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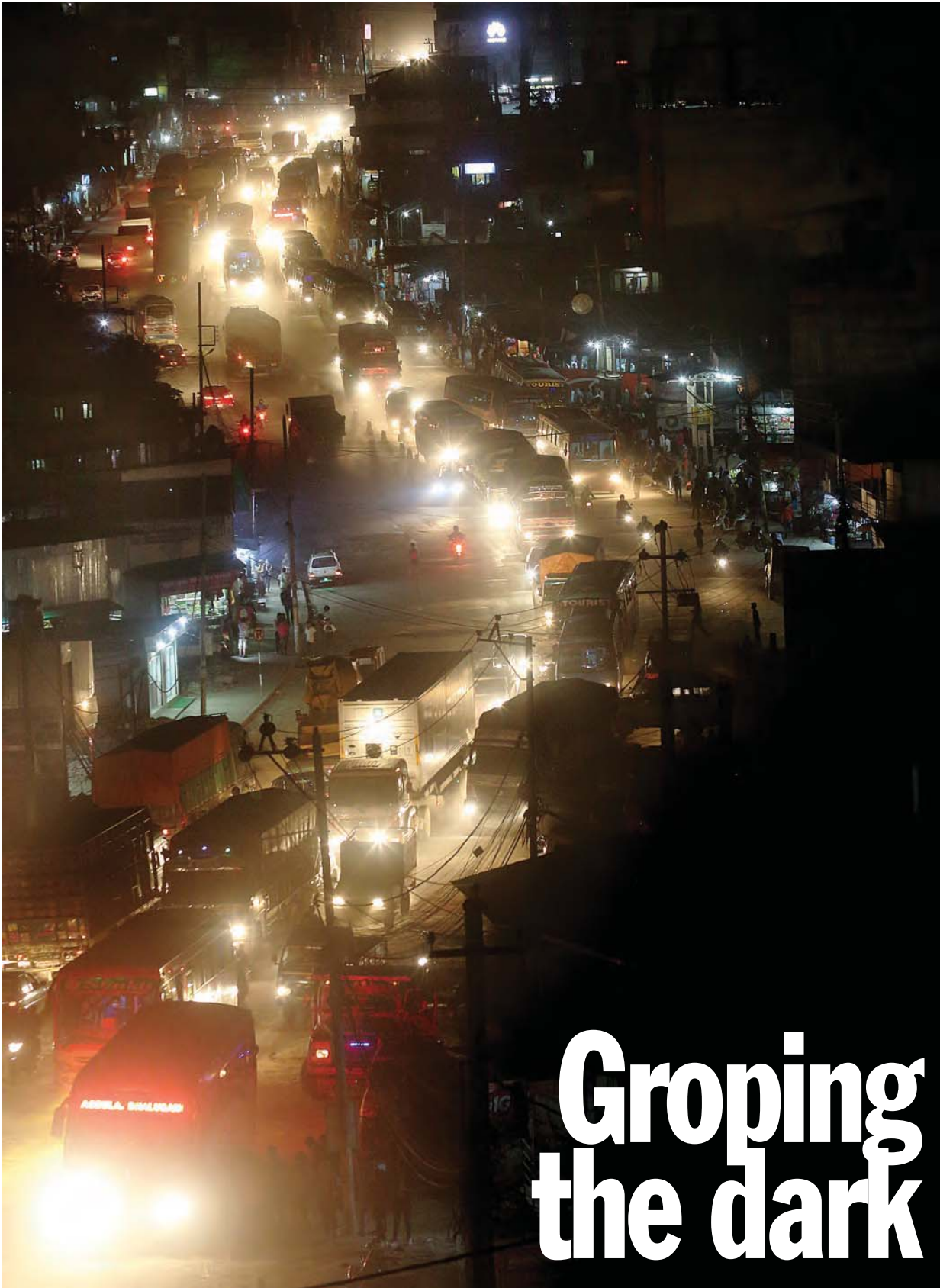
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Groping the dark

BIKRAM RAI

Nepal's arguably most powerful government's first budget has failed to rouse its own supporters.

In their joint election manifesto last year, NCP leaders made some exciting promises like increasing the annual per capita income of Nepalis to \$5,000 and building 50-bed hospitals in all village councils.

But Finance Minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada toned down the budget, probably because he himself has

been making a pretty dire prognosis of the state of the economy. It seems the country simply cannot afford to lavishly throw money around.

Some have defended the budget by saying that Khatiwada is minister in a stable government which will govern Nepal for at least five years, and all electoral promises need not be fulfilled in the first year.

But some NCP supporters themselves wonder if Khatiwada

is working at cross-purposes with his bosses since there was nothing in the budget speech on Tuesday about Prime Minister Oli's pledges.

"Most people hoped for a big bang budget, preparing the country for a great leap forward," says economist Keshav Acharya. "But it is rudderless, it does not reflect the party's election manifesto, and nor is it in sync with the white paper."

Surprisingly, critics like Swarnim Wagle and Bishwo Poudel

KICKING OFF

TELEVISION TECHNOLOGY HAS VASTLY IMPROVED IMAGE QUALITY IN THE 4 YEARS AFTER THE LAST WORLD CUP. IT MAY BE TIME TO UPGRADE.

PAGE 8-9

have described the budget as "realistic", probably knowing the Finance Minister had little room for manoeuvre.

However, Khatiwada has set a target of 8% economic growth this year, contradicting the adverse economic scenario he presented in his own white paper two months ago. Economists are skeptical about the projected growth rate when indicators are so dismal.

Khatiwada mentioned big-ticket infrastructure projects like the Chure Highway, Nijgad Airport, the Tarai Fast-Track, East-West Electric Railway and Kathmandu to Kerung and Raxaul railways, earmarking Rs 109 billion for transport alone.

The Communist plan is to launch major infrastructure projects for massive job-creation, and unleash downstream benefits. However, such gigantic schemes have been ridiculed in social media: many say a government that cannot even upgrade roads like the Kalanki intersection (*pictured, left*) for four years has no right to spin dreams of intercity trains.

Infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya pushes for big infrastructure projects like Nijgad Airport, but worries that the government lacks capacity to implement them.

Om Astha Rai

GIGANTISM

EDITORIAL

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TOURISM MINISTER

RABINDRA ADHIKARI

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DOES NEPAL NEED A 4TH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT?

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

GIGANTISM

It is a phenomenon seen across the world in electoral democracies: politicians falling into the temptation of pouring large chunks of their national budgets into gargantuan projects to show their macho-ness. Admittedly, such big-mindedness is not restricted to elected officials – it is even more prevalent in authoritarian states which lavish money on Olympic complexes, empty skyscrapers, or space programs meant more to enhance national prestige than national well-being. The megalomania of rulers grows to match their egos.

Nepal’s united Communist government seems to be afflicted by an incurable strain of political gigantism reminiscent of their historic mentors. The budget presented to Parliament by Finance Minister Khatiwada on Tuesday laid correct emphasis on youth employment and raising living standards, but at the same time gave mysterious VAT exemptions to mobile phone traders and disbursed pork-barrel funds to MPs.

The main outlays were for infrastructure in energy and transportation, and we have no quibbles with that. Connectivity is key to Nepal’s future growth. The debate is whether we should put all our eggs in one basket, and go for big risky projects rather than invest in smaller and affordable ones distributed evenly across the country.

They promise electric trains whizzing east to west or north to south, when they cannot even widen an existing 36km section of the Mugling-Narayanghat Highway. The cost to the national economy of the three-year delay in refurbishing that arterial road far outstripped its actual cost.



DIPENDRA BHANDARI

Similarly, a 9km strip of the southern Ring Road has been mired in mud and dust for over three years. Apathy and neglect have turned the capital’s thoroughfares into obstacle courses. There was hope that the first elections to municipal councils in 20 years would make mayors and ward committees more accountable. Alas, one year after they took office, the chosen ones have turned out to be even more feckless and clueless: taking the easy way out by blaming Melamchi pipe-laying for their incompetence.

Instead of doing what is do-able, and fixing what can easily be fixed, our city fathers have taken a sudden interest in grandiose schemes like underground metros,

magnetic levitation, monorails, cable cars, and even something called sky rail.

The capital city obviously needs to upgrade to an efficient mass transit system. A metropolis of 3.5 million people cannot rely on tiny three-wheelers to serve commuters on trunk routes. It cannot have minibuses packed like sardine cans by owners of transportation cartels. And instead of being rewarded, a bureaucrat who was trying to rein in the bus mafia was sacked by the Industries Minister.

This kleptocratic, rent-seeking state structure is pushing mega transportation projects. A rational and inexpensive masterplan supported by the Asian Development Bank involving Bus Rapid Transit has been allowed to lapse because it is not grand enough, and perhaps more transparent.

Widening roads, constructing underpasses and flyovers do not ease traffic jams, they increase them. We have seen from other Asian capitals that the solution to traffic congestion is a more efficient and reliable mass transit system. The number of vehicles in Kathmandu Valley has tripled in seven years, and their emissions make Kathmandu Valley’s air often more polluted than even Beijing or New Delhi. A public transport system is therefore needed foremost to protect public health.

Nepal’s rulers are exhibiting a similar edifice complex about building a new airport in Nijgad. The entire premise is flawed because it is designed as a hub to serve transit passengers, which may have had advantages in the 1990s because of Nepal’s location, but with longer range

airliners it no longer makes sense. (See report on page 14-15)

Also, there are two new international airports coming up in Pokhara and Bhairawa (both delayed because of political competition for kickbacks). Kathmandu airport itself is undergoing a \$100 million upgrade to increase capacity and efficiency — also delayed due to

government bungling. Besides, there is an existing domestic airport in Simara 10km away that can easily be expanded in future if an international airport becomes necessary, and save the eastern Tarai’s last large tract of primary sal forest. The primary destination of most passengers arriving at Nijgad will be Kathmandu, which will take at least two hours to reach after landing, even with an expressway.

So, just like with hydropower, highways, high rises, public transport and airports, the motto is: bigger is better because bigger is bigger kickbacks. Mixed with populist politics, this will ensnare future generations of Nepalis even deeper in debt.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

This folding front page image in the 30 May - 5 June edition of *Nepali Times* (#402) had a photo by Min Ratna Bajracharya of Parliament declaring Nepal a republic. The editorial has resonance this week as the country marked 10 years of the republic:

While Kathmandu celebrated the abolition of the monarchy, in remote parts of Nepal life went on as usual. For the 80% of Nepalis who live off the land, the real question was: will a republic make any difference to their lives? An anachronistic monarchy kept the country backward for 50 years, but the parties tried to deflect criticism of their own failings by blaming the monarchy. How was the monarchy to blame for the governance failures after the restoration of democracy in 1990?



ONLINE PACKAGES



ATTACHED TO ART

Celebrated Nepali artist Prithvi Shrestha is back with his fifth solo exhibition, ‘Attachment’. Watch his video portrait and listen to the artist talk about how he melds traditional motifs with contemporary themes to explore the modern way of existence which brings together the physical, spiritual and virtual worlds. Watch Prithvi Shrestha at work in his studio in Kuponhole. *Story on page 7.*



DEADLOCKED

The German Development Bank (KfW) had promised to help rebuild monuments in Bhaktapur damaged in the 2015 earthquake. But KfW withdrew its grant of €10 million last month, after negotiations failed. *Nepali Times* pieced together what went wrong in *story on page 11*. Also go online to watch a video from Bhaktapur of the monuments waiting for repairs.

CAUTION

An eye opening article on antibiotics in chicken, should be shared among all (‘Are you sick of chicken?’, Sonia Awale, #911).

Binod Khambu

■ It’s not scary anymore. It comes as a part of being Nepali. We became vegetarian to avoid tainted meat, but now vegetables are also poisoned with pesticides. Unlike in the old days, we now look for vegetables with insects instead.

Rajeeb Lal Satyal

■ Thanks for the public education about the antibiotics in animal feed. A Nepali version of the article will benefit more people and get wider circulation.

Vijaya Lal Gurubacharya

GOVERNMENT NEGLECT

Refugees are not new to Nepal, but when a government neglects its own people, hostility towards refugees seems logical (‘Living on the margins’, Lindsey A Hedges, #911). The earthquake of 2015 brought thousands of rupees. All for rebuilding the country. Not a bad idea to finally use that money for a good purpose.

Vishma de Keijzer

POSSIBLY PLASTIC FREE

Great initiative to recycle plastic bottles (‘Plastic Money’, Samuel Johns, #910). This example should be followed by every town, city and village!

Bijaya Siwakoti

■ The recycling project is doing a great job helping our country reduce plastic use.

Prakriti Shakya

Cap for Caption Contest



Congratulations to this month’s winner: @paavan11

WHAT’S TRENDING



Are You Sick of Chicken?

by *Sonia Awale*
Did you know that the chicken you eat could be making you resistant to treatment for infections? This *Nepali Times* investigation about antibiotics in poultry meat was the most read story in recent weeks. If you missed it last week, visit nepalitimes.com and also watch the widely shared video with footage of antibiotics being fed to chicken in poultry farms. For readers who are health conscious, this is a must-read.

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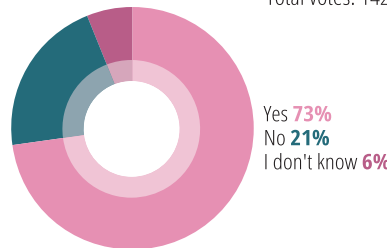
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Times Weekly Internet Poll #912

Q. Do you think public officers should declare their assets even when their tenures end?

Total votes: 142



Weekly Internet Poll #913
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q.Is the government’s focus on large infrastructure projects justified?



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Bribery as wealth redistribution

A whimsical look at how the Nepali state uses corruption to spread the cash around

Nepalis in general are wealthier than ever before in our history. The reason is that over the past 70 years, successive governments have tried to redistribute wealth through the annual budget.

It always turns out that politicians benefit the most and end up being wealthier because they use the budget process to



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

enrich themselves with salaries, allowances and perks of all kinds. Civil servants, as we saw in the recent report of the auditor general, drink Rs7 billion worth of tea annually, and pay themselves Rs22 billion in allowances beyond their basic salaries.

If Nepal produces so much tea, a lot of that tea money is going to estates, their staff, and the people who package the tea, distribute it and also sell it all over Nepal and globally.

When we see a government employee adding a floor to the house or sending children to expensive schools here and around the world, we see how wealth gets re-distributed to the teachers and brick and cement industries. Corruption has a multiplier effect in real estate, and many non-profits and charities rent the houses they built on



graft – further redistributing the wealth. The downstream benefits also go to hardware stores, liquor and meat shops. However, when we need to upgrade the Jorpati road, or the 36km of the Mugling to Narayanghat highway artery, it takes decades.

If the road was paid for by Nepali taxpayers, we could say that the government is doing a good job re-distributing wealth because over

100,000 people use the Mugling Highway every day, and the eateries and shops along the way all benefit.

The current 33kg gold scam also needs to be understood in the context of wealth re-distribution. Many Nepalis believe that in an emergency, gold is the best investment. The joke in the USA is that someone made a spelling mistake while printing the US

dollar. It should have read, ‘In gold we trust’.

Nepalis wholeheartedly trust gold, and so do Indians. Hence the huge upsurge in demand for the metal after demonetisation. The problem with gold is that you buy it, lock it up and there is no redistribution of wealth. You see the gold occasionally at wedding banquets. The gold may not do much, but party palaces help re-

distribute wealth by creating jobs for waiters, drivers, the food and alcohol industries.

In a country that depends so much on foreign aid, the cynics will tell you that ‘aid is taking money from poor in rich countries and giving it to the rich in poor countries’. And that is just another way of re-distributing wealth on a global scale. The prime minister has just pronounced that Nepal will be ‘heaven’ in ten years. Nepalis will probably have to die first before they can go to heaven, yet there are enough who are applauding the heaven-making process because it will involve redistribution of wealth.

There are nearly 4 million Nepalis working overseas, and their absence has created many jobs for foreigners ensuring that wealth distribution in Nepal is a truly transnational affair. If communists believe in wealth redistribution, then China is a shining example because it has the world’s largest number of billionaires. On the other hand in capitalist America, Seattle is home to Boeing, Starbucks, Microsoft and Amazon, yet it has a huge problem with homelessness.

The number one reason for bankruptcy in the US and the world is medical bills. However, here in Nepal the elderly and their illnesses create a huge potential for wealth distribution, job creation and many are already getting their slice of this new economic pie. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc.



SIKUMARA

From luxury to necessity

There used to be a time long ago when listening to the radio was against the law in Nepal. And today, anyone who travels to rural Nepal can see how the media landscape has changed -- there are satellite dishes on the roofs of almost every household.

Today 43% of the population consumes TV content daily, (Sharecast Initiatives Survey 2018) but behind this transformation of the media scene is a decade-long story of struggle.

Dish Media Limited, a broadcast and transmission company with 30% market share in Nepal, otherwise known as Dish Home, was a pioneer in the field.

“Indian direct-to-home (DTH) providers in Nepal created a hype in the early 2000s, attracting many media companies with the promise of a growing market,” remembers Sudeep Acharya, CEO of Dish Home (pictured, above).

In 2010 the government granted authority to six companies to operate direct-to-home dish TV. Within a few months, Marigold Entertainment, M Vision, and Home TV by Satellite Channel merged to form Dish Home. The reason was simple: growth of the business called for more content purchase and updated satellite — meaning a large investment that would not provide quick return, because growing the number of subscribers took time. Such risks were better shared with a team.

In 2011, Dish Home invested Rs360 million in the business with loans from 14 banks and financial companies, but it still did not turn a profit. The

company approached the market continuously and aggressively, guided by the right to information and a mission to make TV a household necessity. Acharya says, “After years of hard work, by 2018 we can finally say that we have become a profitable media company reaching all corners of Nepal.”

Dish Home also operates many subsidiary channels such as Channel DH Showcase, DH Showcase 2, Preview Channel, Ramailo TV and DH Action Sports. It also broadcasts Indian serials and cartoons dubbed in Nepali, believing it could lead to the possibility of creating such content locally.

The main challenge for Dish Home is going fully digital to comply with the regulations of ITU, the international governing body for communication technologies. Unlike in India or the US, where the government provides subsidy on set up boxes, adapters or other technologies to go digital, in Nepal customers get no such facilities. As a result, 65% of the company’s total subscription, mostly outside Kathmandu, is still analogue. The open border with India also allows easy entry of illegal dishes.

Still, Acharya is upbeat about the future: Dish Home is preparing for the World Cup fever, broadcasting the games on DH Action Sports with live commentary in Nepali. “At the moment, we are keeping the identity of the commentator under wraps, but you surely don’t want to miss it,” says Acharya. 🇳🇵

Sikuma Rai

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Deutsch fund

Chief Minister of Province 7 Trilochan Bhatta and German Ambassador Roland Schäfer jointly launched the Renewable Energy for Rural Areas program in



Dhangadi, Province 7 with €5 million from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Kia Ora

New Zealand Honorary Consul in Nepal and *Nepali Times* columnist Lisa Choegyal was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to New Zealand Nepal relations. Choegyal (second from



right) is flanked by her two sons and New Zealand Governor-General Dame Patsy Reddy at Government House in Wellington recently.

World class repair

Boeing and Turkish Technic Inc., the maintenance, repair and overhaul arm of Turkish Airlines, signed a Global Fleet Care supplier agreement to collaborate



in training and certification of technicians from different parts of the world. Turkish Technic is now a strategic Boeing supplier for maintenance and component service and repair of airplanes.

Dining in the air

Qatar Airways launched a new on-board dining experience for its Premium customers travelling to Europe, with newly-



designed tableware, specially crafted cutlery and chinaware, and new signature dishes to the in-flight menu.

Siddhartha service

IME pay customers can now transfer funds to Siddhartha Bank account from its pay wallet and vice versa. Bank customers can also avail other online and offline QR code based payment services of IME pay like recharge and money transfer.

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Who is playing in World Cup 2018?

Excitement is building for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia which begins from 14 June, with all 32 teams now travelling to Russia for the next edition of football's showpiece event.

Spectators and fans from all over the world are also arriving in Russia, where they will be able to experience Russian hospitality. With only three weeks to go until the opening match of the 2018 World Cup between Russia and Saudi Arabia at Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium, hotels are getting filled up.

"We welcome all the teams who are coming here for the World Cup," said goalkeeper Igor



MULTIINATIONAL RUSSIA: The Russian national team, coaching and support staff this week posed for a squad photo donning the jerseys of every country competing at Russia 2018.

Akinfeev, wearing the shirt of reigning world champions Germany. "I think they'll quickly be convinced that Russia is 100% ready for their arrival. Our country has staged plenty of major sporting events and important matches already. I hope every player, coach and fan enjoys Russia and its hospitality."

After years of hard work, the host nation is eagerly looking forward to welcoming football fans and competing teams. "I hope everyone likes Russia," added defender Sergei Ignashevich. "It's summer here, the weather is wonderful and the people are friendly. I'm sure you'll be happy." (fifa.com)

COMPETING TEAMS

-  **AUSTRALIA** - The Socceroos are making their fifth appearance at a World Cup
-  **IRAN** - Team Melli were the first Asian team to qualify for Russia 2018
-  **JAPAN** - The Japanese have made the Round of 16 on two occasions
-  **SOUTH KOREA** - The Taeguk Warriors have been a World Cup ever-present since 1986
-  **SAUDI ARABIA** - The Saudis made their World Cup debut at USA 1994
-  **EGYPT** - The Pharaohs are making their first world finals appearance since Italy 1990
-  **MOROCCO** - The Atlas Lions topped African zone Group C in qualification
-  **NIGERIA** - The Super Eagles have only missed one tournament since their debut at USA 1994
-  **SENEGAL** - In their debut at Korea/Japan 2002, the Lions of Teranga reached the quarter-finals
-  **TUNISIA** - At Argentina 1978, the Carthage Eagles became the first African team to win a World Cup match
-  **COSTA RICA** - Los Ticos impressed at Brazil 2014, making the quarter-finals
-  **MEXICO** - The Mexicans lost just once in qualifying for Russia 2018
-  **PANAMA** - The central Americans are making their World Cup debut in Russia
-  **ARGENTINA** - The two-time champions appeared at the inaugural edition at Uruguay 1930
-  **BRAZIL** - A Seleção were the first team to qualify after hosts Russia
-  **COLOMBIA** - Los Cafeteros coach Jose Pekerman was in charge of his native Argentina at Germany 2006
-  **PERU** - The Peruvians return to the world finals for the first time in 36 years
-  **URUGUAY** - La Celeste were world champions as hosts in 1930 and at Brazil 1950
-  **BELGIUM** - The Belgians went undefeated in topping UEFA Group H in qualifying
-  **CROATIA** - The Croatians finished third in their World Cup debut at France 1998
-  **DENMARK** - The Danes secured qualification with a comfortable play-off win over Republic of Ireland
-  **ENGLAND** - The Three Lions have made the finals 14 times from 16 qualifying campaigns
-  **FRANCE** - Les Bleus are making a sixth-straight world finals appearance

-  **GERMANY** - The defending world champions registered a 100 per cent record in qualifying
-  **ICELAND** - The smallest country by population ever to qualify for a World Cup
-  **POLAND** - The Poles finished third at Germany 1974 and Spain 1982
-  **PORTUGAL** - A Seleção das Quinas are making a fifth-straight finals appearance
-  **RUSSIA** - As the Soviet Union, the World Cup hosts finished fourth at England 1966
-  **SERBIA** - The Serbs topped UEFA Group D in qualification with only one defeat
-  **SPAIN** - Champions in 2010, Spain's World Cup debut was at Italy 1934
-  **SWEDEN** - The Swedes were runners-up as World Cup hosts in 1958
-  **SWITZERLAND** - The Swiss have reached the quarter-finals on three occasions



Go to FIFA Home page slideshow to learn more about:

The 32 teams that will play in Russia 2018 with interactive profiles of coaches, stars, and top goals in qualifying for each team.

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Sewa Bhattarai

It is no secret that Nepal is one of the photogenic countries in the world. Picturesque Nepal is also reflected in paintings, and Phewa and Machapuchre make it to many canvases in Thamel.

However, despite its pristine beauty, Rara never makes it to any oil-on-canvas work. That is because Rara is in Mugu, one of Nepal's most remote districts. It takes at least two days just to get to the lake from Kathmandu — and that is by plane. Surprisingly, it takes about the same time by long-distance night bus.

Which is why artists never really go there. However, 14 fine art students and their teachers braved the precarious journey to hold a five-day workshop and Karnali's first-ever modern art exhibition in Gamgadhi of Mugu.

The paintings captured a wide range of natural and cultural aspects of Karnali, including Rara lake, Chhayanath temple in Chaina village, and lifestyle of the surrounding villages. Local residents looked on with amazement as the artists staged a performance representing their experience of Karnali: they moved from one end of the town to another with painted faces and bodies, writing with chalk on the asphalt and rolling on it so the writing transferred to their bodies.

"Initially we were hesitant about the performance, wondering if anyone would understand it," recalls Koshal Hamal, the only known fine-arts graduate and teacher from Karnali. "But as we spread awareness about junk food and the health and environmental hazards they pose, we heard murmurs of understanding from the crowd."

Hamal and the Karnali Arts Center (KAC), which organised



PHOTO: HIRA BIJULI NEPALI



the event, also intended to get children interested in art, inviting over 2,000 students from 5 schools to the exhibition. Not only did children watch the paintings and performances with curiosity, but their parents also understood art as

a career. Mugu has been a hub of modern art in Karnali of late, starting a decade ago when youngsters from the district entered Sunil Pokhrel's Aarohan Gurukul to learn theatre, and created memorable dramas

including *Karnali Dakkhin Bagdo Chha*.

Local artists credit Min Bham, a member of that generation, for opening the doors to modern art for Mugu. While Bham went on to gain international success with his first movie *Kalo Pothi*, very little of Mugu's engagement with modern arts has gone back to Mugu itself, with local residents unaware of modern styles of painting.

"Painting is the beginning of all forms of visual arts," says Hira Bijuli Nepali, president of KAC. "Other art forms like film and sculpture draw from colour, composition and design of paintings. So it is important to start making children aware of painting. We hope eventually to develop their creativity by encouraging painting in schools."

KAC hopes to also engage with the rest of Nepal through modern art. KAC has always been focused on traditional art, facilitating documentation and enactment of folk tales, songs and dances in the past. Karnali's visually rich

NOVELTY: Karnali's first ever performance of conceptual minimal art depicted the under-served region to spread awareness about the hazards of junk food and plastic (*above*).

Thousands of visitors viewed the paintings in Gamgadhi, excited to see the exact rendering of familiar places (*left*).

traditional arts including clothing, jewelry, dances, sculpture, and architecture remain isolated, and this is what KAC intends to change through painting.

"We want to showcase our traditional arts and make Karnali visible in the mainstream. To connect with the world and build a niche for Karnali's artwork, we have to use modern means," says Nepali. "Also, our way of life is fast disappearing, and painting is a way to archive it, too."

With two paintings already sold in Gamgadhi, the artists are positive about the scope for modern art in Mugu itself. KAC is exhibiting the paintings in Kathmandu soon. 🇳🇵





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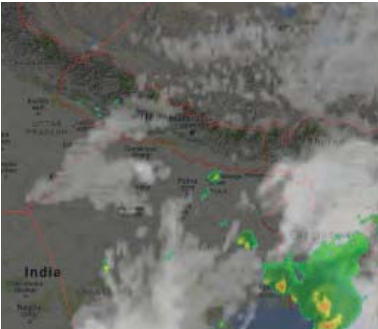
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The pre-monsoon is looking more and more like the real monsoon. The pressure patterns and prevailing winds indicate that the jet stream has migrated northwards earlier than usual, which has allowed moist warm air to move in from the Bay of Bengal. The westerlies, which used to bring weather systems this time of year, have been kept away. Expect bright mornings, overcast days and intermittent rain right through the weekend. Umbrellas and gumboots for the muddy streets.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 17°	26° 16°	27° 17°

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SYMBOLISMS: Artist Prithvi Shrestha explains his painting 'Ritual Conversation' showing how people long to be with their loved ones, even after death.



GOPEN RAI

Prithvi’s earthy art

Duksangh Sherpa

Exploring the universal theme of ‘attachment’, Prithvi Shrestha blends various dimensions of existence, from the physical to divine, as his subjects bubble with energy.

Shrestha’s acrylic on canvas works take us on a journey of understanding various forms of attachment from the mundane to the spiritual, from personal possessions to life itself. Fifteen of these paintings created over the past year are now on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery.

Inspired by the natural and physical surroundings, Shrestha shows us manifestations of attachment and connectedness that we subconsciously have with everything else. Through themes of rituals, festivals, mythology, marriage and death, the artist expresses oneness -- and how we long for it, even after life ends.

“Everything is connected, whether we consciously realise it or not. The actions of one affects all. And because everything is essentially connected through energy, there is attachment,” explains Shrestha, whose calm and serene persona is reflected in his

paintings, all of which exude softness and gentleness.

Shrestha examines the delicate balance and inherent attachment we have with nature, culture, rituals, interactions and the increasing intrusion of technology that has seeped into and changed every aspect of our real and virtual worlds.

“Our lives used to revolve around god, nature and culture, out of which sprang everything else. But now, technology has entered this space. We humans are now adjusting to this new element which has changed traditional ways of interaction,” Shrestha says, pointing to a painting titled ‘My Animal Self’. In it, the artist depicts himself with antlers and there are deer in the background – all symbols of how technology impacts our everyday lives.

Every painting has the physical presence of a body in the form of animals and humans, the energy body through bubbles of power surrounding the figures, and a symbolic circuit board depicting the ever pervasive reach of information technology.

Shrestha is known for using himself as the subject of his artwork, the reason being that he has more artistic freedom when the subject is himself. He explains: “It is

mainly so that I can do whatever I feel like with the subject, without having to explain much.”

‘Attachment’ is Shrestha’s fifth solo exhibition after seven years, and in that time he has been busy with numerous group exhibitions, workshops and performances, travelling within Nepal and abroad.

Shrestha, 42, says he wanted to be an artist from as far back as he can remember: “I was lucky to have an encouraging family who supported my decision, which made things a lot smoother for me.”

A student of fine arts from Tribhuvan University, Shrestha says he was inspired by his exposure to Japanese art culture during his college years, which fuelled his drive to create and cultivate a rich art culture in his own country.

Shrestha was the first recipient of the Himalayan Light Art Scholarship which made his current exhibition possible. The scholarship is sponsored by Chinese artist Zhao Jianqiu who was greatly impressed by Nepali artists during his 2015 visit and exhibition in Nepal. He established the scholarship in collaboration with the Siddhartha Arts Foundation.

The Himalayan Light Art Scholarship

supports up to two Nepali artists each year for the production and exhibition of their work. Says Zhou: “We hope to create an exchange for Chinese and Nepali artists in future and promote a trans-Himalayan art exchange.”

Attachment by Prithvi Shrestha
Siddhartha Art Gallery
24th May-20th June
Sunday- Friday 11am to 5pm
Saturday 12 noon to 5 pm



Watch this video portrait of Nepali artist Prithvi Shrestha, and listen to him explain how he depicts the attachment to the physical and meta-physical pervading our everyday lives. And how all this is changing with information technology.

nepalitimes.com

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SAMSUNG

Model: UA55M5500 ARSHE

Screen: 55 inch LED

Operating system: Tizen

HD Technology: Full HD Smart TV

Resolution: 3840 x 2160 pixels

Features: PurColor, Smart HUB, USB connection, one remote control, Evolution kit for software update, color and contrast enhancer, TV to mobile mirroring, sports mode, Dolby Digital Plus, Smart View, Bluetooth audio, and more.

Offers: 11-27% cash back, 2 years warranty, 0% EMI on purchase, gift vouchers from Turkish Airlines, KGH hotels, Vayodha Hospital and a lucky draw for gift hampers.

OFFER PRICE:
133,300



SONY

Model: KD-49X7000E Bravia

Screen: 49 inch Edge LED

Operating system: Linux

HD Technology: 4K UHD Internet TV

Resolution: 3840 x 2160 Pixel

Features: 4K picture processor X1, 4K X-Reality PRO, Bluetooth and Smartphone connectivity, TRILUMINOS display, dynamic contrast enhancer, live football sound mode, Open Baffle Speaker, 3 HDMI inputs, DTS Digital Surround and more.

Offer: 20% cash back

OFFER PRICE:
124,000



Skyworth

Health-tech Integration

Model: 55G6 Big Screen Android

Screen: 55 inch LED

Operating system: Android 6.0

HD Technology: 4K UHD

Resolution: 3840 x 2160 pixels

Features: Powerful front soundbar, Dolby Digital and DTS TruSurround, metal frame design, Bluetooth connectivity, voice search, cinema and sports mode, Google Play Store, Google Cast

Offers: Up to 25% cash back

OFFER PRICE:
97,356



KICKIN

TELEVISION TECHNOLOGY
IMPROVED IMAGE QUALITY
YEARS AFTER THE LAST
MAY BE TIME TO

The world's biggest sporting event FIFA World Cup was first broadcast on television in 1954, when its viewers exceeded even that of the Olympic Games. As the 2018 World Cup opening neared, the excitement is building up for an exhilarating experience for those who will travel to Russia, as well as those who will spend the summer watching the games on home television. The technology has improved vastly in the last four years, with better image quality, higher definition and better sound systems.

Sales of TVs grow exponentially during every international sports event. "Though the championship happens only every four years, the World Cup is the biggest festival for TV companies," says Nabin Pokhrel at Skyworth in Kathmandu. "We do not want to miss out on this opportunity to present our latest models."

TV was invented only 90 years ago, and the technology is advancing at an accelerated pace. It has gone from large cathode ray tubes to wallpaper-thin QLED TVs now. With the convergence of internet with TV, the demand today is for smart TVs with bigger screens. Global market leaders such as

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ANDRIOD SMART TV
32" | 40" | 43" | 49" | 55"

ANDRIOD 4k SMART TV
49" | 55" | 65"



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Free
2.2 Ultra Rice Cooker
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Email: jnind01@gmail.com

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QUALITY IN THE 4
AST WORLD CUP. IT
TO UPGRADE.



Model: 55UJ652T Smart TV
Screen: 55 inch LED
Operating system: WebOS
HD Technology: 4K UHD
Resolution: 3840 x 2160 Pixel
Features: USB connectivity, 4 HDMI inputs, ultra slim, magic zoom, magic remote and mobile connection, single click access, Tellybean (video calling), unlimited content from LG store, expandable memory, 4 years warranty, and more.

PRICE:
217,590



Samsung, LG, Skyworth and Sony all incorporate these latest features like 43-55 inch screens, 4K or full HD resolution, smart features, fine sound system and LED backlights.

Many companies are offering discounts up to 27% and gift vouchers this season. Some high-end brands are also offering limited editions: Skyworth's thinnest Wallpaper OLED, Samsung's 100% burn-in resistant QLED, Sony's slanted Bravia OLED. They will surely blow a hole in your wallets, but you won't mind when the games kick off.

"Go beyond your initial budget and purchase a higher inch TV with internet and the option to upgrade, so that you won't regret the decision for at least 5-6 years," advises Alok Gupta at Samsung in Kathmandu.

Or, you may want to forego monitors and invest in a high-end digital projector with a surround sound system to watch the action on your wall's virtual stadium.

With TV companies going all out to cash in on the football fever, this might be a good time to go for that flat-screen 4K you have been eyeing. These gadgets will outlast FIFA, adding to your home entertainment system, and will be around for the 2022 games in Qatar.



Model: 65D1800A Smart Android
Screen: 65 inch LED
Operating system: Android 5.1
HD Technology: 4K UHD
Resolution: 3840 x 2160 pixels
Features: Black crystal panel, dual core A53 1.5HZ, Quad core, memory flash 1.5 GBDDR3/8GB flash, wireless WiFi default, multimedia video, 4000:1 contrast ratio, 178*178 view angle, 3 HDMI inputs, 1 year warranty, and more.

PRICE:
162,075



Model: HX55N3000UWT Smart TV
Screen: 55 Inch LED
Operating system: VIDAA Lite 2.0
HD Technology: 4K UHD
Resolution: 3840 x 2160 pixels
Features: 3 HDMI inputs and 2 USB ports, Dolby Digital audio, Internet features, preloaded Opera store, screen mirroring, easy user interface and smart view, 178 degree viewing angle, two built in speakers, and more.

PRICE:
145,000



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सिंहदरबार, काठमाडौं
मन्त्रालयबाट आगामी १०० दिनिभित्र सम्पन्न गरिने कार्यहरूको सम्बन्धी
प्रेस विज्ञप्ति

माननीय सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि राज्यमन्त्री गोकुल प्रसाद बोस्कोटाम्युले एक कार्यक्रमका बिच सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालयको आगामी १०० दिनिभित्र सम्पन्न गरिने कार्यहरू सावजनिक गर्नुभयो। उक्त अवसरमा मन्त्रालय र सम्बद्ध सबै पदाधिकारीहरूलाई मन्त्रालयको परिभाषा भित्र परेका काम र मन्त्रालयले सेवा दिनुपर्ने काम सक्रियतापूर्वक अघि बढाउँदै २९ बुँदे कार्यक्रमहरू असार मसान्तसम्म नतिजा देखिने गरी सम्पन्न गर्ने निर्देशन दिनु भयो। सो अवसरमा मन्त्रालयका सचिव श्री मोहनप्रमान गुरुङले आज घोषणा गरिएका २९ बुँदेको प्रगति समिक्षा १५/१५ दिनमा मा. राज्यमन्त्रीज्यूको उपस्थितिमा गरिने भएकोले प्रभावकारी रूपमा कार्यान्वयन गर्न निर्देशन दिनु भयो। मन्त्रालय र अन्तर्गत निकायहरूले आगामी १०० दिनिभित्र सम्पन्न गरिने कार्यहरू देहाय बमोजिम रहेको छ।

१९. एनालग प्रणालीमा भईरेको टेलिभिजन प्रसारणलाई डिजिटल प्रणालीमा स्थानान्तरण गरी देशभरबाट एनालग प्रणाली बन्द (Analog Switch off) गरिनेछ।

आवण १, २०७५ बाट
७७ जिल्लाकै एनालग टिभि
सिग्नल बन्द हुँदैछ

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ग्राहक सेवा केन्द्र: NTC तथा नमस्ते प्रयोगकर्ताहरूका लागि १६६० ०१ २२००० | Ncell तथा CDMA प्रयोगकर्ताहरूका लागि ०१-८२१७६६६



EVENTS



Wakeful Resting
A collaborative art project by students, Wakeful Resting is a contemporary version of traditional rest stops in Patan. Come for a retreat in this place where lunch, sleep, conversation and rest is possible.
1 June, 3-6pm, Patan Museum, (01) 5521492

Kora
Based on Tenzin Tsundue's poetry anthology and under the direction of Loonibha Tuladhar, Shilpee Theatre presents Kora, the story of Tibetan refugees.
1-14 June, 5:30pm (except Tuesday. Extra show at 1pm on Saturday), Shilpee Theatre, Battisputali Marg, (01) 4469621 / 9848252740

Clean Nagarkot
Join in for a nature walk followed by cleanup programme from Nagarkot View Tower to Hotel Country Villa. Homemade cookies, tea and Chef's special green menu await after the program.
5 June, 11am-1pm, Hotel Country Villa, Nagarkot, 9851192104

Friday with Kreeti
Kreeti Shakya, co-founder of Kazi Studios will be sharing her entrepreneurial journey of marketing and branding creative products, followed by discussion and networking.
1 June, 4-5pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchok, (01) 5530229



Friday secret bazaar
Join-in for various local delicacies, refreshing drinks, handicrafts and live performances by Preety Manandhar and her band followed by Baalak Besura for some psy-fusion jam.
1 June, 3-10pm, Phat Kath's Secret Garden Backpackers Hostel, Thamel, 9823002449

Bird watching
Birding watching at Godawari Botanical Garden.
2 June, 7am onwards, Godawari Bus park, 9848085226

Himalayan travel mart
A travel trade show event for Himalayan Tourism Industry.
1-3 June, 6am-9pm, PATA Nepal Chapter, Gairidhara, (01) 4004016

Trisara food festival
A perfect blend of food, music and ambience, the most anticipated festival is finally here. Artists like Swoopna Suman, Rushan Shrestha, Jyovan Bhujju, Prasanna Adhikari, Subeksha Rai Koirala and Sanjay Mahat performing at the event.
2 June, 1-11pm, Trisara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200



Nepal int'l book fair
22nd Nepal International Book Fair discussion program schedule at Bhrikuti Mandap Hall:
Rethinking Educational Accountability
2 June, 11:00-12:15pm

My Kind of Kathmandu
2 June, 12:30-1:30 pm

The Girl From Kathmandu: Twelve Dead Men (of Nepal) and a Woman's quest for Justice by Cam Simposn
4 June, 1:30-2:30pm

Book Launch & Discussion on the book *Death of an Industry* by Mallika Shakya
5 June, 1:30-2:30pm

Discussion on compiling & editing of *English Nepali Comprehensive Dictionary* by Prof. Shanker Raj Pathak
6 June, 1.30-2.30

Book Talk Programme on *Reply from Tibet* by Dharma Ratna Yami
7 June, 1:30-2:30pm

MUSIC



Shades of sound
Kanta Dab Dab, a well-known trio band with sitar, percussion and bass playing some unique contemporary compositions, creating a soulful fusion groove.
1 June, 7-10pm, Electric Pagoda Bar/Cafe, Thamel, (01) 4700123

Places Blues night
Old school Blues by The Midnight Riders trio, weekend night calls for a balanced combo of healthy food, drinks and music.
1 June, 7-10pm, Places Restaurant and Bar, Thamel, (01) 4700413



Project One
Key members from prominent bands in Nepal come together as one to give their best performance. Mukti and Revival, Robin and the New Revolution, The Shadows, Anuprastha, Hari Maharjan Project, Tumbleweed, Kanta Dab Dab, Newaz and former members of Nepathya and The Axe complete the line-up.
2 June, 4:45-8:45pm, Jawalakhel Football Ground, 9813682053

Harish Mathema
Legendary pop singer Harish Mathema will be performing on stage after a decade long break. *1 June, 7-10pm, Eight Degrees Fine Dine & Venues Jhamsikhel, (01) 5543740*

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 1 June

Hari is an upcoming Nepali movie that follows the story of an ordinary 30 year old man-child named Hari. An overly religious and superstitious being, Hari has lived his whole life on rules set by his ancestors and strict mother. In the movie trailer, Bipin Karki who plays Hari is seen following a repetitive and boring routine until a woman enters his life and twists it. The movie, directed by Pratik Gurung and Safal KC, starring Sunita Thakur and Thinley Lhamo along with Karki, looks intriguing and unusually dramatic.

DINING



Embassy
Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce.
Opposite to Japanese Embassy, Lazimpat, 9802024040

The Diplomat
Experience luxurious culinary delights at the Indian and Continental restaurant, without compromising on comfort.
Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat, (01) 4410432

Bayleaf
Drop by the garden restaurant for Burmese dishes such as Burmese Tofu Thoke, Khao Swe Thoke, Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes.
Tangal, opposite Attic Bar, (01) 4437490

Embers
A spacious yet cosy place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites. Try their traditional marinated boneless chicken kebab served with vegetable, rice and chutney.
Krishna Galli, Pulchok, (01) 5555306



Garden Terrace
Indulge in a carefully selected variety of pizzas and pastas from Soaltee's A La Carte menu with a glass of wine or beer.
1-5 June, 12-10:45pm, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal. For reservation: (01) 4273999

Daawat Indian Cuisine
Sea food BBQ with buffet dinner. A group of more than five gets a special discount.
1 June, 6-9pm, Yatri Suites & Spa, Amrit Marg, Thamel, Rs1,500(per person), Rs2,500 (couple), (01) 4416081, 4423847

GETAWAY



Grand Norling Hotel
Enjoy a calm and relaxing stay at the hotel which provides spacious bedrooms with adjoining bathrooms, a large balcony with sights of the golf course, monkeys and deer herds, and not to forget, the garden.
Gokarna, (01) 4910193

Club Himalaya
For amazing mountain views and a refreshing weekend escape, special packages available.
Nagarkot, (01) 4410432



The Last Resort
Bungee jump, Tandem swing, or white water rafting—take an adventurous trip to Bhote Koshi River near the Tibetan border.
Bhotekoshi, Sindhupalchok, (01) 4700525

Rupakot Resort
Get pampered in the lap of luxury amid stunning views of the Annapurnas.
Maidan-6, Rupakot, Kaski, (61) 622660, (01) 4004687



Meghauli Serai
Relax with fine dining and wildlife safaris in Chitwan at Taj Safari's luxurious lodge.
Chitwan National Park, 9851218500

Step in for more varieties at

LIFE STYLE

DESIGN & DECOR

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

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 25 - 31 May

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							

FRIDAY May 25 SATURDAY May 26 SUNDAY May 27 MONDAY May 28 TUESDAY May 29 WEDNESDAY May 30 THURSDAY May 31

Kathmandu's average daily air quality was back to the Unhealthy band several days this week. That pollution levels are so high despite the rain means that emissions from vehicles, brick kiln smoke and open burning of garbage in the Valley is pumping harmful soot particles less than 2.5 microns into the air, and trapping it at street level. As we keep reminding you, take caution in the mornings and evenings when the pollution levels are highest, and no strenuous exercises along busy roads. The city centre is particularly hazardous.

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

Clash of cultures in Bhaktapur

The cancellation of a €10 million project to restore Bhaktapur's damaged monuments is a lesson for future projects in a federal Nepal

Sewa Bhattarai

At a donor conference after the 2015 earthquake, more than \$4 billion was pledged to Nepal by the international community, multilateral banks and aid agencies. Germany was prompt in signing a reconstruction agreement with the Finance Ministry in December 2015, for €30 million. Three years and three agreements later, a part of the negotiations suddenly broke down last month, as the German government decided to withdraw from a project to restore monuments, schools and streets in Bhaktapur destroyed by the earthquake. This was surprising since Germany, involved in Bhaktapur's restoration since 1970s, had allocated a third of its total outlay for earthquake reconstruction to Bhaktapur.



“We thank those who help us, but ultimately it is our decision. Foregoing aid may look like a loss from outside, but it is in the long term benefit of the town.”

Sunil Prajapati, Mayor of Bhaktapur

At a time when only 75% of the aid pledged in 2015 has actually materialised, and only 16% of the money has been disbursed, the cancellation of a €10million restoration initiative for Bhaktapur was a big loss for the country. *Nepali Times* has tried to piece together what went wrong. This was the first time that the German

Embassy in Kathmandu contracted German Development bank (KfW) as an implementing partner in heritage conservation. The bank has been active in Nepal's hydropower, health and sustainable development projects. Being a bank, KfW had different and stricter operating procedures than the German aid agency GIZ and other non-profits.

Previously, Bhaktapur had rebuilt monuments like the historic 55 Window Palace with local means and expertise. But KfW's rules required international bidding, and its inability to alter this procedure as demanded by fiercely independent-minded Bhaktapur leadership after last year's local elections, led to a deadlock.

“Locally-led construction gives better quality at lower cost,” says Mayor Sunil Prajapati, pointing out that Bhaktapur is already working with local user committees to rebuild damaged monuments, and 27 have been restored by the municipality and the Department of Archaeology.

However, these are smaller monuments with budgets up to Rs15 million each, and larger complexes like the Pujari Math, Phasi Dega, National Art Museum (formerly a Rana palace) still await restoration.

Piecing together accounts of the negotiations from both sides, what appears to have led to the deadlock was a clash of cultures. The Germans, used to lack of transparency in other projects in Nepal, wanted to ensure full compliance with the rules of its banks on the tendering process. Bhaktapur's leaders, on the other hand, didn't want to be told what to do when they felt perfectly capable of carrying out their own restoration.

The main point of dispute appears to have been KfW's insistence that the reconstruction contracts be open to a global tender process, international consultants, and the possible use of modern construction materials as has been done in previous German restoration here, including the octagonal Chasin Dega.

Bhaktapur has always aspired for independence, not just from foreign donors, but Kathmandu. Its political landscape has been dominated by the Nepal Worker's Peasants Party (NWPP) under Narayan Man Bijukche who is not shy about his open admiration of the North Korean ideology of self-reliance called 'Juche Idea'.

Mayor Prajapati is from the NMKP and won a landslide in last year's municipal elections. In an interview with *Nepali Times* last week he sounded defiant: “We will not tolerate foreign interference in the name of aid. We will not let our sovereignty be compromised.” (See full interview online.)

Bijukche has now retired from politics,

but is still the driving force behind the party. He has urged the government to take reconstruction upon itself and not depend on foreign aid. In the absence of elected officials before last year's local elections, NWPP members had been present at negotiations with KfW at every stage. The party is confident it has public opinion in Bhaktapur on its side in the dispute.

German Ambassador to Nepal, Roland Schäfer, admits that after two years of negotiations, “One had to come to the conclusion that KfW had to defend modalities for a reconstruction grant because of its general mandate, not related to Bhaktapur, and that this could not be adapted to where Bhaktapur's leadership saw the city moving between 2015 and 2017.” (Go online for full interview.)

The city's pride and self-reliance are all well and good, but we asked Mayor Prajapati if a compromise could not have been reached,



“Those involved did actually try their best. If one modality of cooperation does not work, for a short period of time, that is not the end of the world, is it?”

Roland Schäfer, German Ambassador to Nepal

especially because Bhaktapur stood to lose so much promised aid at a time when cash crunch is the main reason for delayed reconstruction. Prajapati was adamant: “Without foreign aid, it may take us longer to rebuild these monuments, but we have now decided that it is the best way.”

Some experts are not convinced that losing the KfW aid was good for Bhaktapur. “That amount would have been enough to reconstruct all of Bhaktapur's monuments, and more,” said Rabindra Puri, Bhaktapur's noted heritage conservationist. “It is a great loss for Bhaktapur that the two parties could not come to an agreement.”

For others, this is a lesson in how not to negotiate in Nepal's new federal state

HEAD TO HEAD

The main points of disagreement that stalled negotiations on German aid for Bhaktapur's monuments:

Consultants: KfW required international technical consultants on board. Bhaktapur believed its Khwopa Engineering College had the expertise in reconstruction.

Materials: KfW asked Bhaktapur to be open to using concealed modern materials like cement and steel. Bhaktapur refused to compromise on the use of local materials.

Bidding: Bhaktapur was adamant on employing local user committees for construction. KfW said its rules required an international tender.

Style: For Rana-era buildings like Nepal Art Museum, KfW preferred to rebuild in existing neo-classical design. Bhaktapur wanted to go further back to its Malla-era style.

Dispute Resolutions: Bhaktapur objected to the clause ‘taking all disputes to German courts’. KfW said this was standard language in international contracts.

structure, where local elected leaders are much more vocal about what they want. Bhaktapur's politicians may have blocked the agreement when they found out architects and engineers at Khwopa College would lose out in the bidding system. Meanwhile, KfW could have predicted the fiercely-independent spirit of Bhaktapur's leaders, and fielded locals who spoke Newari for the negotiations. 🇳🇵

With inputs from Monika Deupala in Bhaktapur

DEADLOCKED



Take a walk through the Bhaktapur Durbar Square to see how Bhaktapur is rebuilding the historic monuments damaged by 2015 earthquake, and examine why the city decided to forego German help.

nepalitimes.com





Solo: A Star Wars Story

The new film about Han Solo, one of the most beloved characters of the *Star Wars* universe, starts off slowly and is, to be quite frank, a bit boring during its opening sequences. As I watched the dull, clichéd origin story of Han Solo (played



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

to the best of his ability, by Alden Ehrenreich) unfold, I felt dread that this film could possibly ruin what started off promisingly as a fun, more than competent possible future classic addition to the *Star Wars* universe precipitated by Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm. Fortunately, the film picks up

after Han finally meets his real true love, the furry Chewbacca, who more or less steals the show with his expressive moans in a few memorable, hilarious scenes. Thankfully, Ehrenreich's Han is not alone, his other first true love, Qi'ra, who significantly ups the quality on show, is played by the lovely and immensely likable Emilia Clarke, who made her name through the *Game of Thrones* TV adaptations as Daenerys Targaryen.

As the two battle to stay together in a universe that is incredibly cruel to those who do not wield power, money, and have access to coaxium—a super fuel that powers a ship's ability to jump into hyper-space, they meet a few characters that have now become part of the *Star Wars* lore, starting with Lando Calrissian (played by Donald Grover), and, of course, the Millennium Falcon, who

by now should be acknowledged as a character in her own right. Things pick up, there are surprises, none of which I can relay here, partly because that would spoil your fun, and partly because outside of the *Star Wars* fan universe, I would sound crazy trying to distill a complex plot involving glowing fuel, distant universes, strange galaxies, light speed, and sassy droids to a reader base that may not be able to process that level of fantastical space related detail in mere written form. The main problem here, even when the film takes off, pardon the pun, is that Ehrenreich is no Harrison Ford, and just as this year's *Tomb Raider* mistakenly cast the dull as ditchwater Alicia Vikander, who could not live up to her predecessor, the scintillating, simmering Angelina Jolie, so too is Ehrenreich cursed by the shadow of Ford, though admittedly he never falls as short as Vikander's execrably bland Lara Croft.

The film is set up for further cinematic development, and I for one would jump at the chance to see more of Chewy, Lando, Qi'ra, and another young woman who comes late into the film but is so riveting that it would be worth a sequel just to see more of her. Do not be discouraged, if you can get through the first interminable twenty-five minutes of this particular *Star Wars* film, you'll have a lot of fun. So enjoy your *Star Wars* immersion: I found myself thinking about the film later on, and wondering how the characters might develop, always a good sign for a film that began so woefully.



Watch trailer online

nepalitimes.com



RATNA SHRESTHA

OBJECTION YOUR HONOUR: Nepali Congress leader Gagan Thapa speaking in Parliament on Tuesday against the presidential pardon granted to ex-Maoist MP Bal Krishna Dhungel, who was convicted of a murder during the conflict.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

TEMPLE TEMPLATE: Prithvi B Pande of Nepal Investment Bank and Norwegian Ambassador Lasse Bjørn Johannessen sign a Rs 12.2 million grant agreement to restore the Bhai Degah temple destroyed in the 1934 quake. Historian Satyamohan Joshi, Rohit Ranjitkar of KVPT, Patan Mayor Chiribabu Maharjan and Deputy Mayor Gita Satyal look on. Pande and Mayor Maharjan pledged another Rs5 million each for the restoration.



BRITISH EMBASSY

EVEREST 65: (From left to right) Honorary New Zealand Consul General Lisa Choegyal, British Ambassador Richard Morris, New Zealand Ambassador Joanna Kempfers, Tourism and Aviation Minister Rabindra Adhikari and Ghana Gurung of WWF-Nepal at a function to mark the 65th anniversary of the first ascent of Mt Everest on 29 May at the British Embassy.



DOULAYE KONE

TOILET TALK: More than 30 sanitation experts from 30 countries gathered in Kathmandu for a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-sponsored initiative to set standards for a new generation of toilets that do not produce waste.



SHASHI SHRESTHA

STITCHING THE SOCIAL FABRIC: International Women's Sewing Group celebrates its 60-year anniversary in Kathmandu on Monday. The group was started in 1957 by Ambica Shrestha, Lady Scopes (wife of then British Ambassador) and Lottie Weise (social worker and Rotarian).

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Stuck in Grade 5



PHOTOS: BINITA DAHAL

Binita Dahal in *BBC Nepali*, 28 May



It takes the whole day to reach Syamrang from the highway in Chitwan: four hours by jeep and five hours walk across rugged mountains. Approaching the village, there are people and children in ragged clothes. The elderly look listless, and there are young children carrying baby siblings.

These Chepang villages do not have roads, electricity, education or health. On the next ridge is the village of Kanda, where eight villagers died eating poisonous mushrooms ten years ago. Houses destroyed by the earthquake have been roughly patched up with metal sheets.

Syamrang's only school has two small classrooms crammed with students – one room has children from Grade 1-3, and other has students from Grades 4 and 5. The damaged classrooms are being repaired, but it may take years.

Most students drop out after Grade 5 because higher classes are four hours walk away across jungled mountains. Some keep repeating Grade 5 because there is nowhere else to study.

Dilmaya Chepang repeated Grade 5 for three years, reading the same textbooks over and over so she would not forget how to read, and got married soon after. Today,

at age 35, she already has three children who go to the school she went to.

"Grade 6 was too far away, it is a difficult walk up and down mountains and through forests, so I just kept going to the same class and left school," says Dilmaya, who is still so passionate about education that she teaches younger children in the light of a feeble solar lamp.

After a day of working in the fields and collecting fodder in the forest, young women gather at the school to be taught how to read and write by Dilmaya. "I myself can barely recognise the Nepali alphabets, but this gives me a chance to keep studying myself," says Dilmaya.

She says the village and the school have not changed since she was a child. Dilmaya's eldest daughter Ujeli is repeating Grade 5 just like her mother. There are women who went to the same school who have become grandmothers at 39.

Almost all villages in this area bordering Chitwan and Dhading have the same problem that stems from remoteness and neglect. "Nothing has changed here in 50 years, the school is older but its quality has not improved," says Jhyapu Bahadur Chepang of Syamrang's school management committee. Child marriage has not gone down, even though there are more girls than boys enrolled.

Twenty-one students are enrolled in Dungbang Primary School here, of which 16 are repeating Grade 5. Atibal Praja is the principle of the very school he himself attended. He worked hard, completed his SLC and now is an exception as the only villager with higher education.

"We have tried to talk to the government many times to send more teachers for higher classes, but no one listens," he says.

Bimala Gurung has been a teacher at the school for the past

12 years, and says she hasn't seen much change in living standard in the village in that time. "When I first came, the village was dirty, there was illiteracy, no health post, there was child marriage," she says, "the village is still dirty, there is still illiteracy, no health post, and child marriage."

The only big change is that the young men now leave the village to work abroad. With the money they send home, some families now have mobile phones.

The main reason nothing has

changed is because the school stops at Grade 5, and many girls get married off soon after, thinks Jhyapu Bahadur Chepang. "The problem is lack of awareness because of lack of education," he says.

Simana Praja has been in Grade 5 in Syamrang for the last three years, she says it is too difficult and expensive to continue her studies elsewhere: "If I had been able to continue my studies I would be in Grade 8 by now."

Captions

Stuck: Children are eager to learn as they begin schooling, but soon feel stuck because the nearest school with grade 6 is 4 hours away.

More than a decade ago Dilmaya Praja, 35, attended grade 5 classes for three years in a row, so that she would not forget how to read. Her three children face the same fate.



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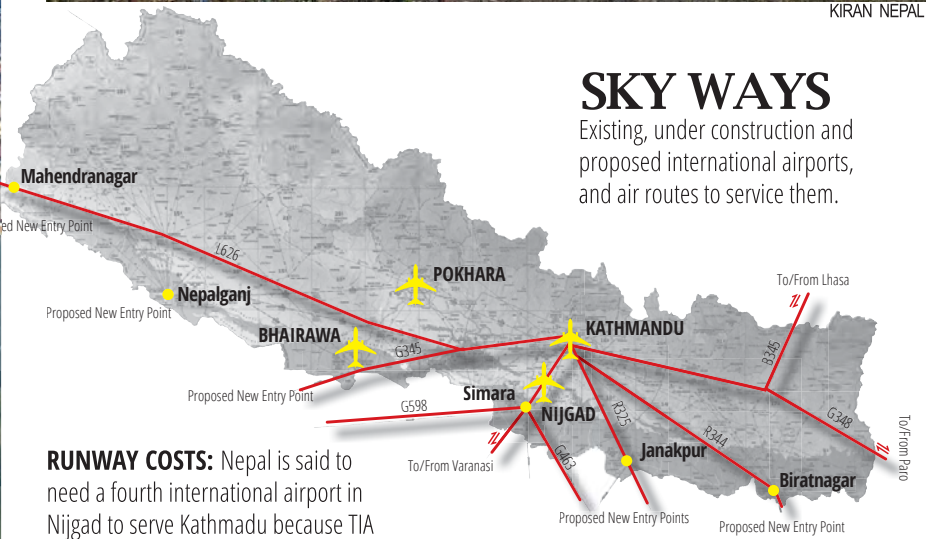
Does Nepal need a 4th international



KUNDA DIXIT



KIRAN NEPAL



SKY WAYS

Existing, under construction and proposed international airports, and air routes to service them.

RUNWAY COSTS: Nepal is said to need a fourth international airport in Nijgad to serve Kathmandu because TIA (left) is so congested. But critics say its \$6.7 billion price tag is unaffordable.

There is also concern Nijgad will destroy 80sq km of the last remaining prime forest in the eastern Tarai.

In an interview with *Nepali Times* (see below), Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Rabindra Adhikari announced that the bidding process will start in six months, and the construction site will be cleared and readied for construction in just two years.

Adhikari claims Nijgad will be “bigger, busier and more advanced” than Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. “It will be a game changer for Nepal’s economy,” he said.

However, there are environmentalists, economists and others who think Nijgad is an unnecessary white elephant being

Om Astha Rai

In 1994, when Nijgad was identified as the site of Nepal’s planned new international gateway, traffic congestion at Kathmandu Airport was not as bad as it is today. It was difficult then to justify a new international airport so far from Kathmandu.

So, Nijgad was projected to be not just an airport serving the capital, but a regional hub for international destinations like Doha, Dubai and Singapore. Like everything else, the war and political wrangling delayed the project for decades.

Today, ultra long-range airliners do not need refuelling and transit stops. The trend is towards point-to-point service with

equipments like the Boeing 787 or Airbus 350. However, traffic volume today has exceeded the Tribhuvan International Airport’s current capacity, and Nijgad may be feasible as a destination airport for Kathmandu if there is a new expressway to cut travel time.

The Communist government came to power with the promise of prosperity, and it is reviving the \$6.7 billion Nijgad airport project

as a catalyst for growth, and to take the pressure off of Kathmandu.

Last week, the government approved the airport’s Environment Impact Assessment report, even though 2.4 million trees need to be axed in 7,000 hectares of hardwood forest where the airport will be. In his budget speech on Tuesday, Finance Minister Khatriwada allocated Rs19 billion for the aviation sector, including Nijgad.

“Nijgad airport will be a game changer”



BIKRAM RAI

Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Rabindra Adhikari is a man in a hurry. He wants Nepal to make up for its lost decades in aviation infrastructure. He spoke to *Nepali Times* this week about why he feels so strongly about Nijgad.

Nepali Times: After 20 years, the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report for Nijgad has finally been approved. What is next?

We will sign an MoU with the Nepal Army in a few days. The military will fell trees and build periphery roads. It may take two years to clear the construction site. But we will initiate the international bidding process within six months. We will finalise land acquisition and resettlement of the 1,400 families

living at the site, either providing them with cash or a relocation site. We will even resettle those who do not have land titles. The project will not face any more delays, and the airport could be ready in less than 10 years.

Why this sudden urgency?

We badly need a second international airport. The only international airport we now have in Kathmandu is congested, and cannot be expanded.

But there are two more international airports coming up in Bhairawa and Pokhara ...

You cannot compare Bhairawa and Pokhara with Nijgad. Not even Kathmandu will match Nijgad Airport’s scale and scope. It will be an international air hub -- a real game changer for Nepal’s economy. International flights from over two dozen cities will be landing every day, tens of thousands of passengers will catch connecting flights. Planes will also be making stopovers for refueling. It will be bigger, more advanced and busier than any other airport in Nepal.

Why not upgrade nearby Simara airport instead of clearing valuable forests?

Nijgad is Nijgad. It is an ideal place for an international hub airport not just from a business standpoint, but also because of climate. This is one place in the Tarai which remains largely unaffected by fog even in winter.

But Simara is just 10 km away from Nijgad.

Yes, but even that short distance makes a huge difference.

Over 2.4 million trees have to be cut to clear the site.

We will plant 25 saplings elsewhere for every single tree that is felled. We are also looking at minimizing the felling. One option is to not build the adjacent airport city planned for the second phase.

What is the economic viability of an airport so far away from the capital?

Nijgad Airport’s future depends on Kathmandu-Tarai fast-track highway. But this airport will be a hub, as I said, and will not depend solely on Kathmandu traffic. In fact, we think only 10% of the total traffic will be for Kathmandu.

Nepal has only one entry point for international flights from Indian air space. Don’t we need more two-way routes for Bhairawa, Pokhara and Nijgad?

We are not just a land-locked but also air-locked country at the moment. But we are negotiating with India for more air routes. A technical team from the Airports Authority of India will come to Nepal next month for talks, India is amenable to new entry points through Biratnagar and Nepalganj, and we are also seeking Mahendranagar, Bhairawa and Janakpur.

Are you serious about a domestic airport in Kavre?

I am serious because it will ease traffic congestion at Kathmandu Airport by 31% . I am also pushing for inter-provincial air connections with Pokhara-Bhairawa, Pokhara-Biratnagar and Pokhara-Nepalganj flights.

People think I am connecting Pokhara to other cities because I am an MP from there, but Pokhara has huge growth potential. The airport will service flights to Lukla, Tumlingtar and other mountain destinations, and we can double the capacity for mountain flights, and help the tourism industry.

airport?

pushed by politicians seeking fame and fortune, and will put future generations of Nepalis in debt.

They say the hub argument doesn't work anymore because longer-range aircraft do not need stopovers, and anyway, the cost of aviation turbine fuel in Nepal is double than other airports in the region. Nepal Airlines is also not ready to be a long-haul carrier that can use Nijgad for international transit passengers.

Aviation analyst Hemanta Arijal says: "Nepal can build a hub airport, but whether it will actually evolve into a hub depends on how convenient international airlines find it."

Arijal argues that any international airport needs a big enough catchment area, and for Nijgad that will be Kathmandu. "If passengers cannot reach Kathmandu within one hour after landing at Nijgad, this multi-billion dollar airport will fail," he says. "So, the key to Nijgad's success will be how fast the fast-track to the Tarai will be."

Minister Adhikari argues that only 10% of passengers flying into Nijgad will be to or from Kathmandu, the others will be using it to fly on to international destinations, or reach domestic points. But aviation experts are skeptical, and say the whole hub concept is outdated and misplaced.

Retired Nepal Airlines captain Y K Bhattarai calls the plan to develop Nijgad as an international hub 'a flight of imagination'. He says the government should have

considered geopolitical realities, and the modern aviation market in the Asia-Pacific.

"Let us build Nijgad, but only after taking into account that Nepal's air space is enclosed by a country that does not give us anything easily or freely," he says. "Nijgad's future as an aviation hub is in India's hands, and building a mammoth airport without taking air routes into account is like putting the cart before the horse."

Bhattarai is a member of a task force that will recommend ways to improve aviation sector. He has experience of Indian air traffic controllers restricting elevation and route clearance for flights to and from Nepal. India has refused inbound air routes through Bhairawa and Janakpur because its air force base is near the Nepal border. This is unlikely to be resolved in talks with the Airports Authority of India next month.

Meanwhile, congestion at Kathmandu is being used as a justification for Nijgad. Some critics say the airport's \$100million ADB-supported expansion project is being deliberately delayed to justify Nijgad. Apron, taxiway and terminal building extensions and better air traffic management could ease the present congestion, and keep Kathmandu airport viable for decades more.

Despite its cost, however, Nijgad now seems to be a political *fait accompli*. Even infrastructure experts like Surya Raj Acharya say: "We should have built Nijgad at least a decade ago." 🇳🇵

The last patch of Char Kose Jhari



The Char Kose Jhari used to be a strip of dense malarial jungle in the Tarai separating the Chure Range from the Indian plains. After the eradication of malaria, the forests were cleared by settlers from the mountains and from India. Construction of the East-West Highway in the 1970s, transmission lines, the 1980 referendum, all helped shrink this primary hardwood forest to a few remaining patches.

Nijgad airport and the expressway linking it to Kathmandu will decimate the last remaining expanse of this once-vast jungle. In all, the Nepal Army is preparing to fell 2.4 million *sa*/trees in a swath of 80sq km – wiping out the last remaining migration corridor for endangered wild elephants and tigers, depleting the buffer zone of the Parsa Wildlife Reserve, and removing vegetation that recharges groundwater. Conservationists also worry that a huge busy airport right next to a nature sanctuary will also disturb wildlife.

Although the government claims that selling the valuable timber from the site will fetch nearly Rs70 billion, it will prevent 22,500 tons of carbon from being sequestered in the vegetation annually,

which in turn will deprive Nepal of earning Rs160 million annually from the global carbon fund. The economic value of oxygen lost due to deforestation for Nijgad airport is huge: Rs 230 billion, and that is not counting the airport's own carbon footprint.

Biodiversity expert Prabhu Budhathoki, a former member of Nepal Planning Commission, explains: "This is going to be the most serious deforestation of the Tarai in the last 50 years, it will affect wildlife, and also damage hydrological ecosystem and agriculture."

Budhathoki argues that clearing the forest for Nijgad Airport will set a bad precedent: and show that jungles are expendable and have to make way for new physical infrastructure.

The airport is the latest example of the need to balance economic needs with environmental protection, even though the main argument against the project is its cost and economic viability. The airport has pitted ecologists against economists: infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya maintains that the airport is so necessary that felling 2.4 million trees is "nothing compared to its economic advantage".

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Heavenly abode

Nepal used to be run by a cartel of four parties, and thanks to the principle of democratic centralism practiced by the **Nepal Communist Party** (Bold-Underlined) it is now under control of a two-man syndicate.

The duocracy has decreed that there is no reason for MPs with criminal records to resign just as yet from the August House – they can stay till September. MPs also threatened to boycott Parliament unless their discretionary budgets for electorate development was increased.

who have threatened to go on strike unless the “setting” at Triglyceride International Airport (TIA) is restored. For their yeoman’s and yeowoman’s service to the nation, all police, immigration and customs officials and loaders will be awarded the nation’s highest gold medals on next Republic Day. We cannot forget their contribution to usher Nepal into a golden era of federalism and Marxism.

The bus mafia has now thankfully been allowed to ply unhindered because of prompt action by Minister Raghuvir Maha-Setting. Now that God-child Dhungel has been forgiven for manslaughter, is Shobhraj next for a presidential pardon? Nepal will soon be the first country in the world to decriminalise murder.



For those of you who just tuned in, here is a brief recap: Nepal as we know it will grind to a halt if syndicates are banned. Better sense has prevailed in the nick of time, however, and we have been saved from the ravages of transparency and accountability. Whew, that was close.

Petroleum tankers go on strike to be allowed to siphon off fuel en route from India, taxi cartels staged a show of force for the right to fleece passengers, and eateries protest hygiene inspections by vowing to continue to commit adultery on food.

It is now the turn of gold smugglers

And to end this bulletin of news, here is the point you should not miss: Prime Minister Oli has announced that lapdogs who can't use laptops will henceforth be sacked, and they cannot join other Nepal's in heaven in ten years time.



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Suzuki
Service Centre

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