by Nepal's corruption-ridden immigration service.

Chinese companies are involved in two airport projects, several hydropower and irrigation schemes in Nepal and need specialised workers. But because of delays, the workers are forced to work on tourist or business visas.

The Pokhara project was also delayed for months because of the refusal by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal to set up a joint escrow account as demanded by the Chinese bank.

Other nationals needed in the tourism industry here are also facing visa issues. Paras Gautam, who operates ultra-light flights in the lake city, says: "The government claims there is an environment for domestic and foreign investment in Nepal, but the reality is different."

Since not many Nepalis are trained to fly ultra-lights, Gautam brought in three foreign pilots. One of them, Turkish pilot Sprhat Basim, finally got a three-month working visa, which expired recently and he is facing hassles renewing it.

Foreigners cannot apply for a labour visa directly at the Immigration Department. They need to apply at a line ministry, which forwards the application to the Home Ministry and then on to the Labour Ministry. Only when the Labour Ministry gives its nod, does the Immigration Department approve the application.

Gautam says: "This process is just too lengthy and painful, it is in Nepal's interest to simplify it."

But there seems to be no sense of urgency within the government. Raju Poudel, director at the Immigration Department, says: "The process to obtain a labour visa in Nepal is still simpler than in many other countries."

Most foreigners choose to work illegally in Nepal because they are not prepared to make illegal payments to have their visas processed. A report by the Labour Department says around 50,000 foreigners, excluding Indians, are working in Nepal, mostly in the service and construction sectors. Only 20% of them are on working visas.

Yuvaraj Shrestha in Pokhara

साप्ताहिक खबरपत्रिका
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Wake up

In today's weekly Asinine column yours truly will be making some very important, timely and relevant points, if I may say so myself. So it is advisable that all readers stay tuned and give me your undivided attention. Thank you.

It pains us to say this but it has come to our notice that some readers don't read. Many of you have been observed skipping entire paragraphs while perusing these lines. Others have even been seen surreptitiously swiping their mobile phones under the table while pretending to read the back page. And some of you have actually dozed off while reading this stuff. HEY, WAKE UP!

What does it take to get some respect around here? Don't you know it is impolite to fall asleep while I am trying to communicate with you? We take a great deal of effort to fill these pages with content rehashed from 18 years ago, and we don't want people dropping down unconscious all over the place.

At a time when the country is steaming ahead to a stable and prosperous future after elections, it is mandatory for all citizens to be alert and to exercise their freedom to read what the Ass has to say even if, like today, he may have nothing major to impart. So, the least you can do is show us some courtesy and pretend to read this

make-believe column and pretend to like it. Let's do a word count here, 240. Drat. Another 200 to go.

As the Chieftain Justice aptly pointed out the other day, and I quote: "There is complete freedom of expression in this country, there just isn't any freedom after expression. All journalists should be objective, that is to say they should have the same objective as us."

He went on: "In other words, it all boils down to how we internalise the totality of the changing juridical paradigm. Are we just paying lip-service here to end-degree refinement or are we empowering constituencies and enabling communities in the long-term? And we may well ask: how are we going to institutionalise the money-spinning aspects of the courts if that doctor keeps refusing to eat? We have to rise above partisan and personal bias to toe the party line with a holistic bottoms-up approach in order to make our ends meet while the going is good. The overall aim should be to galvanise all sectors of society so that the present policy-polity dichotomy can be overcome sooner rather than later."



The Ass

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