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YOUNG MINDS: Students of Betal School in Kailali attend one of 27,000 public schools across Nepal where 80% of children study.



BIKRAM RAI

Class struggle

Every time any government in Nepal sets up a ‘High-level Commission’ it is either a cover-up, or proof of another populist measure to silence critics. The latter may be true for the commission which recommended this month that Nepal’s private schools be phased out. Commission members, some of whose children were themselves educated in private schools in Nepal or abroad, argued that the new constitution stipulates all education be free and compulsory at the basic level, and free up to the secondary level. Inevitably, the High-level Education Commission’s report was roiled in controversy over the provision that all private schools should be turned into non-profit community schools within the next ten years. In an ideal state, free and compulsory education would be appropriate and, indeed, necessary. Nepal’s education is over-

commercialised: private medical education has become a scam, there is blatant corruption in the university affiliation process, and 10+2 school system is an assembly-line industry. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states that free education is a fundamental right, but its Article 26 adds that parents have a prior right to choose the type of education they want for their children. Educationists say that if the government’s schools were of superior quality, there would be no need for private schools, which have reversed the trend of Nepalis going abroad for education. “Private schools will automatically shut down if the standard of government schools are as good as private ones,” says Nagendra Aryal of Kathmandu Model School.

Today, 80% of students in the country are enrolled in 27,000 government schools, and even if the remaining 8,000 private schools became non-profit, they could not accommodate children now going to community schools. The line is further blurred with the Commission’s provision that children from high-income families and foreigners will still have to pay fees. Nepal’s private schools have introduced progressive and innovative curricula absent in most government schools. We have also seen that in areas where government schools have maintained standards, parents prefer them to private schools (see page 14-15). DK Dhungana of the Private and Boarding Schools’ Organisation of Nepal (PABSON) says flatly: “The government made schools register

as companies, it cannot force them now to be converted into trusts without proper compensation.” Baikuntha Aryal of the Ministry of Education told *Nepali Times* that the Commission’s report will be presented to the government in the next few days. **Prakriti Kandel**



The Karnali

Go online for 5-part multimedia series on an epic 1,100km journey from Tibet to India, down Nepal’s longest river.

PAGE 8-9

**LOWEST
COMMON
DENOMINATOR**
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

If you still need proof about the poor quality of government schools in Nepal, just visit one of them. Not at a remote village in a remote district, but right here in the heart of the capital.

Dark and dingy classrooms, cold as a refrigerator in winter, decrepit furniture, absent teachers, putrid waterless latrines. Classrooms are nearly empty, and most of the students are girls. Parents have such a low opinion of government schools that they send children to more expensive private schools — ingrained patriarchy means government schools are deemed just fine for the girls.

Still, some 80% of students in the 35,000 schools in Nepal go to government and community-run schools, while about 18% go to private ones. Yet, only 30% of children enrolled in government schools make it to Grade 10, while 77% of students in private schools do. Only 25% of students in government schools pass the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), while 81% of private school students graduate.

The state of state-run schools is the result of chronic, criminal failure of successive

for free and compulsory education for all Nepali children. But this does not factor in the crucial issue of quality. Private schools are thriving purely because of high demand from parents for better education. They work hard in Nepal and abroad to be able to afford the fees. Nepali parents deserve the choice to send their children to private schools if government schools are not meeting minimum standards.

The only way to remedy the crisis in education is to improve the quality of instruction in community schools. In fact, we have reported in this paper about many instances where private schools have lost students to government schools with motivated teachers whose students excel in SEEs.

Private schools are profit-driven, and that is their incentive to maintain a quality threshold. Teachers are compelled to be more accountable because there is direct supervision and an absence of unionisation that prevails in government schools. Parents work hard to be able to afford these schools.

Turning private schools into non-profit

trusts would remove the incentive investors have to open schools to meet the demand. Enforcing that rule would kill private education, and reduce Nepal's education to the lowest common denominator.

The

private school system is definitely not fair to poorer parents. But a crucial reason why so many citizens are mired in poverty is precisely because they themselves did not get relevant, proper education. No matter how commercialised, private schools at least provide better level of instruction. And citizens have made it clear they prefer more expensive quality education over shoddy, free education.

Taking away the option of a private school education would compel many Nepali parents to send their children abroad for high school studies, further exacerbating Nepal's balance of trade deficit.

The High-Level Commission and Minister Pokhrel who heads it would do well to pay attention to the 80% of students who still go to government schools, and ensure that they get the level of education that will guarantee better earnings and skills when they grow up.

In a globalised world, Nepal must prepare human resources that can compete with other countries. The emphasis should be on upgrading the quality of community schools to ensure our children's — and our nation's — future.



BHANU BHATTACHARYA

governments to run its schools properly. So a 25-member High-Level National Education Commission headed by none other than Education Minister Girirajmani Pokhrel has taken the populist route to recommend that all private schools be scrapped in ten years. In that period, the fee structure of private schools and their taxation will be determined by local governments.

Of all the instances of the Nepal government making decisions to shoot itself in the foot, this one is the most appalling, and one with serious consequences to the future of the country. It is like the pilot of a plane who finds one of his two engines has malfunctioned, and shuts down the one that is still running.

To be sure, there is over-commercialisation in the private school system, with over-charging and lack of quality control. But the government's job is to improve the quality of the schools it runs, not close down the schools that are trying to fill the gap in quality left by the state school system.

The High-level Commission says it is institutionalising constitutional provisions

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The editorial in Nepali Times issue #433 of 9-14 January 2008 ten years ago dealt with the elected Maoist government lurching from one crisis to another. Selected excerpt:

'The Maoists in government are showing themselves to be crisis-prone. Why would they want to destabilise their own government by bringing these crises on themselves?'

It is misleading to think of the Maoists as being split between moderates and hardliners. They are split between hardliners and even more hardliners. Prime Minister Dahal has no time for anything else but to deal with the crisis of the week: the judiciary row, army recruitment, Pashupati, attacks on media, the wholesale shutting down of industry. What's next week's crisis? At the end of his term, Dahal will not be judged by his Machiavellian tactics but by whether or not a truly inclusive constitution is written in the stipulated timeframe.'



ONLINE PACKAGES



KARNALI BLUES

Watch video of the 1,100km journey down the mighty and remote Karnali River from Tibet, through Nepal to India. The water of the river holds hope for this impoverished region of Nepal, but the people see it as a curse. Go online for a five-part series on the Karnali, with more photographs and videos. *Story: page 8-9.*



FUN LEARNING

Travel to a school in Dang to follow a Teach for Nepal fellow through her school day. Be a part of the fun learning in classrooms and the vibrant space that students have created in a neglected government school. *Story: page 14-15.*



BACK IN BAGLUNG

South Korean journalist Sangmin Kim first came in Nepal seven years ago as a volunteer to a remote school in Baglung. This month he revisited Sigana Higher Secondary School in Tityang to reconnect. Follow Kim in his journey to find out how many things have changed for the better. *Story: page 14-15.*

AMAZING ANITA

If a female owns a repair shop and is successful and capable at it, why do the ignorant customers ask for a male mechanic to do the job ('Anita and the art of motorcycle maintenance', Taylor Mason, #941)? Ingrained prejudices and an upbringing that perpetuates the discrimination need to be stopped and all the parents need to raise their children, regardless of sex, to be equals.

Raymond Fuller

■ Good on Anita! Wow. I hope she continues to follow her passion.

Tracey Deane

SOCIAL HIKING

It would be good if some of the benefits are shared with villages farther away from the trekking routes ('Hiking up the benefits of tourism', Sangmin Kim, #941).

Brett Johnson

GROUNDWATER

Water scarcity is further heightened by commercial water sellers draining groundwater from the Kathmandu Valley ('Nepal's silent emergency', Ajaya Dixit, #941).

Konchog Dorje

NEPAL AIRLINES

Nepal Airlines has always been a playground for politicians. Until it is privatised or made non-governmental, it cannot function on its own...It will continue to be what it is, a 'white elephant' that reaps no benefits..

Prakash Moktan

WHAT'S TRENDING



Nepal's silent emergency: springs going dry

by Ajaya Dixit

Nepal's emission of greenhouse gases maybe small, but its annual growth rate is the highest in South Asia. This column shocked readers and was widely shared among the scientific community. Go online to read the story.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most popular on Twitter

Keeping Nepal Airlines airworthy

by Sharad Ojha

Nepal's flag carrier faces multi-pronged attacks just as it prepares to spread its wings. This investigative piece was read in the thousands with many agreeing that in addition to internal problems, the airline was being target by vested interest groups. Join the debate.

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QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
In spite of being nearly 7,000m high, Mt Machapuchre's snow has melted away even in the height of winter. The link between the Paris Rulebook and the snowless Machapuchre massif is closer than we think. @dixit_ajaya analyses in his column.

Puru Shah @digitalsubway
The melting of snow on Himalayan peaks is alarming!

Dolma Himalayan Energy @DolmaEnergy
This is why Nepal needs to urgently substitute coal-fired electricity imports with cleaner alternatives that can still meet growing energy demand in the dry months.

The Glacier Trust @theglaciertrust
Interesting column here by @dixit_ajaya from @ISETNepal on the messiness of Nepal's policies on climate change.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
The Airbus case has become political football as agents who lost out on the deal, rival carriers that stand to lose if Nepal Airlines does well, and those interested in its future privatisation, are all involved in stoking the crisis. Sharad Ojha investigates.

Bijay Amatya @bijayamatya
The real reason explained clearly.

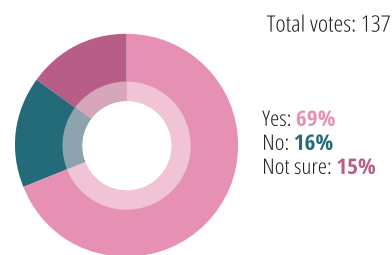
Ashok Pokharel @BigBlackYak
Sharad Ojha hits the nail smack on the head!

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Forest area has nearly doubled in the past 40 years, raising new questions about who should manage it under Nepal's new federal structure. Who now owns Nepal's forests? Read the report by @SoniaAwale

pigreen @pigreen1
Need to distinguish forest from uncultivated land - but question is important... where community forestry is operating, that should be supported but there may be a need for local rural municipalities to play a part.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #942

Q. Do you believe the allegations of irregularities in the airbus deal?



Weekly Internet Poll #943
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should private schools be converted into community schools?



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Reading up on Communism at Nati Bajra's

Kathmandu readers used to flock to a tiny bookshop to buy books by Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung

Last week, linguist, writer and song composer Nati Bajra passed away. He was not well known in the mainstream media, but if you were interested in reading five decades ago in inner city Kathmandu, Nati Bajra was the man to go to.



1/2 FULL
Anil Chitrakar

People went to him for books, magazines and newspapers of all kinds. His little book store at Bhotahiti in a small alley that led into Dagu Baha was where people sat on a narrow wooden bench with a straw mat. In the age before Internet and television, and when Radio Nepal was too boring, they browsed, bought publications, and lingered to chat with him. Nati Bajra was a one-man public sphere.

Among the books and magazines he sold in those days were the beautiful printed, glossy magazines called China and 'Cheen' in Nepali. There were some really elegant hard cover books by Kim Il Sung. Today many visitors ask why or how Nepal has a Communist Party in power with a majority popular vote. Nati Bajra made a big contribution.

These magazines and books painted a utopian picture of communism, and portrayed the United States as the world's enemy. Adults read the English



COMMUNIST COVE: The bookshop Nati Bajra (above) ran was a haven for Nepali leftists, who flocked here to read books by Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung, and chat with the owner.

and Nepali editions with great care and discussed the contents at their local tea shops and rest houses. There was no Nepali translation of *Animal Farm* to counter the propaganda literature.

When the adults were done reading, we children made these

glossy publications into text book covers, greatly increasing their shelf life. Whoever designed, published and shipped these publications to Nati Bajra at Bhotahiti, achieved their mission. The publicity value of the books were immense, and 50 years later



we have a Nepal Communist Party government.

Beyond books, there were also film screenings of how the North Korean and the Chinese armies defeated the Americans in the Korean War.

King Mahendra was right when he is said to have told Prime Minister Nehru that communism would not travel to Nepal in a taxi over the newly-inaugurated Arniko Highway. But it did travel through books, magazines and films, and brought up an entire generation of Nepalis to get a glossy and glorified version of Communism.

There are now Nepalis travelling to China and to the USA all the time, and this generation will vote very differently. Given

the fact that our last local elections were held in 1997 and then again in 2017, we do not have a pattern to go by yet. The reason why many local leaders, representing Communist parties, got re-elected could be because they continued to serve and organise the local population despite the fact that they were not in government.

Today, the world is different, but not much has changed in using the media, this time social media, to manipulate public opinion. The world of tomorrow will be the result of the electronic media and the fact that many have had a chance to visit places and talk to people with different points of view. It will be the result of the experiences we have had.

During a trip to Boston, I met a group of young 'inventors' from Rajasthan. They had taken a ride on the brand new subway in New Delhi and were not at all impressed with the system in Boston. Young Chinese who went to the United States and took on English first names are now moving back to China with Chinese first names.

Nepali worldview is also changing rapidly as the epicentre of the global economy drifts to the Eastern Hemisphere. Hence do not be surprised if we hear about more and more Nepalis coming back home to raise yaks and buffalos, instead of camel and sheep in the Gulf countries. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc.



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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Gypsy Girl Mosaic

Turkish Airlines' TK6 Chicago-Istanbul flight took the missing pieces of the Gypsy Girl Mosaic back to Turkey. The pieces had been smuggled abroad and have a



historical importance for all civilisations living across Turkey. They will be displayed at the Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum and will later be restored to the original.

Trips on discounts

Qatar Airways announced its latest global sales promotion designed to inspire passengers to explore new and exciting destinations in 2019. Passengers can enjoy exclusive discounts up to 50%, bonus



Qmiles and Qpoints of 50% in Economy Class and double Qmiles and Qpoints in Business and First Class, valid on all Qatar Airways flights booked from 7-16 January for travel between 7 January and 31 December 2019.

New Tata CUV

Tata Motors along with Siprati Trading announced the launch of its newest Tata NRG. The SUV inspired vehicle, positioned as 'Nepal's Youngest Compact Utility Vehicle (CUV)' is powered by the 1.2L Revotron petrol engine, and will be available with 5-speed manual transmission. It comes in three color options. The Tata NRG is available at an introductory price of Rs2,955,000.

Teach for Nepal

Sunrise Bank has sponsored Teach For Nepal (TFN) with Rs500,000 to cover the cost of recruitment, pre-service training, on-going support, leadership workshop and stipend. The bank supports TFN's movement to improve the quality of education system in public schools by recruiting university graduates and young professionals for teaching fellowships. (See page 14-15)

France-Nepal 70 years

The Secretary General of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne was on an official visit in Kathmandu from 9-10 January and discussed bilateral, regional and multilateral issues with Nepal's foreign secretary Shanker Das Bairagi. During the visit, Gourdault-Montagne and Bairagi launched commemorative events to mark the 70th anniversary of Nepal-France diplomatic relations.

prabhu BANK

Amrita Acharia comes home

Sewa Bhattarai

Amrita Acharia arrived at the children’s shelter in Godavari on Friday morning wearing a pastel shawl with intricate woven patterns. When complimented, she replied with a smile: “This is Palpali Dhaka, we went all the way to Tansen to get it.”

Daughter of a Nepali father and Ukrainian mother, the *Game of Thrones* actress is in Nepal after 16 years on a journey to reconnect with her roots, and a long-awaited to visit the ChoraChori children’s charity she is involved with.

ChoraChori rescues trafficked Nepali children from circuses as well as victims of rape and abuse in India, giving them skills-training, rehabilitating them, and reuniting them with

families when possible. Acharia helps the UK-based charity with fundraising dinners and other promotional activities.

After leaving Nepal at the age of seven, Acharia grew up in different parts of Europe and turned to acting. The HBO series *Game of Thrones* made her a household name seven years ago. She acted in the role of Irri, maid to the heroine Daenerys, in the show reputed to be the world’s most watched.

“People get killed so easily in that show, I was lucky to have survived for two seasons,” she laughs. “That was so long ago, but it was a good start for me. It opened the door for me to work in other shows.”

After that, Acharia appeared in many British and Norwegian productions, and is currently busy as a doctor in *Good Karma Hospital*. She doesn’t know whether her father, a real-life doctor, finds her take on the medical profession convincing. “He enjoys it as a show, but he is also aware of the artistic liberties we take,” she says.

Good Karma Hospital is set in Kerala, but filmed in Sri Lanka. It was while on location there that she was reminded a visit to Nepal was long overdue both to see the land she grew up in, and also to visit ChoraChori.

“I like how ChoraChori hosts children in a safe environment, provides them with education and skills, and makes them independent, and that is what drew me to help them,” she says. “A lot of people know me, and I want to use that fame to shed some light on the issues of Nepal’s children and

the efforts by charities like ChoraChori to address them.”

On this trip, Acharia also trekked to Ghandruk, visited Butwal, Bhairawa, and Arghakhanchi to meet her father’s side of the family. She does not remember the Nepal of her childhood much, and her impression of this trip is that Nepal is a little busier, but otherwise the same.

Does it feel like home? “I have lived in so many places that I adapt easily,” she answers. “So I am always partly at home, and partly an outsider everywhere. In Nepal, I found there are still people who think of me as family. And that feels good.”

Raised in Britain and Norway, Acharia calls herself multilingual and multicultural, but has not been typecast as someone from a minority community in films. She says: “I don’t look like a typical Asian. I could be cast as anything, from Caucasian to Latina to Asian. So being of mixed race is actually an advantage for me.”

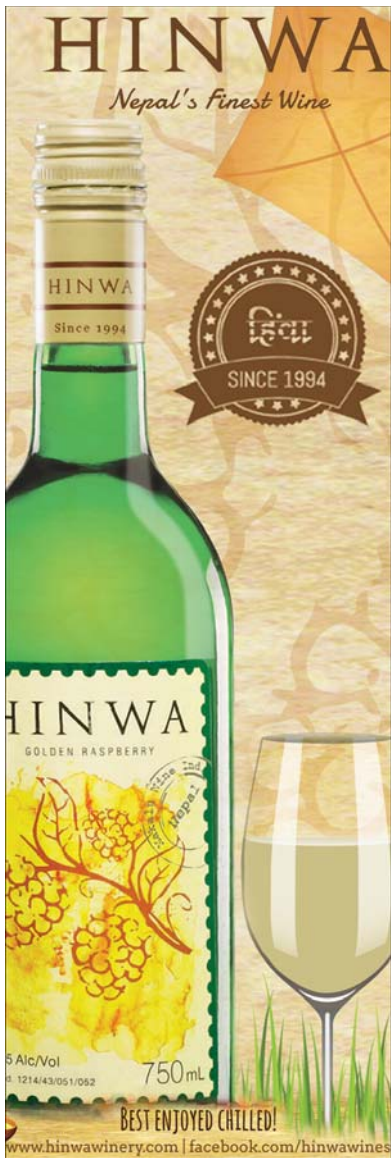
Acharia’s parents spoke to each other in Ukrainian and Russian, so she lost touch with Nepali. But she says she enjoyed being immersed in Nepali everywhere on this trip. In Godavari, Acharia asked in halting, accented Nepali what the girls learnt in tailoring class.

She has never watched a Nepali movie, but says she is open to acting in one if she likes the project. “But I do not like my voice to be dubbed, so I must first learn Nepali,” she adds in English. “Maybe next time I can answer your questions in Nepali.”

BIKRAM RAJ

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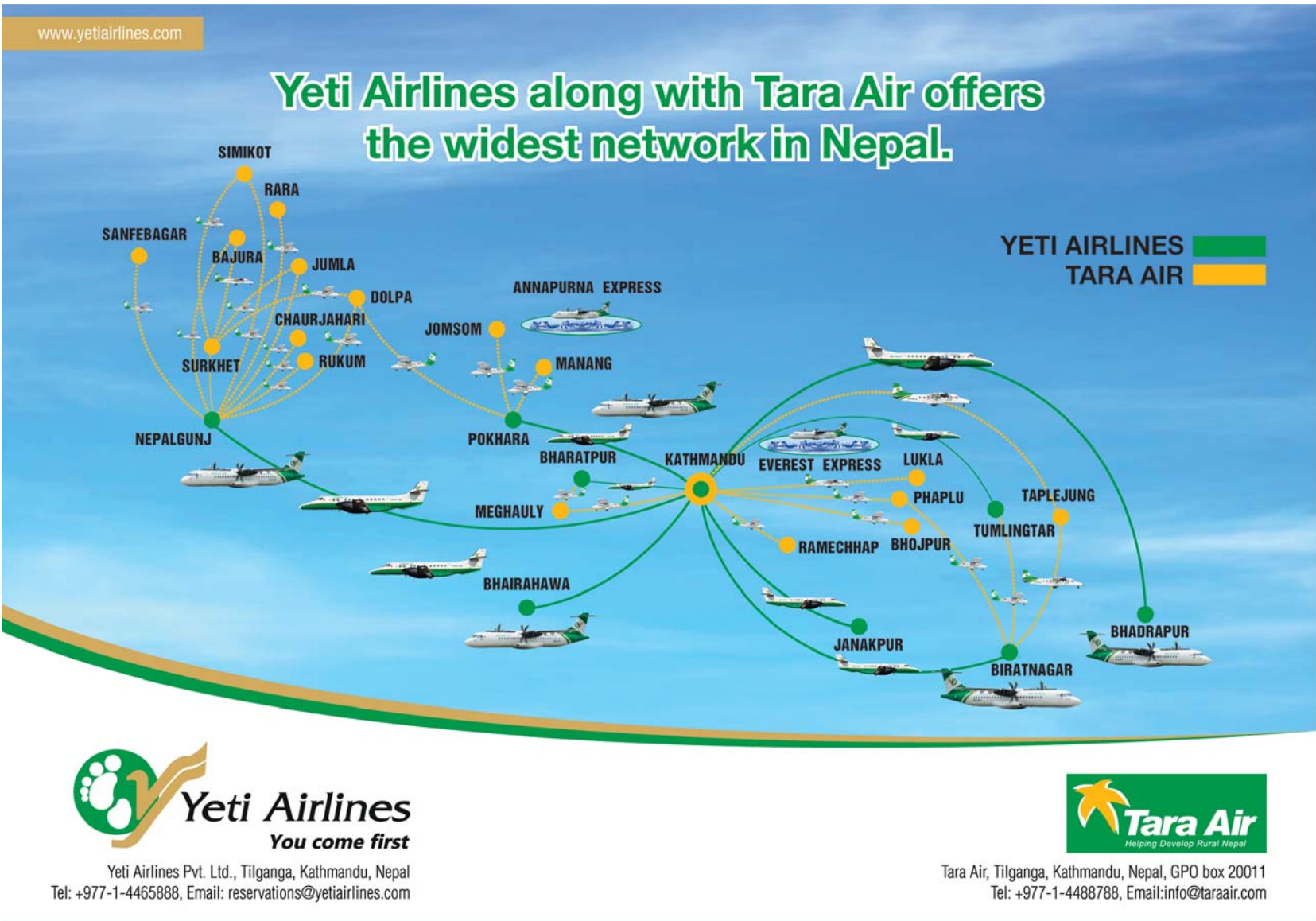
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The vanishing land

GOING GOING GONE: The last remaining fields in Thimi have been taken over by real estate developers (*below, left*). Farmers using the traditional technique of replenishing the nutrients in the soil for the next crop (*below, right*).

Kathmandu’s agricultural families, do not want to work in farms. But they do visit their mother every Saturday, and help sell her cauliflowers and spinach in the local market.

This type of farming is one of the last of its kind in Kathmandu Valley: traditional, organic and hand-grown with no help from machinery. In a couple of years, farmers carrying fresh vegetables in woven baskets down the streets of Bhaktapur, calling out to customers will be a rare sight.

Agronomist Bhola Man Singh Basnet who used to be a scientist at the Nepal Agricultural Research Council says Kathmandu’s farmers had developed a very successful cycle using crop rotation to replenish the nutrients in the soil, and to keep the land fertile.

“People from all over the world noticed our techniques and productivity,” he says, “but farming is becoming obsolete.”

Nepali farmers used a special technique to grow vegetables in tiny parcels of land to sustain their families. It fertilised the soil with organic black soil and cow manure, giving the Valley’s vegetables an amazing taste full of nutrients.

But, Basnet says, “Land for farming is decreasing as the population increases, so new techniques are needed to meet food needs. Chemical fertilisers and green houses are being used, but the quality of these vegetables is not the same ... quality is not even considered important.”

Basnet says the trend of building on prime agricultural land that started in Kathmandu is now spreading to other urban areas of Nepal, and younger educated people from farming families would rather work in salaried jobs.

Babu Krishna is another Thimi farmer, whose children live in Australia. He says: “Farming has been in my family for generations, I have farmed all my life, but now the fields are replaced by houses. I think my generation is the last in my family that will farm.”



ALL PHOTOS: TAYLOR MASON

Kathmandu Valley’s urban sprawl is gobbling up Thimi’s last remaining vegetable patches

Taylor Mason

Ratna Rani Newar grew up helping her grandparents grow vegetables in the fertile farms around Thimi. Today, she is afraid her livelihood passed down through generations

will be taken away.

Kathmandu Valley civilisation was built on the agriculture that thrived in the alluvium of the former lakebed. But as the city expanded, the farms were steadily taken over by houses. Now, the last remaining tracts of what were once Thimi’s famous vegetable farms are also being filled over with concrete.

“I have been growing vegetables in Thimi ever since I learnt to walk, but these days people do not care about farming, they just want property to build houses,” said Newar, who is a single mother of four daughters. Her husband left her because she did not have a son.

Newar’s daughters, like most of the educated younger generation of

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NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.



The rain this week has cleared some of the pollution temporarily, this has made the sun shine more brightly and will raise the maximum daytime temperature to 18 Celsius by the weekend, but it will still be cold at 4 Celsius. This means Kathmandu's smog will be trapped in an inversion layer and make the air unhealthy at night and early mornings.

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The smart people of Piple

A Chitwan village has banned new construction in agricultural land

Mukesh Pokhrel
in Chitwan

Two years ago Mong Tamang sold 1.5 hectares of his farm. When the new owner built a road along the land to turn it into a new housing colony, local farmers were up in arms, and prevented it. Dhab Thapaliya sold half a hectare of his land to Kathmandu-based businessmen three years ago. But villagers again prevented houses being constructed, and Thapaliya had to return the advance he was paid. Today, 2,000 out of 3,500 households in Piple raise cattle and grow vegetables, and much of the credit goes to Nabaraj Onta, who returned from Korea after 25 years and put into practice what he learnt there working in a farm. He brought back seeds, and distributed it free among his fellow-villagers. “He has a vital role in encouraging us to take up farming and protect our land,” says Rameshwar Oli of the dairy cooperative in Piple. The cooperative has a farmers’ savings and loans scheme, providing low interest loans to farmers to buy seeds and buffaloes. All loans are paid in time, and

the cooperative also has a livestock insurance scheme. Farmers of Piple village in Chitwan say their farms are much more valuable for raising vegetables and livestock than as real estate, and have united to preserve cultivable land from being bought by developers for housing and factories. Unlike anywhere else in Nepal, they have enforced zoning criteria to classify farmlands and residential areas, and have prohibited buildings anywhere other than in areas along the road. “Legally we cannot interfere in decisions about private property, but there is an understanding among us to not sell cultivable land,” explains Danda Raj Pandey, one of the farmers who started the movement. It has been ten years since Piple people have turned to vegetable farming and animal husbandry, and transformed their village into a model agricultural settlement. Pandey himself used to buy oranges wholesale in Dhading and Gorkha to sell at

Kalimati market in Kathmandu. Today he sells vegetables and 15 litres of milk every day from his own village, and does not have to travel away from home for livelihood. He now makes Rs600,000 a year, and with his savings, has expanded his farm so he can grow more. Moti Rijal was a daily wage worker until he started farming in a small plot of his ancestral property. The farmer made more than Rs100,000 by selling just cabbages, and he decided to expand into commercial farming. He has now leased more land from neighbours to grow other vegetable cash crops. Rama Dallakoti (*pictured below* spraying vitamins on vegetables recently) also grew beans in her small plot, and in the last season she made Rs400,000 just from selling it in the market. Piple has now overtaken Gitanagar as the dairy capital of Chitwan, and local farmers sold Rs12 million worth of milk and supplied Rs10 million in vegetables to Kathmandu last year. 🇳🇵



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Karnali Sacred River C

Over the last 30 years, most major rivers in Nepal have been researched for their hydropower potential on basis of economic cost and revenue from electricity.

The Marsyangdi, Kali Gandaki, Chilime, Bhote Kosi have now been dammed, and construction is nearing completion on the Modi Khola, Tama Kosi, Upper Trisuli, Khimti. More projects are planned in Upper Marsyangdi, Bhote Kosi (Rasuwa) and West Seti.

All rivers in Nepal have some form of hydroelectric development planned for the next 20 years. But we have to stop and ask: does prosperity only mean damming rivers for electricity, or are there other more nature-friendly ways to raise living standards?

The benefits of renewable fuel sources come at a price – the destruction of the river landscapes and fragile eco-systems

around them. Fish species can be lost due to dams, and the riverine ecology is fractured by rampant development.

In the United States and Japan, overdevelopment has led to dams being dismantled so rivers can flow free again. Bhutan has declared free-flowing rivers, and even Australia has set aside the Franklin River. Norway generates 98% of its energy need with hydro, yet the river ecology is left intact for recreation and tourism.

Why cannot Nepal learn from the mistakes of other countries? We have 6,000 rivers and rivulets with a potential to generate 48,000MW, but none of them have been declared free-flowing, or protected as river heritage. Set aside at least one river on each basin to be free-flowing, and there will still be enough energy to go around. We have national parks to protect mountains, lakes, but none to protect rivers.

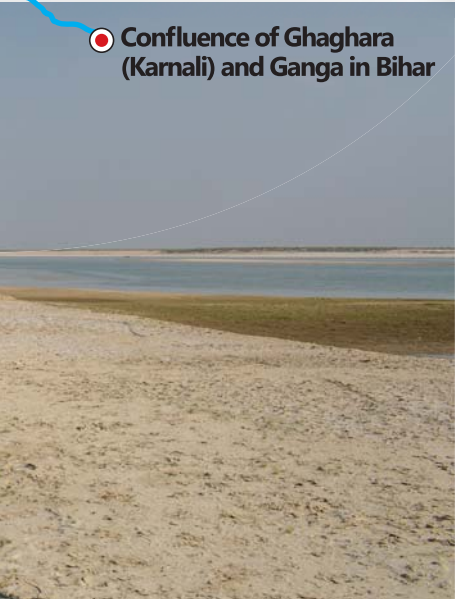
I first did a white water rafting descent

on the Karnali in 1991 and it was the most pristine river I had ever been on. Since then, we have been working to protect Nepal’s longest river from over-development that has destroyed other rivers in the country. The trouble is that the Karnali flows through Nepal’s remotest and most underserved areas, and the pressure for economic extraction is high.

Karnali River Conservation and the Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT) have been working to protect the Karnali, a river that connects Mt Kailash with Bardia National Park and the Ganga in India. There is tremendous potential for eco-adventure tourism and pilgrim trails along the Karnali corridor. Scientists from all over the world would come to study the incredible diversity of the Karnali Basin.

Just making noise was not achieving results, so we decided to put together this expedition to explore the source of the





ALL PHOTOS: NABIN BARAL

The Karnali

A 1,100km journey from the source of the Karnali in Tibet, across Nepal, to where it joins the Ganga in Bihar

Ramesh Bhushal

Unlike other rivers in Nepal, the Karnali is not regarded as auspicious because of the mistaken belief that it originates in Lake Rakshyas in Tibet. Unlike the holy Lake Mansarovar nearby, Rakshyas translates as the 'lake of the demon' because of its association with Ravana.

There are two places considered the real sources of this great 1,100km river. A spring in Mapchu Chungu in Pulan County is taken as the religious origin, while the geographically longer point is actually in the Garuda Valley below the imposing Mt Gurla Mandata.

This region around Lake Mansarovar off Nepal's northwestern tip in Tibet has religious as well as geological significance. From the four sides of the holy Mt Kailash originate four of Asia's great rivers: the Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Karnali.

The lake, mountain and rivers are revered by the Hindu, Buddhist, Bon and Jain faiths. Hindus try to make a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mt Kailash, but inaccessibility makes it hard.

One morning in late September, as an orange lozenge of a sun rose from behind the mountains, Indian pilgrims chanted prayers to Shiva on the shores of Lake Mansarovar.

We had arrived here from Kathmandu via Kerung, riding west on the Tibetan Plateau along the Brahmaputra, admiring the rare view of the Nepali Himalaya from the north: Ganesh, Manaslu, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri.

Our mission was to explore Nepal's longest river from its source in Tibet, through Humla to Kailali in Nepal, and then into Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in India where the river joins the Ganga.

The spring in Mapchu Chungu gushes out of a mountainside festooned with prayer flags, 30km northwest of Lake Mansarovar and south of Mt Kailash.

Further downstream, the river is harnessed for electricity that serves the traditional trading outpost of Taklakot. The roads here are smooth, the river banks are protected by concrete embankments, there are transmission lines.

Across the Karnali on the Nepal side, however, Hilsa is in darkness. Pema Aangmo runs a lodge here for pilgrims and tourists, and speaks frankly about Nepal government's neglect of this farflung border town.

"For us to go to Kathmandu, it takes weeks to walk and much money to fly, we are so far away no one listens to us," she says bitterly.

Hilsa may be underdeveloped, but the sound of helicopters ferrying Indian pilgrims from Simikot is constant. Living standards have improved, but Aangmo is worried about floods if the dam the Chinese have built on the Karnali upstream bursts.

From here, the Karnali flows through Nepal's underserved districts of Humla, Bajura, Kalikot, Dailekh, Achham and Surkhet. There is a lot of despair along the river. "We are too poor to make the pilgrimage to Kashi, and it will be this river that will take our ashes down," says Dila Sunar in Danda Phaya village of Humla.

But change is underway. Dynamite blasts reverberate in the gorges, as the Army builds a new road to connect China. Geo-morphologist Karen Bennett on our team was aghast at the unnecessary destruction.

"Roads are necessary, but this construction is dangerous, making the settlements along the river vulnerable," she says.

Despite the stunning unspoilt scenery, Karnali has been too remote for tourism. Except for Indian pilgrims flying overhead, or the occasional rafters, there are no outsiders here.

The wild and scenic Karnali sweeps through the mountains like a giant serpent, with narrow bends and deep canyons. But what is stunning scenery to us visitors is a curse for locals. They say the

beauty is of little use to them.

The Karnali has potential for world class rafting. But even that prospect is jeopardised because of the Upper Karnali hydropower project and the proposed Chisapani High Dam.

"We lack vision to make use of this river," says Megh Ale of the Nepal River Conservation Trust, who was with us. "For decades we talked about big hydro projects, but did nothing to boost rafting and trekking on the Karnali. We only see dams and hydrodollars."

Dal Bahadur Shahi lives in Tuinkuna at the intake site of the 900MW Upper Karnali project in Dailekh district, Nepal's biggest and the first on the river. He has been hearing about the project for the last 20 years, but it is stalled because India's GMR has failed to secure investors.

The Karnali could easily feed its people if the water of the river is used to irrigate its fertile valleys, but the region is chronically food-deficit because of the lack of investment in development. The effects of climate change is adding to the woes.

Devi Fadera from Srinagar village in Humla was in a rush in early October to harvest golden terraces of ripening rice along the banks of the Karnali.

"The weather is getting unpredictable every year, we have to bring in the paddy while the sun is shining, in case it rains," she says. The region has seen deficient winter rains for several years in a row, and there was a severe drought in 2016.

We run into Mahendra Bahadur Shahi, the chief minister of Karnali Province and ask him about his plans. Even though the problems of his people are about basic needs, the Chief Minister has grandiose plans of a rail link to China.

"We have held bilateral talks with the Chinese about a railway line from Hilsa to southern Nepal," he confides. Railway is a pipe dream when the 100km road from Hilsa to Simikot has not been completed in 25 years. But Shahi does not have time to talk about small problems like that.

After the mighty Karnali Bend, the river cuts through the Chure Hills and glides under the majestic Chisapani Bridge. Here the Karnali's channels are a lifeline for the Bardia National Park in Nepal and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary in India.

After the Karnali flows into India, its name changes to Ghaghara. The Indians have built embankments to tame the river in Bahraich and Gonda districts. The first barrage in Girijapuri diverts the river for irrigation, leaving the riverbed downstream dry.

Rajan Kotru from International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development heads a unique three-country partnership to protect what is called the Kailash Sacred Landscape in China, Nepal and India. This is not easy, given the sensitive geopolitics of the Himalaya, but Kotru says he has started a dialogue: "There is a greater realisation that coming together will benefit all."

The Karnali cuts across the Himalaya with little regard for national borders. But the three countries it traverses have not even started talking about working together to preserve this and other mighty Himalayan rivers. 🇳🇵

Ramesh Bhushal is Nepal Editor for www.thethirdpole.net. Nabin Baral is a nature photographer.

KARNALI BLUES



Watch video of the 1,100km journey down the mighty and remote Karnali River from Tibet, through Nepal to India. The water of the river holds hope for this impoverished region of Nepal, but the people see it as a curse. Go online for a five-part series on the Karnali, with more photographs and videos.

nepalitimes.com 🖱

Corridor

Nepal's longest and only free flowing river should be left as it is



Karnali and travel down with the river to its confluence with the Ganga in India. With us was geomorphologist Karen Bennett to gather science-based evidence on why it should be a free flowing river. We will use the findings to convince politicians.

A NEA report states that licenses have been issued to generate nearly 6,000MW on the tributaries of the Karnali like Humla Karnali, Mugu Karnali, Tila, West Seti etc. The GMR license for Upper Karnali has expired, so this would be the opportunity to cancel it and concentrate on projects that do not touch the main stem of the Karnali.

A pilgrim trail along the Karnali River from Chisapani to Kailash can draw Indian devotees to trek to Mansarovar, and bring Chinese Buddhists to Lumbini. Eco-tourism trails and homestays can provide local income.

The Karnali is nature's gift to Nepal and among the five best in the world for whitewater rafting and kayaking. If it is

promoted well it can lift this entire region of Western Nepal out of poverty.

The government of the province that is named after the Karnali must realise that their river is as important as Mt Everest. This can be a perfect world class Himalayan river heritage site connecting the cultures and economies of India and China through Nepal.

Look out for the 3rd National River Summit 28-31 March at the heart of the Karnali at Rakum. There will be exhibitions and presentations by scientists that highlight the unique features and potentials for this great river. 🇳🇵



Megh Ale is President of the Nepal River Conservation Trust.

EVENTS



Kids yoga

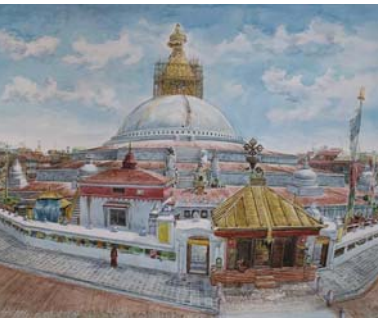
Consider sharing the breathing and mindfulness practice with your children and see how it transforms them. Spoilers: they are likely to cultivate coordination and awareness of others, while developing techniques to relax the mind and body.
Every Sunday, 4:30-5:30pm, Sooriya Wellness and Yoga Centre, Lazimpat, Rs500 (per class), (01) 4001714, 9818481972

Labour of death

A play by Caro de Feijter, *Mritiyuko Kaamdar* is the outcome of an intensive theatre workshop, based on the method of Helmond van Woudenberg, conducted by the playwright himself who is a theatre maker from Netherlands.
13 January, 3pm onwards, Kunja Theatre, Thapagaun, 9813411276

Hip Hop Coppelia

Directed by Alizé Biannic, the play tells the story of Paul, a city youth who becomes infatuated with a life-size doll, and Sophie, who dresses up as the doll, through steps of Hip Hop.
17-20 January, 1:30pm and 5:30pm, Russian Center for Science and Culture, Kamalpokhari, Rs500-1,500, 9861053015



Heritage and honest people

A solo collection exhibition by young energetic artist Rupak Rai, who has painted the heritage and honest people around Nepal with oil on canvas.
11-21 January, Classic Gallery, Chakupat, Patan, (01) 5260354, 9841224753

Dancing Latin

Get your dancing shoes ready to sway away on the biggest dance floor of the town. Come and groove to some awesome Latin beats.
13 January, 7:30-11pm, Club Fahrenheit, Thamel, 9802082557



Coffee brewing course

The most affordable coffee brewing foundation and intermediate combo course by one of the highly talented and reputed Specialty Coffee Association Certified Instructors. Miss not!
12-14 February, 9:30am-5pm, NCA Coffee Lab and Training School, 9802023082

Himalayan Hydro Expo

Attracting shareholders in hydroelectricity, irrigation and drinking in South Asian Region, the expo focuses on investment, research, production, engineering, entrepreneurship and expertise in water resource.
18-20 January, 12am onwards, Bhrikutimandap Exhibition Hall, Kathmandu, (01) 5180402



In pursuit of Dragons

A fascinating talk about the discovery, history and science of dragonflies with photos by a renowned entomologist Karen Conniff.
18 January, 10:30am, Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat, Rs500, csgninkathmandu@gmail.com

Patan on foot

Walk through narrow streets and wide courtyards in the old town of Patan and explore its intangible heritage to understand the relevance of traditions in everyday life today. Examine the scope of Newar Buddhism and evolution of Patan as an urban hub.
Every Monday and Thursday, 9-11am, \$5 per person, 9801002974, sherpashah@gmail.com

MUSIC



Pin Drop Violins

Chapter 3: Arthur Gunn's debut album, *Grahan*, launch with an opening act by Ratul Pradhan. Come on in for soaring soulful vocals and great times.
12 January, 7-10pm, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel, Rs200-500, (01) 5524860

TPIF

DJ Nick from Hong Kong is supported by Niral, Bidhan and Kiran this Friday to make your Privé night memorable one.
11 January, 8pm onwards, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, 9803394500



Beard of Harmony

An acoustic duo based in Bangalore is in town to bring back your memories of Metallica and Tool, and take you back to the Sound of Silence.
11 January, 7-8.30pm, Bikalpa Art Cafe and Bar, Pulchowk, 9851147776

Tribute Concert

A musical tribute to Queen and Red Hot Chili Peppers by local artists.
12 January, 6pm onwards, Moksh, Gyan Mandala, Jhamsikhel, Rs300-500, (01) 5528362

OUR PICK



Opened in Kathmandu on 11 January

Mary Poppins was a beloved children's book series that made a successful transition to movies in 1949. At least six feature films of Mary Poppins have been made since then, a testimony to its popularity. It is returning to screen again this week with Emily Blunt playing the eponymous Mary. Mary is a nanny with seemingly magical abilities, which she uses to bring order into the chaotic Banks family. This Disney production promises entertainment for the entire family.

DINING



The Bent Fork

This European style restaurant offers the best salads and varieties of continental dishes. Cosy evenings with family and friends. Try their vegan dish, creamy polenta with vegetable ragu.
Bishal Nagar, 9802049888

Starry Night BBQ

Enjoy a scrumptious spread of BBQ along with live performance by Tattwo Band.
Fridays, 7pm, Rs2500 Nett per person, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, (01) 4412999 Ext 7518



Prazada

Enjoy Prazada's selection of beers and wine in the lush garden with aromatic food and special pizzas accompanied by relaxing music.
Baluwatar, (01) 4410473

Empire Restaurant & Bar

Enjoy Stuffed Potato Croquette, a classic French dish, for lunch or dinner at the restaurant serving vegan as well as meat food items.
Kupondole Heights, Bakhundole, 9801112311

1905 Restaurant

Enjoy the live music along with grilled dishes and a fine selection of craft beers and wine.
Narayan Chaur, Naxal, (01) 4411348



Ventures Café

Stop by for the best fusion menu and local favourites, beers, and enjoy the breezy outdoor seating.
Baluwatar, 9851228014

GETAWAY



Chandragiri Hills

Enjoy the season's snowfall at Chandragiri Hills. A quick trip with the cable car and there you are with the snow balls.
Chandragiri, (01) 4312515



Tiger Palace Resort

Spend a night or two at the resort which is reminiscent of beach resorts in Dubai and Thailand. One of the finest resort in Nepali plains.
Tiger Palace Resort, Bhairahawa, (071) 512000

Balthali Village Resort

A small, cosy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses.
Panauti, Kavre, 9851087772



Godavari Village Resort

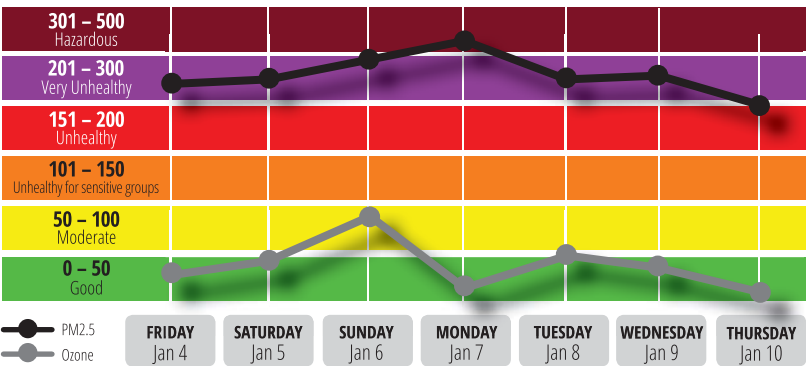
Spread over 14 lush green acres, the resort offers mountain views and traditionally-styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields.
Godavari, (01) 5560675

Himalayan Golf Course

One of the most unique courses in the world, Himalayan currently has 16 holes. Par-73 over 18 holes (players play the first and second twice) it was opened in 1994. The course is vertical, and built in a valley of the Bijaypur Khola 80m directly below the clubhouse.
Majeri Patan, Pokhara, (061) 521882

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 4 - 10 January



The air we inhale in Kathmandu continued to be bad this week. Despite the drizzle on Monday morning cleaning up the air somewhat, the pollution particles in the air picked up again and in fact got a little worse because of the combination of droplets of water condensing around the soot dust. The average daily air quality hit the Purple Band at 'Hazardous' and stayed consistently in the Red 'Very Unhealthy' band. Go to [www.nepalitimes.com](https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/) for live hourly readings.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

“लैङ्गिक हिंसा र दुर्व्यवहारः
छैन हामीलाई स्वीकार”

"Orange the World: #Hear me to"



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Factory of Questions: Sarita Tiwari

Lightroom is a monthly page in *Nepali Times* on interesting figures in the Nepali literary scene.

Born in 1980 in Pokhara, Sarita Tiwari has been writing diligently for over 22 years and published three books: *Buddha ra Lavaharu* (Buddha and Lava, 2001), *Astitwoko Ghoshanapatra* (Declaration of Existence, 2011) and recently, *Prashnaharuko Karkhana* (Factory of Questions, 2016).



LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION
Muna Gurung

Raised by a fierce single mother who didn't believe in wearing eyeliner but believed in educating her daughters, Sarita started writing poetry in Grade 7. When teachers noticed her work, they took her to writing competitions, many of which she won. In 1997, she went to college in Pokhara and got closer to the literary scene led by Saru Bhakta.

"It was the best schooling I could ask for. I was amongst great poets and I learned how to effectively use words, bend them, shape them," Sarita says.

When I read her most recent book, *Prashnaharuko Karkhana* (Factory of Questions), I was blown away by the first section, *Adivasi* (Native) with simple poems and songs written in Nepali and Tharu about labour, land, gender, power, discrimination, ownership, identity, patriarchy, politics and the price of living. How had someone used two languages and a string of simple words to address and deliver with eloquence such large questions?

In her afterword, she writes about how many call her a terrorist, a militant feminist, or worse, a woman who has now attained manhood, due to how openly and bravely she writes about society and politics.

I imagined Sarita as a young woman with short hair, a brisk walk, no husband and definitely no children. It was a different Sarita I finally 'met' over Facebook Messenger. She is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law, she is funny, laughs easily and openly shares stories you don't feel you've quite yet earned. Here is our conversation:

Sarita: I was called *kancha* and *babu* at home. I was treated like a son. It wasn't until I was in 4th or 5th grade that I fully realised I was a girl.

Muna: How?

S: People told me I was one. They said things like "you're a daughter, you're someone else's property." They never said that to my brother or other boys.

M: People are the worst.

S: But at home, Aama never let me feel that difference. She, herself, was taken out of school because her family believed that if you educated your daughter, she'd elope with a male teacher. My father who was never home, and blew all his money and property away, and she realised that daughters and sons should have equal access to education and opportunities. Aama sold all her jewelry to send all four of us to school. Of course, she wasn't perfect, many things she believed were 'cultural'.

M: You met your current husband through your mother?

S: Yes. Aama didn't believe in love. To her love marriages brought shame. Our society is not generous towards love. Aama was worried for us, especially for my eldest sister who was so pretty that boys hung around our house just to catch a glimpse of her.

M: It's funny how we can be so progressive about certain things and so unforgiving about others. So, you relented.

S: I was unhappy at first. I was just completing my bachelors and wanted to study further. But Aama cried, and I'd never



SABITA SHRESTHA

seen Aama cry. She is a strong woman. She said, "I am getting weaker, and soon I won't be able to care for you. You will suffer if you live your life alone." And when I met my father-in-law, he talked very openly about how they didn't want a *buhari* who would just clean the house, but someone motivated to do something with her life. They had read my first book then, and felt like they knew me. Anyway, all marriages are a compromise, ours isn't any different.

M: When I talk to poets, a lot of them speak of light and how poetry is a pathway towards light. What is this light and where is it?

S: If there had been no songs in Aama's life, she would've been depressed. She raised four children alone after suffering under her husband all her married life, and we were not well-off. Still, she was full of life. I, too, have a lot of childhood traumas and dark moments in my life, and the only way to bring light unto these moments is through creative means. When I think about why I'm content in life, or emotionally strong, I know it's because I am close to poetry.

M: In your poems, you write about conversing with the ghost of Parijat.

S: The spirits of Joan of Arc, Parijat and Virginia Woolf come to me in my dreams and slap me across my face. Marx and Confucius come and loosen my feet, make my gait more stable and lead me down the path they have created. But the battle for me is that I have so many things to say, but if I said them all I would break ties with my family who are closest to me. I am in constant battle with myself. I wish I could free me from myself.

M: Is this the *ainthan* that you speak of in your poems?

S: Exactly – you're sleeping and there is something heavy sitting on your chest. And I used to feel this *ainthan* especially in those times when my readers and close friends would call me Taliban, or ISIS and paint this picture of me carrying a belt of bullets around my shoulders, AK47 in my hand just because in one poem referring to Devi, I wrote about how all of society's 'shame has drowned in your vagina', or how in another, I mention 'saliva and semen', or a poem where a girl's own father repeatedly rapes her. There are such disgusting things happening in our society every day, and I have written about less than 5% of that – not even written, just alluded to them – but people can't tolerate it.

M: What about your family?

S: My husband just leaves me alone when it comes to work. I guess I take that

positively. My life is tied to the kitchen, so I can never call myself a full revolutionary.

M: You're better, you're a revolutionary who feeds people!

S: I don't know. My children want me to be that mother who makes *pakauda* for them on a Saturday. Or my husband wants to sit with me in the sun and eat peanuts, but I'm not at home. We don't live with my in-laws anymore and that makes it a little easier. For instance, Sir cooks on days I can't. He would never do that if we were living with his parents.

M: You call your husband *sir*?

S: Everyone calls him *sir* around here. He teaches chemistry and is a principal.

M: Does he call you *ma'am*?

S: He calls me Sarita. (Laughs).

M: I've always been fascinated by how we address people and what that says or doesn't say about our relationship with them.

S: I've started writing an essay *What Name Shall I Give You?* and it's exactly about this. When I heard my friends call their husbands by their name, I tried doing the same, but I think my husband felt offended. And in our Khas Bahun-Chettri communities, the man can call his wife *tan* but the wife always calls him *tapai* or *hajur*. In Janajati communities, I think the language is more equalising, no?

M: *Ki* in Gurung means *you*, and that's how we address everyone from a two-year-old to an 80-year-old.

S: That's incredible. We don't have that. Even our language is oppressive. And let's not even get started on how men can swear, but if women did the same it is seen as nasty. Life is a big zigzag, Muna ji.

M: I see books behind you. Are you in a room of your own?

S: This here used to be the guest room, and I moved some books down here. Then I set up a small table, and bought a laptop for myself. My daughter, who used to keep to herself, now wants to sit at my desk and do her homework. While she does that, I've set up a single bed here where I read. Although this is my room, I am only able to come here to write at night after everyone is asleep. I stay up till 2am writing. The only way I can write is by trading in sleep for words.

M: I want to shift the conversation a little to the world that you have created in the section *Adivasi* of your most recent collection. What made you write from their perspectives?

S: I have a lot of Tharu friends and I grew up around Tharu villages both in Nawalparasi when my mother moved us there and

also when I came to Chitwan after I got married. Most of the characters in my poems are people I know or I met and had long conversations with. I know what oppression they have gone through from the Ranas and most recently Bahuns and Chettris who descended from the hills and took over their lands. I can tell you whose land was taken by whom and how. It's horrible.

M: Do you get accused of telling these stories through your poems even though you are not a Tharu yourself?

S: I understand what you're saying and part of being a responsible writer is knowing that I can never write as well or as accurately as my Tharu friends. I don't have the 'authorised experience' that Tharus have. The poem, *Deilima Macha* actually came out of Devnarayan Mahato kaka's kitchen in Nawalparasi. I was living and working with them for over a week while I was researching and when we sat to eat, I saw a straw basket hanging over the stove and I asked Devnayaran kaka, what is that? He told me it was a *deili*, a basket to catch fish, but how there are no fish in the rivers anymore. So, they put garlic, onions, other vegetables in there. Whatever he told me, I made that into a poem and perhaps only the last four lines are mine. I heard Devnarayan kaka passed away last year. He hadn't seen his children for years, they all went abroad to work and, just like the fish in his *deili*, never returned.

M: That poem is one of my favourites.

S: You know, we have such a rich reserve of folklore and folk literature. If we held all of that, I guarantee you it is as rich or richer than those from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa... I want to continue to collect these Tharu songs and stories. I keep telling myself that once my children are older, I will go away somewhere and write furiously.

Muna Gurung is a writer, educator and translator based in Kathmandu. For more of her work, visit munagurung.com

 **nepalitimes.com**
Go online to watch video clips of Sarita Tiwari.

Fish in the *deili*
by Sarita Tiwari

Now—
how can there be any fish in the deili?

There's just two or four cloves of garlic
some potatoes
onion and chilies

Fish?
There were many in this Muguwai river.

In Maghi,
during Jitiya and Amosha—
I've lost count of how many I've killed!

Fish as plump as my youth.

Like age
all the fish have been swept away

Even so,
every year I cut thin stalks of pampas,
I weave a *deili*

It amazes me
all that fish—
what stream did they enter?
what river did they merge into?

Humans and fish are alike.

Once they are washed away from the source,
they never return

Someone, please return the lost
army of golden fish to this river—
or, shall I continue to sit by the bank
and watch my own age turn

Eastern melodies in Kathmandu

*A long time ago in the beginning
There was no vast cosmos,
And there was no beautiful earth
Later the omnipotent Ningwaphuma arrived
And she created the earth*

It is rare to hear folk songs in the Limbu language in Kathmandu, but this was Manu Nembang, Jhuma Limbu and Deepa Suhang (*pictured*) singing a traditional song from their community at Shilpee Theatre this week. The event was organised by Raithane Music to promote true folk melodies that people live by, and which are endangered by assimilation.

This was Raithane Music's first performance and started off with *Hakpare*, a melody popular among the Limbus from eastern Nepal. It is a kind of *Mundhum*, songs passed down orally from one generation of Limbus to another, with information about the community's traditions, beliefs and worldview. Sung by priests, healers and shamans, the *Mundhum* is also called the 'Veda' of the Limbus, since they contain instructions for life.

Mundhums contain age-old lyrics that trace the history of the Limbu community. *Hakpare* is believed to be the oldest melody or style of Limbu music tradition sung during important occasions like weddings, births, and even deaths.

"When one person starts singing a *Hakpare*, another person may contradict him, and yet another may add information

to clarify it. And so *Hakpare* progresses as a form of dialogue," says sociologist Chaitanya Subba who thinks that since *Hakpare* contained references to people living in caves, the songs could be from the period the Limbus first settled in what is now eastern Nepal 10,000 years ago.

Hakpares can be sung during weddings and about what life was like before people started getting married, and how a young couple's courtship proceeds. The ones sung during pregnancy wish for the baby's safe birth, and the songs of death wish



for the departed soul's safe passage. And then there are the dense songs that sing of the history of the earth, and how human civilisation came about.

"There is a saying we find in these *Hakpares*. When the wind blows too chilly, or the weather grows gloomy, a human heart becomes full of feelings. That is when we sing these songs, to console the heart," said Lokman Wanem from Taplejung.

Senior poet and *Mundhum* expert Bairagi Kainla added: "Youngsters are

holding hands and singing to each other. One would imagine their songs would be joyful. But no, *Hakpares* are sorrowful. That is because they are aware that we are mortal. No matter what we achieve, it is gone. This awareness of the core nature of human existence is what makes the songs melancholy. We need these sorrowful melodies," says Kainla who has collected and documented *Mundhums*.

These songs were orally passed down from one generation to the next, and were barely documented until modern times, but today, their usage is fading as people do not need these songs for entertainment or for social guidelines.

"Our ancestors thought that if they sung and memorised the lessons from their lives, it would be easier for the following generations to live their lives. It is not just music but an entire community's history and tradition," said Kainla.

The melody is popular in eastern Nepal and other communities sing their own lyrics, including in Nepali.

There are even modern and pop songs based on the melody, but the thousands of years of knowledge and wisdom that Limbus collected can only be found in the original Limbu *Hakpare*.

*We the siblings of human genesis
We the wisest animals on earth
Let this Mundhum remain forever
And let this continue even after life*

Sewa Bhattarai



MOFA

NI HAO MA: Prime Minister K P Oli meets newly appointed Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



RABINDRA ADHIKARI/TWITTER

TOUGH SPOT: Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Rabindra Adhikari presents his Ministry's progress report and answers questions on the Airbus deal, at Singha Darbar on Monday.



NABIN PAUDEL/RSS

VIP: Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kano arrives in Kathmandu on Wednesday for a two-day visit during which he will hold bilateral meetings and sign an aviation cooperation agreement.



MONIKA DEUPALA

BELOW ZERO: Trekkers walk from Machhapuchhre Base Camp to Annapurna Base Camp on Tuesday in the middle of a snow storm.



NARAYAN ADHIKARI/RSS

EARNING MILES: Turkish Airlines' Nepal country manager Abdullah Tuncer Kecici welcomed the oldest passenger onboard in its 85-year long history. Ang Phurba Sherpini celebrated her 102th year on the flight from Kathmandu to Boston.

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Govinda KC fast-unto-death in Ilam



BHIM CHAPAGAIN/NAGARIK

Bhim Chapagain in *Nagarik*,
10 January

नागरिक

Govinda KC, who has been on 15 fast-unto-death protests to demand reforms in medical sector, began his 16th protest in Ilam on Wednesday after Parliament's Education and Health Committee passed the Medical Education Bill in violation of the agreement made with him.

He has begun a new phase of protests with six demands, asking for the Medical Education Bill to be amended before it is passed by the full Parliament. KC reached Ilam on Tuesday, and organised a press meet on Wednesday evening to announce his protest at a private home near the Tundikhel.

“By violating the agreement,

the Parliamentary Committee has prepared a bill that is not oriented towards the people but the mafia,” he said. Hundreds of people attended to express solidarity with his protest.

Some of KC's previous demands have been fulfilled by this bill. For example, the bill restricts opening new medical colleges in Kathmandu for the next ten years, requires that medical colleges should be non-profit, and has provisions for scholarships to make medical education accessible to all.

However, many previous demands remain unfulfilled, and KC has asked that the bill be amended to reflect word for word the agreement made with him on Aug 26 of this year. Besides that, he has also made the following demands:

- Tribhuvan University officials found guilty by the Gauri Bahadur Karki investigation committee should be sacked immediately. The Institute of Medicine should be restored with the rights taken over by TU. Planned affiliations through Agriculture and Forestry Ministry that defy the cabinet decision should be cancelled and the culprits punished.
- Medical Colleges should be opened in all seven provinces.
- The culprit of Nirmala Panta's rape and murder case should be apprehended and punished, and those colluding in hiding the evidence should also be punished.
- Wartime crimes should be processed and the guilty punished according to international laws. Victims should be heard and transitional justice process should be concluded.
- Kathmandu University should roll back the high fees it is charging in defiance of the government's decision, and those responsible be punished.

KC began his protest by drinking a glass of water, and said he will only drink water during his protest. He added: “I am fighting for 30 million Nepalis, so I don't care whether I live or die.”



They are all valid demands, tell Dr KC we can't fulfill them.

अन्नपूर्ण

Basu Kshitiz in *Annapurna Post*, 10 January



Signboard: 128th protest
PM KP Oli to Dr KC: Trust me, your demands will be fulfilled. No one trusted me when I said we will have trains, but now you are protesting at a train station!

नयाँ पत्रिका

Rabi Mishra in *Naya Patrika*, 10 January



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Your friends from Jawalakehel remind you to celebrate responsibly.

Prakriti Kandel
in Dang

When their names are called out for the morning attendance, Grade 7 students of Kalakhola Secondary School in Dang respond with names of games: “Badminton, football, horse-riding, ludo.” That is how they begin their English class where the lesson is about an annual sports event in a school.

Teaching the class is Bidi Yolkey Rai, who uses the technique to build the students’ vocabulary by using sports to connect with the lesson. Rai has been working for nearly a year here as an English teacher, and is a fellow of Teach for Nepal which recruits young Nepalis to spend two years teaching in government schools across six districts of Nepal.

Teach for Nepal fellows like Rai try to inject the precious ingredient missing in most government schools in Nepal – a passion among teachers to teach. Rai’s aim in class is to get her students to enjoy learning. And she does that by enjoying teaching herself.

Rai’s classroom is different from others in the school: they are adorned with vibrant drawings by the students. Colourful envelopes contain ‘a-word-a-day’, and there is a mini-library along one wall. The students are all happy and chat with Rai as she does her rounds.

Rai spent her first year in Dhanusha and came to Dang this year. She decided to devote two years to teaching in rural Nepal because she believes Nepal’s future rests on the quality of education.

She was persuaded to join Teach for Nepal after coming across four siblings in Kathmandu who dropped out of school. “I could not persuade them to complete their education, so I thought I would go to a village myself where there would be many such students I could teach,” Rai recalls.

Teach for Nepal was the right platform because it sends fellows



GOOD FELLOWS

Students become teachers to inject a new sense of commitment in government schools

A Korean volunteer returns to a remote government school to see much has changed for the better

Sangmin Kim
in Baglung

It used to be a grueling two-hour ride over rough roads to get to Tityang village from Baglung Bazar. It still takes two hours in a jeep, and the narrow road is as hair-raising as I remember it from 2011 when I worked here as a volunteer.

The picturesque scenery, the clusters of houses, and children who welcome me unconditionally are all very familiar from seven years ago when I volunteered at the Sigana Higher Secondary School in Tityang.

The most significant change is that there is now a new building which did not exist before. A metal plate on the first-floor wall proudly announces a Computer Lab with Nelson Mandela’s famous quote: ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.’

When a group of us of the Korea Information and Communications Technology volunteers arrived at the government school in Tityang in 2011, there were no computers accessible for students. To give computer lessons, we had to walk for an hour, lugging our laptops along. Today, the school has a lab with 20 computers built by EduTech Nepal with support from a New Zealand couple.

Inside, a dozen students are learning to create a powerpoint presentation, and Principal Gopal Kumar Khadka says much of the progress in the school is because of donations, including a new library with more than 8,000 titles.

Another noticeable change is that a field where we used to teach the children Korean martial arts has been turned into a large playground where students now get physical education. It was the initiative of science teacher Krishna Khadka who passed away last year due to stomach cancer. He used to tell us that better facilities could change the lives of students who could then help transform the village.

Khadka was a hard-working and motivated teacher and is sorely missed. I remember staying up late with him, sharing our knowledge of computers we brought with us from Korea. He had a strong, and rare, sense of responsibility and believed in

Seven years in



SANGMIN KIM



PHOTOS: PRAKRITI KANDEL



Teach for Nepal

Teach for Nepal is patterned after Teach for America, and strives to make education more egalitarian by raising the standard of instruction in neglected government schools through a fellowship program that recruits Nepali university graduates to work as teachers for two years.

Fellows receive a 45-day training that prepares them not just with teaching techniques like preparing lesson plans and classroom management, but also about community immersion and social injustice.

Teach for Nepal's CEO Shishir Khanal says he was initially inspired by the Sri Lankan movement *Sramadan* which invests skills and human assets to empower local communities. Khanal discovered that access to quality education was a prevalent problem across many remote communities in Nepal, which led him to start Teach for Nepal.

Fellows also engage with families of students through community visits because Khanal says the quality of education will only improve if local families own it. "There are gaps between school and the community in rural Nepal. Our fellows could be one way of filling this gap."

to villages that need change the most. But building rapport with students was a challenge. So, in her first class, Rai's homework assignments was for the children to write letters to her. Few did in the beginning, but gradually even the more introverted children shared their stories.

"The letters students wrote to me were so emotional and full of their daily struggle," Rai says, "they were very candid about family life and hardships at home. The letters helped me understand and connect with them."

Kalakhola School is situated on the outskirts of Tulsipur, and is half-town, half-village. Better-off families send their boys to a nearby private school, while girls and children of poorer families attend the government school.

As her fellowship draws to a close, Rai is handing over initiatives like a Learning Centre she set up for after-school activities to the students to run. She wants to build another centre using discarded plastic bottles that are strewn all over Dang.

The Learning Centre is an additional platform to improve the English language skills of students through screening English language films on Fridays after school. It is also where they learn skills and craft that will help them after graduation.

Rai's co-fellow Samit Shakya is a science teacher, and started

a STEM Club to give students an opportunity for practical learning. There are 19 other fellows in nine schools in Dang.

Teach for Nepal's work in Dang is a collaborative initiative with the municipal government led by the mayor which pays for the fellows, and supports their initiatives.

Bhaskar Gautam of Tulsipur Municipality says bringing teachers from other parts of Nepal would enhance the exposure for students.

He adds: "Teach for Nepal fellows have become role models for other teachers to be prompt and regular at school, complete their classes, and be more impassioned and enthusiastic about teaching."



Travel to a school in Dang to follow a Teach for Nepal fellow through a school day. Be a part of the fun learning in classrooms and the vibrant space that students have created.

nepalitimes.com

Tityang



BEFORE AND AFTER: Sangmin Kim and some Korean volunteers in a school in Tityang in 2011 (*right*) and in the same place after seven years, where new school children give Kim a warm welcome (*left*).



YESEO SON

the power of education. One of the reasons I wanted to go back to Tityang was to meet up with Teacher Khadka, only to find out that he had died.

His son, Yogesh Khadka, is a science teacher himself in Kathmandu and describes how perhaps because he knew he had limited time, his father put much effort in upgrading the school. "He was not just my

father. I admired him for being a social hero who devoted his life to bring about change in education and school in the village," Yogesh Khadka said.

In a trend familiar across Nepal because of outmigration as well as the preference for private schools, enrollment in Sigana school has dropped from 550 in 2011 to 400 today. Aside from the computer lab and library,

the school needs more help. Yogesh Khadka wants to build on his father's foundation by adding a subject like agricultural science in the curriculum.

"Most people here are farmers, so it would be useful to have practical classes about agriculture," he says.

The sun was setting behind mountains to the west as I hurried to catch my jeep back to Baglung. The passage of time cast a lengthening shadow across a school that once taught me so much about Nepal, and about life.



Sangmin Kim was in Nepal seven years ago, and this month he revisited Baglung to reconnect with school children he knew back then. Follow Kim to a remote school to find out how it has changed, and how some things have remained the same!

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Ha-Ha® Instant Noodles

There is a nasty rumour going around that foreign direct investment in Nepal has fallen drastically because of corruption. That slur doesn't even deserve a rebuttal. The real reason no one is investing is because we have run out of brand names for new products.

Even though the government is in denial, this is a crisis of nationalistic proportions. If we can't come up with new brand names ASAP then I'm afraid this country is doomed. Which investor in his or her right mind would want to come to a country where there is such a dearth of trade marks?

Take Mt Everest, for instance. It's over-saturated, everyone and their grandmother has named their product after the mountain. Mt Everest Steel Rods, Mt Everest Cement, Mt Everest Gin (Motto: 'Get High With Us'), Mt Everest Ghee Udyog, Mt Everest Prawn Crackers, Mt Everest Helicopter & Hospital (Slogan: 'Regular non-stop flights from Base Camp to Rooftop Helipad even if you are hale and hearty.')

So, if you are thinking of getting into the instant noodle business, naming it Mt Everest Noodles is out of the question. Besides, the Ministry of Taxes and Taxonomy has just mandated that all instant noodle brands in this country must compulsorily have names consisting of one monosyllabic word repeated twice, like Wai-Wai or Ra-Ra. But potential investors need not feel restricted. There are oodles of noodles names still available and they come with ready-to-

use mottos: Meow-Meow ('Even your cat will love it!'), Ha-Ha ('Probably the world's funniest noodles'), or Ba-Ba ('The favourite noodles of the black sheep in every family').

Another highly popular brand name is Sherpa, not just in Nepal but also abroad. In Nepal we already have Sherpa pick-up trucks, Sherpa health soaps, Sherpa brand muesli, and internationally there are Sherpa 100 Volt Portable Power Banks, Sherpa Venture Capital, and even Sherpa Supreme Court nominees in the US

My friend Tashi Jangbu says no one asked him if they could borrow his surname, and he intends to sue them through the solicitor's firm, Sherpa, Sherpa & Sherpa. Since Nepal is a multi-ethnic country, this opens up a whole new arena of nomenclature for the manufacturing and service industries: Chhetri brand ketchup, Rai Rye 86% proof, Tharu brand photocopy paper, Bahun Pure Mustard Oil, Lama Vegetarian Momo and Fastfood Franchise, KC's AC-DC Adapters, and Gachhedar Flip-flops.

For new domestic airline operators, the field is wide open because if we can have Buddha Air, we have the whole pantheon. Hanuman Air Lines (Starting Direct Flights to Lanka Soon), or Pushpak Biman which offers in-flight Bow-Wow noodles ('What's good for your dog is good for you.')



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we created HOT RUM PUNCH



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