

Publisher's Note

What a wonderful coincidence! Just as Nepal is formally entering the federal era with the election of the seven provincial governments, the Annapurna Media Network is launching its flagship English news and entertainment outlet: The Annapurna Express.

This weekly news and entertainment newspaper will serve the Nepali reading public quality English content that is both substantive and fun to read.

With the promulgation of the new constitution, followed by the three tiers of elections, we believe Nepal has turned a corner. Now is the perfect time to start the process of economic transformation of the country: boost our industries, create new jobs and eradicate poverty. The AMN is committed to playing our little part in this transformation—and this will be our goal with The Express, too.

We will give space to reportage and analysis from all seven provinces to give our readers a complete picture of how the new federation is shaping up, even as the country now strives to bring about the much-needed balance in the handing of its two neighbors. Besides this, we will run thought-provoking opinion pieces on contemporary national and international issues. We also cover business, technology, fashion, movies, books and expats—it's a complete package.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Yubraj Ghimire, the former editor of The Annapurna Post, for his early inputs in The Express.

We have worked hard to come up with this newspaper over the past few months. The final product is now out and you, the readers, are the ultimate judge. Any feedback is most welcome.

Capt. Rameshwar Thapa
(Chairman)
Annapurna Media Network

IN GOD'S FAMILY



Newari girls married en masse at Bagalamukhi Mandir, Lalitpur on February 6 to Bel (fruit of wood apple tree) which is considered auspicious by the community. Bel represents Lord Kumar, who is the son of Lord Shiva | Photo by DIPEN SHRESTHA

The federal arithmetic

In many ways the financial viability of the federal set-up is a question of whether to see the glass as half-empty or half-full, explains Biswas Baral

One of the main concerns over federalism is regarding its costs, which, some reckon, are prohibitive. Just to set up the new federal infrastructure, for example, is expected to cost Rs 820 billion over the next three years.

The initial signs of profligacy of our political leaders in the new federal set-up are troubling. In a populist measure, for example, the outgoing government decided to drastically increase old-age pensions, costing the exchequer Rs 200 billion immediately, and much more in the future.

Tomorrow, given the checkered spending record of our politicians, there could also be a rat race to buy

There are many benefits of federalism, too, for a geographically and ethnically diverse country

the most expensive bungalows and cars for the new MPs and ministers, and there are bound to be many pitched battles between the seven provinces and the central government over division of spoils. The country may also have to rely on foreign aid to tide over its expenses. Moreover, the functioning (and the costs) of the new federal provinces and local units is rather tricky to

work out.

But it is also a question of whether to see the glass as half-empty or half-full. For there are unquestionable benefits of federalism, too, for a geographically and ethnically diverse Nepal. Nor are costs a one-way street: while some expenses have gone up, others (in having fewer ministries, for instance) have come down.

"It could all be worth it," says Khim Lal Devkota, a fiscal federalism expert. For the first time in the country's history, says Devkota, the power of Singhadurbar is being devolved to the grassroots, which is "something to be celebrated".

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PM Deuba was happily steadfast in passing one populist measure after another

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**MIGRATION TO
'KALAPAHAD'
PEOPLE OF KARNALI
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TOURISM

**Record number of
tourists last year**

Nepal relies heavily on tourism. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2017 tourism accounted for 7.5 percent of Nepal's GDP, and the country was ranked 37th, among the 185 countries surveyed on tourism's direct contribution to GDP. In 2017 tourism supported 427,000 jobs in Nepal were.

With its 'Tourism Vision 2020' Nepal plans to bring two million tourists by 2020. But delays in infra projects make the task difficult.

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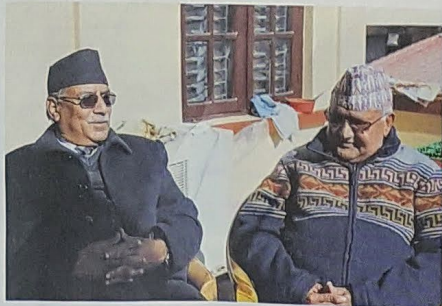
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WATCHOUT

Whither the communist merger?

Oli is reluctant to hand over leadership of what would be an all-powerful party, even if he gets to be the prime minister.



APEX BUREAU | Kathmandu

A few things stall the long-hyped merger between CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Center), the first and the third largest parties in the national parliament respectively. The most important of them is the dispute over who gets to lead the unified communist party. Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has categorically said in merger talks that the unification is happening only if he gets the post of chairman of the combined outfit.

When, back in October, the two parties had announced their pre-poll alliance, and an eventual merger, the 'gentleman's agreement' between the two party chairmen was widely publicized: while Dahal would be the head of the new party, UML chairman KP Sharma Oli would lead the new government. UML denies any such deal. Moreover, Oli is reluctant to hand over leadership of what would be an all-powerful party, even if he gets to be the prime minister.

This is why UML has now proposed a middle-way solution: making Dahal and Oli duo co-chairmen, even as Oli also leads the new government. When The Express asked a senior Maoist leader if such an arrangement would be agreeable to the Maoists, he said the party prefers 'one-person-one-post' formula.

But UML is unlikely to agree to it easily. "During the elections we followed the 70-30 principle for distribution of constituencies between UML and Maoists," says UML Secretary Pradeep Gyawali. "We would like to continue with this arrangement". In other words, Dahal and the Maoists must accept their junior status in the merger process.

Gyawali concedes the Maoist concerns over equitable distribution of portfolios are valid, and something to be expected. "But we also need to give a serious thought to the psychological impact on UML rank and file of a sudden change in party leadership."

Senior Maoist leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha, for his part, believes the hurdles to unification are two-fold: disagreement over the political line of the new outfit and over the shape of the new party organization. "But the two parties continue to talk and discussions so far are extremely positive," says Shrestha. "A breakthrough is imminent."

The Maoists are pressing for a merger before the formation of the new government, which, if the current schedule is followed, could happen as soon as the end of the second week of February. But if Oli becomes the prime minister before the merger, the Maoists fear the loss of their leverage over UML. Perhaps for the same reason UML wants to delay the merger.

Asked when we should realistically expect the merger, Gyawali replies: "Sometime at the end of February."

► also read: Editorial on pg. 4

Quote of the Week



Nepali Congress is ready to hand over government leadership and stay in the opposition, as per people's mandate

Biswa Prakash Sharma,
Spokesperson, Nepali Congress



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The India-bound men of Karnali at the Jamunah border of Banke district | Photo by Govinda Prasad Devkota

Kalapahad still beckons

India is the chief source of jobs for men (and, increasingly, women) from the Karnali zone, a region comprised of five big but sparsely-populated mid-western districts

By Govinda Prasad Devkota | Nepalguni

When what they cultivated proved too little to feed his family even for three months a year, the 12-year-old Harilal Kami decided to live his village in Jumla district for Kalapahad ('Black Mountain') in search of work. Kalapahad is an informal local term for India, historically used to hint of the despair attached to having to leave your country, via an arduous route through the 'black mountains'.

That was nearly 60 years ago. Kami is now 71, back in Nepal, and finally seeking citizenship papers. "I wanted to be a certified Nepali citizen before I died," says Kami.

Likewise, it has been three decades since Laxmi Prasad Devkota, 60, of Kartikswami municipality in Jumla started going to India in search of work. "Who would have given a good job to an uneducated person like me?" he asks. "To go to Gulf countries, I didn't know their language. Nor did I have the money for it. I then decided to go to India."

India is the chief source of jobs for men (and, increasingly, women) from the Karnali zone, a region comprised of five big but sparsely-populated mid-western districts of Dolpa, Humla, Jumla, Kalikot and Mugu. (The zone now falls in Province 6 of the new federal setup.)

In recent times, the people of Karnali have also started going to other countries for jobs, but India remains the prime destination for these mostly uneducated workers. The soil of Karnali is not fertile; the region cannot even grow enough to feed itself.

Often, with little to eat at home, whole families migrate to India. The region now has reliable road networks, which has helped with their daily lives. But Karnali's imports still far outstrip exports, decimating the local economy and leading to more and

more out-migration.

Among those headed to India, again, are 44-year-old Rajkali Damai and her 49-year-old husband Prem Damai of Tatopani rural municipality. Both had first left for India with their parents while they were very young. The two got married in India and had three children there. They were happily settled.

But they were forced to return to Nepal after they started getting into trouble with the Indian authorities over their lack of any identifying documents. "We came to Nepal after four days of travel just to get our citizenship," says Prem Damai. "If there were employment opportunities at home, we would not have had to go to India to start with."

According to the 2011 national census, the population of Karnali is 388,000. It should not be difficult to provide gainful employment to such a small population.

In fact, every year, the central government spends Rs 70 million specifically to create jobs in Karnali. But the money sent with the express purpose of giving all the youths of Karnali at least 100 days of employment a year is invariably pocketed by powerful political leaders and contractors, locals complain.

"Even to build local roads, the contractors hire dozers. They don't need manual laborers like me," says Devkota of Jumla.

Nor are NGOs, whose hoarding boards adorn every other household in Karnali, doing much. The irony is not lost on the locals that most of these NGOs have 'creating local jobs' as their main goal.

So few able-bodied men and women remain in Karnali that, often, should someone fall sick there is no one to take them to the hospital, and should that person die, nor are there enough folks to carry the dead body to cremation-site.

number wise

Global Terrorism Index

10 Worst Affected countries by terrorism



On a scale of 0-10: Ten worst affected and 0 the least. Source: Satatista

weekend weather

AccuWeather

Regional forecast

Kathmandu
Sunday (Feb 11)



DAY: Mostly cloudy, no chance of rain
Sunrise: 6:45 AM
NIGHT: Partly cloudy, no rains
Moonrise: 3:14 AM

Temperature (°C)
Saturday (Feb 10)

22° 6°
Maximum Minimum

Sunday (Feb 11)
21° 8°
Maximum Minimum

Pokhara
Sunday (Feb 11)



DAY: Partly sunny and nice. Winds from the NW 6 km/h
NIGHT: Mostly cloudy. Winds from the N 7 km/h

Temperature (°C)
Saturday (Feb 10)

23° 9°
Maximum Minimum

Sunday (Feb 11)
22° 9°
Maximum Minimum

Biratnagar
Sunday (Feb 11)



DAY: Sun through high clouds. Winds from the SE 9 km/h
NIGHT: Partly cloudy. Winds from the NNE 7 km/h

Temperature (°C)
Saturday (Feb 10)

26° 11°
Maximum Minimum

Sunday (Feb 11)
27° 14°
Maximum Minimum

Climate News

Global warming is accelerating

New research led by the University of Arizona shows that the Earth's average surface temperature increased about 0.9 of a degree Celsius from 1900 to 2013.

From 2014 to 2016, the global surface temperature climbed an additional 0.24 C, which is a record. The researchers determined that this most recent three-year period of warming had actually increased the total amount of warming since 1900 by more than 25 percent.

These record-breaking temperature jumps will continue unless greenhouse gas emissions decline.



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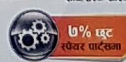
THE WOLF-EYE HEADLAMP



STREET FIGHTER LOOKS & GRAPHICS



WIDE REAR TUBELESS TYRE



समस्त हरेक सडिमा पाकडुमिस् बाप प पावड

Kathmandu Valley Balaju 4361786 • Balkumari 5186184 • Banepa 691224 • Bhaktapur 6613112 • Buddhabari 4104540, 4104541 • Gaththaghar 6638444 • Gyaneshwor 4428970 • Kantipath 4225377, 4266517 • Kumaripati 5008781
Maharajgunj 4373514 • Mitra Park 5241224, 5241033 • Putalisadak 4435155 • Ravibhavan 4670812 • Swoyambhu 4289737
Outside of Valley Attaria 551244 • Baglung 520174 • Bharatpur 526697 • Bardibas 550552 • Bhairahawa 523930 • Bhairahawa 524290 • Birachowk 545227 • Biratnagar 463754 • Biratnagar 536896 • Birgunj 526894
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Gaidakot 502399 • Gaighat 420032 • Gaur 521109 • Golbazar 540327 • Gorkha 420560 • Guleria 420099 • Hetauda 525386 • Inaruwa 561498 • Itahari 587580 • Jaleshwar 521095 • Janakpur 523644 • Kalaiya 551526
Kapilbastu 550160 • Kawasoti 541001 • Kohalpur 540280 • Lahan 562202 • Lalbandi 501628 • Mahendranagar 520745 • Malangawa 521711 • Mirchaya 550803 • Narayanghat 532255 • Nawalparasi 521002 • Nepalgunj 551598
Parsa 583199 • Pokhara 539389 • Pokhara 9846061047 • Pyuthan 460464 • Rajbiraj 523542 • Siraha 520442 • Surkhet 525196 • Surunga 551010 • Tikapur 560426 • Tulsiapur 520808 • Uribari 540074 • Waling 440610

Unification logic

If the left two parties unite now, it will all but guarantee that the country will have a stable government for the next five years.

It is important that the merger talks between CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Center) happens early, preferably before the formation of the new government.

When KP Sharma Oli first became the prime minister at the end of 2015, he inherited a country that was in a state of virtual lockdown from the border blockade. It is to his credit that he was able to pass a constitutional amendment to end it. He must also be lauded for bringing a semblance of balance in the country's relations with its two neighbors. But his nine months in office also were marked by the same degree of cronyism, corruption and impunity as the reigns of any of his immediate predecessors. He, as prime minister, could also have shown more sensitivity in his messaging to the marginalized communities, Madhesis especially.

As he is set to be prime minister again, in as early as a couple of weeks, a different set of challenges await Oli. He will be the first prime minister after the implementation of the federal setup. It will be up to him to guide Nepal through this tricky transition to a full-fledged federal set-up. With the left alliance forming government at the center, as well as six of the seven provinces, Oli will have the mandate to lay a strong foundation for a peaceful and prosperous federal Nepal.

It will be up to Oli to guide the country through this tricky transition to a federal set-up

This is why it is vital that the merger between UML and Maoist party happens early, preferably before the formation of the new government. If the two parties unite now, it will all but guarantee that the country will have a stable government for the next five years.

If not, people will not be assured that the kind of tasteless politicking that has been in display since the 1990 political changes—whereby, on average, governments came and went every nine months—won't again bedevil Nepal. And if that happens, Nepal's development prospects and its quest to graduate from the group of LDCs in the foreseeable future will remain unfulfilled. This is why, the Maoists, as the junior partner in the ongoing merger talks, need to be reasonable in their demand for portfolios in the new party. But as the senior leader in the left alliance, and for the sake of the country he professes to love, Oli should not hesitate to make significant concessions as well.

your say

Basu



Delegates queue up to cast their votes in the National Assembly election on Feb 7 | Photo by Dipen Shrestha

Illusion of stability

Instead of making way, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is happily steadfast in passing one populist (under-researched and unbudgeted) measure after the next

By Jagannath Lamichhane

Despite so much skepticism and uncertainty, in 2017, what was almost impossible suddenly became the rather easily possible. Nepal successfully held three tiers of elections: local, provincial and federal—a feat most Nepalis and anyone else who cared to watch were perplexed by. In a real sense, successfully conducting three elections in a year would have been a giant pat-on-your-back accomplishment for even the most developed of democracies. For this reason, in the eyes of history, 2017 will go down in the books as one that opened up a chapter that no one was confident was even written until we turned the page to find it was.

Perhaps what drove these elections more than anything else was an elusive promise of stability. The past two decades were defined by the contrary 'political instability', a buzzword internalized by most, often as an excuse for larger state incapacity, incompetency, rampant corruption and poor governance. Political instability was unanimously blamed for everything by everyone. As such the dream of a state of 'political stability' was one that, in our collective psyche, we considered a precondition to overcome all social, economic and political evils.

The announcement of the Left Alliance in the run up to elections, in tan-

dem with their message of stability and prosperity, really thrust the public into a mindset that saw for the first time in a good long while, a glimmer of hope. You have two major political forces, i.e. the UML and Maoist Center, put aside their differences to 'unite in favor of stability and prosperity'. Nothing could sound better for the ravaged and beat Nepali psyche. It seemed that all at once, Nepali politics had changed in an unprecedented way and wiggled in a tiny space for positive governance.

However, there are no clear signs that things are indeed changing. In fact, the forecast shows more of the same. For example, the Nepali Congress and its democratic alliance, who badly lost the elections, are still running the government. Instead of making way, stepping back and going through a process of introspection, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is happily steadfast in passing one populist (under-researched and unbudgeted) decision after the next. Albeit a caretaker government, Deuba has so far done little to bring his reign to a close and continues to act as though he has just walked into office with a fresh and popular mandate.

Meanwhile, the victors in this election are spending the majority of their time squabbling over power sharing compromises instead of focusing on a

real plan to deliver on their promised 'prosperity'. So far, no concrete plans or agendas have been set on how 'development' would be achieved, how these promised railways and industries will be built and sustained and how the income of average Nepalis will be three-fold over 10 years, as promised in the election manifesto. The reality is so dire that two months after already having won on the promise of stability and prosperity, the leaders are now discussing drafting 'plans for development'. One can only guess that most of us will have entered old age by the time the discussions are finalized, the plans drafted and approved and finally implemented!

Deep down there is an understanding that the promise of stability was just a ploy to coax the public to relent in favor of the Left Alliance and that Leftist mergers are most often simple temporary, opportunistic endeavors. As for the promise of prosperity, a cursory look at the UML and Maoist Center 'plans' lack thereof speak volumes about the superficial and illusive nature of the idea of prosperity. Yet, the promise of stability and prosperity will undoubtedly be best tested in the months to come after which that tiny glimmer of hope which was seen through the year elections will likely remain as little more than a memory ■

Nepal Policy 2.0

Many perceive India as a power that wants to dictate terms in Nepal

We have read more than enough of how and why the victory of the left alliance in the polls is a huge loss for India. Almost all who have been writing about it, and let's be honest, there's not much else to write about these days either, have mainly focused on how China will be an influential player in Nepali politics in the days ahead. But there's hardly any piece suggesting India what it ought to do now—if it wants those seen "favorable" to its interests win the next elections—or telling it exactly where it went wrong on Nepal.

Let's admit it, many perceive India as a power that wants to dictate terms in Nepal and China as a benevolent power that does not interfere. China thus enjoys enormous soft power. The left alliance's victory has much to do with the thoughtless Indian embargo and KP Oli government's brave resistance against blatant violation of Nepal's rights as a landlocked country. New Delhi policymakers need to understand that the bullying approach coupled with India's efforts to micro-manage Nepal must change. India clearly needs an image makeover and it is not difficult to do; all it needs is Nepal Policy 2.0.

The South Block and old Nepal hands in India must accept that their coercive diplomacy vis-a-vis

Nepal has not in any way been successful. The Indian approach so far has been: you follow our diktat or we blockade you, and if you still do not do what we say, then we foment a revolution/oust you and have our men take over the reins of government. Maybe this worked in the past, but it's not going to work anymore as China has entered the scene and our leaders rightly view it as a power that can keep India in check.

The more coercive India gets, the more our leaders—of course, minus some obsolete ones who are yet to grasp the wishes of the majority—will be open to China's active involvement in Nepal.

Similarly India needs to take seriously the accusation that it does not want Nepal to develop. The delay in completing infrastructure projects; Indian companies dilly-dallying on starting vital projects even after years of getting necessary permits; and doing all it can to prevent companies of other countries from infrastructure projects, especially the ones deemed crucial for Nepal's development—is what angers many Nepalis. It's about time India let go of the unfounded fear of a moderately developed Nepal as a threat to its interests.

India also needs to explain the mystery of border pillars between the two countries moving further

along Nepali territory. It needs to initiate dialogues to resolve the long-standing dispute on Susta and Kalapani. Moreover, it has to understand that the arrogance of Indian security forces entering Nepal in uniform and carrying weapons to either awe the local in the border areas or to arrest criminals only add fuel to the fire.

What could be resolved diplomatically and by following the "unofficial" arrangements where it comes to arrest and extradition of criminals between the two countries, India does just the opposite. And we rightly view as undermining our sovereignty. Controlling the activities of state governments and border forces would give it less or no press and help in creating a negative image in the not-so-long run.

Then there's the issue with peace and friendship treaty of 1950, which was forced upon the ailing Rana regime. Come on, it is 2018. Instead of taking us a ride with futile EPG meetings why can't India show magnanimity and announce that the diplomats of the two countries will be working on replacing the treaty entirely in a year's time?

For many Nepalis, India is an important neighbor, but it is times difficult and insensitive. Now the onus is on it to change this widely held perception.



Trailokya Raj Aryal
Political analyst



Kuire !

I am frequently overcharged for fruit and vegetables, have to pay more for the same hotel room (why?) than locals, and cannot walk through Thamel without getting Tiger Balm and a sarangi thrust in my face

"Kuire", whispers the girl in front to her friend. Yes, it is always a bit of a shock when I go out of my 'local' area. I mean, I've lived in Kathmandu longer than I have lived in any other town. That makes me a local right? Beep! Wrong! Being female, tall and blonde definitely sends out the signal 'not local'. And yet I know the back roads and short cuts better than most taxi drivers; was in Nepal during the whole conflict; stood in the street to watch the funeral procession of the royal family, and suffered the curfews, bandhs, load-shedding, earthquake and



Jackie in Kathmandu
JACKIE TAYLOR

blockade just like the rest of the population.

But I also have skipped the queue to get into Singha Durbar, been offered a seat on a full bus (not often mind you), am royally treated at restaurants, and trusted by my bosses and clients alike. On the down side, I am frequently overcharged for fruit and vegetables, have to pay more for the same hotel room (why?) than locals, and cannot walk through Thamel without getting tiger balm and a sarangi thrust in my face. "Kuire", shouts the little boy in the street. His mother and I smile at each other, me through my teeth. Such is life.

Based on the fact I am not local, I will be writing this weekly col-



AMN Archive

umn giving some insight into the life of an average 'non-local' in Kathmandu. Which brings up the question—'what is an average non-local?' For want of a better word, let's use 'expat'. Yes there are all sorts of racial connotations attached to that word but...

Come in all shades

There are several kinds of 'expats' in Kathmandu. There are those who are married to Nepalis, many of whom have been here for decades and have grown-up children and even grandchildren. There are some who have only been married for a short time and are desperately trying to get a visa for their spouse to their home country. There are

There are expats who are married to Nepalis, many have been here for decades and have grown-up children and even grandchildren

those who came in the mists of time to study Buddhism and dharma. There are those who are young and enthusiastic volunteers. There are those who are working on a two- or three-year contract with the UN or some INGO, climbing the career ladder. Then there are those like me, who don't fit into any category and who don't look at

Nepal through the rose coloured glasses of 'newbie-ism', Buddhism, or any other 'ism'. We are an anomaly and are quite unique. "Kuire". Yes, perhaps.

So let's get this party started by outlining a typical 36 hours in the life of a neutral category expat. Able to afford the luxury of a taxi across town, I'm off to visit a farm on the outskirts of the city. This is an organised trip so it is both social and educational. Quick catch-up coffee with a friend returning from her Christmas break (we decide we can't afford the food prices in the restaurant despite the fact it is aiming at a local clientele).

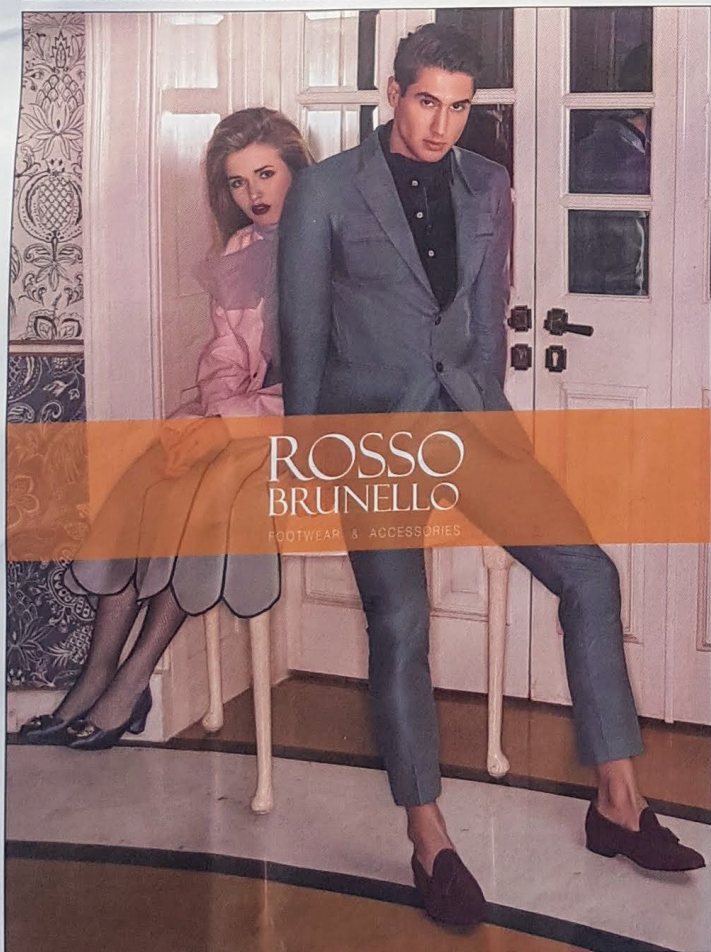
Off for a meeting, which is comfortable since it's with another expat

and we are both in sweaters and jeans (unheard of if we were in the West) in the chilly weather.

This is followed by shopping in a large supermarket. Yes, definitely the owner needs my money less than the little pasal on the corner but it has what I want. Get home to discover a long-standing client has sent four urgent pieces of work that need to be completed by 5pm. It's already 4.15. My client of course leaves the office promptly at 5pm and does not have access to his emails. Some confusion takes place and finally the work is sent to the correct people at 7pm. Is the solar water still hot? Lukewarm will do, so step in. Lights go out. It's fine, I know where the soap is....

Saturday morning off to a market catering almost exclusively to expats. I cannot afford the prices and have never heard of some of items—but seemingly they are the latest thing in Australia and America. The staff in the coffee shop look stressed at the sudden influx of people wanting lattes, cappuccinos and what's that—a baby cappuccino?

My phone rings—the person I met with yesterday is having an emergency work problem which she hopes I can solve. Despite the fact we have only met twice, and never actually worked together, we are both Westerners so we have a bond of trust between us already. "Kuire". In this case she is very glad I am such a beast. Finally my new (but as yet unconfirmed) client's problem is solved and it's 5pm. On a Saturday. Sacred day off for Nepal but often not for us "Kuires" ■



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New Delhi is clearly in a mood for 'course correction' on Nepal. Having decided to support the border-centric protests of Madhesi parties, which brought Nepal to a standstill for over four months, the new emphasis is once again on directly engaging Kathmandu.

The cause of the Madhesi people, if the Indian establishment ever believed in such a thing, has been conveniently sacrificed at the altar of the old geopolitical game that was tilting towards China.

Sino-Nepali ties had gotten a boost following the India-inspired blockade, what with KP Sharma Oli going to China to sign landmark transit and fuel agreements in its wake. China has since cleverly used the rising anti-India sentiment to expand its influence in Nepal. The Chinese stock in Nepal, in fact, has never been higher.



Beyond Borders
BISWAS BARAL

This is why Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has of late been keen to cultivate Oli, the prime minister-in-waiting, as reflected in his repeated calls to the CPN-UML chief, and dispatching of his foreign minister, Sushma Swaraj, to Kathmandu on the eve of Oli assuming power. Gradually being forgotten is the animosity that Oli had built for himself in New Delhi as he inched closer to China post-blockade. Only by maintaining friendly relations with Kathmandu, New Delhi has discovered, can a semblance of challenge be mounted to China's growing clout in Nepal. (Too bad the Madhesi don't figure in this new calculation.)

What is interesting is that KP Sharma Oli seems as keen to improve the frayed Nepal-India ties. So when Modi called on January 21 to congratulate "the new prime minister of Nepal", and invited him to visit India on assuming premiership, Oli gladly accepted the invite and said he also wanted to welcome Modi and arrange for his visit to Janakpur and Muktinath. Then, on his message on India's Republic Day on January 26, Oli once again conveyed his eagerness "to work with your Excellency and your government for the betterment of our two countries."

Oli's overtures to India should come as no surprise. After all, not long ago, Oli was reputed as among India's most trusted in Nepal, one with extensive ties not just with the Indian political parties but also with their bureaucrats and spies. Were it not for the border blockade and the resulting anti-India hysteria, it is inconceivable that Oli would have dared to bite the hand of his old patrons. As former Indian foreign secretary Shivshankar Menon likes to say: Oli's cozying up to China after the blockade was no different to similar efforts of other power-hungry politicians in the region who, like Oli, are ready to do just about anything to get to power.

But there is a wee problem in this reading. It is true that Oli's growing proximity to China owes to his desire to cash in on the recent nationalist anti-India fervor. Yet, at the fag-end of his political career, perhaps even his life, Oli also wants to leave behind a sterling legacy: of someone who brought back much-needed bal-



The old battle heats up

KP Sharma Oli, the PM-in-waiting, is torn between his desire to appease India and to further improve relations with China

ance in Nepal's relations with India and China.

This is why he is for expediting works on establishing reliable road and rail links between Nepal and China, which is only right. After all, Nepal has time and again been reminded—and how!—of the exorbitant costs of overreliance on India. Any self-respecting leader of post-blockade Nepal would work to create a condition whereby no country, not even the mighty 'Big Brother' next door, is in a position to blackmail Nepal.

Oli is thus torn between his desire to appease India (to extend his government-stay) and to further improve Nepal's relations with China (a populist measure that is nonetheless also in Nepal's interest). It will not be easy. India seems in a mood to make significant concessions, including revising the 1950 treaty. In return, it will expect Nepal to keep a calibrated distance with China. But there is now a big constituency in Nepal clamoring for closer ties with China and any Nepali leader who ignores this reality will be committing a political hara-kiri.

Oli, the consummate politician that he is,

may be among the rare Nepali leaders capable of pulling off this delicate balance, at least for some time. But it will be hard to sustain. Unlike in the past, China today, just like India, is looking for Nepal's unambiguous commitment to closer cooperation. This is part of its broader South Asian strategy to minimize 'American influence', the influence that is often expressed via America's regional 'proxy': India. On the other hand, India fears that unless the rulers in Kathmandu and Thimpu and Dhaka are quickly and firmly brought back into its camp, its strategic space in South Asia will be forever lost to China.

In the lead-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections Modi will want to show his 'Look East' policy, and his South Asian policy in particular, has been a success. After all, this is a prime minister who started his tenure by inviting all SAARC heads of state to his swearing-in, sending a clear signal of his intent as prime minister.

He will have a tough time tackling a resurgent China in Nepal. Oli, Modi and company may soon discover, has acquired a harder edge, too ■

Brewing crisis in the Maldives

Fresh elections, with the opposition free to contest, are the best option for the Maldives

Matters are coming to a head in the Maldives, with President Abdulla Yameen's government pitted against the judiciary, polity and sections of the bureaucracy. Mr. Yameen has ruled since 2013 when he won power in an election, the result of which is still contested. He defeated Mohammad Nasheed, who had been deposed in 2012 and who, in 2015, was sentenced to 13 years in prison on charges of terrorism.

Mr. Nasheed is now in exile. In an order on February 1, the Supreme Court cancelled his imprisonment term and that of eight other political leaders, reinstated 12 parliamentarians who had been disqualified last year, and ordered Mr. Yameen to allow the Maldivian parliament, or Majlis, to convene. Mr. Yameen has thus far failed to comply with any of these orders, despite an official statement on February 2 about his government's "commitment to uphold and abide by the ruling of the Supreme Court".

The most egregious failure is the government's refusal to cancel the imprisonment of the nine leaders, amongst whom is Mr. Yameen's former vice president and his former defence minister, members of parliament and leaders of major opposition parties, apart from Mr. Nasheed himself. The President has also refused to allow the Majlis to meet, which has led to the resignation of its Secretary General. In fact, the government sent the army to stop lawmakers from entering the premises, besides arresting two parliamentarians at the airport. Meanwhile, several officials, including two police chiefs and the prison chief have resigned or been sacked, reportedly for seeking to implement the Supreme Court's orders. The Attorney General has now announced that only the Constitution matters, not "illegal orders" from the court. In short, the Maldives is in the midst of a constitutional crisis. Calling fresh elections, which are in any case due later this year, may be the best way out.

Amidst the turmoil, India has joined the U.S., the European Union and several other countries in calling for Mr. Yameen to carry out the Supreme Court's order. New Delhi said in a statement that it is monitoring the situation in Male "closely". But currently, Delhi's leverage in the Maldives is less than it has ever been. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to cancel his visit to Male three years ago, has singled Maldives out as the only country in the South Asian and Indian Ocean Region that he hasn't visited. Given that the Maldives has pulled out of the Commonwealth, and there is little semblance of a SAARC process at present, India's influence in Male is further limited. It will require concerted action from the international community to persuade Mr. Yameen to steer the Maldives out of this crisis, without taking recourse to coercive means.

(Editorial in The Hindu)

Nature of neighbors' relations

"Secret Superstar" has taken Chinese audiences by storm, and Chinese filmgoers' appreciation of Khan's performance is evidence that Chinese people bear no ill-will toward their neighbors

Given the sensitivity of China-India ties after last summer's trespassing across the border by Indian troops, it is no surprise that the Indian defense minister's recent visit to military posts along the border has provoked Chinese concerns.

Yet the popularity of a new Bollywood movie among Chinese filmgoers highlights the warmth of relations between the peoples of the two countries.

On Saturday, Indian Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman visited forward posts along the China-India border, where Indian media reports say she was briefed on their operational preparedness. Considering that Indian and Chinese troops were locked in a two-month standoff in Donglang from June to August last year, an event that put a freeze on bilateral



ties, the move has, not surprisingly, been interpreted as India showing it is taking a hard-line stance on the border issue.

But while Sitharaman's border visit has revived the strategic mistrust and suspicions between the two sides, Indian film star Aamir Khan has opened another window

on ties, one that offers a more upbeat perspective of relations between the two peoples.

Khan's latest film Secret Superstar has taken Chinese audiences by storm, and Chinese filmgoers' appreciation of Khan's performance is clear evidence that Chinese people bear no ill-will toward

their neighbors.

India should appreciate that after last summer's standoff this is not the time to test China's bottom line on the sensitive border issue, because any misstep and misjudgment could easily trigger another round of tensions.

But there is really no reason why the two sides cannot continue to deepen the bonds of friendship that exist between the two peoples and seek to resolve the issues that threaten to drive a wedge between them. Certainly, the fundamental foundations of the relationship between the two countries remain strong.

To this end, cultural exchanges and cooperation, rather than deliberate provocations, are a much better choice for the two neighbors to build good momentum in their relations. CHINA DAILY



83 killed in 'war on children'

AMMAN: At least 83 children were killed in Middle East war zones in January, mostly in Syria, UNICEF said, vowing their voices "will never be silenced". "They were killed in ongoing conflicts, suicide attacks or frozen to death as they fled active war zones," said UNICEF's regional director for the Middle East, Geert Cappelaere. "In January alone, escalating violence in Iraq, Libya, the State of Palestine, Syria and Yemen has claimed the lives of at least 83 children," Cappelaere added. Calling January a "dark (and) bloody month", Cappelaere said it was "unacceptable children continue being killed every day". AFP

Nepal is spending a lot on federalism. Is it worth it?

For the federal experiment to succeed our political leaders must learn to rein in their profligate ways and remain true to their electoral promise of meaningful decentralization

BISWAS BARAL

biswasbaral@gmail.com

Is federalism prohibitively expensive for Nepal? Even though the federal system is an irreversible truth after the promulgation of the new constitution and holding of all three constitutionally-mandated elections, the old debate over the cost of the new system refuses to die down.

To make their ends meet, the new constitution allows "the federation, province and the local level entity... to impose tax on subjects within their fiscal jurisdiction and collect revenue from such sources". If revenues collected at provincial and local levels are inadequate, "the Government of Nepal shall make necessary arrangements to equitably distribute the revenue generated by it from its sources, between the federation, province and the local level entities." But is the economic pie big enough for all three layers of government?

"For a rough estimate, multiply the costs under the old unitary system by three," says Ram Saran Mahat, the multiple-time finance minister. "I have always maintained that a federal system is inherently costly and complex. The early signs of implementation of federalism only adds to my suspicion."

The signs Mahat hints at are the disputes over the designation of provincial capitals. He believes these challenges will get more and more complicated.

820 bn—and counting

According to the Ministry of Finance, Nepal will need Rs 820 billion over the next three years on federal infrastructure alone. To put this into perspective, in the first six months of the current fiscal, Rs 336 billion has been collected in revenues, two billions more than the target of Rs 334 billion. The government thus seems to be on course for the yearly revenue target of Rs 730 billion. But a year's worth of revenues will still be inadequate to meet the added costs.

"All this money for federal infrastructure and administrative tasks will be at the cost of the all-important development expenditure," says Mahat.

Economist Biswo Poudel is not very sanguine either. He cites the recently introduced voluntary retirement scheme for civil servants,

which is expected to cost the exchequer Rs 50 billion, as an example of the new profligacy under the federal setup. "A civil servant should be ready to go to any part of Nepal that he or she is deputed to. The government is setting a troubling, and expensive, precedent for federal Nepal by giving civil servants who don't want to go to certain places golden handshakes."

Poudel is also unhappy with what he deems unnecessary expansion of government. The country will now have as many as 825 MPs and 110 ministers. "Even if we assume a low-end salary of Rs 60,000 for each of them, their monthly bill will amount to Rs 49.5 million. This is not factoring in other associated costs like vehicle and secretariat costs."

But there are also those who believe the initial investment in the federal setup, however big, is worth it. "For those who say federalism is expensive, I would like to ask, 'On what basis?'" says Uma Shankar Prasad, a professor of economics at Tribhuvan University. "I don't know of any systematic study on the financial viability of federalism in Nepal."

Apples and oranges

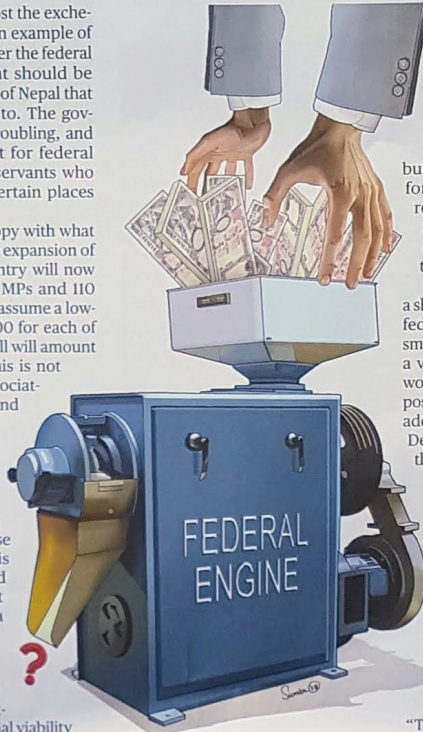
Nor does Prasad buy that the seven provinces, as proposed, are unviable. "People say that Province 2 is unviable as it does not have natural resources. But there are other ways to make money. For instance, there are hardly any good hospitals across the border in Bihar. If we can build good hospitals in Province 2, hun-

For a rough estimate, multiply the costs under the old unitary system by three

Ram Saran Mahat, EX-FINANCE MINISTER

dreds of thousands of patients from Bihar will come to the province for their check-up every year."

Likewise, "the apples of Jumla and oranges of Ramechhap" can be processed, packaged and exported profitably. There are many such



innovative ways to make the federal system work, Prasad says. Perhaps the reason so many people in Nepal are skeptical about the federal setup, he muses, is that they focus on failed examples of federalism: "If the tiny Switzerland, which is much smaller compared to Nepal both in terms of area and population, can thrive with 26 cantons, why can't Nepal prosper with its seven provinces?"

Fiscal federalism expert Khim Lal Devkota believes it's a question of whether to see the glass as half-full or half-empty. "Ever since the first Constituent Assembly stated debating Nepal's federal contours, I had been saying that the federal provinces should be demarcated based on their fiscal viability rather than group identity," Devkota says. (According to the new constitution, the provincial demarcations will be based both on "identity" and "viability").

"Most of the revenues will be generated in areas with high populations. In fact, already, 96 percent

of our revenues comes from just 15 districts. So equitable distribution of revenues across federal provinces will not be easy," he said.

But Devkota is optimistic.

"Yes, federalism may be a little costly, and complicated as well, but what you cannot deny is that for the first time the power and resources that was centralized in Singhadurbar have been passed down the line. This is something to be celebrated."

Moreover, federalism is based on a sharing model. Devkota expects the federal model to start functioning smoothly after, in the course of time, a viable revenue-sharing model is worked out. It is true that many new posts and offices have been created, adding to the administrative costs, Devkota adds, but then, to offset these expenses, the number of ministries have also been reduced, considerably reducing the costs.

Power to people

There are also tangible, if hard to compute, economic benefits of federalism. "Factor in the savings of all those who do not now have to come to Kathmandu for the most minor of things," Devkota says.

Economist Poudel agrees. "There is also a way to do federalism cheaply. But for this the role of the central government in a federal setup should be largely advisory". Core functions like defense, monetary system and foreign affairs remains with the federal government, Poudel advises, everything else should be delegated.

Even Mahat, the ex-finance minister, reckons that federalism can succeed if our leaders show more "fiscal discipline"—by learning to live within their means, controlling corruption, maintaining uniformity in taxation and pruning the size of government. "But all this is easier said than done," he adds.

In the end, it all boils down to the will of our major political actors to make the new system work. For the federal experiment to succeed they must learn to rein in their profligate ways and remain true to their electoral promise of meaningful decentralization. Done right, federalism can empower each and every Nepali, politically as well as economically—not that we have the luxury to get it wrong ■

A JAYA SUMARGI

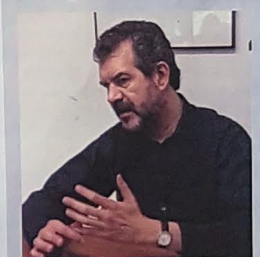
Interim order on bank transfer



Kathmandu: The Supreme Court has paved the way for businessman Ajaya Raj Sumargi to recover around Rs 2.25 billion that the Nepal Rasatra Bank had frozen earlier. A single bench of justice Tej Bahadur KC issued an interim order on Tuesday in the name of the bank to desist from implementing its earlier decision to withhold the amount. "The legal reasons put forth by the bank to withhold the fund were not transparent, and hence this order is issued to allow the petitioner to withdraw the money," reads the order.

The court has also summoned both plaintiffs and defendants on February 14. Sumargi and Subas Chandra Poudel had filed a writ at the Supreme Court last Sunday on behalf of the Nepal Satellite Telecom Company, arguing that the bank's decision to withhold the funds had damaged the company and had asked for immediate release of the funds. **RSS**

Migrant worker benefits



Kathmandu: The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, has recommended effective implementation of existing labor-related laws in Nepal for the welfare of migrant workers. At a press conference, Morales briefed journalists about his findings on Nepal's foreign employment during his eight-day Nepal stay. He arrived on January 29 at the invitation of Government of Nepal. **RSS**



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Bumper harvest for tourism industry

The tourism board made a concerted effort to promote Nepal abroad. In April 2017 it signed up to promotion schemes with the BBC, Trip Advisor and Reuters

By Biplob Prasai

No visitor to Kathmandu's Thamel or Pokhara's Lakeside this past tourist season (from September to November) could have failed to notice the unusually high crowds of foreign visitors compared to the same time in previous years.

The year 2017 was indeed a high-water mark for Nepali tourism as a record number of foreign tourists came calling. The Department of Immigration data shows a total of 940,693 tourists visited Nepal in 2017, easily surpassing the previous record of 803,092 in 2012. If we factor in tourist arrivals by various land routes, the 2017 figure will easily cross one million, according to the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB).

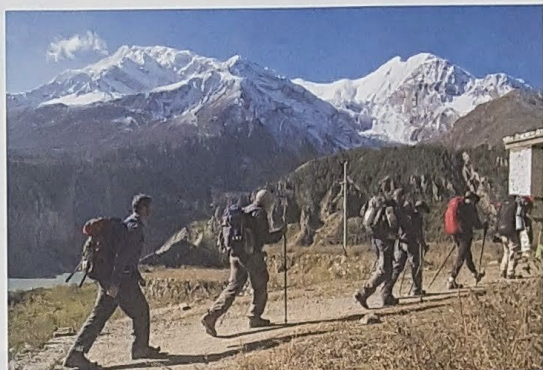
There has in fact been a steady uptick in the number of foreign tourists since the low of 2015, when, due to the earthquakes and the border blockade, just 538,970 of them visited Nepal.

The top-five tourist-contributing countries in 2017 were: India (160,832), China (104,664), the US (79,146), the UK (51,058) and Sri Lanka (45,361).

The tourism board deserves some credit. It has in recent times made a concerted effort to promote Nepal abroad. In April 2017 it signed up to promotion schemes with the BBC, Trip Advisor and Reuters. The board also initiated online and TV promotional campaigns in different parts of the world. Nepal, for instance, participated in the 21st East Mediterranean International Tourism and Travel Exhibition (EMITT) in Istanbul, allowing the country to showcase its tourist attractions in the Middle East for the first time.

Another successful promotional campaign was the first-of-its-kind 'International Photography Competition on Nepal' held in the Chinese city of Chengdu in December, 2017. At least 600,000 Chinese and foreign tourists visited the exhibit of photos related to tourism, art and culture of Nepal.

"We have been rigorous in promoting Nepal abroad following the 2015 earthquakes," says Sunil Sharma, officiating director, PR and publicist branch of the NTB. "Not just the NTB, tourism entrepreneurs, other responsible government bodies, our industries, each became an unofficial brand ambassador for the country". Brand Nepal also got a fillip when the country was voted the second 'Best Travel Destination'



in 'Adventure Travel' category of the 2017 National Geographic Travelers Award.

Nepal relies heavily on tourism. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC), in 2017 tourism accounted for 7.5 percent of Nepal's GDP, and the country was ranked 37th, among the 185 countries surveyed on tourism's direct contribution to GDP. In 2017 tourism

940,693

Tourists visited Nepal in 2017, easily surpassing the previous record of 803,092 in 2012

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC), in 2017 tourism accounted for 7.5 percent of Nepal's GDP

supported 427,000 jobs in Nepal.

The mood among hoteliers is upbeat. "We had 81 percent room occupancy in 2016," said Phurba Sherpa, Director, sales and marketing for Hotel Shangri-la. "In 2017, occupancy went up to 87 percent and in the first quarter of 2018 we are already expecting 91 percent of occupancy."

Yet there are skeptics who argue that new tourist numbers should be put into perspective. For instance, according to the Hotel Associa-

tion of Nepal, overall hotel room occupancy in 2017 was just 60 percent, the same as in 2016. This is because more and more hotels are being opened, says Binayak Shah, the association's general secretary. "We currently have the capacity to accommodate 1.6 million tourists but only around 1 million came at the peak of 2017. The supply far outstrips demand."

On the other hand, says Tek Mahat, the CEO of Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal, hotel occupancy gives only partial picture of tourist interest, as it does not factor in the tremendous growth in village tourism and home-stay option. "We have for instance been trying to connect tourists with people of Annapurna and Everest regions. Tourists value this opportunity to get to know Nepalis and their habits up close," says Mahat.

Nepal has the potential to welcome even more tourists. After all, "a tourist who comes to trek in Nepal won't get the same experience anywhere else in the world," says Sharma of NTB.

With its 'Tourism Vision 2020' Nepal plans to bring two million tourists by 2020. But delays in construction of vital tourism-supporting infrastructures like the second international airport in Nijgadh, Bara and the regional international airport in Pokhara make the task difficult. Nepal's only international airport is crowded and mismanaged. The condition of the roads and highways is no better. Nepal has a lot going for it, say tourism entrepreneurs, but it would be dangerous to relax, as the competition for foreign tourists in South Asia is stiff.



A young swimmer

To compete internationally, swimmers need to be able to train at the one at Satdobato (pictured above), they have to share

When Gaurika Singh set eight national swimming records in the 2014 Galaxy Cup, young Nepali competitive swimmers like me were left flabbergasted. We would have been lucky to break one or two records—and here was this 13-year-old completely rewriting our record books.

Singh is an inspiration for my generation. But in many ways comparing her achievement with the achievements of other young Nepali swimmers is also unfair. Singh lives in England, where she can train, morning and night, right through the year. Swimmers here in Nepal can barely train for six months a year, and even that training is subpar. As a national level competitive swimmer, I have experienced these problems first-hand. And so have the rest of the 130 registered swimmers who take part in national games every year, along with countless others who never make it that far.

We had time and again contributed for the construction of a heated pool, to no avail

A Parent

To compete internationally, we need to be able to train in an Olympic-sized (50m-long) swimming pool. But the only Olympic-sized pool in Kathmandu, the one at Satdobato (there is another one in Birgunj), we have to share with the public for three hours every day. Moreover, the pool is not heated in winters.

Invariably, our hard work goes down the drain during this long winter slough. National swimming head coach Ongden Lama likes to compare young Nepali swimmers to frogs in a well: "They learn to jump high, only to come crashing back".

Ride of hope: A cycle rally on Cancer Day

Only a third of cancer patients get treated. The rest do not pursue treatment due to lack of finances, illiteracy and negligence

Around 30,000 new cancer diagnosis are made in Nepal every year—only a third of them get treated. According to the National Cancer Registry Program, the rest do not pursue treatment due to lack of finances, illiteracy and negligence. It is to get these untreated people to seek timely treatment, and to raise general awareness on the diseases, that the Annapurna Media Network (AMN) has been organizing a yearly cycle rally, 'Ride for Life', on the World Cancer Day on February 4.

Lung cancer is the most common cancer in Nepal while incidents of cervical, breast and abdomen cancer are also rising. A patient diagnosed with cancer in the first stage

has 95 percent chance of cure; with cure rates plummeting to 50 percent with a third-stage diagnosis. On the fourth stage of cancer, cure is nearly impossible. Raising awareness on this was one of the goals of the cycle rally.

The Chief of Army staff Rajendra Chhetri kicked off the fourth edition of the Ride for Life from the AMN head office in Tinkune, Kathmandu. Hundreds of cyclists took part, as the rally passed through Gaushala, Chabahil, Maharajung, Gongabu, Balaju, Sorakhutte, Lainchaur, Jamal, Ratnapark, Bhadrakali, Tri-pureshwar, Thapathali, Maitighar, Baneshwar, before converging at Tinkune again.

"We should all unite to fight can-



cer and to give the message that it can be prevented if we become self-aware," said Sushil Pant, the Chairman of Nepal Cancer Foundation Sushil Pant, who was also participating in the cycle rally.

The names of the participants of the cycle rally went into a lucky draw. The bumper award of a 43-inch television went to Samim Paudel. Similarly, Rajendra Chhetri got the first prize (a mountain bike) while Sanubabu Thapa and Ratman Gurung together got the second prize (each a two-way Simrik Airlines Kathmandu-Pokhara tickets). Likewise, in third prize, seven lucky winners were given six-month subscription of Annapurna daily and Annapurna Sampurna magazine.



Pritam Chhetri

Swimmer's lament

in an Olympic-sized (50m-long) pool. But the only Olympic-sized pool in Kathmandu, with the public for three hours every day. Moreover, the pool is not heated in winters

By Eva Kafle

All heat

We don't even get bare minimum facilities. For instance, the national team should have a gym workout before training in water. But the gym at the Satdobato pool is always under lock and key. Swimmers should also consume food within 30 minutes of training. But by the time we reach our homes from Satdobato, it is usually too late.

The National Swimming Association (NSA), started providing post-training diet to swimmers after the 2016 South Asian Games. But the little that is provided goes to the 10 swimmers who participate in the SAG, most of whom, in any case, can train on their own, in the Lincoln School's heated pool (because they are students there) or abroad (because they live there). But the rest of us are barred from Lincoln, nor do we have the wherewithal to

go abroad.

With the funds it gets from FINA, the global competitive swimming regulator, the NSA arranges for some star athletes to go abroad and train. But no one knows what happens to the association's own funds, collected via private sponsors and parents of young swimmers. Even simple tasks, such as maintenance of the old pool, is being carried out by the Chinese government, which built the Satdobato complex in the first place.

Said one parent of a budding swimmer: "We had time and again contributed for the construction of a heated pool, to no avail". The parent did not want to be named fearing that NSA officials, angry with her critical comment, would bar her child from future competitions.

When I asked him about the missing NSA funds, Ashok Bajracharya, the president of the association, hedged: "The private sector is only

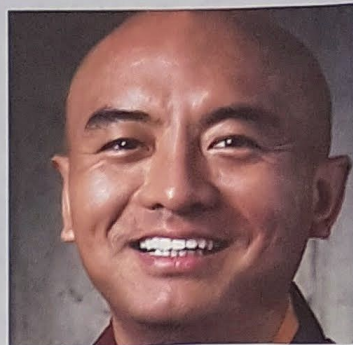
just starting to see swimming as a lucrative investment. This stands us in good stead for the future".

Signs of hope

Thankfully, after years of pleading and pressure from parents as well as swimmers, the construction of the heated pool has finally begun, with 80 percent contribution coming from the government and 20 percent from the NSA. Why the abrupt change of heart? Because the country is again hosting the South Asian Games in March 2019. Moreover, the association needs to show FINA something tangible for all the funds it gets. Some old problems, such as leakage in the Satdobato pool, are suddenly being solved now.

Whether this is a mark of real change in the way competitive swimming is governed in Nepal or a blip on the NSA radar remains to be seen. Fingers crossed ■

IT'S TIME TO...



MEDITATE IN KATHMANDU

Teachings on the Third Karmapa's Aspiration of Mahamudra with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche Tergar Ösel Ling, Kathmandu, Nepal

Awakening is something we can discover for ourselves through the practice of meditation. In Tibetan Buddhism, the most direct and powerful way to experience this inner freedom is by exploring the nature of awareness, a journey that puts us in touch with a source of equanimity, wisdom, and compassion that we can access anytime and anywhere.

In these teachings, from March 7-10 - 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mingyur Rinpoche will offer instructions on the nature of mind drawn from the Mahamudra teachings, a profound lineage that originated in ancient India. In particular, he will teach The Aspiration of Mahamudra, a short text written by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. This text - one of the most treasured teachings in the Kagyu lineage - captures the essential points of the view, meditation, and application of Mahamudra practice.

ADVENTURE FESTIVAL



Himalayan Outdoor Festival, from February 16 - February 18 this year, is the brainchild of a passionate group of longtime climbers, trail runners, mountain bikers, and event managers based here in Kathmandu Valley.

Professional and amateur outdoor athletes from all over Nepal and around the world will converge upon the trails, rocks, and downhill slopes to compete in three main sports: trail running, rock climbing, and mountain biking. Numerous other activities will include the dyno competition, slackline competition, ice-axe pull-up, acrobatic paragliding show, flying fox, zip lines, rappelling, mud run, and auto expo.

OPENING SOON



SOALTEE
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Mailing Address: Lazimpat, Kathmandu-2, Nepal, Tel: +977-1-4420424, 4425386, E-mail: info@tranquilityspa.com.np, Website: www.tranquilityspa.com.np
Our Outlet: Lazimpat: 01-4420424, 4425386 • Lazimpat (Beauty Salon): 01-4002214, 9802021272 • Kupondol: 01-5528125, 5548751 • Hotel Radisson: 01-4423888, 980201286
Hotel Shangri-La: 01-4412999, 9801021263 • Hotel Mirage Lords Inn: 01-4487600, 9801114284 • Thamel: 01-4700248, 4218396 • Pokhara: 061-466260, 466261

Nissan Terrano: Fashionably Late

Mechanically, the Nissan Terrano is identical to the Renault Duster. In fact, Nissan rebadged the Duster to fill a void in their product portfolio, cleverly slipping into the vastly popular and competitive Compact SUV segment.

By **Nepal Drives** | Auto writer for APEX

FEATURES

Variants:
XLP and XVD

Cost:
Rs. 42,99,000 to
Rs. 53,99,000

Engine (XVD):
1.5 ltr 110 PS

Power:
108 bhp at 248 Nm

Fuel Economy:
19.1 kmpl

Ground Clearance:
205 mm

- Cruise control
- 7.0 in touchscreen
- Steering mounted audio and phone control
- One touch lane change indicator

Interior and Styling

It's a spacious affair inside the Terrano's cabin. There is plenty of legroom and shoulder room for all passengers, even if you're on the bigger side of the size spectrum. You can comfortably accommodate three people in the rear passenger seat.

Fit and finish of the interiors are also good, but not incredible. It doesn't exude premium quality but you wouldn't exactly deem it shoddy either. The seven-inch touch screen infotainment system works great; it would have been even better if it were angled slightly upward for easier access. The climate-control knobs do what they're supposed to and the controls for the audio and telephony are mounted onto the steering column. While we're in this vicinity, it's worth quipping

that a chunkier steering wheel would have added to the SUV-ish appeal of the Terrano.

Moving on, the soft touch dashboard gets a two-tone treatment with a black upper half and a brown lower half. The leather seats are very comfortable and provide plenty of support, the foldable armrest for the driver seat being a very welcome addition to the entire driving experience.

Also, the large boot is big enough for a family's luggage compartment needs for a weekend getaway.

Ride and Handling

Up until now, the Nissan Terrano has earned pleasing marks in terms of the exterior designs and the interior styling. Performance then, takes it to the next level. You get two engine options—a 1.6 liter four-cylinder petrol motor or a 1.5 liter diesel (we were behind the wheels of the latter). On the tarmac, the Terrano performs well. Delivering a respectable 85PS @3750rpm and 200Nm @ 1750 and decked out with features like ABS, EBD (Electronic Brakeforce Distribution) with BA (Braking Assistance) it is a pleasure to drive.

Thanks to its smooth revving engine, the Nissan Terrano covers ground well. However, for best results, you will want to build up the revs past 2000rpm as the lag will bother you if you're on the inclines or lugging around in second or third gear. There is minimal body roll and you can easily hit triple digits on the speedometer in the Bhaktapur Highway stretch (we of course didn't try that because of the speed regulations, and we'd suggest you didn't either; we're just saying that

if you wanted to, you could.). You're rarely ever left feeling a lack of power. That being said, it isn't a speedster either; nor does it claim to be.

Where it truly excels in though, is when you're faced with undulating road surfaces, which are aplenty in Nepal. The Nissan Terrano soaks up the bumps splendidly and it performed brilliantly when put against massive potholes and rough terrain. Boasting of a 205mm ground clearance, it undertook minor offroading duties with ease. And in its price segment, there are few other vehicles that do the job of flattening rough roads as well as the Terrano.

Overall, Nissan have nailed the suspension's ride and handling balance, making the Terrano a great car to drive.

The verdict

Let's look at the critical points here. Is it an ultra-premium offering from the Nissan roster chock filled with frills and bangs? No. Nevertheless, at this price segment it offers a whole lot, especially in terms of the driving experience and robustness. A tiny bit of lag aside, the Terrano is an absolute all-rounder, capable of on-road and mild off-road prowess. And, it doesn't look all that bad either.

However, it is coming into a segment with cut-throat competition and it is arriving pretty late. That means it has to be ready to lock horns with the likes of the Renault Duster, Ford EcoSport, Suzuki Brezza, and the soon to come Tata Nexon. It does have the Nissan badge playing to its advantage, which is a huge plus in our market that is loyal to Japanese manufacturers. But is it leverage enough for Pioneer Moto Corp to triumph? That is yet to be seen ■

Exterior and Design

Up front, a honeycombed grille divided into three parts by vertical chrome slats are flanked by boxy twin-barrel head lamps. It assumes a wide stance, which adds to the burly demeanor of the Terrano and it looks more like a proper SUV compared to its competitors in the market. Truth be told, its small stature is probably the only thing that doesn't give it the street cred to strut with the SUVs. Adding a spare tire to the boot lid would have further helped the case.

More noticeable changes compared to the Duster can be observed in the rear that gets redesigned tail lamps and sheet metal changes. The side profile remains pretty much unchanged.



Nissan Terrano, XLP (Petrol) | Photo by Nepal Drives

APEX TECH REVIEWS

Three iconic products of 2017

By **Prajesh SJB Rana** | Tech writer for APEX

With many companies showing off really interesting technology at the recent 2018 International Consumer Electronics Show, we can rest assured 2018 will see exciting developments in consumer electronics. From foldable TVs to augmented reality glasses, there is plenty to look forward to in 2018, but at the cusp of the year, it is worth looking back at the products of 2017 that have, undoubtedly, paved the way for the future. Here are a few of them:



Samsung Galaxy S8 and S8+

Price
Rs. 70,000-90,000

One of the most important devices of 2017, Samsung's flagship phone redefined a smartphone's look and feel by coming up with a phone with 83.6 percent screen-to-body ratio. With many companies like Sharp and Xiaomi experimenting with the bezel-less designs, bezel-less smartphone had been a hot topic of discussion online. While Sharp's Aquos Crystal and Xiaomi's Mi Mix did create buzz among technology enthusiasts, it was Samsung's bezel-less version that pushed the 'enthusiast technology' into mass market. Everything about the S8 Edge spells well-thought out design. There hasn't been a compromise on any front-facing functionality, unlike many of the other devices that resort to experimental new technology. While there are some rough edges in design, like the awkwardly placed fingerprint sensor, overall, the Samsung Galaxy S8 is a refreshing rejig of smartphone design.

Nintendo Switch

Price
Rs. 45,000-50,000



There has always been a stark divide between portable gaming and console gaming. Consoles are known for their graphical performance and gaming complexity while portable consoles are better suited for light gaming on the go. Even powerful portable gaming consoles like the PSP does not have the graphical or logical compute performance to back bigger triple-A titles. It wasn't until Nintendo's release of the Switch in early 2017 that a truly hybrid console experience was achieved. The Switch effortlessly changed between portable and console gaming modes, as per the gamer's preference. The Switch, however, still can't compete with more performance-driven consoles like the Playstation 4 or the Xbox One. But seen through Nintendo's aesthetic approach to gaming, the Switch manages to produce a great looking, utterly novel and remarkably fun gaming experience. Paired with games like The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, the Nintendo Switch carves out an exciting new niche in gaming.



DJI Spark

Price
Rs. 65,000-85,000

In mid-2017, DJI announced their affordable Spark drones. While up to this point drones needed a controller to navigate, the Spark introduced a new gesture feature that made controlling the drone and interacting with it effortless. With a really affordable price tag of \$500, the DJI Spark instantly launches from your palm and reacts to your palm controls. Intelligent enough, the drone also positions itself for automatic framing of pictures and videos and even recognizes and reacts to obstacles in its flight path. Considering the affordability and ease of use of the Spark, drones might further penetrate the mass market in 2018.

Looking back at 2017, there have been countless other revolutionary products that defined the year. But considering just how innovative the past year has been for consumer electronics, we can't help but look into the future with great expectations.

(Figures mentioned are the average market prices)

WORLD INDICES

Stock	Value	Month ch %
Dow Jones (US)	24,893	-1.54
FTSE 100 Index	7,234	-6.00
Nikkei 225 (JPN)	21,890	-7.69
Hang Seng (HK)	30,451	-1.45
NIFTY (IND)	10,576	-0.44

Index at 4:00 p.m. on Feb 08, 2018

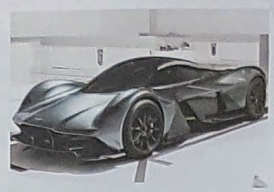


FOREX RATES

Selling rates in NPR (Feb 8)

US Dollar	103.15
Euro	127.35
HK \$	13.19
AUD	81.08
INR	160.15

Source: Nepal Rastra Bank



\$ 3,900,000
Price of
**Aston Martin
MA-RB 00**
World's costliest car

A question of adjusting rather than preparing

It's definitely an opportunity in the long run as the local markets might emerge at state level, provided that our state-level political leadership does not waste time again in the name of transition and political development

Samsung J2 4G edition launched in Nepal



Samsung Nepal has launched the Galaxy J2 4G edition, the latest entrant in the Galaxy J series family. Samsung is looking to further strengthen its portfolio of 4G smartphones in Nepal, allowing customers to have super-fast internet connectivity and faster downloads. According to the company, the 4.7-inch qHD Super AMOLED screen will provide customers with an immersive experience. Whether it be browsing through photos, watching videos or surfing the web at blazing fast 4G speeds, users will be able to do so in vibrant colours due to the Super AMOLED screen. The large screen display will bring life to content and enhance the viewing pleasure—resulting in an immersive experience. The Galaxy J2 4G is now available in Nepal for Rs11,290.

As the country makes the transition to the federal set-up, the financial sector is also trying to come to terms with the new decentralized system of government. In this connection, **Sunny Mahat** talked to Gyanendra P Dhungana, President of the Nepal Bankers Association and CEO of Nepal Bangladesh Bank, on how the country's commercial banks are preparing.

Excerpts:

How are the commercial banks in Nepal adjusting to a federal set-up?
So far there have been no specific directives from the regulator in this matter. Having said that, as the banks already cater to people from all parts of the country, I think it's more of a question of adjustment than preparation. However, banking sector will have to consolidate its regional capacity to expand business in the states and be ready to cater to customized requirement of each state with their differentiated needs.

Can you talk about specific challenges commercial banks are likely to face?

Nepal has always been a unitary state and federalism is a new concept for us. Although the need to implement federalism is fairly evident, its effectiveness and practicality is hard to gauge. Banks have traditionally operated in a national capital centric orientation, with our branches reaching some select local markets outside the valley. Now with the ensuing change in governance structure, we will have to change to regional/provincial or statewide setup. This will entail a big expansion of banking manpower to begin with.

Are you taking it as an opportunity for expansion or a liability as your operation costs could increase?

It's definitely an opportunity in the long run as the local markets might eventually emerge at state level, provided that our state-level political leadership does not waste time again in the name of transition and political development. But in



the short run, our costs will surely increase as we expand operations.

Has the Nepal Rastra Bank issued any directives or formulated plans for commercial banks to adapt to federalism? And are they practical?

Like I said, till now there are no such directives from Nepal Rastra Bank. I think they will come when the regulatory authority establishes

its decentralized working apparatus in the federal structure. The picture will be clear when the State Level Financial Commissions and the State Level Planning Commissions are formulated and a proper vision and direction for governing financial services then emerges.

Will regional development banks benefit more in a decentralized Nepal?

The efficacy of regional development banks has already been tested. The consolidation of overall Financial Services Industry has seen many development banks merge with commercial banks or higher level financial institutions. But if there is a network of well-functioning regional development banks in a given province, say, these regional banks will definitely have an edge as they will be local banks. This can also serve as a platform for the larger commercial banks to move in, by merging with or buying out such development banking networks, thereby increasing banking capacity as well as efficiency ■



The Creative Life



Every **GENERATION** in Nepal is doing something new.
This is the **NEW GENERATION...**



TCL SMART TV

P6, S62 & S6 SERIES

Teschu Dolma: From the Himalayas to Forbes

Changing lives in the mountains

Teschu Dolma is the Founder/Director of the Mountain Resiliency Project, an organization which addresses "the poverty and food insecurity prevalent in mountain communities"

Interview by Sunny Mahat

I am a Himalayan American," says Teschu Dolma when asked about her nationality. At only 25, Dolma's work and achievements are mountainously high, just like the terrains she loves to work in. A graduate of Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, Dolma has been active in social work from a very early age.

She has also co-founded women and girls economic and social empowerment component of ACHA Himalayan Sisterhood in New York and advised UNDP in Colombia on natural resource management and impact on indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

She runs indigenous honeybee farms, apple orchards, and greenhouses in the remote areas of the Nepali mountains. Ideally, the mountains are not considered the most lucrative terrains for agriculture and farming.

But with Dolma's education, knowledge and persistence, she has been able to transform the areas she has working in into profitable hubs of agro business, thus changing the lives of many farmers and their families especially women.

Her work as a social entrepreneur has been recognized by many organizations globally. She is a 2014 Brower Youth Award Winner, a 2013 Udall Scholar from the US Congress, 2017 Fulbright Hillary Clinton Fellow, 2015 Echoing Green Fellow, 2016 Global Youth Laureate. She was named one of the 2015 NBC News International Women's Day: the Legends and Leaders to Know.

This young environmental scientist and anthropologist of Tibetan origin, who was born in Nepal and grew up in Kathmandu and Sindhupalchowk is also the founder of the Mountain Resiliency Project which is working with communities in the rugged high mountains to build climate change

resilience. Dolma was recently listed in the 'Forbes 30 under 30: Social Entrepreneurs', an achievement which is the first for a person from this region.

The Annapurna Express managed to briefly talk to Dolma who is currently based in Kathmandu. Excerpts from the rendezvous:

The beginning

I started this when I was 16 and studying in the US. From early childhood, my religion, culture and family always taught me that whatever you gain in life, you share the privilege with others. Because of these values, I felt it unfair to see how my childhood friends were living and how their lives were so different from mine, just because of the resources available to us. Therefore, when my college provided resources for me to do summer projects, I chose to come back to Nepal to do small agricultural projects in remote areas, like Mustang. This is how concept for the Mountain Resiliency Project was developed.

Managing resources

After my first trip to Nepal's mountainous regions, I started sharing everything I had seen here with the people in the US. I started doing presentations and talking about food and water insecurities, climate change and identity politics. By sharing my ideas with people, I found donors and foundations who supported us. I am fortunate enough to have gotten seed grants for our projects.

Areas of work

The Mountain Resiliency Project is currently active in Mustang, Baglung, Sindhupalchowk, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Manang, Dolpa and Solukhumbu. We are focused on developing the agriculture sector there. We work with local communities and farmers to connect them to value added market chains, to make farming more lucrative for remote areas.

Changes

In roughly nine years, we have managed to create a network of 15,000 farmers. The average income of the farmers has increased by 800 percent. This has improved their standard of living and the children

now have better access to education and health care. In our calculation, we have managed to generate a net benefit of \$25 million in the past nine years.

Challenges faced

As a young woman, whenever I go to district offices here in Nepal, I can never go forward and say I am the founder or CEO of an organization. I have to hide behind another man and pretend that he is running the show. The problem of



age and gender discrimination still exists in Nepal. There is also a gap between different ethnicities. The people of Tibetan-Buddhist origins are still treated with a certain amount of foreignness despite us co-existing with our neighbors here for generations. There is a lot of identity politics in Nepal.

The future

We have 15,000 farmers in our network right now and we are planning to reach a million farmers in the next three years. We would also like to scale up to 12 more districts in Nepal and expand to northern India, if possible. Also, we want to turn the net benefit of \$25 million into \$250 million within the next 10 years for the benefit of the communities we are working with.

Recognition

I would never feel comfortable introducing myself as a 'Forbes 30 under 30' person. In the past three or four years that I have been living in Nepal full time, I have spent 90 percent of my time up in the mountains instead of Kathmandu. It was never a priority for me to develop a network in Kathmandu. For me, being a part of the community, being there out on the ground is so much more important than networking. All the awards, fellowships and recognitions I have received are based on the evaluation of my work.

Forbes 30 under 30

It has been such a blessing and privilege to be a part of this cohort. I have spent time with the other 29 participants and each of them has been equally inspiring. I think to be the first Nepali-Tibetan person to be on that prestigious list is inspiring to the other people in our communities as well. To see someone just like you who comes from the same background reaching this position based on her own hard work is relatable to the youth here.

Message

I truly believe that what I am today is because of the people I met in the past and the lessons I learnt from them. I believe in sharing my knowledge and experience with everyone else, especially other young women. My message to the youth and people who want to work in this field is—always say yes to everything. You get so many opportunities in life but you can grab them only if you put yourself out there. Also, seek mentors. Getting training and guidance at an early age is very important ■

MY MOBILE

Your mobile phone is 10 times dirtier than even a toilet seat



Most of the people do not really give another thought to using their mobile phones everywhere, from early morning walk to dinner. They keep using their unwashed hands to make call, or surf the Net. As per a Deloitte survey quoted by Time, mobile phones are far more dirtier than

people actually think of. As per the report, it is your hand that is the biggest culprit. It is the hand that is responsible for filling the mobile with filth. As per the Deloitte survey, people in the US, check their phones every day not less than 47 times, resulting in germs to move to mobiles from hands.

Most Popular Apps for Fitness



Couch to 5K: Allows you to create music playlists to workout to, and various tracking features for when you go out running.



Endomondo: Considered one of the best of the best fitness apps. You can track your fitness and performance, record pep talks for your friends.



Google Fit: A must-try option for those who rock a smartwatch. It covers all the basic features very well; great for beginners.



Runtastic: It has Android Wear support as well as GPS tracking for your running, walking, biking, and jogging routes.

Popular on YouTube



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLTQeRlB0dK>

JATRA: Nepali Movie

Cast: Bipin Karki, Rabindra Singh Baniya, Rabindra Jha.

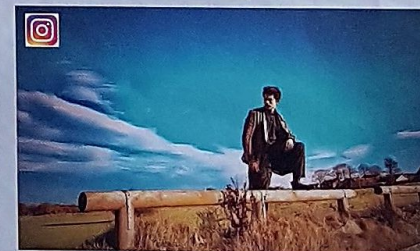
Director : Pradeep Bhattarai

Production : Shatkon Arts

Youtube Channel : Highlights Nepal



Caught on Instagram



Anmol KC: The 'Kri' actor's macho avatar is getting him quite a many followers on Instagram.

TWEET OF THE WEEK



Rubeena Mahato
@rubeenaa
Mahato tweets about the ongoing rape cases.

To dismiss rape, saying she went willingly or she was 'sexually active' is appalling. Such attitude enables rape and punishes victims.

Feb 6, 2018



Pritam Chhetri

Quincy Jones says Michael Jackson stole songs

Jones suggested similarities between "Thriller" and disco queen Donna Summer's "State of Independence," which was also produced by Jones and released several months earlier in 1982.

Quincy Jones, the legendary music producer behind Michael Jackson, says that the late King of Pop plagiarized some of his hits.

"I hate to get into this publicly, but Michael stole a lot of stuff. He stole a lot of songs," Jones said in an interview full of eyebrow-raising comments published Tuesday by *Vulture*, the culture site of New York magazine.

"The notes don't lie, man. He was as Machiavellian as they come," the 84-year-old music veteran said.

He specifically cited "Billie Jean" — a signature song off the Jones-produced "Thriller," the top-selling album of all times. Jones suggested similarities between the song and disco queen Donna Summer's "State of Independence," which was also produced by Jones and released several months earlier in 1982.

Few listeners would immediately associate the two songs, although both open and are built on unusually lengthy synthesized bass lines.

Jones also said Jackson was "greedy" and should have given partial writing credit to keyboardist Greg Phillinganes for his song "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough."

Jones' allegations run against prevailing public perceptions of Jackson, who died in 2009 and is often viewed as a tortured soul with little financial acumen as he amassed wealth.

The producer voiced sympathy over Jackson's personal issues, saying he had raised concern to the singer over his

plastic surgery and blamed abuse by the singer's father for the King of Pop's poor self image.

Jones has remained active as an octogenarian, recently launching the Qwest TV video streaming service for jazz, but has also made a stream of headline-grabbing comments with a generous sprinkling of profanity.

In a recent interview with *GQ* magazine, he said he had 22 girlfriends around the world, spoke 26 languages and had undergone a cutting edge treatment in Sweden to help him live to 100.

"I think he was secretly in love with the sister. She is a very pretty lady."

"It's pretty audacious, with the lie under the chin, which focuses you on its own anyway, without any of the other stories," he added.

The painting is expected to sell for around £250,000 (\$347,000, 282,000 euros) when it goes on sale jointly in London and Lagos on February 28, but Okri argued that its worth was more than financial. "It gives us a glimpse of an important African reconfiguration of the art of portraiture," he said.

"It's going to start a fire, start a debate. Never have they given proper due to African painters. This is the perfect work to start" to ask why, he added. **AFP**

Abhishek Bachchan's Twitter account hacked

Actor Abhishek Bachchan's Twitter account was on Wednesday hacked by pro-Pakistan Turkish cyber army Ayyidit Tui, which had earlier hacked veteran actor Anupam Khar's Twitter account.

As a result of the hacking, the verification tick on Abhishek's Twitter account vanished, and his cover photograph featured a message that read "Ayyidit Tui" in Hindi.

Abhishek's profile also had several tweets in Turkish.

Twitter said in an official post: "Our teams are working to resolve an issue affecting a small number of Indian users. We will notify affected account holders



directly. Reminder: do not click on links in DMs coming from unknown accounts."

On Tuesday, it emerged that the Twitter accounts of Anupam, RSS leader and BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav and senior Indian journalist and Member

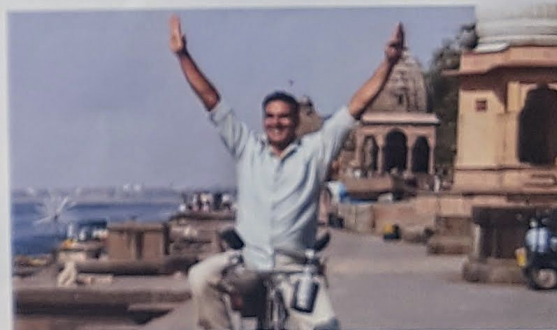
of Parliament Swapan Dasgupta were hacked.

After his account was restored, Anupam sent out an advisory to his followers.

"To everyone on Twitter: Please don't open any link sent on your direct messages, however genuine they appear. That is the tool hackers are using to hack into your account. Please share this message with as many people as you can. Thanks." **anon**

Pad Man—first to release in Russia, Iraq and Ivory Coast

Pad Man is based on the story of real life hero Arunachalam Muruganantham



After bringing about a revolution and getting people talking about menstrual hygiene on social media, R Balki's *Pad Man* is ready to achieve another milestone.

Apart from releasing in 50 countries, the film, starring Akshay Kumar, Radhika Apte and Sonam Kapoor will become Bollywood's first film that will release in Russia, Ivory Coast and Iraq.

The shared producer Twinkle Khanna took to Twitter to announce this. "I once told my *Pad Man* that I will take him places... Well, not only will *Pad Man* release in 50 countries all over the world but it is Bollywood's first film that will be releasing day and date in Russia, Ivory Coast and even Iraq."

Twinkle tweeted:

Pad Man is releasing on February 9. It is based on the story of real life hero Arunachalam Muruganantham and addresses the issue of menstrual hygiene. Arunachalam had invented a machine to produce low-cost sanitary napkins, after seeing the plight of his wife. Radhika Apte

Twinkle on Twitter "I once told my *Pad Man* that I will take him places..."

plays the role of the protagonist's wife in the film.

The release date of *Padman* was earlier scheduled to release on January 25. It's release was postponed after Sanjay Leela Bhansali rescheduled Akshay Kumar to do so in order to allow a smooth release for his film *Padmaavat*, which had seen trouble since its days of shooting. **MUMBAI MIRROR**

Priyanka Chopra: I was in a very committed relationship

In a recent interview, the usually tight-lipped actor Priyanka Chopra opened up about her relationship status. And not just that, she even accepted being in a very committed relationship in the past year.

Here's what she said. "Right now, I'm single. Of course, I've been close

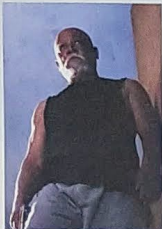
"I'm a serial monogamist. I was in a very committed relationship. But since almost a year, I've been single."

bie ya! When do you think I'm a serial? But recently, I've been single. Let's just say that I've been single after a really really long time. I get a lot of attention. But I don't know what to do with it. Of course, I like it. I'm a girl and I'm vain.

Also, when the *Baywatch* actor was asked if she dated anyone in America, the actor responded in the affirmative. She also specified that it wasn't any of her *Quantico* co-stars because all of them are married. And on being further probed if she found anyone interesting in the past year, Priyanka said, "No, I haven't. I'm a serial monogamist. I was in a very committed relationship. But since almost a year, I've been single. I've met a bunch of people. I've gone out with people. I let someone woo me but no... My mind hasn't expanded, not yet!" **ENTERTAINMENT**



FILM / BOOKS Review


 ★★
 Action/Thriller
Sher Bahadur

CAST:
 Menuka Pradhan,
 Sunil Thapa, Karma and
 Rabindra Jha
DIRECTION:
 R Rajbanshi



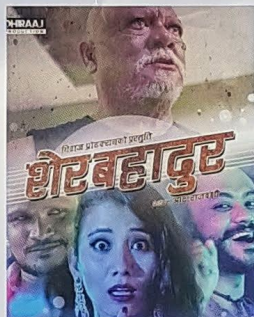
Sher Bahadur: Crash, boom, bust

 Review by **Pragyan Thapa**

It's ironic how the latest Nepali thriller 'Sher Bahadur', a movie about burglars getting into trouble when they decide to steal from the wrong man, is itself guilty of stealing the plot of the 2016 American film 'Don't Breathe'. While the original film tightly grounded itself by packing in some genuinely fresh punches in the otherwise overwrought horror genre, its Nepali counterpart never makes us fully care about its central characters and gives us many moments of unintentional hilarity.

The movie opens with Bihari (Rabindra Jha), an Indian car thief, entering Dharan in a stolen car. He takes the car to a garage where a Nepali mechanic by the name of Kumar (played by Karma) works. Bihari is used to bringing stolen cars to Kumar's place and Kumar is used to re-selling the cars with fake papers and number plates. Then we meet Maya (Menuka Pradhan), a bar dancer whom both Kumar and Bihari have a crush on. Whenever Bihari is in town, the trio gang up to burglarize rich households.

In an over-extended scene, we see them enter a house in the day



'Sher Bahadur' falls flat under its shoddy special effects and lackluster acting

dressed like salesmen pretending to sell toilet cleaners. This gives them the opportunity to scan the house for available loot, which they easily rob later that night. Meanwhile, we get to know that Maya is putting together money to take her (missing)

sister's daughter to Kathmandu, away from Maya's unkind stepmother. Kumar wants to buy a garage of his own. And Bihari's intent is to make Maya his wife some day.

Soon fed up with small-time burglaries that yield them only pennies, they look to score big. When they hear that a blind man named Sher Bahadur (Sunil Thapa) is stashing large amount cash in his house, they target him. For them the job is super easy: what danger would an old retired army officer hold, that too if he's blind and lives only with his dog? But when they break and enter the house, they realize they've misjudged him. They soon find out that the man will not forgive those intruding his privacy.

Surely, the premise of burglars getting locked down inside a house and being preyed upon by a monster of a man sets up an intriguing hook for a contained thriller. But director R Rajbanshi wastes much of screen time in establishing the band of burglars.

We are also made to sit through repetitive information on burglar alarms and home security with boring and clunky dialogue exchanges.

These sequences are so slow, it kills the built up for the moment when the trio coming face to face with Sher Bahadur.

Sunil Thapa's performance as the titular antagonist is wobbly and inconsistent. He tries to appear scary by grunting and quivering his facial muscles, which honestly isn't hair-raising but laughter-inducing. The same goes for Rabindra Jha, whose already established forte as a comedian prevents us from taking him too seriously in moments where his character demands emotional maturity.

Even at times when Jha's character is running for his life or getting shot at, the majority of the audience members continue laughing. As for Menuka Pradhan and Karma, the two talented actors are wasted, as they mostly sleepwalk through their scenes and mindlessly parrot their dialogues.

'Sher Bahadur' falls flat under its shoddy special effects and lackluster acting. It is inconsistent and messy throughout and is guilty of a cardinal sin for a thriller: lack of any compelling terror or suspense sequences to get your adrenalin rushing ■

As for Menuka Pradhan and Karma, the two talented actors are wasted, as they mostly sleepwalk through their scenes and mindlessly parrot their dialogues.



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