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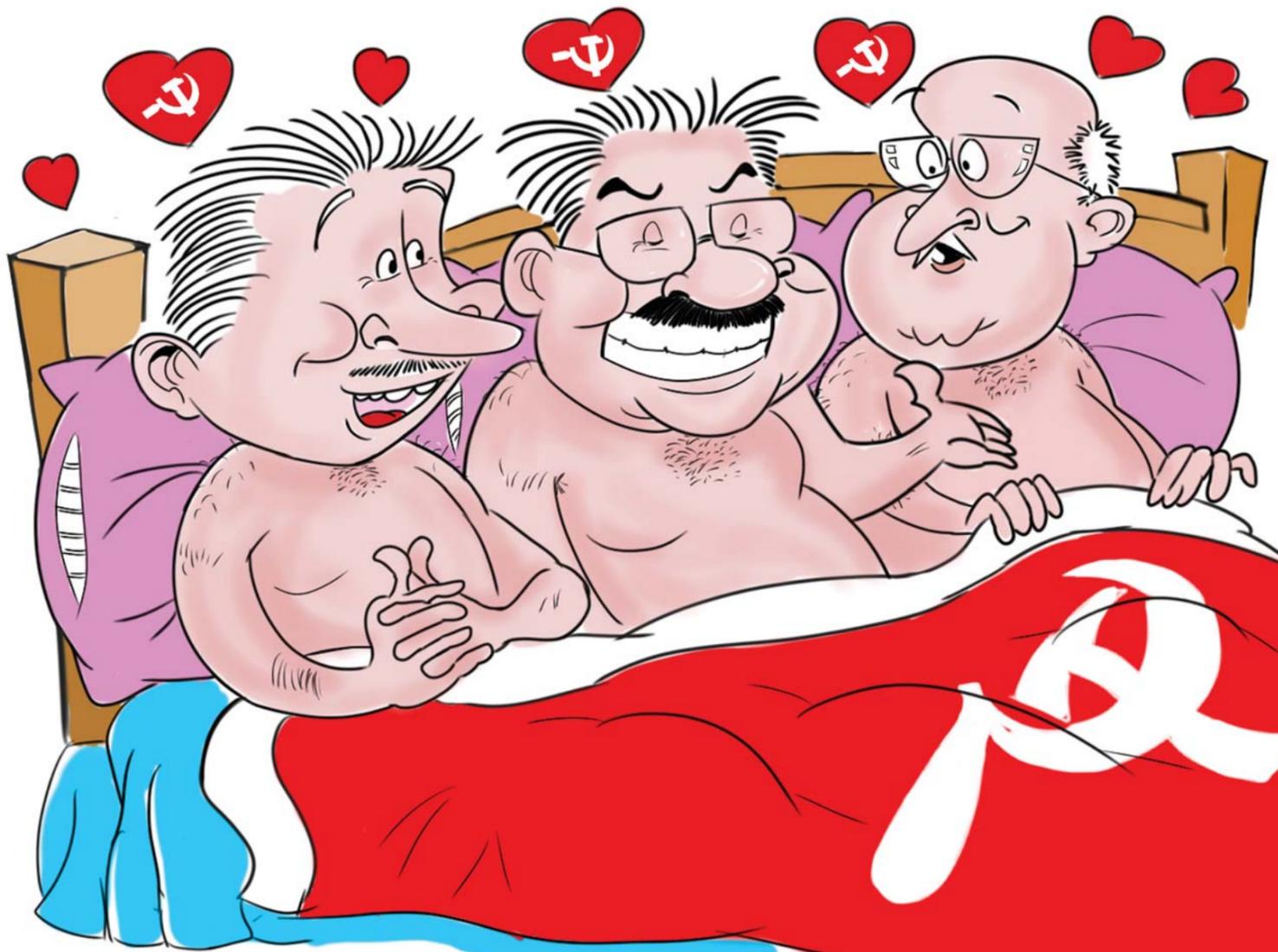
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DIWAKAR CHETTI

## Bedfellows

Who would have thought that Nepal's two largest communist parties, poles apart ideologically and sniping constantly, would unite? Especially when one of them was still in bed with a third party.

But they did. The announced move towards unification of the UML and Maoists was such a tectonic shift in Nepali politics that it is still causing aftershocks, with the NC trying to cobble together an anti-left coalition including not just Madhesi parties but also rightists, royalists and pro-Hindu parties.

Analyst Narendra Jung Peter says the marriage of the UML and Maoists is so weak it is bound to end in divorce. "They made a mistake in haste, and will repent at leisure," he quips.

All these years,

the UML denounced the insurgency by the Maoists, who in turn belittled the UML's philosophy of 'People's Multi-Party Democracy'.

Of late, Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal had been accusing UML Chair KP Oli of being 'casteist' and working against Madhesi, Janajati and other marginalised people. For his part, Oli has often slammed Dahal for breaking their alliance at India's behest.

When they decided to unite, therefore, the cadres of both parties were left utterly confused. "Did Dahal admit that the Maoist war, as argued by the UML, was a crime? Did Oli admit that he, as accused by Maoists, only serves the interests of the hill elite?" Peter asked rhetorically.

This week, Nepali politics birthed even stranger bedfellows.

**ELECTIONS IN A KAKISTOCRACY**  
EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Fringe communist parties of the pro-Soviet school, condemned by Nepal's mainstream communists for supporting King Mahendra's coup in 1961 and vilified ever since, joined the Maoists, once acolytes of China's Mao Zedong.

All this political promiscuity is the result of a phobia about losing in the November-December elections. But the bed shared by former foes is not so comfortable.

Baburam Bhattarai of the New Force threatened to quit if he does not get the Gorkha constituency and 15% of seats for his cadres. The

Maoists will not settle for anything less than 40%, making it harder for Oli to address demands of his own candidates.

The story is the same in the anti-left alliance, with Madhesi and the RPPs claiming more than they deserve. The NC cannot give them what they want, but cannot ignore them, either.

As things stand, the left alliance has an edge over the democratic grouping. But it is far from certain if these blocs will survive intra-party and intra-alliances rifts before polls.

**Om Astha Rai**

Stairway to heaven  
buzz  
**DOLPO**  
Make a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the sacred landscape of Phoksundo Lake  
BY KUNDA DIXIT  
PAGE 8-9

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# ELECTIONS IN A KAKISTOCRACY

This week's Supreme Court decision to reinstate tainted Nepal Oil Corporation chief Gopal Khadka, who was relieved of his position last month by the government after a series of media exposes, is symptomatic of this country's deep political malaise. It followed a slew of similar moves where the executive branch allowed proven kleptocrats legal loopholes to evade punishment. The reason is not difficult to fathom. People like Khadka have survived multiple governments because they have been generous with kickbacks to politicians, and spread the wealth around. The rot is so deep that it has infected the body politic from the head down, and the law is used to facilitate lawbreakers.

Taking its cue from the Khadka verdict, and probably discerning that the time is ripe, the Nepal Army has also filed a writ to overturn an earlier court verdict that found soldiers guilty in the iconic conflict-era, Maina Sunar rape-murder case. This proves that political patronage in Nepal's kakistocracy has now also entered the realm of transitional justice. Mortal enemies from the war are coalition partners in the current government, and they are working assiduously to airbrush away war crimes.



GUEST EDITORIAL  
NILAMBER ACHARYA

## PLUS AND MINUS

The surprise announcement by the CPN-UML and Maoist Centre just after Dasain to forge unity must be understood mainly as an alliance strategy for November's parliamentary and provincial polls. It looks like the goal was to bolster the position of the UML and to arrest the slide in support suffered by the Maoists.

There is also talk of ultimately unifying the party. However, until we are told about the ideological underpinnings of such unity and what their common principles and political programs are, we will not know for certain if this will go anywhere.

Even though both are leftist parties, they do not have the same viewpoints on democracy. Which way the UML-Maoist alliance will go in future will depend a lot on the progress that the Maoists make in adopting democratic values. It is not advisable, in the changed circumstances, to dwell on the adversarial relationship of the past. However it would be morally wrong to forgive heinous crimes and to encourage impunity. Just because the Maoists are subsumed within the UML, it doesn't mean their war crimes will be erased.

No one had imagined that the Maoist Centre would join a rival alliance with the opposition while it was still in the governing coalition. The Maoists let the NC down badly, repeating what it had done to the UML earlier. The Maoist Centre is also a political force in this country but its unstable character has cost it credibility. The NC should not try to emulate the Maoists.

Some have found former comrades-at-arms Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai to be surprisingly keen on amalgamating with the UML, and concluded they must also be driven by the urge to wash their hands of the blood from crimes against humanity committed during the insurgency.

The parties are coalescing into alliances because of the fear that voters have wised up to their sordid past. By teaming up with other parties just ahead of upcoming provincial and parliamentary elections, they want to ensure that they remain in power. Elections tickets are being auctioned to highest bidders: a powerful former minister jailed for corruption has been distributing tickets to Nepali Congress candidates, and on Wednesday the UML shamelessly made a convicted mafia don a candidate in Manang.

We may have a new Constitution, there may be new rules of the game, but for the most part we have the same old faces in the same old parties with the same old promises. Worse, because the ticket distribution, campaign funding and vote-buying can be so expensive, the hope that this election might at least begin to clean out our defiled democracy seems now to have been too optimistic.

The alliances have also cancelled out the chances of the non-mainstream Bibeksheel Sajha party in the few constituencies where they are fielding candidates. Voters in November, therefore, may not even have candidates for Parliament who represent a clean and fresh alternative to the three-party cartel.

We wish we had better news, but it does look like the first national and federal elections under the new Constitution will be business as usual in our politics, and politics as usual in our business.

All we can hope for now is that the people, in their wisdom, will at least vote out some of the crooks.

This electoral alliance will obviously have a long-term impact on Nepali politics. Earlier, there had been an effort from within Nepal and outside to isolate and weaken the UML. It was publicly acknowledged that New Delhi was backing the Maoist-NC coalition: this latest move could be the UML's response to that effort.

If the distance between the leftist and democratic forces grows, it will lead to a future crisis. The UML and NC can compete, but there will be political instability if they are enemies. They need to work together on international relations, national security issues, long-term development and on the constitutional commission.

Alliances before and after elections are different. Pre-poll alliances have far-reaching impact on politics even if they fall apart. In this case, it will disrupt the functioning of parties, from the leadership to the cadre level. Going it together is both good and bad.

If making alliances is for the cause of deepening democracy, it is a positive move. But if it is to usher in a one-party state then it is negative. The NC cannot be left out of Nepal's democracy.



**Nilamber Acharya** is a former ambassador and member of the India-Nepal Eminent Person's Group

Times.com

### ONLINE PACKAGES



HOLY HIKE

The clouds, sky and mountains are worshipped here, the rivers are holy, waterfalls are believed to descend from heaven, boulders sculpted by rivers are venerated, plants and trees are treated like sentient beings. Join us on a video trek to Phoksundo Lake in Nepal's remote Dolpo district. Read the story on page 8-9, or go online to see our photo gallery, interactive map and videos.



MUSIC MUSEUM

Hari Lal Kul has given himself the task of protecting Nepal's musical heritage by preserving traditional instruments. Follow us to Kul's shop in Patan where he lovingly restores old instruments and invents new ones. Listen to the sound of music, old and new.

### STABILITY ABOVE ALL

Nepali politics was in need of a shake-up and the left electoral alliance has certainly jolted people out of years of apathy as evidenced by the flurry of reactions – generally positive and some negative – from tea shops to social media ('A 2-party state', Om Astha Rai, #878). The centre of political gravity in Nepali politics has shifted to the Left and if the next election is going to be about political stability, it is Advantage Left. Whether Nepal can prosper under a communist party government is up for debate, but stability is such a powerful issue right now that the Left may be able to get away with the fact that it has a very weak economic agenda that is irrelevant in the 21st century.

AiDeeAh

### LITTLE CHOICE

Nepali migrants have little choice ('Freedom of being illegal', Upasana Khadka, #878) as the article points out. Stay home and be unemployed and unproductive, go abroad and face this harsh reality. Blaming the system doesn't get you anywhere. And this vicious cycle continues.

Gyurme Dondup

### BACKSTABBER

In the past 20 years we all know that Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been an expert at stabbing people in the back ... why would it be any surprise when he does it again ('Two horse race', Editorial, #878)?

Samjhana Poudyal

### ENJOYABLE STAY

I have stayed at Hotel Shanker twice now on both my trips to Nepal and plan on staying there again when I return next year ('Raze, retrofit or rebuild?' Sahina Shrestha, #878). I'm looking forward to seeing the repairs complete. This place really makes my stay enjoyable, and I hope there will be many more heritage hotels like it soon.

Randy Watts

### TO PUKE OR NOT TO

The most disgustingly funny thing I have read in a while ('Going rogue in Nepal', Backside, #878). Didn't know whether to puke or laugh.

Jane G

### WHAT'S TRENDING



#### Raze, retrofit or rebuild

by Sahina Shrestha  
The video and story of the post-earthquake restoration of the Rana-era property, Shanker Hotel, was the most popular online item on nepalitimes.com last week. You can still view the film to see how damaged palaces can be transformed into heritage hotels to boost tourism.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Most visited online page



#### Sky is the limit for Sano Babu

by Dinkar Nepal  
Nepal's credential as the world's top adventure sports destination may get a further boost if Sano Babu Sunuwar's plan to host the 2020 Paragliding World Cup in Syangja is successful.

Most popular on Twitter



#### 2-party state

by Om Astha Rai  
This page 1 piece from last week's print edition of Nepali Times generated vigorous debate online. Visit nepalitimes.com to read the feedback.

Most commented

### QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
The main political actors have not changed: they are still mostly conservative, 'higher' caste men  
<http://bit.ly/2y4yODU> #Nepal #Politics

Amish Mulmi @amish973  
Damn straight. A coming together of parties may translate into more stable politics, but it'll remain politics of upper-caste Hill Men

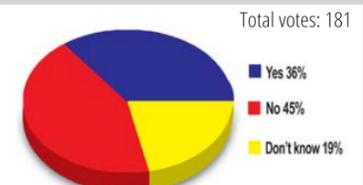
Cheryl Saunders @CherylSaunders1  
And this despite a highly inclusive Constitution-building process. Lessons to be learnt, although possibly premature

Nepali Times @nepalitimes  
LET'S TALK ABOUT BREASTS  
#breastcancersurvivor Suvекhуа Ghimire talks about her battle with #breastcancer <http://bit.ly/2vuA8Sh> #Nepal

Alaina B. Teplitz S@USAmbNepal  
In the US, October is breast cancer awareness month. Kudos to @nepalitimes for talking about this important women's health issue.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #879

Q. Will the announced unification of Nepal's communist parties be good for the country?



Weekly Internet Poll #880  
To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

Q. Are you confident that the killers of Saurav Kumar Gauchan will be brought to justice?





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30 OCTOBER 2017 ONWARDS	ISTANBUL - KATHMANDU	01:45	11:25	MON, WED, THU, FRI, SAT
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# The myth of public transport profitability

Even if it runs at a loss, good urban transport makes a metropolis efficient and dynamic

It was a coincidence to arrive in Kochi in the Indian state of Kerala last week on the day its second metro line was opened (right). The first was inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi in June.

The Greater Cochin metropolitan region has a population of just over 2 million. Kathmandu Valley has over 4 million inhabitants, and we have always lamented that the cost of a



**ON THE WAY UP**  
Kanak Mani Dixit

metro system (one estimate from 2012 is Rs330 billion for a full-fledged 77km system) cannot be managed by the national and Valley economy.

How is Kochi paying for its \$800 million metro project? We know it is financed more or less equally between the state and central government, with an injection from the French external aid agency AFD. Obviously, rich European cities of Kathmandu's size can afford a full metro network, but does Kochi's example work for us? Will it work for Kochi?

Lahore, too, is readying its own new metro (25 trains, meant to carry 250,000 commuters a daily) built with Chinese investment, said to be part of the multi-billion dollar largesse under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Rather than make fragmented plans and promises, the 18 new



HIMALI DIXIT

mayors of Kathmandu Valley, perhaps under the aegis of the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, can put together an integrated public transport program. They must task a panel of experts to address the matter, to start with, looking at the studies already done, keeping in mind the extreme distress of the Valley commuter.

The Kathmandu Valley Sustainable Urban Transport Project (KSUTP) has suggested clustering of bus routes and working with the private sector to rationalise the existing haphazard transport network. To gauge the riding public's suffering, the reader may simply remember the desperation of commuters waiting for rides at Jamal, Sundhara or Bhrikuti

Mandap and compare the situation in the accompanying photograph on the Kochi metro last week (including a Kathmandu couple).

The mayors' expert team will have to understand the geographical terrain of Kathmandu Valley, projected population growth, the devastatingly unplanned nature of the urban expansion of past decades, and how the Valley may evolve demographically under the federal system – with the hope that the provinces will provide alternative nodes of urbanism to take the pressure off the Valley.

Thereafter, the expert team would need to evaluate the various proposals on the table, from a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system,

which requires wide roads for dedicated lanes, to monorail, cable car gondolas, trams and trolley buses, light rail, and full-fledged overhead metro trains. Even while all these modalities are considered, the most urgent matter is simply to coordinate the existing private bus companies as well as the Sajha Yatayat cooperative (with which the writer is associated) to create a seamless network. There is no sense imagining grand mass transit castles in the air before addressing the here-and-now problems of public transport.

One issue that everyone, from the mayors to media and analysts, must come to terms with is the matter of unprofitability of public transport systems. Only in rare instances is urban public transport turning a profit around the world. A true public transport system requires subsidy, provided by the state or municipalities, with the rationale that a good system makes the metropolis efficient and dynamic. It will be hard to be profitable working under public transport standards (running early and late, running even with low

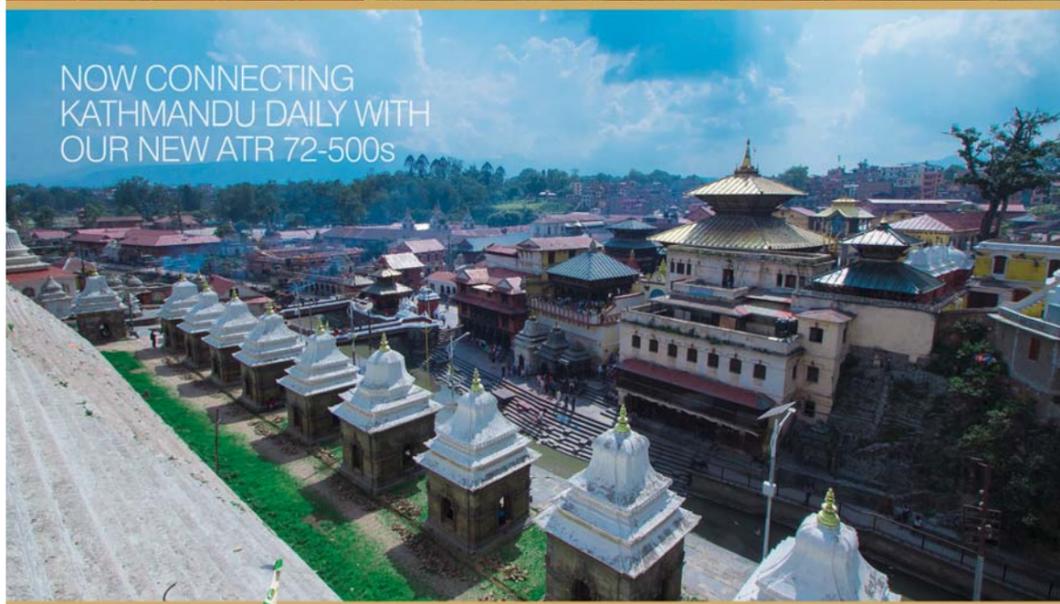
occupancy, keeping to labour standards, etc.).

Scholar Hussain Indorewala, who teaches urban politics, theory and design in Mumbai, cautions the Mumbai authorities in an article on *The Wire* portal: 'Neglected, Starved and Sold: The Uncertain Future of India's Public Transport' on their plan to partially privatise BEST, one of the best public transport systems in South Asia. What Indorewala has to say is relevant for Kathmandu Valley:

*'The BEST bus system that had been widely regarded as a model for other cities to emulate, is now under sustained attack. Its accumulated losses have become the subject of moral opprobrium. In a world where profitability is the only mark of health, losses are a sign of disorder; sustained losses are (seen as) a sign of sheer pathology... (But) the reason why Mumbai's bus system has worked so well in the past is precisely because it could run a loss. A public transport system plays a crucial economic role; it facilitates the labour market by efficiently distributing workers all over the city. Almost every metropolitan public transport system in the world runs a deficit with the intention of partially socialising the cost of improving employment opportunities, reducing transport costs and cutting down travel time... By socialising costs and stimulating demand, (public services) help economic growth while improving overall living standards.'* 🇮🇳



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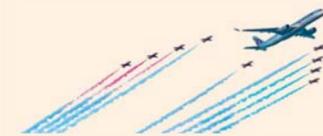


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## PRABHU BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### 20 years of Qatar

Qatar Airways celebrated its 20th anniversary this month by flying an Airbus A350 in formation over Doha with the world-famous Red Arrows aerobatic display team.



The airline was recently awarded 'Best Cabin Service' and 'Best Food and Beverage' at the 2017 APEX Passenger Choice Awards.

### 20 years of Buddha Air

Buddha Air marked the 20th year of its operations in Nepal this week by announcing it would start international flights from the new Pokhara airport in



2021. The airline was set up in 1997 by Birendra B Basnet (above) and currently has seven ATR-42s and 72s, two Beechcraft 1900D, and two more ATR-72s on order.

### Summit Air adds plane

Summit Air, formerly known as Goma, has added one more Czech-built L410 aircraft taking its total fleet strength to four. The



18-seater STOL aircraft will operate in the airline's far-western as well as Lukla routes.

### Turkish load factor

Turkish Airlines has reached its highest ever Load Factor in the last five years with 81.5%.

**TURKISH AIRLINES** Total number of passengers carried went up

by 13%, reaching 6.7 million while cargo/mail volume increased by 25% in 2017 compared to the previous year.

### Louis Philippe in Nepal

Men's apparel brand Louis Philippe has opened its first showroom in Nepal at the upscale Labim Mall in Lalitpur.

Customers can now get men's designer clothing, shoes, and belt among others.

### Oppo demand

OPPO A57 has become the 2nd highest selling Android phone in the world. The smartphone endorses a 16MP front camera with new hand gesture and bokeh effects to capture the best selfies.

OPPO A57 is priced at Rs 26,590 in Nepal.

prabhu BANK



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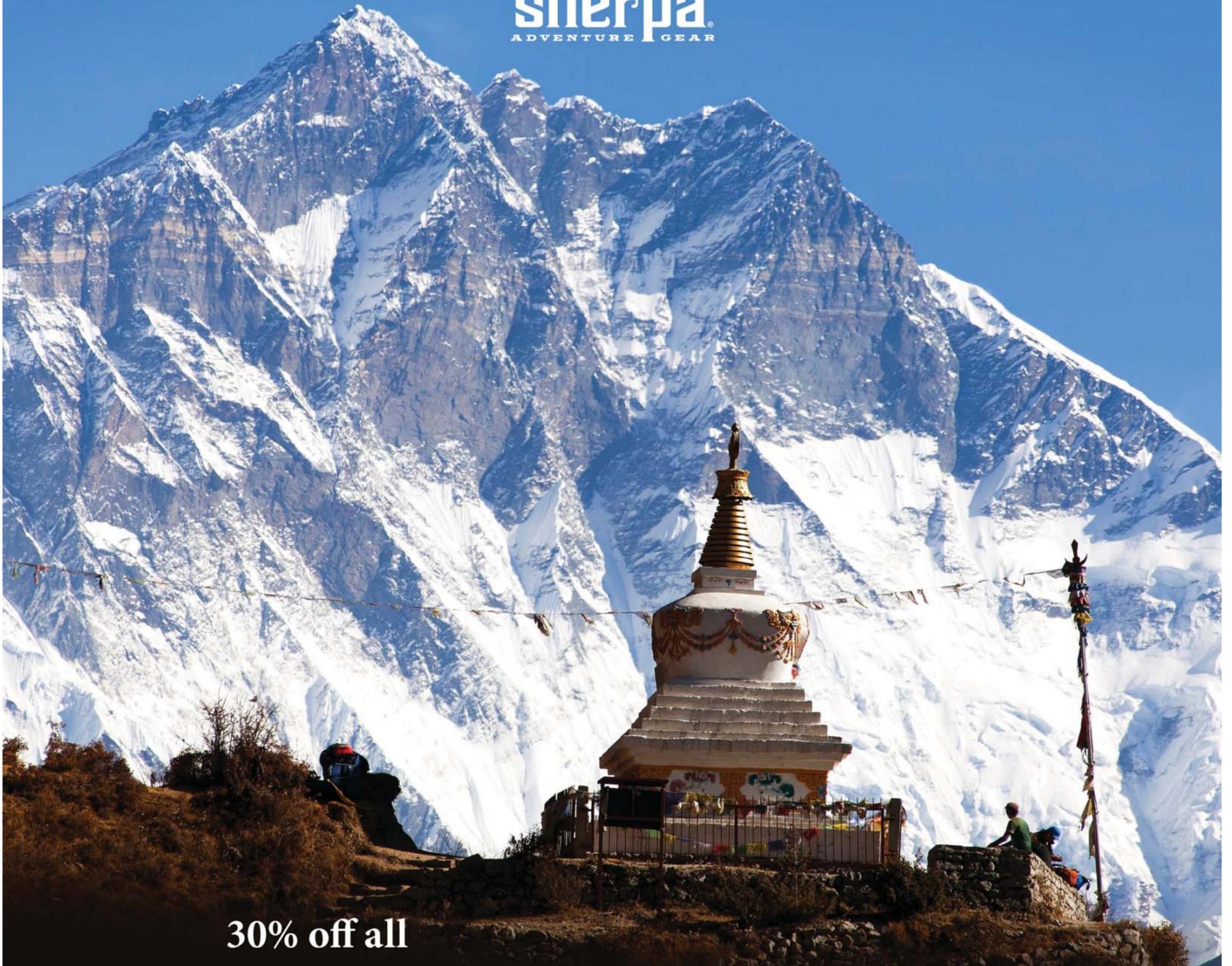
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easy because of these reasons. Friends must tell the truth. We will correct all these areas together and in collaboration with all related organisations and authorities. This is not just for us, it is for Nepal.

**Have the international airlines brought this to the notice of the CAAN (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal)?**

We have to be hopeful and keep prodding the authorities. All international airlines operating in Nepal need to offer their quality of service to continue their business. Even though Nepal is very popular as a tourist destination, a lot more people would come here if the infrastructure was upgraded. We keep explaining to the concerned authorities that Nepal can reap benefits if airlines bring in more people. So, I am hopeful that the authorities will come up with the solutions. We will keep pushing the government and want everybody to see us as part of the solution, and to provide better service to help Nepal's tourism industry.

**How about congestion at Istanbul for transit passengers?**

We already have two airports in Istanbul. Now we are building the third one. The new airport will be one of the world's biggest, and will be completed next year. The city's location makes it an ideal transit hub for passengers from Kathmandu to world destinations. We are also encouraging transit passengers flying via Turkish Airlines to make stopovers in Istanbul by offering reasonable packages and e-visas. Besides that, depending on the connection time we have Tour Istanbul packages and free hotel accommodation.

Nepal's tourism industry has seen what Turkish Airlines is trying to do to develop the market. Hopefully we will celebrate silver, golden anniversaries and be able to offer two daily flights in the future. We will move together with Nepal to reach the targets.

# Turkish marks 4 years in Nepal

Turkish Airlines this month celebrates its fourth year of operations connecting Kathmandu directly with Europe and through Istanbul to the rest of the world. The airline has now increased frequency to five times a week. *Nepali Times* spoke to General Manager for Nepal, **Abdullah Tuncer Kececi**, about challenges and opportunities ahead. Excerpts:

The number of people travelling to and from Nepal went down almost 40% after the earthquake, but it has been picking up again. We believe that promoting Nepal as a tourism destination will also help to recover quickly. The tourism industry is one of the main income earners for the country. You can see Turkish Airlines in all tourism fairs such as WTM London, FITUR Madrid, ITB Berlin and IFTM Paris, trying to promote Nepal.

We are not trying to get a big piece from the cake. We are trying to make the cake bigger for everyone. For us, Nepal is more than mountains.

**Which areas of the world are you focusing on for Nepal traffic via Istanbul?**

It's mainly Europe. We even celebrated 50 years of operation in some of our destinations in Europe. Our passengers know Turkish Airlines for the quality of its service very well. We have been honoured as Best European Airlines for six consecutive years and fly to 117 destinations in Europe. Of course it is not only Europe. We have 300

destinations all over the world: 9 cities in the US, 5 in South America, 2 in Canada, 51 cities in Africa and almost all Asian countries as well.

**What are the major operational bottlenecks for you in Nepal?**

Nepal has great tourism potential. We have a target of 5 million tourists in Nepal. But everything must move parallel to reach this target. As everybody knows, there are some infrastructure problems we have to resolve. These are barriers for growth. Roads, airports, connectivity between cities, number of hotels, service quality — all must move in parallel. We have only one international airport. The capacity is a major concern for us and all other airlines operating here. Kathmandu is not an easy destination because of heavy air traffic, which forces aircraft into long holding patterns. The airport has to be urgently upgraded and extended to meet growth targets for tourism.

**What about fuel costs?**

This is a very critical point for us. We are the only European airline and have a long-distance flight to and from Kathmandu. The cost of refueling in Kathmandu is almost double that of other destinations, which is unacceptable for us and other airlines too. Similarly, ground handling charges are unreasonably expensive and do not meet quality standards. We are trying to have daily frequency to Kathmandu, but it is not



See excerpts of the *Nepali Times Studio* discussion with Abdullah Tuncer Kececi of Turkish Airlines. [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

**Nepali Times:** Has load factor on Turkish Airlines Kathmandu sector now returned to pre-earthquake levels?  
**Abdullah Tuncer Kececi:** Turkish Airlines started flights to Nepal in 2013 September and has been promoting Nepal as a tourism destination from the beginning. We are celebrating the fourth anniversary of connecting Nepal to the rest of the world.



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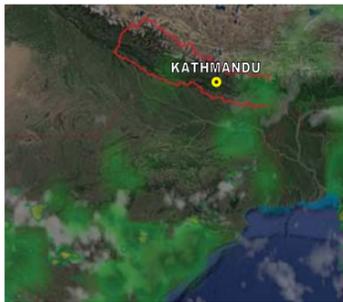


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NEPAL  
 WHEREVER  
 YOU ARE.





The monsoon is trying to prove it is not done with us yet. This low-pressure trough sneaked in from the Bay of Bengal using a weak jet stream to pump late-season water vapour into eastern Nepal. Okhaldhunga actually got upwards of 30mm of rain this week, which is quite unusual. There will still be some lingering moisture from this system, but most clouds will be blown away by resurgent dry westerlies over the weekend. The minimum will go down to the mid-teens, and let's not dispel the notion of some isolated showers, especially east of the Arun.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 17°	27° 16°	27° 15°

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entrepreneur Oscar Kneppers in 2011 to help entrepreneurs realise their dreams. Nepal is Rockstart Impact's first country: its priority areas include agriculture, food, education, environment, clean tech and healthcare.

"There is a big gap between people building scalable, innovation-driven companies and the expectation of investors," Kneppers told *Nepali Times* during a recent visit. "Rockstart Impact helps to bridge the gap between start-ups and investors by sharing the best practices to grow business," he adds.

The program has now received applications for its fourth iteration in which, as in earlier rounds, 10 participants will be selected and given intensive training for 100 days.

Says program director Victoria Ous: "We seek ambitious entrepreneurs with scalable and innovative business models that can create social impact. The selected entrepreneurs will learn to build a business plan, develop communication skills and pitch business to investors in 100 days of mentorship with us."

After mentorship, the Nepali entrepreneurs have to pitch their business plans to potential investors in Amsterdam.

Kneppers says that starting Rockstart Impact in Nepal has been a successful experiment and, encouraged by its popularity and positive response, the program is being expanded to Myanmar.

"I feel very thankful that Nepal will always be the launch pad for Rockstart Impact in Asia," he says, adding, "we will continue the program as long as we find entrepreneurs who want to make the local ecosystem and economy stronger." 🇳🇵

# Business builder

Connecting Nepali start-up entrepreneurs with venture capital

## SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Five years after it launched, RedMud Coffee is already a well-established brand in Nepal, on track to be this country's version of Starbucks. Founded in 2012 with just two employees, the company now employs over 70 young people, and is preparing to

open its fifth outlet in 2017.

"Our long-term plan is to open at least 10 outlets in Nepal and sell three tons of coffee annually," says founder Aashish Adhikari, a USA returnee.

But RedMud's future might not have been so rosy without the help of Rockstart Impact, a Dutch program that helps Nepali start-ups secure crucial venture capital.

RedMud Coffee received

international investment in 2015 – and hasn't looked back since. "Our growth would have definitely been slower if it weren't for foreign investment," says Adhikari. "We all should be happy that Nepali start-ups are getting such support from Rockstart Impact."

Started in Nepal in 2014, Rockstart Impact has already helped 29 companies, out of the 521 applications that it received.

Of them, 21 firms have secured international investment pledges totalling over Euro 3 million.

Best Paani, Karkhana, Cotton Mill, Bloom Nepal School, Fresh Meats, Smart Tech Solution, ICT for Agriculture, Rammed Earth Solution and Intercontinental systems are among the alumni.

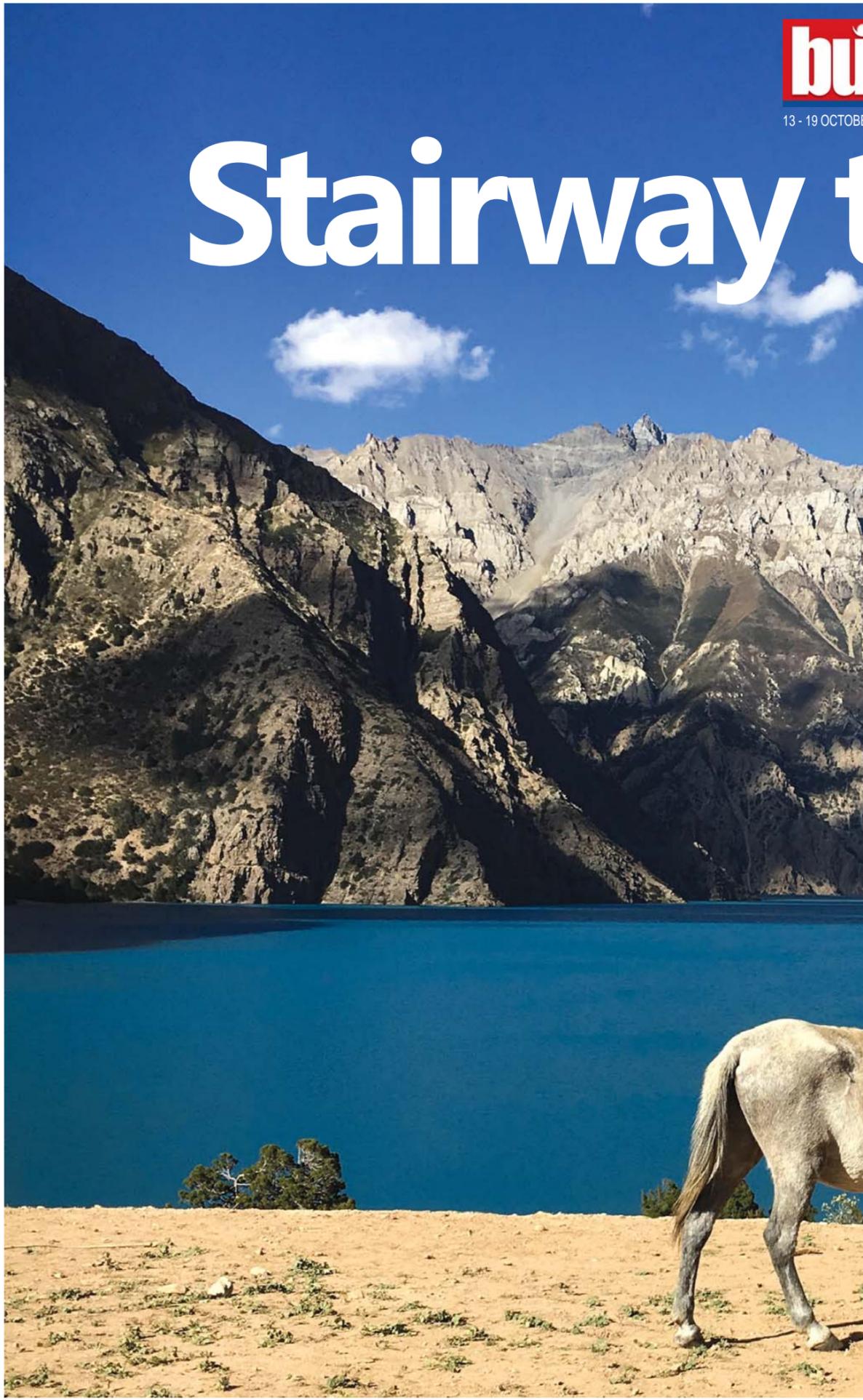
Rockstart Impact is one of four programs of Rockstart, started by journalist-turned-serial-



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4444177



# Stairway to

## Make a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the sacred landscape of Phoksundo Lake

KUNDA DIXIT  
in DOLPO

Mythology and geology are in agreement about the genesis of the holy Phoksundo Lake in this arid trans-Himalayan district, just as they are about many other natural features across Nepal.

Legend has it that a demoness had a run-in with a rival upstream. In a fit of rage, one of them brought down an entire mountain to block the Suligad River, creating the lake.

Geologists have confirmed that the lake at 3,600m was indeed formed when the river was dammed by a giant, post-glacial mountain collapse 40,000 years ago (See box). The water finally found an outlet,

and today plunges 170m through the spectacular Ringmo Waterfall to the valley below.

Whichever theory you believe, there can be no denying that this ink-like lake and the falls are two of Nepal's most precious natural jewels. It must be the sheer beauty of the place that has made it holy to local adherents of the Bon Po faith.

The clouds, sky and mountains are worshipped here, the rivers are holy, waterfalls are believed to descend from heaven, boulders sculpted by rivers are venerated, plants and trees are treated like sentient beings.

For centuries, vast and desolate Dolpo has been protected by its remoteness. It is Nepal's last remaining district without a road, but within two years the Nepal Army hopes to connect the district capital of Dunai with the rest of the country. The airfield at Jufal was recently black-topped, and there are now six flights every morning from Nepalganj.

As in Lo Manthang and Manang five years ago, locals are torn between support and opposition to the road. But there is general agreement that even if buses and trucks reach Dunai, the road should not be extended into Shey Phoksundo National Park.

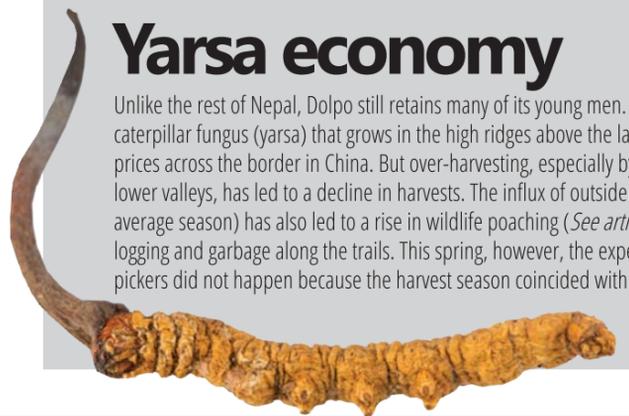
"We have seen from Upper

Mustang how the road has disturbed the sanctity and tranquility of the place," says Raj Tamang of Responsible Adventures, who was taking a group of Polish tourists on a boutique trek to Upper Dolpo last week.

Along the shore of the turquoise lake, the sound of hammer and saw breaks the silence as new lodges are built to cater to the expected tourist boom. Pema Dolma Lama of Kanjirowa Hotel is adding five rooms and

## Yarsa economy

Unlike the rest of Nepal, Dolpo still retains many of its young men. The reason is the caterpillar fungus (yarsa) that grows in the high ridges above the lake and fetches massive prices across the border in China. But over-harvesting, especially by villagers from the lower valleys, has led to a decline in harvests. The influx of outsiders (150,000 in an average season) has also led to a rise in wildlife poaching (See article below), illegal logging and garbage along the trails. This spring, however, the expected invasion of yarsa pickers did not happen because the harvest season coincided with local elections.



# Shey-Phoksundo may become a bus park,

TSHIRING L LAMA

Dolpo is home to many of Nepal's protected mammals including the snow leopard, Himalayan wolf and musk deer, and is a major storehouse of high-value biological resources like the yarsa. It is endowed with some of Nepal's most scenic natural landscapes such as Phoksundo Lake, the holy Crystal Mountain and Kanjiroba Himal, and is also the last remaining repository of the Bon culture.

The larger part of the district is made

up of Shey-Phoksundo National Park, which was set aside in 1984 for the conservation and management of its nature and cultural heritage. However, Shey-Phoksundo is not treated as a national park: it is used by outsiders and even the government mainly for revenue extraction rather than conservation.

For a small fee, outsiders are allowed to roam across the high slopes every spring to pick yarsa, severely disrupting the ecology of the region. In 2016, I recorded two snow leopard cubs that had been tranquilised by yarsa harvesters, probably by poisoning. I saw a blue sheep being poached and three stone traps set for these animals, which are the

main prey of snow leopards. One of these traps was first recorded in 2011, and is still there.

Recently, we rescued blue sheep trapped in wire snares 5km from the National Park and Nepal Army post in the village of Tso. Momo dumplings made with the meat of blue sheep are in high demand in the Lamar border checkpoint between Dolpo and Tibet.

While working on my thesis on the impact of the yarsa collection on the snow leopard, I found that nearly seven out of every ten respondents had no permit slip from the national park to harvest yarsa. Local residents have to pay Rs500, Dolpo citizens Rs2,000 and outsiders Rs 3,000. The park collected Rs9.5



# to heaven



ALL PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

a dining area with large windows facing the lake. Showing visitors around, he says: "This is for Nepali tourists who will start coming when the road arrives: the foreigners all camp anyway."

Even in this remote district, recent local elections have already had an impact. The three VDCs of Vijer, Saldang and Phoksundo were combined to make up one Village Council with the UML candidate from Saldang elected Head, while the Deputy is from Vijer (*See below*). A dispute over where to locate

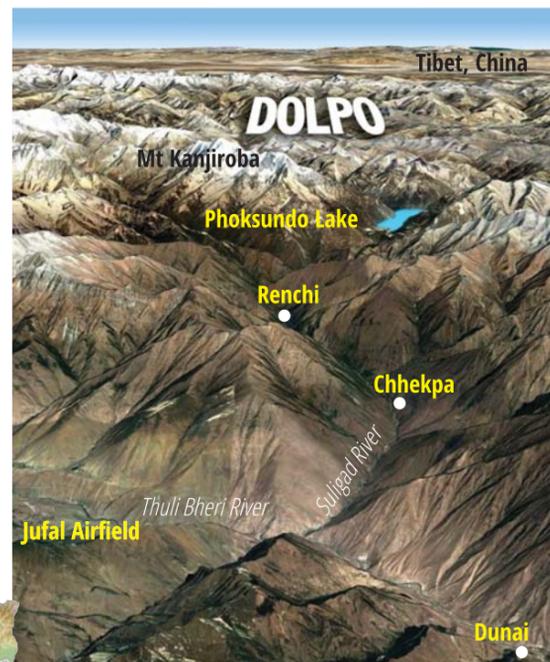
the Village Council has escalated to a point where Phoksundo has blocked seasonal yak grazing, yarsa picking and timber permits for up-country villagers. As in the Khumbu, Village Councils are raising their own fees in addition to the National Park royalty and other trekking charges.

Phoksundo's newly-elected committee is upgrading the treacherous trail along the cliff above the lake that was made famous by Eric Valli's Oscar-winning documentary, *Caravan*.



## DOLPO

Nepal's largest, but most sparsely-populated district is one of the last not to be linked by road.



A massive rockslide 40,000 years ago blocked the Suligad River to create the lake

Phoksundo located at 3,600m elevation is 167m deep

At 170m, Ringmo Waterfall is one of the highest in Nepal.

## The lake

Phoksundo Lake was formed 40,000 years ago by one of the biggest known rockslides in the Himalaya, which blocked the Suligad Gorge creating a barrier up to 500m high. The lake is 5 sq km, the second largest in Nepal and second deepest (after Rara). The rockslide is made up of blocks of limestone and sediment that detached itself from along a ridgeline at 5,700m to the southeast of the lake, probably during a seismic event. Geologists say the natural dam is sturdy and the spillway stable enough not to threaten downstream settlements. Phoksundo doesn't have fish, and relatively few migratory birds use it as a stopover.

Tashi Lama (*left*) supervises the work, as he stands at the narrow ledge where the yak plunged to its death in Valli's film. He says: "The trail was dangerous, several people have been killed, so we needed to make it safer not just for trekkers but for our own people."

For Dolpo, as for many other parts of previously remote Nepal, the challenge will be to balance the local people's need for tourism income with the equally important goal of preserving the ecology and culture of this fragile region.

### HOLY HIKE



Join us on a video trek to the turquoise waters of Lake Phoksundo, along raging rivers and waterfalls wearing rainbows in Nepal's remote Dolpo district.

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

# instead of a national park

million from yarsa harvesters last year.

With the road connecting Dunai within two years, Dolpo needs to adopt a strict ecotourism model. Only 431 foreign tourists visited the national park last year, but most of their fees went to the national exchequer rather than to the local economy. This number will grow, with a large influx of Nepali visitors once the road is complete. The challenge will be to conserve Dolpo's natural resources and protect its cultural heritage from greater tourist inflows.

Blunders have already been made: like the ugly stone wall constructed at enormous cost by the Lake Conservation Committee

with support from the National Lake Conservation Development Committee (NLCDC). Supposedly built to protect the lake, it ended up becoming an eyesore. The money could have been spent on sediment control gabion walls along three major glacial river inlets into the lake.

A majority of the locals support the arrival of the new road because it will bring free-spending Nepali tourists who will stay in lodges. There is also a road linking Tibet with Upper Dolpo, which will reach the region even sooner.

Last year, as a member of the Dolpo Expedition on George Schaller: Return to the

Realm of the Snow Leopard, I saw that most monasteries were empty and in a state of disrepair. Many of the monks were missing. Dolpo's unique pre-Buddhist Bon culture is being gradually eroded by time.

Dolpo's former Saldang, Vijer and Phoksundo VDCs are now grouped under the Shey Phoksundo Village Council. In recent local elections the council head was elected from Saldang and his deputy from Vijer, and Phoksundo was denied the right to host the council headquarters as previously agreed. In retaliation, Phoksundo has cancelled timber extraction and plans to ban yarsa harvesting and grazing for residents of Saldang and Vijer.

Traders from Phoksundo used to take their Tibet caravans to Kyato through Saldang, but this year have re-routed them through Dho Tarap to Lamar on the Chinese border.

To conserve Dolpo's wildlife, preserve its unique culture and address natural resource conflict among locals, the Nepal government will have to work harder than before to enforce laws and plough back tourism earnings for local conservation.

Otherwise, it would be better to designate the Shey-Phoksundo National Park as Shey-Phoksundo Conservation Area.



Tshiring L. Lama is a mountain wildlife researcher. Go online for photo gallery.

# EVENTS



## Tihar ayo

**17 October, Kag Tihar:** Dipawali kicks off with a puja for the bird of good tidings, the crow.

**18 October, Kukur Tihar:** A marigold garland for man's (and woman's) best friend.

**19 October, Gai Tihar:** Welcome Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, into your home by paying respects to the cow.

**20 October, Mha Puja:** The Newar community honours the physical body, while others pay homage to Gobhardhan, an avatar of Lord Krishna.

**20 October, Nhudaya Bhintuna:** Welcome the year 1138 in the Newari Calendar.

**21 October, Bhai Tika:** Sisters and brothers worship each other to ward off Yama, the harbinger of death.

**26 October, Chhath:** Celebrated by the people of the Maithili-speaking region of Nepal and India, Chhath lasts four days. On the third day, people worship the setting sun at Rani Pokhari in Kathmandu and on the banks of rivers

## Jazzmandu,

The Kathmandu Jazz Festival turns 15 this year. Jazz music will fill the air as various artists play their sets at intimate venues across the valley. Take your pick of where to go.

12-18 October, 9803516450, info@jazzmandu.org

## Golden horizon,

12 artists from Nepal and India come together for a joint exhibition with underlying themes of heritage, society and culture, environment and human psychology.

Until 15 October, 10am-5pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, <http://www.nepalartcouncil.org.np/>



## Photo contest,

Submit your three best tourism-related pictures in this contest organised by the Nepal Tourism Board, SMARTH and DFID to mark World Tourism Day (27 September). Send your pictures to: dfidnepal@gmail.com to participate **Deadline: 31 October, (01) 5542980,** [www.facebook.com/NepalDFID](http://www.facebook.com/NepalDFID)

## Rock climbing,

Guage your own strength by trying your hand (and feet) at rock climbing on Astrek Climbing Wall. The package includes lunch, a bottle of water and climbing and safety gear. No previous experience required.

Every Saturday, 8am-5pm, Rs5,500 per person, (01) 4419265, 9841313561, [www.facebook.com/astrek.climbing](http://www.facebook.com/astrek.climbing)



## Tradition subverted,

An exhibition that explores self-identity and gender identification, as well as engages viewers in a dialogue about urbanisation and ecology, by artists Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dangol.

13 October-3 December, 11am- 10:30pm, Yala Mandala, Kwalkhu Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690,

## MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



- Unknown

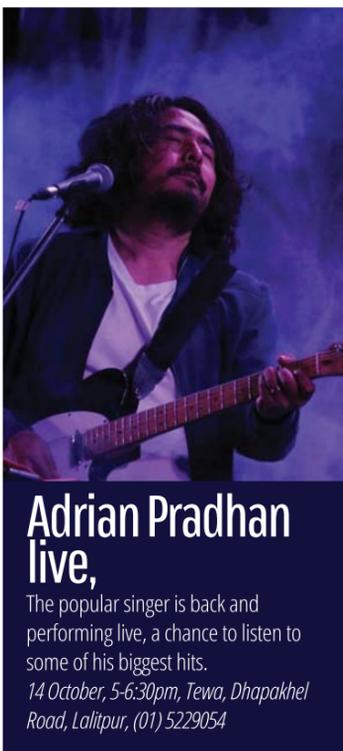
Miss Moti-variation Kripa Kreations

# MUSIC

## Live with Bipul,

Long-awaited live performance by rising star Bipul Chhetri. Tickets available at Base Camp (Arun Thapa Chok), Durbar (Durbar marg) and Calm (Tangal).

14 October, 5pm, Hotel Annapurna, Durbar marg, Rs2,000, Rs 1,500 (pre sale), 9841226397, 9801111406, 9801057609



## Adrian Pradhan live,

The popular singer is back and performing live, a chance to listen to some of his biggest hits.

14 October, 5-6:30pm, Tewo, Dhapakhel Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5229054

## Nima Rumba,

Your favorite pop singer is here to rock the stage again. Reserve your seats.

14 October, 6-11pm, Tirsara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200

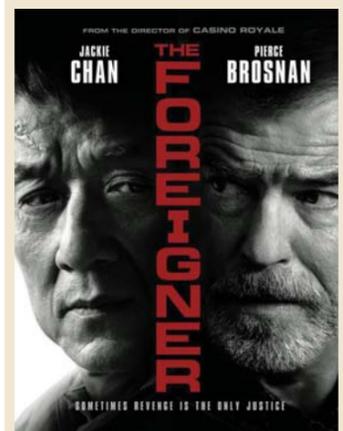


## Friday night live,

Unwind with a soothing musical performance by Aadrasha.

13 October, 7-10pm, Ai-La Lounge, Lalitpur, 9801018681

## OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 13 October

Based on the 1992 novel *The Chinaman*, the film tells the story of a British-Chinese retired Navy SEAL (Jackie Chan), now a small business owner on a quest for justice after his daughter is killed in a terrorist bombing. He enlists the help of a British government officer (Pierce Brosnan) whose hidden past may hold a clue to the killers' identities.

# DINING



## Cellar's Café,

Perfect place for breakfast, lunch or dinner. The only eatery in town where you can shop for the wine of your choice as you dine.

Lazimpat, (01) 4410463

## Dhokaima Café,

Try indigenous cocktails with ai-la to mark Nepal Sambat 1138 new year at the Rukhmuni Bar.

Patan Dhoka, (01) 5522113, [dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com](mailto:dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com)

## Falcha,

Give in to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.

Jhamsikhel, 9851013475



## Café Jireh,

Escape the hustle-bustle of the city and enjoy firewood pizza.

Bhaisipati, (01) 5592102

## Yala Mandala,

Spend an evening at a café in this urban artisan village. Take a tour of the gallery and handicraft workshop until your food arrives.

Kwalkhu Road, Lalitpur, (01) 5536690

## Prazada,

A new pick in town. Spend the weekend with good food and draft beer.

Baluwatar, 9801120222



## European Bakery,

For patties, éclairs, Swiss rolls, cookies, doughnuts and many more Saturday specials.

Chundevi, (01) 4422047

## Wunjala Moskva,

Treat your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in the lush garden surrounded by ancient trees and trickling streams.

Naxal, (01) 4415236



## Dunga,

Head down for some delicious continental food and don't forget their signature cocktails, all served with fine hospitality in an excellent space.

Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 463321

# GETAWAY



## Shivapuri Heights Cottage,

A special package for those who want to view the spectacular display of Laxmi Puja Lights down in the Kathmandu Valley this Tihar.

Budhanilkantha, 9841371927

## Glacier Hotel,

Good value and friendly service for travellers on the lap of Lake Phewa.

Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 463722, [www.glaciernepal.com](http://www.glaciernepal.com)

## Chhaimale Resort,

Enjoy the beauty of nature and a peaceful weekend. Perfect for BBQs, picnics and family hangouts.

Dakshinkali, (01) 4628121, 9851181409

## Balthali Village Resort,

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

Balthali, Kavre, 9851075818



## Park Village Resort,

Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu.

Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01) 4370286, [peace@wellness.com.np](mailto:peace@wellness.com.np)

## Milla Guesthouse,

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

Bhaktapur, 9851024137



## Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at Bardia National Park.

info@mangotree lodge.com, Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotree lodge.com

## Pataleban Vineyard Resort,

Japanese-influenced eco-resort with great views, jungle walks and picnics.

Chisapani, Kathmandu, 9841679364

## Jhule Mountain Resort,

Resting 2,050m above sea level, the eco-resort has a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic homestay experience.

Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Lapsipedi-3, Jhule, (01) 6212399



PHOTOS: SEBASTIAN WOLLIGANDT

# Saving the sound of music

Meet Hari Lal Kul, who is keeping Nepal's musical tradition alive by preserving its instruments

SEBASTIAN WOLLIGANDT

If you want to hear the history of Nepal in its sounds, you have to visit the shop in Patan that makes and preserves ancient instruments, all lovingly restored to bring the beats, rhythms and melodies that are centuries old right to our ears today.

Hari Lal Kul has given himself the responsibility of preserving this important part of Nepal's heritage. On a lane in Saugal Tole off Patan Darbar Square, he runs the Nepali Sanskritik Baja Udyog, together with his wife and son. Tucked away in a narrow alley, the place is

more of a music museum than a shop, with a collection of over 85 traditional and modern musical instruments.

Kul, 57, is obsessed with his work and always has something to repair or make. Two years ago, he cut short his visit to meet his sister in England because he became so impatient at not doing anything with his hands.

"I missed my work here in the shop, so I changed my flight and came home early," remembers Kul, who joined the Royal Nepal Army in 1974, when he was just 14, to be a drummer in

the marching band.

He learnt the craft of making musical instruments from his father, who learnt it from his father. The Kuls have been in the profession for at least seven generations.

Theirs is one of the three old musician families made up of the Kul, Kulu and Kuluju. The word probably comes from Kulu, where drums originated during the 17th century. These were brought to Kathmandu as percussion instruments for royal festivals.

Today, Kul also designs and builds other string and percussion instruments like ek rare, sarangi and madal. He sometimes takes up to three years to finish a madal because

the right type of wood needs to be seasoned.

Bands like Kutumba buy their instruments in Hari Lal Kul's shop. He has even designed his own musical instruments, and on one of them he can produce the sound of ocean waves or insect sounds.

Ashish Kul, Hari Lal's 26-year-old son, is also in his ancestral profession. He plans to open a small café next to the shop so that young people can see and listen to traditional instruments. But young Nepalis may not need coffee to be attracted to the sound of music: Ashish's five-year-old son is already making his first moves on drums. 



Join Hari Lal Kul in his musical instrument shop in Patan, which also serves as a museum of traditional Nepali instruments. Watch and listen to the sound of music old and new.

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com) 

## LISTEN

Go online to hear the sound of each of these old and new instruments.



### Tungna

The popular ancient folk instrument Damphu and an original rhythm of Tamang Selo have unique importance and influence in Nepali folk music. This string instrument has a body carved from a single piece of wood and a resonating chamber made from goatskin.



### Ek Tare

Plucked with one finger, this was a single-string instrument of wandering bards and minstrels from Nepal. The string is pulled over animal skin covering a head made of dried pumpkin, gourd, wood or coconut, with a split-bamboo cane neck.



### Thunder Drum

When the tube is shaken, the sound is amplified and resonates, producing a booming thunder sound.



### Insect Sound

Another instrument invented by Hari Lal Kul, it trills like crickets.



### Chhal

A slim 2-sided frame drum that has many steel marvels inside to produce soft and melodious sounds like ocean waves. The drum is made of goat skin and has many steel balls inside that strike each other. Invented 26 years ago by Hari Lal Kul, it is used for music therapy and theatre.

# West African soul



The members of the Julia Sarr Quartet see themselves as having three main things in common: a grounding in jazz music and performance, their shared home of Paris and a strong enthusiasm for bringing the sounds of West Africa to Nepal's Jazzmandu festival this year.

With a set list of original Sarr songs, primarily from her debut solo album *Daraludul Yow* released in 2014, the musicians will collaborate for the first time at Jazzmandu, bringing a new twist to Sarr's music and a range of musical experiences to their performances.

Sarr will take the stage alongside pianist Fred Soul, who also arranged the instrumentals of her album, percussionist Julie Saury and bassist Bruno Schorp, each of whom composes their own original work.

Sarr, who moved to Paris from Senegal at 13, sings originals in her native Wolof language, melding the sounds of West Africa with jazz



influences while preserving her own culture and language.

She has collaborated with a mix of highly acclaimed jazz musicians, including Youssou N'Dour and Patrice Larose, and is widely sought after as a backing vocalist. She describes her first album, *Set Luna*, in collaboration with Larose, as "an encounter with guitar, flamenco, and French" influences, while her solo album was a "long journey" in which she had the chance to create original work.

"If you do backing vocal, you serve the music of someone. You must be humble just to give the best of your skill and work," said

Sarr, in conversation with her band mates soon after arriving in Kathmandu. "It's more emotional when you perform your own work, your song and your own history. It's a different approach. Going live is transferring your feelings to the people," she told *Nepali Times*.

Living in Paris, where musicians hail from many countries and work in myriad languages, the possibilities for making music are immense. "Paris is a capital with lots of magic, every kind of culture and race," Sarr says. "We deal very easily as we can learn different cultures from all over the world."

"Singing in the Wolof language is the most important thing for me," she added.

Sarr says "the flavour of the song" is at the core of her song-writing process. "A song is like a remedy. When I write songs, I bring in my childhood memories in Africa, the idea of being exiled and the experience of living far from our country, of being detached from your roots and creating your new roots."

Sarr and Soul are making their Jazzmandu debut, while Saury and Schorp have each performed three times at the festival since 2009.

Julie Saury continues to return with various artists because she has fallen in love with Nepal: "The most exciting part for me is to play with Nepali musicians."

The Julia Sarr Quartet will have major performances on 13 October at Moksh in Jhamsikhel from 7-9 pm (Rs600), and on 15 October at Yala Maya Kendra (Dhokaima Café) 7-9 pm (Rs1,500). Seats limited. 🇳🇵

Julia Thomas and Shreejana Shrestha

## HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

**UNITED WE STAND:** Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Chairman of CPN (Maoist Center) and Ganesh Shah of the Communist Party of Nepal (United) signing an agreement on the integration of their parties in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



YUWARAJ SHRESTHA

**HIGH CULTURE:** MP Rabindra Adhikari dances after inaugurating the Annapurna Sanctuary Tourism Festival 2017 at Annapurna Base Camp on Wednesday.



RSS

**WE SWEAR:** Chief Justice Gopal Parajuli administers the swearing-in of newly appointed Supreme Court judges in the presence of President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in Kathmandu Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

**BACK TO SCHOOL:** Former Kumari Matina Shakya attends classes on her first day in school at Kathmandu on Monday.



RSS

**TALKING BUSINESS:** Minister of Industry Sunil Bahadur Thapa inaugurates a workshop on Nepal-US trade organised by the US Embassy on Wednesday. At right is US Ambassador to Nepal Alaina Teplitz.

# Enjoy your Smile

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WHITE

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**Trisa**  
OF SWITZERLAND

## Remembering Rara

Tufan Neupane in *Himal Khabarpatrika*,  
24 September-7 October

हिमाल  
अवस्थापिका

Lok Bahadur Shah used to run a small store near Rara Lake. One day 40 years ago, a government clerk went door to door, ordering him and everyone else in the village to pack up and move out. They were being resettled in the Tarai to make way for Rara National Park.

This was in the days of the Panchayat, when there was no question about disobeying a royal decree issued by King Mahendra himself. Mahendra was mesmerised by Rara, and penned his famous poem *Rara Ki Apsara* sitting under a juniper tree on the southern shore of the lake in 1964. The king died before his dream of creating a pristine nature reserve could be realised, but his son Birendra fulfilled his father's vision by evicting 314 families from around Rara Lake, which was declared a national park in 1976.

Lok Bahadur, now 82, still remembers the day he had to leave his home for good. That morning, he lit a lamp and put enough oil in it for the whole day. He secured his house with a padlock as if his family would return soon.

The family had lots of cows, buffalos, sheep, mountain goats and mules. There were rumours that the sooner they reached the Tarai the larger would be the plot of land they would get. So he sold all his livestock at throwaway prices and headed down to Motipur village of Bardiya district in the mid-western plains.

Rara's displaced families were told that the government had already built concrete houses for them. But that turned out to be just one of the many lies they uncovered as they settled down in the malaria-infested jungles of Bardiya.

Not only were there no houses, there was no drinking water and no easy access to nearby towns. The mountain dwellers could not adjust to the heat of the Tarai, and moved to Chisapani without asking for government permission.

Chisapani was better, but the Rara families faced resentment from locals. After a five-year struggle, they finally got the land they were promised. The younger generation adapted to the new life, but those who had social, economic and cultural roots in Rara still pine for what they consider home.

**SINGLETON**  
12 YEAR OLD

Located west of Iverness, the Black Isle is a peninsula that gets its name from the rich, fertile soil which nourishes the barley used by Glen Ord distillery, among others. Add to that a pure water source and you have two convincing reasons to establish a distillery.

**KEY FLAVOUR INFLUENCES**

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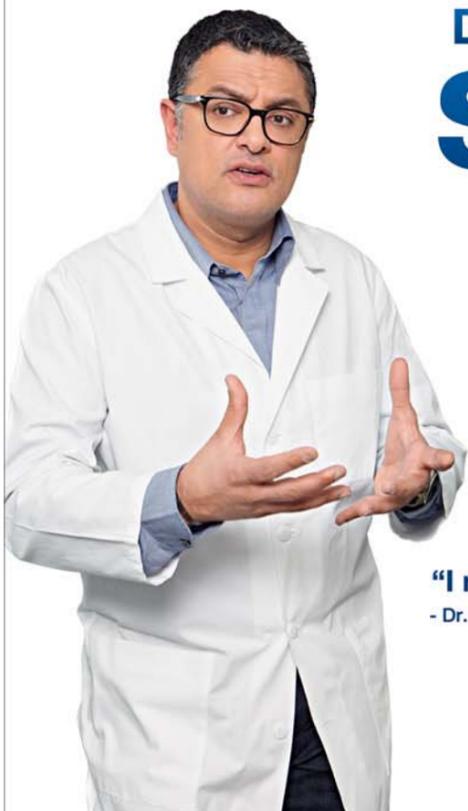
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# Selling Nepal on the Net

Digital marketing of Nepal's tourism is replacing traditional advertising

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

The number of tourists visiting Nepal is expected to reach an all-time high of 1 million this year, recovering from the slump after the earthquake and blockade in 2015. Much of this is not because of placing commercials on cable news channels, but because of a new social media and digital strategy.

The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says positive feedback from tourists on sites like TripAdvisor and Agoda as well as posts on Instagram or Facebook are much more effective in attracting visitors to Nepal. Which means the country could reach the target of doubling arrivals to 2 million by 2020 by



having greater online outreach.

"Digital marketing is extremely important to promote Nepal's tourism, and the best part about it is that we can measure the impact of

the money we spend," said NTB's Deepak Raj Joshi.

NTB spent Rs60 million on digital marketing in 2016-17 – including partnering with

TripAdvisor, and believes this contributed to the post-earthquake tourism rebound. This year's budget has been increased to Rs80 million, and this includes collaborations

with Lonely Planet and others.

Although NTB still buys costly airtime for commercials on mainstream media like CNN and BBC, they are not as effective anymore.

Says Damian Cook of E-Tourism Frontiers: "Firstly, it is expensive, but more importantly it places your tourism message alongside news, which is overwhelmingly negative."

Cook, who participated in an International Travel Blogger's Conference earlier this year in Kathmandu, says Nepal needs "aggregation" – gathering, filtering, purposing and repurposing content from visitors and using this in targeted social media campaigns.

Since that conference, global media listed Nepal as the country to visit in 2017. The endorsements were widely circulated on Facebook and Instagram, and NTB sponsored content about Nepal on Facebook to attract Indian tourists.

Travel blogger and consultant Mike Shubic, who also attended the Kathmandu conference, says video is becoming a much more impactful medium: "They say a photo is worth 1,000 words but a 1-minute video is worth 1.7 million words. We consume a lot more information in the video format, in a whole lot less time than it takes to read."

Indeed, 70% of web traffic today is video content, and by 2020, that number will be 83%. Shubic says a more effective, and affordable, marketing strategy for Nepal



## Facebook friendly

Bloggers Anne Mugnier and Jeff Johns went to bed after posting a video of their Nepal trip, '48 hours in Nepal: Kathmandu and Beyond' on Facebook. When they woke up, it already had 270,000 views. It was shared by Nepalis as well as viewers who excitedly started planning trips to Nepal. It already has 1.1 million views on the couple's Facebook page. Most of their travel videos do phenomenally well, Johns wrote in an email interview. The couple live in Dubai and blog about their travels on [www.whatdoestsuck.com](http://www.whatdoestsuck.com), where they also provide travel advice and feature their blog series, 48 Hours.

"More and more people turn to fellow travellers and influencers for advice and feedback," says Johns, "they feel they can trust us more than an advert on tv about a place. Facebook is such an interactive platform. It allows our fans to comment, tag and share with their friends, so the information can travel very quickly."

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### “You dog, you cow.”

When the video of a British trekker Gemma Wilson being chased by a Nepali tea-shop owner for bargaining over a cup of tea on the Annapurna Circuit went viral on the Internet last month, Nepal's tourism promoters were worried. Within a week of appearing on the *Daily Mail* website, the clip had been viewed 15 million times, and was widely shared by the mainstream media. However, instead of support, the British woman was heaped abuse on the website as well as on most reposts on the social web. She was ridiculed for bargaining, while the obviously overworked and underpaid Nepali woman even got some praise for chasing her customer so determinedly up the mountain, venting her anger using such pithy words. The British tourist was also criticised for selling the clip to the *Daily Mail*, and for trying to make money out of the episode.

would be to either sponsor content development, or run pre-roll ads on targeted video content on websites like YouTube, ROKU and DirecTV.

“Tourism needs people who can capture stunning photos, write helpful content and film compelling footage to be disseminated and shared on social media,” he adds.

When people travel they post four times more pictures and videos on Facebook or Instagram pages. The video ‘48 hours in Nepal: Kathmandu and Beyond’ by Nepal visitors Anne Mugnier and Jeff Johns has been viewed by 1.1 million on Facebook. (See box)

However, social media can

be a double edged sword, and visitors feedback, for instance, on the poor quality of roads, long waits at airport immigration and overcharging can also spread negative publicity.

Which means the only way to increase tourism today is to provide better value and quality service to individual travellers who then post feedback online. 📺



[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Go online to watch ‘48 hours in Nepal: Kathmandu and Beyond’ on Facebook.



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# Sons of bitches

It's that time of year again, and as we involuntarily get the urge to raise our hind-legs when passing a telephone pole, we are reminded that it is time for another annual column on Catmando's canines.

The election season in Nepal this year conveniently coincides with the end of the rains, and the start of the rutting period for dogs. All along the red-light districts these days we see strays from all walks of life taking part in x-rated doggie style xtracurricular activities in broad daylight hours. And at night the yelping and yowling means 'tis the season to be jolly for our four-legged friends, who

year let's also celebrate Ass Tihar and feed donkeys treats.

Kathmandu Valley's dog population has already exceeded the carrying capacity of our garbage dumps, and there is an urgent need to snip them hounds. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that given the wild and carefree manner in which mutts are shagging, Nepal is sitting on top of a ticking volcano. The by-products of these interlocutions will be evident several months hence (at about the time when the new Parliament sits) when the streets near the august House will be crawling with sons of bitches.



are working hard to faithfully implement the commandment from *Genesis 9:7* (King James version): 'And you, be ye fruitful; populate the Earth abundantly, and multiply therein.'

The dogs are also gearing up for Kukur Puja, which this year falls on 18 October, the day when dogs can play god. Every year, this is what gets the Ass' goat: how come Fido here is deemed worthy of worship, and not us donkeys? Crows are divine, but not vultures? Who made these rules? And how come it only rains cats and dogs, but not gnus and donkeys?

I hereby, henceforth and hereinafter propose a more inclusive Tihar under the new Constitution whereby the canine elite doesn't monopolise the right to be man's best friend forever. This

And at this rate, there will be more man's best friends in Kathmandu than man himself, or herself. The question is, what is the new mayor doing about it besides letting sleeping dogs lie?

His first order of business is to do something about dog do-do. Now that the capital is open-defecation free for humans, when is the rule going to apply to dogs? One can't have one law for people and another for pooches. Given doggie demographics, when these baby boomers reach adulthood, how is the Metropolitan City going to ensure that there is enough garbage to feed the goddam dogs?



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