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India watching from Nepal

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP has suffered a shocking setback in assembly elections in five states, some of them in the Hindu heartland. The defeat is comparable to the debacle faced by President Donald Trump in November's mid-term polls in the US.

The loss of crucial states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh this week is a severe blow to the BJP's Hindu-right agenda. The party was stoking communal divisions, but the extreme rhetoric appears to have backfired. This setback has made many analysts rethink BJP's chances of winning in next year's general elections.

In 2014, Prime Minister Modi led his party to a landslide with promises to transform living

standards of ordinary Indians. Modi, however, was constantly abroad in his first year, busy being a global statesman. When he returned to New Delhi after one such visit, Indian media even headlined: 'Modi Visits India'.

Prime Minister Modi was the first Indian leader to visit Nepal in 17 years when he came to Kathmandu in 2014. Since then he made two more visits, including pilgrimages to Janakpur and Muktinath this year, televised live to Indians preparing to vote in state elections.

However, Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy turned out to be a curse for Nepal because of the inhumane five-month Blockade in 2015 that stopped energy and

essential supplies as well as urgent earthquake relief at the border.

"We have to analyse how India's policy on Nepal changes depending on whether the BJP or Congress is in power in New Delhi, and be prepared for it," cautions Nepal's former ambassador to India, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa.

Under Modi's powerful National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) called the shots in Nepal rather than the other spy agency, RAW.

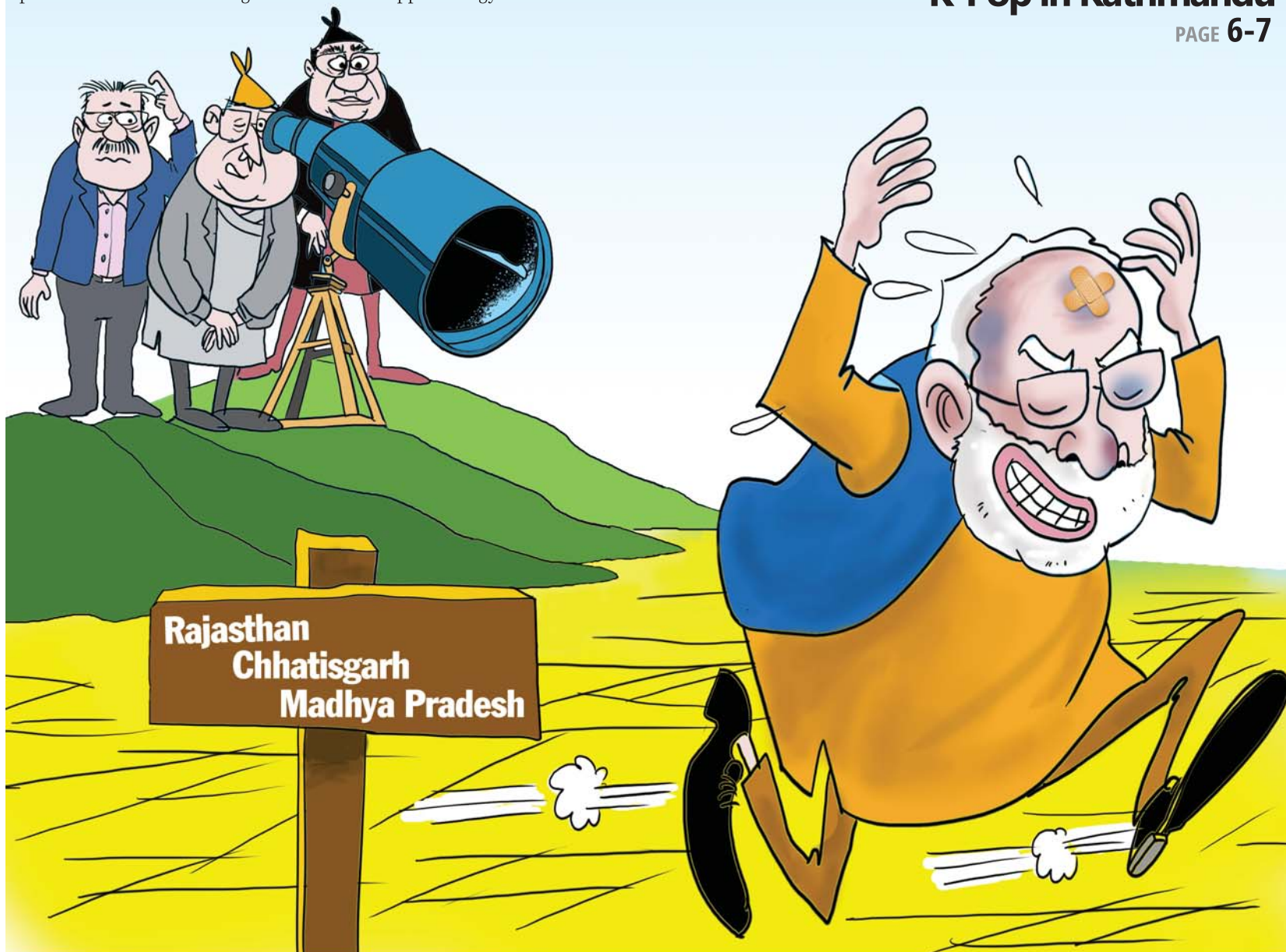
This election was a referendum on Modi, and the Indian electorate has reminded him that they prefer better living standards to slogans of populist Hinduism.

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K-Pop in Kathmandu

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THE NEW NORMAL

It does not matter who advised Prime Minister K P Oli about attending the dubious Asia-Pacific Summit in Kathmandu last week organised by the Korean Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon. He should have refused to go.

Even if he had been told that other Asian leaders would be attending, just glancing at the invitee list should have made it clear to him that they were ones currently ostracised by the international community: Cambodia's Hun Sen and Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi.

Hun Sen got himself elected again this year in an another staged election, and the former Khmer Rouge guerrilla who has brutally silenced critics is Asia's longest-ruling prime minister. Aung San Suu Kyi may still retain her Nobel Peace Prize, but she has been stripped of numerous other international awards for her refusal to condemn her government's ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya minority and imprisoning journalists who covered it.

Nepal's entire political leadership, including even President Bidya Devi Bhandari, tarred themselves by hobnobbing with this disreputable evangelical cult that has been known to buy political influence in soft states around the world. Seeing Nepal's entire political spectrum on stage with Moonie figures was not just shameful, but exposed gullibility and collusion with a shady born again sect.

A promotional video made by the Church boasts about how it has the backing of Nepal's political leadership. It shows clips of UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal on hand at the Kathmandu airport tarmac to welcome the group's 'True Mother' earlier this month, and other leaders receiving 'blessings' from her. (*Go online to watch video.*)

Moon's Unification Church and Universal Peace Federation (UPF) has nearly 15,000 members and dozens of churches across Nepal. It has also bankrolled various political parties to give its Chairman and head of the Nepal Paribar (Family) Party Ek Nath Dhakal berth as Peace and Reconstruction Minister in successive coalition governments in the past four years. Dhakal has taken Nepal's top politicians and MPs on frequent and lavish junkets to Korea.

The Oli administration has been hapless about getting its timing right even when it makes positive moves. It squandered the PR advantage of signing the much-vaunted Trade and Transit Treaty with Beijing earlier this year by installing a controversial head of the Nepal Telecommunication Authority on the same day. Headlines about the appointment

overshadowed the geopolitical significance of the China treaty. The government has done little to followup on the treaty, but that is another story we will go into some other time.

Prime Minister Oli also announced a bold social security scheme for private sector employees, but the extravagant publicity campaign, in which his face was plastered all over the country, undid any brownie points from it. It will take a long time to undo the damage from the ridicule the government and Oli personally suffered in the mainstream media and social networking sites.

Many Nepalis would probably have ignored all this nonsense if in the past nine months of assuming office the Nepal Community Party-led government had used its two-thirds majority to perform. Not only has the government not been able to deliver, its accomplishments in just about every sector has been less than underwhelming.

Last week, we lamented in this space how the government has managed to spend only 11% of its outlay for development projects in the first quarter. In the same period, foreign

direct investment in Nepal is down 75% from the same period last year, and it is the lowest in three years. Combined, these two trends mean that Nepal is unlikely to achieve the projected 8% growth target.

Successful governments have promised that the pace of development and economic growth will pick up once things get back to 'normal'. The war has been over 12

years, the constitution was promulgated three years ago, elections were over and one with and the three levels of government have been in office for nearly a year. When are we ever going to be 'normal'?

A rape/murder case in Kanchanpur that could easily have been solved with detective work at the local level was bungled with a cover up, and the framing of innocents until it grew into a

crisis of national proportions.

Such weakness and chronic failure, especially of an elected government with a strong mandate, is not good news for Nepal's long-suffering people who have waited out two decades of conflict and transition. It also undermines the people's trust in their elected representatives, and belief in democracy.

The response of the prime minister and his spokesman has been a knee-jerk attempt to blame the messenger and lash out at critics in the time-honoured way of all failed leaders. Our unsolicited advice to the prime minister would be to make a list of can-do deliverables and just get them done. The public will give him credit without him having to beg for it.



The weakness and chronic failure of an elected government with a strong mandate is not good news for Nepal's long-suffering people who have waited out two decades of conflict and transition.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Ten years ago this week, the *Nepali Times* edition #428 of 6-11 December 8, 2008 had the front page headline 'Red carpet' alluded to the string of foreign visitors in Kathmandu. An excerpt from the analysis:

Since the UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon in October, there have been four ministers from India, Britain, Denmark and China. The Chinese sent a military delegation and the British their army chief. Most visitors expressed concern about delays in the peace process, army integration and lamented the lack of consensus politics. They urged the Maoist-led government to deliver law and order, prove its commitment to democracy and the free press and ensure industrial security.

Some visitors said privately they saw a gap between what the Maoists were saying and what they were doing. There was concern that Nepal, which two years ago was hailed a model country for conflict-transformation, was about to slip back into anarchy. Nepal had a great opportunity after the peace accord to restore stability and be stronger internally. But the country now seems to be going in the other direction. The only way to dissuade foreign meddling is to build consensus during the transition period and to cooperate in the constitution-drafting process. If the Maoists who lead the government can't do this, opposing geopolitical blocs will start getting jumpy and try to influence political decisions. When that doesn't work, they will interfere directly.



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ONLINE PACKAGES



NEPALI AAMA

In 1974, Peace Corps volunteer Broughton Coburn arrived in Kolma village in Syangja and was hosted by a 70-year-old widower. Aama died in 1991, but Coburn ended up writing two books about her. He recently returned to Kolma after 37 years. Watch video story depicting the changes he saw. *Story: page 8-9*



HALLYU WAVE

South Korea long ago rose to global prominence with its addictive TV serials, catchy pop beats, chic fashion and sophisticated cosmetic products. The K-pop wave has arrived on Nepal's shores. Watch young Nepalis explain why they just cannot get enough of K-pop. *Story: page 6-7*

GURKHA PEACE CORPS

The Gurkhas mean too much to the British people, so a joint initiative could be just what is needed ('The time has come for a Gurkha Peace Corps', David Seddon, #937).

Alan Roadnight

■ I actually agree! My village in Eastern Nepal was comprised largely of former British soldiers & officers and they were well trained in international development by their former units.

Bradford Cottel

■ "Gurkha Peace Corps" could also help establish a sustainable "Gurkha Memorial National Innovation Centre". This would not only honour the valour of Gurkhas, but help them become creative and self-sustained citizens. This in turn will strengthen the relationship between two countries and bring substantial economic development in Nepal.

Mahabir Pun

BRILLIANT REPORT

Brilliant work *Nepali Times* on covering the impact of climate change on Mt Everest. ('On thin ice', Kunda Dixit and Sonia Awale, #935). I hope this marks the beginning of many in-depth scientific stories to follow. The impact of global warming on the Himalaya is shocking indeed. More importantly, what are we, the world, going to do about this calamity that will obviously impact a huge swathe of the global population?

Akhilesh Upadhyay

■ Excellent case study on climate change in the Himalaya. But Nepal must also think about biodiversity loss and adverse effects on public health. I think it is the right time to integrate all climate scientists, environmental epidemiologists and policy makers working on climate change to prevent the extreme consequences of climate change.

Yadav Joshi

■ Hope that more people could read about what global warming is doing to the Himalayas.

Wieslaw Krajewski

■ First ever technical writing I read about the glacier and glacial lakes of Nepal. I expect more such reports from Kunda Dixit in coming days.

Chand Mohan

WHAT'S TRENDING



Trails less travelled

by *Joy Stephens*

The disaster that struck a Korean expedition on 10 October and killed nine climbers including Kim Chang-ho brought the relatively unknown region below Gurja Himal to world attention. The region is also where Fair Tread model of sustainable trekking is making a mark. Visit nepalitimes.com for video.

[Most reached and shared on Facebook](#)

Animated in Nepal

by *Sikuma Rai*

Did you know that many of the popular animation sequences in your favourite Hollywood movies were created in Kathmandu? Go online for this most popular feature of the week on Incessant Rain Studios' use of local Nepali artistic talent.

[Most popular on Twitter](#)

[Most visited online page](#)

A Gurkha Peace Corps

by *David Seddon*

Nepal-Britain relations could be recast as one between equals through a common force for peace and development. This op-ed generated heated debate online. Visit our website to read feedback and join in the discussion.

[Most commented](#)

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Animated in Nepal The next time you watch a Hollywood cartoon movie, chances are it has animation sequences created in #Kathmandu Read all about how the Incessant Rain studio uses local artistic talent in this @nepalitimes feature.

Sanjeeb Bhandari @thesanjiv
This is so encouraging. Please find more stories like this and bring them to the limelight!

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Mt Everest is Melting Dramatic images and video of how global warming is thawing the glaciers below the world's highest mountain. Click here for coverage in @nepalitimes

Mark Horrell @markhorrell
How to spot evidence of global warming on a helicopter flight through the #Everest region https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/on-thin-ice-in-the-khumbu/ ... interesting report and video by @nepalitimes

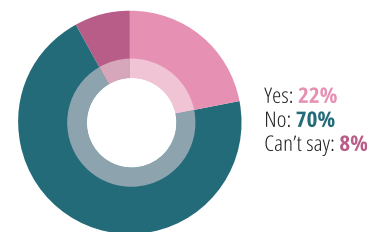
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
What if the Britain & Nepal were to agree that in future there would be an expanded recruitment of young Nepalis not to a military outfit serving mainly overseas but to a jointly managed 'Peace Corps'? @pigreen on the future of British Gurkhas @nepalitimes

Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam
Worth considering David Seddon's idea of "Gurkha Peace Corps". In my book Lost in Transition, pages 112-113 & 359-360, I suggest downsizing & reorganizing @thenepalesearmy & creating a world class peace keeping corps. Let's emulate best of UK Gurkha experience & partner w/ UN-PKO



Weekly Internet Poll #938

Q. Should Nepal have hosted the Asia Pacific Summit?



Weekly Internet Poll #939
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How will the defeat of the BJP in state elections this week in India affect Nepal?



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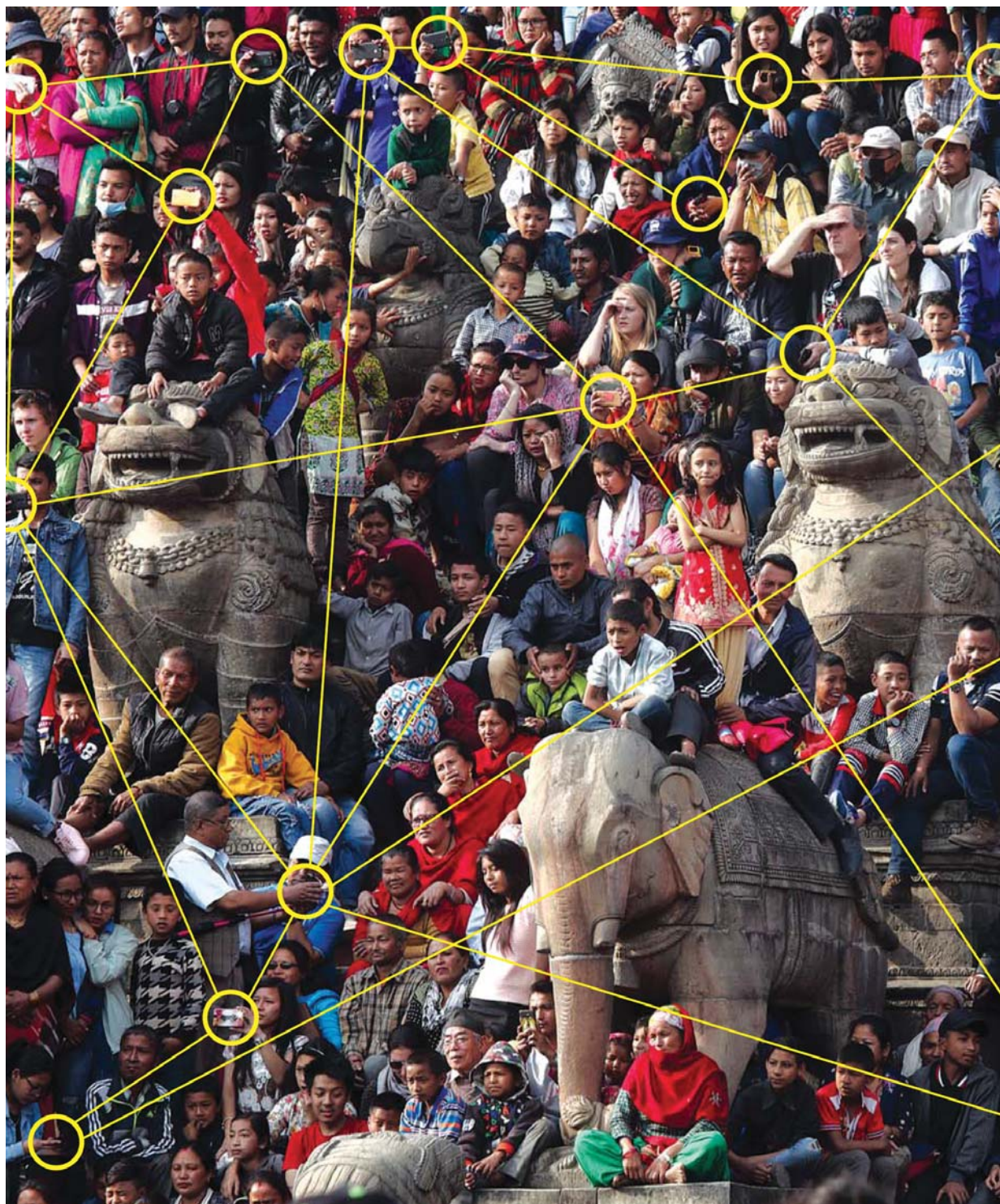
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BIKRAM RAI

Landline to online

We are beginning to see the full economic impact of connectivity in Nepal

Africa marked the end of World War I two weeks after Europe because it took that long to get out the message that the war had ended.

Months after the end of World War II, Gurkha soldiers were still in the jungle of Burma looking out for Japanese troops,



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

unaware that a peace agreement had been signed. When British officers asked them how they found their way back, one of them produced a road map of London. Today, they would use Google Maps.

In a recent episode of James Corden's *The Late Late Show*, the CBS late night talk show had to make a real effort to explain to younger members in the audience what a "letter", "envelope", "postage stamps" and "mail boxes" were.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi elaborated on his connectivity strategy in an address to Nepal's Parliament on his first visit to Nepal in 2014 with the acronym "HIT" standing for highways, information and transmission lines.

This week, the number of people online throughout the world crossed 3.9 billion – more than half the global population. It took 100 years for the first billion people to say "hello" on

a landline phone. In the early 1990s, the only way to get a phone line in Nepal was to pay a hefty bribe or to register a company and to get a landline.

In India, the joke in the old days was that 5% of the population had phones, and 95% was waiting for a dial tone. And across the border in India "ISD, STD" were ubiquitous acronyms because long after Nepal's telecommunications went digital in the 1990s, India still had analog phones under the 'Be Indian, Buy Indian' philosophy. Then it was cyber cafes, and now even those have been replaced by smartphones.

In Nepal, the government does not distribute free mobile phones, and there are no donor-funded projects subsidising these devices. Yet everyone, rich or poor, has a phone. On the other hand, the government with donor support has been building toilets and providing free material and training. Yet, many people are still defecating in the open.

No one runs a literacy program on how to use a smart phone, yet everyone seems to know how to use one. Connectivity is clearly more important for people than toilets. There is a willingness to pay for connectivity, but that does not seem to apply for anything else. Nepal currently has full phone coverage and 72% have access to the internet.

Now that access is less of an issue, the content and what

people use connectivity for is up for debate. The Home Ministry blames the rise in rape cases across Nepal on online pornography. E-banking, e-commerce and Nepalis reaching family members across the globe on Viber or Skype are all obvious benefits. China's next great leap forward is to skip credit cards and go straight into the mobile phone payment.

The government now wants to provide online services hoping to fight corruption by reducing human contact. People now go online to pay bills, check a recipe, find offices and meeting locations, check on the people they are about to meet, do research, find images and to show off selfies with celebrities.

You can listen to a great lecture, read archived articles in far away libraries, video chat and negotiate deals. One wonders how the world even functioned when we were not online. The earthquake of 2015 taught Nepalis to make a shift from a downloading society to an uploading one. We simply do not upload enough, but things are changing due to the social media and the trend of sharing images online.

It will be interesting to analyse the data to see how many photos will be uploaded in this week's weddings. And the results will probably show that just like the global digital divide is narrowing due to mobile connectivity, so is the digital divide within Nepal. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharth

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Growing Turkish

Turkish Airlines's passenger and cargo traffic results for November 2018 showed that the airline reached 81.4% load factor. The passenger growth trend also continued, reaching 5.5 million travellers,



a 4% increase compared November 2017. Moreover, transit passengers increased by approximately 8%, and the number of international passengers went up by 13%.

Sustainable energy

A new World Bank report analysing global progress on sustainable energy policies has revealed that the number of countries with strong policy frameworks for sustainable energy more than tripled –



THE WORLD BANK

from 17 to 59 – between 2010 and 2017, and many of the world's largest energy-consuming countries significantly improved their renewable energy regulations since 2010. However, challenges persist as policies to decarbonize heating and transportation – which account for 80 percent of global energy use – continue to be overlooked.

Trade in 2019

A new regional UN report has analysed the impact of a full blown trade war. It notes accelerated restrictions on trade goods and services, and more reservations on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which saw a 4% drop in 2018. The United States-China tensions have also started to disrupt supply chains and diminish investor confidence. Continued trade tensions may slow export growth to 2.35% in 2019, and decreased exports will lead to a minimum net loss of 2.7 million jobs in Asia and the Pacific.

Qatar World Cup

Qatar Airways was part of a draw that determined the groups in which the 24 qualified teams will play for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. The tournament



will be held across nine French host cities from 7 June to 7 July 2019. In May 2017, Qatar Airways became the Official Partner and Official Airline of FIFA until 2022. This partnership will also give Qatar Airways extensive marketing and branding rights at the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar.

Tucson in Nepal

Laxmi InterContinental, the sole authorised distributor of Hyundai for Nepal has launched Tucson 2019 edition. The new



Tucson comes with features providing improved power, convenience and luxury, and the driving technologies applied are based on rigorous safety measures. Some features are panoramic sunroof, floating type 7" LCD touch screen and six airbags.

Rugby Festival

2500 people participated in a rugby festival organised in Tundikhel last week as part of the Rugby World Cup 2019 Trophy Tour of which Nepal was the last destination of



the year. The Trophy Tour supports World Rugby's *Impact Beyond Program*. This also includes *Project Asia 1 Million* which aims to attract one million new rugby participants by 2020, and has already involved over 900,000 people across Asia.

Sanima insurance

Sanima Life Insurance organised a blood donation program at its head office in



Kamaladi on the occasion of the company's anniversary. Chairman Kumar Prasad Koirala also unveiled the *Sanima Jeevan Shri* insurance scheme for high-quality, modern life insurance to customers.

Cathay to Komatsu

Cathay Pacific is introducing a new seasonal service to Komatsu, Japan next spring. The two-times-weekly service will be operated



on Wednesdays and Saturdays. These flights will bring the natural landscape and cultural attractions of Ishikawa Prefecture closer.

Women Migrants

The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens organised a two-day conference to discuss opportunities for women migrant



workers who have returned to Nepal. Migration and gender experts discussed governance in federalism, reintegration of women returnee migrants, and the social implications of migration on those left behind. The participants also called for political commitment to a strong roadmap that makes migration safe with respect towards women's rights to freedom of choice and mobility.

Not just social security

Nepal needs a rights-based approach to transform unequal social structures, not piecemeal schemes

Josh Glover

The Nepal government's announcement of a social security scheme for formal sector workers this month has once again thrust social protection policy into the political spotlight. While such schemes can be important social policy instruments, significant concerns have been raised about this scheme and previous policies, particularly regarding government's ability to fund and implement them.

Now more than ever, it is important that social protection policies and programs effectively address issues of marginalisation and vulnerability that undergird social insecurity and injustice.

Marginalisation is deeply ingrained into Nepali social, economic, and political practice. Lines of exclusion across caste, gender, religion, geography have resulted in complex, multi-dimensional poverty. When poverty is entrenched over long periods of time, vulnerability graduates from individuals and households to community and government levels. Ultimately, the cost of not addressing vulnerability is borne across society.

Vulnerability is exaggerated during times of instability, and in Nepal it is caused and exacerbated by politics, natural disasters, informality of labour and income, and so on. Vulnerable individuals suffer double jeopardy, and tend to enter a downward spiral of wretchedness if left unnoticed by government.

Governmental responses to vulnerability through social protection policies and programs have mirrored the trajectory of the country's transformational politics. Social movements, government restructuring and changes to legal and constitutional frameworks have shaped how marginalisation and vulnerability are addressed.

Today, all major parties recognise the political value of adopting social protection elements into their policy platforms. Alongside the recognition of the political significance of social protection policies, there is also growing appreciation of the positive impact of these policies for the country's development. Despite this, poor policy design impedes social protection efforts in Nepal.

It may be useful to analyse the effectiveness of Nepal's social protection schemes by considering the following three design approaches:

Equality-based approaches provide blanket security to the entire population. The best examples are many of the labour market regulations, which regulate working conditions, occupational safety, worker rights, and minimum wages.

Equality-based schemes assume that all people are alike and have the same needs. However, this assumption of homogeneity ignores the fact that some groups experience marginalisation and vulnerability more acutely than others.

Equity-based schemes recognise varying types of vulnerability and marginalisation and employ targeted strategies of redressal. An example is Nepal's Disability Grant, which targets persons with disabilities to ensure greater social inclusion and economic independence.

Most of the budgetary allocation in Nepal's social protection portfolio is directed toward equity-based social assistance and allowance



BIKRAM RAI

programs. This reflects the evolving political understanding of equality and equity: with policy shapers increasingly seeking to incorporate targeted instead of universal strategies. However, since Nepal's universal schemes play a significant role in protecting the vulnerable, it is vital that the government pursues both equality-and equity-based strategies.

Equality- and equity-based approaches seek to address poverty and marginalisation. However, these social challenges are symptomatic of the underlying root problem of societal injustice. For durable effect, it is important that the root problem is targeted, not just symptomatic manifestations. It follows, therefore, that policies that limit themselves to equality- and equity-based strategies are likely to be inadequate.

A justice-based approach seeks to go beyond addressing economic marginalisation and vulnerability,

and instead understand and confront social injustice. Social protection policies are but one tool that governments can use to address vulnerability and marginalisation, justice-based schemes are integrated with other programs to transform unequal social structures.

There is a decided gap in Nepal's current social protection framework with respect to well-designed, justice-based schemes. However, there are some encouraging examples that show signs of progress from an equity-based to a justice-based approach in social protection policy.

The Emergency Cash Transfer Program, for example, leveraged the government's existing social assistance registers and provided two cash transfers targeting the people who had likely been left most vulnerable after the 2015 earthquakes. What makes this program significant is that it was formally incorporated into


the emergent Social Protection Framework of Nepal, which gives an otherwise isolated transfer program an integrated dimension.

Federalism and inclusive nation building introduced by the 2015 Constitution has set a decisive inflection point for addressing social injustice in Nepal. Not only are 31 fundamental rights constitutionally enshrined, Parliament has moved to enact legislation to apply them. The agenda to see social justice embedded throughout society is, at least in theory, a top priority for the government.

However, like other public policy initiatives in Nepal, social protection has been historically constrained by inadequate policy design and poor integration, resourcing and implementation of policies by weak and incapable governments. This has significantly hindered the country's ability to redress injustice through policy instruments such as social

protection.

Fears surrounding the history of inadequate program implementation arose again last week after the announcement of the private sector social security scheme. The scheme is generous and consequently ambitious. Regardless of intent behind the announcement, the success of the program is contingent on how well it will be implemented. The costs involved are significant and the private sector has not reacted well to the potentially huge increase in wage burden. How the program will be financed remains an unanswered question.

As a social security scheme that will decidedly not benefit the informal sector, the majority of Nepal's workforce, it is hard to see how this additional levy helps reduce injustice in society. 

Josh Glover attends Melbourne University and interned at Niti Foundation in 2018.



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Cloud cover associated with a westerly system will pass over Nepal into Friday and the weekend, bringing the season's first snow flurries to higher valleys. The cyclonic system off southern India is too far to affect us, but it will alter the wind patterns and bringing in colder (and cleaner) air from the northwest, making Kathmandu's winter crisper with better visibility. However, this is not expected to last into next week.

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ALL PHOTOS: SANGMIN KIM

K-Pop in

Nepalis are into everything Korean: television and music, cosmetics and cuisine

Sangmin Kim

Usmita Silwal is from the younger generation of Nepalis that is addicted to Korean pop music and television serials. She has taught herself to write her name in Korean, and introduces herself

confidently in Korean. Like many of her peers, Silwal did not learn all this in class, but on YouTube and Facebook. This week, she was attending another cultural event organised by the Korean aid agency, KOICA, in Patan. She never misses any of them. "I can read, speak and even write Hangul a little bit. I love

everything about Korean culture, and want to visit, it will be my dream vacation," she said, while Baik Hye-seung of KOICA's volunteer program looked on. "We are amazed that today's event has an even greater turnout than expected," Hye-seung said, adding that his agency would look for a bigger venue next time.

With the growing popularity of K-pop worldwide, the Oxford Dictionary officially added the term 'K-pop' in 2012, defining it as Korean pop music and culture. Like the rest of Asia, the tsunami of Korean soft power has also washed ashore in Kathmandu, 4,000km away from Seoul. Even before the recent Internet

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K-TOWN: Priyanka Shrestha (*right*) and Rojita Gurung (*left*) are heavily addicted to spicy Korean food like *Tteok-bokki* (*pictured, left*).

Neha Tamrakar and Shriya Maharjan are co-administrators of Nepal BTS ARMY, the fan group for Korean boy band BTS (*right*).

Nepali and Korean KOICA staff pose with big smiles at a photo zone decorated with a night view of Seoul city at a KOICA event in Patan on Monday (*above*).

Nilam Rai, 23, always carries a range of Korean beauty products in her bag (*below*).



more Nepalis returning from Korea, the spicy and strong flavour of Korean food also seems to appeal increasingly to the Nepali palate.

Korean stir-fried pork *Jeyuk-Bokkeum* and *Tteok-bokki* (spicy rice cakes) are the popular menu items in Korean Kitchen Picnic in Kathmandu. A kitchen staff Saroj Lama says 60% of his customers are Nepalis.

At one of the tables is 18-year-old high school student Priyanka Shrestha, who says she loves spicy Korean cuisine, and comes here once a week with friends. She is also a big fan of K-dramas and Korean actors, especially Kim Hyunjoong who played Yoon Jihoo in *Boys Over Flowers*.

Neha Tamrakar and Shriya Maharjan are co-administrators of the fan group BTS ARMY in Nepal for the Korean boy band, BTS, and recently held a charity event to raise money for the Chepang community.

“We posted about donating to those kids on our Facebook page, and many ARMYs chipped in, so, we decided to collect clothes and funds,” Tamrakar told us. BTS ARMY has also collaborated with other K-pop fans to hold a ‘Flood Donation Campaign’ in August. The inspiration comes from BTS which has lyrics with messages like ‘Love yourself even though the world does not recognise you’.

Says Maharjan: “We are so inspired by BTS we will continue to do more fundraising campaigns.”

Irtika Bajracharya is an art and design student and is hooked on K-pop just like her school mates who listen to BTS songs and dance to its music to de-stress.

“I am surprised K-pop has become more popular than Bollywood and Western culture, K-pop just feels more natural here,” Bajracharya says. “the aesthetics of K-pop with storylines in its dance and lyrics is very creative. It helps me grow up as a person.” 🇰🇷

K-Town

boom in Nepal, Korean television serials like *Dae Jang Geum* (2003) or *Winter Sonata* (2002) starring Bae Yongjoon were already popular through DVD rentals, and *Boys over Flowers* (2009) became the rage among younger Nepalis attracted by glamorous young Korean stars. Suddenly, the young Kathmandu crowd started

asking for items they have searched online.”

Thapa says the reason for the new fashion trend is the popularity of K-pop music and movies. “Our customers look for skin care products and BB cream to achieve natural beauty like Korean actresses or singers,” he explained. A salesperson, Nilam Rai, who

is working in Misumi Cosmetic Nepal at Labim Mall, uses more than ten K-beauty products from eyeliner pencils to sunblock. Rai says “I do not like heavier makeup because it irritates my skin. But Korean cosmetics like Missha and The Face Shop are good for me.”

With the proliferation of Korean restaurants in Kathmandu, and

Go online to watch video of a Korean cultural event in Kathmandu, and listen to fans of K-pop talk about what attracts them to Korean culture, and why Korean soft power is spreading across Asia.

nepalintimes.com



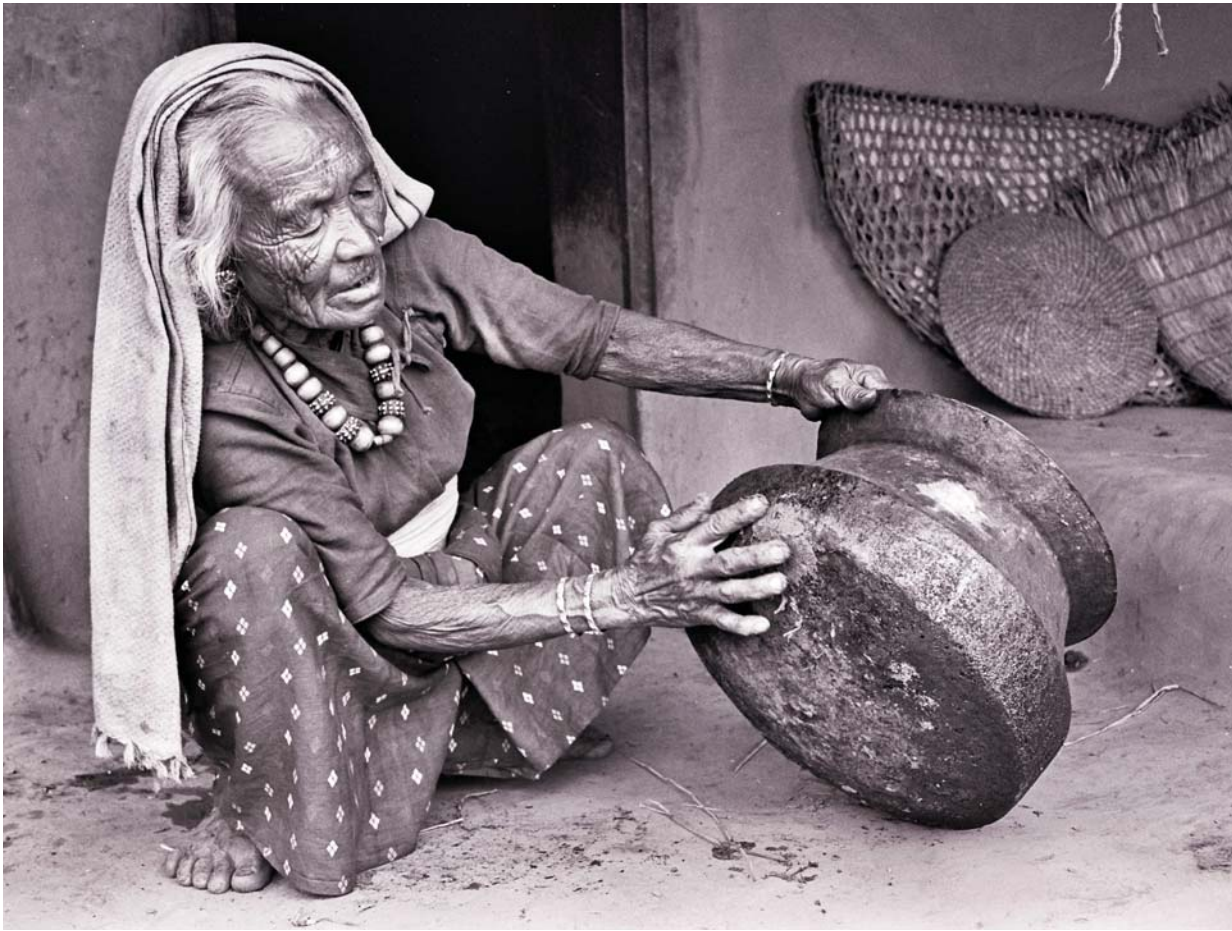
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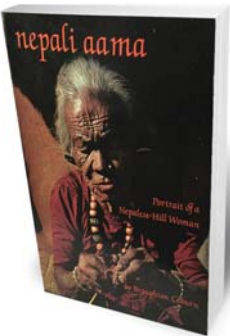
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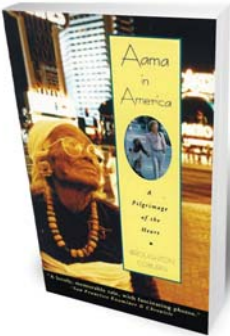
AAMA IN 1975 IN KOLMA VILLAGE OF SYANGJA DISTRICT



In 1974, Broughton Coburn hiked up to a Gurung village on a ridge at the eastern edge of Syangja District, and introduced himself to the headman. He had been assigned by the Peace Corps to teach at a high school. The headman found lodgings for Coburn with a 70-year-old widow who lived alone with a cat, some chicken, and a water buffalo. ‘Aama’ was even more surprised by the sudden appearance of such an unusual lodger, and Coburn eased the transition by helping Aama with her daily chores.

Aama did not have children, and Coburn’s own mother had died three years earlier. A mother-son bond grew between them, and culminated in two books: a photo-portrait of Aama’s life, *Nepali Aama: Life Lessons of a Himalayan Woman*, and *Aama in America: A Pilgrimage of the Heart*, the tale of their odyssey in search of the soul of the United States.

Coburn recently revisited Aama’s village of Kolma after 31 years. Aama died in 1991, at age 87. When her only daughter, Sun Maya also died two years ago, he vowed to return to the village and visit descendants four generations on. If Aama were still alive, she would have a new great-great-grandson.



IN 1977 BROUGHTON COBURN DROVE AAMA AROUND KATHMANDU VALLEY ON A MOTORCYCLE, AND A DECADE LATER TOOK HER

Aama’s

Broughton Coburn in Syangja

I connected first with Resham, one of my students from 44 years ago, in a coffee shop in Katmandu. He is now working at an NGO and had not been back in his village for eight years.

“It’s not the same there,” he said. “There is something missing.”

Most villagers and Aama’s descendants were no longer there. Thagu, Aama’s only grandson, had found work with the police in India and his son is in the Indian Army. Maita, Aama’s eldest granddaughter, married along ago and moved to Pokhara.

In a quiet alley behind the shambling grittiness of Pokhara’s

Pardi Bazaar, was a two-storey cement house with an ornate metal gate. Maita, who I had known as a young girl, graciously served tea and juice and *sel roti*. For her husband, daughter, sister and sister-in-law, she launched into selective recollections of how afraid the village children were of me initially, and my hilariously awkward manner of eating, sitting and speaking.

“Things have changed a lot, Gora Mama,” Maita said, as if



searching for some news from the village to share. The relatives lined up and we solemnly clicked away with our smartphones. “Remember that clunky camera you were always putting plastic film strips into,” asked Maita. “And Aama said that her lifespan might shorten if you took too many photos of her? Well, nowadays we’re the ones taking all the photos.”

“If you make it to Syangja Bazar in time, Gora Mama, you can catch the morning jeep that will take you up the hill to Kolma village,” Maita added.

“I’m thinking I’ll just walk from the bazar,” I said.

“You can’t,” she said flatly.

“What do you mean, can’t?” I said.

“There is no trail anymore. Everyone travels on the road.”



AAMA LOOKING DOWN AT HER TERRACE *BARI* IN 1977 IN KOLMA VILLAGE OF SYANGJA DISTRICT

Kolma

From the roof of the bus, the airy perch I had always preferred, fresh landslides appeared like ink splotches cast upon the Syangja hills. Everywhere, mad scribbles of ad hoc dirt roads linked even the smallest hamlets.

I walked along the road that paralleled the small *khola*, then searched for the trail at the base of a 700m vertical climb to Kolma *danda*. The hillside was crisscrossed with crude switchbacks. Maita was right. The old trail could be seen only as broken fragments: shards of a civilisation that walked.

By cell phone I connected with Aama’s granddaughters, Sainli and Kanchi, and they converged on the dirt road to guide me to their homes. After food and tea we walked on the road to Aama’s village, their *maiti*, as I struggled to get my

bearings. The old stone stairway that I trekked each day to school was mostly overgrown, superseded by the road on the hillside above.

“Walking on the road takes longer than on the old trail,” I objected to no one in particular. “Yes,” Kanchi admitted, “but the trail is not the way people go, anymore.”

The acting headman, warmly gracious and purposefully upbeat, greeted us above Aama’s village. “We have electricity,” he pointed to the wires, “and now water flows in pipes to cisterns here. No need to get water from the spring below the village as you used to do for Aama with a *naamlo* and *doko*.”

From the school on the ridge, a half hour walk from Aama’s village, a jeep departed each morning for the district centre, where villagers could cash remittance checks and purchase food and supplies, mostly imported from India. As the headman said, no one really needed to work very much, anymore.

I privately sensed that village development was a consolation prize for those who had stayed

behind, a rationalisation for the uncomfortable absence of so many of the village youth. The village *looked* like a village, but there was something missing, as my student Resham had haltingly suggested.

Corn and millet are still cultivated in the fields, and those we met (mostly women, middle-aged, and elderly) appeared well adjusted to a daily routine, and content. With fewer youth to herd them, the diminished need for draft power and manure fertiliser, and fewer mouths to feed, there are not as many livestock. No vehicle came or left the village while I was there. Water overflowed the cisterns.

One villager confirmed what social scientist Ganesh Gurung has noted about Nepali villages today: women carry corpses of their parents to the cremation site on the ridges, and even light the funeral pyres in the absence of sons who, tradition dictates, must perform this task.

Maita told me that many of the weddings, rituals, and festivals have reconvened at the Kolma-Bahakot Samaj in Pokhara. Gurungs prefer to marry Gurungs, and some meet



KOLMA VILLAGE IN SYANGJA IN 1976

each other through Facebook. In 1974, the high school on the ridge had 500 students, today it is half that number. The students now are largely Dalits, because most Gurungs study in Pokhara, or further afield.

As early as the 1980s, Aama had noted that young people were

losing interest in subsistence farming, and home-grown skills such as roof thatching, or hand-hewing a wooden plow, were no longer being taught. How, I wondered, will the youth recraft a subsistence when the demand for foreign labour ends?

My resistance to the future, and



R TO AMERICA TO SEE THE SIGHTS

s village



WITH NO ONE LEFT TO FARM, THE SAME TERRACES IN 2018 ARE OVERGROWN WITH SHRUBS AND TREES



BY 2018, KOLMA VILLAGE HAD ELECTRICITY, PIPED WATER AND A ROAD CONNECTING IT TO THE HIGHWAY

the present, was beginning to seem idealistic and futile. The ancient *bari* terraces were being reclaimed by weeds and shrubs. In places, tall trees had emerged where corn used to grow. Trees are not a bad thing, *Nepalko dhan*. The countryside was a semi-natural landscape, courtesy of limited markets and

opportunities.

Some spoke of the potential for cash crops such as coffee or walnuts in the fallow fields. If hillside farming were someday mechanised, might the land be converted to commercial agro-enterprises? “Nepal imports approximately a billion rupees worth of food



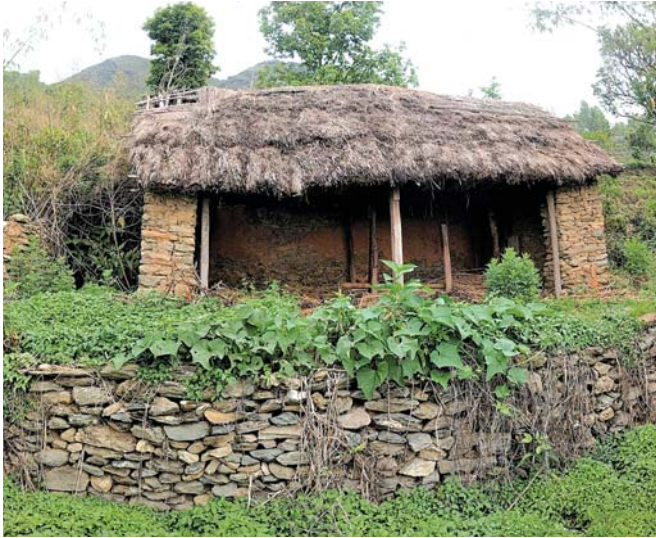
AAMA ON TOP OF A TREE IN KOLMA TO CUT FODDER LEAVES IN 1975 ...



AAMA AT HER HOME WITH A NEIGHBOUR IN 1977 ...



... AND GAZING UP AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE IN NEW YORK IN 1989



... AND HER ABANDONED HOUSE IN 2018

Aama's house

Sainli and Kanchi stepped from the dirt roadbed onto the leaf-strewn trail that meandered to Aama's house. I could hear Aama saying, as she did when I showed up after months of work in Kathmandu, that she had premonitions of my arrival. Perhaps, somehow, she could perceive that I was again coming to see her.

Pushing through a thicket of weeds, we pulled up to a crude goth that filled the space where her house had stood. I set down my rucksack and, avoiding nettles, walked about quietly, mumbling to myself like an explorer deciphering an overgrown Mayan ruin. A low wall, the crumbled foundation of Aama's house, appeared in the shadows. I took some photos while puzzling my way through a reverse sort of future shock, resurrecting the colours and bustle and the sounds and smells of decades earlier.

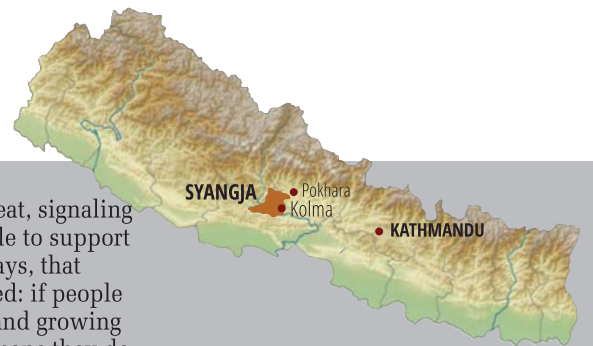
Kanchi and Sainli stood silently, their heads tracking my movement. They clearly sensed my confusion and sadness. “If you had stayed in the village, Gora Mama, it would not be like this,” said Kanchi softly.

A tear formed in my eye, and I mentally fast-forwarded wild scenarios of local marriage, village projects, healthful living, and Buddhist practice. But I was not the only one who had left. Kanchi and Sainli's brother and sister and most of their relatives had also left. We were all participants in something much larger than all of us.

What had not diminished during the past 45 years in Aama's village was the boundless hospitality. My inability to graciously decline had not changed, either, nor could I any better explain why I had to leave. Sainli and Kanchi begged me to stay.

“My family awaits me,” I told them tearfully, garlanded with *mala*.

They replied: “Then, next time bring your wife and daughter and son.” I promised. And I will.



an admission of defeat, signaling that they were unable to support themselves. Nowadays, that sentiment has flipped: if people are tilling the field and growing their own food, it means they do not have relatives working overseas to send money to buy provisions. They are regarded as failures.

Resham said: “One day, just maybe, as people retire or become weary of towns and cities, they will return to the peacefulness of the countryside.”

The reverse migration trend may not have quite begun, but the abiding sentiment will make it forever possible. Perhaps out of my own nostalgia, or hope, I sensed that Resham, Maita, Kanchi and Sainli shared a vision of village revival too — the return of family, and the re-engagement of the cycles of rituals, festivals and seasons.

The present moment might be something of a holding pattern, a *bardo* or transition following death, prior to rebirth in a very different incarnation, one humming with commerce and commodities. And hopefully community.

NEPALI AAMA



In 1974, Peace Corps volunteer Broughton Coburn arrived in Kolma village in Syangja and was hosted by a 70-year-old widower. Aama died in 1991, but Coburn ended up writing two books about her. He recently returned to Kolma after 37 years. Watch video story depicting the changes he saw.

EVENTS



Art
Karma, Kundoon and Raymon Das Shrestha appear as three young friends navigating life in urban Kathmandu. When one of them invests in art, it threatens to completely destroy their friendship. Based on the award winning play by Yasmina Reza, *Art* is a comedy with themes about human relations and the redeeming power of art.
14-16 December, 7:15 to 9pm, Rs 500 (for students) and Rs 1000, Hotel Vajra, Bijeswari, (01) 4271545, info@hotelvajra.com

Hogwarts Express
A magical evening to celebrate the world of Harry Potter! There will be activities inspired by the Hogwarts curriculum, including Potions, Charms, Herbology and Defence against the Dark Arts. Make your own wand, transmogrify a monster, and many more attractions.
22 December, 12-7pm, GAA Hall, Thamel, 9801087072



IME Nepal Literature Festival
The 7th edition of the festival will feature exciting conversations, book signings, author meets, musical celebrations, workshops and much more, and will have participations from authors, journalists, artists. Some international guests coming for the festival include Pakistani writer Mohammed Hanif, British illustrator and graphic artist Nicola Streeten, Indian journalist Harish Nambiar.
22-25 December, Nepal Tourism Board, Pokhara, (01) 4443263, info@nepalliteraturefestival.com

Together Apart
The documentary *Together Apart* showing the story of two Filipino migrant workers will be screened in Nepal as part of the Global Migration Film Festival.
18 December, 2-4pm, IOM Nepal, Baluwatar, 01-4426250, iomnepal@iom.int

sprou4rights
Alliance Française Kathmandu is bringing a special human rights exhibition, #sprou4rights, which is jointly produced by the UNHCR and a French comic journal SPROU on the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
14-31 December, 9am to 5pm, Alliance Française, Pulchok, (01) 5009221

Kathmandu: My Fascination
An exhibition of graphic artist Prabod Shrestha's pop-art silkscreen prints, illustrated with a sound installation. Shrestha captures the lifestyle of Kathmandu city by exploring various graphic styles.
14-22 December, 10am to 6pm, Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchok, 9851147776



Nepal Art Now
A pre exhibition of the best works of Nepali contemporary and traditional art. These pieces will be presented in one of the most renowned ethnographic museums in the world, Weltmuseum Wien, in Vienna in 2019.
14-21 December, 10:30am to 5pm, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, (01) 4220735

Phulchoki Day Hike
Enjoy a serene hiking experience through the lush, sub tropical forest trail of the Phulchoki Hill. For details about meeting points and the price, visit their facebook page.
15 December, 6:45am to 6pm, 9841326364, 9841326364, blossomexpeditions@gmail.com

Christmas Market
The final edition of the Local Project Nepal's Christmas market for 2018. Don't miss the opportunity to explore exciting products.
15 December, 4-8pm, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

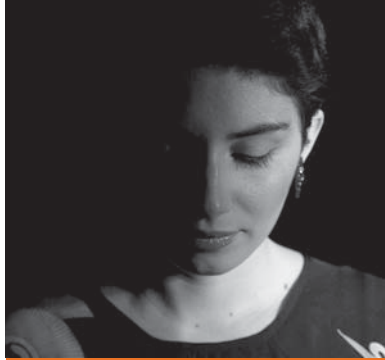
ABOUT TOWN

MUSIC



Reggae with JFI
House of Music offers its last gig for 2018 with reggae music by Joint Family Internationale. The band's vibrant songs will be a great way to end the week.
14 December, 8-11pm, Rs 400, House of Music, Amrit Marg, Thamel, 9849377915

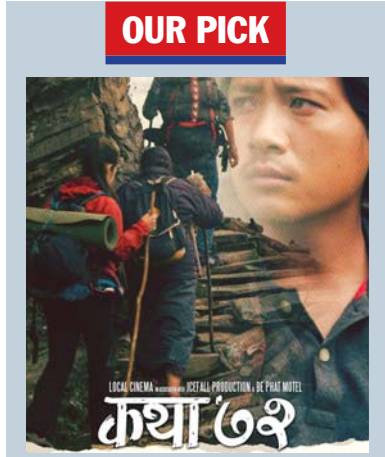
Christmas Concert 2018
Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory is bringing a festive night of music and dance featuring international artists Abhisek Bhadra, Daahoud Salim, Maria Fajardo, and Jacek Chmiel. There will also be performances by the KJC Elementary Diploma students from 4 to 5pm.
22 December, 6-7pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, 01-5528362



Jazz
Martha Del Grandi along with Samyog Regmi in guitar will perform jazz music together. Enjoy the afternoon with jazz music, good food and drinks.
15 December, 2pm, Rs.200, The Yard, Sanepa, 9851095046, (01) 5532965

Blues Paradise
A musical night with live performance by The Midnight Riders Trio. Have a fun-filled Friday evening with the special stories Blues songs have to offer.
14 December, 8-11:30pm, Irish Pub, Lazimpat, (01) 4416027

Sushant K.C
Join in to hear the talented singer's hits. He will be performing solo for the first time in Nepal.
15 December, 6-11pm, Bento Lounge & Bar, Bishalbazar, 9869163339



Opens in Kathmandu on 14 December
Though comedy of errors is the trend in Nepali cinema, some filmmakers are swimming against the trend and making introspective films. Prabin Syangbo has directed one such movie, starring Akash Magar, Supriya Rana and Bhuisal Lama. In a mountain village without roads, a man wants a better life for his family, but his stubborn mother is determined to walk on a pilgrimage despite broken legs. Away from regular masala fare, the movie delves into internal and inter-personal conflicts. Shot in Sindhupalchok, it features stark scenery and ethnic music of a distinctly Nepali flavour.

DINING



Barbecue at Hyatt
A special way to enjoy Saturday afternoons with succulent barbecues and a sumptuous buffet spread – all accompanied by a bottle of chilled beer. There will also be a live band and unique dishes like Grilled Pineapple with coconut rum sauce ice cream and Jambalaya Rice and Grilled Pineapple Dome Poached Peach with Rosemary Flavour.
15 December 2018 - 31 March 2019 (Saturdays only), 12:30 to 4pm, Rs2500++, The Pizza terrace, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 01-4217123

Shangri-La
A New Year's Eve Package with a lavish gala dinner. Also spend the night at the hotel, with a complimentary buffet breakfast on January 1, free wi-fi in room and other attractions.
31 December, Rs20019 Nett per couple, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, (01) 4412999

Thistle Triangle
Thistle's special Peri Peri wings or triple chicken feast or any item from its Eurasian menu is a great treat.
Matighar Mandala Bhawan, Matighar, (01) 4101740



Fire and Ice
One of the first pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice offers genuine Napolitana pizza and dozens of vegetarian and non vegetarian variants to choose from. A warm pizza will be the perfect, hearty meal on a cold winter day.
Thamel, (01) 4250210

Buingal
A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar great for a casual get-together with relatives and friends. Vegetarian sekuwa is finger licking!
Maitidevi, (01) 4421393

GETAWAY



Royal Singi Hotel
The distinctive and symbolic art elements of Tibetan culture made by local artisans add to the serenity and charm of the Potala suite at Royal Singi hotel.
Lal Durbar, Kamaladi, (01) 4424190/ 4424191

Shivapuri Heights Cottage
Treat yourself to a 90-minute ayurvedic massage at Neema's Spa, followed by a healthy lunch at the Cottage.
Shivapuri Hills, Budanilkantha, 9841371927



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

Hotel Barahi
Enjoy a great view of Phewa lake and cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises.
Lakeside, Pokhara, 061-460617/463526



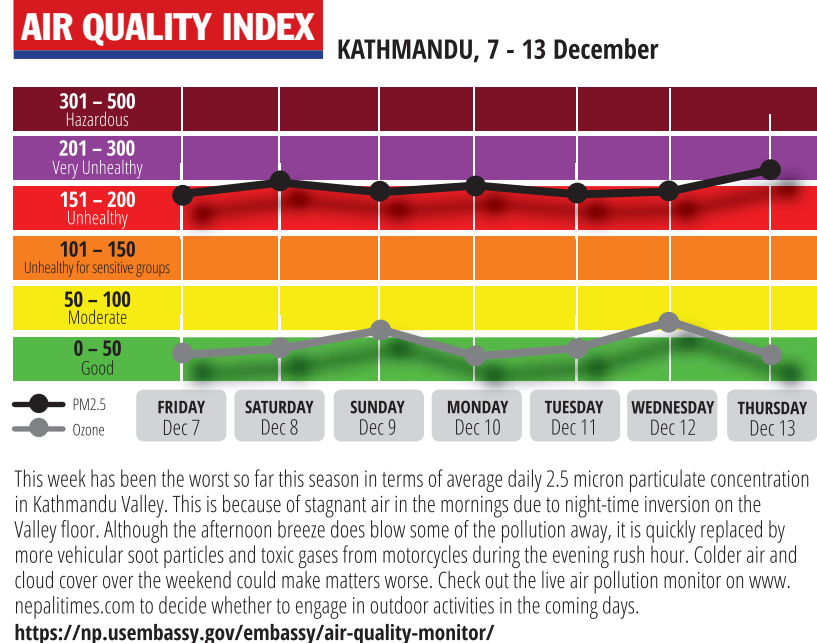
The Old Inn
The B&B is reminiscent of black and white Tudor buildings in England, the cobbledstone, pedestrianised main street is elegant, and there is the breathtaking view of the Central Himalaya from Annapurna in the west to Langtang and beyond in the east.
Bandipur, (065) 520110

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Nepal Mandal in Manhattan

The Met ends its exhibition of five ancient Vajracharya crowns from Kathmandu Valley

Kanak Mani Dixit

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presents ‘over 5,000 years of art spanning all cultures and time periods’ in its galleries, and for a year until the exhibition closed this week, it displayed a unique facet of Kathmandu Valley’s Vajrayan Buddhist heritage.

‘Crowns of the Vajra Masters: Ritual Art of Nepal’ presented five heirlooms of the Vajracharya clans of the Nepal Mandal (Kathmandu Valley) in a darkened gallery. The tapered crowns made of gold-plated gilt copper with repoussé medallions carrying the images of the Five Dhyanī Buddhas (Vairochan, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhav, Amitabh and Amogasiddhi) were beautifully spotlit.

The *mukuts* sparkle with semi-precious stones, turquoise and coral, and each has half a thunderbolt sceptre (*vajra*) at the tapered top. The way the crowns follow the contour of the wearer’s head from temple to forehead just above the brow is distinctive of this genre, but each of the five on display is different from the other.

It is not that The Met is lacking in cultural items related to Nepal, some of which have arrived here through the back door, so to speak. A decade ago, historian Ramesh Dhungel gained access to the storage space of the Museum and emerged with the work, *The Lost Heritage: Hindu and Buddhist Art of Nepal at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (2010).

Nearly 40 years ago, the venerable Lama Ugen Sherab (Bhikchu Krishnaman) personally presented a full set of the nine instruments of the Nepali *naumati baja* folk orchestra to the Museum’s permanent collection.

The exhibit of crowns which



THE MET

date from the 12th to the 18th century was curated by John Guy, who heads the South and Southeast Asia section at The Met, and also the museum official who came to Kathmandu in early April to return two statues that were found to be stolen (a standing Buddha and Uma Maheswar).

The Vajracharya are the masters of the thunderbolt sceptre (*vajra*), and the crowns the priests wear during rituals Guy describes as ‘one of the most spectacular symbols of Buddhist ritual in Nepal’. Donning these crowns is central to Vajrayana rituals, transforming the wearer into ‘a perfected being, a bodhisattva’.

The Met exhibition described the devotional use of the crowns, their iconography and stylistic evolution. The pieces preserve memory of the

earliest Buddhist traditions going back to the 5th century, as far back as the mural portraits of Ajanta and Ellora where we find figures wearing comparable headdresses.

It is entirely possible that the crowns of Kathmandu are descended from a line of tradition that goes back to those worn by the nobility depicted in those murals. The ancient Hindu and Buddhist statuary of gods and goddesses from the Valley and other parts of South Asia also show them wearing similar headdresses.

The Vajrayan tradition itself started in the 8th century in the region encompassing today’s Bihar, Bengal, Odisha and Nepal, and gained momentum for about four or five centuries. Vajrayan weakened in the Ganga plains and Odisha around the 12th century, and the Valley became the

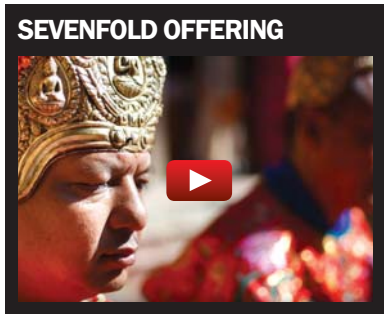
natural refuge for the tradition.

“The Valley remains today the centre of the Vajrayan tradition, and the Vajracharya community provides continuity to the ancient practice,” says Guy.

It is worth considering how these crowns left the Valley and joined the collection of The Met. There is an inscription in one *mukut* which says it was made in the year 1145 CE. Two of the pieces were actually held by the Museum’s section on Tibetan art, where they were had been stored as Tibetan war helmets. It was only in preparation of the exhibition that the Museum officials realised they were Vajracharya crowns.

While these five crowns ended up spotlit in a New York museum, in the *baha* courtyards of the Valley’s inner cities the rituals associated with wearing the crowns continues as living

tradition among Newar Buddhists. The Vajracharya community, custodians of the crowns and the tradition they represent, help connect us all to a thousand years of Nepali and South Asian history.



Watch this Metropolitan Museum of Art video featuring five Vajracharyas Buddhist priests of Nepal, led by Manjushri Shriratna Bajracharya, officiating at the Seven fold Supreme Offering ceremony to set the devotee on the Buddha-path.

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NEPAL ART COUNCIL

Nepal Art Now to Vienna

The Weltmuseum Wien, one of the most renowned ethnographic museums in the world, is organising a first-of-its kind exhibition to showcase the best works of Nepali contemporary and traditional art to a worldwide audience.

Nepal Art Council, a national institution founded in 1962 to promote the arts and artists in Nepal, is the home-country partner and collaborator for this project.

The Nepal Art Now Exhibition is scheduled for 11 April – 05 November 2019 in Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and home to the great Hapsburg connoisseurs of the arts.

This exhibition will include 100 art works by 37 Nepali artists and will be the first major exhibition of Nepali art outside Nepal. The selection has been carefully curated by Christian Shicklgruber, Director of the Weltmuseum Wien and assisted by Nepal Art Council. It will be showcased at the Weltmuseum, which used to be the Hofburg Imperial Palace.

The project was conceived in 2016, by the late Dina Bangdel, was co-curated by Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha from the Nepal Art Council and was coordinated by Sagar SJB Rana, Vice-President of the Council.

"The exhibition will include original art works by the premier artists dating from the 1950s, the senior and the young emerging artists of today will compliment and enrich the collection," Rana said.

Some of the art were commissioned especially for the Vienna exhibition, while others were borrowed from collectors and the artists directly. The art works are embedded in the culture and traditions of Nepal but also discuss and probe into current international issues and social concerns, giving them a global relevance.

Art historians emphasise the overriding influence of art works by European masters in the evolution of contemporary art in Asia. The exhibition will demonstrate this cultural cross-pollination and serve to highlight

Nepali talent that builds on the country's traditional art-forms fused to modern influences and techniques. The curators say that the works of Nepali artists underline the coming of age of Asian contemporary art that now compares well with the best works in the West.

While the art works like the triptych (above) by Sunil Sigdel will dominate the exhibition, some outstanding sculptures and a few representative pieces of traditional metal, wooden and stone art will also be on display in Vienna to demonstrate and inform the international art community and visitors that these genre of art forms occupy equally important and vibrant space in the art of Nepal. A pre-show exhibition will be held at the Nepal Art Council on 13-21 December before the pieces are flown to Vienna. 🇳🇵

*Nepal Art Now Pre-Exhibition
Nepal Art Council
Baber Mahal
13-21 December*



INDIAN EMBASSY

FLYING YOGI: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath being greeted by Province 2 Chief Minister Lalbabu Raut and Indian Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri in Janakpur airport on Wednesday.



MOFA/TWITTER

FOND FAREWELL: Chinese's ambassador to Nepal Yu Hong paid a farewell call to Nepal's Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali, in Singha Darbar on Friday.



SITAIIR

SNOWED UNDER: The season's first snowfall blankets Simikot in Humla district this week. Daily life came to a standstill, flights were cancelled, and students had a hard time giving exams due to the cold.



KIMFF

PROMOTING MOUNTAINS: Bidya Chapagain and Kamal Kumar win the Nepal Panorama Best Documentary Award at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival on Tuesday for their film *The Man Who Died Once*.



ISLINGTON COLLEGE

CLASS OF 2018: Islington College, affiliated to the London Metropolitan University, organised a graduation ceremony last week in Kathmandu where 291 students were conferred with degrees.

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Changing the headlines on migration

By signing the Global Compact on Migration in Marrakesh this week, Nepal commits to move beyond rhetoric to action

The road to the Global Compact on Migration in Marrakesh this week has not been smooth in a politically tense global environment as an anti-migration wave is fuelled by nationalism and xenophobia. On Monday, the United States, Australia, Hungary and some other eastern European states said they would not participate in the Compact.



COMMENT
Upasana Khadka

While the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration deserves much credit, the road ahead is fraught with challenges of turning rhetoric into action. The agreement will be non-binding for the signatories, including Nepal. Among the issues Nepal will have to start examining is the India corridor for Nepali migrant workers. Despite the high volume and remittances, India as a destination country has been overshadowed by Nepalis migrating to the Gulf, Malaysia and overseas. With all its complexities, informality and its seasonality, India is the elephant in the room in Nepal's migration discourse.

The GCM will rake up this long-overlooked issue because by adopting the Compact, both Nepal and India are committing to make migration safe, orderly and regular, none of which characterise migration between the two neighbours at the moment. On the home-front, too, Nepal's elected local governments are well placed to take ownership and begin keeping records of India-bound migrants.

Extreme stories shape the Nepali public's perception on migration: from stories of unspeakable abuse at one end, to tales of migrants-turned-millionaires on the other. While important, perhaps the average migrant also deserves attention, the ones who go abroad for a few years,



OMASTHARA

get the jobs they were promised at the salary agreed, remit frequently, and come home better off than when they left.

These uneventful and mundane experiences may be the stories of a majority of Nepali migrants, but fall through the cracks in media coverage of the issue. Because these tales never make it to the headlines, the risk is that only the ones of extreme hardship or reward shape public opinion on migration.

One female domestic worker returnee from Makwanpur told me: "There is a perception that if you have returned as a domestic worker, you are impure because you engaged in sexual activities, even if unwillingly."

Moving anecdotes and ad-hoc generalisations about migration can have grave consequences. Administrative data on legal migration exist, but provide an incomplete understanding of its nuances. They miss out on important facets like the actual terms of employment and recruitment costs, the reality of undocumented workers, social costs and the state of the returnees.

They also do not account for opportunity costs and counterfactuals: are migrants really choosing to overlook equally good-earning prospects in Nepal as is increasingly believed in Nepal? Or are these views shaped by anecdotes that cannot be generalised?

All this matters because curbing migration has public appeal in Nepal, even though research and evidence show that as countries develop and incomes grow, migration too increases to a certain point before falling at an income per capita of between PPP\$5,000–6,000. Nepal is only at the early stages of development, and far from this

threshold.

Curbing unsafe and unrewarding migration should, however, be a policy concern and there are many initiatives in Nepal aimed at addressing those. A rigorous evaluation of these programs and a culture of evidence-based policymaking, however, has remained weak and deserves more attention.

When migrants are so desperate to travel abroad, asking them to slow down to consider all alternatives and to be better prepared, is often too challenging. However, Korea proves that aspirant migrants are willing to spend months learning

a language and preparing for an overwhelmingly oversubscribed test if it promises a secure future.

The same cannot be said about training programs for other countries where investing in skills has not always guaranteed a better outcome. Even if uptake has improved for pre-departure training, how much better off are our migrants who have taken these classes? Without honest and rigorous evaluation, we will not know what works and what does not. We then risk becoming complacent and replicating similar programs.

The Global Compact on Migration offers somewhat more clarity on how these safeguards can be made operational. For example, it seeks out-of-the-box thinking like the Global Skill Partnership model which will directly involve employers and/or governments in destination countries in trainings, both in the curriculum design as well as financing.

Such a skill partnership pilot initiative can also allow for a home-based track that would enable stayers to benefit from such programs. The onus to leverage the Compact for such practical purposes and innovations rests on us.

At this stage, it is still unclear how the Marrakesh agreement will help address the lapses in Nepal's migration governance. In such cases, we are yet to see if and how the Global Compact on Migration can complement our ongoing efforts so that it is not limited to rhetoric. 🇳🇵



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The science of learning

Nepal’s schools need to add STEM-based instruction to prepare the country for the future

Prakriti Kandel

Now that school enrolment in Nepal is approaching 100%, attention has turned to upgrading the quality of instruction and keeping the curriculum in tune with the times with a stronger focus on science and mathematics.

This is because STEM education that integrates science, technology, engineering and mathematics in experiment-based learning is now needed in everyday life, and in every profession.

With the convergence of technology, all appliances and applications need hands-on technical experience. However, most education in Nepali schools is still light years behind with rote-based text book learning of stultifying and irrelevant content.

“A focus on STEM education can unleash students’ creativity, and it begins with small steps,” explains Irina Sthapit who was involved in STEM education in Nepal is now at Stanford University. “Hands-on STEM learning is not about fancy equipment, but how we can use the simplest of materials to encourage students to think and create.”

Sthapit used paper cups to make rudimentary robots that could make sketches, and says STEM instruction is missing an ‘A’ for art, and the acronym should actually be STEAM. She says future careers will depend on students being fluent with technology, arts and humanities, and they have to be able to adapt for jobs of the future.

Robotics Association of Nepal’s Manoj Lekhak agrees: “Even if students make simple lamps, they can learn about electricity, design-thinking, and create useful products.” Starting schooling with the basics of science, technology



MONIKA DEUPALA

and mathematics can radically improve learning. And adding ‘art’ in STEAM encourages students to enhance their 4Cs: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication.

By working on projects like designing automatic street lights using photoresistors, or wearable tech with solar-powered LEDs, school-going children come up with

solutions for real-life problems such as load-shedding and energy efficiency.

In recent years, research has shown that STEM education must start early, from primary school or even younger, to lay foundations of necessary thinking skills and learning culture.

The Nepal government has been talking about creating

child-friendly schools, which also entails an engaging learning process. But in most government schools, especially in remote areas, teachers are unable to align learning with experimental activities, and are often unaware of the latest

technological advances. Moreover, there is pressure on them to finish a rigid course for the supposed supreme measure of success: exams.

The process of change must start with a new government strategy to prioritise STEM

The World of Science

Nations across the world have recognised the importance of STEM, and have taken steps to include it in their education system.

Finland has a strong emphasis on STEM-philosophy in learning. A research-based master’s degree is a prerequisite for all teachers, who in turn work to foster inquiry and problem solving skills. Since 2004, technology was included in the craft curriculum that encourages students to design and create products. Standardised tests do not dominate learning, and teachers are given time to thoroughly plan classes.

STEM education is also big in

Singapore. In 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, “In the next 50 years, we need strong STEM capabilities to be what we should be - a vibrant, exciting, advanced society.” Singapore honours its teachers, and only the top 5% of graduates are recruited as teachers.

South Korea has focused on STEAM (the ‘A’ is for ‘art’) to engage students and inspire creativity. Teachers receive STEAM-specific training and a study by KOFAC revealed that students in STEAM classes showed greater interest in all different elements of science, and demonstrated enhanced creative thinking skills.

When he was US president, Barack Obama

TOP TEN

Countries performing the best in Math, Science and Reading in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the OECD in 2016.

launched the *Educate to Innovate* project that worked to train 100,000 STEM teachers and increase federal investment in STEM. Obama said in 2013: “How do we create an all-hands-on-deck approach to science, technology, engineering, and math? We need to make this a priority to train an army of new teachers in these subject areas, and to make sure that all of us as a country are lifting up these subjects for the respect that they deserve.”

In China, there is a nationwide effort

for a comprehensive STEM education system from policy-making right down to curriculum reform and teaching innovation.

STEM education is encouraged in Switzerland and Germany, where students engage in hands-on experiments and activities in class. Ireland released a STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026 which presents objectives, actions and implementation of policies for STEM education in the country.



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learning, experts say. Teachers need to receive experiential training, and teaching-learning processes in classrooms must change. Scientists and teachers agree that instead of simply listening to lectures, children would learn more by making and inventing, using their hands to expand their minds and come up with solutions to real world problems.

Suyog Shrestha, a Nepali particle physicist at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, notes that Nepal’s schools need to attach a premium to hands-on experimenting in schools. “Nepali education puts a lot of emphasis on deriving and memorising formulae, applying them to get an answer, and to pass exams,” Shrestha said in an interview. “There is not enough emphasis on experiments. For example, I never had any exposure to laboratory work till Grade 11.”

Beyond this, school leadership plays a vital role to envision the philosophy of learning, provide support to teachers and ensure accountability. Most government schools that have done well have done so because of the activism of their leadership.

In Dhading’s Bhubaneswori school, principal Ram Chandra Acharya worked consistently to foster responsibility in teachers for quality education so that the school even succeeded in attracting students from private schools.

But Acharya also realises that Nepal is behind on STEM education, and is concerned that teachers themselves may not have adequate training to pass on that knowledge. He thinks there should be a provision to compulsorily post undergraduate and graduate science students to public schools as temporary support teachers to improve the quality of instruction.

STEM education is urgently needed for innovation and Nepal’s sustainable economic future as well. The country has a lot of catching up to do, and the few Nepalis who have achieved notable scientific breakthroughs have done so after going abroad.

Moreover, with unprecedented growth in all STEM sectors, there is rising concern about how Artificial Intelligence will affect the future job



BIKRAM RAI

market, removing options available today and creating new ones that do not even exist yet.

The fact that there are young Nepalis involved in cutting-edge scientific research across the world proves that given the opportunity, they could be contributing to STEM-related fields back home. Many brilliant Nepali scientists have gone on to work in organisations such as NASA and CERN, or have made breakthroughs in transplant surgery or astrophysics.

If students had more opportunities starting at a young age in school in Nepal, many more could in future achieve even greater success. STEM education is not an absolute solution to the crisis in Nepal’s education, but it is a significant gap which if filled can empower students to find jobs, and be innovators. 🇳🇵

Innovating in Nepal

Mahabir Pun (*above*) does not just talk about science education, the Magsaysay Awardee has been working hard to retain Nepali technical talent in Nepal through his National Innovation Center.

Just like he himself returned to Nepal from America, he wants Nepali scientists to come back to nurture science and engineering graduates to become entrepreneurs and bring economic growth. Pun’s Centre still lacks adequate funding but is already supporting a range of projects in science, engineering and technology which include medical drones, alternative animal protein resources for poultry and an e-commerce platform.

Pun says reversing the brain drain is a tough task, but there are measures that can be taken without much money to improve the chance of retaining Nepal’s science-minded students. “There have to be laboratories, equipment and tools for professionals to work in. Mentoring is another

important element to help youths to reach their potential, but the main ingredient is transferring your passion to the students,” Pun told *Nepali Times*.

Suyog Shrestha, a Nepali scientist at the particle research station at CERN in Geneva also notes that the least policymakers can do is to create policies at the national level to invest in science and technology and to relate those investments to development goals.

“I know several Nepalis, all world-class scientists working abroad, who want to return to Nepal but will not because there is so much uncertainty and distrust,” Shrestha says, adding that some have returned in spite of initial drawback.

Still, scientists like Pun have not been deterred by a cynical working environment, bureaucratic hurdles, and discouragement. But if they can overcome those givens, scientists can provide platforms for today’s students to get be a part of, and even initiate, their own state-of-the-art research in Nepal. Pun is a living example that it can be done.

Green STEM

After decades of emphasising environmental education, Nepal’s Curriculum Development Centre under the Ministry of Education is now planning to remove Health, Population and Environment (HPE) as a compulsory subject, and integrating its content into other science and social studies subjects.

This controversial move, it is feared, will detach students from environment related-exposure during their high school education, especially at a time when pollution, global warming and water scarcity are such important topics with impacts on health.

However, government curriculum developers under pressure from some donor agencies arguing that HPE has not been



HABELI OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTER

very effective because, like other subjects, students had been just memorising concepts like biodiversity and conservation without understanding them -- just so they could write long answers during examinations.

Proponents of environmental education, however, say that with climate change, air and water pollution, wetland destruction and rapid urbanisation becoming serious national and global crises, far from removing the subject, Nepali students need to understand it even more in-depth.

Reshu Aryal works at Habeli Outdoor Learning Centre outside Kathmandu that gives students an immersive outdoor learning experience.

“Children today need radical awareness about building climate resilience. They need to learn about the human rights connection to the environment, and

about the natural resourcefulness of Nepal to be innovative and create a sustainable economy,” she told *Nepali Times*.

Incorporating the need for environmental protection as a strong element of STEM would empower students to amalgamate science, technology and engineering to create sustainable solutions, Aryal added.

By combining environment and engineering, for example, Nepal’s future professionals would not treat environmental protection as just an after-thought in infrastructure and health projects. Activists argue that adding nature and environment studies into STEM will dilute their importance at a time when sustainable development should be Nepal’s primary focus. Instead, they advocate more intense training of teachers for hands-on field instruction of environmental subjects and nature studies.

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Any arriving or dear departed passenger at Kathmandu Airport will have noticed that after Nepal was selected to be one of the top ten most popular destinations for tourists in 2019, the authoritarians have made a real effort to spruce up the country’s one and only aeronautical gateway.

Improvements are visible from the moment one lands to the time one’s flight out is cancelled. At a time when there is so little good news to cheer us up, it is especially heartening to note that the airport is not congested anymore. This is because of the grumblement’s well-executed strategy to make the terminal building so inhospitable that Tribhuvan Unintentional Airport was voted the world’s worst airport third year in a row. The ploy worked: people just stopped coming. Voila! The over-crowding problem was solved.

Similar ingenious tactics have been employed to resolve the problem of smelly loos. Readers with a nose for news will remember a time when, invariably, passengers using toilets in the terminal became terminally ill. The concentration of ammonia and hydrogen sulphide inside the euphemistically named ‘rest rooms’ were designed to closely approximate the atmosphere of the planet, Uranus. (An appropriately named planet, I might add.)

There has been a huge improvement in the toilet situation, as we discovered during a recent inspection. Large signs have been placed at the doors of urinals and arsenals: ‘Closed For Repairs’. In one bold stroke, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAN’T) has cleverly removed the stink. “We figured that if no one uses the toilet it will not smell,” explained the CAN’T Spokesperson speaking from behind a surgical mask on condition of complete anonymity.

There have been other visible improvements. Recently, arriving passengers must have noticed that private parking has been moved from just outside the arrival area down to Ringworm Road. This entails passengers having to make a steep descent down a 30% incline with luggage in tow to get to waiting vehicles. The Spokesperson said this was to provide arriving tourists an authentic first impression of Nepal, and to ensure that their trek begins the moment they get out of the airport, thus giving them more value for money.

Great care has been taken to maintain Nepal’s international brand as a top adventure destination. Arriving visitors are provided no assistance at all and have to figure out the deliberately-complicated arrival formalities for themselves. This is to test your survival skills, emotional maturity and patience and to separate the wheat from the chaff. For instance, if you lose your temper after a two hour wait at immigration, let’s be frank, Nepal is not for you. If you can’t handle that, how do you expect to survive a one week wait in Lukla for a flight out?

It is to preserve Nepal’s unique heritage that while all other airports in the world have metal detectors before you get on a plane, here we check for metal after you land. A new Metal-Free Zone has been declared recently in the arrival area after immigration, and this is to deter anyone wearing gold rings and/or bangles from smuggling such contraband into the country. Those with 33kg of gold in their false bottoms can bypass this x-ray



screening and be whisked away straight to their waiting armoured SUVs outside.

Another test is to see whether you can wait in multiple lines without blowing a gasket. After your plane had to wait in line for one-and-half hours to land, and another hour waiting for a parking bay, you have to queue up for the e-visa line, the visa payment line, the immigration line, the gold smuggler detection line, the baggage line, the line to have your baggage tag verified, and the taxi line.

And you have to get into the same lines in reverse order to get out of the country: 1st x-ray line, check-in, escalator line, immigration, 2nd x-ray line, line to enter the pre-departure sauna chamber, the x-rated pat-down line, the full body massage line at the ramp located 6” above Nepali air space if you are flying to India, and your plane has to wait in line for start-up clearance giving you the chance to earn more ground miles.

All these queues are designed to give departing visitors a lasting impression of just how disciplined we are as a nation. And don’t you dare come back: we don’t want the congestion at our airport to give the world a bad impression about Nepal.



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