



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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POST PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

Spotted deer are seen in an enclosure at Pashupati Margasthali in Kathmandu on Sunday.

## Oli's parliamentary address leaves his party members wondering

The statement seemed to put a firm end to the gentleman's agreement with Dahal, which said the two co-chairs would take turns to lead the government.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, AUG 18

KP Sharma Oli's statement in Parliament on Sunday has led many Nepal Communist Party leaders to speculate if the prime minister is attempting to put to rest a gentleman's agreement that he and Pushpa Kamal Dahal had reached in May last year.

"I will remain in office until the next elections," said Oli, co-chair of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, while addressing the House of Representatives.

According to the agreement, which is already public knowledge, Oli and Dahal would lead the government by turns—two-and-a-half-years each.

When Dahal, the other co-chair of the ruling party, made the agreement public in May, Oli was in New Delhi attending the swearing-in ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Though Oli had made light of the statement then, it caused quite a



POST PHOTO: ELITE LOKSHI

commotion, creating new equations in the ruling party that was struggling to assign leadership to its various departments due to factional feud. The department heads were only appointed last Friday.

Oli's remarks on Sunday follow a semblance of calm in the party.

"I have not seen anyone in this world who has not stepped down from power and position—be they kings, monarchs or elected representatives," said Oli. "I am also not interested in

remaining [in power] after the elections. I urge friends to wait until the elections."

While one of Oli's aides, who requested anonymity, said that Sunday's statement was a message to Dahal, a section of former CPN-UML leaders and most former Maoists in the ruling party believe that the agreement between Oli and Dahal should be upheld.

"In principle, the prime minister should have said that the present government will continue for a full five-year term," said Ghanshyam Bhusal, a central committee member who has been picked as head of the party's federal affairs department. "He was referring to those who are trying to destabilise the government."

According to Bhusal, who is considered to have close relations with senior leader Jhala Nath Khanal, there should be no confusion over the gentleman's agreement.

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### SPOTLIGHT | 16

The art of making—and drinking—Marpha brandy

## Eight proposals under consideration for Nijgadh airport

The project, which is expected to cost \$3.45 billion in total, is eyed by both China and India.

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, AUG 18

Eight companies from seven countries, including Nepal, are bidding for the construction of the \$3.45 billion Nijgadh International Airport in Bara.

At least two officials at the Investment Board told the Post that they had received proposals from investors from China, India, Qatar, Finland, Switzerland, Malaysia and Nepal to build the airport, 175km from Kathmandu in the plains. The airport is expected to serve as an alternative to congestion and winter fog at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport, the country's sole aerial gateway.

As per the Investment Board, the airport will be built in three phases—the first phase will cost \$1.21 billion, the second phase \$1.12 billion, and the third phase \$1.12 billion.

GMR Group, an infrastructure company headquartered in New Delhi, India, and two airport construction firms from China have submitted proposals, the officials said.

One Nepali company has also submitted a proposal to develop the airport under the public-private partnership model.

The board has received a proposal also from Qatar. The Qatari government had approached Nepal in January to build the project in a bid to strengthen its presence in Southeast

Asia. The government had also mooted an option to award the project through a government-to-government deal before the 2019 Nepal Investment Summit in March.

"We have asked for proposals under the public-private partnership modality but the government has the option to build the project under any modality," said Maha Prasad Adhikari, chief executive officer of the Investment Board.

The Malaysian and Indian governments have been eyeing the project for long. The Malaysian government, on January 6, 2016, had proposed fully-financed construction of the airport under a 'design, finance, build, operate and transfer' (DFBOT) model through a government-to-government deal.

In July 2015, a four-member delegation from the Airport Authority of India visited Kathmandu before heading to Nijgadh for a site inspection. The delegation had informed Nepali officials that they were ready to invest in the project, either through the private sector, government funding or both—as per the wishes of the Nepal government.

As an international airport close to the border with India would be more accessible to the large populations of the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, India has an interest, according to the government officials that the Indian delegation spoke to.

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## Meet the women who are building bodies on their own dime

Female bodybuilders say there is hope for the sport in Nepal, but support from the government and the national association is crucial.



POST PHOTO: PRAKASH CHANDRA TIMILSENA

Binita Rai, Nepal's first female International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness pro-card holder, trains at Cage Total Fitness in Gwarko, Lalitpur.

SNEHA DAHAL

KATHMANDU, AUG 18

In 2005, Nirmala Maharjan was asked to give a demo at the Dharmashree Nationwide Bodybuilding Championship in Kathmandu. This was the first time that a Nepali woman had been asked to showcase to the audience what a Nepali female body-

builder looks like. Since then, Maharjan has given several demo performances at many male bodybuilding competitions. It took over 10 years for a women's category to be included in a major bodybuilding championship.

The 2016 Mr Kathmandu was the first competition to have a women's section. Soon, all national competitions began having a women's section.

There is still no women's tournament. The 2019 Women's Bodybuilding Championship, organised by Gurkhas Classic, will be the first women's-only competition that is going to be held in Pokhara this September.

"I've been in this field for 15 years now and I got no financial support from the government or the Nepal BodyBuilding and Fitness Association in the preparation phase of the competition which includes diet, costume and gym training, the most financially draining aspects," said Maharjan, a 36-year-old single mother. "I've always had to keep nearly Rs 500,000 as back-up per competition and as of today I've spent around Rs 1.5 million, just to earn titles for the country."

Maharjan has represented Nepal internationally multiple times, including the 2015 World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championship in Pattaya, Thailand, which marked the first female representation from Nepal in bodybuilding. Maharjan placed seventh in the 51st Asian Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Federation and fourth in its 52nd iteration.

But without support from the government and a lack of interest from bodybuilding enthusiasts, female bodybuilders like Maharjan have been left to fend for themselves.

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EDITORIAL

## Gift from the past

The Valley's hitis must be saved for their practicality as well as aesthetic value.

It is ironic that water management issues and scarcity plague the residents of the Kathmandu Valley, given that Nepal has access to plenty of snow-fed and glacier-fed water sources, and that the ancient inhabitants of the Valley had placed much focus on a functional network of water sources. For centuries, the ponds, canals and *hitis* of Kathmandu Valley were joined in a system that indiscriminately provided water to everyone throughout the year, all the while helping to recharge ground-water sources as well. Now, this ancient water system—still the main source of water for many—is dying out. It is a shame that this system has been underappreciated and allowed to disappear. The city governments in the Valley must prioritise its conservation. Not only are these spouts, wells and ponds part of the answer to water security issues, but they can also be cultivated as community centres with aesthetic value. After all, that is how they had been used in the past.

The water system of the Kathmandu Valley is considered to be one of its ‘greatest technological achievements’. Using ponds as reservoirs—fed through monsoon rains or through water canals—the system employs underground clay pipes that supply water to the *hitis* (water spouts). The spouts are laid out in deep pits that are below ground level, essentially using gravity to provide a steady supply of water. The walls, steps and terrace structures that make up the pit hide natural filtration, sedimentation and regulation systems that would have ensured clean running water. What is remarkable about this entire system is that until recent damage because of improper urban development, it worked as it should for centuries.

In a city that has grown to demand 360 million litres of water a day, where 20 percent of households are still not connected to the water supply, and where the authorities have only been able to ensure a maximum supply of 140 million litres a day, such an ancient utility should have been celebrated as a blessing. Instead, short-sighted development has ensured the destruction of many aspects of the system. The ponds that feed the spouts, store monsoon water and recharge aquifers have been left to stagnate or have been actively destroyed. The most famous one, Rani Pokhari, was drained by Kathmandu Metropolitan City without consulting conservation experts. Another one was destroyed last year to make way for the Chhaya Centre—a mall. The water canals and underground pipes too have been cut off or bottlenecked due to construction projects. In some cases, like Bhotahiti, the entire *hiti* has been covered over to facilitate the construction of buildings and underpasses.

Such myopic moves will only come back to haunt the Valley's residents in the future. With the Melamchi water project nowhere near completion, people are already reeling under water insecurity. As such, people have had to rely on groundwater extraction, which brings with it short-term problems of iron and arsenic toxicity and long-term issues of water shortage and entire geographic areas becoming unstable and sinking. Bhaktapur and Lalitpur have started to conserve their ponds, which is a step in the right direction. However, all city governments in the Valley need to come together with a plan to conserve and restore the entire water system.

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# Why ‘big merger’ faces a big hurdle

Relatively large ownership by a single entity is a potential roadblock to mergers and acquisitions.

PABAN RAJ PANDEY



Talks of mergers and acquisitions among Nepali banks have been on the rise in recent weeks. The latest Monetary Policy lays down measures meant to encourage banks to merge. By mid-July next year, commercial banks are required to maintain an average interest rate spread (the difference between rates on loans and deposits) of 4.4 percent from the current 4.5 percent; banks that complete mergers and acquisitions by that time will get a one-year extension. Also, by mid-July next year, commercial banks are required to float at least 25 percent of their paid-up capital in debentures; banks that decide to tie the knot by that deadline will get a one-year reprieve. A merged bank also does not have to seek Nepal Rastra Bank's approval to open new branches. Currently, the board of directors, CEOs and deputy CEOs are required to abide by a cooling-off period of six months during which they cannot join another bank. This restriction will not apply to executives of a merged bank.

The argument for mergers and acquisitions goes something like this. There are just too many banks and financial institutions in Nepal. As of mid-June, there were 28 commercial banks (Class A), 32 development banks (Class B), 24 finance companies (Class C) and 91 micro-credit companies (Class D). Conceivably, larger banks should be able to fund large infrastructure projects individually. The existence of larger Nepali banks could also make it easier for them to branch into India. Bigger Nepali banks will be able to compete with foreign banks better on Nepali soil. These are all valid reasons. But how many is too many?

### Short history

The history of competitive Nepali banking is brief. Formal banking began 80 years ago when Nepal Bank Limited was established in 1937. It was not until the 1980s and 90s that



If a large bank fails and the government steps in to save it, it's the taxpayers who end up paying.

private entities entered the sector. Here is the rub. Of the 28, 14 were founded in this century, meaning they are less than 20 years old. In other words, a good majority of the 28 have not witnessed enough cycles.

It helps if one has been through cycles—both up and down. It is in a down cycle when the wheat gets separated from the chaff. This is the perfect time for the strong to be on the lookout for cheap assets to merge with or acquire. In Class C, for instance, 10 percent of the total loan portfolio was non-performing as of mid-June, versus 1.7 percent for Class A and 1.1 percent for Class B. Just using this metric, Class C is not faring well. However, they are nothing in size compared to their A and B peers. Acquiring Class C outfits should be a walk in the park for Class A institutions. But this will not help the commercial banks bulk up. To achieve that goal, they have to merge with

each other.

In early July, Global IME Bank and Janata Bank—both Class A institutions—signed a memorandum of understanding to merge. A few days later, Citizens Bank (Class A) agreed to acquire Sahayogi Bikas Bank (Class B). Nepal Rastra Bank would love a virtuous cycle to begin. The reality, however, is a bit different. First and foremost, commercial banks are profitable. Loan demand far supersedes deposit collection. They are more than earning their cost of capital. In an environment like this, there is no urgency to consolidate through economies of scale or lower cost structures.

### Big not necessarily better

Relatedly, in 2015, while announcing the 2015-16 Monetary Policy, Nepal Rastra Bank gave commercial banks two years to raise their paid-up capital from Rs2 billion to Rs8 billion, hoping this would set in motion a merger and acquisition cycle. Banks did bulk up, but by issuing rights and bonus shares. Since commercial banks now are more or less the same size, in all likelihood a new bank results from a merger of equals. This means that there is no strategic lever to push a merger or acquisition.

Of the 25 privately owned commercial banks, Nepal SBI Bank is 55 percent owned by the State Bank of India. The Standard Chartered Group

owns 70.2 percent of Standard Chartered Bank Nepal. Punjab National Bank holds a 20 percent equity stake in Everest Bank. FMO of the Netherlands holds 17 percent of NMB Bank shares. Nepal Bangladesh Bank was established as a joint venture with IFIC Bank of Bangladesh, where the latter holds three of six board seats.

Relatively large ownership by a single entity is a potential roadblock to mergers and acquisitions, as more often than not such large players would like to maintain control or influence. This also applies to banks in which an individual or a family or a group of like-minded people own a significant chunk. It will be a miracle if Nabil Bank (Chaudhary Group) and Laxmi Bank (Khetan Group) merge. In the unlikely event that more banks follow in the footsteps of Global IME/Janata in the months to come, they will be fewer in number but much larger in size. In this scenario, if in due course a large bank goes belly up and the government steps in to save depositors, it is the taxpayers who will end up footing the bill. Big is not always better, particularly not if the merger and acquisition initiative is taken not to fulfil market demands but to fulfil the regulator's wishes.

*Pandey worked in the securities industry in the US for two decades.*

## Disputing FDI



Nepal's investment strategy should be designed from a legal, not just policy, perspective.

SABRINA SINGH



In 2001, a Swiss corporation sued Pakistan in an arbitral tribunal. Initially hired to provide pre-shipment inspection services for Pakistan's exports, the Swiss corporation claimed that by cancelling their contract, Pakistan breached its Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with Switzerland. Thus began the arbitration case known as SGS v. Pakistan at the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). From Pakistan's viewpoint, this course of action came as a bit of a surprise. This was the first time that it had faced such a legal proceeding. The then attorney general of Pakistan searched 'ICSID' and 'BIT' on Google to even comprehend what was happening.

This anecdote is no criticism of a particular country but a paradigmatic example of how developing countries have approached foreign investment and trade. Many leaders and policymakers see economic development, including foreign investment and trade, as high-level policy decisions and diplomatic formalities while ignoring the tangible and binding legal effects they could have in the governance of their own countries. One such legal effect of

investment policy is investor-state dispute settlement.

International investment agreements and codes are critical instruments to attract and retain foreign direct investment (FDI). They often also contain arbitration clauses that allow investors to sue host countries. Worldwide, there are 3,300 international investment agreements, both bilateral and multilateral. Although Nepal has lagged behind in attracting FDI, today's Nepal seems keen on catching up. The government is targeting a 10-percentage-point increase in investment rates by 2021, and a graduation to middle income country status by 2030. The Investment Summit earlier this year unveiled projects worth \$24 billion, and a similar Tourism Investment Summit is on the horizon, scheduled for 2020. Nepal has introduced some domestic law reforms meant to create an investment-friendly environment and signed BITs with countries like India, Mauritius, and Germany. At this critical juncture, we should learn from the experience of other developing countries and recognise that

investment instruments are not just policy frameworks, but can be binding and legally-enforceable commitments at the international level.

This is an important lens for Nepal due to several reasons. First, it is theoretically likely that Nepal could be subject to arbitration proceedings in the coming years. Earlier this year, Axiata UK (through investment in Ncell) filed a request for arbitration against the government of Nepal, based on the UK-Nepal Bilateral Investment Treaty signed in 1993. If Nepal is indeed serious about attracting and retaining FDI, the government should simultaneously build its legal dispute resolution capacity. Second, Nepal's administrative and legal bodies can be slow, ambiguous and unpredictable. Such conditions are fertile grounds for disputes to arise with foreign investors.

For example, in 1990, Mexico contracted with a foreign company to build a landfill, and the federal government had given some form of assurance about the proposed investment to the foreign investor. Shortly

A smart path to development includes legal capability, foresight, and flexibility.

after, there was widespread local opposition to the landfill, and the municipal government denied the investor the final permit needed to continue construction, stating that the targeted area was ecologically sensitive. By 1994, construction had come to a complete halt and the investor brought an arbitration proceeding against Mexico. The tribunal found Mexico liable. It is not a stretch of the imagination to picture a similar scenario in Nepal. This is important in the context of Nepal because such disputes can influence domestic resources and decisions about tax, regulations, human rights, environment and other governance issues.

The future of international investment and trade dispute regimes are uncertain. With the rise of Chinese investments and numerous other states calling for reform in investor-state dispute resolution, there may be changes in the practicalities of the legal investment and trade regime. But it is especially important in uncertain times to make smart moves. Nepal's leadership should learn from the investment and trade experiences of other developing countries: A smart path to development includes legal capability, foresight, and flexibility.

*Singh studies international law and human rights at Harvard Law School.*



# The links between climate change and viral infection

Global warming has taken vector-borne viral diseases such as dengue to new dimensions.

**IFTIKHAR AHMED**

Climate change is one of the most complex challenges of this century. Globalisation and climate change have caused an unprecedented impact on emerging and re-emerging diseases including zoonoses (diseases that can be passed from animals to humans) in recent years. Emerging infectious diseases refer to diseases caused by newly identified and previously unknown infectious agents; they have the potential to cause immense burden on public health both locally and internationally. On the contrary, re-emerging infectious diseases, caused by agents that have been known for some time and have fallen to very low levels, are now showing an upward trend in incidence worldwide. It is worth noting that viruses and biological vectors (e.g. mosquitoes) swim in the evolutionary stream—they swim so fast that even any thoughtful intervention usually fails to stop them from infiltrating the system.

Global warming and climate change have taken diseases like dengue and other vector-borne viral diseases to new dimensions. Climatic factors, particularly temperature and rainfall, affect the ability of viral disease propagation and potential mosquito vectors to coexist long enough to maintain and increase the rate of transmission. The decreased prevalence of infectious diseases in western countries in the 20th century was due to urban sanitation, improved housing, personal hygiene, antiseptics and immunisation. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, there has been a resurgence of infectious diseases: certain viral diseases (Avian influenza, Ebola, Marburg, Rift Valley fever, chikungunya, dengue, Japanese encephalitis) have emerged or re-emerged while others (smallpox, poliomyelitis, measles) have declined significantly.

Zoonotic transmission of infectious agents from animals (wild and domestic) to humans constituted more than two-thirds of emerging infections. Contact among animals and people is another driving force behind the emergence of new infections. Deforestation forces wild

animals into closer contact with humans. Increased possibility for agents to breach species (host) barrier between animals and humans is responsible for the spread of diseases like Lassa fever, yellow fever and swine flu while global warming facilitated the spread of vector-borne diseases such as dengue, chikungunya and Japanese encephalitis.

Rapid urbanisation and population displacement have given rise to the growth of densely populated cities with sub-standard housing, unsafe water, poor sanitation, overcrowding, indoor air pollution (triggering incidence of viral diarrhea), acute respiratory tract infection, and many other microbial infections. Recognising the complexity of the diverse sociocultural processes involved in the emergence/re-emergence of infectious diseases, many researchers in the fields of biology, medicine, and public health are calling for inputs from experts in the social, economic and behavioural sciences. With its integrative approach to complex bio-cultural issues, anthropology is well-positioned to make significant theoretical and practical contributions. Climate change has been responsible for at least one emerging or re-emerging disease in many countries and the number of such countries is gradually increasing.

Diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), one of the first emerging viral diseases of the 21st century, in one country are an alarming threat to all travellers with a tremendous negative economic impact on trade, travel and tourism. Nipah virus infection is becoming endemic in Bangladesh as cases have

Climate change has been responsible for at least one emerging or re-emerging disease in many countries.

been continuously detected since 2001. Avian influenza (H5N1) has been detected since November 2003 in birds and affected 60 countries across Asia, Europe, Middle East and Africa, and more than 220 million birds were killed by the virus or culled to prevent further propagation. Swine-origin influenza A (H1N1) which leads to swine flu causes respiratory diseases in pigs; pigs can get infected by human, avian and swine influenza viruses. In late 2009 and early 2010, the global pandemic of swine flu caused great panic. Although a few cases of swine flu were detected, there were only two recorded deaths in Bangladesh.

The outbreak of dengue has taken place over the past 40 years with a 20-fold increase to nearly 0.5 million cases from 1990 to 1998. The medical community of Bangladesh was fairly unfamiliar about the presence of dengue in the country before 2000. Since its outbreak beginning in the summer of 2000, cases have been reported every year. Chikungunya fever is also a re-emerging condition in previously unaffected areas with possibly changing epidemiology and severity of the disease. This tends to be clustered geographically and overlap with dengue because they share some common clinical features.

The role of climate as well as environmental changes on the growing burden of emerging and re-emerging infections calls for a new approach so as to prevent these threats. The response options need to be appropriate keeping in mind the nature of vulnerabilities that might affect demographic transitions due to climate

change. Health, nutrition and population experts must address these areas of public health issues related to climate change with the required responses. Member countries have given the World Organisation for Animal Health a mandate to address the issue by using its scientific capabilities and networks at the global, regional and sub-regional levels. The aim is to prevent or reduce the effects of climate change on animal diseases which are transmissible to humans. In order to offer a multidisciplinary perspective to mitigate the problem, infectious disease specialists, epidemiologists, geneticists, microbiologists, and population biologists need to join hands to address questions about the definition, identification, factors responsible for and multidisciplinary approaches to viral infections. There is also a need for monitoring at the national, regional and global levels which can be done by taking an epidemiological, laboratory-based, ecological and anthropological approach and adopting early control measures.

The role of public-health professionals is to establish monitoring and surveillance for unusual diseases and drug-resistant agents as well as ensure laboratory capacity to identify new agents and develop plans to handle outbreaks of unknown diseases. Finally, socio-political commitment at both the national and international levels is crucial for effective containment of these dangerous diseases.

*This article was previously published in The Daily Star, a part of the Asia News Network.*

# Hungary's Holocaust simulacrum

The memory of the Holocaust in Hungary and elsewhere is slowly becoming a simulacrum of historical reality.

**ANDREA PETO**

The exhibition at the House of Jewish Excellence in Balatonfüred, a small, picturesque town on the northern shore of Hungary's Lake Balaton, features some 130 prominent Jews in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), many of them of Hungarian origin. The museum shop, however, has nothing specifically referring to Jews in the Hungarian context. At best, one can purchase a bottle of kosher wine or a mug with the iconic photo of Albert Einstein sticking out his tongue.

Perhaps this is not a problem. Maybe we should just celebrate the opening of another Jewish museum in Hungary, which has the second-largest Jewish community in Europe but very few Holocaust memorial sites. We might even overlook the fact that by identifying excellence only with STEM research, the museum renders invisible several other prominent Jewish scholars whose oeuvre is more closely related to progressive ideas and actions. That skewed view doubtless pleases the current Hungarian government, which is supporting the museum financially.

Yet it is impossible to ignore the exhibition's painful lack of critical reflection as to why even the talented Jews it did decide to feature were persecuted, and how they survived. The only three-dimensional, material object in the museum is a plaque by the entrance that refers in general terms to 'wickedness' and 'a plan to kill.' This vagueness—or rather silence—about the Holocaust, and Hungarian collaboration in it, is part of a wider, disturbing trend in Hungary.

That trend relates to the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard's category of 'simulacra', which was in turn inspired by a one-paragraph story by Jorge Luis Borges entitled 'On Exactitude in Science'. In it, Borges describes an empire so attached to the map of its own territory that when the empire collapsed, nothing remained but the map, or the simulation of the land that once was a powerful empire. After the collapse, he writes, the land was 'inhabited

by animals and beggars.'

Similarly, the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary and elsewhere is slowly becoming a simulacrum, owing to a paradigm change in the way the event is memorialised, including in museums. This shift aims fundamentally to alter the current, universally recognised status of the Holocaust as a moral landmark in European history, with major consequences for the continent's values and politics.

It took a long time for the history of the extermination of European Jewry to achieve its current status. In countries occupied by the Soviet Red Army after

World War II, Jewish communities had a corner or a room in their underfinanced and dilapidated synagogues dedicated to documenting the Holocaust. Official war memorials, however, did not mention the Jewish victims.

This Eastern European memory culture was fundamentally transformed after the collapse of communism by the 'Americanisation' of the Holocaust – meaning, as German cultural studies scholar Winfried Fluck puts it, a democratising process of stripping away complexity in order to make complicated events accessible to a wider public. After 1989,

the Americanised Holocaust narrative also reached Hungary. But not until the 2002 opening of a small memorial center in a former Budapest synagogue did any museum feature the international language of Holocaust exhibitions. At any rate, that language does not correspond with the national Hungarian memorial culture nor with the religious conceptualisation of the Shoah.

The Americanisation of Holocaust museums also technologised remembrance, resulting in exhibitions without historical objects. Instead, visitors use touch-screens to tailor their museum visit to their own interests—a dangerous educational strategy at a time when ignorance about the Holocaust is growing.

The over-technologised House of Jewish Excellence is an extreme example of this. On entering, visitors first come to a computer terminal on the ground floor. Here, they are expected to choose which scientist's brief life story they want to read on an interactive board conspicuously placed on the floor above. The mismatch between international, religious, and national discourse about the Holocaust could not be greater.

Moreover, the House of Fates, the long-planned second Holocaust museum in Budapest that was originally scheduled to open in 2014, shares this misguided high-tech approach. Although the showy buildings have been finished for years, the exhibition is still not ready, and its script is like a yeti: officially, nobody has seen it, and experts have never discussed it publicly, but it is widely believed to exist.

No respected Hungarian academic is prepared to collaborate with this project, the financing of which is alarmingly non-transparent. The museum's newly hired staff of retired Israeli and American male scholars—helped by media agencies—have been rewriting a script that was originally conceptualised along the same lines as the House of Jewish Excellence. Again, fluffy language and digital wizardry will be used to obscure the question of responsibility for the killing of 600,000 Hungarian Jews.

With a fresh start, the House of Fates project could yet help to establish a new language and self-definition of the Holocaust's meaning and legacy in Hungary today. This should involve a dialogue between the different memory cultures, among experts, local communities, and the wider Hungarian public.

Otherwise, the memory of the Holocaust as a moral landmark will become a vanishing simulacrum: the more that museums put it on touchscreens, the emptier it will become. And soon we will all be living in lands 'inhabited by animals and beggars,' selling kitschy mugs of Einstein sticking his tongue out at us.



# ‘Nepali market for beers is changing with consumers’ preferences for alternative tastes’

Thomas Nösner on Nepal's beer scene and its adaptability with the international brands.

German beer brand Warsteiner's arrived in Nepal last year with much fanfare, having teamed up with Jawalakhel Groups of Industries. Since then, rumours of the beer failing swirled around Kathmandu, but it's all part of playing the long game, according to Warsteiner International's Technical Director **Thomas Nösner**. Following a recent visit to Raj Brewery, he spoke to the Post's **Thomas Heaton** about Nepal's beer scene, global trends, craft beer and the brand's future.

**What was it like for Warsteiner to enter into a lager dominated market, run by a few breweries who flood the market with their product?**

Nepal is dominated by, let's say, one group. From what I've seen, our problem wasn't in distribution, it was at the point of sale. But, what is happening in this market, which is dominated by one group and one or two types of beer, is it's already changing. I think this change will rapidly ramp up over the next 12 months.

For comparison, in Germany 20 or 25 years ago, we had 10 stock keeping units (varieties), now we have 250. We extended the units because you cannot exist in a market with one or two different brands.

In Nepal, what I see is competitors are blocking new brands, which is something you can only do for a certain time. Eventually you will fail. When you block the competition, you block the customers. The customers are expecting variety and expect more beers, and this is going on all over the world. No one can avoid the competition.

For instance, until 20 years ago, there was only one beer in Argentina but now, there are a lot of beers. Then there are the craft brewers. Many of my colleagues say craft beer is bad for our business, but it's not true—they make beer interesting. They give a push to the beer business.

I think Nepal is also following the same trend.

**What has Warsteiner learned about the Nepali market since entering last year? What is the marketing strategy now?**

We want to be premium. People expected us to come in a big rush, but we didn't. When you come into such a different market, it will take a while and you have to explain what you're doing. Nevertheless, we are continuously growing—not exceptionally fast—but there will be a point when we will grow faster.

Warsteiner has offered a different product—visually and taste-wise in comparison to the existing lager beers. People who like it, love it, and that was my expectation.

You cannot expect people who have had only one beer for decades to take up new tastes quickly, because they might not be used to it. But over time, there will be a lot of changes and a lot more competition. For pub owners, I would recommend they take up more variety, because if they don't, they will fail.

Regarding Warsteiner, we wanted to make it into more of an experience. Our glass itself is a champagne glass, and our target was to always be really premium, not only by the label. Our next differentiation is our purity law—there's no alternative for us.

But entering a new market is always different in terms of infrastructure and habits in markets, especially in a country like Nepal. In Germany we call it liquid bread, we have beer



POST PHOTO: THOMAS HEATON

nearly at any time. In Nepal, people mostly prefer drinking on weekends, but that's changing too.

**Warsteiner Group's ideals include the idea of sustainability, in many forms, but what is it doing on an environmental level?**

We cannot do much with the product itself. But Raj Brewery is state of the art and is brand new, and is built with sustainability in mind. We constantly work to improve processes regarding wastewater and energy consumption. There is an above-average wastewater plant from the beginning, which puts clean water back into the river, and the spent grain is going to farmers for livestock. Nothing is really wasted or lost.

**Given the large 'strong beer' market in Nepal, and the international offerings Warsteiner has, would the brand look into doing its own strong beer?**

Nepal is not a typical lager beer market. We see the consumption running up in Nepal—this means we can bring new ideas in.

In the next couple of months, we will launch a strong beer because you cannot ignore that market.

Of course, we will make it a bit different, but not with Warsteiner. Maybe it will be more adapted to the Nepali market. It will be the same procedure, basically, with the purity laws and ingredients. We'll see how it goes.

I think there will be some more surprises in the next couple of months.

Nepal is not a typical lager beer market but we see the consumption running up in Nepal.

**Nepal doesn't have a malt industry, or a culture of following German purity laws. What are the major difficulties in brewing?**

Yes, malt is not available in Nepal, it needs to be imported. For malt, we had an agreement with malters and we audit them. Raj Brewery can take advantage of that—they can buy malt at the same place as we do. The hops are flown in as are the yeast, which we've selected over decades. The yeast has a big impact on several taste parameters.

In other countries, I know companies are forced to use barley produced in the country, but it's impossible in Nepal. You can't do a good malt everywhere, because it depends on the raw materials. It's pretty hard for the marketing department to explain purity laws to people, and there's still a way to go to explain it.

Due to all the imports, it's a bit more expensive, but of course it has to be for the quality. It's pure malt, pure hops, yeast and water—nothing more—and not blended with rice or sugar to lift alcohol levels.

But we are more than happy with the brewery and the quality of the beer including flavour stability. It has exceeded my expectations.

We've got the result of good preparation, because we've been involved with Raj Brewery from the start, to influence all the equipment and details so we meet all our technological targets. Usually breweries at the beginning have big problems, but meanwhile here it's doing very well and the organisation is good.

# How companies are de-stressing workforces

Burnout: It takes place across industries and across regions.

CHRIS TAYLOR

No matter who you are or what you do, let me take a wild guess: You feel a little burned out right now.

Was I right? If so, you are one of the two-thirds of Americans who report feeling burned out on the job, according to a recent Gallup poll.

That breaks down into 23 percent who are burned out very often or always, and another 44 percent who feel that way sometimes. Those numbers are epidemic.

But they do not surprise Cleveland Clinic's Dr Adrienne Boissy. When the famed clinic asked its own physicians about burnout, surveying over 1,500 of them, 35 percent reported at least one symptom. Across the nation for physicians it is even worse: a whopping 54 percent, according to Mayo Clinic researchers.

"People are feeling like their bucket is empty at the end of the day," says Boissy, who as the clinic's chief experience officer is leading the charge to combat employee burnout. "There is an ocean of distress and suffering out there."

Burnout does not just happen in healthcare, though, with its particularly intense life-or-death environment. It takes place across industries and across regions. Popular YouTuber Lilly Singh even made headlines when she announced she was taking a break to recharge her batteries. So what exactly is going on, to make everyone feel so depleted?



WILLIAM IVEN/UNSPASH

ed? There is no one answer. Rather, a host of factors conspire to make modern workers feel tapped out.

Technology is one. Smartphones now make people accessible 24/7, leading to the expectation that they will be responsive outside of normal office hours. It can develop into a two-shift day: one at the office, one at home.

"All the ways we can get in touch with people these days, puts stress on people about how to balance it all," says Julie Coffman, a Chicago-based

partner with consultants Bain & Co and global head of its organization practice. "It's exhausting to navigate."

To their credit, organisations are starting to realise that burnout is in no one's interest. At the Cleveland Clinic, Boissy and her team have rolled out a number of fixes to help reduce physician burnout. Since much of the problem stems from overwhelming documentation, assistants are now handling more paperwork or refilling prescriptions, so doctors can interact more with

patients.

Cleveland Clinic is using innovative solutions like "Code Lavenders," where dedicated teams help during the painful or traumatic moments that happen every day in a hospital.

### Tips to prevent burnout

Some burnout prevention tips from Bain & Co's Coffman: Try no-meeting or no-email days to give staffers a break from overscheduling.

Another suggestion is to analyse your employee networks. If everyone

Try no-meeting or no-email days to give staffers a break from overscheduling.

wants access to a particular manager, you need to help that manager out with his or her workload. And remember that it is okay to say no. If you have five project groups demanding your time, go to your supervisor and figure out which are priorities, and which you can pass on.

Changing jobs can also relieve some pressure. Just ask Jane Barratt, who has plenty of experience working in the digital space, where "all anyone could ever talk about was how tired they were."

When she signed on with financial-data firm MX as its chief advocacy officer, it was like a different world. Dedicated areas for spouses and kids, nap rooms, massage time, big family events like booking movie theaters or taking over theme parks—the list goes on.

As a result, her new venture "does not have the level of exhaustion of other tech companies," she says. "It's something I haven't really seen before."

—Reuters



# Desolation but in its diverse forms

The current exhibition in Classic Gallery brings together the works of five contemporary artists but fails to link their individualistic themes and styles.

**SRIZU BAJRACHARYA**  
LALITPUR

It's another scorching hot afternoon, the kind of day when you are thinking of dipping yourself in ice. Those walking the pedestrian pathway are swiftly hurrying to get to their destinations in Chakupat, Banglamukhimarg, but are distracted by the paintings put up by Classic Gallery as part of its 'Being Together 2019' exhibition. They can't help but brood deeper into the paintings, even in their state of hurry—which seems like a tactic to pull passersby into the gallery. And, the lure seems to work, because these artworks are relatable. They might not be surprising but they are engaging.

Inside the gallery, a faint traditional instrumental imbues emotion to the exhibition, which feels rather melancholic, but it's apparent that is not what the exhibition wants to bring to the front. 'Being Together 2019'—an exhibition that brings together the work of five artists: Binod Giri, Aman Maharjan, Deepak Thami, Suresh Basnet and Leo Jhankar—invests in telling onlookers the artistic diversity and dynamics of young contemporary artists. There is no underlying theme that brings the artworks together.

But what makes this exhibition different is its simple expression. While many exhibitions around Kathmandu make onlookers ask 'what is art exactly', this exhibition maybe something that everyone will enjoy, because it is easy to contemplate—poetic but not too abstract. The artwork is detailed but leave you feeling hollow and estranged.

Binod Giri's large painting titled 'Pattern' explores different motifs visible in the Valley.

The painting feels like an opening to another realm, one that will transport viewers to the city of temples. The yin-yang water shapes that surround the window in the painting look like they are part of the spell that opened the realm. The painting feels ancient with the use of gold; however, because of the use of dark hues and withering effect, they look detached from the real world—as though on the verge of disappearing. And the style remains persistent in all of Giri's other works present in the gallery.

Another artist, Deepak Thami's artwork feels familiar and novel at the same time—for his paintings are of old people. His elderly characters hold and embrace things forgotten in the hustle of life, such as a lotus and birds. But they also feel like they are wrapped in the worlds they live in—a world uncared for by others. The minute details make the artworks poignant—for instance, the detailed precision on the wrinkles tell of the



POST PHOTOS: ANISH REGMI

One of the five artists whose artworks are displayed in 'Being Together 2019' exhibition at the Classic Gallery, Leo Jhankar's artworks explore the deterioration of green forests due to urbanisation.

characters' age and the stories they have lived.

However, it's Suresh Basnet's artworks that stand out the most in the exhibition. His paintings are colourful, although they delve on social pressure, enclaved worlds and departure. Some of his works are even comical. In one painting, a woman is adorned in jewels made out of greens, her earrings shaped like eggplants.

In another painting, he explores the backdrop of post-earthquake ruins in Kathmandu Durbar Square. The painting illustrates people pointing at flying deities, perhaps to account for how people described the devastating earthquake as the wrath of the gods. But even amidst this chaos, there is one character who is immersed in taking pictures of the flying deities—showcasing how in the modern world, we are addicted to capturing even our tragic moments.

But, Aman Maharjan's artwork, 'Utpatti'—in which he retells the story of Swoyambhu's origin and Kathmandu's beginning after Manjushree cut a gorge in Chobhar, draining out the water that filled the Valley—will make onlookers think otherwise. An observer might interpret the painting as Swoyambhu being engulfed by the rapid changes happening around its vicinity. The use of dark cyan in the painting imbues a tragic feel.

While Leo Jhankar's environmental dystopia, which looks like a view from a lens, shows how forests are being cut down to serve humans—although this isn't a new idea, and many have seen such artwork before, the pieces are still penetrating. The forests he inscribes look ravaged and abandoned.

But it's likely that most, after viewing the exhibition, will question the title 'Being Together'—how do these artworks come together and what is

the aligning theme of the exhibition. Especially, because all of the artists touch on diverse issues and while they are just making expressions of culture, chaos, origin, and dystopia, the paintings unintentionally seem to lurk with melancholy—the hollow feeling when one is lonely.

Sarita Dangol, the founder of Classic Gallery, says, 'Being Together' was never the theme, rather it served as a title to bring together works of various young artists. 'Artists in Nepal are always looking for opportunities to exhibit their work, and although the prospects for them look better today, there still aren't enough opportunities, hence under the title 'Being Together' I wanted to bring together works of various contemporary artists,' said Dangol.

It is peculiar that artists and the curator have decided to abandon a defining coherence among the artworks on display. Although the art-

works carry their own individualistic meaning and purpose, it is somewhat disappointing that the exhibition doesn't offer any underlying collective theme. Heterogenous ideas can showcase diversity, but it can also leave the audience dazed and scattered—and hence, requires a curator's careful choice over the displayed works, artists' styles and themes that can bind the exhibition together.

But, despite the missing theme, 'Being Together' will still bring people closer to knowing and understanding art, as the artworks can stand alone. This is an exhibition people shouldn't miss, specifically if they want to contemplate the meaning of art. After a long time, this is an exhibition that feels straightforward and comprehensible.

*'Being Together 2019' will be on display until September 10 at Classic Gallery, Chakupat.*



The exhibition brings people closer to knowing and understanding art.



# Gotta catch and keep 'em all: Pokemon's enduring legacy

More than 7,500 people from 49 different countries are expected to attend the annual Pokemon World Championships in Washington.

**TORI OTTEN**

Pokemon — the small, adorable creatures with special fighting abilities — have been around for more than two decades, and they're as popular as ever, mainly due to families sharing the legacy.

More than 7,500 people from 49 different countries are expected to attend the annual Pokemon World Championships in Washington this weekend. On Friday, as the event kicked off, most of the attendees appeared to be in their twenties or older.

"I'm 24, but I know I look young," joked Amanda Gunkle, who was decked head-to-toe in the gear of Pikachu, the iconic yellow Pokemon.

She came in from Pittsburg with her twin brother to watch the tournament.

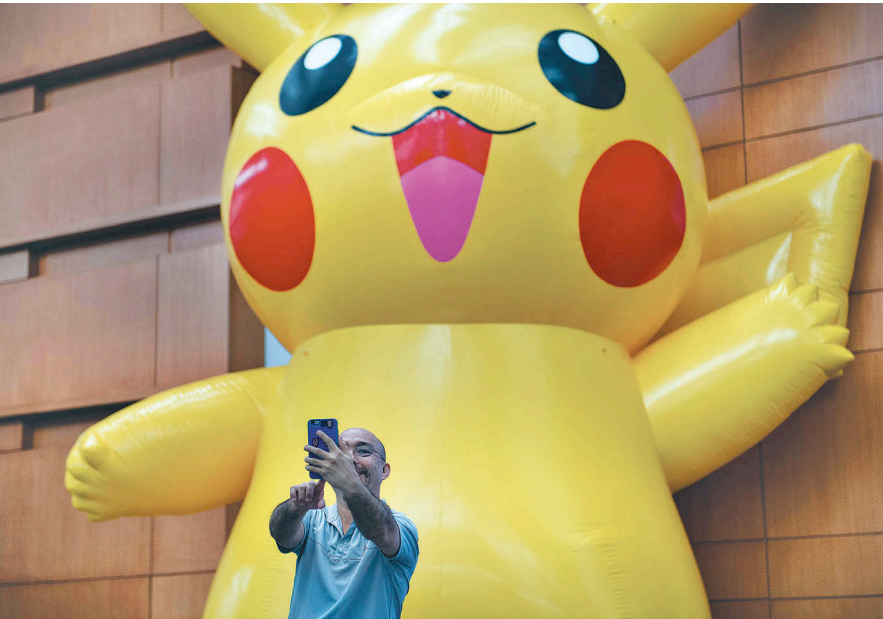
"I've been a fan (of Pokemon) since my early childhood," she said.

It's clear why Pokemon appeal to younger children. But for many of the older fans, Pokemon simultaneously represent nostalgia and novelty.

The Pokemon franchise launched in Japan in 1996 but didn't take off in the United States until the early 2000s.

The brand, which is currently estimated to be the highest-grossing media franchise ever, produces video games released in pairs every one to two years, alongside a new batch of Pokemon species.

It also makes trading cards that players



AFP/RSS

A man takes a selfie with a Pikachu during the first day of the 2019 Pokemon World Championships at the Washington Convention Center.

use to battle each other, an animated television series and several movies.

"We're definitely seeing some intergenerational fans," said Elvin Gee, a spokes-

man for the Pokemon Company, who was a big fan of Pokemon himself growing up.

"It's amazing to see parents pass on their cards or pass on their video games to

The goal of the event is to encourage education and strong principles.

their children," he said.

**Something for everyone**

The franchise's popularity is also due to the recent success of smartphone app Pokemon Go, a game that lets players walking the real world hunt virtual Pokemon, as well as the film "Detective Pikachu," which opened in May and has made more than \$430 million worldwide.

"There's something for everyone," Gee said.

New Jersey native John Kim drove down with his family so his two older sons, ages 11 and eight, could compete in the tournament.

"I really like it for (my sons), because... they have to learn to lose gracefully, to win gracefully. They learn rules, they learn to accept outcomes," the 40-year-old said.

For the Kim family, Pokemon's legacy moved in the opposite direction: John became interested when his sons started playing.

Now, the whole family plays together, even the youngest boy, who at four years old plays alongside his brothers — albeit with a simpler deck.

"They have to sit with an opponent" and engage with others, Kim said.

That engagement is a staple of the Pokemon community, with many players developing close friendships, despite only seeing each other at the World Championships once a year.

The Championships prize money—which runs up to \$25,000 for the card game tournament—is mainly offered in the form of scholarships or travel certificates, particularly for players under 18 years old.

The goal is to encourage education and strong principles among the participants, many of whom are minors.

"It's about sportsmanship, it's about great characters, it's about a great game," said Gee.

Like the Kims, Yannick Daunais' interest in Pokemon was sparked when his daughters started playing. The 38-year-old from Joliette, Quebec drove to Washington so his 11-year-old son could compete in the Championships. "We're like a huge family," said his daughter Mya, 14. She and her sister Lidya, 12, were dressed as Pikachu and Eevee, another Pokemon.

"Exactly," her father agreed. "We're part of a huge Pokemon family."

—Agence France-Presse







# Thousands of protesters flood Hong Kong streets in ‘peaceful’ march

Despite the near-nightly clashes with police, the movement has won few concessions from Beijing or the city’s unelected leadership.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HONG KONG, AUG 18

A sea of democracy activists once more flooded the streets of Hong Kong in a defiant show on Sunday to the city’s leaders that their movement still pulls wide public support, despite mounting violence and increasingly stark warnings from Beijing.

Ten weeks of demonstrations have plunged the financial hub into crisis, with images of masked black-clad protesters engulfed by tear gas during street battles against riot police stunning a city once renowned for its stability.

Communist-ruled mainland China has taken an increasingly hardline tone towards the protesters, decrying the “terrorist-like” actions of a violent hardcore minority among the demonstrators.

Despite the near-nightly clashes with police, the movement has won few concessions from Beijing or the city’s unelected leadership.

The spiralling violence, which last week saw protesters paralyse the city’s airport, has tarnished a campaign that had taken pride in its peaceful intent and unpredictability—which demonstrators have tagged with the slogan ‘Be Water’.

Organisers of Sunday’s rally, which started at the city’s Victoria Park, said it was an attempt to wrestle the narrative of the protest back to its peaceful origins.

It is a “rational, non-violent” demonstration, according to organisers the Civil Human Rights Front, the driving force behind record-breaking rallies in June and July that saw hundreds of thousands of people hit the streets.

Protesters flouted a police order not to march from the park, pouring across the heart of Hong Kong island despite torrential rain.

Calling it a “flowing rally”, one protester said the leaderless movement was constantly adapting to outfox the police.

“We keep learning, the movement has evolved and become more fluid,” the 25-year-old recent graduate, who gave his name only as Lo, told AFP.

China’s propaganda apparatus has seized on the weeks of violence, with



AFP/RSS

Protesters shelter from the rain next to the Tin Hau metro station in Hong Kong during a rally on Sunday.

state media churning out a deluge of damning articles, pictures and videos.

State media also ran images of military personnel and armoured personnel carriers across the border in Shenzhen, prompting the United States to warn Beijing against sending in troops. Analysts say any intervention by Chinese security forces would be a reputational and economic disaster for China.

But Hong Kong’s police force are under intense pressure, stretched by flashmob protests and criticised for perceived heavy-handed policing including the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and beating demonstrators—incidents that have pinballed across social media.

“I think the way police have dealt with this is absolutely out of order. You can make your own judgement based on the many videos out there,” protester James Leung told AFP.

Opinions among the protesters have

diverged over the billowing violence, which has seen hardcore protesters using rocks, Molotov cocktails and slingshots against the police.

Some say the violence has driven the pro-democracy movement into an uncomfortable direction.

“There are some expressing extreme views,” rally-goer Ray Cheng, 30, told AFP.

“But we have tried many times with peaceful approaches... I really hope the government can listen to us.”

Many among Sunday’s rally goers carried rucksacks stuffed with protest paraphernalia—laser pens, gas masks, goggles and helmets.

“The consensus in online forums is that today is ‘a peaceful, rational’ gathering,” said a 30-year-old identifying himself only as Man.

“We have our gear with us, but we hope not to use it.”

A Hong Kong government spokesperson praised the police for handling

“illegal acts with tolerance” and appealed to the protesters to “express their views in a peaceful and rational manner”.

Hong Kong’s unprecedented political crisis was sparked by opposition to a plan to allow extraditions to the Chinese mainland.

But protests have since morphed into a wider call for democratic rights in the semi-autonomous city. Under a deal signed with Britain, authoritarian China agreed to allow Hong Kong to keep its unique freedoms when it was handed back in 1997.

But many Hong Kongers feel those freedoms are being chipped away, especially since China’s hardline president Xi Jinping came to power.

Beyond suspending the extradition bill, Beijing and city leader Carrie Lam have shown no desire to meet key demands such as an inquiry into police violence, the complete withdrawal of the bill and an amnesty.

## BRIEFING

### Three dead as Israel fires on Gazans after rocket attack

**GAZA CITY:** Israel said it opened fire on armed Palestinians on Gaza’s border overnight and Hamas’s health ministry reported three dead on Sunday, the latest in a series of incidents along the tense barrier. Israel’s tank and helicopter fire came after Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired three rockets at Israel late Saturday, the army said, the second such attack in 24 hours. Two rockets were intercepted by Israel’s air defence systems, it said, without specifying what happened to the third. Police reported no casualties in Israel, but said a rocket fragment fell on a house in the southern Israeli town of Sderot. Israeli medics said they had treated six people, including two with minor injuries sustained while running to bomb shelters and four others with panic attacks.

### Yemen Huthi rebels appoint ‘ambassador’ in Tehran

**DUBAI:** Yemen’s Iran-linked Huthi rebels have appointed an “ambassador” in Tehran, a step condemned by the internationally recognised government as a breach of international laws. The Islamic republic made no announcement about accepting the appointment of an ambassador for the Huthis, who control the Yemeni capital Sanaa and much of the north. The Huthi-run Al-Masirah TV said late Saturday that a “presidential decree was issued appointing Ibrahim Mohammed Mohammed al-Dailami as an ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary for the republic of Yemen to the Islamic republic of Iran.” Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi severed diplomatic relations with Iran in October 2015, accusing Tehran of providing military aid to the rebels.

### Gun found in FedEx package sent from US to China

**BEIJING:** Chinese authorities have found at least one firearm in a FedEx package sent from the US, local police said on Sunday, in the latest incident to befall the logistics firm in China. Police in Fuzhou, eastern Fujian province, said “in recent days” they had received a tip about a package sent to a Fujian-based sporting goods company. The parcel was sent by a US client and contained at least one firearm, said Jin’an district police through their official Twitter-like Weibo account. The firearm has been seized and officers are investigating, they added. **(AGENCIES)**

## Eight protesters injured, restrictions reimposed in Kashmir, officials say

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SRINAGAR (INDIA), AUG 18

Eight people have been injured during weekend protests in Kashmir’s main city with authorities reimposing heavy restrictions to quell unrest in the troubled region, officials said.

Tensions remain high in the disputed Himalayan territory following New Delhi’s decision to strip its semi-autonomous status on August 5.

Authorities were gradually easing a massive movement and communications lockdown imposed two weeks ago. But clashes in a dozen locations around Srinagar on Saturday saw restrictions brought back in some locations, the Press Trust of India reported, citing unnamed officials.

Authorities have previously denied or played down reports of any violence and stressed that most of the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley has been peaceful. Jammu and Kashmir government spokesman Rohit Kansal told reporters late Saturday that eight

people had been injured in the clashes but did not provide further details.

A senior government official told AFP earlier Sunday that more telephone exchanges would return to normal operations “by the evening”.

Schools in some areas will reopen on Monday, officials said.

In the Hindu-majority city of Jammu, authorities cut mobile internet services and warned locals not to circulate messages or videos on social media that they said were fake, PTI reported. The Indian army also confirmed that one soldier was killed when it exchanged “heavy” cross-border fire with Pakistan on Saturday.

Kashmir has been divided between the two countries since independence, and has been the spark for two major wars and countless clashes between the two nuclear-armed arch-rivals.

New Delhi’s shock decision to strip the special constitutional status of the part of Kashmir it controls and impose a lockdown has sparked public anger and frustration.

## About 3,000 homeless as fire consumes Bangladesh slum

REUTERS  
DHAKA, AUG 18

About 3,000 people in Bangladesh were left homeless after a massive fire consumed several hundred shanties in a slum on the northern outskirts of the capital city of Dhaka, government officials said on Sunday.

Three people were injured in the blaze that struck a congested slum in Mirpur town on Friday night.

Video footage showed heavy plumes of smoke billowing all around the slum area, just a few kilometres from the country’s main cricket stadium.

Fire officials scrambled to get access to enough water and struggled for three hours to douse the flames, said Anwar Hossain, senior station manager of Mirpur fire station.

“According to our investigation committee 1,200 shanties were damaged and out of this 750 shanties burnt totally,” said Enamur Rahman, junior minister for Disaster Management and Relief.

## Joy turns to horror as bomber kills 63 at Kabul wedding

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KABUL, AUG 18

Joy and celebration turned into horror and carnage when a suicide bomber targeted a packed Afghan wedding hall, killing at least 63 people in the deadliest attack to rock Kabul in months, officials and witnesses said on Sunday.

The massive blast, which took place late Saturday in west Kabul, came as Washington and the Taliban finalise a deal to reduce the US military presence in Afghanistan and hopefully build a roadmap to a ceasefire.

The groom recalled greeting smiling guests in the afternoon, before seeing their bodies being carried out hours later.

The attack “changed my happiness to sorrow”, the young man, who gave his name as Mirwais, told local TV station Tolo News.

“My family, my bride are in shock, they cannot even speak. My bride keeps fainting,” he said.

“I lost my brother, I lost my friends, I lost my relatives. I will never see happiness in my life again.”

Interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said at least 63 people had been killed and 182 injured.

“Among the wounded are women and children,” Rahimi said. Earlier he stated a suicide bomber carried out the attack.

Afghan weddings are epic and vibrant affairs, with hundreds or often thousands of guests celebrating for hours inside industrial-scale wedding halls where the men are usually segregated from the women and children.

“The wedding guests were dancing and celebrating the party when the blast happened,” recounted Munir Ahmad, 23, who was seriously injured and whose cousin was among the dead.

“Following the explosion, there was total chaos. Everyone was screaming and crying for their loved ones,” he told AFP from his bed in a local hospital, where he is being treated for shrapnel wounds.

Images from inside the hall showed blood-stained bodies on the ground along with pieces of flesh and torn clothes, hats, sandals and bottles of mineral water. The huge blast ripped parts of the ceiling off.

The wedding was believed to be a Shia gathering. Shia Muslims are frequently targeted in Sunni-majority Afghanistan, particularly by the so-called Islamic State group, which is also active in Kabul but did not immediately issue any claim of responsibility.

Wedding guest Hameed Quresh told AFP the young couple were saying

their vows when the bomb went off.

“We fainted following the blast, and we don’t know who brought us to the hospital,” sobbed Quresh who lost one brother and was himself wounded.

Another guest told Tolo that some 1,200 people had been invited. With low security, weddings are seen as easy targets.

The attack sent a wave of grief through a city grimly accustomed to atrocities. President Ashraf Ghani called it “barbaric”, while Afghanistan’s chief executive Abdullah Abdullah described it as a “crime against humanity”.

The attack underscores both the inadequacy of Afghanistan’s security forces and the scale of the problem they face. While the police and army claim they prevent most bombings from ever happening, the fact remains that insurgents pull off horrific attacks with chilling regularity.

## The blast comes as Washington and the Taliban agree to cut down US troops in Afghanistan.

On July 28, at least 20 people were killed when attackers targeted Ghani’s running mate Amrullah Saleh as he campaigned in presidential elections.

The incident showed how even amid tight security and known threats, insurgents can conduct brazen attacks.

The issue also goes to the heart of a prospective deal between the US and the Taliban that would see Washington begin to withdraw its approximately 14,000 soldiers from Afghanistan.

The deal relies on the Taliban providing guarantees they will stop jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and IS from using Afghanistan as a safe haven. Saturday’s attack suggests any such promise would be tough to keep.

The “Taliban cannot absolve themselves of blame, for they provide platform for terrorists,” Ghani said.

Few believe such a deal will bring quick peace.

Many Afghans fear the Taliban could return, eroding hard-won rights for women in particular and leading to a spiralling civil war.

Meanwhile, in the northern province of Balkh, 11 members of the same family were killed when their car hit a roadside bomb, officials said. The provincial governor blamed the Taliban for planting the device.



AFP/RSS

A wounded man receives treatment at the Wazir Akbar Khan hospital after a deadly bomb blast in a wedding hall in Kabul on Sunday.

## High-end rebrand makes life sweet for Japan’s ‘ice farmers’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NIKKO (JAPAN), AUG 18

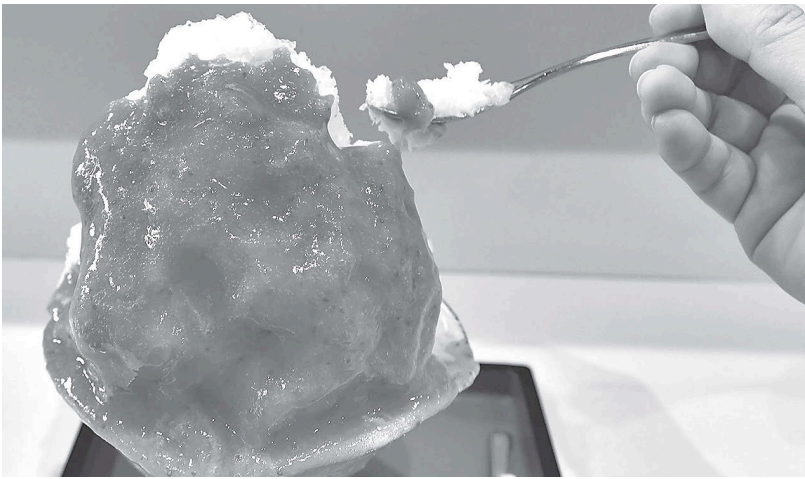
In a mountainous area north of Tokyo, a priest blows a conch shell as Yuichiro Yamamoto bows and thanks the nature gods for this year’s “good harvest”: natural ice.

Yamamoto is one of Japan’s few remaining “ice farmers”, eschewing the ease of refrigeration for open-air pools to create a product that is sold to high-end shaved ice shops in trendy Tokyo districts.

His trade had all but disappeared in recent decades, and the shaved ice or kakigori that is popular throughout Japan in summer had been produced with cheap machine-made ice.

But reinventing natural-made ice as a high-end artisanal product has helped revive the sector and save his firm. “When I started making natural ice, I wondered how I should market it. I thought I needed to transform kakigori,” Yamamoto tells AFP at his ice-making field in the town of Nikko, north of Tokyo.

Yamamoto took over a traditional ice-making business 13 years ago in



AFP/RSS

Shop owner Koji Morinishi makes a kakigori dessert with natural ice in Tokyo, Japan.

cially flavoured syrup.

After months of research, he began producing his own small batches of artisanal kakigori.

“I put the price tag at 800 yen for a bowl of kakigori. I also priced the ice at 9,000 yen per case, which is six

that ordinary people could taste the dessert.

With the development of ice-making machines, the number of traditional ice makers dropped to fewer than 10 nationwide.

The story is one familiar to many

traditional Japanese crafts and food-stuffs—with expensive and labour-intensive products losing ground as cheaper, machine-driven versions become available.

And making ice naturally is a grueling task. The season begins in the autumn when workers prepare a swimming-pool-like pit by cultivating the soil and pouring in spring water.

Thin frozen initial layers are scraped away along with dirt and fallen leaves. The ice-making begins in earnest in the winter, when water is poured in to freeze solid, but it must be carefully protected. Producers regularly scrape off snow that can slow the freezing process.

“I once spent 16 hours non-stop removing snow,” Yamamoto recalls.

And rain too can ruin the product, causing cracks that mean the whole batch has to be discarded.

“I check the weather forecast 10 times a day,” Yamamoto laughs.

Once the ice is 14 centimetres (5.5 inches) thick, which takes at least two weeks, workers begin cutting out rectangular blocks. Each block, which weighs about 40 kilogrammes (88

pounds), is glided into an ice room filled with sawdust on a long bamboo slide.

The blocks are sold to some of Tokyo’s high-end shaved ice shops as well as department stores.

In the Yanaka district, more than 1,000 people queue up every day for a taste of kakigori made with natural ice produced by another ice-maker from Nikko. Owner Koji Morinishi says the naturally made ice has a texture that is different from machine-made products.

“It feels very different when you shave it. It’s harder because it’s frozen over a long period of time,” explains Morinishi.

“It’s easier to shave really thin if the ice is hard. If not hard, it dissolves too quickly.”

Morinishi himself struggled when he first opened the kakigori shop, but has gradually built a cult following for his desserts topped with purees of mango, watermelon, peach or other fruit. And Yamamoto’s firm has seen demand soar—he now harvests 160 tons a year and knows two new producers who have entered the market.







FOREX

US Dollar	114.15
Euro	126.59
Pound Sterling	138.70
Japanese Yen	10.73
Chinese Yuan	16.21
Qatari Riyal	31.34
Australian Dollar	77.40
Malaysian Ringit	27.32
Saudi Arab Riyal	30.44

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

Shares

Nepse

1,214.83pts

-0.75%

HIGHEST LOSERS

GLBSL	-4.75%	WMBF	-3.96%	GLICL	-3.85%	RHPC	-3.33%	CCBL	-3.08%	PICL	-3%
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MODERATE LOSERS

NAGRO	-2.99%	NIJCL	-2.98%	CLBSL	-2.97%	CHCL	-2.96%	NNLB	-2.81%	RADHI	-2.81%
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MODERATE GAINERS

CFCL	0.86%	GBBL	0.93%	PMHPL	0.99%	UIC	1.29%	HBL	1.48%	NICA	1.57%
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HIGHEST GAINERS

CEFL	1.73%	SLBSL	1.92%	NMBMF	2.63%	GFCL	3.73%	RLFL	6.83%	GILB	9.85%
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BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 71,000
Silver	Rs 830

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH

**Petrol (Per Litre)**  
Rs 109.00/-

**Diesel (Per Litre)**  
Rs 97.00/-

**Kerosene (Per Litre)**  
Rs 97.00/-

**LPG (Per cylinder)**  
Rs 1375/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

Nepal hosting 56th DGCA conference after two decades

**KATHMANDU:** The 56th Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation of Asia and Pacific Region will begin on Monday in Kathmandu. Nepal is hosting the conference after two decades. The theme for the Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is ‘Harmonising Efforts to Meet Capacity Constraints’. According to Rajan Pokhrel, director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, the five-day conference will see 400 foreign delegates from 34 countries. The participants will present 54 discussion papers and 48 information papers during the event. Pokhrel said that the conference will focus on 12 topics including aviation safety, aviation security, air transport, aviation meteorology and human resource. The International Air Transport Association in its forecast states that routes to, from and within Asia-Pacific will see an extra 2.1 billion annual passengers by 2036, for an overall market size of 3.5 billion. Its annual average growth rate of 4.6 percent will be the third-highest, behind Africa and the Middle East. This is the third Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation hosted by Nepal. The first and second was hosted in 1978 and 1998.



POST PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

A general view of agricultural land with sprawling houses in the background seen from Khonaka in Lalitpur, on Sunday. Rampant construction in Kathmandu has been shrinking arable land over the years.

Brace yourself for expensive festivals, traders say

The government has increased the customs duty on foreign farm and industrial products in a bid to hold down imports and trim the trade deficit.

**KRISHANA PRASAIN**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

With food prices rocketing into the stratosphere due to tax hikes and shrinking domestic production, the upcoming festival season is poised to strain household budgets.

Traders said that people will have to dig deep into their pockets when they do their festival shopping for the impending Dashain, Tihar and Chhath, the most widely observed celebrations in Nepal. Vegetables, fruits, dried fruits, meat, edible oil, sugar, legumes, flour and rice have all become dearer, and prices are expected to increase further, they said.

The government has increased the customs duty on foreign farm and industrial products in a bid to hold down imports and trim the ballooning trade deficit. The higher tariffs have pushed up food prices. Traders and consumer rights activists said that prices of daily essentials started rising immediately after the budget statement for this fiscal year was released on May 29.

“Traders have started hiking the price of food items as the festivals are drawing closer,” said Prem Lal Maharjan, president of the National Consumer Forum. “The government is unable to regulate the market.”

As per the Department of Commerce, Supply and Consumer Protection Management, prices of food items such as rice, beaten rice, lentils, spices, sugar, beans and flour have bloated by more than 22 percent after the budget.

Raj Kumar Shrestha, president of the Nepal Retailers’ Association, said that food prices may increase by 10-15 percent this festive season mainly due to a hike in the customs duty and transportation costs after the government enforced the vehicle consignment tracking system.

Opportunist traders may engage in



POST FILE PHOTO

Middlemen and traders spike prices during festivals because of loose market inspection, consumers complained.

price gouging during festival time by creating artificial shortages or hoarding goods if the market is not properly monitored, association members said.

Nabin Jha, a consumer from Balkhu, told the Post that Dashain was a special festival for traders as they are free to spike prices of essentials. “Every year, during the festivals, the price increases and the quality decreases,” he said.

Shrestha said that the government should conduct effective price and quality inspections starting now in order to check the festival market.

Rajan Sharma, former president of the Nepal Freight Forwarders’ Association, said that Dashain shoppers may have to fork out 10-15 percent more due to higher transportation costs and poor distribution systems.

Prices of food items such as rice, lentils, spices, beans and flour have bloated by more than 22pc.

“Our production and distribution mechanism is not good. And the government has jacked up the customs duty as part of its ambitious policy to curb imports which has resulted in a steep price hike. As demand soars during Dashain, market prices can go out of control.”

The price of mutton increased to

Rs1,300 per kg after the government made it mandatory for traders to produce a quarantine certificate for live goats imported from India, traders said. During the same period last year, the price of goat meat was Rs900 per kg. Anil Khadgi, former vice-chairman of the Nepal Fish and Meat Sellers Association, said that it wouldn’t be a surprise if the price of mutton reaches Rs1,500 per kg this Dashain. “This is because of a drop in domestic output. As imports of live goats from India could be limited this Dashain due to quarantine hassles, prices may increase sharply.”

The government has also started charging a 5 percent customs duty on livestock imported from India.

Devendra Bhakta Shrestha, president of the Wholesalers’ Association,

Permanent account number rule to come into force despite calls for deferral

**RAJESH KHANAL**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 18

The government is likely to make it mandatory for all individual wage earners to obtain a permanent account number (PAN) immediately despite calls from the private sector to postpone its implementation.

Permanent account numbers became required for salaried workers from July 17, the beginning of the fiscal year 2019-20. The government also made it mandatory for cargo transporters to use the vehicle and consignment tracking system from that date.

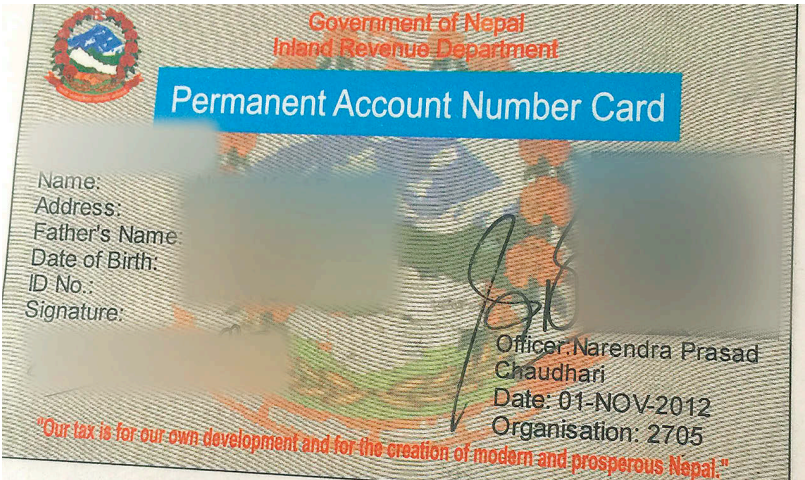
As per the Finance Act, firms cannot put distributed salaries without PAN under the expenditure heading. Any firm making payment to its workers who do not have a PAN is not validated by the tax authority.

The private sector has urged the government to defer the date of implementation complaining that the rule was impractical. It has also demanded

Firms cannot put distributed salaries without PAN under the expenditure heading.

that the government enforce PAN only on payments of more than Rs5,000 per day. Currently, PAN is mandatory for all transactions exceeding Rs1,000 daily.

Following complaints from the private sector, the Ministry of Finance formed a task force under Joint Secretary Nirmal Hari Adhikari consisting of representatives from the Nepal Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Confederation of Nepalese Industries. The ministry has held several meet-



POST PHOTO: NIMA KANTI POUL

ings with business persons, but it has not fixed the minimum value of transactions for the implementation of PAN.

“The ministry is holding discussions with the private sector to revise

the limit, but it will not stop from implementing the system for all salary earners even at the grass roots level,” said Uttar Kumar Khatri, spokesperson for the ministry.

Khatri said the ministry had sched-

uled the next meeting for Monday. “Government officials and the private sector are expected to reach a consensus at that meeting,” said Khatri.

According to the private sector, the ministry is adamant on implementing PAN for all despite the fact that there are a number of practical difficulties. Parsuram Dahal, chairman of the Tax Revenue Committee of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce and also a member of the task force, said the ministry was holding discussions with the private sector on how to implement PAN for wage earners in businesses like tea estates, small shops and eateries.

Dahal said the ministry planned to require non-Nepali workers engaged in small businesses obtain PAN. “The government will distribute PAN cards to these workers based on the recommendation letter issued by their employers and their identity cards,” he said.

Small business owners are sceptical about the ministry’s move. “People

who work in small shops change their jobs frequently. Shopkeepers cannot issue recommendation letters frequently to workers who are always switching jobs,” said Pawan Jajodiya, proprietor of Jajodiya Khadda Store, Gyaneshwor.

The private sector has also asked the government to reschedule the date of implementing the vehicle and consignment tracking system. As a result, the launch date has been postponed to mid-October.

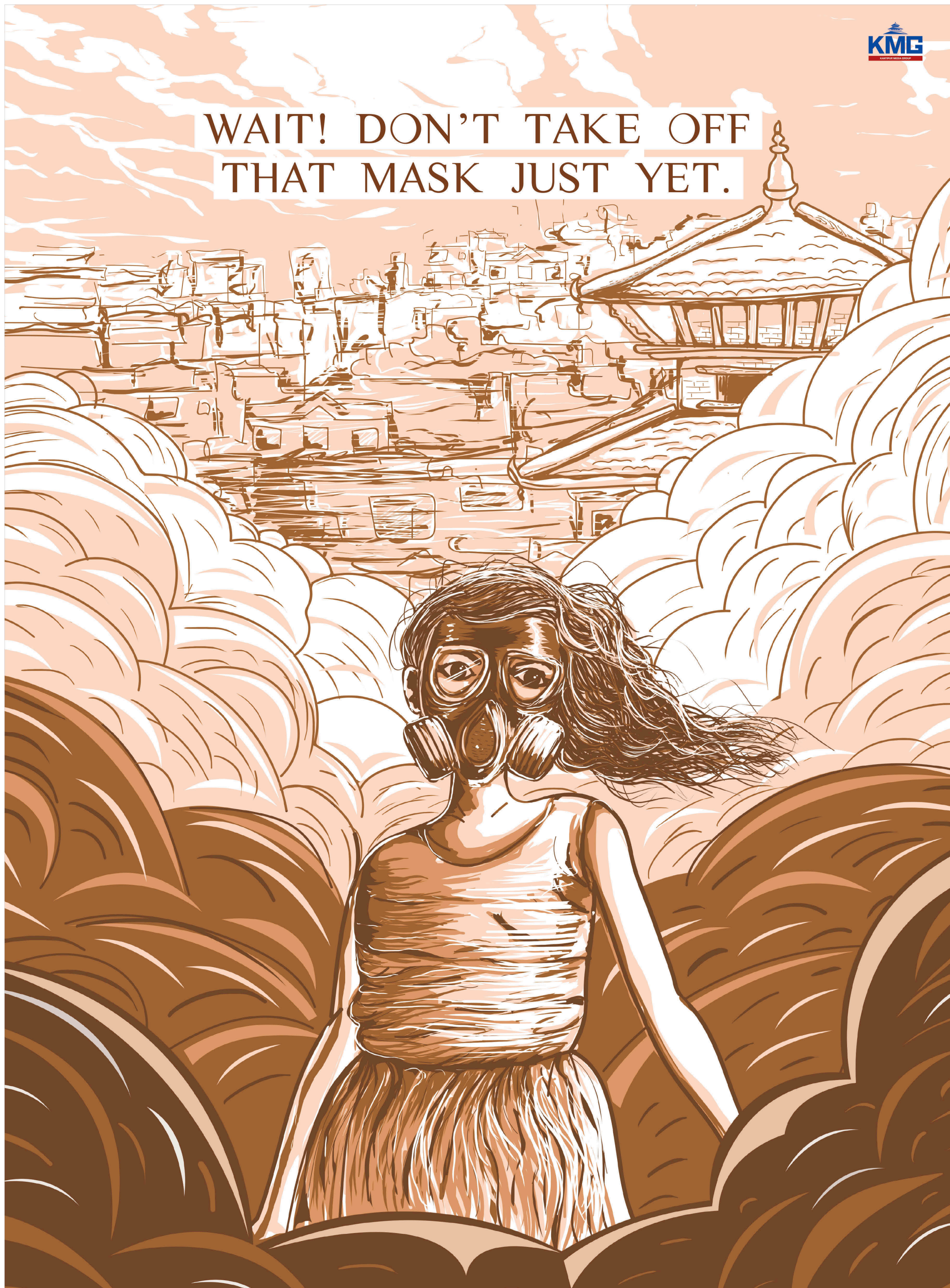
Kamlesh Kumar Agrawal, vice-president of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce, said they were requesting the ministry to pilot the tracking system for a year. “As many transport operators are not familiar with the online system, we have asked the government to give more time for preparation,” he said.

According to Agrawal, the government should also define the type and quantity of traded goods and the related distance to effectively implement the tracking system.









WAIT! DON'T TAKE OFF  
THAT MASK JUST YET.

The prime minister says fewer people have to wear dust masks since he's taken office. But pictures don't lie, and neither do numbers. The Post will bring you both, without fear or favour. See upto-the-minute status of air quality in major cities across the country at :

**[kathmandupost.com/airquality](http://kathmandupost.com/airquality)**

THE KATHMANDU POST  
WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR



# The art of making—and drinking—Marpha brandy

Distilled from the fermented mash of the apple itself, much of the stuff sold in Marpha falls into the category of fruit brandy.



POST PHOTOS: CHASE BRUSH

Vishnu Raj Hirachan holds bottles of apricot and apple brandy at his home in Marpha, lower Mustang.

## CHASE BRUSH

In the dark backroom of his distillery in Marpha, Vishnu Raj Hirachan stoops low over a cask of clear liquid, an empty glass in hand. He turns the spout at the bottom, taking care not to spill as he collects the contents. But the liquid runs out too fast, and soon the glass is spilling over, suffusing the room with the sharp scent of alcohol. Can you drink this much? Hirachan, coming up with a full cup still dribbling over at its edges, asks. Not one to pass on free liquor – especially not the kind pulled fresh from the tap –this reporter nods vigorously. This is Hirachan’s “Marphak” brandy, a colorless but potent alcohol derived from fermented apples. It’s made right here, in Hirachan’s distillery, a squat old building that sits amidst his 400-tree-strong apple orchard on the outskirts of the village. The backroom, comprising the cask and four massive vats of liquor nearby, is where Hirachan keeps his supply in the offseason—and also where he offers tastes to curious visitors.

“I don’t usually drink,” Hirachan says as he pours himself a glass, which he dilutes with a splash of water, to bring out the flavour. “But since I have a guest...”

Situated on the banks of the Kali Gandaki, Marpha is an ideal place to try brandy—specifically apple brandy. Long renowned as the “apple capital of Nepal”, its fertile soil and temperate climate makes it particularly suited for growing the sweet, crunchy fruit, which serves as the bedrock of the local economy. Walking down the village’s narrow cobblestone streets, stopping to peruse the shelves of its storefronts and the menus of its myriad guesthouses, one finds apples in nearly every form imaginable, from dry apple snacks and apple crumble to apple jam, sauce, juice and cider.

Brandy, of course, is also one of those forms. Distilled from the fermented mash of the apple itself, much of the stuff sold in Marpha falls into the category of fruit brandy, a style distinct from the old-world brandies that use as their base cider or wine. And unlike the latter, which are usually put through a wood-barrel ageing process, most of Marpha’s brandies go straight from still to bottle, leaving them with the moonshine-like transparency—and in many cases taste—that typifies many fruit brandies of the world.

“The taste must be smooth, with no other flavours,” Hirachan says, lifting the glass to his nose. “And there should be no other smell. That should be removed during filtration.”

Hirachan should know—at 75, the Marpha native has been making brandy for much of his adult life. Fifty years ago, the Nepal government installed an



agricultural outpost just down the road from here, on the property that Hirachan’s family originally owned. The office soon began introducing various varieties of apple trees to the region, including Red Delicious and Golden Delicious, and teaching local farmers to turn them into marketable products, such as juice, cider, and even wine. Naturally, it wasn’t long before someone—in this case, a man named Pasang Sherpa, the agricultural office’s first chief, according to Hirachan—came up with the idea to use the sugary fruit to make a more potent spirit.

“At the time we were just young men who enjoyed a strong glass of alcohol,” Hirachan, who rarely imbibes these days, says. “We didn’t know there would be money in it.”

Today, there are at least five major distilleries in Marpha, including one operated by the agricultural centre itself. Marphak is among the more recognisable brands, distinguished by its red and yellow label, red cap, and frosted glass bottle, which Hirachan imports from India. It comes in two varieties, an apple and a “premium” apricot brandy, both around 42 percent alcohol. Hirachan produces over 2,500 bottles a year, distributed mostly in and around the Mustang region, though he says there is an increasing demand in places as far-flung as Kathmandu, where one bottle goes for Rs 1,000.

But the industry is not without its challenges, Hirachan is quick to add. Lately, apple farming in the Mustang region has been beset by climate change, as rising temperatures correspond with an increase in pests and diseases that can wreak havoc on crops.

“We have had to use more pesticides, which has made everything more costly,” Hirachan says. “The business is not as lucrative as it once was.”

Still, brandy makers like Hirachan persist. Virtually all of the Marphak’s supply is brewed and packaged in the building on Hirachan’s farm, beginning with the harvest, which takes place in October for apples, and August for apricots. After it’s collected, the fruit goes to the washing area, where it is cleaned. Next is the fruit processor, into which the bulbous materials are fed to create a thick mash. Thirdly there are the tubs, inside of which the mash is mixed with some yeast and brown sugar and left to ferment for several weeks.

Finally, there is the elaborate—and ancient-looking—pot still, where the now-fermented mash is heated, the alcoholic vapour condensed, and the brandy ultimately released. Each batch distillation takes around four hours and can produce up to 90 litres of liquid, according to Hirachan, and the process is repeated throughout the year.

Hirachan’s brandy has clearly brought him a lot of success, but he takes no credit for it. At the end of the day, he says, it’s really all about the fruit.

“A good apple is the same as a good man,” Hirachan says. “If you are a good man, you will have success in all parts of life—a good job, good relationships, lots of money. It is the same with fruit—if it is good, it will make good juice, good pie, and good brandy.”



Apricots ripen on a tree.

Today, there are at least five major distilleries in Marpha, including one operated by the agricultural centre itself.



A woman collects apricots for the making of Hirachan’s Marphak brandy on his farm in Marpha in lower Mustang.



A selection of fruit brandies stand on display in a shop in Marpha.

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