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Alpha males

There are signs that the power struggle between Prime Minister K P Oli and co-Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal is now reaching a climax.

After two years of cohabitation with the tussle between them increasingly playing out in public, the two top leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), are now on a head-on collision course.

The outcome of this final bout will determine whether or not the NCP will split along its UML-Maoist fault line, who will become

the next prime minister, and whether the spat will drag in the office of the President.

Primarily, it is an ideological struggle between the social-democratic UML and the Maoists — the two parties that had a gunshot wedding for the 2017 election, after which conjugal relations have been rocky.

Prime Minister Oli thinks Dahal is in the pockets of big business, is anti-democratic and has ambitions of becoming a strongman. Dahal has publicly declared his support for a directly

elected executive presidency, obviously with himself as head of state and government. Hence, Oli wants to prevent Dahal from succeeding him at all costs.

The problem is that Oli is now morally, politically and physically weak. Scandal after scandal involving his coterie have tarnished the prime minister's image, and undermined his nationalist credentials. Dahal has managed to wean away former UML leaders like Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhalnath Khanal and Bam Dev Gautam, and left Oli with only two loyalists in the nine-member NCP secretariat.

Dahal's strategy is to keep chipping away at the UML citadel because without weakening it he cannot be the supreme leader of



LAVISH LAPSI SPREAD PAGE 8-9

the united party. He is exploiting the disaffection towards Oli among the UML rank and file, as well as dangling carrots in front of the prime minister's erstwhile colleagues to get them to defect.

Dahal has used every trick in the book: deploying the media to systematically demonise Oli and isolating him on matters like the US-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the selection of a new speaker, and the nomination of Gautam to the Upper House.

The prime minister has not exactly helped his own cause by the lack of transparency of his business dealings, and other scandals involving trusted comrades like Gokul Baskota, who resigned last week as Information Minister after an incriminating kickback tape was made public.

Surprisingly, Pushpa Kamal Dahal has managed all this by staying out of the limelight, lobbying influencers from the shadows, and avoiding blame for his machinations — including getting the secretariat to install Gautam into the Upper House.

Oli wants to ensure Dahal doesn't pull a fast one during his kidney transplant hospitalisation, even if it is by giving his ally President Bidya Devi Bhandari emergency powers.

Party insiders say Dahal's strategy is to take full control of the NCP, make Bam Dev Gautam prime minister, replace Bhandari with either Nepal or Khanal as president, and then amend the constitution to declare an executive presidency.

Both factions of the NCP now have a few more days before President Bhandari returns from a trip to the far west, after which a final showdown is expected, possibly next week.

Kunda Dixit



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

THE OLIGARCHY

There is an old Hungarian proverb: ‘If you are among thieves, and you keep quiet, that makes you a thief as well.’ The saying does not hold much weight in Nepali politics, where impunity has now been elevated to this government’s mission statement. There was the lack of rule of law before, but never has it been as blatant as it is today.

A Speaker of Parliament accused of attempted rape is the same man who as Finance Minister ten years ago was caught on tape asking for Rs500 million from a Chinese contractor to buy off opposition legislators for a no-confidence vote. Needless to say, he never had to answer for the leaked tape, and two weeks ago he was acquitted by a district

was not the first time this has happened. A New Delhi five-star hotel sent a \$10,000 bill to the Nepal government in 2016 when Oli celebrated his birthday there during his first tenure as prime minister.

Oli is known for carefully cultivating his public persona, and he should have known the social media reaction to heli-borne cakes and videos of birthday boy slicing into Nepal with a kitchen knife. It is looking more and more like the emperor has no idea he is naked.

Oli is doing his nemesis, prime minister-in-waiting Pushpa Kamal Dahal, a great favour with these mis-steps. In fact, Dahal has only had to twiddle his thumbs, waiting for Oli to self-destruct. There is no love lost between these two Big Boys of the NCP, and it now looks



RSS

court on the rape charge as well. Meanwhile, a murder-accused who never answered for his war-era crime, replaced him as Speaker.

The Minister of Information and Communication is caught on tape bargaining for a Rs700 million kickback from a commission agent supposedly representing a Swiss security printing supplier. He is forced to step down, but questions have arisen about his political patron, Prime Minister K P Oli. What did he know, and when did he know it?

The scandals are coming thick and fast. Nepal has become a one-scam-a-day country. The Baluwatar real estate heist and the nefarious dealings that gave Yeti Holdings unprecedented access to royal assets administered by Nepal Trust have added to cumulative public disillusionment with the Oli administration.

At a time when all these scandals are swirling about, and trending on social media, Prime Minister Oli staged a lavish birthday bash in his hometown at state expense this week (picture, above). Dignitaries fly over from Kathmandu in five helicopters, and even before the dust from the landing pad had settled, another Dynasty Air chopper arrived with an enormous birthday cake in the shape of a 3-D map of Nepal strapped to the back seat. We are living in a crony-communist Oligarchy.

There is nothing wrong with a prime minister celebrating his 69th birthday, but PM Oli has done himself no favours by not paying attention to the optics. The Athrai birthday was timed badly and was in bad taste. And it

We are living in a crony-Communist Oligarchy.

like Dahal has the upper hand.

A morally weak, politically feeble and physically frail Oli would like to have his succession issue sorted out before checking into hospital for his second kidney transplant. But Dahal is determined not to let that happen.

In this elaborate chess game, Dahal’s primary aim is to undermine the foundation of the former UML rank and file, who still make up a significant block in the NCP. He knows he cannot make a dent at the cadre level, which is why he is peeling away top leaders like Jhalanath Khanal, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Bam Dev Gautam from the Oli camp.

Dahal advanced former UML leader Bam Dev Gautam into the Upper House this week. Gautam has been home minister thrice, and has a barely concealed ambition to be prime minister. The trouble is, he lost in the 2017 election.

But Dahal’s move has spooked Oli, who has got Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel to deliver some Twitter broadsides, and to keep Yubraj Khatriwada on as Finance Minister till the announcement of the annual budget even if his Upper House term is expiring on 8 March. Former Speaker Subhas Nembang has also come out strongly against Gautam being inducted into the Upper House, saying this sets a bad precedent.

One danger is that President Bidya Devi Bhandari, who is close to Prime Minister Oli, will be dragged into the fray. The sooner this paralysing power struggle in the NCP is resolved, the better it is for Nepal, for whom the electoral promise of ‘stability and prosperity’ has become a joke.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

In an editorial 10 years ago this week, we wrote about how political instability and corruption was hampering economic growth and scaring off investors. Unfortunately this is still the case. We have seen some significant growth in economy, but intense power struggle and polarisation with the ruling Nepal Communist Party has paralysed party decision-making and corruption has grown (the latest being Communication Minister Gokul Baskota’s printing press kickback scandal). Excerpt from Nepali Times #491 of 26 February-4 March 2010:

In a scenario dominated by politics, we know we are crying in the wilderness to talk about the economy. But even if it is only for economic reasons, this government must be reformatted. The state has no credibility. The economy is on the verge of collapse. The cost of capital is so high that big projects are not viable anymore. Investors have fled, there is huge capital flight. Even the investors who are here are being harassed, as made evident by the ‘Maosists’ extortion of power projects. Businesses struggle to cope with the daily 12-hour power cuts. Corruption has never been worse than it is now.



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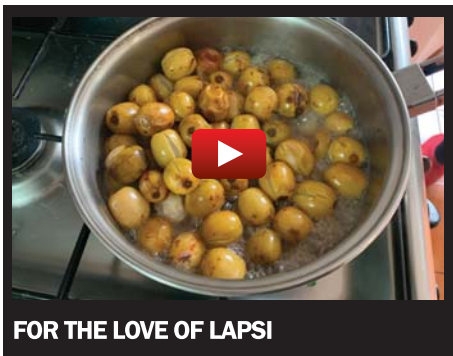
ONLINE PACKAGES



MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE

Meet Bibhusan Raj Joshi, proprietor and chef of El Mediterraneo, a Spanish and Iberian restaurant in Sanepa. In this video, Joshi shares his journey from studying hospitality business in Spain, becoming a tour guide for Spanish tourists in Nepal and opening his very own restaurant in the city.

Story: page 4



FOR THE LOVE OF LAPSI

The beloved lapsi of Nepalis comes in many forms like in umami titauras and sweet or spicy pickles. Watch how *lapsi ko acharis* prepared from start to finish as it is peeled, boiled in a sugary syrup and spiced to perfection.

Story: page 8-9

STOLEN DEITIES

It will be best to put a tag on every replica where the original is (‘Replicating Nepal’s stolen gods,’ Alisha Sijapati, #998). This way people will know if it is stolen.

Hitesh Pant

■ All stolen artefacts should be returned to their rightful places.

Sara Parker

VIRAL PANIC

This article needs to be seen by as many people as possible (‘When panic goes viral,’ Sonia Awale, #998). Great stuff.

Pranaya Jung Bahadur Rana

■ Containing the hysteria may be more of a problem than containing the virus.

Sigmund Stengel

■ This is how a typical health achievement is turned into a disaster by the media.

Sudip Umesh Bajagain

CHINA’S WRATH

Can we spare already dead and respected people? There are living politicians for this.

Mukesh Lama Lo

BRUCE COVILLE

Great article (‘The author is an alien,’ Sanghamitra Subba, #998). You are amazing. I can still see you and hear you reading to all of us so many years ago. (We will not say how long). Thank you for being a awesome teacher and helping me read and enjoy it.

Lori Victoria Jensen

■ This just made me smile over and over again.

Leslie Archer

■ Love it!! I’m so glad you chose this as your vocation, Bruce. You inspire children everywhere to read again.

Susan Rosson

■ You certainly set my imagination and love of writing/reading ablaze.

Jason Spencer

■ Your book *Jeremy Thatcher Dragon Hatcher* essentially taught me how to read. I was a late bloomer in that sense but as soon as I discovered the Magic Shop series I was hooked on reading. In college I found a book shop going out of business and I bought up the entire Colville collection. Now I have so many of your books in my classroom and my students also find a love for reading them every year.

Millie Lang

WHAT’S TRENDING



Nepal’s baby export

by Akash Chhetri

A major discrepancy between Nepal government and foreign records of the number of Nepali children adopted in North America and Europe has exposed a trafficking ring that involves various child welfare agencies in Kathmandu. Visit nepalitimes.com for this investigative piece.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Replicating Nepal’s stolen gods

by Alisha Sijapati

A 700-year-old statue of Laxmi-Narayan was recently tracked to the Dallas Museum of Art after it was stolen from Patan’s in 1984. But it is difficult to get western museums to return trafficked deities, so Nepalis are making copies of the missing statuary. Read story and get the first look of the Museum of Stolen Arts, set to open in 2022. Watch video on our YouTube channel.

Most popular on Twitter

Nepal media feels China’s wrath in coronavirus fallout

by Kunda Dixit

Nepal feels geopolitical fallout of the coronavirus epidemic as Chinese Embassy rebukes Kathmandu editor and paper. This analysis was read by thousands and generated heated debate online about the image of Mao Zedong on China’s 100 yuan banknote wearing a mask.

Most visited online page

This author is an alien

by Sanghamitra Subba

American author with over 100 books in his repertoire Bruce Coville in town for Bal Sahitya Mahotsav and spoke about the importance of reading out loud. The profile drew a lot of his readers who sent fond comments about the best-selling author and his books.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
“God is god regardless of it being a #replica or not. However, it does pinch you that the original piece is among foreigners who could not care less about its #religious significance.” @AlishaSijapati reports on #stolengods & replicas. #museums #heritage

Ashish @Ashish60241438
It’s true that the foreigners only see the statue as a collectable item. (‘Replicating Nepal’s stolen gods,’ Alisha Sijapati, #998). But it’s our government who couldn’t care less, they must have had the authority to bring the statue back, but I guess they don’t want to spend their resources in bringing something worthless to them.

Pigreen @pigreen1
Nepal should try harder to get ‘stolen’ items returned - the mood is in favour of this - but is Nepal committed enough and do they have the competence to look after them and make them available for public display on their return? I doubt it.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Tuberculosis kills 6000 people in #Nepal each year, and every other #Nepali is a carrier of the bacillus, which means half the population should actually be #quarantined. Yet, the #coronavirus with one suspected case has everyone in a frenzy.

ROBERT NEIL ANDERSON @ROBERTNEILANDE1
It’s all true. So many problems.

Eves @EvelynMoktan
Fear is bigger than the actual reality.

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TURKISH AIRLINES

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A taste of Spain in Sanepa

Nepali restaurateur returns home to build a culinary bridge

Restaurants in urban Nepal are growing in number, and in Kathmandu today many world-class establishments vie for favour and seek to fill an empty niche. But most still cater to the Nepali palate for momos, sekewa, pizza, chow mein, or the mandatory dal-bhat-tarkari.



MADE IN NEPAL
Naresh Newar

Bibhusan Raj Joshi is one of a growing set of entrepreneurs that want to do something different, and his contribution is a Spanish restaurant called El Mediterraneo in Jhamsikhel. Joshi has always believed that restaurateurs should take the risk and introduce Nepalis to cuisines from around the world.

A fluent speaker of Spanish who started out guiding Spanish tourists in Nepal, it was natural that as a restaurateur he would go for Iberian cuisine. But in between, Joshi spent ten years in Spain working as a chef and finishing his hospitality management studies. Joshi thus returned to Nepal with a wealth of knowledge about the diversity of Spanish fare.

El Mediterraneo has been a fixture of the Jhamsikhel neighbourhood for the past eight years, a favourite with local expatriates, tourists, and increasingly, young and upwardly mobile Nepalis.

Joshi has trained several of his staff not just in the preparation of



NARESH NEWAR

Mediterranean dishes, but in how to share their knowledge with guests while serving.

"Most Nepali guests are still not used to European cuisine, and part of our job is to describe the items and how they are prepared," explains Joshi, who can often be seen chatting with his guests, most of them regulars who keep coming back.

Running a restaurant like this is still financially challenging, and there are customers who come to El Mediterraneo and ask for momos, rice and curry. Joshi's staff tells

them to try out the paella, instead, describing it as "a Spanish biryani".

There may actually be a correlation because north Indian Mughlai cuisine shares the West Asian roots of the Muslim culture that helped shape the development of Spain's culture, architecture, and food culture during the middle ages.

The basic ingredient of running a restaurant is passion, Joshi believes, and owners have to give it all they have got. Then there is the knowledge and specialisation that translates into the unique selling

point of an establishment. Decor and ambience help, but customers mostly look for authenticity and a unique dining experience.

"I don't want us to be like other restaurants. But even when restaurants are still not keen to introduce specific western cuisines to target the tourists, they can still make the effort of doing more research on Nepal's diverse cuisines," Joshi says.

In fact, several restaurants in the Patan area have already started to experiment with Gurung, Newa, Tharu, and Madhesi cuisine, and

even fusing elements of these with western dishes.

Although not highly profitable, El Mediterraneo has earned a reputation among visitors to Nepal thanks to customers who have written positive reviews on popular online platforms including the TripAdvisor.

But Joshi believes his best promotion is still word of mouth, which is why he has so many repeat customers. Nepal has no grading system for restaurants, and there is no go-to food website that aggregates restaurants with information and menu.

Joshi has no regrets about coming back to Nepal, and says the satisfaction of being in one's own city and the fulfillment one feels by working here more than compensates for the lower income compared to working in Europe. Just like he latched on to the niche of Spanish cuisine, he feels there is a market for unexplored European, African and Asian food in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Journalist-turned-farmer Naresh Newar contributes this fortnightly multimedia column in Nepali Times, profiling successful young entrepreneurs. 🇳🇵

MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE



Meet Bibhusan Raj Joshi, who worked as a chef and studied the hospitality business in Spain for ten years, and then returned home to Kathmandu to start his own Spanish restaurant. He does not make as much money here as he did there, but says the job satisfaction is much greater.

nepalitimes.com



TURKISH AIRLINES

Turkish, NCC sign MoU

Turkish Airlines and the Nepal Chamber of Commerce (NCC) on Wednesday signed an agreement in which the carrier will provide special travel arrangements for members and employees of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce.

The MoU was signed by Turkish Airlines general manager for Nepal Abdullah Tuncer Kececi and Nepal Chamber of Commerce director general Kailash Krishna Bajimaya at a ceremony in the NCC office.

NCC President Rajesh Kazi Shrestha facilitated the ceremony in which the organisation's board members were present.

"We hope that Turkish Airlines will help us make Visit Nepal Year 2020 a success," said Shrestha before the signing of the MoU. "We were so happy to know that the airlines had partnered with the campaign."

In response, Kececi said: "Our main objective is to maintain a long-term relationship between Nepal and Turkey. We want this partnership to promote trade, tourism and business opportunities between our

nations and help the Nepal Chamber of Commerce do more in terms of exports and imports."

Kececi also added that since the Istanbul hub at the new airport has one of the biggest cargo capacities of any airport in the world, Nepali exporters and businesses would have no issues transporting a large volume of goods between Nepal and the rest of the world.

Turkish Airlines, the national flag carrier of Turkey, was established in 1933 with a fleet of five aircraft. As of 2019, the airline has 358 aircraft to more than 127 countries and 319 destinations worldwide from its hub in Istanbul. Turkish Airlines began flights in Nepal in 2013, and has helped promote tourism in the country ever since.

Nepal Chamber of Commerce established in 1952, and is Nepal's first business grouping. It aims to promote trade and support the formulation of commercial, industrial and fiscal policies by the government of Nepal. The NCC has more than 1,600 members and 8,000 registered firms affiliated to it. 🇳🇵

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BIZ BRIEFS

DoingBusiness 2020

Nepal has been ranked 94 out of 190 economies on the World Bank Group's Doing Business 2020 ranking, climbing up 16 spots from last year. This marks a significant shift for the country into the top 100 economies for the ease of doing business.

Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways is making temporary hold and schedule adjustments to its operations to South Korea and Iran until further notice due to operational challenges caused by



entry restrictions caused by the coronavirus epidemic. An ongoing review of operations will be conducted regularly with the intention to reinstate flights as soon as the restrictions are lifted.

Nissan Scheme

Nissan announced the winners of its Festive Drive scheme at its showroom in Thapathali on 25 February. Nissan had introduced the scheme during the festival season, allowing customers purchasing a new car to be eligible for lucky draws.

Hyundai 2020 IONIQ

Hyundai is offering the IONIQ electric 2020 to Nepali customers. The all-new

electric premium sedan comes with better power, long driving range and an array of other features. The IONIQ electric 2020 is a



significant leap forward for Hyundai Motor as it intensifies its commitment to produce highly efficient, eco-friendly vehicles

Agni Group

On Wednesday, former captain of the Nepali cricket team Paras Khadka was appointed Brand Ambassador for Agni Group, the main authorised distributor of Mahindra vehicles in Nepal.

Turkish Airlines

Turkish Airlines will increase the number of its tourism-focused international flights



beginning summer 2020. The airline is set to operate 98 flights every week from 26 international destinations to Turkey's tourist destinations, an 18% increase in frequency as compared to 2019.



The India, US, Nepal, China quadrangle

There are some takeaways for Nepal from Trump’s visit to India amidst communal violence

The leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist must take note of two events that unfolded in India this week: the roaring welcome to US President Donald Trump and the ongoing communal riots in Delhi’s northeastern suburb.



DEL-KTM

Akanshya Shah

The Narendra Modi government’s massive two-day show meant to woo Trump, who repeatedly praised Modi and said “America loves India,” has been overshadowed by the violence that has claimed over 20 lives.

The two events present contrasting pictures: one of India as an emerging power that engages with superpowers and even takes the lead in issues of international concern. The other is of an India engulfed in violence between some Hindus and Muslims. The ruling BJP and Modi, supported by the right-wing RSS and VHP, find themselves in the vortex of this violence.

Trump reached India on Monday and along with Modi addressed the ‘Namaste Trump’ rally in Ahmedabad’s Motera Stadium, the largest cricket stadium in the world, attended by over 100,000 people. The two presented their visions for the next phase of Indo-US strategic partnership.

Although the much-awaited trade deal did not happen, the two sides put together a \$3billion military deal, sought commitments to fight terrorism, narco-terrorism and organised crime, and signed three memorandums of understanding in the health sector and in oil. Ahead of 5G trials in India that involve China’s Huawei technology company, Trump made claims about the importance of secure 5G networks, which he



said must be “a tool for freedom, progress, prosperity, not a conduit for suppression and censorship”.

Important for Nepal to note is the dialogue between Modi and Trump around security cooperation. Besides reiterating that the two countries will work to combat “radical Islamic terrorism,” something which will clearly affect the functioning of SAARC, Trump promoted military cooperation and said that the US and India, along with Japan and Australia, should work together for security of the Indo-Pacific region as the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) grouping.

The diplomatic and military arrangements of the Quad are widely viewed as a response to the rapidly increasing economic and military power of China in the region. Sandwiched and landlocked between India

and China, Nepal will have to balance its relations between China and a US-backed India.

As it is, a \$500 million US-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) deal to improve Nepal’s connectivity is in limbo because of opposition from a faction of the ruling Communist Party that sees it as a part of the American Indo-Pacific Strategy. Parliamentary ratification of the project has been delayed.

The MCC is viewed with much interest by India’s civil society and academia lately, and is seen as a direct counter to China’s Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Sections of the Nepali establishment view India as an obstructionist power, and are trying to develop closer ties with China.

But India is finding more grounds of

convergence with the US, which now views South Asia as a vital part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy. Smaller countries in India’s periphery are bound to be trapped in this rivalry. With pressing concerns at home over opposition to the Constitution Amendment Act, (CAA) India may play silent and quiet diplomacy, leaving the US and China to compete for influence in India’s neighborhood.

Trump and Modi are said to have discussed developments in South Asia at length during this visit, suggesting that they will collaborate and closely consult with each other on regional matters. Nepal must gear up to deal with a more forceful America in the near future even as it is already grappling with a dominant China.

It is to India’s advantage if the US temporarily fills the vacuum in Nepal, which New Delhi feels is its traditional sphere of influence. So, the foreign policy challenge for Nepal will no longer be to balance between India and China, but to have meaningful dialogue with China and the US to protect its national interest.

India considers the US as its natural ally. The Modi-Trump equation seen in Gujarat and Delhi this week speaks volumes of their friendship and desire to foster closer ties between the world’s oldest and largest democracies. Even in midst of communal riots in Delhi, Trump stated at a press conference that “it is up to India” to deal with the CAA matter, quickly adding that Modi is committed to “religious freedom in India.”

Most analysts conclude that if Trump is re-elected in November, India’s relations with the United States could be further strengthened. 🇺🇸

The author is a Nepali journalist and researcher based in New Delhi.



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Enjoy Responsibly

‘Mainly fine throughout the kingdom’

Next Friday, the *Nepali Times* will be publishing its millennial issue. It is getting on for 20 years since this august weekly first hit the newsstands, providing those of us who cannot read the Nepali language with insights into the news and media, and rescuing us from the bland reporting in *The Rising Nepal*.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

When I first arrived in Kathmandu the government daily, with its carefully filtered news, was the only English newspaper in circulation, the Royals and their exemplary activities reliably featuring in every headline. The depth of analysis could be summarised by the unwavering daily weather forecast: ‘Mainly fine throughout the kingdom.’

Taking a lead from my boss Jim Edwards, the ruling Royals were never mentioned in those days except in terms of utmost respect and reverence. Political access was achieved by Jim’s strategic hobnobbing with court advisors and military aides, often over surreptitious cups of tea at dawn, or covert early morning walks through the paddy fields of Sanepa, avoiding the cow pats and stray dogs sleeping off a noisy night on the prowl.

Today’s range of English-language dailies leaves us foreign guests better informed and spoiled for choice, although we are aware that to understand really what is going on the local broadsheets, news sites, blog spots and web pages tell a very different story. And for those of us still in the dark, the *Nepali Times* provides an invaluable weekly summary, entertaining evaluation and informed opinion.

Kunda Dixit had come onto my radar long before he embarked on launching the *Nepali Times* as its creator, editor and publisher. Whilst an energetic young reporter with a passion for ecology, I had asked him to write the chapter on environmental issues in the *Nepal* Insight Guide of which, by a series of random coincidences, I was the producer. He came highly recommended by the acerbic Elizabeth Hawley, Reuters correspondent in Kathmandu, with whom he had interned as a budding writer. With her rigorous reporting and uncompromising journalistic standards, this was high praise indeed.

The illustrated format of the *Apa* Insight Guides was invented in the 1970s by Hans Hoefer, a charismatic itinerant photographer



LISA CHOEGYAL

Life and times of Nepal through the pages of 20 years of *Nepali Times*

and publisher based in Singapore and originally from southern Germany. In our world of Trip Advisor and Lonely Planet, it is hard to appreciate how revolutionary was this cheerful travel guide design, taking over from the dry and photo-less presentation of Baedekers. Before he sold the *Apa* series, Hans Hoefer had created dozens of Insight Guide books throughout Asia but the very first were *Bali* and *Nepal*, his two favourite hang outs.

Tousle-haired and draped in cameras, I had been beguiled by Hans when we met early in 1974 at a Hindu Thaipusam festival in the Batu Caves, a colourful melee of millions of devotees in the back blocks of Malaysia. A new arrival in Asia, I was susceptible to his enthusiastic energy and ability to translate his passions into successful business.

I was on my way to Nepal and once settled in Kathmandu, I helped with other South Asian titles, contracting expert writers and identifying promising photographers.

It was a collaboration that lasted for years and covered books on Sagarmatha, Indian wildlife, hikes and bike routes in Nepal, as well as comprehensive guides to Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile in Kathmandu, the *Nepali Times* was changing the landscape of informed media. Kunda’s patrician profile and startling white head of hair is a familiar sight at newsworthy events and press gatherings around town. His fearless approach and relentless satire sometimes got him into trouble, but the paper could always be relied on for an articulate opinion and a balanced view, highlighting issues where others feared to tread.

Kunda’s gravitas was also in demand at book launches and current affairs debates. He was an unforgiving facilitator of a panel discussion that launched General Rookmangud Katawal’s autobiography, probing the

finer political points amidst Kathmandu’s literati.

Five days prior to the 2015 earthquake, Kunda was with us on a sunny afternoon in the Dwarika’s Hotel courtyard to launch the bulky two volumes of Elizabeth Hawley’s chronicles that portrayed the evolving political and social scene in Nepal through some turbulent times from 1988 to 2007.

With Kunda’s assistance on finer linguistic niceties, Mikel Dunham and I had edited her monthly journal, which faithfully recorded the recent history of Nepal in a fresh light with her relentless accuracy, and without the benefit of hindsight. It had been a laborious task sorting through her extensive dusty ring binders and ancient computer files, with many diary entries having to be transcribed by hand or digitised from obsolete soft wear. Dr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa wrote the foreword, and the *Nepali Times* gave the book

WE HAVE A LAUNCH: Elizabeth Hawley is flanked by American Ambassador Peter Bodde, Dr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa and *Nepali Times* editor Kunda Dixit at the launch of *The Nepal Scene* on 20 April 2015, just before the 2015 earthquake.

extensive coverage.

It was several years later that Kunda collared me on a chilly winter evening at an ambassadorial reception. Both being dog lovers, we chatted innocuously about our labradors and my boxer before he sprang it on me. Would I like to contribute a fortnightly column about tourism and conservation? I had been asked before, but Kunda must have caught me at a weak moment, because this time I took a deep breath and agreed.

So, in this issue #999, I thank the *Nepali Times*’ team for the opportunity, and for every Friday interpreting the news for us non-Nepali-literate residents. And to say that we look forward to the next 1,000 editions. 🇳🇵



नेपाल सरकार

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सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

“लोभ, लालच र प्रलोभनमा नपरौं अब:
लैङ्गिक हिंसा विरुद्ध लागौं सब ।”

“समन्वय, सहकार्य र साझेदारी सरकार:
लैङ्गिक हिंसाको अन्त्य मानवअधिकार ।”


“सीप, सृजना र रोजगारी सहित अघि बढौं:
लैङ्गिक हिंसा र दुर्व्यवहार हामी नसहौं ।”

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Righting the wrongs done to India's Chinese

A new book about Chinese imprisoned after the 1962 war documents this stain on Indian history

Kunda Dixit

Besides bad food, heat and boredom, what William Ma remembers about the Deoli concentration camp is the parrots. Ma was just eight when his family was rounded up from Kalimpong along with 3,000 other Chinese Indians and transported by train to a former POW camp in Rajasthan. The 1962 war between India and China had just ended, and they were to be imprisoned in the camp for five years.

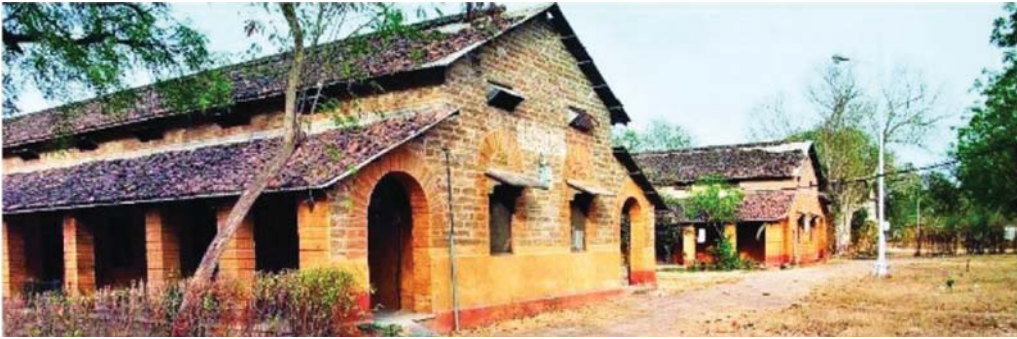
The parrots used to flock to *neem* trees in Deoli, and Ma remembers thinking: “Even the parrots have more freedom than us.”

William’s grandfather worked in the tea gardens of Hasimara in Assam, and cleared the forest during World War II to build an air force base that is still in operation. His father was born there and later moved to Kalimpong where William’s mother’s side of the family was involved in the Tibet trade.

There was no school in camp, so William and his brother Lynden were taught by their father, who made them memorise the Oxford English Dictionary. Another boyhood memory of William’s is the camp loudspeaker playing the sad Bollywood song *Bis Sal Pehele* over and over again, as if to send the message that the inmates had no future.

The prisoners were released in phases. Some were sent to China where many of them had never been before, and did not even speak the language. Others returned home to Calcutta to find their houses and businesses looted or taken over. Most then migrated to Canada, Australia or the United States.

William found a job in Nepal’s nascent trekking industry, and moved up to Kathmandu from Calcutta with his family. His sister Joy, born during the family’s detention in Deoli, has now co-authored a book with Dilip D’Souza. *The Deoliwallahs: The True*

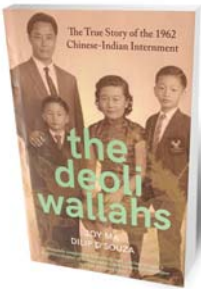


Story of the 1962 Chinese-Indian Internment documents the stories of some families, including her own.

As a young reporter on the tourism beat in Kathmandu of the early 1980s, for me William was a trusted source of news. But over the 40 years I have known him, he never once mentioned his family’s imprisonment in Deoli. I found out about it only after reading his sister’s book for this review.

I asked William this week why he never told us about the internment. “After enduring, overcoming and surviving all that, many of us do not want to remember and relive the past. We want to embrace the future,” he replied. “My Dad was psychologically scarred by the shock of being treated as an enemy by his own country even though he did nothing wrong.”

Even now, half a century later, many Deoliwallahs do not want to rake up the



The Deoliwallahs
The True Story of the 1962 Chinese-Indian Internment
by Joy Ma and Dilip D'Souza
Pan Macmillan, 2020
198 pages INR362 (Kindle), INR382 (hardcover) in Amazon.in

past. But some have begun to speak out and to document the injustice before memories fade and the older generation passes on.

Joy Ma, who now lives in California, said in an email: “I found it very difficult to tell the story because every time I brought it up I saw how much pain it caused my family and the people I knew. The breakthrough for *The Deoliwallahs* was that it is the story of a community. It was a terrible shared experience that they had survived and it was time the world heard about it so it won’t be repeated.”

The British first brought Chinese people to India to plant tea in Assam in the late 18th century, and others fled prolonged war and poverty to settle in Penang, Singapore, and Calcutta. By 1947, there were some 200,000 Chinese in India with businesses spanning tea, tanneries and timber. The brief Sino-Indian

border war had already ended when Chinese families were rounded up in Calcutta, Darjeeling and Assam and brought to Deoli. Like Joy Ma’s book, Yin Marsh’s *Doing Time with Nehru* documents the physical hardship and psychological mistreatment in the camps, which has strong parallels to the internment of American Japanese after Pearl Harbour.

Marsh was 13 when she was imprisoned with her family. Like William, she moved to Kathmandu after being freed. There are others like Wong Shiao Leung, whose family was also in Deoli and left Calcutta to set up a shoe shop in Bag Bazar in Kathmandu.

There is a larger underlying lesson for the present day from this dark chapter of Indian history. The unwillingness of the Indian state to acknowledge the injustice, and its lack of remorse means this could happen at any time against any other minority. And in fact, it is now happening with the CAA and NRC.

For the imprisoned and their families, an apology from the state would bring some kind of closure. Co-author Dilip D’Souza describes former Deoli prisoners travelling by bus from Ottawa to Toronto in 2012 after the Indian High Commission refused to accept their letter demanding an apology from the Indian government, singing in pure Hindustani, *Ajeeb Dastan Hai Yeh*.

He writes: “It is easy to say that such an incarceration can’t happen in 21st century India. . . then in 2019 the National Register of Citizens raised just this spectre.” 🇮🇳



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Go online to watch the documentary *Beyond the Barbed Wires* by Rafeeq Ellias



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Hari Bahadur Karki was seven years old when he first tasted lapsi in his hometown of Pharping. The raw fruit was very sour and at first he didn't like it, but over time the taste grew on him. Now in his 70s, Karki tends lapsi trees on his two ropanis of land in Pharping. Though the family is engaged in other farming as well, every February Karki's son Ishwor travels to Kathmandu with four sacks of lapsis from their farm.

The Karkis' lapsis are bought up in no time, and the family is happy with its sales. The demand for lapsi in Kathmandu is so great, supply cannot keep up.

"When I was first introduced to lapsi, I picked it from a tree," says Karki, "I didn't know the fruit would be so much in demand in the city. I was so surprised to learn that we could add all sorts of spices,



from sour to sweet, and consume it with our daily meal as a pickle, or that it could even be a candy." Indeed, during the September-January lapsi harvesting season, households all over Kathmandu make multiple varieties of homemade pickles and sweet-and-sour candies from this favourite fruit.

Lapsi (*Choerospondias axillaris*) is a tree native to much of Asia, including China, India, Vietnam, and Thailand and as far east as Japan. According to botanist Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha, it comes from the *Anacardiaceae* family – the same genus as mangoes – whose fruits have moist, thick pulp on the outside and a hard kernel on the inside. In English lapsis are often called Nepali hog plums, but Shrestha avoids this term so as not to confuse it with the real hog plum (*Spondias mombin*) similar to the lapsi but is native to the tropical Americas.

Lapsis are cultivated particularly

in hilly regions and the trees grow up to 30m high. Unlike other members of the *Anacardiaceae* family, *Choerospondias axillaris* trees can be male or female, and farmers may not be able to differentiate between them until they have reached maturity. Female trees give more fruit.

Vijaya Shrestha of Machhindra Bahal in Kathmandu always woke up to a house smelling strongly of lapsi. Shrestha's maternal family, and especially his aunt, made *mada* and *titaura* from lapsi peels and pulp. The mouth-watering candies were then sold at the family's Paun Bhandar in Ratna Park.

Opened almost 50 years ago, Ratna Park Paun Bhandar was once hugely popular. Business did so well that in 1997 it shifted production out of the family kitchen and into a factory in Matatirtha, which now churns out more than 30 varieties of *titaura*. In 2017, the shop itself moved from Ratna Park to New Road.

THE LO LAI

Nepalis cannot g
versatile

Alisha

THE LOVE OF LAPSI

et enough of this wild fruit

Sijapati

According to Vijaya Shrestha, lapsi is very popular and the supply falls well short of demand. The Paun Bhandar needs 2,000 to 3,000 kg of lapsi a day to make four types of treats – dry *titaura*, *mada*, *jhol titaura*, and candies. A current favourite among customers is the recently introduced lapsi *choila titaura*.

“The best thing about lapsi is, it can move between sweet and sour ingredients when used to make pickles, candies or *mada*. It can absorb any taste, making it an interesting food,” said Shrestha.

Lapsi also has health benefits. In Newar culture, after a heavy meal guests are offered *paun:kwa*, a thin lapsi gravy. “The purpose of serving *paun:kwa* after a meal is for digestion. Lapsi helps prevent stomach ache,” says Shrestha.

Public health advocate Aruna Upreti concurs. “The tanginess of lapsi helps in digestion and it has many micronutrients,

including iron and vitamin C.” She adds that lapsi, as anything, should be eaten in moderation. “You eat to enjoy the taste, not to fill your stomach. If you go overboard, lapsi itself will give you a stomach ache.”

Lapsi is such a popular fruit of the Nepal hills that many carry it abroad with them when they leave. Lisa Sherchan, 27, has lived in New York for the past 10 years and every time she visits Kathmandu or has anyone visiting from here, she asks them to bring her *titaura*. “I particularly like the *jhol titaura*, but I ask for the spicy dry one as carrying liquid food items is restricted.”

Sherchan remembers buying titaura wrapped in newspaper for two rupees when she was a child. Now, five packets of titaura last her nine months, and if she has a stash, she will never feel far from home.

She adds: “Whenever I miss home, I plop a *titaura* in my mouth and this brings Kathmandu to New York.” 🇳🇵

THE LOVE OF LAPSI



Nepalis' beloved lapsi comes in many forms, like umami titauras and sweet or spicy pickles. Watch how *lapsi ko achar* is prepared from start to finish as it is peeled, boiled in a sugary syrup and spiced to perfection.

nepalitimes.com



EVENTS



Photo Exhibition

“A Reunion of the Souls” features 32 photographs that will be on display and sold in a silent auction.
29 February, 1pm-7pm Dalai-La Boutique Hotel, Thamel (01) 4701436

Poetry Workshop

Participate in a poetry writing workshop inspired by the profound insanity and bewildering sorrow encased in Leonard Cohen’s songs and poems.
29 February, 11am-2pm, Tickets: Rs500, House of Palattes, Jhamsikhel, 9802071128



Film Screening

Attend the screening of *In The Shadows of Everest*, featuring Conrad Anker and directed by Gaëtan Lamarre. Grab your favorite drink and food from the cafeteria throughout the movie. Seating options are first come first serve.
3 March, 5:15pm-6pm, Outdoor Adventures Center Nepal, Thamel (01)4433515



Aitabaré at Dhokaima

Shop for sustainable products like organic honey, veggies and eggs, freshly baked goods, books, locally made artisanal crafts at this new Sunday market.
Every Sunday, 8am-12pm, Dhokaima Cafe, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 9803228588

NOWTHERE

NOWTHERE features work by artists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.
20 February-10 March, 11am-5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited (01) 4218048



Windhorse Gallery

Windhorse Gallery opens with its inaugural exhibition Prayer Flags: Art from the Himalayas.
28 February, 4pm onwards, Bhanimandal

Film Festival

The 8th Nepal Human Rights Film Festival will bring to light issues of minorities, justice and peace through film. Watch films from Nepal and well as the rest of the world
4-7 March, Russian Culture Center, Kamalpokhari



Farmers Market at Le Sherpa

Take your weekly shopping to the farmers market at Le Sherpa. Buy fresh organic produce cheeses, baked goods,, honey and more. You can also enjoy some delicious breakfast.
Every Saturday, 8am-12pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj

Plays from Lalabala

Lalabala, a children’s theatre group, presents two plays ‘Hurray’ and ‘Mausuff ko Dami Luga’ directed by Tanka Chaulagain and Prakesh Sindhuliya respectively.
28-29 February, 11am-2pm, Kunja Natak Ghar (01) 5245111



Nepathya Concert

Join Nepathya for a charity concert “Music for Education”. All funds will go towards building a state of art infrastructure for a school in Dolakha district.
29 February, 4:30pm-8pm, Tickets Rs1250, Bhrikutimandap, 9840057839

Mantra Live

Mantra Band will be in town all the way from the hills of Darjeeling. Join them and sing along with their hit songs.
28 February, 9pm-3:30am, Tickets: Rs1500, Privé Nepal, Tahachal, 9801090111

Acoustic Night

Enjoy the first Friday of Spring with some live acoustic music, barbeque, and free cocktails the rooftop
28 February, 6pm onwards, Pauline’s Rooftop, Panipokhari, 9803919575



Adrian Pradhan Live

Welcome spring with live music from Adrian Pradhan featuring Suraj Singh Thakuri and DJ Rupesh
28 February, 7pm-1am, Entry: Rs500, Los Escobar’s, Gairidhra, 9841945952

Jerusha Rai with Jaire


Join Jerusha Rai for a musical night as she kicks off her tour with with Jaire and Mannu Shahi.
29 February, 7pm-10pm, Beers N’ Cheers, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5524860

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu 28 February

An action-adventure comedy film, *Sonic, the Hedgehog*’s based on a Japanese video-game series created by Sega in 1991 of the same name. The film tells the story of a blue hedgehog who runs at a supersonic speed and is on the run from the evil scientist Dr. Robotnik. The film is the directorial debut of Pat Casey and Josh Miller and has an interesting ensemble cast, with Ben Schwartz as the voice of Sonic, and with Jim Carrey and James Marsden.



Overeasy

Who says breakfast foods are just for breakfast? Enjoy fluffy pancakes, refreshing smoothie bowls and healthy Buddha Bowls in the minimalist setting of this newly opened all-day breakfast place.
7am-7pm, Bansbari, 9841587695

Barbecue at the Terrace Garden

Visit the Terrace Garden for an exquisite experience of fresh, grilled, smoky and flavourful barbecue and an à la carte menu with amazing views from the rooftop.
23–29 February, 6:30pm–10:30pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat (01) 4411818



Detox Cafe

Looking to kick-start your health regime? Detox Cafe is the place for you. With their healthy smoothie bowls, quinoa salads and green juices, you can still eat out while eating clean. Try their Chickpea Salad.
8am-8pm, Labim Mall, Pulchowk, 9849371072

Sarangi

For fantastic vegetarian options and a relaxed atmosphere, Sarangi is one of the best that Kathmandu has to offer. Their beetroot hummus with fresh pita bread, eggplant lasagna and decadent nachos are delicious and healthy.
10am-10pm, Thamel, 9813992602

Raithaane

Eat your way through Nepal at Raithaane, a restaurant that is committed to using locally sourced foods. Each dish on the menu is connected to the different communities of the nation, so you can eat everything from the east to the west.
12pm-7pm, Patan Darbar Square, 9801002971



Soalte Westend Premier

Located in the green plains of Nepalgunj, this expansive resort is one of Nepal’s more energy efficient and eco-friendly getaways.
Nepalgunj (081) 551145

Bandipur Safari Lodge

The town of Bandipur is famous not only for its cultural assets but for its wild terrain, and Bandipur Safari Lodge is the optimal gateway for this jungle experience. You can enjoy activities like Wildlife Safari, Bird Watching and Nature Walk.
Bandipur, 9449597880



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

Pataleban Vineyard Resort

An eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picnics to rejuvenate from your tedious routine. Take a stroll through the vineyards of Pataleban, watch the panoramic view of Kathmandu Valley and sip aromatic wines during your stay.
Chisapani (01) 4316377, 9841679364



Kantipur Temple House

With its red brick walls, wood carvings, floor seating and traditional courtyard, Kantipur Temple House resembles the palaces of old Nepali kings right at the outskirts of Thamel.
Thamel (01) 4250131

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KRIPA JOSHI





Home composting is the most environmentally-friendly way to deal with kitchen and garden waste. It reduces organic waste in landfills and their subsequent greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, the compost that is produced is rich in nutrients and helps to improve both soil's quality and its ability to retain water and air. For small spaces you can try vermicomposting, using earthworms. #FridaysForFuture

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 21 - 27 February

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

PM2.5

FRIDAY Feb 21	SATURDAY Feb 22	SUNDAY Feb 23	MONDAY Feb 24	TUESDAY Feb 25	WEDNESDAY Feb 26	THURSDAY Feb 27
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Finally a breath of fresh air, literally. After soaring to the ‘Very Unhealthy’ purple zone last week, the concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns in the city air came down significantly (*daily average in graph, above*) except for during peak hours, thanks to a pretty wet weekend that cleared much of the pollutants from the air. But as the rains taper off and things warm up, expect the quality of the air to decline as the week goes by. Enjoy the relatively clean air as long as it lasts.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



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ROSHAN SAPKOTAR/RS

WORK IN PROGRESS: Rani Pokhari undergoing construction against the backdrop of the newly completed Darbar High School in Kathmandu this week. Both the pond and the school were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.



MONIKA DEUPALA

SMILE, PLEASE: A monk takes a picture of a Dipankara Buddha brought to the Samyak festival in Nag Bahal in Patan on Thursday. The almsgiving festival is held once every five years in Lalitpur.



RADHIKA KANDEL/RS

MAJESTIC ARENA: A panorama including Mt Machapuchre as seen from a new football stadium in Pokhara which is nearing completion.



MONIKA DEUPALA

FESTIVE MOOD: Tibetan and Sherpa communities in Baudha celebrated their new year Gyalpo Losar on Wednesday with traditional dance and song performances.

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Reassessing Nepal's ban on domestic work abroad and exploring employment alternatives

Activists decry the ban on migrating for employment in domestic work as it impedes a person's freedom of mobility, freedom of work and freedom of choice. And women in particular continue to circumvent the ban, a testament to their determination to provide for their families despite restrictions.



The ban removes the urgency to actually address the root causes of vulnerability. But let us pretend for a moment that the ban has achieved its desired goal -- women have stopped going abroad to work in this sector in which they are highly vulnerable.

The focus should then have been on the alternatives to domestic work abroad. Women interested to engage in remunerative work either being absorbed into the internal labour market or migrating abroad for relatively safer, more rewarding jobs in other fields. A ban in itself is an ineffective tool. A ban in the absence of alternatives, both domestically and abroad, is worse.

International



A Nepali domestic worker hanging clothes out to dry on a balcony in Beirut.

UPASANA KHADKA

A substitute to the domestic worker ban that merits consideration is female labour outmigration for work in jobs in other sectors. While gender-based occupational segregation is a reality, should female labour migrants just be shunted into domestic work?

There is no explicit ban on women's mobility to fields of manufacturing, hospitality and services. Why are women who are willing to overcome cultural and familial barriers to use unauthorised and risky channels for domestic work abroad not opting for legal channels to work in other sectors? The financial, informational or skills-related

barriers they face need to be gravely considered and addressed.

The reality is women physically moving to where jobs are, even domestically, is not common. According to the latest Labour Force Survey, more than 90% of female internal migrants in rural areas and 70% in urban areas of Nepal reported marriage as their primary reason for moving.

In the case of foreign employment, given that an explicit ban is imposed on a sector that disproportionately affects women, explicit efforts targeting their access to other, safer jobs should have been considered.

The internal labour market

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migration for domestic work

ON AND OFF

The flip-flop saga of imposing and lifting bans on Nepali women seeking domestic work abroad in the past 35 years.

1985-1995

Consent required from a guardian

1995-2000

Allowed only in certain organised sectors

Ban on labour migration for women (1998)

2000-2005

Conditional ban (embassy guarantee required)
Reapproval after visiting Nepal, approval in writing from family (2003)

Allowed for jobs in organised sectors in Malaysia (2005)

2005-2010

Conditional ban on female migrants (2007)

Gulf and Malaysia opened for women, but not for domestic work (2008)

Complete ban on female domestic work in Lebanon (2009)

Ban lifted for women to go to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar

2010-2015

Age ban on women domestic workers below 30 in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE (2012)

Temporary ban on housemaids to Gulf countries (2014)

Age ban for women domestic workers under 25 for Gulf (2015)

2015-2020

Women above 24 allowed for domestic work through select recruiters (2016)

Ban on domestic workers after field visit by Parliamentary Committee (2017)

Ban lifted for current domestic workers to visit Nepal during holidays (2019)

options also remain bleak for women. The Labour Force Survey found that for every 100 males in the working-age population, there were 125 females, whereas for every 100 employed males, there were only 59 employed females.

We often express concerns about Nepal not being able to capitalise on its youth dividend because of mass migration abroad. We like the idea of youth staying back and building the country. But what we mean is that we like the idea of male youth staying back and building the country because women are, in fact, not leaving. The number of legal female migrants has been around 20,000 annually, less than 19% of total male migrants.

Recognizing the potential of women would have meant addressing the barriers to their participating and flourishing in the labour market, which would have been further opportune in the context of high male outmigration. Instead, the labour-force participation of women is low at 26% (excluding work carried out for domestic production) while the share of female youth (15-24) not in employment, education or training is over 47%. Among those employed, the median monthly earning of women is two-third of their male counterparts.

The ban on domestic work abroad is an easy fix that can be dismantled in its entirety should a willing leader, or in our case a willing Parliamentary Committee, come along. What is more difficult to dismantle are pervasive protectionist norms and stigmas that are perhaps as restrictive, but more enduring.

The issue of the ban on migration for domestic work in Nepal will resurface this month to coincide with the visit of the Parliamentary Committee to West Asia to reassess it. The ban needs to be lifted, but this is also an opportune moment to address other less-explicit but enduring factors that are holding women back, both literally and figuratively. 🇳🇵

Upasana Khadka writes this column, *Labour Mobility* every month in *Nepali Times*, analysing trends affecting Nepal's workers abroad.



An aspiring migrant worker in a Korean language class in Kathmandu.

UPASANA KHADKA

Shama had a job awaiting her as a domestic worker in Kuwait. But given Nepal's ban on such work, she had to travel overland through India to fly out from Delhi airport. However, she could not make it past immigration in the UAE, and was sent back to Kathmandu the same day – to the very airport that she had avoided due to the ban.

The Parliamentary Committee on Industry, Commerce, Labour and Consumer Interest will be visiting the Gulf this month to review the situation of Nepali domestic workers. This visit will determine the fate of tens of thousands of Nepalis like Shama, who are impacted by the ban on domestic work abroad that came into effect in 2017 after a similar visit by a Parliamentary Committee.

That visit was considered not thorough enough because Committee Members, instead of making the effort to reach out to domestic workers outside the Embassy, were reported to be more interested in meeting politically connected businessmen and Non-Resident Nepali Association leaders. Their interactions with domestic workers were limited to abused migrant workers at embassy shelters.

With insufficient protection, domestic work is one of the employment sectors that sees the most exploitation, but imposing a ban took the focus away from the core issues, including more bilateral efforts, diplomatic pressure, strengthening of embassies, better training, new ways to maintain regular contact with domestic workers and stronger monitoring of both employers and recruiters.

Lift the ban on household workers

Instead, the ban superseded any policy to correct weaknesses in the domestic work sector, making domestic workers even more invisible as they are neither in the government's records, nor eligible for participation in safe-migration initiatives. This has made holding recruiters or employers accountable for abuse even more challenging.

As a blanket policy, the ban also does not distinguish among destination countries or domestic work categories. Not all countries where Nepalis are employed in domestic work are equally vulnerable. The UAE, for example, has made visible efforts towards domestic-worker safety. It has adopted a domestic-worker-specific law, and has set up government-approved Tadbeer Centers that provide all services related to domestic workers. Similarly, not all domestic workers are equally vulnerable. A domestic worker is not just a housemaid, but can also be a guard, a gardener, a personal cooks or a driver.

Because of the high demand for domestic workers and the push factors in Nepal, the ban has allowed unscrupulous agents to find loopholes to overcome the state-imposed barriers. Nepal's long open border with India has rendered the ban ineffective. And continue to emigrate for domestic work as cleaners or on tourist visas, with airport 'setting' – a widely understood phenomenon involving bribes to at the immigration and labour counters.

We decry the limited mobility of Nepali workers abroad due to passport confiscation by employers, yet we limit domestic workers' mobility by refusing them labour approvals to travel abroad legally. We emphasise skills-training for migrant workers, but we deprive those travelling for domestic work of the 35-day mandatory, free, residential domestic worker pre-departure training as per Nepali law when the ban isn't in place. We censure limited labour rights abroad, yet impose a ban that prevents thousands of women from visiting ailing parents or reuniting with their children back home. Until recently when the government finally allowed current domestic workers to come home for holidays, they could not return to Nepal for fear of not being allowed back out to well-paying jobs. Those who did had to pay large sums to use unauthorized channels.

The ban clearly does not take into account the factors that drive women to seek domestic work abroad. For many women, such work is the first time they engage in work with remuneration and allows them to provide for their families.

Stories of abuse are prevalent and horrific, but surely numerous on-and-off restrictive policies in the last two decades (age bans, country bans, conditional bans, blanket bans) are not the appropriate response. The Parliamentary Committee owes it to current and future Nepalis in the domestic work sector to end the ban once and for all, and to emphasise more effective policy responses that get to the heart of the issue instead of shrugging off responsibility by attributing any malpractice to the domestic worker's own irresponsibility for breaking the law. 🇳🇵

Name of worker has been changed.

Upasana Khadka

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The climate connection to

Rastraraj Bhandari

The Covid-19 epidemic has now spread beyond China, and is being transmitted even by infected individuals who are asymptomatic.

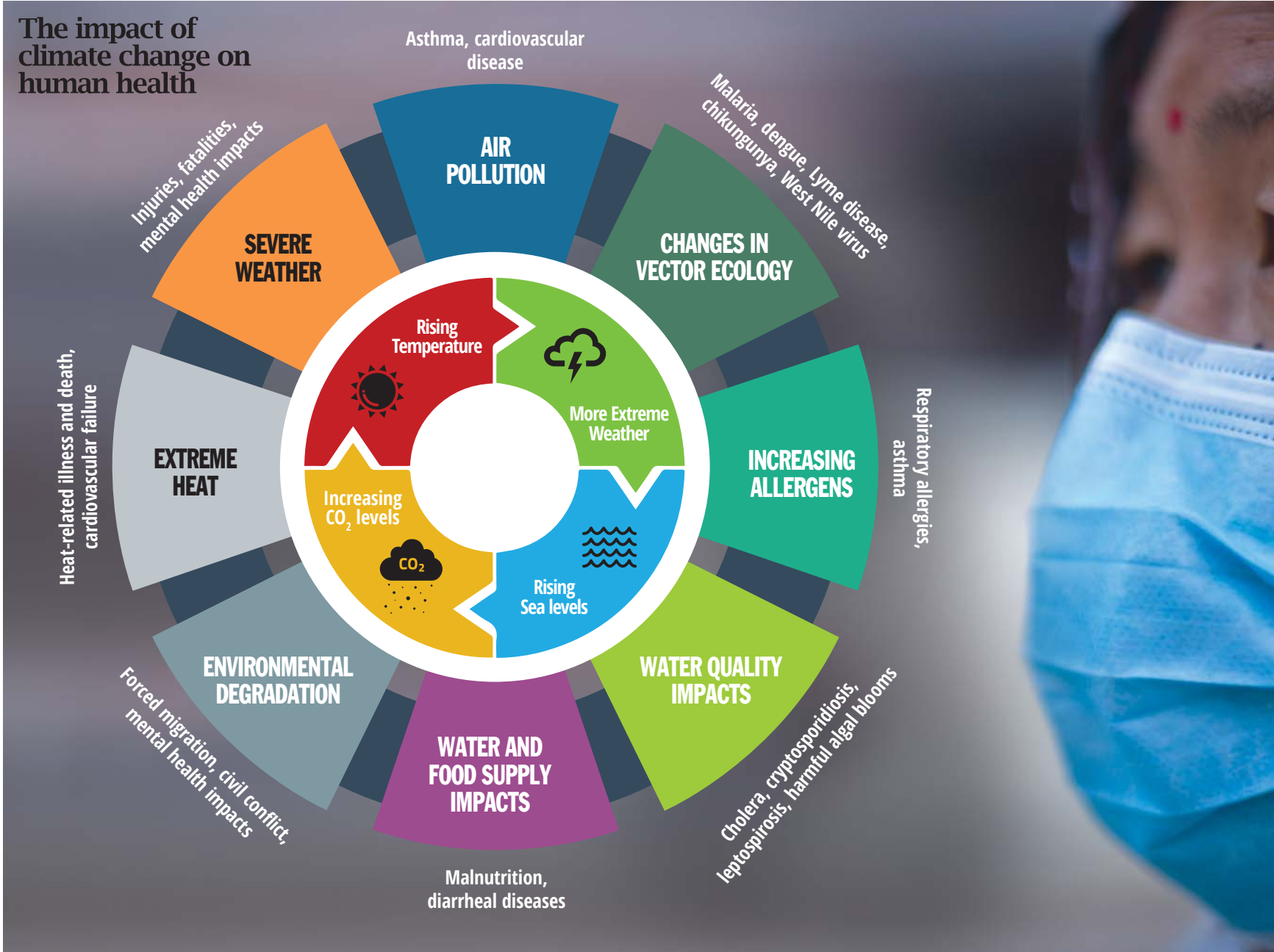
Chinese scientists sequenced the genome in weeks, and many countries have resorted to containment measures. The WHO has declared Covid-19 an emergency of international concern, stopping short of labeling it a pandemic.

The virus continues to spread, highlighting our common vulnerability in understanding and responding to a crisis of this scale. It now appears that Covid-19 might have emerged as a seasonal disease, one that is likely to go global and stick around.

Containment of Covid-19 and longer-term measures to deal with future epidemics require us to look beyond this singular outbreak and to see human and animal health and indeed the entire ecosystem and integrally interconnected.

The Covid-19 epidemic may turn out to be the tip of the iceberg of the climate crisis. The geo-physical and socio-economic changes that the world is experiencing today will bring unprecedented challenges, including public health crises like this epidemic.

Among the climate crisis’ many implications, the effect on public health has received relatively little attention, despite its broad scope from mental illness to cardiovascular, respiratory and infectious diseases. The most straightforward public health impact of climate change comes from the increase in diseases that peak in the warmer months: vector-borne infections such as malaria and dengue, and food-borne afflictions like salmonellosis. Between 2030 and 2050, WHO estimates climate change will cause approximately 250, 000 additional deaths per year from



malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.

Nepal is a real world example of a country already witnessing the public health impact of climate change. Dengue has moved to higher altitudes because of global warming. Nepal had its first reported dengue outbreak as late as 2006 in the Tarai, but fast forward to 2019, and 67 of Nepal’s

77 districts, including those at higher elevations, saw dengue epidemics. Last year, 14,000 Nepalis were diagnosed with dengue and six died, and some estimates put the number of infections closer to 140,000.

The other fear is that new viral epidemics will be released by the thawing of permafrost. The frozen soil in the earth’s polar regions and

higher elevations binds microbes, methane, or poisonous mercury, but with global temperatures rising twice as fast in the Arctic and the Himalaya, permafrost is thawing at an alarming rate.

Some scientists estimate that 10% of permafrost has already melted since the 1990s, and the world might lose more of it even if nations adhere to cuts in carbon as

per the 2015 Paris Agreement. In addition to the risk to public health, the dangers of melting permafrost include the release of sequestered carbon and methane, the compromising of infrastructure built on top of permafrost, and the impact of the melting on ecological balance.

Permafrost typically hosts up to one billion bacteria per gram of

The yin and yang of

Marcia Chen
in Shanghai

Today is my 33rd day of isolation in my apartment in Shanghai. I have spent over a month living in solitude and not going outdoors, not speaking with anyone in person. This has been the longest silence of my life.

When the coronavirus first struck China, I entered a deep panic, as did everyone I knew. After some days of cloistered existence, however, the crisis started to show us its instructive side. In Chinese, the word for ‘crisis’, 危机, is composed of two characters, one representing danger and the other representing opportunity: like the union of yin and yang.

Opportunity #1: Slow down

China has been on hyper mode for many years. GDP growth seems to be the single measure of success here and the country operates like a machine set at maximum speed. As an individual I am a part of that machine. I know it is important to slow down to review and reflect, but I do not have the courage to press the brakes. This winter, the

coronavirus pulled the brakes on the whole system.

The whole country ground to a halt. We had the longest holiday in history. People stopped being cogs in a machine and returned to being human beings. For my part, I have been able to ask myself what is truly important to me. I have started to read books not about productivity and how to get to the next level in my career, but about humanity and the meaning of life. No longer on autopilot, I have been able to step out of my programming and to live more consciously, to make more deliberate choices.

Opportunity #2: Bond with family

In the busy modern lives we live here in urban China, spending time with our elders does not even make it into the top five of our priorities. But the coronavirus changed all that. It brought us the gift of precious time with our families, time that many of us had not realised we had been missing.

My friend is 55 and her parents are in their nineties. “It is the first time in my life that I have been with them like this and I had never before this imagined myself connecting with them so deeply,” she said, her voice trembling, “No rushes, no agenda, no

Forced to slow down, people in urban China have come to understand what matters most to them



Covid-19



BIKRAM RAI

soil. The release of these pathogens could unleash deadly epidemics. The melting of Himalayan permafrost is of particular concern to Nepal, but it has received little research or media attention. The 2016 Anthrax outbreak in Siberia is attributed to bacteria released from frozen reindeer carcasses exposed by thawed permafrost. But scientists are

unclear about the magnitude, scale and type of risk posed by thawed bacteria. Amidst all the uncertainty, what is clear is that the climate crisis is going to expose humanity to new epidemics. Politicising the global challenge of combating microbes that see no borders is both counterintuitive and detrimental. Instead of criticism of the Chinese government, what we need is an objective evaluation of the efficacy of policy measures used by that government in containing the Covid-19 epidemic. Global coordination and more investment in public health research are what is needed. Even so, the United States government is proposing to reduce funding for the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the National Institute of Health (NIH) and foreign aid. Although the Covid-19 epidemic itself might not be directly linked to environmental and climate change, it highlights the interconnectedness of human health with animals and with the ecosystem that supports all of us. Beijing's ban on wildlife trade and consumption now needs to be emulated and enforced worldwide.

If China with its massive logistical capacity has struggled to come to grips with this epidemic, it is questionable how less-developed countries with weak health infrastructures, such as Nepal, may contain a possible future outbreak. International assistance in capacity building to reduce health vulnerability will be crucial.

In preparing for extreme impacts of climate change on global public health, it is important to avoid doomsaying. It is urgent that the world come together and shift the narrative towards identifying solutions. 🇳🇵

Rastraraj Bhandari is pursuing a *Masters in Economics and China Studies at the Yenching Academy of Peking University in Beijing.*

coronavirus

to-do list, just spending time with them, listening to them, sharing my world with them, and understanding their fears and joys. It felt like a life gift.” When our work lives slowed down, we came to recognise our human need to connect and to share with the ones we love. The virus shed light on the things we take for granted and reminded us of how precious they are.

Opportunity #3: Community Modern life has trained us to live in isolation: to compete rather than collaborate, to be independent rather than interdependent, individualistic rather than community-minded. The crisis has taught us the opposite. Instead of thinking about personal achievement, in this moment of shared difficulty we have thought about how we can connect with others and make things happen together. Though most people are keeping indoors, online communities have been more active than ever. Numerous WeChat groups were created overnight, offering free online coaching, counselling, meditation, and all manner of nurturing support. Once again, the crisis reminded us that we were

human beings, not robots. And that we have a deep longing for love, belonging and connection; that these things matter more to us than career advancement or material gain. The evolution of personal awareness and consciousness, as we have seen happen in many ways during the coronavirus scare, leads to our being able to contribute to creating a better world. The crisis has a thick silver lining. May it be instructive and teach us to start the new decade in a reflective, fresh, and new way. Stay strong, China. To end, I would like to share a poem written last week by a friend:

*In the days I was kept indoors
I saw myself start
To smell the scents of a flower
To feel the rhythm of rain drops
To see the light of sunrise
To see beauty in every small thing in life
Also, I reminded myself to start
To see the truth as it is
To grow myself inwards
To make a difference with my presence
To speak to my heart
To love, truly and authentically.*

Marcia Chen is a business professional based in Shanghai, and contibuted this comment for Nepali Times online.



ABHINAV SHRESTHA

From Hubei to Kharipati

A Nepali medical student evacuated from Wuhan in China shares his experience of the Covid-19 outbreak

Shristi Karki

When Abhinav Shrestha, 23, saw the Nepal Airlines Airbus 330 jet land at Wuhan Airport on 16 February, the proud sun-and-moon flag of his country on its tail, his heart swelled with pride. It took until after boarding for it to sink in that, after three weeks of confinement in his dorm room in Jingzhou in China's Hubei province, he was going home. Shrestha was halfway into his one-year MBBS internship at the Jingzhou No. 1 People's Hospital when news came of the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, three hour's drive away. Doctors at the hospital advised all students to remain in self-quarantine for two weeks. Being the child of a physician back in Nepal and a medical student himself, Shrestha knew that the virus had a low fatality rate. He was in constant touch with his father, who reassured him, advising him to take the necessary precautions but urging him not to worry. "I knew the elderly were most vulnerable, and was aware of what to do to protect myself from the virus, but there was nothing to protect me from the boredom and loneliness of those three weeks," Shrestha told Nepali Times over the phone on the fifth day of his quarantine at Kharipati near Kathmandu. Of the 182 students in Hubei province who signed up to be flown back to Nepal, six had a fever and were returned to the hospital from Wuhan airport. Shrestha says it was a matter of great pride for the Nepali students that their government had sent a plane

especially to take them home. Many African students and those from other Asian countries are still in lockdown in various cities in Hubei. "It was surreal seeing the big Nepal Airlines jet taxiing into the empty terminal in the snow," Shrestha says. "Whenever I travelled between Nepal and China, it had always been on a Chinese airline." Shrestha had been back to Nepal just twice during his six years in China, and it was finding himself at the epicentre of the epidemic that brought him back home for the third time. He had completed his studies at Yangtze University in Jingzhou and was doing his internship in gastroenterology. Shrestha and other students had their temperatures checked five times during the three-hour bus ride to Wuhan airport, where they had a thorough medical exam one more time before boarding. After the five-hour flight to Kathmandu, Shrestha and his fellow passengers were quarantined at a converted Nepal Electrical Authority training facility at Kharipati, where he shares a room with two other Nepali students. "It was a great relief to be back home, and although our movement is restricted we feel much more free here than during lockdown in China," Shrestha says. "It is like being in a college hostel again, and the food is superb." The evacuees, some of them friends, have been spending time together sunning themselves on the terrace and using the free SIM cards provided by the government. They play sports and watch movies. Shrestha has also been studying at night, in case he can go back to Hubei to complete his internship and the exams at the end of it. However, it is unclear when his university is going to reopen, and

he is trying to see if it might be possible to complete his internship in a hospital in Nepal instead. For Shrestha and other students, though, China has become a second home. "I really miss China," he says. Many Nepali students in China speak Mandarin, which has allowed them to make Chinese friends and to feel comfortable there. Shrestha's experience of the outbreak has strengthened his conviction in his choice of profession. In the early days of the outbreak, he saw patients having to be sent back home despite Chinese health officials' best efforts, because there simply was not enough space to treat everyone. He also saw that people did not give up hope. "They would wait outside the hospital all night," he says. "My father is a doctor, so I had always wanted to be one, but in those moments I realized how much people expect from doctors." Preliminary test results for all 175 students evacuated from Hubei have come back negative for Covid-19. The evacuees will undergo another round of testing after the 2-week quarantine period is over on Sunday, and if they still test negative, they will be given the all-clear. Shrestha cannot wait to see his family. Because the news from China has focused on deaths from the virus and not recoveries, he says, his family has been very concerned about him. Seeing them after the quarantine period is over will be a tremendous relief for both him and them. "The joy I will feel when I see them this time will be very different to the joy I felt when I came back home from China on other occasions," he says. 🇳🇵

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YOUR EXPECTATIONS



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PKD+BDG+MKN vs KPO+BDB

Some of you have taken The Ass aside at party palaces in the past week to ask: “What is the meaning of life?” Others have wanted to know: “Will the world end with a whimper or a bang?”

Such questions are easily answered, but there was one deeply philosophical query that flummoxed me: “Who will be the next prime minister?” To which my answer was: “How should I know, I am an asstrophysicist, not an asstrologer.”

It is natural for many of you to be confused by the conspiracies being hatched within the NCP. That is why, as a free public service to members of our loyalty card holders, let me simplify it for you:

KPO and PKD agreed to take turns being PM, but KPO changed his mind. PKD realised KPO’s kidneys were not packing up just yet, and got MKN and JNK to poke KPO. But that didn’t work, so PKD got BDG into the Upper House with the help of NKS, JNK and MKN. RBT said it was a terrible idea but didn’t stand in the way. KPO said No Way Jose, YRK is in. BDG is so desperate to be PM he will kowtow to anyone, even GBBSD. KPO is now isolated with only SN and IP on his side, even trusted lieutenant BP has bolted because of fear being blackmailed over Baluwatar. MKN would rather back KPO as PM, but is miffed KPO hasn’t given him the respect he deserves. MKN knows PKD will dump him the instant his usefulness is over, but is angling for PKD to make him Prez. JNK also wants to be Prez. But neither has a chance because PKD’s top-secret goal is to be Executive Prez after KPO vacates party Chair.

And here is where the plot thickens: MKN meets KPO on Wednesday night, who tells him PKD will not keep his promise, but by now there is too much bad blood between them. A weak NCP would have been a golden opportunity for the NC, but SBD and RCP are at each other’s throats, and cannot get their acts together. Intense behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings are going on as we speak, with the following meetings this week:

Tuesday:
PKD+BDG+MKN+JNK
Wednesday morning:
RBT+TBR+NKS+BP
Wednesday afternoon:
NKS+PKD+MKN
Wednesday midnight:
BDG+PKD+JNK
Thursday telephonically in the wee hours:
BDB+KPO
Thursday morning at the crack of dawn:
KPO+SN+IP
Thursday noon:
SBD+RCP

The reason anal-yeasts get it all wrong when trying to make sense of Nepali politics is they think there are rules. Actually, it is more like a cockfight. The gloves are off, and hitting the opponent below the belt is SOP. We don’t bother with backstabbing, we just stab each other in the front. But the main rule is: the enemy of your enemy is your enemy.



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