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NETRA SHAHI

Risking his life to save lives

Medical care should be affordable and accessible to all. In one sentence, that is all Govinda KC wants on behalf of Nepalis.

On Thursday, the government ordered police to use force inside a Jumla hospital where KC was on the 20th day of his latest hunger-strike demanding an end to commercialisation of the medical sector. A policeman was killed in friendly fire, hit by a rubber bullet at close range.

Amidst protests in Jumla and Kathmandu, and a nationwide hospital strike, KC finally agreed to be flown back on an Army helicopter, saying he wanted to prevent any more violence.

The reason quality health care is out of reach of Nepal's predominantly poor people is that subsidised government hospitals are so shoddy, ill-equipped, poorly-managed, under-funded and understaffed.

State neglect and mismanagement at its facilities means expensive private hospitals have stepped in to fill the gap. Medical care has therefore become a lucrative business, where rampant over-charging is the norm.

But that is not where the real money is. The bonanza is in medical education, where billions can be made overnight charging students for admission fees and royalty to feed the demand from private hospitals. It is no secret that the medical mafia enjoys strong political protection.

KC's main demands follow the recommendations of the Kedar Bhakta Mathema Commission two years ago: an end to universities giving random affiliation to new medical colleges in return for kickbacks, restricting universities to maximum five affiliations, limiting private medical colleges in Kathmandu Valley to ten. Successive governments over the past decade have promised to meet these demands to make him end his fasts, but never fulfilled them.

After the government restricted protests in Kathmandu, KC went to Jumla for his 15th hunger strike last month, where he was hounded by the local administration, making him seek refuge in the Karnali Health Science Academy.

That was where on Thursday the riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to dislodge students

and protesters blocking access to KC's room on the third floor.

Although there are more doctors in Nepal today than 20 years ago, the population has also increased in that period. Nepal's doctors to population ratio is one of the lowest in the world: 2 physicians for every 10,000 people. KC's demand is to spread medical care evenly throughout the country, not just Kathmandu.

However, with so much money involved, KC's hunger strike is a direct challenge to Prime Minister Oli, who is beholden to powerful businessmen with investments in the medical sector. Tycoon Durga Prasai, who owns B&C Hospital in Jhapa, was a key facilitator in uniting the UML and Maoists to form the Nepal Communist Party. Rajendra Pandey and comrades have invested heavily in the Man Mohan Memorial and the Kathmandu National Hospitals. NCP backer Upendra Mahato (whose brother-in-law is Transport and Infrastructure Minister Raghuraj Mahaseth, who also owns Medicity Hospital) reportedly wants affiliation for a medical college in Kathmandu.

Kunda Dixit

SICK STATE: Govinda KC being taken by ambulance to an Army helicopter in Jumla that flew him to Kathmandu on Thursday evening. The fasting physician agreed to be flown to the capital to prevent further violence, but said his hunger strike would continue.

Nepalis in Qatar work on facilities for the 2022 World Cup

PAGE 4



KLEPTOCRATS of KATHMANDU and KUALA LUMPUR

Find out how cross-border corruption on a grand scale has robbed poor Nepali migrant workers of Rs5 billion in 5 years.

PAGE 14-15

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f t i

BETWEEN TWO OCEANS

There was a time when Nepal just had to worry about balancing its giant northern and southern neighbours, but the world is now multi-polar and getting to be a much more complicated place.

As his tour of Europe showed, Donald Trump has reset relationships, frayed post-war alliances, and upset many apple carts. There has been a tectonic shift in geostrategic ties in the region, which means smaller countries like Nepal have to be much more supple and sure-footed in foreign policy and economic diplomacy.

One of the clearest indications yet of the current shift is the Trump administration renaming its Pacific Command into Indo-Pacific Command. It builds on President Obama's Asian 'pivot' and 'rebalance', and designating India as a Major Defence Partner. But Trump has gone one step further by combining America's strategic assets in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Then there has been a revival of the Quad Alliance involving the U.S., Japan, Australia and India which offers countries in the region alternative quality infrastructure to Beijing's \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as the option of a security umbrella. Last year, Japan, U.S. and India held the Malabar 2017 joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean.

These developments are proof that America's allies in the region are nervous about China's global economic clout, and also want to counter its expanding military presence in the two oceans. Once feeling isolated by the BRI, India has now found solidarity with the US and Japan to provide Central and South Asian countries with a substitute for connectivity projects.

At a recent conference in Singapore organised by the Hawaii-based East-West Centre, US Deputy Secretary of State Walter Douglas said: "Things have changed on the ground, trade and investment is expanding rapidly, and there is the rise of India and its desire to play a larger regional role. The Trump administration's decision reflects that. However, this is an Indo-Pacific strategy, not an India-Pacific one. It goes beyond India to the other countries in the region."

Although many in the region may see China as a hegemon, Beijing itself considers itself increasingly encircled by America's allies, and interprets the Indo-Pacific strategy as a way to constrain its rise. Which is why the BRI is China's way to push its geo-economic agenda through infrastructure and connectivity by land, sea and air.

The US is still the dominant player militarily and economically in the region, and the world is struggling to adapt to Trump's new rules of America not paying anymore for the defence of rich allies, raising tariffs and stemming immigration.

"We have to deal with this new reality. We used to ask the Americans to do the

heavy-lifting in the past, and then criticised them for doing just that. Trump wants more burden-sharing, he wants the region to do more and pick up the slack, and that suits India fine," said C Raja Mohan, the newly-appointed Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, a think tank at the National University of Singapore.

A US-India strategic alliance could also mean that Washington will be outsourcing even more of its South Asian policy to New Delhi, and allow it to play the regional cop.

In ASEAN, the Indo-Pacific strategy is gaining traction among member states spooked about Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea islands dispute.

"No ASEAN country wants to be forced to choose between the US and China, trade wars have no place in the region," Zakir Hussain, Foreign Editor of *The Straits Times* in Singapore told the conference.

There are misgivings about falling into a debt trap in some countries where China has provided huge loans for large infrastructure projects. Sri Lanka had to negotiate a long-term lease on a Chinese-built port project because it couldn't afford to pay back the loan. There are similar murmurings in Laos, Pakistan and Burma.

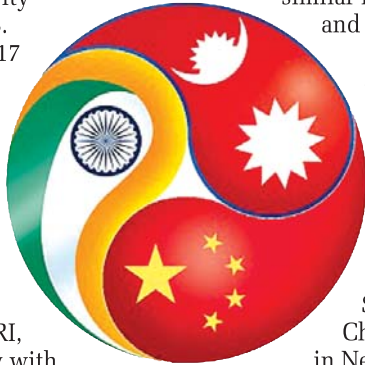
The US strategy is to provide an alternative to smaller Asian states to China's BRI through financing for transparent and no-strings-attached infrastructure projects. When he was still US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson actually cited the example of the \$500million Millennium Challenge Corporation project in Nepal to upgrade electricity transmission and transportation as an example of America putting its money where its mouth is.

For its part, Japan is also trying to counter Chinese inroads in Central and South Asia by channelling its official development aid for high-quality infrastructure projects as a part of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy to counter the BRI.

Shutaro Sano of the National Defence Academy of Japan writes: 'Japan needs to balance its policies towards Central Asia and China in a very sensitive manner with India in mind. This is important because Tokyo is now willing to cooperate under certain conditions, with China's Belt and Road Initiative.'

What is the message for Nepal from all this? Because of our location between India and China, we have to be even more careful to keep a geostrategic balance between the two giants. Luckily, despite their rivalry and frontier disputes, India and China do not want to inflame their Himalayan border. They need Nepal to be a stable buffer state.

However, we have seen from recent history that when push comes to shove, the North and South will not do much to guarantee the protection of democracy, pluralism and press freedom. However powerful our neighbours may be, Nepal cannot afford to turn its back on the rest of the world.



"The Indo-Pacific strategy reflects changes in the regional ground reality, India's rise and its desire to play a larger regional role."

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The *Nepali Times* of 18-24 July 2008 (#409) covered the election of Nepal's first president. After promising the job to Girija Prasad Koirala, the Maoists backtracked and put up the candidacy of the prototype republican, Ram Raja Prasad Singh. Here is an excerpt from a front page analysis by Kunda Dixit:

'In a dramatic last-minute turnaround, the Maoists on Thursday dumped the NC and UML and placed veteran Madhesi republican, Ram Raja Prasad Singh, as their candidate for president. Even though ideologically opposed to the Maoists, Madhesi parties immediately supported Singh's candidature, making it almost certain that Nepal's first president will be from the plains. The fact that the NC presidential candidate (Ram Baran Yadav) and the UML (Rampriti Paswan) are Madhesis shows the importance of the Tarai vote bank for all three parties. Although the post is ceremonial, the president is the nominal commander-in-chief.'



ONLINE PACKAGES



GREEN CITY

Narayan Chaur is a fine example about how to restore Kathmandu's open green space. Watch this video and meet the people responsible for this rare success story. Story on *page 11*, and video online.



TAP IT IN

Golf is gaining popularity in Nepal, but during the monsoon there is a slight lull as people retire from the heat and rain. But the monsoon should not deter golfers, as this video shows. Go to *page 8-9* for story and online to watch.



PARKOUR DINESH

A young Nepali boy from rural Nepal has set two Guinness World Records in two years for Parkour, a sport that was developed from military obstacle course training. Watch this video of record-holder Dinesh Sunar demonstrate his back flips and leaps. Story on *page 7*.

BAMPHA RAI

The report went around the globe and touched our hearts, even tough ones ('No one to care for doctor who cared for everyone', Om Astha Rai, #917). Kudos to Nepali Times. Some former refugees in the US collected money and sent it to the doctor, and are also holding a function in his honour.

Ram Kirantee

LUMBINI

In developments of this scale in a relatively unspoiled country, the outcome is both positive and negative ('Boom time in central Tarai', Sewa Bhattarai, #918). It is necessary to build, but also protect local people and their environment. Isn't that what the Buddha would want?

Gerald Fernando Heng

Cap for Caption Contest



The winning blurb for this photo of Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and North Korean Ambassador to Nepal Kim Yong Hak is: 'As we have absolutely nothing worthwhile to say to each other, let's observe a minute's silence for world peace.' by @pigreen. Congratulations.

WHAT'S TRENDING



Red Rice

Editorial

The government that came to power with so much promise for reform is letting the kleptocracy grow even deeper roots. State failure has poisoned our air, water, and food, making Nepalis ill, but they cannot afford treatment because of the same state failure. Go online if you missed the editorial, and join the debate.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook**
- Most visited online page**
- Most popular on Twitter**

Bhaktapur inundated

by Bikram Rai

Although rainfall last week had been heavy, the primary cause of the floods was haphazard house, road and wall construction along the river's floodplains. Poor drainage and infrastructure aggravated the problem, leaving hundreds of people stranded and schools closed. Visit www.nepalitimes.com for dramatic photographs of the flooded streets and rescue work.

- Most commented**

IMPACT



Bhutanese physician Bhampha Rai, who voluntarily treated tens of thousands of refugees is now penniless and battling cancer himself. His wife Urmila needs kidney dialysis twice a week. There was an outpouring of response to the Nepali Times story, with many readers pledging support. The Nepal Government donated Rs1 million with Prime Minister Oli offering a personal contribution of Rs100,000. Email editors@nepalitimes.com for contribution inquires.

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Although rainfall had been heavy, the primary cause of the floods was haphazard house, road and wall construction along the floodplain on the river. More pictures and full story: <http://bit.ly/bhaktapur-inundated-nt> ... Text @omastharai Photos @Bikram

Colin McQuistan @ColinMcQuistan
Combating poor land use & development planning, enforcing regulations and recognising room for the river are all critical components of a long term strategy if we are to live with flooding, climate change is exacerbating heavy rainfall therefore expect increased loss and damage

Flood Resilience @floodalliance
Clear demonstration of how #flood risk & vulnerability is controlled by many factors - some natural, some manmade. All factors must be considered to strengthen resilience <http://floodresilience.net>

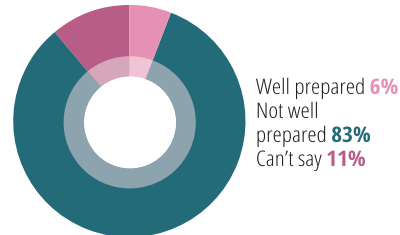
bharat koirala @lampuchhre
While we seem to have finally figured out what caused the flooding in many areas of Bhaktapur I do hope we will find ways and means of avoiding a repetition of the same phenomenon, in the same areas next year.



Weekly Internet Poll #919

Q. How well prepared do you think Nepal is for this year's monsoon floods?

Total votes: 118



Weekly Internet Poll #920
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you think if the way Govinda KC hunger strike has been handled by the government?



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Publisher and Chief Editor: **Kunda Dixit**
Associate Editor: **Om Astha Rai** | Design: **Kiran Maharjan**
Published by **Himalmedia Pvt Ltd** | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
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The workers' football

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar will shine a light on Nepali migrant workers' welfare

In a world where populist anti-immigrant narratives dominate, the diverse composition of football teams in the World Cup in Russia did not go unnoticed. Players of foreign origin, including former refugees and children or grandchildren of immigrants,



COMMENT
Upasana Khadka

especially in the winning French team, stole the show.

In Doha, Nepali workers busy building the infrastructure for the next World Cup found escape from their hard work watching the games in the evenings. The next championship, in the winter of 2022, presents opportunities and challenges for Qatar, which is still in the throes of a Saudi-Emirates blockade, as well as for Nepal which is a major supplier of workers to the country.

Qatar is expected to further ramp up hiring as it races to complete all its eight stadiums and other facilities. This will translate into jobs for hundreds of thousands of workers. On the other hand, given the nature of work, it raises questions over migrant rights: a topic the Qataris are sensitive about.

After media highlighted human rights abuse including migrant deaths on FIFA construction sites, there have been reforms. Implementation remains murky, but they include minimum



wage guarantees, lax exit visa requirements, allowing workers to keep their passports, and timely payment of wages through bank accounts under the Wage Protection System.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) recently opened an office in Doha and there is talk of Qatar setting up one stop centres in several migrant-sending countries, including Nepal, rightly recognising that many problems faced by migrants start at home. Under this scheme, recruitment procedures like medical check-up, biometric fingerprinting, and contract signing will be completed prior to departure.

"There have been improvements: stricter audits and random checks by welfare officers at workplaces are ongoing with consequences for non-compliance of labour standards," admits one Nepali worker in Doha.

Others are less optimistic however. A Nepali social worker who helps distressed and stranded

Nepalis, says: "Monitoring and implementation is focused on employers working at high profile worksites, particularly the stadiums, but not in others. These are reforms made without workers in mind."

A football tournament for migrants, captured in a well-made documentary *The Worker's Cup*, has been criticised as a publicity stunt to appease outsiders. "It is not about the worker. It was never about the worker," one migrant labourer says in the documentary.

However, the international spotlight surrounding the 2022 World Cup presents opportunities for worker welfare to get global attention so they can be redressed. There is a precedent: reports of child labour in Sialkot of Pakistan, the supplier of balls used in the World Cup, spurred big brands like Adidas and Nike as well as FIFA to take action resulting in the elimination of the practice.

There has been similar reform following media publicity about



worker mistreatment in the coffee, chocolate, garments, and handheld gadgets industries. This is not easily extended to the construction industry because Nike, Apple, Starbucks, H&M have become household names, in ways that firms like Al Jaber and Tekfen which hire migrant construction workers are not.

With all eyes on Qatar, however, there is scope for migrant issues to be highlighted through non-conventional partnerships with players like the Centre for Sport and Human Rights that focus on labour rights in the sports industry. Because migration is receiving global attention, a strategic campaign that appeals to the spirit of the game, which these construction projects are tied to, would also be useful.

The Global Compact on Migration this month got countries to agree to cooperate on migration governance. It remains to be seen how these non-binding agreements impact on the day-to-day lives of

TEAM OF WORKERS: Padam (second player standing from right) in the documentary *The Worker's Cup*.

Nepalis working on facilities for the 2022 championships in Qatar avidly watch a World Cup game being played in Russia last week.

migrants. The real challenge is in implementation, and how well the World Cup is used as a global platform for worker welfare.

None of the issues of poor working and living conditions, high recruitment costs, and unexplained deaths of workers, are new. What is new for Qatar is their association with a mega-sporting event like the World Cup, and the power of sports diplomacy gives it wider relevance and potential for longer-term reform.

Says Padam, one of the Nepali players depicted in *The Worker's Cup*: "We had players from Ghana, India, Nepal, Kenya while our coach was from Egypt. Most of us spoke broken English, in so many different accents, it was hard to understand each other, yet we had a strong team-spirit, we bonded very well."

He adds that Nepalis have a very good reputation in Qatar's construction sector, where high-risk jobs on high scaffoldings needs deft and courage. He expects the demand for Nepalis will grow in the coming years.

Padam, who also played at the Khalifa International Stadium with other migrant workers, hopes to visit Qatar in 2022 like many other Nepalis. And it won't be just for the love of the game. 🇳🇵

Das Deutsche Bier



PHOTOS: JGI

In 1753, in a small town located in the heart of Germany's western Sauerland region, farmer Antonius Cramer was told to pay tax when the beer he brewed for personal consumption exceeded allowed limits. What would seem to be sticking to the rules turned out to be the starting point for his home brew to become one of the largest privately-operated breweries in Germany: Warsteiner.

Today, the Warsteiner Group is a key player brewing in the premium beer category in Germany. The company is the producer of its flagship brand Warsteiner Premium Beer in Germany, which is the official beer on board Lufthansa flights and is currently available in more than 60 countries, now including Nepal.

Hoping to fill the gap for premium German beer in the region, owner Catharina Cramer opened a state of the art Raj Brewery (*see pictures*) in April, located in Hakui of Nawalparasi



district. The brewery was built in partnership with Nepal's biggest liquor company, Jawalakhel Group of Industries (JGI).

Nepal has an increasingly diverse market, following a global trend of aficionados seeking more variety and higher quality. Warsteiner Group has long been selling its product internationally, so the investment in Nepal's beer scene is a mark of confidence.

With its commitment to consistency and quality, Raj

Brewery says it assures the production of the premium beer by focusing on state-of the art methods of quality control, innovative measurement practices and cutting-edge production technology. Indeed, Raj brewery is the most modern and advanced in South Asia, following the same exacting standards set by German Purity Law.

JGI had been working for the past five years towards establishing a world-class brewery in Nepal cognizant of the Nepali customers' demand for quality. Through its state-of-the-art manufacturing, big sales and marketing team, innovation, and sound financial base, the company says it is looking forward to a strong partnership with Warsteiner.

"We went and tried over a 100 of the world's top beers and couldn't find any as refreshing as this. Warsteiner appeals to the palate of beer-loving Nepalis, without creating a hole in their pocket," says Raj Bahadur Shah, CEO of Raj Brewery, a subsidiary of JGI.

Like JGI, Warsteiner also has a long history of family ownership handed down through generations. Cramer is the ninth generation of her clan to carry on the brewing tradition. Taught by her father Albert Cramer, Catharina knows the essentials of running a successful beer brand while maintaining a strong family culture.

With the introduction of four varieties, it is aiming to bring quality German beer culture to Nepal. As the sales have taken off just four months after its launch, it is evident that Nepalis love the new German beer in town. 🇳🇵

Sikuma Rai

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Increasing traffic

Turkish Airlines has reached the highest first-half load factor rate in its history with 80.4%. That means, according to the June



2018 traffic results, the airline carried 6.3 million passengers, and almost 116,000 tons of cargo and mail. That's a whopping increase of 10.6% and 18.6% respectively, from same period last year.

Trips by Qatar

Hotel Yak & Yeti announced the winners of the lucky draw contest held during the FIFA World Cup 2018, in partnership with



Qatar Airways and Budweiser. Santosh Prasad Rijal and Andrija Stojic won round trip tickets to any of the airline's global destinations.

Educating girls

Celebrating its 15th anniversary, Samsung Plaza, the authorised distributor of Samsung Electronics, operated by HIM



Electronics, presented a cheque for Rs250,000 to Asman Foundation. The money will fund the education of 50 female students from Nirmal Vidyapeeth School and Shree Aajad School for a year.

WhatsApp, Etihad



Etihad Airways has launched a WhatsApp business solution, allowing premium guests to communicate instantly with the airline via the popular messaging app. The WhatsApp number will be

exhibited in premium check-in at Abu Dhabi Airport.

IDP scholarship

IDP Education, an international education service provider, has announced a scholarship program amounting to a total of AUD \$50,000 for Nepali students wanting to study in the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland. It also announced plans to open an office in Kathmandu by August 1.

prabhu BANK

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Jaunts with JBS

Catching up with Col John Blashford-Snell, the army explorer and Nepal aficionado

“With this amazing sunny weather, the garden would have been much better if the deer hadn’t eaten everything.” Judith smiled, unconcerned in a bright orange top, as I looked out at the scorched grass and flowerless beds, the trees shady with the green freshness of the early English summer.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

We were sitting on a chintz window seat after lunch in the Dorset home of Judith and Colonel John Blashford-Snell (pictured, right), the army explorer and Nepal aficionado. I rested my coffee cup on a glass-topped cabinet that contained a bewildering jumble of JBS’s many expedition treasures – a tiger’s claw, a shark’s tooth, an old compass, glass beads, a mysterious paw.

“I once did a whole television program talking about bits in there,” remarked John, arms folded across a solid barrel chest. “Mementoes from our Operation Drake and Raleigh voyages as well as scientific excursions to various corners of the world.”

Last month to celebrate the 40th anniversary of these youth adventure training journeys, the brigantine-rigged tall ship, the *Eye of the Wind*, processed under full sail up the Thames with past trainees, staff and patron Prince Charles on board. I was not amongst them, but was keen to catch up with the aging JBS and had driven several hours to see them.

Other than a slight loss of hearing and a few more grey hairs, I need not have worried -- Blashers was undiminished in energy and intent, his upright stance only slightly stooped. “I leave with a group next week for



a scientific survey of northern Mongolia, and next spring we’ll see you back in Bardia.” JBS’s trips have investigated Karnali river dolphins, Tarai snakes and a suspected mammoth that was in fact a jungly elephant.

But next year will be without Judith. “These days I prefer to travel on my own,” she confides. “No one ever notices, but it’s no fun being on John’s jaunts unless one has a proper job to do. I’m not good at just being the wife.”

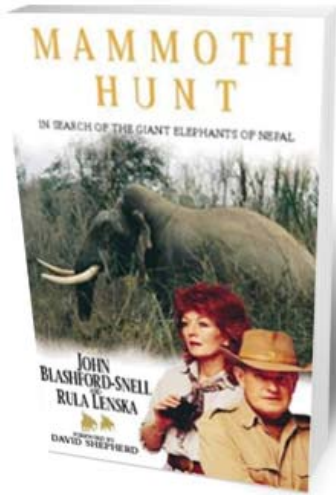
They have been coming to Nepal since the 1970s – back when the country’s unparalleled mountain, river and wildlife resources made it one of Asia’s first pioneer adventure tourism centres, an essential choice for those interested in active holidays.

Today we take climbing, trekking, river running, paragliding, bird watching and wildlife safaris for granted as core Nepal attractions, but in those days tourists tended to be more sedate sightseers. Nepal was at the forefront of creating adventure travel and ecotourism, now an established global market.

JBS helped put us on the world map, and some of my more radical opportunities came courtesy of him. Taking a holiday break from Tiger Mountain, I was asked to recce remote northern Papua New Guinea for an Operation Drake voyage, assessing its potential with the Naval Defence Force and Robbie, the enthusiastic 21-year-old son of a major American sponsor.

Robbie didn’t last longer than the tree-lined harbour of Rabaul, East New Britain’s provincial capital, where one sultry afternoon agonising pain from kidney stones had him bouncing off the walls of our borrowed apartment. Robin Cooke, the government volcanologist helped me get him to hospital. Eruptions and earthquakes were so frequent and severe in Rabaul that his official observatory seismograph had fallen off its stand during the last big one. Decades later in 1994 the whole town, precariously sited within a caldera flanked by active volcanoes, would be engulfed in heavy ash fall and destroyed, Robin being amongst the fatalities in this cataclysmic event.

That evening over a drink



in the Aussie tavern I naively asked: “What do you guys do in a quake?” Propping up the bar, the locals looked at me, baffled: “Pick up yer beer, mate!”

Without Robbie I had no choice but to proceed alone on the Navy’s patrol boat early next morning. The very large and very Papuan Captain graciously moved out of his tiny cabin for me, and the all-male crew could not have been more polite. We put to sea but it wasn’t long before the engines failed and I was handed over to another similar vessel. That got us a couple more days through the flying fish and past the distant coconut clad volcanic islands of New Ireland, when the same thing happened again.

Near Kavieng we visited an old Planter’s Club that literally rocked on its wooden pillars and crumpled to the ground before my eyes – or am I imagining this episode? Eventually we reached the remote Feni Islands in the Bismarck Archipelago that was our destination, but, having anchored offshore within tantalizing sight of its sandy beaches and gently swaying palms, I was unable to land because the outboard on the dinghy failed to start.

“Don’t worry, it always happens at this time of year!” declared the unlikely-named Colonel Manyana, cheerfully leaning on his desk in a starched white uniform when, back in Port Moresby headquarters and reunited with JBS, we admitted to my having single-handedly disabled the best part of his entire PNG naval defence force. Colonel Manyana grinned shaking his head in sympathy, “It’s the end of our annual budget cycle and without any funds for maintenance the boats are always breaking down.”

I left John and Judith waving farewell from their back door in the English summer sunshine, and drove back through the lengthening shadows past the Stonehenge monoliths – it was nearly the longest day with its midsummer rituals, the ancient power of these places still potent. 🇳🇵



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Watch video from Explorer Portal, where scientific explorer John Blashford-Snell talks about the road he followed to become a legendary modern adventurer.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r53dVtYjg0>



PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI

Sahina Shrestha

David Belle and his comrades at the Yamakazi could not have foreseen how much influence they would have on a young rural Nepali boy when they started the Parkour movement. Indeed, no one could have known this boy from Khotang in eastern Nepal would set two Guinness World Records in two years for the sport developed from military obstacle course training.

Dinesh Sunar broke the record for the most backward somersaults against a wall in 30 seconds in January this year, managing a staggering 16 somersaults, beating the previous record by leaps and bounds. Last year he also did 18 back flips to set the record for the most twisting backflips off a wall in one minute.

So, what are Parkour and Freerunning? Let's hear it from the man himself: "Parkour is an act of going from point A to B using the obstacles in the path to increase efficiency. And Freerunning is using the movements

skillfully to express ourselves.”

These days, when Sunar is not busy with his police duties he uses Kathmandu as his training ground. The 25-year-old, known as 'Parkour Dinesh' also works as a stuntman in movies, having performed in 15 Nepali and one Bollywood movie.

Sunar started attempting flips and jumps off mounds of construction sand on the banks of the Manohara River in Kathmandu. “At that time I didn’t know what I was doing had a name, I just got together with few of my friends and jumped off high places,” recalls Sunar, who only found out it was called Parkour after watching videos on YouTube.

When he moved back to his hometown in Khotang, he continued to practice. When the internet became available, he relied on online videos for inspiration.

Things took a dramatic turn when Sunar got an opportunity to perform Parkour at a competition in Khotang. Police chief Sanat Kumar Basnet of the Armed Police Force spotted his talent and brought him to Kathmandu to put him under the tutelage of sports in-charge Prem Kumar Shrestha and


coach Rajeshwor Man Sthapit. Sunar started learning gymnastics and bagged two gold medals in the national games.

But it was Parkour where his passion was. “I cannot remember the number of times I was scolded and punished for doing Parkour in the middle of gymnastics practice,” smiles Sunar. The rules for Parkour are quite specific: each flip must be a full mid-air 360 degree backward rotation, and the person must also rotate the body 360 degrees in a barrel-roll twist before landing, facing the wall. When his application was approved, Sunar was required to do at least 15, he did 18.

The inspiration to attempt a world record came when he was browsing the web and saw Parkour videos. “I thought to myself, if others can do it then why can’t we Nepalis?”

With the record in his bag, Sunar was noticed by the World Parkour and Freerunning Federation, and landed an opportunity to train in the US, getting a wild card to compete in the USA Parkour Cup, where he finished in the Top 8.

“It was an incredibly proud moment for

me to represent Nepal in the international arena, and it was made possible by the people who supported me,” says Sunar, who is now the first and only certified Parkour trainer in the country. “Parkour and Freerunning are getting more popular, and my aim is to promote and train more Nepali athletes.” 



Watch record-holder Dinesh Sunar demonstrate his back flips and leaps, and see him recall how he rose from humble beginnings to be so passionate about the sport. Despite injuries, Sunar is committed to helping other young Nepali athletes get the opportunity to pursue their passion just as he did.

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Golfing in Nepal monsoon

Not only are Nepal's golf courses exquisite, they are even more exciting in the rainy season.

Thomas Heaton
in Nawalparasi

It's either sweat or rain during monsoon season on Nepal's golf courses. But, we golfers are a specific sucker-for-punishment breed.

Rain, shine, snow, hail; we will keep playing no matter what nature throws at us. My first experience on a golf course in Nepal was during the monsoon's humid heat, and it would be fair to say I was a frustrated hacker by the end of the round. Not only are the courses in this wonderful country exquisitely difficult, they are even harder and potentially more hazardous during monsoon.

The key to enjoying golfing in the rain is being prepared, using common sense and timing it right. Seasoned players are in the habit of waking early to beat the heat and rain, while some play later in the day. But because it rains mainly at night, the course is soggy in the mornings. The afternoons may be hotter, but they are drier. While the weaker ones resign golf bags to the

broom closet during the monsoon, those playing continue to improve their games.

Just visit the Royal Nepal Golf Course in Kathmandu on Saturdays, Sundays or Wednesdays, to see the vibrant culture continuing through the dreary months. Teeing off at 7am, troops of Gurkhas take to the course for their rounds to beat the heat and, on Saturdays plenty of young aspiring golfers take to the range to hone their swings.

The best-known courses in Nepal, Royal Nepal and Gokarna

Forest Retreat, are unique, but there are three other courses in Pokhara, Dharan and Devachuli. Having played in four of these to write this review, it is fair to say each has its own challenges and charm (*see map*).

Golf is simultaneously frustrating and rewarding at the best of times, but more than usual when playing during the monsoon season. Squelching down the fairways, players have to not just contend with the heat and rain which are not unique by

international standards, but also leeches, mosquitos, livestock and wildlife in the greens. (And watch out for the snakes.)

The balls plug into the turf, but courses typically allow for placement and cleaning of the balls. It is a hassle many have to contend with and getting the ball to run down the fairway is almost impossible.

With impromptu and intermittent downpours, those who are game should pack a rain jacket and umbrella, and a pair of waterproof shoes. There is also a lot of long grass in the monsoon, which makes the stakes of the game a little higher as the pressure to hit the perfect shot is even more important. Even still, it's sometimes hard to find the ball on the fairway.

During high season, the Himalayan Golf Course in Pokhara offers stunning views of the Annapurnas. During monsoon you play among few, if any, other players. Hitting over rivers and gulleys, shooting blind over trees and across the Bijaypur Canyon, the course is stunningly vertiginous and there is plenty of cover when Pokhara's legendary rains come pouring down.





Pratima prepares to tee off again

Pratima Sherpa's past year has been anything but subpar

She has met golf great Tiger Woods and played at some of the best courses in the world after gaining international media attention. ESPN featured the young golfer in a dedicated documentary: *A Mountain to Climb*.

The 18-year-old golfer, having grown up in a shed on the third hole of Royal Nepal Golf Course, acknowledges it's been a crazy year. Back in Kathmandu, the self-assured yet self-effacing Sherpa continues to work hard on her golf and schooling in hopes of making a career in the game. The goodwill of the Nepal Golf Association, and several others, has seen her kitted out and benefiting from a good education.

On a rare afternoon off training, she sits outside her home on the third hole and reflects on the past year. She has gained attention from golfing greats, touched by her story, and is now working hard to do well in her TOEFL and SAT exams in three months time, having been encouraged to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship to pursue higher studies in the US.

"It's a great opportunity, for me and the upcoming ladies," she says.

In October Sherpa is travelling to speak at the ESPN Women + Sport Summit in the US.

To lower her handicap by 5, to become Nepal's first female pro, she is focusing on her course management – a piece of advice from Tiger Woods himself.

"Nothing's impossible. It's difficult, it's not impossible," she says.

And, if all goes according to plan, Sherpa wants to come back to Nepal to continue feeding the burgeoning game. There are many young people striking the ball well, however, not just Sherpa.

Sachin Battarai, her coach, says there are eight determined girls playing at the Royal Nepal Golf Course, and there is plenty of talent in the ranks. Among the best are Prativa Rai, 17, Kashmira Shah, 18, and Bhumi Banaya, 15.

Sherpa says she hopes there will one day be enough women serious about the game to justify a women's tour. She also hopes to represent Nepal at the Olympics one day.

There are many young men making a go of the sport as well.



BIKRAMRAI

Nepal Golf Association's Deepak Acharya says many underprivileged young golfers are coming through the ranks. Every Saturday, the courses host youth development sessions for them. Typically Royal Nepal Golf Club hosts about 40 young players, while Nirvana Golf Club and Resort, Himalayan Golf Club and Gokarna host 10 players each.

One such player, 20-year-old Sukra Bahadur Rai, has shown both willingness and talent. NGA has helped him further his education, like many other young golfers—. There are plenty of golfers hitting the range in the hopes of making a career out of the sport. Names to look out for will be Binod Tamang, 15, Subash Ghising, 15 and Bipin Tamang, 19. Rai scored himself a place in the top 10 at the Thailand Amateur Open last year, while Tanka Bahadur Karki won the Bhutan Amateur Open recently. Both these players were found through the NGA's youth development programme, and there is obviously more talent to come.

h's on

tely difficult,
season

Billionaire Binod Chaudary's personal course in Devachuli of Nawalparasi opened to the public eight months ago, and is as well kept as Gokarna Forest Resort. The short 9-hole CG Retreat course is arguably the most forgiving of Nepal's courses, with plenty of clear ground for mishits to fly, and has some of the best greens in the country. When it rains, however, it is a different story, and thankfully there is a spa and gym to keep you occupied.

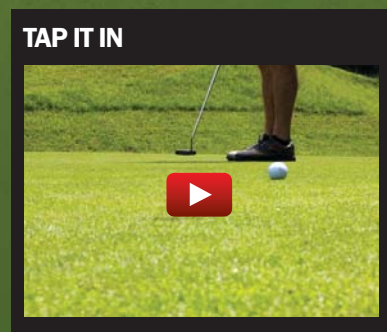
The heat, while it might seem unbearable to some, is really quite temperate in comparison to tropical southeast Asia. Gokarna Forest Resort senior golf director Deepak Acharya believes Nepal's relatively temperate climes, even during monsoon, makes for a potentially lucrative attraction.

"But you need to have a product that will actually get you to stay one extra day or night in the city, but we are not catered to do that. We need to put our heads together, because we have the potential," he says.

Indeed, golfing in the monsoon could be an attractive package for golfers from the Gulf who only have

sandstorms for excitement. It is just a matter of time until not only Nepal twigs, but the rest of the world does too.

The most unfortunate thing about golf, but what makes it great, is that we must play to the conditions. In Nepal, the US or Europe, rain or shine it is well worth being out there no matter how pitiful the score. It is going to be our fault for not being out there or not scoring well, just don't blame the weather. 🌧️



Nepal's golf courses are great year 'round, but there are some tricks to keeping up your game during the monsoon. For a look at some of the country's courses and for some tips, take a look at the Nepali Times website.

nepalitimes.com



Himalayan Golf Course, Pokhara

Considered among the most unique courses in the world, it currently has 16 holes. Par-73 over 18 holes (players play the first and second twice) it was opened in 1994. The course is vertical, and built in a valley of the Bijaypur Khola 80m directly below the clubhouse.



Royal Nepal Golf Course, Kathmandu

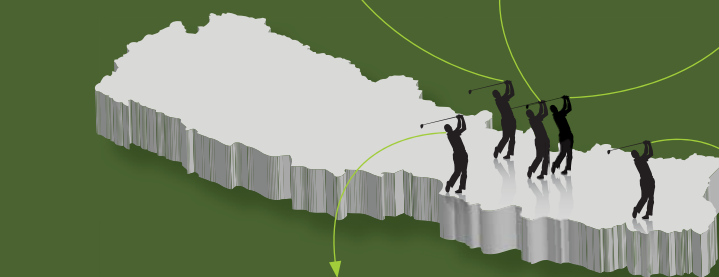
Located adjacent to Kathmandu airport, this course may be only nine-holes but is challenging with plenty of hazards. However, there are some forgiving holes, the caddies have a good knowledge of the terrain and there is a vibrant member culture.



Gokarna Forest Resort, Gokarna

Ten km from Kathmandu city centre, this well-kept par-72 course offers a varied 18-hole experience. Part of an ancient native forest and opened in 1999 at a former royal hunting resort. It has plenty of water hazards and some of the best putting greens in the country. Warning: bad roads to get there.

NEPALI COURSES



CG Retreat, Devachuli

Opened to the public eight months ago, this was used as a private course of billionaire Binod Chaudhary. Located in an Industrial Park, this 9-hole course (par-64 over 18 holes) is maintained to an exceptional standard.



Nirvana Country Club Health & Golf Resorts, Dharan

Forty-five minutes from Biratnagar Airport, this 9-hole course in Dharan was built at a former recruitment and pension base for the British Brigade of Gurkhas in 1962. The course is par-70 over 18 holes.

EVENTS



Coffee meet

Discover more about Coffee with trainers from Università del Caffè, Nepal and challenge yourself in various interactive activities.
20 July, 3-7pm, Silver Mountain School of Hotel Management, Lainchaur, Rs150, (01) 4415038 / 4412584 / 4429151

Kathmandu Kora Cycling

Kathmandu Kora Cycling Challenge is back this July, in its eighth edition. Riders from Nepal and all over the world gather to ride a personal challenge of 50/75/100km around Kathmandu Valley, for a social cause.
21 July, 7am-7pm, Begins at Patan, (01)4412508

That’s what she said

Funny Side up brings you an all women comedy show with Nepal’s lady standup comedians cracking their side of jokes and stories.
20 July, 6:30-8:30pm, Garage Lounge and Bar, Jhamsikhel, 9840011717

Trivia night

Join in at the Trivia Night for 5 rounds of 10 questions on a variety of themes and win prizes. Networking and booze session follows.
20 July, 5-8pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchowk, (01) 5530229



Health Transformed by Art

A community art project bringing out the untapped therapeutic value of visual art in a hospital setting, providing psychological relief to patients, hospital staff, and general public. The exhibition marks the completion of the pilot project and displays the process and moments captured during the project.
22 July-16 August, 10am onwards (5:30pm-inauguration on 22 July), Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revised, (01) 4218048

Shapes and shades

A basic sketching workshop for beginners by Mrigaja Bajracharya. Bring along materials and any drawing inspiration for a crash course on basic rules of constructing faces while making portraits.
21 July, 11-3pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, Rs1,000, (01) 5521812

Panorama 60’s

‘Panorama 60’s: Pioneers of Nepali Modernism’ is a panoramic showcase of 1960s Nepali contemporary art, featuring work from eight modern art pioneers of Nepal.
27 July, 6pm onwards, Bikalpa Art Centre, Pulchowk, (01) 5013524



The Storytellers

Mark your date for the guitarists’ edition of The Storytellers—Hari Maharjan, Sunny Tuladhar, Binayak Shah and Deepak Moktan are sharing their stories.
25 July, 5:15pm onwards, Raashtriya Naachghar, Jamal, Rs 350 (pre-sale)/ Rs450 (door), 9851242128

A song rises in me

Join in for an intimate conversation with American poet, Christina Olivares, as she talks about writing life, body and being. Special performances by the women Word Warriors of Spoken Word Nepal and music by Ruby Basnyat & Co.
21 July, 4-6pm, Everfresh Cafe, Pani Pokhari, 9801064936

Neftalk: Nepali economy

Having witnessed the transition of Nepal into a Federal Democratic Republic and experienced many economic upheavals, Alaina B. Teplitz, US Ambassador to Nepal speaks on ‘Nepali Economy: Reflections and Potential’.
24 July, 4-6pm, Hotel Himalayan, Kupondole, (01) 5548400

MUSIC



Kta Haru

The fun filled band with their originals take the center stage on Friday night. Groove along with the entertaining music while sipping some beer.
20 July, 7:30pm onwards, Beers N’ Cheers, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5524860

Nabin K Bhattarai

Presenting the legendary pop singer, live with Atripta band on Friday night. Enjoy the musical performance along with the restaurant’s good food.
20 July, 7pm onwards, Warehouse Café, Hattisar, (01) 4425666, 9813524648

The Blue Fret

The band with the line-up: Daniel Christopher Subba, Kiran Nepali, John Rashin Singh, Shawn Pyngrope, Mark Don Rani and Suman Thapa will be playing songs from their upcoming album Jiri Blues.
27 July, 8pm onwards, Blue Note Cafe, Sanepa, 9865706761



The Many Roots Ensemble

An evolving entity of varied music of various genres like Jazz, Funk, Hip Hop, African, Folk, Classical, Reggae, Disco, Fusion, Electronic and Experimental.
21 July, 7pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs300, (01) 5528362

Blues & Roots session

Weekend night with groovy blues performance by the bands from the Valley—TMR Trio and Newaz.
21 July, 6-11:45pm, Shisha Lounge & Bar, Thamel, (01) 4701104

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 20 July

Parthavi (Janhvi Kapoor) and Madhukar (Ishaan Khatter) are two youths from Rajasthan, belonging to different castes, who are in love with each other. The movie revolves around the story of these two young lovers who have to fight against the disapproval of their family and society to be together. *Dhadak* is an official remake of the critically acclaimed Marathi film *Sairat*. The movie is directed by Shashank Khaitan and produced by Dharma Production.

DINING



Fairfield by Marriot

Indulge in a monsoon delight at the hotel with unlimited buffet dinner and in-house beverages.
Every Saturday, 7-10:30pm, Kava Restaurant, Fairfield by Marriot, Thamel, Rs1,999, (01) 4217999, 9801227613

Le Trio

The vintage-esque posters that line the walls and rustic wooden tables all give the impression that you’ve stepped into a 1960s Parisian café but the menu is very much local in taste. Must try their signature jhol momos.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5521674

Japanese Noodle Kitchen

JNK offers a fresh, fast, uncomplicated Japanese dining experience at an affordable price, with a focus on noodles, dried or soupy.
Nakhu Dobato, Ringroad, wedged between On the Grill and Kwality Food Café

The Diplomat

Experiencing luxurious culinary delights at the hotel’s 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 (Noodle Salad), Mohinga (fish noodle soup) and other signature pork dishes.
Tangal, opposite to Attic Bar, (01) 4437490

Arniko Room

Enjoy a 3-course set ‘Executive Lunch’ at the hotel’s Chinese restaurant. An array of soup, main course and desserts to choose from.
Sunday to Friday, 12-3 pm, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg, Rs1,500 (single), (01) 4221711

GETAWAY



Hyatt Regency

Overlooking the Japanese garden, the hotel’s spa offers a tranquil retreat to rejuvenate and relax the body, mind and soul. Try an Ayurvedic massage, Shirodhara or enjoy a personal Yoga lesson for a unique, traditional therapeutic experience. Packages available: *Mountain Path, River Path and Forest Path*.
30% off for treatments between 9am-2pm, Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudhdha, (01) 5171234

Dahlia Boutique Hotel

A luxury hotel at the bank of Phewa Lake with 180 degree mountain and city view: a good end to a memorable trek.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 466505

Shangri-La Village Resort

2 nights and 3 days special package at the village resort. Let the monsoon bring out the madness in you.
20 July- 30 September, Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs7,499 (single, get coupons worth Rs3,000 back), (061) 462222

Atithi Resort & Spa

Continuously on the top ten list of hotels in Nepal by TripAdvisor, the resort is a quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities. Spend a monsoon getaway here to make it remarkable.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 466760



Temple Tree Resort and Spa

A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it’ll be hard to leave once you get here.
Gaurighat, Lakeside, (061) 465819

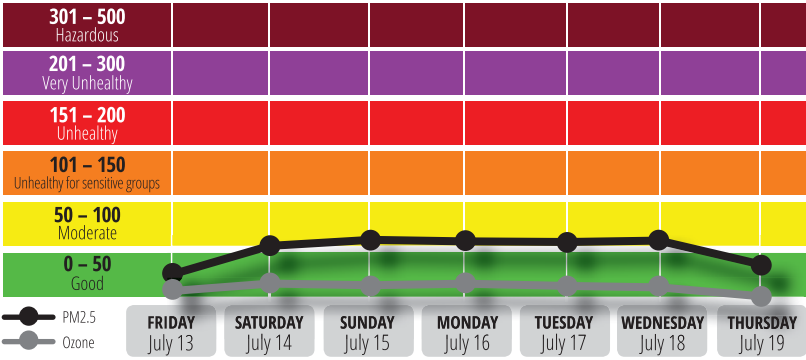


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AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 13 - 19 July



From this week onwards, the daily average of Kathmandu's Air Quality Index has been segregated into concentration of harmful fine particles below 2.5 microns (black) as well as ozone (grey). Ozone is a very reactive and short-lived gas formed when gases in vehicular exhaust react with oxygen in the atmosphere in the presence of sunlight. Since the U.S. Embassy monitoring stations at Phora Darbar and Maharaiganj are located away from busy streets, the ozone may appear less than sidewalk conditions.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Parks, not parking lots

Exemplary community effort to restore open space gives hope for a greener Kathmandu

Duksangh Sherpa

It is 6AM on an overcast monsoon morning. Despite dark clouds threatening rain, people are already at Narayan Chaur, some jogging, others walking with umbrellas, a group is doing yoga on mats in the grass. The children are on swings and slides, and the elderly amble slowly along the stone paths.

For a city known for its congestion and lack of parks, Narayan Chaur stands out as a model for urban renewal in which a community got together to restore an open space for public use.

Spread over a hectare, in the heart of Kathmandu, and surrounded by new office towers, the Nandi Keshwor Garden (as it is officially called) provides an oasis of green amidst the concrete chaos surrounding it. Until five years ago, this was a smelly garbage dump, infested with drug dealers. It got to a point where people from the neighbourhood would not walk out after dark.

The person most responsible for Naryan Chaur's transformation is the artist and writer Narendra B Shrestha, who understood the cultural significance of the Nandi Keshwor temple. During the reign of Rana Bahadur Shah in the later 18th century, flowers from the garden where the park now stands used to be offered to the temple.

One of the few people who helped Shrestha in his park renovation project since the beginning was Prabighya Basnet. A forestry and environmental studies student, Basnet was appalled at the state of the historic site and consulted Shrestha about how to restore it. Basnet runs a farm and is the founder of Khali Khutta, a company which produces eco-friendly, all-natural products. She used her knowledge of trees and plants to start greening the periphery – and that effort grew into an initiative to reclaim the area.

“We could do it because it was a community effort, and it is proof that it is possible to transform other such spaces in the Valley to make Kathmandu cleaner and greener,”



NARENDRA B SHRESTHA



PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI

GREEN REVIVAL: Narayan Chaur, officially known as Nandi Keshwor Bagaicha, is a green oasis of calm in the middle of grey Kathmandu (*top*).

Narayan Chaur before the renovation, when it was a garbage disposal site (*above, left*).

The park following renovation, fully equipped with emergency boxes containing tools and equipment for earthquake and fire rescues (*above, right*).

says Basnet, who is now working to revive other open spaces that have become parking lots or garbage dumps.

Some are already following the example of Narayan Chaur. The Vijay Park in Dhumbarahi is an initiative of The Vaidya Organisation which has transformed another garbage dump along the Dhobi Khola into a park. Along the Bagmati River numerous

organisations have come together to turn the filthy banks into parks.

Narendra B Shrestha agrees that the park would not have been possible without the Naxal-Narayan Chaur community and the community police being involved, and his initiative which brought together the entire community, proves that change is possible if there is will. “The government was not involved, it was the people

coming together to restore the space, and to manage its maintenance,” he adds.

Work on the restoration began in 2012 and took in factors like selection of tree species and disaster management preparedness, while ensuring that the drug pushers did not return. Architect Prabal Thapa was enlisted to design the park, and corporate figures like tourism entrepreneur Yogi Shakya chipped

in with seed money. By 2013, the master plan was complete and presented to the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KVDA), and the park was opened to the public a few months before the earthquake in April 2015.

Fully equipped to cope with the disaster with safety boxes, six water recharge wells and solar lights, Narayan Chaur provided refuge for hundreds of people after the earthquake.

“People these days are focused on commercialising public areas, putting up high rises and not enough importance is paid to community open spaces, not just for recreation and aesthetics but also for safety in times of crisis,” Shrestha adds.

Kathmandu's rapid urbanisation without proper planning is a slow-moving disaster in itself. Protecting green spaces is therefore not only socially and environmentally necessary, but can also bring economic benefits. Land and rental prices have soared in Naxal after the Nandi Keshwor Park was opened.

The park was handed over by the government to the community to maintain and manage, something quite rare in Nepal. Learning from Nandi Keshwor, the government has come up with a list of 83 other sites which can be turned into community parks and safe spaces during times of emergency.

One of them is Tinkune, on the airport road, which has been an eyesore for more than 20 years. Narayan Chaur has shown how to go about it: stop waiting for the government to do something, get the community involved. 🇳🇵

GREEN CITY PLANNING



Watch this short video to meet the people responsible for the transformation of Narayan Chaur from a wasted public space to a model community park.

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They say the difference between truth and fiction is that fiction has to make sense. Truth is true, no matter how improbable it sounds. Such is the story of Pakistani teenager Nazo Dharejo, who had to defend her land against a gang of 200 armed bandits. Nazo (Suhaee Abro) and her younger sister Saeda (Eman Malik) are aided in their night-long gun battle by their mother Waderi (Razia Malik), who would rather die than be forced off her land.

My Pure Land is based on the true story of a family feud that left three women guarding their ancestral land. At its heart is the perception women are not rightful owners of land, and that when men are gone, property is up for the taking. But these women believe their land is their honour, and honour is even more important than life itself.

The story starts with happy family moments with the girls' Baba (Syed Tanveer Hussain) and brother Sikander (Atif Akhtar Bhatti). Through well-placed flashbacks, we slowly realise how the men became incapacitated, and how their parents trained the girls to fight with guns. Images of the teenagers running around in shirts

and trousers raises the poignant question of whether a woman's strength is ever enough, or whether they must act like men to be respected in patriarchal societies.

The film creates nail-biting suspense as the women find themselves surrounded by their uncle Mehrban (Ahsen Murad) and his henchmen. Taking stock of their arms they realise, with a sinking feeling, that they don't have enough. Braving the bandits, they stealthily steal their weapons. The women in the audience feel a chill down their spine when the armed bandits realise there are only women in the house, and ask if they can "go in." Women treated as spoils of war, sounds familiar?

Amidst the staccato of gunfire is a little romance that even delivers some laughs. Voluble and fiery Nazo finds her match in the silent, almost poet-like Zulfiqar (Tayyab Ifzal). Only after setting the condition she should be free to study and travel, that is.

At this point one wishes the director had not left the story hanging, and had gone beyond the single battle to tell us how Nazo actually managed to take control of her land. Some of the flashbacks seem prolonged, because

one would have liked to see how Nazo continues to fight, how her example has inspired other women to question patriarchy, and how she successfully acted on the aforementioned conditions she set before marriage.

The director seems to have taken a few artistic liberties with the material: portraying the women as more outnumbered than they were (when Nazo's recounted to other media, she spoke of a dozen people in the house), and by portraying the family as innocent victims rather than active agents in the family feud. He has delivered an engaging thriller that has not only been called a "feminist western", however, but also lays bare the struggles of women in patriarchal hinterlands of South Asia. The movie succeeds in showing how women must go the extra mile in a society that makes them vulnerable, and how they muster courage from within to do so.

Sewa Bhattarai

[Watch trailer online](#)
[nepalitimes.com](#)



WHEELCHAIRS OF HOPE: Israeli Ambassador Benny Omer and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali distribute wheelchairs to differently-abled children at the Embassy of Israel on Tuesday.



AU REVOIR: Having completed his tenure, French Ambassador to Nepal Yves Carmona pays a farewell visit to President Bidya Bhandari on Friday.



RAM, SITA AND ME: Prime Minister KP Oli visits the Nepal Academy to mark the 205th anniversary of the birth of poet Bhanu Bhakta Acharya on Friday.



YOUNG GUNS: Youth footballers of Mugu who recently participated in the Donosti Cup 2018 tournament in Spain pose for a group picture in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



SMOOTH AS SILK: Thai Airways received three awards at the annual Skytrax Awards in London on Tuesday, in the categories Best Economy Class, Best Airline Lounge Spa and Best Economy Class Onboard Catering.

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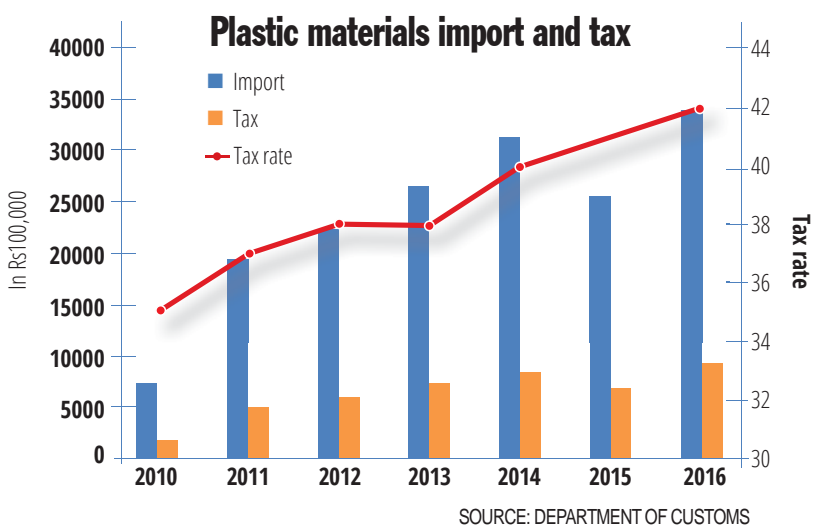
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A plastic republic



An integral part of modern lifestyle and the global market, plastic is an essential component in the latest gadgets and luxury goods, and in packaging everything from electric appliances to food items. Around the world, governments are under growing public pressure to ban single use plastic, to use less and recycle everything. Rwanda, and even parts of Somalia have banned plastic. There is no reason why Nepal cannot do the same, but repeated government efforts to ban plastic bags have failed. Hetauda restricted the use of plastic bags some 20 years ago, but was unsuccessful.

More than 1 million plastic bags are used once and thrown away in Kathmandu Valley every day, and it now forms more than 11% of the waste. Of the 204 tons of plastic waste generated in Nepal every day, 131 tons end up in garbage piles and dumping sites.

Plastic is contaminating our water sources and the soil, it ends up in cattle feed, and is a major threat to fisheries. The floods in

Bhaktapur last week were partly blamed on plastic garbage blocking drains.

When Denmark started charging for plastic bags, it reduced use by 66%. Similarly, Ireland taxed 0.15 euros per bag and brought down use by a whopping 94%. London has also been able to control plastic use since it started charging 5 pence per bag. Nepal can learn from these examples, which suggest that taxing is more effective than a blanket ban.

Nepal lags far behind, both in policy and implementation, despite importing plastic materials worth Rs 22billion annually and earning Rs 6billion in excise tax. Because of the source of revenue, and the lobbying by industries, a blanket ban is not realistic.

Plastic Bags Regulation and Control Directive restricts production, sale and use of plastic bags below 30 microns. Our studies have revealed that while municipalities like Byas, Hetauda, Ilam, Damak, Palpa and Pokhara have banned the use of plastic bags thinner than 30 microns and black polythene, the use is increasing in

Ghorahi, Dharan and Mechinagar.

On average, a family uses 10 plastic bags per week. This means if a person is charged Rs200 for plastic bags below 30 microns, its use can be reduced to zero. When Ilam municipality implemented a penalty of Rs223, it could reduce the use of plastic bags to almost zero. Whereas in areas with full restriction, the use never went down to zero, even when businessmen and consumers were in support of the ban.

FOLLOW UP

18-24 May, #910

On average, plastic materials are charged 34% tax, which isn't high compared to other items. Timely monitoring is equally important. We observed 282 travellers in 24 municipalities during our survey. Most of them didn't carry a spare bag from home, but 9% carried plastic bags, 11% of people in areas with partial restriction were found to be carrying plastic bags while only 1% did in municipalities with full restrictions.

In addition to monitoring, we have to communicate through mass media that officers are out to catch offenders and make them pay, as well as broadcast recent arrests and penalties. We can mobilise communities and demonstrate street plays to increase the effectiveness of the campaign.

If we are to successfully implement the restriction and penalty in Kathmandu, we will save more than Rs 500 million in plastic bag waste. But more than this, we will be saving the future generations of Nepalis from dealing with our waste.

Bishal Bhardwaj, Rajesh kumar Rai, Mani Nepal and Muktinath Subedi in Himal Khabarpatrika (8-14 July)



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Pokhara's plastic road

Keshav Sharan Lamichhane in *Annapurna Post*, 17 July

अन्नपूर्ण

Youth in Pokhara have shown the way to recycling plastic by paving a section of road with the non-biodegradable waste (pictured, above).

Plastic wrappers from noodles, biscuits, milk packets and tobacco were used to blacktop 100m of Anupam Marg in Pokhara-14, and the section was inaugurated by Pokhara Mayor Man Bahadur GC.

Green Road Waste Management introduced plastic into the traditional bitumen mixture, reducing the amount of expensive asphalt concentrate to make cheaper, longer-lasting and environmentally friendly roads.

The plastic waste is first processed into pellets, then boiled at 160 Celsius with other components including asphalt. Of the 2,475 litres of bitumen used in the blacktopping of Anupam

Marg, up to 16% was plastic and cost only Rs20,000.

"The use of plastic saves Rs200,000 per km of road. This means if we are to pave 200km of road, it will save us Rs20 million," said civil engineer Rajiv Subedi of Green Road Waste Management.

Subedi spent a week in Bhutan learning about the technology, first introduced in India in 2001. So far, 100,000 km of roads in India and 200 km in Bhutan have been blacktopped using plastic. Kathmandu can learn from Pokhara, given how much plastic is piling up in garbage on the streets.

"Using plastic to pave roads is an appropriate alternative to the Valley's growing plastic pollution," said Sanjeev Bastola, founder of the Green Road Waste Management. "Roads blacktopped with plastic have higher load-bearing capacity, are water resistant, and durable."

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Kleptocrats of Kathmandu

Politicians and recruiters in Nepal and Malaysia collude to loot poor Nepali migrant workers

Ramu Sapkota in Kathmandu with **Alya Aldajri** in Kuala Lumpur

A deeply-rooted nexus of politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats in Nepal and Malaysia have looted more than Rs5 billion over the past five years from vulnerable Nepali migrant workers desperate to seek work in Malaysia.

Nepal's Labour Minister Gokarna Bista is trying to dismantle those involved in the exploitation by cracking down on several Kathmandu-based companies set up to extort fees from overseas contract workers. In Malaysia itself, the newly-elected Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has also launched an investigation into the previous government's involvement in profiting from migrant workers.

The scam involved powerful Malaysian businesses with close links to ministers and officials in the Barisan Nasional coalition of former Prime Minister Najib Razak and implemented by their agents in Kathmandu who had contacts with influential politicians and bureaucrats in Nepal.

It all started five years ago when Malaysia's Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi outsourced a private company (Ultra Kirana Sdn Bhd) which required Nepali migrant workers to apply for work visas through a Kathmandu-based affiliate, Malaysia VLN Nepal. The agency charged Rs3,200 from every Malaysia-bound Nepali worker, and collected Rs 1.95 billion from more than 600,000 workers between September 2013 and April 2018.

Then in July 2015, Malaysia made it mandatory for all Nepali migrants to undergo a biometric test. The Malaysian government hired Bestinet Sdn Bhd, a tech firm run by Malaysian Home Minister Hamidi's brother-in-law Amin Bin Abdul Nor, for biometric health

screening. Minister Hamidi's brother Abdul Hakim Hamidi and ex-Malaysian Environment Minister Ajmi Khalid also reportedly owned shares in Bestinet.

Bestinet partnered with Nepal Health Professional Federation (NHPF) to carry out biometric screening through 39 medical centres which charged Rs4,500 from each migrant worker for biometrics. Bestinet and NHPF have already collected over Rs1 billion from over 200,000 Nepali workers.

Previously, migrant workers could have applied for visas independently or through any manpower agency. They could get a visa for just Rs700. They could get medical tests from any of 200 government-approved health facilities. But after Malaysia required private companies for visa processing and biometric screening,

workers were forced to pay much more.

The real scam involved

the lack of transparency in Malaysia and in Nepal on the choice of the private companies hired to facilitate this process, which ended up fleecing workers. While in Malaysia the companies were partly-owned by relatives of politicians, in Nepal bureaucrats and politicians benefited from kickbacks for sanctioning the new system. Fees were added on arbitrarily, and all involved in the syndicate in the two countries divided up the profits.

For example, the Rs3,200 visa processing fee did not cover all visa-related costs of a migrant worker. In May 2016, Malaysia hired another private company, One Stop Centre (OSC) to collect visa forms and passports and drop them at its embassy in Kathmandu. The OSC chose the same Malaysia VLN Nepal for this job, which added an extra fee of Rs2,800 from each applicant. Bestinet has also been allowed



to charge each migrant worker Rs3,200 just for scanning passports, fingerprinting and an additional Rs3,500 to upload the data online. Bestinet's Kathmandu-based agent, GSG Nepal, scans passports and fingerprints for all Malaysia-bound migrant workers. Bestinet in turn collaborated with labour recruitment agencies in Kathmandu and has so far collected over Rs1.3 billion in fees for passport and fingerprints scanning, and online data entry.

Tallied together, the Malaysia government and companies backed by powerful Malay politicians have, in total, taken more than Rs5 billion (US\$ 450 million) from over 600,000 Nepali workers between September 2013 and April 2018. Nepali politicians, bureaucrats and businesses were directly colluding with their Malaysian counterparts in cheating the workers. There are over 600,000 Nepali workers in Malaysia, and their remittances help sustain Nepal's economy.

The arrangements have been put into place on an ad hoc basis, without transparency and in the absence of any bilateral agreements between the governments of Nepal and Malaysia. Some of the companies managing migration in Nepal do not even have government approval.

Nepal's Labour Ministry was initially reluctant to accept Malaysia's proposal to introduce biometric systems, arguing it

would allow certain medical centres to overcharge migrant workers. But those lobbying for biometrics were so powerful that the ministry had to approve the system as a 'pilot project' for six months. But long after the six

months were over, Bestinet and the NHPF continued with biometric system with no interference from the government.

In January 2015, Parliament's International Relations and Labour Committee instructed

Hundi men

In May, police arrested 40 businessmen, including Malaysia VLN Nepal Chief Ram Prasad Shrestha, for illegally charging Nepali migrant workers for visa processing, biometric and online data entry.

Shrestha, who was later released along with 39 others on bail, told police that he was just an agent responsible for sending fee money collected from migrant workers to Malaysian companies in Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. He also informed police that his Kathmandu-based company would get a cut of Rs168 of every Rs3,200 visa processing fee and another Rs420 of every Rs2,800 passport collection fee.

Shrestha claimed his company had sought permission from the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) to transfer the money to Malaysia and Hong Kong. Police wrote a letter to the NRB to verify Shrestha's claim. Bhisma Raj Dhungana, Executive Director of the NRB's Foreign Currency Exchange Department, says: "A company that does not have a permission from the government to collect money cannot exchange currency and transfer it out of Nepal."

There is evidence that the companies used unofficial hundi channels to transfer cash to Malaysian parent companies. Malaysia's Migrants Management System (MIGRAM) collected more than Rs720 million through Nepali manpower agencies between May 2016 and April 2018 through the illegal hundi system.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) has revealed that ex-Malaysian PM Najib Razak's brother owns an offshore company in the British Virgin Islands which was used to stash ill-gotten wealth. The speculation in Kuala Lumpur is that it includes fees collected from impoverished and desperate Nepali migrant workers, that were illegally sent to Kuala Lumpur.

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Duped and dumped

Before Malaysia-bound Nepali migrant workers were forced to undergo expensive biometric tests from July 2015, they used to go to for normal health check-ups at any of the 200 health facilities accredited by the Nepal government.

But a significant number of workers who got a clean bill of health from Nepali medical centres were found to be 'unfit' in tests in Malaysia and immediately deported. Medical centres in Nepal licensed to examine the health of migrant workers were seen to not meet international standards.

This was the excuse used to push the biometric system. Those who lobbied for the biometric system had promised Nepali migrant workers that they would not have to undergo another test in Kuala Lumpur if they were declared 'fit' in a biometric test in Kathmandu.






However, the 100,000 Nepali workers who go to Malaysia every year also have to undergo a separate expensive test conducted by the Foreign Workers Medical Examination Monitoring Agency (FOMEMA).

More importantly, the percentage of Nepali migrant workers who pass health tests in Nepal but fail them in Malaysia has also not decreased.

Last year, more than 9,000 Nepali migrants were declared 'unhealthy and unfit' by the FOMEMA, and were sent home. Saroj Sarki of Chitwan is one of them. He spent more than Rs120,000 to go to Malaysia, passed the health test in Nepal, failed it in Malaysia and was immediately deported.

Sarki filed a complaint against the Nepali recruiting agency, but has not got his money back. The Labour Ministry has received more than 200 complaints filed by those who passed the health test in Nepal but failed the FOMEMA test in Malaysia. No action has been taken against some of the 39 private medical centres chosen by the NHPF which were responsible.

CASH BONANZA

| SEPTEMBER 2013 | JULY 2015 | MAY 2016 | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Malaysia makes it mandatory for Nepali workers to apply for visas through Ultra Kirana Sdn Bhd, a private Malaysian firm. | Malaysia hires Bestinet Sdn Bhd, a private company run by ex-Malaysian Home Minister's brother-in-law, to conduct biometric tests on Nepali workers. | Malaysia also hires Bestinet Sdn Bhd for scanning passports and fingerprints of Nepali workers from May 2016. | Malaysia hires Bestinet Sdn Bhd for entering data of Nepali workers into an online system | Malaysia hires Bukti Megah Sdn Bhd and Diamond Palace Cooperative Limited to submit Nepali workers' passports at the Malaysian embassy in Kathmandu, and collect them from there. |
| Ultra Kirana chooses Malaysia VLN Nepal as its local representative in Kathmandu | Bestinet chooses Nepal Health Professional Federation (NHPF) as its local agent in Kathmandu. | Bestinet chooses GSG Nepal as its local agent in Kathmandu. | Bestinet partners with Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) in Kathmandu. | Bukti Megah and Diamond Palace also choose Malaysia VLN Nepal as their local agent in Kathmandu. |
| Malaysia VLN Nepal charges Rs3,200 from each worker, collects over Rs1.95 billion from 609, 879 Nepali workers over five years. | NHPF charges Rs4,500 from each worker, collects over Rs1 billion from 222,280 Nepali workers over a three year period. | GSG Nepal charges Rs3,200 from each worker, collects over Rs660 million from 207,414 Nepali workers in two years. | Manpower agencies affiliated with the NAFEA charge Rs3,500 from each worker, and collect over Rs720 million from 207,414 Nepali workers in two years. | Malaysia VLN Nepal charges Rs3,200 from each worker, collects over Rs660 million from Nepali workers in two years. |



SOFT TARGET: Malaysia-bound migrant workers at a Kathmandu-based GSG facility, where their passports and fingerprints are scanned for Immigration and Security Clearance (*top*).

In August 2015, Labour Minister Tek Bahadur Gurung meets with Malaysian Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (*left*),

In June 2016, Deepak Bohara who succeeded Gurung as new Labour Minister meets with Malaysian Home Minister Hamidi's brother Abdul Hakim, who is believed to have a share in Bestinet.

the government to terminate the biometric system. It also directed the government to ask Malaysia to first make biometric test mandatory for migrant workers from all 14 countries that supply labour to Malaysia. It also ordered that biometric tests should be less expensive by ending the monopoly of a handful of selected medical centres.

The Parliament committee, however, reversed its decision after its Maoist Chair Prabhu Sah went on a junket to Australia paid for by the Nepal Health Professional Federation in which he was accompanied by NHPF's Kailash Khadka.

In June 2016, a committee led by Joint Secretary Govinda Mani Bhurtel recommended that the government prevent private firms from overcharging Nepali migrants. But Labour Minister Deepak Bohara trashed the report and himself flew to Kuala Lumpur to 'study the problem' the following month. He met Malaysian Home Minister Hamidi's brother Abdul Hakim at the Hotel Oriental Mandarin in Kuala Lumpur. On his return, Bohara took no action against Bestinet.

In Malaysia itself, Prime Minister Najib Razak and Home Minister Hamidi were slammed for hiring private companies to do what the Immigration Department should have done. Razak's party lost the elections in May mainly because of allegations of massive corruption. 

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It is both a pleasure and a pain in the ass to be invited here once again to the Reporter's Pub for the Faeces to Faces Program today to speak to you about how well the country has been doing. Firstly, since I am among fellow-oxymorons here I don't need to belabour the obvious and waste your and my time speaking about how the country is now embarked upon the glorious path to stability and propensity.

Come to think of it, if I don't need to tell you, then why am I doing just that? This is a question that I often ask myself when I have to attend fora and fauna like these. It has bedevilled me, and I am sure it has bedevilled every Prime Minister of this country since time immemorial.

That is why today I am departing from my prepared English text to speak frankly

and to toot my own trumpet here, if I may. It must be clear to all you political observers, anonymous analysts and western diplomatic sources who don't want to be quoted by name, that despite some impediments and difficulties we are well on track to achieve stability in this country in the not too unforeseeable future.

In fact, just this morning while attending to a call from Nature I was temporarily disconnected because Nature as usual wasn't calling me on my landline, but on Viber. But when we established contact again I was naturally delighted that I had to pay an extra 13% tax for the call. We will use that money to pay for my medical bill in Singapore.

The other sign of the new normal is that garbage is piling up again on the streets. It is a deliberate government policy to scatter trash so that nostalgic residents of the capital don't forget the good old days.

We promised a government that is stable, and we fulfilled it with all this horse manure. You wanted prosperity, and we are on track to manufacture at least 10 more Nepali Forbes billionaires.

Hey, wake up, the speechification is over. Please stand up for the national anthem.



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