



ILLIBERAL ILLS

Across the world from the Philippines to the United States, and in Central European countries like Hungary and Poland, we have seen worrying signs of democratic reversal. Even in open societies like the UK, Germany, France and India there has been a recent ascendance of the racist right.

Extremism and populism have taken centre-stage as demagogues whip up xenophobia and bigotry to get elected in democracies that are abandoning a rule-based society. They are systematically gagging the free press, using the power of the social web to spread hate and lies, and encouraging violent extremism. Hungary's Viktor Orbán boastfully calls his country an 'illiberal democracy'. Using the Trump administration as a shield, Israel is mowing down Palestinians. Cambodia has just shut down its last independent newspaper.

The decline is not isolated, and it is not a temporary occurrence. The Freedom in the World Report 2018 notes that political freedom is in retreat across the globe. More than 70 countries have seen declines in political and civil rights in recent years, and there were gains in only half that number of nations.

The only recent silver lining is Malaysia, where the people last week voted out a brazenly corrupt and openly racist cabal, even though the electoral system had been rigged, and the judiciary coopted, to bring back 92-year-old Mahathir Mohamad. Hopefully, Malaysia's example will spread, and send a message to those struggling against despots: sooner or later democracy will prevail.

Even so, in many Asian countries today there is open admiration for China's economic growth and the Singapore miracle. This has led to a growing attraction for strong-man rule. Political and civil liberties are seen to be putting the cart before the horse, and freedom is seen as a luxury that is keeping people poor. The emphasis is on economic and cultural rights, and citizens are asked to give up their basic freedoms while waiting to prosper. The state's priority has become national security, fighting terrorism, stopping migration, to ensure stability and prosperity.

All this is now getting to sound disturbingly familiar in Nepal where the slogan of the ruling coalition that was elected last year is 'prosperity through stability'. The alliance is made up of a moderate leftist party named after Marx and Lenin which is soon going to merge with former communist rebels who are inspired by Mao.

The UML may have changed its spots to espouse the People's Multi-party Democracy line, but the CPN-MC has still not convincingly abandoned its ideology of revolutionary violence. It wants the

People's War to be glorified and enshrined in the guiding principles of the new Nepal Communist Party. There is no move towards transitional justice, and to say sorry.

Recently, we saw how easily both parties as well as the NC, now in the opposition, were held hostage by their own appointee to the anti-corruption commission as he terrorised the press and dismantled the rule of law for three years. The warning to us is that Lokman Singh Karki can easily happen again.

Communists are guided by the principle of 'democratic centralism' which is an antithesis to federalism and devolution. And the ruling coalition is doing just that: centralising power in the PMO. The recently released draft National Integrity Policy, while seeking to lay legitimate ground rules for the conduct of public officials and outside agencies, has some disturbing provisions.

As we report (page 14-15) in this edition, the restrictions appear to be guided by the perception of aggressive proselytisation and donor funding for indigenous and excluded groups during the Constitution-drafting process.

There may have been a need to regulate the proliferation of NGOs, and the government does need to keep track of where outside funds go. But some of the points in the draft are so open-ended that they seem intended for control rather than regulation. The government now wants only foreign assistance in 'hardware' and not 'software', and is turning away aid on anything to do with inclusion, human rights and democracy.

Given the spread of illiberal democracy around the world, there is reason to be worried that 'stability and prosperity' could be a euphemism for control, and silencing dissent.



10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The 16-22 May 2008 issue of *Nepali Times* exactly ten years ago this week had a photograph of Rani Pokhari on the front page, full of water. Today, that historic pond lies dry and abandoned after a faulty restoration project by the Mayor's office. The temple in the middle of Rani Pokhari seen in the picture was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

Ironically the same front page ten years ago also carried a report from Aruna Uprety in Xining about the devastating Sichuan earthquake that killed about 60,000 people. This week China marked the tenth anniversary of the quake and showcased its reconstruction and rapid transformation of the towns in the epicentre. The report has an eerily prescient headline seven years before the earthquake struck Nepal.

The state of Rani Pokhari in the heart of Kathmandu three years later is in stark contrast to Sichuan a decade after 12/5/2008.



ONLINE PACKAGES



PLASTIC NATION/CASH FROM TRASH

Why have plastic bans failed each time? Who is protecting big manufacturers? Trace the production and use of plastic bags in Kathmandu, and then travel to Langtang to see how a group is buying discarded plastic bottles and recycling them in a plant in Pokhara for reuse, all the while generating local jobs and reducing plastic waste.

TRUST AND RESPECT

It is high time India became more sincere in dealing with Nepal, took a long-term view, respected Nepal's sovereignty and implemented mutually-beneficial projects without any delays ('A political pilgrim', Om Astha Rai, #909). In essence, discard the attitude and manners of its colonial rulers, and become more efficient in cooperation.

Purushottam Mudbhary

■ Nepal buys electricity from India despite being a country with great potential for hydro electricity. With proper sustainable hydro development, Nepal can be self sufficient in energy and sell electricity to India, reducing the trade gap. Nepal needs dams to tame rivers, and also for inland navigation. If Nepal is connected to India's National Waterway, it would change the trade scenario of the country.

Marcos Alpha

NO CITY FOR CYCLISTS

I used to cycle from Bhaktapur to Gwarko four times a week to attend lectures when I was an undergrad student, and later in university ('No city for cyclists', Sewa Bhattarai, #909). But due to the lack of bicycle lanes and over speeding traffic, I had a few near misses. I still love to cycle, but congestion and other problems mentioned in your story make me fearful.

Nonetheless, I'm thinking about resuming commuting on a bicycle. However, roads are hazardous in the absence of policies that encourages cycling. I think the problem lies within the revenue that auto vehicles generate for the government.

Suman Laudari

■ Make a cycle path, and I know I will be the first one to ditch my car and ride a bicycle. I guess the lobbying from vehicle businesses, hospitals, cartels and politicians is too strong.

Shradha

BEST WISHES

Dr Upendra Devkota, you are a role model, an icon and an inspiration ('I want to live my last among friends, From the Nepali Press, nepalitimes.com'). Your contribution is valuable. You will live long.

Achyut Raj

■ I salute you for your commitment, contribution and courage. May God's blessings always be with you.

Parvathy Uprety

■ Why do bad things always happen to good people? Hope you get all the strength and I wish for your miraculous recovery.

Sameekshya Basnet

■ I salute you, sir. Death is inevitable but it's how you live that matters the most, and you lived like a giant. Thank you for your contributions.

Bhuwan Khanal

WHAT'S TRENDING



PMO INDIA

Dam it, it's all about the water

by *Om Astha Rai*
As Modi and Oli patch up after last year's elections in which Oli capitalised on the perception that he had stood up to India during the Blockade, there are also concerns about how Nepal will safeguard its national interest on water resources. Talks on building high dams on the Kosi or Karnali at a time when there is mistrust in Kathmandu, Modi and Oli are cleverly using the term 'waterway' as a code for 'dam'. Read more of the special coverage on water resources by going online to nepalitimes.com.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

No city for cyclists

by *Sewa Bhattarai*
Nepal's terrain is ideal for all kinds of cycling, but policies and plans actively discourage bicycles at a time when cities around the world are returning to this mode of transport. Bicycles made a comeback during the fuel crisis of the 2015 Blockade, but soon things went back to roads choked with cars and exhaust fumes. Visit our online page for a special multimedia package which was widely shared on social media.

Most popular on Twitter

A Modi-fied Oli

By *Om Astha Rai*
Modi was campaigning in Nepal to woo voters at home, and also to restore Nepal-India relations that were badly bruised by the Blockade. But what did Oli gain? Click on nepalitimes.com and read the most visited online story and mixed feedback from readers.

Most visited online page

A political pilgrim

By *Om Astha Rai*
Indian PM Narendra Modi spent most of his Nepal visit in prayer and worship, but his two stopovers in Kathmandu for political meetings will have long-term consequences for the two countries. Join the online discussion and find out how people reacted to Modi's visit to Nepal last week.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Time @nepalitimes
Modi's water pilgrimage: 'Inland waterway' is a code for building high dams in Nepal Himalaya: <http://bit.ly/apoliticalpilgrim> ... @omastharai
#ModiInNepal

Rajendra Dahal @RDahal62
Interesting angle. Without dams, high dams no big canals. And without big canals no water transportation ! conclusion: dams first !

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
#Editorial Given the close economic relationship, why can't India Nepal relations ever be 'normal'?
#ModiInNepal

dharma adhikari @dharmaadhikari
Interesting editorial! Not to ignore here-- the hyperbolic media in both countries deserve some rebuke. And methinks, for a Nepali newspaper, it's "Nepal-India relations" and not "India Nepal relations"

Weekly Internet Poll #910

Q. Do you still see PM KP Oli as a nationalist?

Total votes: 657

Yes **36%**
No **47%**
Not sure **17%**

Weekly Internet Poll #911
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you believe the communist parties' unification will be long lasting?



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A wealth of meaning

How to make money in an unequal world

Only a handful of people in the world have more wealth than the rest of humanity. The number of zeroes behind their net worth is mind boggling, but what is even more difficult to understand is how some people became so rich while others have nothing.



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

For example, every person in Kathmandu who has a few *annas* of land in Kathmandu is a rupee billionaire while *ropanis* and *bighas* of land in rural Nepal are not worth much. This is why many Valley residents feel they do not need to work like the rest of the world.

There are others who watch television, see images of North America and Europe and feel that the moment they get to these places, they will become as wealthy as the people on screen. They also do not feel they have to work till they cross the immigration desk at Kathmandu airport.

Many of us are aware of a time when we were able to buy one *tola* of gold when our salaries were Rs1000 a month. These days, if you make about Rs55,000 a month you can buy only one *tola*. If salaries were in gold, nothing would have changed. Twenty years ago, if you sold land and bought a vehicle, you



KUNDA DIXIT

now have no land and the vehicle is banned.

About 25 years ago we bought a piece of land near Bhaktapur and watched its 'value' go up. We recently sold it and got many folds in return. With the money we made, we went to buy more land and realised we could only buy half the area we had sold.

Unlike in rural Nepal where a subsistence way of life is an option, urban poverty is really bad here because only cash can get

you what you need to survive – including water in a bottle. With the expansion of roads, which are regarded as the ultimate symbol of development, the traditional *namlo* has disappeared but are people better off and more wealthy? Mule train drivers have been replaced by truck drivers. What used to be a village where travelers spent the night are now only a few minutes or hours of drive in between and have lost their economic relevance.

Food and vegetables grown for

local consumption are now out of reach of locals who have no cash. Remittance from overseas workers plays a crucial role in ensuring that families have cash to pay for their basic needs. In some parts of Nepal, tourism has helped add to the income stream.

Wealth creation becomes complex when we want to generate power from flowing rivers because it costs a lot of money up front and revenue does not come in for nearly a decade. There are market

uncertainties which means you may not get the price you seek, or regulators who will not allow the power into the market because a particular country did not make the investment.

Some want to create wealth by making a watch using rocks from the top of Mt Everest for the dial. Religion and the fear of god seem to be a good means of wealth creation in the form of fees for rituals. Cold drinks, alcohol and processed food look like easy money makers as well. Nepal has a billionaire in the Forbes list who makes ready-to-eat noodles.

But most Nepalis, like billions others around the world, make a living buying low and selling high. Most get by with a salaried *jagir* or renting out floor space. Artists seem to do really well when it comes to value creation. They take a piece of rock or a sheet of copper and create a masterpiece that can fetch huge returns. It is however not easy to find buyers. Most wealthy countries make money by making and selling weapons, and preventing others from doing the same. They need wars to stay rich. Some people in Nepal and the world are rich because they take resources such as trees, land, water, oil, minerals and people as a 'free good' and then monetise them. If you think wealth creation is complicated, wait till we discuss wealth distribution in the next installment.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc

Crossing over in Freestyle



SIKUMA RAI

When Ford introduced its SUV EcoSport in Nepal in 2013, it combined luxury with a rugged handling in the country's rough roads – a rare combination. Now, in introducing a vehicle that feels like an SUV but does not dig such a deep hole into your pocket, Ford seeks to address the growing demand for affordable yet smooth rides.

GO Automobiles, Ford's authorised distributor in Nepal, launched the latest global product, Ford Freestyle, a Compact Utility Vehicle (CUV) that combines the iconic design of a SUV with features Nepali customers look for in a car.

GO Automobiles has brought Next-Gen Figo, Figo Aspire, Fiesta and the classic SUVs Endeavour and EcoSport, and the new Freestyle is the first car in the CUV range in Nepal.

"Ford specialises on bigger cars with more than 1,500cc, and the new Freestyle does not fall under that category. It is the smallest car ever made by Ford, specifically tailored for India and Nepal where the roads are rough and people demand compact cars," says Akash Golchha of GO Automobiles (*pictured, above*).

At first glance, the Ford Freestyle has a masculine

and sporty look with striking lines sweeping out front to back. The front bumper has an integrated skid plate and sculpted fascia sections that create a protective full-width beam element, accentuating Freestyle's SUV look and credentials.

The model is fitted with three-cylinder 1.2L TiVCT petrol engine, delivering 96ps power and had ground clearance of 190mm, the highest in its segment, making it able to easily negotiate the bumps on the Nagarkot road, for example. For safety, the car comes with Active Rollover Prevention combined with Electronic Stability Control, to automatically detect potential rollover situations by applying brakes to individual tyres and decreasing engine torque. It also has six airbags and a Sync 3 infotainment system.

India aims to go completely electric by 2030, and Golchha says: "We are waiting for Ford to support customers with after sales service like repair, maintenance and training as well. Only then will we be able to release their electric versions in Nepal, possibly in 2020. Until then, we are betting on this new crossover, fully confident that it will lead the market."

Ford Freestyle is priced at Rs 2,699,000.

Sikuma Rai

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Acharya wins trophy

Madhav Acharya won the sixth edition of Amateur Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup,



Kathmandu qualifiers held on 12 May at Gokarna Golf Club. Acharya will be going to Antalya, Turkey for the 2018 finals slated for November.

Break the fast

Qatar Airways passengers fasting during the holy month of Ramadan will be offered



a nutritious Iftar meal box filled with healthy options to break their fast. The specially designed 'Ramadan Kareem' meals will be offered on selected routes across the Middle East, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Africa.

Instant energy

Glucovita, the instant energy drink based on 99.4% pure glucose, is now available in three different flavours-juicy orange, tangy lemon and mango. Packed with iron and calcium, the drink is supposed to help overcome summer lethargy and dehydration.



Road to Russia



Laxmi Intercontinental offers all its Hyundai owners a chance to win a trip to Russia and a ticket for the final match of FIFA World Cup 2018 through an online campaign which requires registration before 15 June. www.laxmihyundai.com/roadtorussia

Norvic and IME

Norvic International Hospital signed a MoU with Global IME Bank, to provide



5-10% discount on service and facilities to the bank's Privileged Customer credit card holders, its employees and their families.

New rides

Nepal General Marketing, the authorised distributor of Hero motorbikes and scooter in Nepal, has introduced a new 125cc



'Glamour' motorcycle and 110cc 'Duet' scooter in all of its outlets. The products are priced at Rs193,000 and Rs179,500 respectively.

prabhu BANK



GOPEN RAI

“I can do it 25 times”

Kami Rita Sherpa broke the previous record by climbing Mt Everest for the 22nd time this week.

“The country needs the record, but not the man who makes the record,” Kami Rita Sherpa said on 28 March in Kathmandu before he set off to climb Everest.

True to his word, the 48-year-old from Thame village of Solukhumbu summited the world's highest mountain for the 22nd time on the morning of 16 May. And as the person who has climbed Mt Everest the most number of times, he made international headlines.

Kami Rita is a guide at Seven Summit Treks, and had started climbing from Camp 5 with nine Chinese climbers on Tuesday night, and reached the top on Wednesday morning. Before this, Appa Sherpa and Phurba Tashi Sherpa had jointly held the world record, with an impressive 21 times each on top of Everest. Appa and Phurba Tasi have repeatedly said that they will probably not climb again.

Kami Rita is a humble man, and often said he was not hungry for fame. “Many Sherpas have made records. Ang Rita Sherpa made a world record by climbing Everest 10 times without oxygen. But what is the point of such records?” he asks.

However, Ang Chhiring Sherpa, former president of Nepal Mountaineers Association, says Kami Rita has made Nepal proud and he should be recognised.

“Now it is the country’s responsibility to figure out how to appreciate such a person,” said Ang Chirring Sherpa.

Kami Rita started mountaineering in 1992, and first summited Everest in 1998 as a guide. In 2009, 2010, and 2013, he climbed Mt Everest three times in a single season. His brother Lhakpa Rita Sherpa has also climbed Mt Everest 17 times.

Kami Rita, who had studied only up to Grade 4 in Thame Primary School, lives in a rented apartment at Bouddha. His son studies in Class 12 while his daughter has just completed high school.

Worried about the safety of Sherpas who work in mountaineering, Kami Rita does not want his children to follow his footsteps. He says: "The government only cares about royalty from the mountains, it does not care about our future. We have to support our family from what we earn every season. Who will take care of our family if something happens to us?"

He says there may soon be no Sherpas willing to guide alpinists up the mountains. Meanwhile, Kami Rita continues to climb. His friends encourage him to get to the top for the 30th time. But he says: "I think I will make it 25 times." 🍷

New records, oxygen failure on Everest

It is that time of the year again when all eyes are on top of the world, with mountaineers and Sherpa guides making their final push to the top of Mt Everest.

More than 160 mountaineers have already reached the top this season, and many more are on their way up.

Liaison Officer Tilak Ram Pandey told *Nepali Times* from the Base Camp on Thursday that weather has improved and the climbing window is expected to remain open until 23 May.

"We have already seen some interesting new records, but we hope for some more," he said.

Wednesday turned out to be the big day with two Sherpas breaking their own records and setting new ones. A Chinese double amputee, Xiya Boyu, also amazed the world by successfully scaling Mt Everest.

On Thursday, Italian astronaut Maurizio Cheli climbed Mt Everest becoming the first European to have flown in space and climbed

the highest mountain on earth.

Kami Rita Sherpa (*see left*), 48, set a new world record for the most Everest summits by reaching the top for the 22nd time. Lhakpa Sherpa, 44, also set a new record for the most Everest climbs by a woman, summiting for the ninth time, from the north side.

Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summits Treks said: “Kami Rita is the new legend, the new Appa Sherpa.”

While Lhakpa Sherpa was climbing to break her own record on Wednesday morning, others were dealing with oxygen failures. Some 26 climbers had to descend to fix their oxygen regulators (*see page 6*). Some Sherpa guides gave their oxygen regulators to clients, risking their own lives.

Alan Arnette, a mountaineer, posted on his blog that everyone was safe but it was a rare emergency. At least 10 of 39 oxygen bottle regulators had failed, making several teams give up their climbs. He confirmed the cylinders were



supplied by Summit Oxygen (SO), and it seemed to be a bad manufacturing batch.

Meanwhile, there have been two Sherpa deaths on Everest and Makalu. Some 865 climbers have attempted or are climbing 22 Himalayan peaks in Nepal this spring season, creating employment for 1,200 high-altitude guides and many thousands of porters. Of them, 346 climbers and most of the porters are on Everest. There are 15 Nepali women, including a female journalists' group, hoping to make

it to the summit.

An expedition hopes to replicate NASA's famous twin study that compared astronaut Scott Kelly's body functions with his earthbound identical twin brother, by examining genetic changes in two American climbers climbing Everest this season while their twin brothers are at sea level.

However, the Tourism Ministry nearly cancelled their permit after they skied from Camp 3 to 2, saying they needed a permit to do that. 🇷🇺

The advertisement features a dark blue background. At the top center is the "MASTER SELECTION PREMIUM" logo, which includes a crest and a banner. Below the logo, the text "NEPAL'S FIRST BLENDED MALT SCOTCH WHISKY" is displayed in white serif font. The central focus is a bottle of Master Selection whisky next to its box. The box is blue and white, with the text "NON CHILLED FILTERED WHITE OAK CASK" visible. Both the bottle and the box feature the same ornate label design as the logo. In front of the bottle is a glass filled with whisky and ice cubes. The entire scene is reflected on a glossy black surface at the bottom.

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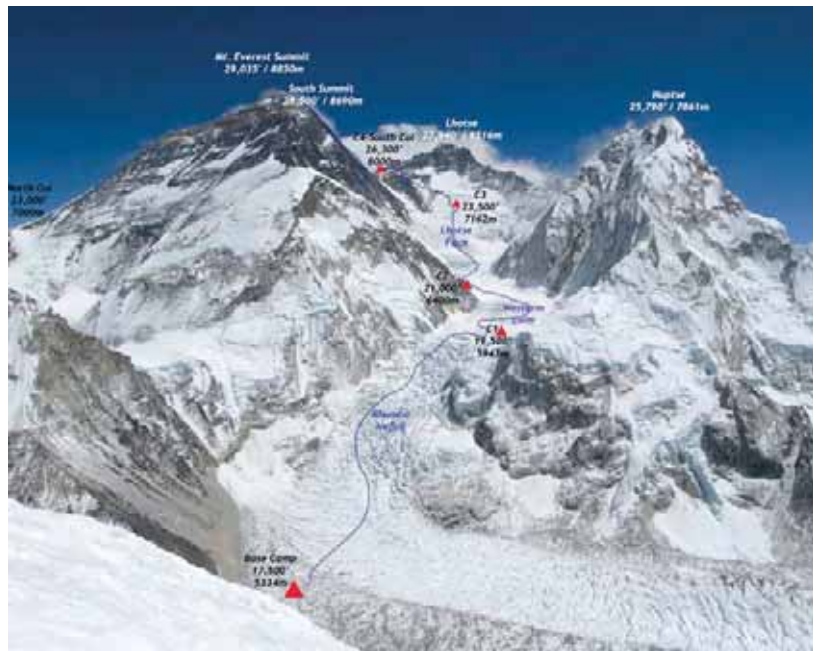
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The oxygen of mountaineering

The failure of oxygen cylinders this season on Mt Everest has forced expeditions to cancel their climbs

I have just returned from setting up a new oxygen factory in Khumjung in the Khumbu region to see my last column in this space ('For a few dollars more', #909), in print. It is also good to get feedback, and see impact. In another column two years ago, I had suggested that Thamel be pedestrianised.



OUTSIDE IN
Ted Atkins

Thamel is now pedestrianised, and it is a much better place. It feels good to be right, but not always. Last week I warned that the unregulated oxygen industry was unsafe, with unmarked, uncertified old Russian cylinders still in circulation. I was prompted to write this because while filling such a cylinder, I found it to be leaking from the bottom, meaning the weld which holds it together was fractured. At best this cylinder will lose its oxygen by the time the user needs it. At worst it could explode. We are used to leaking valves, and those can be fixed, but cylinders cannot be fixed. The unscrupulous will still sell such cylinders, not caring about the damage done to ordinary working people who support this industry and for the mountaineers who lose their dreams. Then this happened. Yesterday I woke to the news that there have




PHOTOS: TED ATKINS

EXPLOSIVE BREATHING: The author was injured five years ago when this oxygen cylinder exploded before a climb. Many climbers this year faced malfunctioning oxygen systems and were forced to turn back from Mt Everest.

been 25 regulator explosions at 8,500m on Mt Everest this week. Teams have retreated from the mountain and their summit hopes have been dashed. (*See page 5*) Luckily no lives were lost, but it is too late this season to make another attempt. Five years ago while checking regulators I had one explode while fitting it (*picture, above*). The old regulator blew apart because the cylinder had been over-pressurised. I understand what these climbers have been through, except while I nearly lost my life I did not lose my dream. Some of the climbers have sold their homes to get a chance to climb the highest mountain in the world, they are not all stupid rich people. I definitely am not, and I fulfilled my Everest ambition. It changed my life and made me appreciate all the more what I have. For these

climbers who had to turn back, there may not be another chance. Adrian Ballenger, the leader of the Everest north face climbing team affected by these oxygen failures, told me on Wednesday he is pulling out. He said: "We need to educate clients and the mainstream on basic standards of safety and ethics, and then shame those that refuse to meet that standard. We also need to lobby China and Nepal to set, require and enforce standards." We know that earthquakes happen, these are natural disasters. We have to be prepared for them, but accept it when it happens. What we should not accept are potentially deadly things that you, we, the government, the industry have control over, and still allow to happen. Someone must be accountable

for the oxygen failure that dashed hopes of climbers this season. Not for blame, but at least to ensure that it does not happen again and again. Who is that someone? Revenue is being lost for the government which has no oversight or control over black market oxygen products being sold by unregistered companies, being filled who knows where. This may suit some people because when it goes wrong there is no one to blame: where did the cylinder come from, who filled it, with what? It is easy to say what has happened here, the above are the facts to date. What has happened is never an engineer's concern, but why did it happen and what can we do to be sure that it does not happen again? For this we, the Nepali climbing guides, and everyone else whose lives and

livelihoods depend upon this amazing industry need government regulation and accountability. The above relates to equipment that has been identified, and is now out of use. The rest of the equipment is fine, and many climbers are making successful climbs. I echo here the brave words of Upendra Devkota, the neurosurgeon who is battling terminal cancer, in this paper last week: "Death is not so important. What is important is what the dead person leaves behind". Wise words that make me wish I knew the doctor. What do we leave behind, did we make anything better, what will our children say about us? Think about the future, their future.  **Ted Atkins** is former RAF Chief Engineering Officer and works on mountaineering oxygen systems.



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This is looking like one of those years without a summer. We are going straight from spring into the monsoon. The normal maximum temperature this time of the year would have been 29-30 in Kathmandu Valley, but it reached that only one weekend last month. Rain and thunderstorms are forecast right till Sunday and into next week with maxima staying in the mid-20s. The good news is that farmers are happy, electricity generation is up, and the whole country is now power cut-free.

Day	Forecast
FRIDAY	24°C / 16°C
SATURDAY	24°C / 16°C
SUNDAY	26°C / 17°C


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Voytek Kurtyka unleashed

Art of Freedom is a brilliant portrait of one of the purest alpinists of our time

Kunda Dixit

MATEUSZ SKWARCZEK/AGENCJA GAZETA

There was the rattle of pans and the hiss of a kerosene stove from the kitchen tent. Poking my head out of the sleeping bag, I saw the huge hulk of Makalu silhouetted against the dawn sky. It had snowed all night, the moon and some of the stars were still out. There in the darkness, Voytek Kurtuka was hanging by one hand from a truck-sized boulder.

It was the spring climbing season in 1981, and we were camped out on a moraine by the Barun during the march-in to Base Camp. Kurtyka was planning an alpine style ascent of Makalu’s unclimbed west face with his partner Alex MacIntyre. The weather was bad and the face was impossible. The two gave up, and returned in the autumn, but they were defeated again by a 500m rock overhang near the summit. Another Polish climber, Jurek Kukucka made it to the top solo a few days later.

Bernadette McDonald, the Canadian author of ten mountaineering books, chronicles those Makalu expeditions and other climbs by one of the greatest alpinists of all time, Poland’s Voytek Kurtyka, in her new book, *Art of Freedom*. Even though they were mountaineers of the same generation from the same country, Kukucka and Kurtyka’s approaches to climbing could not be more different.

McDonald writes how Makalu presaged the gap: ‘Jurek was focused on summits, and Voytek was obsessed with style.’

Kurtyka was a driven man, completely

consumed by his climbing, and an ardent opponent of militaristic expedition-style climbing of Himalayan peaks. Attaining the summit was not so important for the reclusive Kurtyka, what was more important was how a climber got there.

A year after Makalu, Reinhold Messner invited Kurtyka to join him on Cho Oyu. But when he got to Base Camp, Kurtyka found out the climb was not going to be alpine style, but ‘siege style’ with high altitude porters, ropes and fixed camps.

Kurtyka tells McDonald in the book that he likes to climb ‘unleashed’. We read about his dislike for mountaineers who write in a ‘pretentious or self-aggrandizing style’. Kurtyka adds: ‘I now see clearly that climbing is an Art. I also see that advertising is a poison, while self-advertising is the oldest disease in the human soul.’

In a week when the assembly line jumar mass-conquests of Mt Everest is reaching its annual climax, these lines have special relevance. *Art of Freedom* takes us back to the purity of climbing that Kurtyka believed in like a religion – a style in which humans meet mountains one-on-one.

Kurtyka’s approach to climbing is low-key, humble and almost Buddhist, a complete antithesis to the chest-thumping, record-breaking race that it has become, especially on Everest. Naturally, Kurtyka is vehement about over-regulation by governments intent on turning climbing into an industrial enterprise. He is actually

proud of his many illegal climbs.

He tells McDonald: ‘Being illegal is part of a creative life. Restrictions are mostly imposed by the brutes of the world and they turn our lives into slavery. They ruin the sense of freedom. I am not a natural born hater, but sometimes I find it is my duty, I hate every kind of rule.’

After returning to Kathmandu from Makalu in 1981, Voytek and Alex would go bar-hopping in Thamel, and come home to Patan after curfew. Because they did not want to wake up my parents, the two would climb up the drain pipes to the second floor ‘apline style’ with the dogs howling at the intruders.

Kurtyka would have taken a dim view of the outrageous reaction by Nepal’s tourism ‘authorities’ to Willie Begenas and Matt Moniz skiing from Camp 3 to Camp 2 last week. Or the new ‘rule’ decreed by the governors

of mountaineering in Kathmandu to ban double amputees from climbing (since rescinded).

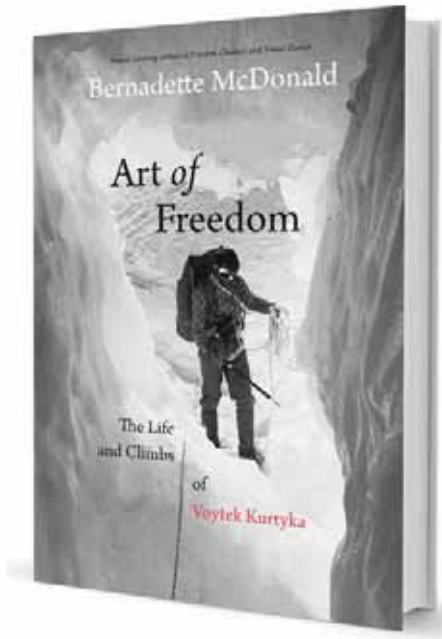
The danger is always there, and Kurtyka is one of the few who is still alive to tell the tale of alpine style climbing of the big peaks. Kukucka died on Lhotse South Face, and MacIntyre on Annapurna South Face.

In the book, Kurtyka tells McDonald why he thinks he survived: a combination of luck, an instinctive alertness to danger signals, or even ‘some idealistic notion of a reciprocal love between the mountain and him’.

Bernadette McDonald’s *Art of Freedom* takes us into the soul of a spiritual climber who sees in mountaineering a manifestation of nature in its purest form, a creative drive he calls ‘Crea’.

Art of Freedom is a brilliant portrait of one of the cleanest climbers of our time, and carries lessons for a more moneyed era. 🇵🇱

Art of Freedom: The Life and Climbs of Voytek Kurtyka by Bernadette McDonald
Rocky Mountain Books, 2017
326 pages Hardcover \$32



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PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI

The government's plastic bans have been repeatedly sabotaged by big businesses

Industrial scale litter

Mukesh Pokhrel

Two years ago, just after the government announced a ban on plastic bags thinner than 30 microns, the newly-appointed joint-secretary at the Ministry of Environment, Durga Prasad Dawadi, had visitors.

They were plastic bag manufacturers, and were shown in. They bluntly warned Dawadi that if the ban went ahead, their investment would be lost and tens of thousands of workers would be out of their jobs.

"I told them the main source of garbage on the streets is plastic waste, and we cannot measure the damage to the environment and human health in rupees," Dawadi recalls. However, he said there first needs to be a law to apprehend and punish plastic bag manufacturers.

Sunil Manandhar was Environment Minister at the time and says the lack of legal provisions is being used as an excuse to allow the plastic industry to function without hindrance. He says the Environment Conservation Law of 1996 clearly spells out conditions under which a violator can have its license revoked.

It has been 20 years since the production and use of plastic bags has seen exponential growth. Now, there are 250 factories converting imported raw material in pellet form into bags and other goods.

BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

World Environment Day 5 June
With plastic pollution becoming a global crisis, UN Environment (UNEP) is marking World Environment Day 2018 with a campaign #BeatPlasticPollution calling for collaborative action to change the way countries manage plastic pollution.

Another former Environment Minister Ganesh Shah admits that he tried but failed to implement the plastic ban in 2008. While being involved in a Bagmati solid waste cleanup campaign, Shah realised that plastic bags constituted a large portion of the city's non-biodegradable waste. In fact, Kathmandu Valley today produces more than 500 tons of plastic waste a day.

Former ministers, secretaries and other bureaucrats in the Environment Ministry interviewed for this article all confirmed that their initiatives to ban the production of plastic bags were sabotaged by industrialists who enjoyed political protection.

"They used all kinds of pressure and inducements to ensure that the plastic ban was not implemented," says former minister Manandhar. "I

experienced the coercion myself during my tenure." He suspects that officials of his own ministry involved in formulating a plastic bag ban directive in 2011 were conspiring to allow loopholes.

Durga Prasad Dawadi, who is now Director General of the Department of Environment, says every time a minister started talking about a plastic ban to reduce the garbage burden, somehow the businessmen would get wind of it and arrive at the ministry with large delegations. He says the pressure also came from political party leaders.

Just a fortnight ago, four businessmen came to his office with a recommendation from the Maoist Minister of Forests and Environment Shakti Basnet to clear 16 truckloads of waste cotton from Bangladesh stopped at Jhapa customs.

"I said I could not clear something harmful to the environment, and they threatened me. They said they would teach me a lesson for not obeying the minister," Dawadi recalls. He says similar tactics were used to revoke plastic bans in the past.

Another former Environment Secretary Krishna Gyawali says there is no excuse for the bureaucracy to let businesses off the hook: "If the law is weak, it is their job to make it stronger."

A notice in the gazette announced a ban on bags below 30 microns effective Nepali New Year on 14 April 2015. As with all previous directives, this one was never implemented. This time, the earthquake was used as the excuse, but ex-minister Ganesh Shah is convinced industrialists were again behind it.

Plastic bag manufacturers petitioned the Supreme Court to overturn the ban in 2015. However, the court ruled in favour of the government, saying that plastic bags were harmful to human health and the environment, and that the ban had legal basis.

Last year's budget once again announced a ban on plastic bags. That decision was also soon forgotten. Towns like Pokhara, Biratnagar and Dharan have also tried to implement plastic bag bans without success.

Dawadi says the government's policy itself is contradictory: "How can the Ministry of Industry give licenses to plastic factories on the one hand, and the Ministry of Environment ban them?"

Shard Sharma, Chair of the Nepal Plastic Producers Association, says it is natural for his industry to lobby against the ban. "We have invested billions with permission from the government, we have been paying taxes, you cannot ban plastic just because some NGOs oppose it,"

he told Nepali Times. "If you want to close us down, we have to be compensated."

Environmentalists say the excessive use of one-time-use plastic bags clog up drains, spoil river banks, and release carcinogenic dioxin into the air when it is burnt. Thin plastic bags are blown about by the wind into farmlands and affect harvests.

The public is used to the convenience of plastic bags, however, and not enough has been done to raise awareness about its hazards. Affordable alternatives to plastic bags and water bottles are also absent. Future bans must also include foil wrappers and smaller instant noodle and candy packs, Dawadi says.

One way to reduce plastic use would be to tax it, or to put a price on plastic waste, as has been done in the Langtang National Park (see adjoining article).

Shopkeepers can also pay a role, as shown by Bhatbhateni and Big Mart which do not give away plastic bags. But the volume of plastic waste can be reduced if household and street garbage are sorted at source.

There is also an initiative to turn plastic bags into diesel by Rabintra Dhakal at the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST). Although proven, it has to be upscaled from a lab experiment to industrial production. On Monday, Kirtipur announced that it would discourage plastic bags, and is distributing 10,000 cloth bags as alternative. Lamahi of Dang has banned plastic cups and plates, and will soon ban bags. However, noodle and biscuit wrappers are still a problem.

Says environmental campaigner Bhusan Tuladhar: "Yes, plastic waste is a huge problem. But with big store chains banning it and rising public awareness, it is not all a flop." 🇳🇵



Track the production and use of plastic bags in Kathmandu, find out why past bag bans have failed. Then travel to Langtang to see how one group is buying discarded plastic bottles and recycling them in a plant in Pokhara.

nepalitimes.com



RECY
REUS
REDU



1 Discarded PET bottles trucked in to Pokhara from as far away as Langtang National park.



2 Workers sort the bottles, selecting transparent ones.

Yuvaraj Shrestha
in Pokhara

VIRTUOUS CYCLE

When Daniel Burgi first came to Nepal to work for United Mission to Nepal's hydropower projects, he travelled all over Nepal and decided to dedicate his life for the education of Nepali children.

He set up the non-profit group,

Plastic money

Conservation group pays Rs 1 for every discarded plastic bottle in Langtang to upcycle them

Samuel Johns
in Langtang

Langtang Valley is just beginning to recover from the earthquake three years ago, but another disaster looms large here in the high Himalaya: The Plastic Crisis.

As the region rebuilds, tourists are flocking back to this stunningly scenic region, 7-hour drive north of Kathmandu. Every year, about 15,000 trekkers visit the Langtang National Park, using up and leaving behind 200,000 plastic water bottles. A conservative estimate puts the number of discarded bottles in Langtang Valley alone at 5 million.

It takes just three seconds to throw away a water bottle, but it will take 450 years for it to biodegrade. The plastic will be around for seven more generations of Nepalis by the banks of the Bhote Kosi (*picture, above*).

But here in Langtang survivors of the earthquake are building a new beginning, they have understood the importance of keeping this jewel clean and safe. These mountains are an asset in the richest sense of the word, with huge aesthetic and environmental value which, if protected, can also provide economic benefits from trekking.

The Partnership for Sustainable Development (PSD) is a Nepali advocacy group involved in the retrieval and recycling of plastic trash in cooperation with the Kyanjin Gumpa Langtang Society. PSD is

tackle the impact of the quake on tourism. It creates jobs, local employment, and local responsibility for waste that would otherwise litter the environment.

Thopden Sonam has been hard at work for the past seven months collecting, sorting, cleaning, and storing the 500kg of plastic bottles a month that are trucked to Himalayan Plastic. The 1000-litre drums are full to the brim with sorted plastic, ready for the next shipment. Thopden stores the leftover mix of sugar-soda bottles and mineral water bottles supplied to trekkers in the valley. You name the brand and they have all been salvaged from the banks of rivers in Langtang Valley: Bailey, Natural Nepal Water, Kinley, Aqua, Coke, Sprite.

Our slogan 'Langtang Himal, Ramro Himal' seeks to spread environmental consciousness and clean trails, and help the



BOTTLED UP: Among the 5 million plastic bottles discarded in Langtang National Park are these by the banks of the river (*top right*).

Plastic bottles occupied a pride of place at a meeting between the presidents of India and Nepal at Shital Niwas last year (*right*).



also partnering with Sustainable Mountain Architecture to build a model pavilion entirely of plastic bottles in Rasuwa to raise public awareness. It supports the work of Nepali scientists to turn plastic waste into diesel. All this may seem like a drop in the ocean compared to the 1,000 tons of solid waste daily, much of it plastic, that Kathmandu produces. But every drop counts.

In 2017 PSD launched a simple scheme to pay Rs1 for every PET bottle. About 15,000 bottles per month collected from Langtang are dispatched to Himalayan Plastic in Pokhara where they are recycled to make educational material. The whole enterprise is funded and fuelled by the economics of recycling and providing desperately needed employment, vision, and long-term support in Langtang, where 400 people lost their lives in the earthquake.

Cultivating a circular economy around waste, especially plastic, is one way to

tourism economy. Convincing the locals is no easy matter, and sometimes things move slow.

Recycling is not only an option for keeping the Himalaya clean, but can also be a modest income stream for local people. The 100 tons of plastic thrown away actually represents Rs 7 million, if it can be collected for recycling.

Slowly, the message is spreading: why throw bottles in the river, if you can recycle them? Even better, why recycle them if you can upcycle? 🇳🇵



Samuel Johns studied geography at the University of Oxford and UBC in Canada and writes about the Himalaya in the anthropocene.

YCLE
SE
UCE



3 Labels and caps are removed. Coloured bottles are sold to other recyclers.



4 Bottles are machine-shredded into flakes to be processed into plastic pellets.



5 The Chinese-made machines can recycle 3,000 bottles in every 8-hour shift.



6 Pellets are weighed and filled into sacks before dispatch to customers all over Nepal.



6 Sacks of pellets ready for transport from Himalayan Life in Pokhara.

ALL PHOTOS: VIJAYRAJ SHRESTHA

Himalayan Life Nepal and to pay for its work, Burgi and Nepali colleague Chanman Srimal spent most of their time fundraising from donors. There must be a self-sustaining way to pay for a children's charity, they thought.

What could be a social entrepreneurship activity that could raise money for children? At first they thought of making chemical-free soaps for Pokhara's hotels, and while planning for it noticed

mountains of plastic waste piled high along streets in the scenic city.

Six years ago, no one had really thought you could make money recycling plastic. But Burgi and Srimal came up with a feasible plan and registered Himalayan Life Plastic Pvt Ltd in the Pokhara Industrial Estate with an initial investment of Rs60 million.

The factory now employs 65 workers to buy discarded PET bottles collected from Kathmandu,

Pokhara, Syangja, Tanahu and Langtang (*see story, above*) and recycle them into pellets for reuse.

The business model is quite simple: discarded transparent PET bottles are bought for Rs35 per kg, processed into pellets and sold to other plastic industries for reuse at Rs115 per kg, which is much cheaper than the raw material they import for Rs200 per kg of pellets.

"Using recycled pellets means there is less plastic garbage in the

environment, plastic industries have cheaper raw materials, and it reduces Nepal's import bill," says manager Prabhat Pratik of Himalayan Life.

Ironically, one of the biggest problem is competition from Indian recycling companies who source plastic trash from Nepal in bulk and have the advantage of an economy of scale.

There is criticism that the plastic is being recycled to make

other plastic, but that overlooks the fact that the environment is rid of plastic trash. Pratik calls this "upcycling, not recycling".

Ashok Sapkota of Green Society Nepal agrees: "Ventures like these need government support. They clean up the environment, reduce the import bill, create employment, pay taxes, and still make a profit that they plough into children's welfare." 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Architecture talk

Dane G. Carlson, a landscape designer and researcher currently based in Lower Mustang and Kathmandu, talks on ‘Landscape Past, Landscape Future: Hybrid Landscapes of Nepal’s Tibetan Frontier’.

18 May, 3pm onwards, Fulbright Commission Auditorium, Gyaneshwor, (01) 4444779

Improv workshop

Muneeb-ur-Rehman from Pakistan brings the wonders of improv, a form of live theatre, to Nepal. Listen beyond words and body language to nurture creativity, cultivate spontaneity and build empathy in your performance.

18-21 May, 12:30-3:30 pm, International Center for Social Theater, Bhakti Thapa Sadak, Baneshwor, Rs2,000, (01) 4494257

International food tasting

Get a taste of American, Japanese, British, Spanish and Sri Lankan cuisine prepared and guided by students from culinary arts and hospitality at the International food tasting event.

19 May, 11am-5pm, Academy of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management, Rs350, 9801104804



Art gallery opening

On International Museum Day, Taragaon opens Contemporary Art Gallery with performances by Saurganga Darshandhari, Sabita Dangol and Sundar Lama.

18 May, 4pm, Taragaon Museum Amphitheatre, Boudha, (01) 6201035/ 5171234

Byoga

An hour-long session to experience beer with yoga. Breathe, sip and stretch.

19 May, 4-5pm/6-7pm, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, Rs2,500, 9813365426, 9841269962

Seminar with Rah

Rah Sharma, director of photography of Sunkesari, is in Kathmandu to inspire young filmmakers. Hear his experience of filming the Nepali horror movie and learn from his techniques.

19 May, 1-4pm, Nepal Film Development Board, Chabahil, (01) 4414137

Hike out

One day hikes, Godavari-Lakuribhanjyang-Lubhu on Saturday and Budhanilkantha-Nagi Gumba-Shivapuri on Sunday for small groups led by a trusted guide. Register online for the package.

19/20 May, 6:30am, Outdoor Adventure Center Nepal, Thamel, Rs1,000, (01) 4433515



Dog socialisation

A call out to all dog owners to bring along their pets for treats, trainings, grooming, games and idea sharing.

19 May, 8am-2pm, Around the Corner, Bansbari, Rs600, 9808517349

Mindful art

Michael D. Gordon, Fulbright student, researcher of painting, and curator of ‘Sacred Survival’ speaks on the contemporary landscape of Thangka and Paubha painting in Nepal.

21 May, 5pm onwards, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4018048

Photography workshop

A 10-day workshop on photography, focusing not just on technicalities but also on innovation and perspectives. Beginners with a digital SLR, digital compact camera or mobile phone are encouraged to register by 21 May.

22- 31 May, 7-9am, Artudio, Swoyambhu, Rs5,500, 9803779777/ 9823490390, artudio@hotmail.com

MUSIC



Neetesh Jung Kunwar

A musical session with one of Kathmandu’s youngest, most popular and happening artist Neetesh J Kunwar.

19 May, 6pm-12am, Durbar, Darbar Marg

Jammin’ Thursday

A place to meet fellow musicians, play a few tunes with them, or listen to those making music.

24 May, 7-9pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5528362



Speakeasy ft. Lindy Hop

Speakeasy plays tunes from the swing era to get you to dance along with Lindy Hop dancers at the ‘Swing Night’. Don’t forget to put your vintage looks on.

26 May, 7-9pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5528362

Open mic for Dylan

Open mic night dedicated to Bob Dylan in celebration of his 77th birthday. The host Kaustuv, will accompany you on a night full of nostalgia.

22 May, 7:30-10pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9849377915

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 17 May

The sequel to the 2016 film Deadpool, Deadpool 2 follows the journey of a wisecracking mercenary who, after undergoing an experimental regenerative mutation, forms a team of superheroes (X-Force), to protect a young mutant from a villain named Cable. Directed by David Leitch, the film stars Ryan Reynolds in the title role alongside Josh Brolin, Morena Baccarin, Julian Dennison, Zazie Beetz, T.J. Miller, Brianna Hildebrand, and Jack Keely. The film features Reynolds’ comic dialogues, on-point acting, as well as violence and strong language.

DINING



Fun Café

Get a bite of a flavourful buffet brunch at the Café after taking a dip at the pool to beat the blazing summer heat. Also enjoy a complimentary cocktail or mocktail with the package.

Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat, Rs2,200 (adults), Rs1,100 (children below 12 years), (01) 4411818

The Coffee Shop

Following the popularity of last year’s event, ‘Mad About Mangoes’ is back with a special menu with mangoes in every item, from drinks, main course to desserts. Happy indulging!

Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg, (01) 4221711

Kava Restaurant

Discover the culture of Hyderabad through traditional Nizami and Andhra Pradesh delicacies specially curated by Chef Deepak and his team.

24 May-2 June, 7-10:30pm, Fairfield by Marriott, Thamel, Rs1,999, (01) 4217999

Capital Grill

This American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone’s tastes. Present 3 bills from Capital Grill paid in the same month and get a privilege membership for discounts and seasonal offers.

Bhatbhateni, (01) 4428426



Lhakpa’s Chulo

Nepali dal bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry. Lakpa’s Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. Garlic chilli prawn at this cosy restaurant is to die for.

Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

Hyatt Regency

Enjoy your weekend brunch by the pool with family and friends and a wide spread of vegetarian and non-vegetarian buffet featuring barbecue, kebab stations, antipasti and a wok station

19-20 May, 12:30-4pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, Rs2,500 (single), (01)5171234

GETAWAY



Tiger Palace Resort

Dance your stress out at the resort’s party and enjoy the day with BBQ, burgers, ice creams and cocktails. A stay at the hotel also offers a pool day pass.

19May, 12-5pm, Tiger Palace Resort, Bhairahawa, Rs2,500, (071) 512000

Rupakot Resort

Get pampered in the lap of luxury amid stunning views of the Annapurnas.

Maidan-6, Rupakot, Kaski, (061) 622660, (01) 4004687



Gaida Wildlife Camp

Bordering the rhino zone in the central area of Chitwan National Park, the camp is a great place to reconnect with wildlife. Drive to Sauraha, and the Camp folks will take care of you from there.

Chitwan, (01) 4215409/ 4215431

Atithi Resort & Spa

Continuously on TripAdvisor’s list of top ten hotels in Nepal, the resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali traditions with modern amenities. Spend the weekend here to make it remarkable.

Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 1466760



Godavari Village Resort

Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views and traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields.

Godavari, (01) 5560675

Step in for more varieties at

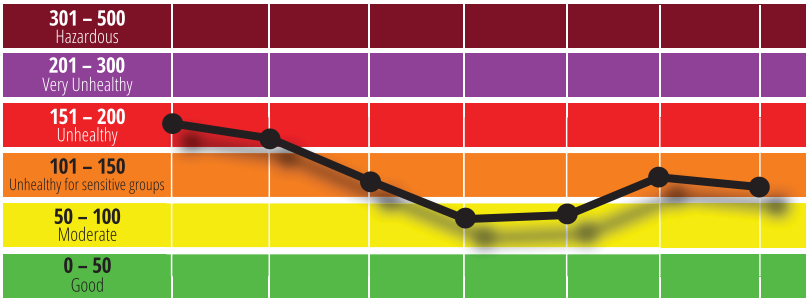
LIFE STYLE

DESIGN & DECOR

Show Room: SRD Building New Plaza, Putalisadak, Tel:4425402

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 11 - 17 May



FRIDAY May 11 SATURDAY May 12 SUNDAY May 13 MONDAY May 14 TUESDAY May 15 WEDNESDAY May 16 THURSDAY May 17

The good news is that this week’s rains brought down the average daily pollution levels at Kathmandu city centre to the ‘Moderate’ band for two days in a row for the first time this year. On Monday and Tuesday the concentration of surface ozone and particles below 2.5 microns were within acceptable limits set by WHO. However, vehicular emissions quickly built up after rains even on those days, and for five other days, including Saturday, they were consistently at Unhealthy levels.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

The life and times of Arniko

The cultural legacy of Nepal’s famous son can still be seen across East Asia



WHOSE ART: The White Dagoba built by Arniko dominates the Beijing skyline 900 years ago in this rendering (*left*), and still stands today. Silk and ink portraits of Kublai Khan and his consort Chabi, supposedly by Arniko, are now in a Taipei museum. Kublai Khan was the grandson of Genghis Khan and ruled over Mongolia and parts of China and Korea.

Sewa Bhattarai

Stamps have been issued, a highway has been named after him, he has been declared one of Nepal’s national icons. But 900 years later Arniko still remains very much an enigma in the country of his birth.

In China, however, where Arniko went as a master architect to the court of Kublai Khan in 1260, he is still respected. He was given the title of Duke of Liang, and a memorial stele marks the spot where he was cremated in Hsiang Sheng near Beijing. A biography was written about him, and the Yuan genealogy contains a chapter on him.

It is because of these reliable information from Chinese sources that today we are able to trace the story of this remarkable historical figure from Kathmandu, even though details about him in Nepal itself are patchy.

In 1260, the Mongol leader Kublai Khan asked his spiritual guru Phags-Pa to build a golden stupa in Tibet. When the patriarch of Tibetan Buddhism’s Shakya sect asked the king of Nepal, Jaybhimdev Malla, for a hundred artists the king could muster only 80. Sixteen-year-old Arniko, already known as a child prodigy, volunteered to lead them.

“The fact that they needed Nepali artists proves just how developed Nepal’s art and

architecture were at that time,” explains art historian Manuj Babu Mishra. “In fact, the sixth-century Changu Narayan Temple pre-dated Arniko and indicates the richness of Nepal’s artistic past.”

Due to the decline of Buddhism in the subcontinent, Tibet looked upon Nepal as the source of Buddhist wisdom and philosophy. Phags-pa was so impressed with Arniko’s stupas that he trained him into monkhood and sent him to Beijing to meet the Great Khan himself. Arniko impressed Kublai Khan (Genghis Khan’s grandson) by repairing a bronze statue, and went on to build the White Dagoba, which is a Beijing landmark to this day.

“China’s art and architecture were already highly developed, so China was not looking for just any architect from Nepal. What Arniko took to China was Buddhist architecture with its philosophy and symbolism,” says historian Satya Mohan Joshi, whose treatise on Arniko was published in 1988. “For example the Chaitya in Swoyambhu and Baudha symbolised Chaitanya, or consciousness.”

It is supposed to be Arniko who took Kathmandu Valley’s famous tiered temple style to China, from where it travelled to Korea and Kyoto. But while that is difficult to prove, Satya Mohan Joshi says Arniko took many other Nepali elements north: the wooden gate, stone steps and carved windows (*tikijhya*) at the White

Dagoba, its bronze spire (*gajur*), Nepali-style statues of Dipankar, Shakyamuni and Maitreya Buddha, Paubha paintings of deities like Mahakala, White Tara, Green Tara, Avalokiteswar.

Amidst the ruins of the Cloud Terrace near the base of the Great Wall is a huge stone arch containing images like the Garud, Nagkanya, crocodiles, elephants, and Panchabuddha. The white stupa in Nanking and other sites actually have inscriptions in Ranjana script – all vestiges of Arniko’s influence

Arniko meets Kublai Khan

After he arrived, the Emperor looked at him at some length before asking, “Are you afraid to come to the big country?”

He answered, “The sage (Kublai Khan) regards people in all directions as his sons. When a son comes to his father, what is there to fear?”

“Why do you come?”

He replied, “My family has been living in the west (Nepal) for generations. I took the imperial edict to build the stupa in Tibet for two years. I saw constant wars there, and wish Your Majesty could pacify them. I come for sentient beings.”

“What do you practice?”

He said, “I take my mind as my teacher and know roughly painting, casting and carving.”

The Emperor was greatly pleased.

(Extract from Arniko’s biography, 1316)

in China.

After Arniko constructed three stupas, nine great Buddhist temples, two Confucian shrines, one Daoist temple, he was made the ‘master of all classes of artisans’. Prof Jing Anning at Michigan State University writes that Arniko made ‘new symbols of the emperor’s sovereignty, based on designs from Indic culture such as the *dharmachakra* (Wheel of the Law) which was used to lead imperial processions, and the image of Garuda, the celestial bird that was displayed over the imperial throne’.

In another research paper, late historian Dina Bangdel states that Arniko’s works were instrumental in the conversion of Kublai Khan to Tantric Buddhism. ‘Phags-pa directed Arniko to create an image of Mahakala that was used in a protection ritual to aid Khan in his battles (which he won). Arniko’s Mahakala image became a powerful symbol of a leader’s authority to rule,’ Bangdel has written.

Arniko also crafted scientific instruments like armillary spheres and water clocks. However, art works that can be definitely attributed to him are rare. The Cleveland Museum says its image of Green Tara is by Arniko, while portraits of Kublai Khan and his wife Chabi at the National Palace Museum of Taiwan are believed to be by Arniko.

Although these claims cannot be proven, Prof Anning says a bronze statue of Manjushri (dated

1305) now in the Palace Museum in Beijing and a brocade image of a three-faced, six-armed *Guhyasamaja* now in the Potala Palace in Lhasa are by Arniko.

Arniko established a school of Nepali art in China which trained at least two of his own sons and thousands of Chinese artists. ‘By drawing inspiration from the artistic traditions of Pala, Nepal and China, Anige (Arniko) single-handedly created a new form of court art and promoted it through the huge artisan agencies under his leadership,’ Prof Anning writes.

The Italian traveller Marco Polo, who journeyed to China from 1271-1295, was a contemporary of Arniko. If they ever met, history has no record of it. Marco Polo is not even named in Chinese history. Ironically, while Marco Polo gained lasting fame after he returned home and wrote of his travels, Arniko despite the respect he commanded in the Chinese court, disappeared from world history after his death in 1306 at age 62.

Satya Mohan Joshi thinks Arniko’s legacy is the enduring bond between Nepal and China, and cites the White Dagoba which was left alone even during the Cultural Revolution, and is still cared for and renovated with high priority by the Chinese state.

He adds: “Nepal needs to live by the policy of *panchasheel*, and we have historic proof that Arniko espoused it. That is why he deserves to be our national icon.” 🇳🇵





Last week’s column lamented the reviewer’s plight when having a real paucity of recent films to choose from, a drought that comes a few times a year. At this point, I revert to a store



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

of contemporary films that were pushed aside, but are not to be missed. Last week’s *Faces Places* was one of these neglected films. This week, I’d like to bring attention to Sally Potter’s *The Party*—a deep, rich, tragi-comedy that came out in 2017, and was considered by many to be one of the truly superlative

films of the past year. If you have missed Sally Potter’s films, and are a cinema person, you must go back and find them. Potter is an artist (trained in dance, theater, and cinema), who happens to practice largely in the cinematic medium. Over the years, she has become legendary for her complex and captivating films that include classics like *Orlando* (1992), and *The Tango Lesson* (1997) – to name two. Last year, Potter released this intimate, seven actor only, living room drama starring the cream of thespians, her fellow British compatriots that include Timothy Spall, Kristen Scott-Thomas, Emily Mortimer, and Cillian Murphy. The film, a tense, darkly comic drama, centres around a special lunch that is arranged by Kristen

Scott Thomas’s character, Janet, who has just been appointed to the post of shadow Minister of Health. Her husband, Bill, played by Timothy Spall, sits in their living room playing records as Janet prepares her celebratory lunch, and fields congratulatory phone calls from friends, acquaintances, and her secret lover. As their friends arrive, the tight knit group talk about their ideologies, beliefs and hopes for the country now that Janet is in a position to make a difference, and field kitchen fires, home fires, and many other crises that emerge moment after moment, putting everyone on edge, and necessitating nail biting nervous laughter from the viewers. This is the sort of writing that one might expect from the famous Irish playwright turned film-maker Martin McDonagh, but Potter, who wrote the screenplay singlehandedly proves to be adept at yoking together humour and tragedy, giving backbone to the film that another more superficial writer-director would have failed at. The film, shot entirely in black and white, within the confines of the seven-person ensemble, and Janet and Bill’s lower ground floor home, is almost more suited for the stage than cinema. Yet the antics of these brilliant actors blossom in front of the camera, and the film comes to life, leaving all of us wondering what the heck is going on, and how things might end—making for a truly refreshing film from the mind of one of the great art-house directors of our time. 🍷



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RSS

REMEMBRANCE: Prime Minister K P Oli and Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal plant a ginkgo sapling at Baluwatar on Thursday to mark the 25th death anniversary of UML leaders Madan Bhandari and Jibraj Ashrit.



RSS

ANOTHER CRASH: Makalu Air’s single engine Cessna 208B Grand Caravan cargo aircraft crashed in Humla on Wednesday morning, killing both pilots. The crash occurred at an altitude of 4,000m, 15km south of Simikot.



INDIAN EMBASSY

DISASTER PREVENTION: Indian Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri presenting a replica of a cheque for Rs180.74 million to the Water Induced Disaster Management office for river training works along the Lalbakeya, Bagmati and Kamla Rivers.



MOUNTAIN EXPEDITIONS

NEARLY THERE: Mountaineers on the summit ridge of Mt Everest early morning this week, among whom is Australian Steve Plain who completed his 7 Summits World Speed Record in 117 days by doing an Everest-Lhotse traverse.



TURKISH AIRLINES

LET IT FLY: Turkish Airlines Flying Chef Şafak Avni Seğer and Country Manager Abdullah Tuncer Kececi present awards to the winner of Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup 2018 Kathmandu qualifiers Madhav Acharya (*centre*) on Saturday at Gokarna Golf Club.

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Women conservationists brave discrimination, and the wild

Female environmentalists struggle against gender stereotypes as they work to save Nepal's nature



Mukesh Pokhrel in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 13-19 May

When Madhuri Karki, then chief of the District Forest Office in Bhaktapur, introduced herself to the CDO in Chitwan, he asked, shocked: "A woman forest officer?"

Karki was the first female forest officer in the country, and those were the days when the proportion of women in the Department of Forest was so small, Karki recalls: "There was a queue of people who came to watch us as if we were animals in a zoo."

Twenty years on, Karki is under-secretary in the department, but things have not changed much. The number of women in conservation has gone up, but the perception that being a forest officer is a 'man's job' still remains.

Saraswati Sapkota was 18 when she started working as a national park officer. The enthusiasm for her first job soon turned bitter when she got only two pairs of uniforms when the male officers all got three pairs every year. She was the only woman among 15 staff members.

"It was a way of showing me that they thought I was not capable," recalls Sapkota. "Instead of trying to understand the issues women face working in national parks, and trying to make the workplace female-friendly, people treated us as a part of the problem."

This is all very familiar to other female conservation officers here. They work equally as hard as the men, if not more, to contribute to the protection and conservation of wildlife, but are not given the same responsibilities or trust.

The working conditions are challenging: living alone in the middle of the jungle, patrolling with Army soldiers, being on call all the time, being close to wild animals, having to climb trees and do physically challenging work. This has given people the notion that women are not suitable for this kind of work.

But today Karki, Sapkota and others are breaking the stereotypes. There are currently 86 female forest officers in the Wildlife and Forest Conservation Department. Women officers are not only doing well, but are rising up the ranks in the conservation field.

Pratibha Kakshapati worked in Chitwan National Park soon after joining, and was posted in Meghauli, an area that used to be severely affected by wild elephant attacks. She used to stay up all night, patrolling and securing the village perimeters from marauding wild elephants. She says, "Once you are on duty, there is no distinction between male and female. We all have to work equally

hard." It is because of such dedication that women officers have earned the grudging respect of their male colleagues. People were initially hesitant to have women in charge of their community

forests, demanding male officers instead. But women like Madhuri Karki held on, determined that they could do the job just as well. People gradually realised that female officers are not only capable and qualified for the job, but that they also understand forest related issues better.

Radha Wagle, who has been working in conservation, says the main problem for women is not the threat of wild animals or the physically challenging work, it is the attitude of men towards women.

Says Wagle, "There needs to be a major shift in the way men view women in this field."

But she and others have taken the discrimination and snide comments in their stride, undaunted by the physically arduous nature of their work and the threat of wild animals.

Says Saraswoti Sapkota: "We take it all as a given, but unless male officers change their behaviour and attitude, more women will not join this profession."

JOKES APART: The unification of UML and CPN-MC parties has given cartoonists much fodder. Two recent cartoons published since the parties signed a unity agreement in February.




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The crow and the

Om Astha Rai

In a sign of its new assertiveness, the Nepal government has issued a draft document laying down strict guidelines about what aid agencies and non-government groups can and cannot do. But critics say its provisions are too broad, and could easily be misused to silence critics at home and restrict the activities of international groups in Nepal.

The National Integrity Policy is aimed at ‘promoting integrity and transparency’ in all spheres of public life, guiding the conduct of public officials, and regulating the activities especially of western aid agencies, INGOs and civil society groups working on democracy and human rights.

Detractors say it is prompted by the establishment class feeling insecure about losing its grip on power and privileges. The document appears to be a backlash against the funding indigenous and excluded groups received from western donors during the Constitution-drafting process. It also seems to be a reaction to heightened activities of evangelical groups in Nepal.

Here are just some of the items in the new directive:

- INGOs cannot forward any reports to headquarters or donors without first submitting them to, and securing approval from, the government.
- NGOs must report foreign individuals or agencies involved in ‘activities against Nepal, Nepali civilisation or social harmony’ to the authorities.
- I/NGOs and foreigners are barred from ‘levelling unwarranted charges against Nepal ... and spreading hatred’.
- Security agencies under the Home Ministry will monitor foreigners to check if they are working against the ‘national interest’.
- Nepali officials meeting foreign diplomats should not work against Nepal’s ‘national interest’ and should maintain secrecy.
- Foreign embassies cannot disburse development aid directly.

The Association of International NGOs in Nepal and the NGO Federation have slammed the draft, arguing that they are impractical and create unnecessary hassles, while admitting there may be some wayward and opaque NGOs that need to be reined in.

What diplomats and aid officials are worried about is that the policy has ambiguous provisions that can be used to shut down any I/NGO, aid agency, or deport foreigners. Such broad rules could also be used to target critical civil society groups and political dissidents.

To be sure, the idea to silence civil society is not new. After king Gyanendra’s coup in February 2005, the Army cracked down on pro-democracy forces, putting Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba under house arrest, jailing political dissidents, and forcing many to go underground.

As political parties regrouped, thousands of NGOs and civil society members fought back to reclaim democracy. The king saw civil society as a direct threat to his authoritarian ambition, and jailed many members. He announced new controls on non-profits, INGOs and donors similar to the ones in this draft National Integrity Policy.

Deuba returned to power 12 years later, and his first decision in 2017 in his fourth term as prime minister was to do exactly what king Gyanendra had tried: restrict civil society, international donors and diplomatic missions.

He chose two government secretaries known to be vocal critics of international agencies and donors to formulate his National Integrity Policy. It was clearly guided by suspicions that proselytisation was undermining Nepal’s Hindu identity, and the conviction that western embassies, their aid agencies and INGOs were behind conversions.

Gopal Lamsal, who is now President of the NGO Federation of Nepal, was a young activist when the king tried to silence critics in 2005. He remembers how they had to hit the streets, burning copies of the NGO regulations and clashing

with police. Lamsal says some of the provisions of the new National Integrity Policy seem to be directly lifted from the king’s and Deuba’s rule-book. He says the Policy is full of vague, impractical and outrageous clauses like the one asking NGOs to report anti-national activities. He says: “It is ridiculous that the government wants us to be its spies.”

The real reason Deuba ordered a National Integrity Policy last year seems to be because his advisers had concluded that over 65% of NGOs in Nepal were close to UML, and could use their budgets to finance the party’s election campaign. Deuba’s NC party lost the elections anyway, and UML Chair K P Oli replaced him as the new PM in February.

Ironically, it is now the Oli government’s turn to revive a Policy paper he inherited from Gyanendra and Deuba. An activist explains that Oli is endorsing the controversial draft because it has so many broad provisions that it can be used to snare political enemies.

He says: “Gyanendra or Deuba or Oli, they all hate an independent and critical civil society.”

Another rights activist interviewed for this article told us the policy was initially mooted in 2011 when Janajati lawmakers, supported by the British aid agency DfID through the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), formed a caucus to push for greater representation in the new Constitution.

Indeed, even five years ago, various line ministries delayed a UNDP medium-term plan document and demanded that words like ‘structural discrimination’, ‘gender’, and ‘inclusion’ be removed.

“The Kathmandu elite began to create a false narrative that foreigners are funding Janajati-Madhesi NGOs to perpetuate political instability and promote proselytisation in Nepal,” the activist said. However, Ex-secretary Sharada Prasad Trital, who led the team drafting the Policy, defended the document: “Does the Chinese government allow an INGO to

publish whatever report it writes about China? If not, how can INGOs expect Nepal to allow it?”

Trital argues that the guidelines will actually protect Nepal’s international image. “If this policy had been in place, the EU Election Observation Mission could never have been able to publish its one-sided report about Nepal’s election laws in March,” he says. “Such biased reports harm Nepal’s reputation, without allowing the government to put forward its own perspective.”

A board member of AIN argues otherwise: “Of course, I/NGOs need to be within the Constitutional framework, but it is also their role to monitor the government and be critical if necessary.”

He adds: “Some NGOs are required to submit shadow reports to the UN pointing out the government’s failures or weaknesses. The government is obliged by several international treaties to allow these NGOs to draft independent reports.”

To be sure, the National Integrity Policy has tried to assert the government’s authority after many decades in which donors and international agencies were allowed to do what they liked without much scrutiny. Many of the provisions in the document could actually help make aid agencies more transparent and accountable.

For example, more than one person of a family can no longer be in the executive committee of an NGO, one cannot hold executive posts for more than two terms, and I/NGO budgets cannot cross a threshold for administrative cost. It also reduces the role of Social Welfare Council by empowering the Finance Ministry to approve budgets and programs of all I/NGOs.

UML leader Rajan Bhattarai assured *Nepali Times*: “The guidelines are not intended to curb any freedoms. There will be no compromise on democratic values.”

However, the policy has alarming provisions like the setting up of a surveillance network to monitor foreigners working in

Nepal, check their past records and scrutinise if they are involved in undermining the national interest.

One such mechanism will be at the Ministry of Home Affairs overseeing surveillance teams made up of the Army, Police, Armed Police Force and National Investigation Department. Those found guilty can be deported, or declared persona non-grata.

What troubles many is that the draft is being issued at a time when a joint communist government is in power – parties historically not known to be supportive of democratic freedoms and human rights. (see Editorial, page 2) Critics say such a policy, instead of strengthening Nepal’s standing in the world, would undermine its democratic and liberal credentials.

Said one: “If the government fairly implements this policy, it could promote integrity. If not, its provisions are so sweeping they could be used against anyone. Even the most upright and law-abiding citizen can be punished.”

It is an indication of the degree of fear the policy paper has already spread that most civil society members interviewed for this piece wanted to remain anonymous.

Ex-AIN President Deepak Raj Sapkota is not so worried. He says: “We are almost certain the government will not pass the policy in its current form without addressing our concerns.”

 nepalitimes.com
For detailed guidelines from the National Integrity Policy paper, go online.







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scarecrow



Nepal wants funds, but on its own terms

Olav Myrholt

Several things come into play with the Nepal government's new National Integrity Policy that wants to tighten control over the activities of international NGOs and donor governments. Most of them relate to the country's sense of integrity and sovereignty.

It is quite normal for a government to monitor and control the flow of non-corporate funds coming into one's country. There are mechanisms already in place in Nepal to ensure that aid organisations and special interest groups can channel funds to government, institutions, non-government organisations and projects in Nepal.

The bureaucracy involved for approval varies depending on project parameters. On a global scale, Nepal is considered fairly liberal in this sense, and there is a long history of foreign support for aid and infrastructure projects. Governments in the past have also been more tolerant than most in giving free rein to outside agencies to help with infrastructure, development, and even constitution-writing, transitional justice and human rights.

Of late, such aid projects have also included extreme evangelical Christian missionaries that are seen as undermining local culture and religion and upsetting the old order. The claim is that money buys souls. Perhaps worse for the government is that money also buys politics, and with a quasi-communist coalition as

the leading power, this is not appreciated.

Two emerging global powers are Nepal's immediate neighbours: China and India which are vying for a foothold enabling them to adjust Nepal's internal and external politics to suit their interests. Neither country is tolerant of foreigners, and have strict controls on the activities of non-governmental players and outside agencies.

Money can buy sympathy in the countryside and concessions at the central level. And there is more. Nepal wants to have the funds, clearly, but on her own terms. Those terms appear to involve further control measures and prohibitions. The government will be happy to get rid of all the perceived negative influencers, but it seems to throw out the baby with the bath water.

A full implementation of some of the suggested measures in the draft Policy make it much less attractive to work in Nepal for aid agencies, and there are other takers ready elsewhere. Nepal is in a process of devolving power to provincial and local governments, at the same time the central government wants centralisation of financial assistance.

Aid organisations and similar outfits don't want to have to go through the Ministry of Finance, and clear funds there before disbursement. Even worse, the new Policy has stricter guidelines for foreign diplomats, the activities of aid groups and even proposes a surveillance mechanism under the Ministry of Home Affairs and the security agencies to monitor the activities of foreigners.

The current channel for aid agencies to work through is the Social Welfare Council policy/registration system which is seen as more workable to get funds straight to legitimate recipients. Why fix something that isn't broken?

Olav Myrholt is a social development worker based in Norway with a special interest in Nepal for the last 40 years.



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Govt issues draft guidelines for public hygiene

Now that we have a government if the people, buy the people, and f**k the people, we can be fairly confident that there will be stability and prosperity for those in office. Trickle-down economics will ensure that ill-gotten wealth will finally dribble down to the grassroots at some point in our country's glorious future.

And speaking of trickle down, the grubberment has just issued a draft National Hygiene Policy that lays down strict new guidelines about how Nepalis should conduct themselves with regards to personal and public hygiene under the new federal Constitution.

Nepalis love to nitpick and can be seen doing this in public on public transport, in offices, and on sidewalks even if they don't exist, at all times of day and/or night. Under current law, anyone can nitpick anyone else as long as it is consensual. Since looking for lice on someone else's hair is an indication of some degree of mutual intimacy, it is frowned upon if it involves two or more individuals of the same sex.

It is perfectly acceptable, however, to approach a stranger sitting next to you in an overnight flight to Sharjah, and, after necessary introductions, start plucking follicular fauna from each others' hair. The new draft law allows nitpicking in public as long as it does not harm the national interest, or disturb Nepal's socio-economic harmony.

Like smoking, **breaking wind** in public places is henceforth banned in the national interest under the new guidelines. Exceptions are made for ass acoustics during emergencies but only if the perpetrator in question has a national ID card or valid visa to prove eligibility to blow his/her own trumpet in Nepali air space. However, commandos will be scrambled if stink bombs are found in Cabinet Meetings or during Parliamentary Hearings.

Extricating **belly button** lint is now legal for all age groups, genders, and at all times. This decision has been taken to boost the pashmina industry which has been suffering from a crippling shortage of raw material. Similarly, civil servants both in federal and provincial ministries will be hereby allowed to mine **ear wax** during office hours, and also on national holidays, so as to make the country self-sufficient in candles.

Toothpicking is another national activity and because there are no rules governing how people with advanced halitosis should pick their teeth in polite company, the new Code of

Conduct has set up a surveillance mechanism under the Ministry of Homestay Affairs to apprehend those who refuse to engage in self-exploration of their oral cavities within Nepal's territorial waters. It is in the national interest to dislodge morsels of mutton from the molars so our breath does not smell like the Bagmati.

Nepalis are **nosey parkers**, and our ancestors risked life and limb to explore the uncharted upper reaches of our nostrils so that modern Nepalis can go boldly forth where our forebears once planted the national flag. The probe of choice for nasal expeditions is the pinkie with a nail that is designed to grow into the shape of a tiny shovel so that it can efficiently mine nuggets of nutrient-rich booty from deep inside our snouts.

Because of space constraints we cannot go into the conventions of etiquette governing the grooming



of other body parts. Suffice to say that the draft guideline has adopted a laissez faire attitude about expelling body fluids in public. Attending to **calls from nature** is now allowed anywhere along the East-West Highway where there is a mobile signal. This will curb fertiliser imports and boost organic agriculture.

Under the guidelines, Nepalis are now also allowed to legally **clear their throats** in public. This is traditionally done with a quick intake of breath to dislodge the primary target in the oesophagus, pneumatically roll the excavated material into an aerodynamic glob, and then, with the same technology used in shoulder-fired heat-seeking Stinger missiles, expectorate this biological warhead at an innocent bystander.

The favourite male Nepali past-time of **rummaging through the toolbox** in public is now permissible by law. Immigration officials can, in full view of arriving passengers, scratch the crotch as long as it does not violate the Vienna Convention of 1935 and its later amendments. And the Ass is gratified to note that in the spirit of Public-Private Partnership, this provision in the National Hygiene Policy also allows those with a **posterior motive** to attend to urgent private itches in public.



The Ass

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