

















Roadblocks

t a ministerial review meeting last month, Prime Minister K P Oli warned bureaucrats he would not take "If's and but's" anymore in expediting infrastructure projects. This was his latest strict instruction to ministries to deliver results.

Various Parliament committees have also issued similar instructions. Cabinet ministers and secretaries have repeatedly instructed government officials t be result-oriented. Yet, a report this week by the Office of the Auditor General shows that four months into the fiscal year, only 11% of the budgeted capital expenditure has been spent. More frightening: the government spent three times that amount on salaries, administrative costs an overheads.

"It is clear that issuing instructions alone will not work."

says economist Keshav Acharya, "instead of more instructions we need to pinpoint obstacles to implementation of projects and remove them."

However, the government already has monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place: at the Prime Minister's Office, the National Planning Commission, and the finance and other ministries have their own project assessment committees. Most experts blame the lack of accountability in the political leadership and a lethargic bureaucracy.

There was hope that with a strong government commanding a two-thirds majority in Parliament, and devolution of power to local governments,

things would change.

But not only has the

development budget remained unspent, but there has been shocking over-spending in current expenditure (administrative cost, salaries, vehicle purchases, or allowances on foreign trips). In the first quarter, the national government spent three times more on current expenditure than on capital disbursement.

The government is spending on cars, but not on maintaining roads. Whatever little is disbursed is mis-spent on unnecessary projects like this road that cuts through an ecologically sensitive wetland in Pokhara Valley (above).

Most provincial governments have managed to spend even less - only about 1% of their capital expenditure in the first quarter.

The inability to spend the development budget has been a chronic malaise in Nepal, but this year, it is worse because of

COMMUNIST

CAPITAL

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

Kathmandu's reluctance to devolve financial decision-making to local governments. This has triggered a credit crunch in the banking sector,

stifled job creation and encouraged migration. At this rate the government will not meet its 8% growth target this year.

Says economist Dilliraj Khanal: "The entire system of development administration has become so ineffective that unless it is overhauled, we will not see growth and progress." Ramesh Kumar

New species of dragonfly discovered in Nepal **PAGE 8-9**

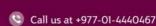




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Times.com

COMMUNIST CAPITAL

e see signs of stalled development all around us, every day, all over Nepal. Dusty, half-finished highways, national pride projects like Tama Kosi and Melamchi delayed by decades, crumbling infrastructure. Where there is economic activity, it is usually extractive, and happening at great cost to the environment — exposing corruption and lack of accountability of those in authority.

All this has become such a given in present-day Nepal that citizens do not even bother to complain anymore. Since they do not expect anything from their elected leaders, the people are not even outraged by this lack of performance. Public fatalism and a high threshold for punishment has let politicians and bureaucrats off the hook, and encouraged impunity.

At the root of this deep malaise is poor governance. And the starkest proof yet of political failure is that in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, the central government has been able to spend only 11% of its



It is a supreme irony of

our times that a strong

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Party with no political

opposition in sight,

and one which has

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main slogan, should

be so incompetent.

budgeted capital expenditure. The situation in the seven provinces is even more alarming: with one-fourth of the fiscal year finished they have spent less than 1% of their development budgets. Even the relatively better-governed Gandaki Province has only spent 5% of its budget in four months, and even that is mostly to cover overheads.

It is a supreme irony of our times that a strong government led by a monolithic Communist Party with no political opposition in sight, and one which has made prosperity its main slogan, should be so incompetent. Like in any business, it is a sign of good governance when a state maximises revenue, minimises running costs and prioritises development expenditure. Capital spending in productive sectors helps the economy by creating jobs, spurring development, and augmenting growth.

At present we have got it upside down. In fact, the government's own statistics show that in the first four months of this fiscal year, current account expenditure (for salaries. day-to-day costs of running government) was three times higher than capital spending. All

this goes to prove once more that Nepal is not poor, it is just poorly governed.

To be sure, this is nothing new. Even in the bad old days of the absolute monarchy, Nepal had a chronic problem of not spending its budget. This persisted after the democratic changes in 1990, and usually it was blamed on unstable coalition politics. In the past 12 years after the war ended, the excuse for the inability to spend has been the rocky political transition.

How long are we going to pretend that we are in perpetual transition? If a government with a two-thirds majority cannot get its act together, which government will? We now have political stability, the peace process is over, and governance has been decentralised to seven provinces and 753 elected municipalities.

Still, the reasons for the woeful inability to get projects off the ground are manifold. They mostly stem from a lethargic political and bureaucratic class that is loath to sanction any project unless there is direct

personal benefit. Then, there are structural issues like convoluted approval processes, red tape within and between line ministries, delays in issuing and selecting tender bids, and the culture of spending most of the budget in the last two months of the fiscal year in order to maximise kickbacks and payoffs.

This points to a systemic defect in the state structure that has not been corrected by improved accountability and performance of elected governments.

The lack of visionary leadership at all levels of government means there is no one to untie the knots and untangle the nexus between a rent-seeking state and private greed.

Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa started off vigorously to try to dismantle transportation cartels, others promised speedy service delivery and expediting delayed projects. Most people have even forgotten what was

promised. One year after they were installed, even elected local governments which want to get projects off the ground have been stymied by Singha Darbar refusing to let go of the purse strings. The impact of capital budgets not being released has unleashed another credit squeeze in the banking sector that is reeling under a liquidity crisis. It has slowed job creation and encouraged outmigration. At this rate we will not meet the 8% growth target for this year.

The rot is deep and the solution is a structural overhaul of governance. But the buck stops with the Prime Minister. It is he who will be blamed for failing to deliver even with such a strong majority government.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Join us on a video trek of two of Nepal's remotest districts. The West Seti gorge is Nepal's natural heritage and should be protected from future road-building. And how trekking can help the local economy and promote social justice on the Gurja Himal trail. Watch rare clip of avalanche on the mountain similar to the one that killed nine climbers in October. Story: Page 14-15.



Catch up with YouTube sensation and US-based singer-songwriter Bartika Eam Rai who is in Kathmandu for her first Nepal tour. Watch a short video profile where Rai talks about her new fulllength album Taral, her childhood, the therapeutic power of songwriting and her future plans. Story: Page 7.

LUMBINI

Nepal should learn from the results of the catastrophic deforestation of the Amazon and preserve the precious few trees and greenery at the birthplace of the Buddha ('Lumbini's unholy mess', Om Astha Rai, #936). Turning the site into a concrete jungle to profit the rich few with greed is hardly Buddhism. The place should protect its nature and be kept sacred.

Ganesh

KHUMBU FOREST

I read the story on forest regeneration in Sagarmatha National Park with interest but the article failed to give due credit to the local communities, the Park and its Buffer Zone Users Committee, and Khumbu Bijuli Company in protecting the trees ('More trekkers, more trees', Adam Stern, #936). The New Zealand government helped establish the Park in 1975 and built nurseries at Phurte and Tashinga. The new growth in Namche's periphery is the result of reforestation program by the Park, New Zealand foresters, and later the Himalayan Trust.

Nima Wangchu Sherpa

BARDIA

The ecological links between tigers, deer and grasslands is a vicious circle ('It's a jungle out there', Kunda Dixit, #936). At the top of the food chain are human beings, the most dangerous species for all other forms of life on this planet.

Jela Krivanova

BUDANILKANTHA

Lisa Choegyal is my neighbour in Budanilkantha ('A house in Budanilkantha', Lisa Choegyal, #935). And she is right, the location is amazing with a cool breeze blowing down from the national park. There is no shortage of water, and the only problem is the poor road. Nevertheless, this is one of the best places to call home.

Gyurme Dondup

CORRECTION

The spelling of Cas de Stoppelaar of the Himalayan Tiger Foundation in the story 'It's a jungle out there' in #936 was misspelled in print, and has been corrected online.

WHAT'S TRENDING



It's a jungle out there

Tiger numbers increased from 18 to 87 in ten years in Bardia National Park, but the prey density has declined sharply. What will the tigers eat? Visit nepalitimes.com to find out how the park is now trying to increase the



Most reached and shared on Facebook

Justice delayed and denied

As protests for justice for the rape and murder of Nirmala Panta rage across the country, a reminder of the heavy toll it has taken on her surviving relatives.



Most popular on Twitter



Most visited online page

Lumbini's unholy mess

With 32 structures within its core area, Lumbini is turning into a theme park, and losing its natural habitat that is home to the sacred Sarus crane, among others. Visit nepalitimes.com to join the online discussion.



Most commented

OUOTE TWEETS



Nepal's tigers increased from 121 to 235 in ten years. Treating Nepal and India's adjoining forests as single complexes, and not as separate territories had a lot to do with the increase. @sewa_ditee reports on trans-boundary cooperation in conservation.



Buddha Basnyat @BasnyatBuddha Nepal and India should follow the same kind of strategy (like they did for tiger conservation) for the control of anti-microbial resistance (AMR) a burgeoning problem worldwide and especially in South Asia



Nepali Times @nepalitimes Get a print copy of Friday morning's Nepali Times with a fake jacket ad, and @omastharai's analysis of the government's social security plan:



pigreen @pigreen1 Minority of Nepalis benefit even if the scheme works - probably better to properly enforce decent minimum wage across public and



private sectors Nepali Times @nepalitimes With 32 monasteries and temples within the



core area of Lumbini, and 58 hotels outside it. Lumbini is turning into a Buddhist Disneyland. @ omastharai reports on the struggle to save the essence of the Buddha's birthplace from greed and bad planning. 17

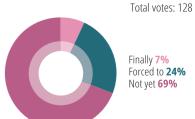


Tseten Norkyel @norkyel True, Lumbini is fast losing its appeal as a spiritual destination for Buddhists and non-



Weekly Internet Poll #937

Q. Do you see the presence of the government?



Weekly Internet Poll #938 To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should Nepal have hosted the Asia Pacific Summit?

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

and is creating conditions for his own downfall.

The Nepali Times Issue #427 of 28 November - 4 December 2008 dealt with rising labour discontent fuelled by a rivalry between Maoist and UML-backed unions to be more radical in their demands. However, the government was busy splitting hairs, as we noted in this editorial ten years ago:

'The Maoists have spent the entire past week splitting hairs over whether to go for a 'people's republic' or a 'democratic republic'. Às if it makes any difference.

In fact, the whole thing is beginning to look like an elaborate charade to distract attention from more pressing problems of governance, and to hoodwink an impatient cadre base.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal needs to realise that he doesn't have to threaten or extort anyone

anymore. He is undermining the very democratic process that propelled him to power

The coalition Dahal heads is a transitional entity with three jobs: take the peace process forward, assist the CA in framing a new constitution and ensure a functioning government. Everything else is either a diversionary tactic or sheer waste of time.





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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

Animated in Nepal

Sikuma Rai

ust when Kiran Joshi was trying to get more business for his Incessant Rain animation studio in Kathmandu ten years ago, one of his artists decided to quit. The reason was lack of support on his career choice from his family. Joshi had to do something, so he announced an Open House in which family and friends of his animators could come and see them at work.

More than 175 parents attended the event, and one of them was the mother of the artist who had applied to resign. She had tears in her eyes when she finally found out that her son was not playing video games all day at

Ever since, open houses have become an annual feature at Incessant Rain, not just to retain existing talent but also to welcome new ones. This year's Open House had 450 attendees, among whom were prospective artists who wanted to see what is now possible in Nepal through state-ofthe-art computer animation.

Joshi was encouraged: "This year was the highest turnout yet, and everyone was surprised that we create animation for the latest Hollywood releases.'

Indeed, Incessant Rain Animation Studio has moved to a larger studio in Chhauni, employs 140 artists producing live action animation and VFX projects for Walt Disney Studios, Fox Studios, Universal Network, Paramount, Warner Brothers, Netflix, Amazon,



Next time you watch a Hollywood movie, you may be looking at live animation sequences created in Kathmandu

and many others.

"Nepal is on the world map for animation production, and that is thanks to the enormous talent pool we have in this country," says Joshi, who divides his time between California and Kathmandu.

The problem now is retention: how to ensure that gifted Nepali animation artists are not poached by companies in Singapore, Malaysia or India doing similar work. While some have left for good, others have gone to gain more experience and returned to put it to good use back home in Nepal.

"Initially it used to annoy me that artists we painstakingly trained left us for jobs abroad,"
Joshi confessed, "but I have come to accept that as a given."

Nepal faces stiff competition from Asia's animation industry. Countries in the region have more human resources and get a big share of the live animation projects. But Joshi says his emphasis on quality and reliability has projected Incessant Rain as a world class studio producing high standard

animation. The company has so far worked on 94 movies, 124 tv series, 28 commercials, 15 public service announcements, and 10 location based entertainment. Joshi is now confident enough to create original content such as documentaries and fully animated

In 2015, Incessant Rain produced the documentary Moving Mountains with the British Red Cross on the stories of ten survivors of the 1990 earthquake in eastern Nepal, and showed Dharara tower in Kathmandu collapsing in a future quake. The film was criticised for panic mongering, but within a few months of its release Nepal was struck by the April 2015 earthqauke when the Dharara actually collapsed.

Incessant Rain then made a sequel, Moving Mountains, the Awakening in 2017 for the International Red Cross. The film told stories of child survivors and warned of the next Big One so the country can be better prepared.

Joshi plans to organise an animation conference in Kathmandu to tap into young Nepali students with art backgrounds. The studio is also building an animation lab for art experiments and research. Incessant Rain is collaborating with Kathmandu University School of Arts to have animation as an elective course, under its Arts and Design faculty in Hatiban.

Says Silicon Valley digital entrepreneur Bijay Niraula: "We need more people like Kiran, who has his feet in both East and West. He has trusted connections in Hollywood, and because he is Nepali, is able to function here. But he has also shown that it is possible to give back to Nepal while doing international

CARTOON CHARACTERS: Kiran Joshi at the Incessant Rain studio (*above*) and texture artist Renu Shrestha with project supervisor Kundan Basnet (below).



Job satisfaction guaranteed

As interesting as the character Shifu is in *Kung-fu Panda*, it is more interesting to learn that behind the design is young Nepali artist, Renu Shrestha. She joined Incessant Rain in Kathmandu in 2011 as a trainee for 3D animation and has also designed other famous characters like Master Monkey

and characters in Wreck-It Ralph. Shrestha now leads an all-male team of five texture artists.

"At first I had my doubts about managing a team, but we are all professionals and it is the work that binds us," says Shrestha, who had planned to move to Australia with her husband. "There is a lot

of respect for the work we do here, irrespective of gender or age, so I do not regret not going abroad.

Project supervisor Kundan Basnet has been at Incessant Rain since the studio's beginning, and oversees visual effects in animal projects. Originally from Ilam, Basnet self-taught the basics of animation to himself and now supervises 3D cartoon segments.

As soon as he gets a script, Basnet sits down with his team and breaks the story down into

satisfaction we get here is amazing. All the work is credited, we get a sense of belonging and everyone is eager to learn.

prabba Bank BIZ BRIEFS

Turkish simulators

Turkish Airlines has signed an agreement with HAVELSAN to produce full-flight simulators with international D-level certification for Boeing 737MAX and



Airbus A320CEO/NEO type aircrafts for pilot trainings allowing them to receive adaptation, evaluation, and renewal trainings at low costs.

Hyatt honoured

Hyatt Regency has been honoured recently at the Star Partners Awards Ceremony. Institutionalised by MakeMyTrip, Star Partners Awards recognises the hotels providing best services to customers on the basis of a quality score that takes customer reviews and business

performance in MakeMyTrip platform into

Strong Service

Qatar Airways celebrated 10 years of service to New York with a VIP gala dinner at Cipriani. Guests included business

leaders and political dignitaries, including the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Qatar Airways currently flies to over 160 destinations, and plans to launch new ones including Gothenburg in Sweden, Mombasa in Kenya, and Da Nang in Vietnam before the end of the year.

Premium R Series Oppo plans to launch its premium R series

soon in Nepal. The phone company has been working to consistently offer aesthetic designs, excellent photography and user-friendly experiences. In 2017, OPPO

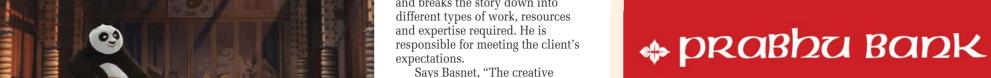
R11 was the bestselling Android phone and in 2018, the R15 model in China was the most popular smartphone.

New CEO in NIC ASIA

Roshan Kumar Neupane has been appointed the new Chief Executive Officer of NIC ASIA Bank last week, taking over from



Laxman Risal. The bank currently has over 140,000 customers in 268 branches and 281 ATMs across Nepal.



Times

Security reduces poverty

Philippa Stroud

epal is one of the top 20 countries in the world with fastest rising prosperity over the last 10 years, a trend to be celebrated by Nepal's leaders and citizens.

Nepal is among middle and low-income Asia-Pacific countries like Indonesia and India which have shown the sharpest improvement in their levels of prosperity in the past decade.

The Legatum Prosperity Index tracks prosperity in 149 countries, and its report released last week has good news: global prosperity is at its highest level ever. More countries are becoming prosperous, and more people are living more prosperous lives.

The Index also shows that rising wellbeing is linked to rising levels of prosperity. This might sound obvious, but there is a less clear relationship between wealth levels and wellbeing, where rising wealth does not necessarily translate into greater happiness.

Prosperity entails much more than wealth, it reaches beyond the financial into the institutional, the judicial, and the wellbeing of the people of a nation — it is about creating an environment where each citizen can reach full potential. A nation is prosperous when it has an open economy, inclusive society, strong institutions and empowered people who are healthy, educated and safe. This leads to higher levels of wellbeing.

Our analysis of what the top 20 rising countries have in common shows they all score highly for Safety and Security, one of the nine pillars used to measure prosperity and the key building block for prosperity. Ending war and conflict has proved to be the single most significant contribution to unlocking the prosperity of most rising countries, enabling widespread improvements across all the other pillars of prosperity.

Nepal is a good example: having ended a decade long war in 2006 after a peace agreement was signed between Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal allowing the rebels to join a transitional government.

This was an achievement of leadership at a time when war, terrorism and deprivation are rising significantly around the world. The fact that 15 of the 20 rising countries have improved in this pillar illustrates that insecurity from conflict and oppression can and must be overcome, before more broad-based prosperity can be achieved.

In the past 12 years after the
Comprehensive Peace Accord of November
2006, Nepal has witnessed a transition towards
democracy, with the largest rises in the pillars of
Personal Freedom, Business Environment, and

Within Personal Freedom, the biggest changes have come from the increase in people reporting satisfaction with freedom, and increased tolerance of LGBT rights. This follows legal reforms, such as the anti-discrimination laws, which have been in effect since 2015. In fact, Nepal is the third highest scoring country in Asia-Pacific (after New Zealand and Australia) in the sub-pillar of Social Tolerance.

Nepal's weakest pillar, however, is the deterioration of the natural environment with pressure on nature — in fact Nepal scores nearly at the bottom of the countries surveyed in terms of urban air pollution. There are also problems with labour market flexibility, anti-monopoly policies and health outcomes.

In the last decade, India and China have lifted their populations out of absolute poverty and created economies that are growing much faster than those in the West, moving up eleven and six places respectively since 2007. Both countries are home to a growing middle class, but there are significant differences in the way that they govern and the levels of freedom.

My ambition for the Prosperity Index is that it becomes a tool for leaders around the world to help set their agendas for growth and development. The measurement of national prosperity is an important task for governments and for those who hold them to account.

Nepal exemplifies that Safety and Security is a foundation of any successful nation-building and enables other pillars to follow.

Baroness Philippa Stroud is the CEO of the UK-based Legatum Institute.











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Gap yah gals in the jungle

Such was the allure of adventure in Chitwan, parents actually paid for their offspring to work at Tiger Tops

omewhere along the way at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, it was decided that we needed a gentle female hand to look after guests, to reassure them in the remote jungle setting, and to balance the macho effect of the wildlife naturalists who swaggered through tiger and rhino country.



The result was a succession of guest relations girls (gals), most of whom did not last more than a couple of seasons -- such was the intensity of the task and isolation of life within Nepal's Tarai national parks.

When I first worked in Chitwan in 1974, we all did everything. I could be found in my khaki shirt not only on airport duty and briefing the guests on arrival, but also escorting barefoot visits to the tiger blinds, explaining the careful husbandry of the elephant camp, or pointing out crocodiles and birds whilst floating down the Narayani river in local wood boats with only the dip of a paddle or the call of an osprey to spoil the silence.

Most thrilling was driving guests in the battered green Land Rovers on afternoon excursions across the rickety bridges, through shallow streams and along the rough tracks carved each year out of the encroaching jungle. I could change one of the heavy tread tyres in less than eight minutes, and had to do so on more than one occasion -- usually on some distant stretch of rutted road, never quite sure what creature might emerge out of the forest and grassland.

Early evening tigers would use the same roads to patrol their territory and spray-mark trees, leaving pungent cat-scent hanging



THE INTERNS: Visit to Tiger Tops by then-U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, flanked by guest relations Arati Rai and Sam Vincent.

in the air, and impossibly large pug marks imprinted in the dust.

After Î moved to the Kathmandu office, the boundaries became less blurred and the guest relations job description tightened to exclude driving – prompted by one enthusiastic dark-haired American gal colliding head on around a jungle corner with the only other vehicle for miles.

Safaris, drives, boat trips and walks were deemed the masculine domain of operations staff, naturalists and nature guides. Guest relations' focus was entirely on the feminine duties of housekeeping and the kitchen, planning menus, assigning tree-top rooms, arranging tents, and ensuring guests felt at home – more systematic perhaps,

but not nearly so much fun.

I suffered the ultimate feminist indignity when, during a glossy London magazine fashion shoot that I had arranged in 1977 with top models and a celebrity photographer, and me posing at the wheel of an open safari jeep, a moustache was later photoshopped onto my upper lip. If not women's liberation, we did achieve 10 valuable pages of publicity for Chitwan's wildlife tourism.

Our guest relations girls were mainly recruited from friends of friends, meaning we had a bias of Western gals (and the occasional guy) from the wide-open spaces of North America, and the more specialised British habitat of Sloane Square, the Pony Club and titled country house parties. Doublebarrelled surnames proliferated, and at one point we had a Lavinia, a Philippa, a Venetia and a Samantha in close succession.

In those conservative times, few Nepali or Indian girls were permitted by their families to work in the mostly male atmosphere of the lodges and camps, although we did find a few individuals who gained traction as attitudes relaxed. By definition, they were mavericks, pushing the boundaries; Asha moved on to Disney in the US, Pramoda still campaigns for animal rights, Christabel from Darjeeling now lives in Melbourne, and Gauree has risen to international lodge manager status in her own right.

Over the decades, Tiger Tops

gals came and went, and many are still in touch. Those that did not succumb to suburbia discovered their destiny – many still work in hospitality and conservation. Some fell foul of the system (or the boss' kids) and had to leave in a hurry. A few left their heart in the jungle and there were several Tiger Tops marriages.

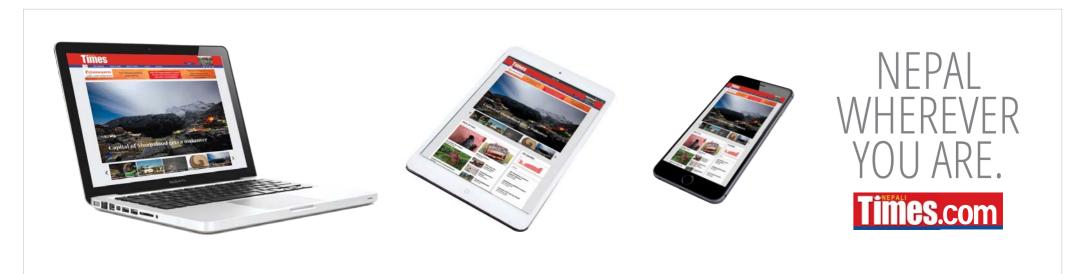
One English blond had to be rescued from an enamoured royal prince who was found installed in a Soaltee suite – that was tricky to explain to her mother in Surrey. Many took an interest in the food. A lovely lady from Tasmania would greet guests with "Have a nice cup of tea!" and an older lady returned regularly to teach new European recipes. Nodding patiently, the eyes of the Nepali cooks would glaze over with years of conflicting instructions.

Such was the allure of adventure in the jungle that Tiger Tops developed a clever category of young kids whose parents actually paid for them to work with us. Un-catchily named the Youth Trainee Programme, YTPs would spend a month or two traipsing around, shadowing guides, and ostensibly helping out in Chitwan and Bardia, often in their gap year between school and university (yes, gap yah!).

Other than a few casualties -- usually related to love, drink or homesickness -- an 'amazing' time was had by all. One chap overdid the elephant camp ganja, one misjudged the Khukri rum, and another got no further than the Thamel throngs before being nursed back to Oxfordshire, but they were the exception.

Most of our guest relations' gals and the transitory gap yah kids claim that the experience in Nepal changed their lives, and I have no doubt that it did.









There is quite a hefty westerly disturbance shooting a plume of clouds over Nepal, and it will bring some cloud cover into the weekend. However, it is a dry system with fast-moving high altitude clouds and there will not be much by way of precipitation. This does mean a drop in maximum temperature to the high teens, and that in turn will mean Kathmandu's pollution-laden inversion layer will not get a chance to oe burnt off. Prevailing southwesterly wind will also feed thick pollution haze from India.











A sky full of images Bartika Eam Rai comes home to sing about home

Sewa Bhattarai

Get up every morning To chase a goal That you don't even know. Life is wilting away In the corner of a Sajha Bus Have you done anything To make you happy?

7 hen Bartika Eam Rai released the first song *Khai* on YouTube in 2016, it took Nepali cyberspace by storm. The song captured the

existential angst of her generation: life wasting away in routine tasks as dreams are postponed. The lyrics were autobiographical, and the voice captured an inner emptiness.

Rai composed the song to share with her mother and close friends, and was taken by surprise when it spread like wildfire in the Nepali diaspora on the Net.

'My songs come from real life, from anger with social conditioning, identity crises, and existential questions," the US-based singer said this week on a visit to Nepal. "A person is supposed to achieve certain things by a certain

age, like getting a good job, being settled. These things apparently define us, and it was not working out that way. So I weaved my own confusion into music.

But instead of revelling in her newfound fame, Rai did what she had always done to cope: compose another song. Shoonya was to become part of her second album.

The singer is an accountant by day and composer by night. The voice is so original, the words so genuine that each song goes viral as soon as it is released. *Khai* won her two Hits FM awards: Best Female Pop Vocal Performance, and Song of the Year. She is in Nepal after almost five years on a concert tour.

Rai jots down her feelings as they come, and only later slashes them into song lines that are distinctive from all other genres of Nepali modern music. She admits to being unsure at first about whether they would work at all.

I was under the impression that Nepali audiences do not appreciate lyrics much, and are more into melodies," she said. While many singers start with riffs and notes, I start with words. And the words are quite literary.

Nepali audiences proved her wrong, and she gets over 4 million views for each song. The words and music seem to appeal to Nepali youngsters because they echo their own feelings. "My mother, a Nepali teacher, instilled a love of Nepali language in me," Rai remembers. "When I was in boarding school, my friends' parents would sneak in food, but my mother would leave letters for me.

One of the letters read afulai avalokan gara (observe yourself) – hefty instructions for a 9-yearold girl. Today, Rai carries on that tradition and includes Sanskrit words like *pragadhor abhinaya*, and the title of her first album is *Bimbaakash* which means 'a sky full of images'.

'I grew up singing and admiring classic Nepali songs, but in school

I found out that everyone else was singing in English, and my self-esteem dropped," she recalls, "Today I make a conscious effort to record in Nepali, because apart from commercial songs, I feel that we are not writing and recording in Nepali as much as we should.'

Rai's songs reflect her intensely private persona. And after the success of her first album, she felt pressure from audience expectations. Her second album *Taraİ* feels more intimate, with *Umer* about her deceased father, and *Anumati* that gives a loved one permission to move on.

But doesn't she feel vulnerable exposing heart and soul to strangers? "Of course there is some negative feedback," she admits, "people harass you for being a girl, make sexist remarks, and that does make me anxious sometimes. But in the grand scheme of things, these things do not matter.'

What does matter to Rai is home, and she weaves the theme of homesickness into many of her songs, with nostalgia of school and childhood. Even her Nepal tour is called *Ghar*, but she now wonders where home really is.

"Here in Nepal I was always surrounded by writers and musicians. In the US, I felt lonely, and many of my songs were composed in that dark, empty space," she says. "I realised I wanted to be back home, but Nepal is changed every time I come back. It is not what I left behind. So, the question now is: what is the home that I really want to come back to?"

She is here for a month this time, and despite the inner torment in her lyrics, Bartika Eam Rai's songs leave listeners with hope:

Look at yourself How long has it been Since you laughed freely? Lived fearlessly? Go, be lost.. Content in happiness, Find you in yourself...

SOUL TO SOUL



Catch up with YouTube sensation and US-based singer songwriter Bartika Eam Rai who is in Kathmandu fo Rai talks about her new full-length album *Taral*, her

nepalitimes.com

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Dragonfly Project A new species of dragonfly

A new species of dragonfly is found in Nepal, but its existence is threatened by the destruction of aquatic habitats







Pokhara's shrinking lakes

he name Pokhara is derived from the Nepali word for 'pond', and points to the numerous lakes and wetlands in the valley below the Annapurnas.

However, with tourism-driven urbanisation, Pokhara is losing its water bodies. The smaller lakes have been overtaken by farmlands or settlements. Sedimentation is shrinking Phewa and the other bigger lakes, and pollution has affected aquatic and bird life.

In addition, haphazard building and road construction on the slopes above the lake have increased sedimentation, and affected the groundwater table causing many springs and streams to go dry. While there has been a visible decline in the number of bird species, numerous other insects, including butterflies and dragonflies, which depend on clean water sources, have also started disappearing.

Now, fearing that Pokhara's tourism business may be affected by its depleting lakes and wetlands, the Gandaki provincial government is setting up a Lakes Commission, the first such initiative for nature conservation since Nepal went federal. It is logical that Gandaki should take the lead since the province has 43% of all of Nepal's lakes. There are 63 lakes below 3,000m in the province, and new glacial lakes are forming at higher altitudes because of global warming. Gandaki also has wetlands that are the favourite stopovers for migratory birds.



PHOTOS: YUVARAJ SHRESTHA

One of the Lake Commission's first order of business will be to save Phewa, which has become a dumping ground for urban garbage and sewage (*above*). The lake is being encroached upon by real estate speculators, while sedimentation has shrunk the original lake area. In addition, the lake's water level has gone down considerably. The Gandaki government is studying the construction of higher dam to replace the current one built 40 years ago, in order to increase the size of the

Attracted by soaring land prices, however, local communities at Begnas Lake and elsewhere are lobbying to have the national restriction on building within 100m of a lake shoreline replaced by a 10m limit. In 1957, Phewa Lake was 1,000 hectares, today it has shrunk to half that area (*pictured, top*). This has affected populations of migratory bird species, insects and aquatic life.

Says Gandaki Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung: "We will start with Phewa, and then we will be very strict about conservation of other lakes in Pokhara Valley."

Yuvaraj Shrestha in Pokhara

current rate of habitat destruction.

KAREN CONNIFI

7 - 13 DECEMBER 2018 #937

GETAWAY

EVENTS

will be screened back-to-back, in the presence of filmmakers, film enthusiasts, forums, guest lectures, exhibitions of books 7-11 December, Rastriya Sabha Griha (City Hall) and Nepal Tourism Board, (01) 4440635,

For full schedule visit: www.kimff.org

(City Hall)

Addicted to Altitude

Pavol Barabas 7 December, 3:30pm, Nepal Tourism Board

Katha '72 (The Story of '72)

Directed by Prabin Syangbo 8 December, 1pm, Rastriya Sabha Griha (City Hall)

Breaking Barriers – Perspectives on Women and Adventure Panel Discussion 8 December, 3pm, Nepal Tourism Board

A Thousand Girls Like Me

9 December, 1:30pm, Rastriya Sabha Griha

Chaman (Shaman)

Directed by David Gomez Rollan 9 December, 3:45pm, Nepal Tourism Board

Gatlang - Happiness, Hardship and other Stories

Directed by Pen - Ek Ratanaruang/ Passakorn Pramunwong 10 December, 3:30pm, Rastriya Sabha Griha (City Hall)

Tibetan Illusion Destroyer 3D/2D

Directed by Thomas Vendett

Griha (City Hall)

Miliard (Billion)

Directed by Evgheni Dudceac

Boulder Film Festival

Colorado's Adventure Film Festival will be in Kathmandu as part of its Global World Tour. Join in to watch exciting narratives of adventure and be inspired. 8 December, 1-10:30pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs500 at door,

Same Time Next Year

info@himalayanoutdoorfestival.com

A play about two people who meet for a romantic rendezvous once a year for 24 years. A Katha Ghera production with Diva Dev and Akanchha Karki on stage. 7-15 December (except Tuesdays), 5pm, (also 1:30 pm on Saturdays), Kausi Theater, Teku, Rs300 and Rs500, 9818709302

Musical at Malpi

Malpi International School is presenting Doctor Zhivago, a musical based on Boris Pasternak's famous book.

12 December, 5pm and 13 December 1pm and 5pm, Rashtriya Nach Ghar, Jamal, Kathmandu, (01)4169119, (01)4430356



Park Art Fair 2018

Explore modern and contemporary art from a wide range of artists in the 12th edition of the art fair.

7-9 December, 10:30am to 6:30pm, Park Gallery Pulchok, 01-5522307

Christmas Market

The Local Project Nepal is hosting its annual Christmas Market with a range of attractions including local foods, sustainable products and film festivals.

8 December, 2-6pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, 9808110115

Butterfly Effect

Sangeet Pathshala is organising this event to raise awareness and fight against domestic violence on women and girls. There will also be musical performances.

8 December, 3-9pm, Tangalwood, Naxal, 9849181518



Health at home is an organization which facilitates home based health care services. Health at home service promotes health care i.e., out of hospital setting to the clients. Being the first of its kind in the whole South Asia, Health at Home is here to cater to the needs of those who desire health care facilities to be delivered at their doorsteps.

Doctor on call Visit by qua

Lab on Call

All kinds of lab re

Elderly Care Assistant

Fine and professional care by our qualified and experienced care giver

Appointment Management

Apointment management with required do in different hospitals.

Nursing Care

24 hours nursing care at home by qualified and experienced professionals.

Physiotherapy on Call

Physio/Electro/Acupuncture therapy by qualified and experienced physiotherapist.

Travel Support for Sick Clients Travel support for sick clients are provided by professional.

Equipment Rental & Drug Supply Drug supply at your doorstep and best qual edical equipments in rent.

MUSIC



Albatross

Sing along with the band as they perform their classic songs. You will also have a chance to hang out with Albatross afterwards.

8 December, 5-9pm, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel, Rs500 (pre sale) and Rs1000 (door), 9841226397

Tribute to Queen

Enjoy the Saturday evening with performances of songs by the famous British band, Queen. Complete with live guitar, keyboard, bass and drums, the event promises a vibrant musical night. 8 December, Hardik Lounge, Arun Thapa Chok, Ihamsikhel, Rs500, 9818233710

Reggae Night

The Riddim Sons, a young and talented ensemble from Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, will be performing live reggae

7 December, 8-11pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9849377915

Sufi with Sam

Bring your family and friends to enjoy a hearty meal accompanied by Sufi music. 7 December, 6pm, Muse Restobar, Uttardhoka, Lazimpat, (01) 4445533



Skin & Bones

Join in for a sunny BBQ, sparkling wine, Pims, chilled beer afternoon with live performances by Skin and Bones, an amazing fusion ensemble of sarangi, guitar, tablas and percussions, and who has performed amazing covers of Despacito, Sia and Ed. Sheeran among other surprises. 8 December, 1:30pm onwards, Pauline's Garden, Baluwatar (01) 4221537, 9803919575

OUR PICK

The movie features a love story between a wealthy Hindu girl on a pilgrimage to the historic Kedarnath Temple and a humble Muslim boy who becomes her guide in Uttarakhand in India. Directed by Abhishek Kapoor and starring Sushant Singh Rajput and Sara Ali Khan in her debut, the film is set against the backdrop of 2013's devastating flashflood in North India that killed more than 5,000 pilgrims and locals.

DINING



Taza

The restaurant brings a bit of Middle-Eastern flare to Kathmandu with its all Syrian items. Shawarma, falafel, hummus, kebab everything is fresh and finger licking. Now, Taza also has a kiosk at Labim Mall. Pulchok Lane, 9860960177

Imago Dei Café

The menu Nourish by Imago Dei features limited option for each weekday, yet thoughtfully created with a healthy balance of nutrition and 500 calories approx. Healthy food was never so good. Nag Pokhari, Naxal, (01) 4442464



Chez Caroline

This is the place to visit for authentic enjoying your meal in a serene ambience. The restaurant now offers catering and takeaway services too. Try their Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce. Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4263070/ 4264187

Utopia

Located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel's noisy streets, Utopia features Newari dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines. Ekantakuna, 9849592412

Kings Lounge

A highly recommended place to enjoy great get together with friends and family with amazing food, drinks and superb sound. Darbar Marg, (01) 4223110

Mystic Mountain Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot,

the resort is exquisitely built using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort. Nagarkot, (01) 6200646

Milla Guesthouse

If you prefer the quiet and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far from the city, yet worlds apart. Bhaktapur, 9851024137

Park Village Resort

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. Enjoy the services of Himalayan wellness centre- a onestop centre to relax your mind and body. Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286



Gaida Wildlife Camp

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

Chitwan, (01) 4215409/ 4215431

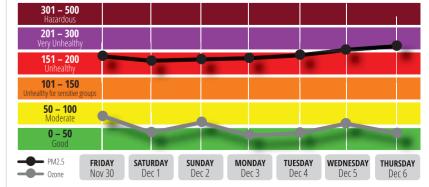
When the Chocolate Runs Out

Internationally renowned teacher of Buddhism Venerable Robina Courtin will lead the weekend at an exclusive retreat on the edge of the Shivapuri National Park. Don't miss this amazing opportunity to investigate core Buddhist principles and to look within in a safe and supportive retreat environment.

7-9 December, 4pm onwards, Chandra Ban Retreat, Budanilkantha, \$195-250, 9808296590, www.fpmt-hbmc.org

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 30 November - 6 December



Not surprisingly, pollution levels are higher as the winter chill reinforces the inversion effect in Kathmandu Valley. A breakdown of the daily peak shows that the concentration of particles smaller than 2.5 microns is highest around midnight, and remains high in the mornings. It goes down slightly in the afternoons, but is still in the red unhealthy band. The daily averages are consistently in the Red Band, with Wednesday having the worst daily average in the Very Unhealthy Purple Band. Surface ozone concentrations are still high at street level, but drop sharply with distance. Follow hourly live pollution measurements on www.nepalitimes.com

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

Times

The time has come for a Gurkha Peace Corps

Nepal-Britain relations can be recast as one between equals through a common force for peace and development

This is now more than 200 years that men from Nepal have joined the British Army to fight, if needs be, in support of Britain's overseas interests. And it is 100 years since the end of the First World War, in which 200,000 Nepali men went to France, North Africa, Palestine and Mesopotamia to fight against the Germans and their allies. That is a very long historical relationship.



So, it is a good time to question the future of the British Gurkhas and of the relationship between Britain and Nepal in this regard. Some may feel that the whole tradition of providing soldiers for a foreign army is an imperialist phenomenon which should be terminated. Others see it as a matter of pride, to be continued and even reinforced.

Successive cuts in the budget of the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) over the last few decades have significantly reduced the overall size of the armed forces, and particularly the British Army. The Brigade of Gurkhas now comprises

fewer than 4,000 men.

One might have thought, in the light of this, that the British government would have felt that time had come to call a halt to further recruitment from Nepal and to phase out this anomalous element of the British Army.

But even if the size of the British Army is declining, there is a serious shortage of recruits from Britain itself – the number of new recruits was down last year by 24%. It was therefore decided in November to allow members of the British Commonwealth, even if not resident in the UK, to apply for positions in the British Army.

There remains keen competition among young Nepalis to join the Brigade of Gurkhas, even if the number of recruits each year has been reduced to only a few hundred. What more natural, then, than to increase the quota of recruits from Nepal? This would please those who believe that Nepal would benefit from such an expansion, but would upset those who argue that recruitment to the British Gurkhas is a relic of an imperial past, not to be continued let alone expanded.

funued let alone expanded. Furthermore, there might be



scope for women as well as men to take advantage of this apparent willingness of the MoD to recruit from abroad, including from Nepal, to the Gurkhas. In what to many was a surprising move, in July this year, it was decided to allow women to apply to join this hitherto all-male outfit.

Is this just a nod to 'equal opportunities'? Or the beginning of the re-definition of the role of 'the Gurkhas' -- widely caricatured as 'fearless and ferocious' -- in favour of a softer image? In fact, the British Army already includes some 30,000 women in a wide range of roles, but in another surprise move in October, women were allowed to apply for and to take up combat roles.

All of this assumes a continuation of an essentially military role for 'New Lahures'. But what if the Britain and Nepal were to agree, under the special conditions of their bilateral relationship, that in future there would be an expanded recruitment of young Nepalis -- not to a military outfit serving mainly overseas, but to a jointly managed 'Peace Corps'. Organised by the Brigade of Gurkhas, such a force would be committed to peace-keeping and community

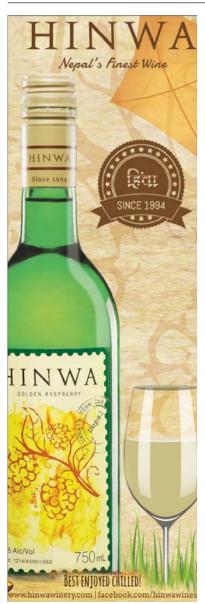
development in Nepal and elsewhere in the developing world.

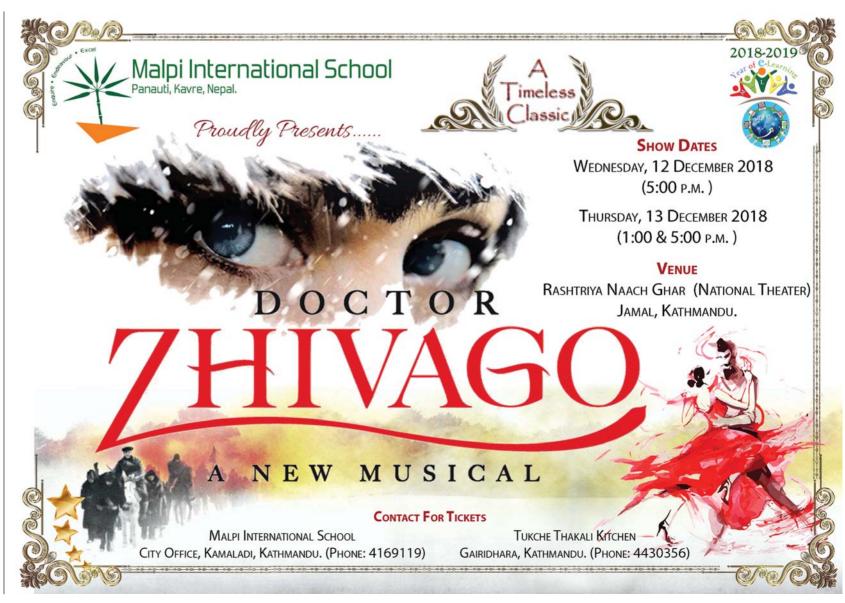
This would be a gradual transfer of responsibility, and of funding, over a period of years for this new 'Gurkha Peace Corps' from the MoD to the Department for International Development (DfID) in collaboration with an appropriate government department in Nepal.

Eventually, however, it would become a fully joint British-Nepal responsibility, able to provide young Nepalis with suitable training and experience, and to deploy them in various roles (including peace keeping and security, but also in community development) across the world, including Nepal.

The Gurkĥa Peace Corps would also be open to recruits from Britain, encouraging young people from Nepal and Britain to train and work together in Nepal and elsewhere. This would make it possible to sustain and renew the long historical relationship between Britain and Nepal through the Gurkhas, but recast it as one between equals, involving young men and women from both countries in a common endeavour: for peace and development.









WOMEN SUMMITEERS: President Bidya Devi Bhandari meets María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, president of the 73rd Session of UN General Assembly in Katowice, Poland on Monday at the 24th Climate Change Summit.



NO CHILD MARRIAGE: Actress Rekha Thapa participates in a campaign to end violence against women and girls by engaging men and boys to commit to end child marriage in



ONE STEP AT A TIME: People with disabilities participate in rally to mark 27th International Day of Persons with Disabilities in Kathmandu on Monday



HIDDEN HIMALAYA: Turkish Airlines and Nepal Tourism Board hosted a meet and greet evening with Hollywood actress Gabriella Wright (third from left) to showcase hidden trails in the Himalava. Other guests included Turkish Airlines Nepal manager Abdullah Tuncer Kececi (*left*) and Deepak Raj Joshi of Nepal Tourism Board (*right*).



THAI AIRWAYS

GOLDEN JUBILEE: Thai Airways marked 50 years of flight operations to Kathmandu on Tuesday at an event in Hotel Shangrila where top travel agents were felicitated.



Bloody periods

f you ask people what they know about menstruation in Nepal, the Lfirst answer will be the practice of *chhaupadi*, the menstruation exile. Most local and international media focus is banishment of women to the cow shed, even though the issue is much more complex, and there is a wealth of activity in Nepal to promote more dignified periods.

Activists are now challenging the media representation with visual images, photography, film and art. The Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Alliance's forthcoming MenstruAction on 11 December at the Kathmandu International Film Festival (KIMFF) will bring together film-makers and activists for a panel debate titled Breaking Code Red – A Conversation on Menstruation and How to See It.

For many Nepali girls, menstruation means not only blood and cramps but also forced seclusion and social ostracism once a month. These traditional and religious beliefs have even led to the death of some young girls who are forced to practice ritual segregation.

A new law in Nepal says that discrimination of young girls during their monthly period is illegal but how do the girls see the process? What are the fears and beliefs that force them to be a part of it? How do urbanites see it? What are the discussions around menstruation? The KIMFF sessions will explore this subject through photography, collaborative films, virtual reality, and a panel discussion.

Panelists include menstrual health and rights expert Pema Lhaki, transmedia artist Poulomi Basu, researcher/filmmaker Sara Baumann, photographer Uma Bista and Sara Parker. The session will be moderated by Diwas Raja KC of The Feminist Memory Project. The collaborative film *Menstrual* Practices and Displacement in Far-West Nepal, which is an initiative of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health

and the Nepal Fertility Care Center, will also be screened.

The photography and virtual reality exhibitions *Blood Speaks* by Poulomi Basu and I'm Pure by Uma Bista are presented in collaboration with Voices of Women Media. Sara Parker and Kay Standing of Liverpool John Moores University have been researching gender education and participation in Nepal over the past 25 years, and are currently working on a British Academy Global Challenges Research project with Tribhuvan University on the origins of menstrual beliefs and practices. They have been studying the impact of reusable sanitary pad kits. Called Dignity Without Danger, the project explores diverse range of beliefs, practices and historical and cultural roots which underpin menstrual health customs in all 7 provinces.

The project is being launched at KIMFF whose theme this year is Women Move Mountains.

Breaking Code Red A Conversation on Menstruation and How to See It Sunday 9 December 11:30 – 1:30 pm Nepal Tourism Board









With a legacy of successfully organizing first of its kind international level management conference, Corporate Club Nepal proudly announces its second edition 'Nepal Management Conclave 2018' on December 19, 2018. With a theme 'Lead for change', this management conclave is the best platform for top-level management professionals to discuss management issues, leadership, change management, strategic planning and leading the people to attain the organizational goals. Do not miss a chance to meet international and national management gurus.

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For booking and further information 9801014483/9801014404 01-5541370/5539957 nepalmanagementconclave@gmail.com www.corporateclubnepal.com

Price: NRs. 10.000 exclusive of VAT Venue: Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu Date: December 19, 2018, Wednesday Time: 8:00 am onwards (breakfast available)

Keynote Speaker

Lt. Gen Ata Hasnain **Topic:** Transformational

Leadership and Organizational

Effectiveness in Turbulent

Times

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7 - 13 DECEMBER 2018 #937

Corruption deep rooted in government

Sunil Sapkota in Nagarik, 5 December

In October, the government introduced a provision for civil servants to take an oath every day: 'I will not indulge in corruption, I will prevent corruption and will honestly work for my country and people.

Despite this, corruption is more rife than ever, according to a Nagarik investigation. Of the 715 people who went to 15 government offices in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, 504 of them said they had to bribe the official to get their job done. The highest number of corrupt officials were in the Survey Department in Dilli Bazar, where 34 out of the 45 of those who needed registration reported being asked for bribes to complete the work. In two other Survey Department offices in Kathmandu, 50 out of 65 submitted bribes. Officials from Registrar Office and Land Revenue Office were also leading dens of corruption. Out of 180 people who went to four Land Revenue Offices in Kathmandu, 140 were forced to bribe officials.

Officials asked for bribes for a variety of reasons such as expenses for tea and lunch, tips, and saying the payment would expedite the work. In many cases officials delayed work under various pretenses, and would not get the job done until handed a baksheesh. Others said they offered a tip as a reward for the work being completed in time, which was not refused.

A spokesperson from the office of the Prime Minister Binod Kunwar said the oath-taking idea was introduced make citizens aware that they can register complaints if they encounter corruption. Kunwar notes that with greater awareness among citizens, CIAA has been able to catch more officials red-handed.



But the Chair of Transparency International, Shreehari Aryal says that as long as officials do not have a sense of responsibility towards the nation and people, no amount of oath-taking ceremonies can reduce corruption.

Aryal also pointed out that brokers must be removed from public offices so citizens are not deceived by them. The Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation has instructed the Survey Department and Land revenue offices to prevent middlemen from accessing documents.

16th Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival **Opens Today**

Highlights of the Day

Rastriya Sabha Griha (City Hall)

 $3.00 \, \mathrm{pm}$

RJ Ripper (20 min)

5:00 pm

The Riyalists (58 min) dir. Kesang Tseten | Nepal

Ananta Yatra (15 min) (The Eternal Journey) dir. Sunil Pandey | Nepal

3:30 pm

Addicted to Altitude (63 min) dir. Pavol Barabas | Slovakia

Nepal Tourism Board

5:00 pm

Break on Through (26 min)

Notes from the Wall (37 min)

Photo Exhibition

Favresse | Belgium

Blood Speaks: A Ritual of Exile, Isolation, an Immersive

Meditation

I'm Pure

by Uma Bista

'Women on Top - First Nepali Women Journalists'

Everest Expedition 2018

The photo exhibitions will be showcased from 10:00 am-5:00 pm

7-11 December

Organised by:

Himal Association

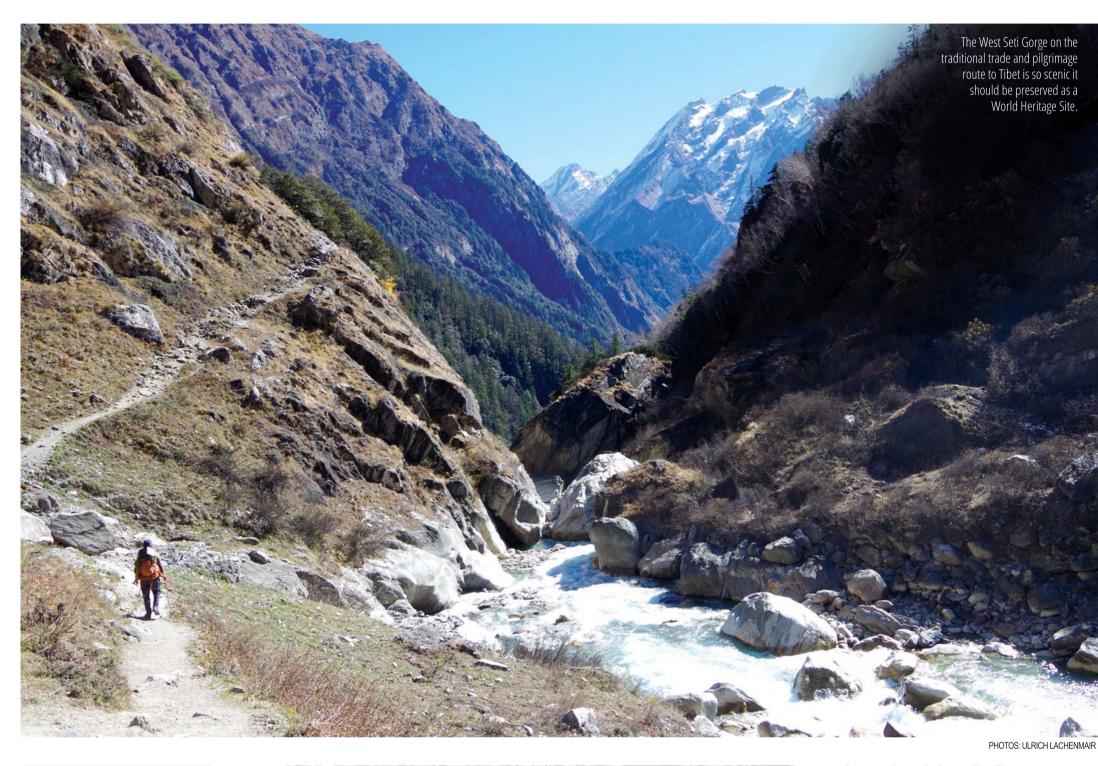
Ad-space supported by:





Trails less

Nepal should save its gorgeous gorges, and the Seti's canyons are one of the most spectacular



Hermann Warth

in Bajhang

epal's rivers are older than the Himalaya, and their waters have been cutting channels over millions of years as the mountains rose. The Arun, Budi Gandaki, Marsyangdi, Kali Gandaki, Bheri and Karnali all begin north of the mountains, and their waters have carved the most spectacular canyons in the world.

But by far the most stunning gorge in the Himalaya is located on the West Seti river on the trail from Simikot to Chainpur. After crossing Chaupha La in winter conditions last month, we followed a trail traditionally travelled by traders to Tibet, and pilgrims to the holy Lake Mansarovar (*map, opposite*).

This landscape should be protected as part of Nepal's natural heritage. However, like other gorges on other rivers, a new road now threatens the Seti canyon. Surveyors are already at work between Talkot and Urai La, the border pass between Nepal and China.

Local businesses want the road because they think it will increase pilgrim traffic. But is it really the aim of a pilgrimage to amass money? How does the promotion of pilgrimage justify the destruction of fragile slopes, rock cliffs and precious forests of oak, fir, pine, walnut, cedar. Roads in other parts of Nepal have already ravaged the landscape, and here in remote northwestern Nepal, it will be a sacrilege.

A road here would not just be environmentally and culturally destructive, a simple input-output analysis will show it is also economically unviable. The construction and maintenance will cost billions, and this will far exceed any future income from pilgrims. In fact, as seen



in the rest of Nepal, the road will not bring down prices of essentials, but will promote consumerism, bring garbage and lead to an outmigration of young people.

Besides, there is an alternative road from Simikot to Hilsa that will soon be ready. Pilgrims who cannot endure the hardship of walking through the Seti gorge can use jeeps and buses plying there. Goods required by the villages between Talkot and Dhuli are at present reliably delivered by mules, sheep and goats. They do this on well-built trails on which maintenance costs are negligible.

If just a small part of the road budget is used to improve the trail and repair bridges along the uninhabited Seti gorge, it would actually keep local jobs and ease access. Local communities could keep the trail clean, especially the litter at camp sites.

The West Seti Gorge should be registered as a natural heritage site at UNESCO with the help of the IUCN and WWF in Kathmandu. The Seti Trail can be promoted as the longest, hardest and most beautiful pilgrimage route from Nepal to Mansarovar and Kailash.

The rest of the road budget could go to improve school and health posts in this underserved part of Nepal. At present the clinics lack medicine and classrooms are dark, cold and poorly built. Health and education are basic needs of any human being and should take precedence over unnecessary road construction.

The upper reaches of the West Seti are a natural jewel, and God's gift to mankind. It should be our responsibility to protect it.

Herman Warth was the former country director of the German Development Service.

travelled

The Fair-Tread trekking model maximises impact of tourism on poverty-reduction and social justice in the Gurja Himal trail

'The best momo ever," one trekker, a retired British Army colonel who stayed here a month,

wrote. He taught Pariyar some

the pass, is an unusually large village of Dalits and has three homestays. "People respect me

that her homestay provides supplementary income to pay for

her daughter's school.

English words, and she is happy

Lulang, on the south slope of

more because they see that I have a

steady income from my rooms, they

our Tourism Committee," says Rati

unaware of caste discrimination in Nepal, and the ignorance means

Most visitors here are blissfully

even chose me to be the Chair of

Maya Biswakarma proudly.

that they could be indirectly

supporting it. Dalits have not

not become guides in numbers proportionate to their population.

occupation easily accessible for

hired on a daily-wage basis. They often lack accident insurance and

Lal Chhantyal, a licensed guide

adequate clothing for high altitudes.

from Gurja Khani, says uncertainty

trekking aims to ensure that porters

properly equipped, and paid a fair

wage. Fair-Tread also emphasises

respect for the environment, local

Tourism has often brought modern

materials and architecture because

attached bathrooms and modern

these facilities as superior to the

traditional architecture, artisanal

Jhak Bahadur is the elected

chair of the Gurja Khani council,

health, especially to reduce the

Because of its remoteness, women

with childbirth complications die

skills and artifacts they have.

and his main emphasis is on

high maternal mortality rate.

because they cannot reach the

easier, but the cost is too high.

Himalaya, but surely the people

benefit from our visit.

nearest health post in Lulang in

time. Ihak Bahadur says building

road would impact on trekking, a

ropeway would make transportation

Nobody owns the views of the

who live in their shadow deserve to

www.offthebeatentreks.org

Joy Stephens has worked in Nepal for

20 years as a researcher in education and

Annapurna (1988, Victor Gollancz).

OFF THE BEATEN TREK

trafficking. She is the author of Window onto

plumbing. Villagers then perceive

culture, and traditional skills.

trekkers demand rooms with

and guides are recruited locally,

of income is the biggest problem.

The trekking season is short, and the cost of renting a room in

Pokhara in the hope of getting

work is exorbitant. Fair-tread

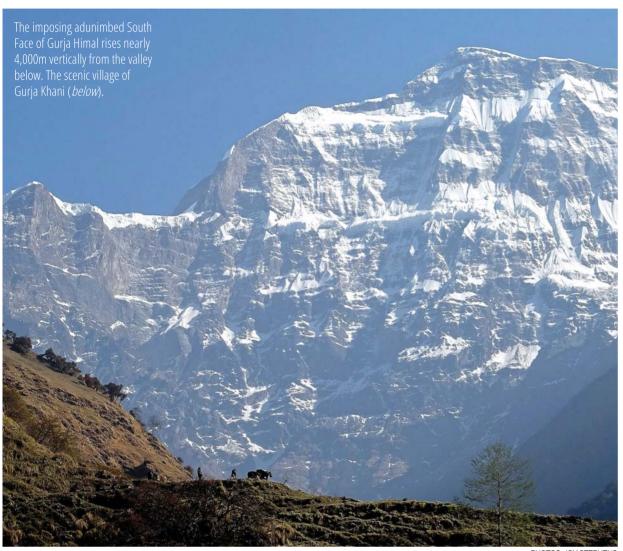
Porters are usually not salaried employees of trekking agencies but

as much because they have

The only tourism-related

them is low-paid portering.

been able to benefit from tourism



PHOTOS: JOY STEPHENS

t 7,193m Gurja Himal is not high by Himalayan 🗘 上 standards, and is dwarfed by the rock and ice pyramid of the valley below.

would expect to find a family of five, including a baby. Siddhi Man Biswakarma and his wife own the teashop, and because it is the only resting place between Lulang and

The Biswakarmas set up shop

trains, but as trekkers to Nepal try to find new and untraveled areas, there are now tourists who also

stop by.
"Nowadays we get foreigners as well. And during last year's election, some politicians spent the night here while campaigning," recalls Biswakarma, who makes about Rs500 a day and plans to add rooms. He has also invested in two horses which he will rent out to those who want to reach Gurja Khani.

Since it has not been exposed to commercial tourism, the Gurja Himal trek is a place where the Fair-Tread trekking model is being tried out over the past five years. It is based on the same principles as the fair-trade label on foodstuff, and urges trekkers to think about the impact they leave on the local people and economy.

Fair-Tread takes into account who benefits from tourism expenditure, and tries to maximise its impact on poverty-reduction and social justice. More of the expenditure is designed to benefit those who need it most, without undermining their self-sufficiency



Commercial trekking mostly involves booking online with a trekking wholesaler in Europe or elsewhere, who sub-contracts to a Kathmandu company. This means that up to half the expedition expenditure never makes it to Nepal. Of the other half, much of it stays in Kathmandu and does not trickle down to places like Gurja

Annapurna areas, trekkers either camp or stay in purpose-built lodges established by companies in Kathmandu. Camping treks may be environmentally friendly, but their contribution to the rural economy is minimal, since the fees are paid to the trekking agency, and most of the food is sourced from outside.

In contrast, even a poor family can invest in and profit from a homestay. In Gurja Khani, Belmoti Pariyar started her aptly-named Jivan Ko Bato (Road of Life) homestay with one tiny room and a single bed. Now she has enlarged that room and added another so that she can accommodate four paying guests. Her guest book shows visitors from Brazil, Switzerland, Canada, the UK, and Nepal.

and dignity.

Khani. On the popular Everest and

of Gurja Himal Base Camp, similar to the one that

Watch video of an avalanche fall down the south face killed nine climbers in October. Watch clip of video taken by rescue helicopter of Base Camp

The disaster which struck on 10 October brought Gurja Himal (7,193m) and this inaccessible region of Nepal to world attention. Two months after the disaster, there is still uncertainty about what caused the Base Camp at 3,500m to be blown away, killing five Korean and four Nepali climbers.

Gurja Himal is one of the westernmost peaks in the Dhaulagiri massif and has an unclimbed south face that soars nearly 4,000m above the valley. The Korean expedition was led by veteran mountaineer Kim Chang-ho who is famous for being the first Korean to summit all 14 eight-thousanders without bottle oxygen. Disaster struck even before the climbing began, and since no one survived. It was probably an avalanche like the one pictured below coming down the face.

Locals who helped retrieve the bodies said there was no ice or snow at Base Camp, and the bodies had been blown across the river to the opposite slope. Tall trees in the narrow valley had snapped in half, and videos taken by the rescuers show scars from what look like an air blast preceding an avalanche that roared down the face.

Villagers say they told the expedition to establish Base Camp lower at 3,000m to avoid angering the mountain's guardian deity which they say does not tolerate people defecating nearby. Over the years, they report that several locals have died near the same

Sita Chhantyal, sister of one of the local guides who died in the disaster, said the expedition did everything to propitiate the deity, sacrificing a chicken and a goat. She added: "But they made the mistake of locating the camp too close to the mountain. It made the god angry."
Rescuers talk of the bodies

flung off the mountain, yet in the camp site, they found crates of eggs unbroken. Chhantyal said in amazement: "Not even one egg was cracked,"

Joy Stephens in Gurja Khani



Joy Stephens in Baglung

Mt Dhaulagiri to the east. The mountain is nonetheless impressive because of its imposing south face, rising nearly 4km vertically above

One of the last villages near the mountain is Gurja Khani (right), a fascinating settlement tucked away in splendid isolation in the Dhaula Valley. This area of Nepal is still untouched by roads, and much of the traditional architecture and way of life remains. Steep canyons make the valley impenetrable from below, and the only access is on foot over a

Near the wind-swept pass is a tea shop, and it is the last place you Gurja Khani, they do brisk business.

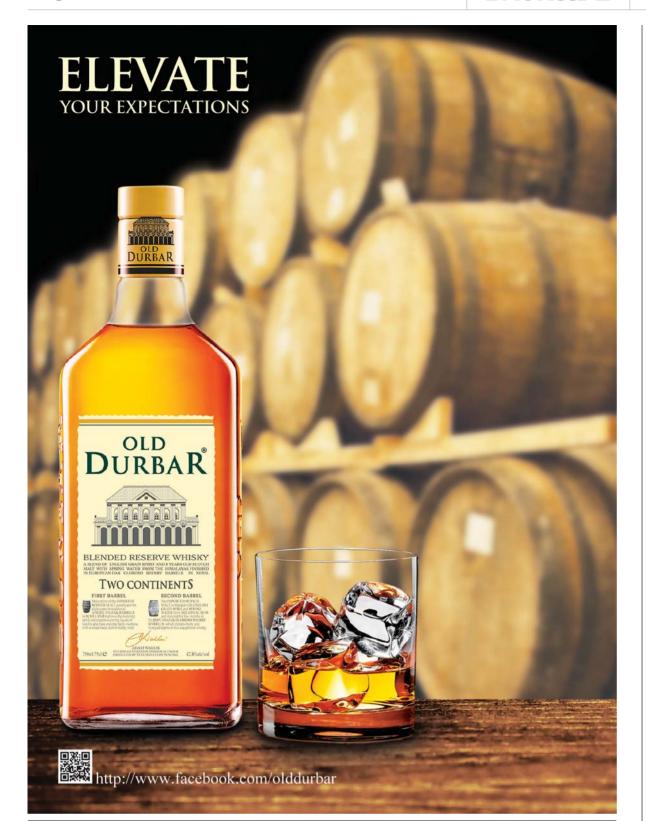
five years ago to serve the mule



Gurja Himal tragedy

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Kathmandu Summit of Kleptocrats

nder the capable leadership of the Nepal Communist Party (Moonies) and the Great Helmsperson the Right Honorary Prime Minister, this is a country that is busy going places. We can tell that by the fact that the Asia Pacific Summit of Communist Evangelicals selected Kathmandu as the venue for its conference last week.

It was in recognition of Nepal's Revolution of Glorious Blood-letting that fellow pariahs ostracised by the international community gathered in Kathmandu to rub shoulders and award each other medals for good governance. In attendance were former Khmer Rouge leader Hun Sen, and Burma's Šuu Kyi who offered tips to our own Comrade Awe-Inspiring about how to win a Nobel Peace Prize and retain it despite having blood in your hands.

Learning from this experience, Kathmandu is now ready to host a plethora of conferences which will be great opportunities to showcase our many achievements in the promotion of corruption as a national past-time, muzzling the media, meeting international targets for the lack of accountability, and for the tendency to take one step forward and two steps back.

Having notched up a few more points in the Transparency International Corruption Index (even overtaking pros such as Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau) Nepal has won the bid to host the next Global Conference on Graft by bribing members of the International Organising Committee in Berlin.

This is indeed great recognition, since some of the world's most renowned rascals will be here to deliberate for three days on how to swindle more efficiently, as well as to put finishing touches on the Universal Declaration on Plunder and State Capture.

Not only will the conference put Nepal firmly on the world corruption map, it will also boost our convention industry in preparation for the Visit Nepal 2020 target of attracting 2 million tourists to Nepal.

More than 1,000 internationallyacclaimed thieves and knaves from 48 countries have confirmed participation, including war criminals, despots, kleptocrats, thugs and tyrants.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Injustice and Malfeasance who is also chairman of the Main Organising Committee of the Kathmandu Summit of Rogues, is trying its best to use the occasion to showcase the great strides Nepal has taken in the past three decades to make corruption a way of life.

"Earlier only a few people used to be corrupt, but since the new federal democratic constitution we have decentralised corruption. Now, everyone is on the take, and everyone gets a cut," the minister boasted after pocketing a baksheesh we had to slip him in exchange for that on-the-record quote.

However, he added, there is no room for competency. There is still a threat to troll armies and bot attacks from Facebook's new policy on factchecking and Twitter removing fake

accounts. There is also a danger that corruption will once more be monopolised by a few at the top. This goes against the spirit of Federalism and Decentralisation. We have to ask ourselves: are we serious about ensuring the freedom of embezzlement, or do we have to burn some tyres and shut down the country again?

Meanwhile, a draft agenda for the Kathmandu Summit of the World's Top Scoundrels has just been released which looks like this:

Sunday

Delegates Arrive

Many will sneak in without paying visa fees while others will smuggle vast quantities of contraband by evading customs. This is standard operating procedure at such Summits.

Opening Plenary

Introductory Remarks and Welcome Speech by Comrade Charles Shobraj, streamed live at the venue via Skype from the Central Jail.

Keynote Speech

'You Can Run and You Can Hide' by Imelda Marcos.

Working Paper

'How to Have Your Billions and Eat It Too' Maslaysian ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Free Lunch

Workshop 1:

E-banking Your Hard-earned Cash Executives from a consortium of Cayman Island banks will be on hand to answer queries from potential depositers.

Resource Person: Mossack Fonseca.

Workshop 2:

New Stealth Techniques to Combat Transparency

Technological advances in that art of theft allows greed to grow by leaps and bounds. Find out how from world famous money launderers.

Tea, Coffee with Cookies and Hard Cash.

Workshop 3:

Correlation Between Corruption and Economic Growth

Dani Kaufmann of the World Bank Institute reveals empirical data for a modified inverted Kuznets Curve showing Nepal cannot achieve middle income status without medium-to-high levels of corruption.

Workshop 4:

Conscience and the Fourth Commandment (or Is It the Sixth?) How to ignore your inner voice, and silence vour conscience. Guru Shri Nagadnarayan Thugastakacharya demonstrates meditation therapy to indulge in hanky panky without irritating pangs of morality.

Dinner: Tyrants' Networking Evening.

"खुलेर बोलौं विभेद रोकौं" "महिला हिंसा विरुद्ध शून्य सहिष्णुता कायम गरौँ" "दमनको प्रतिवाद गरी महिला हिंसा अन्त्य गरौं"



सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय सुचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग